

CELEBRATE

STORY BY JENNIFER STREISAND PHOTOS AND GRAPHICS PROVIDED CIVIC THEATER PROGRAM COVERS DONE BY O-LIV DESIGN.

Live Theater

Journey to Scotland in the 11th century, a school gymnasium for a spelling bee with pizzazz, and a dance floor that mixes ballet and hip hop, all without leaving your seat. These shows—"MacBeth," "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee," and the "Rubberbandance Group," are just a sampling of the live stage performances scheduled for the first half of 2011 in Lafayette and West Lafayette.

Many of the performances that play here also play in major metropolitan areas, says Todd Wetzel, director of Purdue Convocations.

"Our prices are better, it's easier to navigate, you don't have to drive to another community and pay big fees to park or anything like that, so it adds a lot to our quality of life in Greater Lafayette," he says.

Live performances, which take place all year long, but are plentiful during the school year, are designed to entertain, uplift and educate audiences, says Richard Rand, Department of Theatre chair, and professor of acting and movement at Purdue University.

"We want to expose audiences to works that address relevant topical issues and expand our awareness, and to show audiences different styles and genres of theatre," Rand says. There are so many productions in Greater Lafayette, that people are often unaware that Rand's department—Purdue Theatre—produces an entirely different set of performances from Purdue Convocations. Purdue Theatre is performed by students, while Purdue Convocations are professional touring companies.

Then there is Civic Theatre of Greater Lafayette with a volunteer cast and crew, but with all-star performances that easily match a professional theater company in a major metropolitan area.

"We have plenty of actors that have been with us for a number of years," says Steve Koehler, managing director. "Yet with every production, we are also bringing in new volunteers. We have 800 volunteer opportunities every year."

The three main stage productions for the spring 2011 Civic season are "All My Sons," "Out of Order" and "Little Shop of Horrors." "All My Sons" is the American playwright Arthur Miller's first hit play, notes Koehler. "Out of Order" is a British farce written by Ray Cooney, and "Little Shop of Horrors" is a musical written by Alan Menken that is an excellent family show.

Sometimes audiences will attend one of Civic's youth productions, get so lost in the dialogue and acting, and not realize that the entire cast and crew are all 18 and under, except for the director. In spring 2011, the Civic Youth Theatre will perform Shakespeare's "MacBeth," "Once Upon a Mattress" and "The Velveteen Rabbit," written by Laurie Russell, a local writer and actor, explains Koehler.

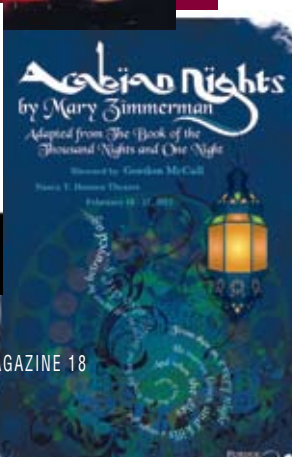
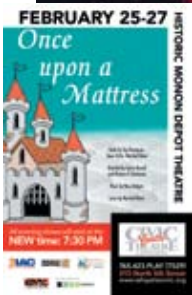
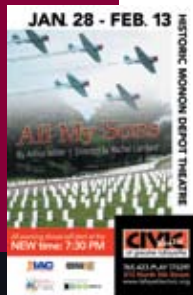
Civic Theatre also does several staged readings of plays, where actors will read scripts aloud without the accoutrements of a full-stage production. For more information about the Civic Theatre of Greater Lafayette, including schedules, shows, tickets and drama classes, go to www.lafayettecivic.org.

Still another theatre company in Greater Lafayette that receives less promotion than Civic, Purdue Theatre, and Convocations is the Chancel Players, who will perform two one-act plays, "The Robe of the Galilean" by John McGreevey and "The Long Christmas Dinner" by Thornton Wilder for the Religious Arts Festival of Lafayette in February/March 2011, says Camilla Cripps, president. In 2011, the Chancel Players also will present "The Day They Kidnapped the Pope" by Joao Bethencourt. The cast and crew are volunteers, and they perform in area churches.

The scripts are chosen selectively for their superior story and for the societal message conveyed by the performance.

"We want to entertain, but we are not shy from selecting a play that might address topics that are controversial in nature, such as prejudice, spousal abuse, alcoholism, prison themes and homosexuality," says Cripps.

New this year for the Chancel Players is their designation as a certified 501(c)(3) organization, which means that the theatre company will be able to apply for grants from foundations and to have the ability to inform donors that they can receive a tax deduction for their contributions, explains Cripps. Anyone who is interested in helping Chancel Players with fundraising efforts and to volunteer should contact them at chancelplayers@yahoo.com, call (765) 742-2693, or by



Designed by Yvette Shen

mail at Chancel Players of Lafayette, P.O. Box 4894, Lafayette, IN 47903. For schedules of upcoming shows, use the same contact information, and request to be added to the theatre company's e-mail or mailing list. You can pay at the door for tickets.

For theatre companies, fundraising is a critical issue and can often make the difference between the quality of a production, or choosing whether to perform a specific production. In 2011, Purdue Convocations will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of Friends of Convocations, which will recognize the years of dedication and support given by donors to Purdue Convocations, explains Wetzel. The original group of donors in the 1980s became known as the Friends of Convocations, explains Wetzel.

The public is invited to an exhibition at the Purdue Archives on the fourth floor of the HSSE Library in Stewart Center, to view memorabilia from the last 25 years, and there will be other events marking the anniversary, including a celebration at the end of the season.

Each year Wetzel tries to bring in touring companies from outside the United States, and in January, Ruberbandance Group from Canada will perform a program called Loan Sharking in the Loeb Playhouse.

"They are a hybrid of classically trained ballet dancers and hip-hop dancers, and so they fuse these forms together," Wetzel says. The accompanying classical music also is manipulated "to have a much more rhythmic feel," he adds.

Also on the Convocations calendar for spring 2011 is the 2005 Tony winner for best musical, "Spamalot,"

which is basically the Broadway production of the popular movie, "Monty Python and the Holy Grail." In April, Convocations will present "My Heart in a Suitcase," which is a play based on the memoir of Anne Fox, who was sent to England as a young girl to escape the Holocaust. Matinees are scheduled for school groups as well as performances for the general public. For more information about the Convocations schedule and how to order tickets, go to www.convocations.org.

Audiences in Greater Lafayette are lucky in still another aspect of their access to live theater: Purdue University has a master's in fine arts program with areas of specialization in acting, directing and all areas of design, Rand says.

"We are very much a professional training program with a great heritage."

There is an undergraduate major in design and production and an undergraduate major in acting, adds Rand. Students in the programs participate in the productions staged in the Yue-Kong Pao Hall of Visual and Performing Arts, which opened on the West Lafayette campus in 2005. During the 2010-2011 academic year, Purdue Theatre will be honoring alumni and faculty that date back to 1938 and the earliest years of Purdue Theatre.

During this season, all of the productions are first-time productions for Purdue Theatre, which is unusual, notes Rand, because often they perform revivals. On the schedule for 2011 is "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee," which is a musical comedy that made its Broadway debut in 2005. Also on the schedule is the classic, updated "Arabian Nights," by Mary Zimmerman. Unprecedented this year for Purdue Theatre is a collaboration with students

from Peking University in China, says Rand. Students from Purdue will go to Peking University to rehearse and perform "The Monkey King," and following the workshop performance there, Peking University students will come to Purdue to perform the play on March 4, 5 and 6, 2011, in the Carole and Gordon Mallet Theatre in Yue-Kong Pao Hall.

The effort is being done in collaboration with The Confucius Institute on campus.

"We're putting together an ensemble that will bring ingenuity and innovation to a very original interpretation of this classic Chinese fairytale," Rand says. For the complete Purdue Theatre schedule go to <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/vpa/theatre> and call the box office: (765) 494-3933 or (800) 914-SHOW to buy tickets for a great theater adventure.✽



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