

McHenry County theater community readies for fall season

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McHenry County's theater lineup is primed to upstage other forms of entertainment this fall. Musicals, one-man acts, comedies and improv shows offer a wide array of opportunities for both young and old to take in a show.

It's community theater at its best, say the many throughout the area who devote themselves to the cause.

Live theater is something everyone should experience, said Paul Lockwood, president of the TownSquare Players, the oldest active community theater group in the county.

"It's difficult to compete sometimes against other entertainment, whether it's movies or television or DVDs or whatever, but live theater has to be something that the community continues to support lest we get to the point that we can't afford to present shows anymore," he said.

Lockwood's group is putting on a production of "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" at the Woodstock Opera House this November.

Based on an unfinished Charles Dickens' novel, the play is unique in that the audience will play a role. In it, a British musical troupe performs a play within a play.

"There are constantly times when (the actors) appeal to the audience directly, talk to the audience... At the end of the show, the audience gets to vote on a couple of things, which determines the ending," Lockwood said.

Lockwood's also performing this fall in the Woodstock Musical

Theatre Company's production of "Love, Sex and the I.R.S." next month at the Opera House.

Company President Kathie Comella stars in the comedy as well. The two play characters at odds with one another.

"This may be the only time the president of one theater group gets to slap the president of another theater group," Lockwood said.

If this isn't reason enough to see the show, how about the theater itself?

A landmark and community theater venue for 120 years, the Opera House has hosted famous performers, such as Paul Newman and Orson Welles in their early careers.

"That always gives those of us acting in these productions a bit of pause," Lockwood said.

Not many theaters anywhere can boast such a history, said John Scharres, managing director of the Opera House. And because of that, the theater's built quite a following, he said.

Same goes for the **Raue Center** for the Arts, located in a restored, 1920s showcase theater in Crystal Lake. The **Raue** is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year with shows such as the contemporary Russian one-man play, "I Am the Machine Gunner" and performances by The Neverly Brothers and legendary American folk singer Arlo Guthrie.

Along with the long-time theaters are those making names for themselves in the area.

Theater Underground, which will perform this October at the Memorial Hall Civic Theatre in Richmond, describes itself as a "fringe" theater company.

"We're flipping the perception of live theater in McHenry County one show at a time," the group advertises.

With "Still Not Quite What You Expected," the group will perform a sequel to the play it performed last year.

"It turned out to be a phenomenal show for us," group President Tim Mosbach said.

Once again written by local writer Katelin Stack of Woodstock, the play will feature some unexpected surprises as a rock band tries to make its way to a battle of the bands.

"It is themed for Halloween," Mosbach said. "We kind of like to push the envelope with some edgier subject matter for the PG-13 crowd

and above, at least.”

For a more traditional show, there’s the classic musical, “Carousel,” to be performed this November by the roughly 7-year-old Theatre Company of Sun City. The musical is quite a production for the ensemble, including a cast of at least 20 and 11 dancers, said publicity co-chair Ellen Butler.

“A lot of work is going into it,” she said. “I’m amazed at the talent there.”

And for the younger crowd, a group of 14 children with the Theatre on the Green Company of Young Actors, based in Woodstock, also have been working hard to put on “Dracula Kidds” this October.

A former professional performer in Chicago, Lisa Waichunas started the group to give youth a place to learn theater. The shows take place on her family’s farmland on St. Patrick Road in rural Woodstock.

Along with the shows mentioned below, the Woodstock Opera House and the **Raue Center** for the Arts in Crystal Lake both feature an extensive line-up of fall events. Lucy’s Cafe, an eclectic nightclub at the **Raue Center**, features live performances most Fridays.

For information on the opera house, go to www.woodstockoperahouse.com. For more information on the **Raue Center** for the Arts, go to www.rauecenter.org.

“LEO KOTTKE”

Sept. 24-25, Woodstock Opera House, 121 W. Van Buren St., Woodstock. Celebrate Kottke’s 25th anniversary performance. The guitarist has played to sold-out performances at the Opera House for a quarter of a century.

Schedule: 8 p.m. both nights. Tickets: \$25 all seats. Info: www.woodstockoperahouse.com or 815-338-5300.

“THE DRACULA KIDDS”

Oct. 1-3, Theatre on the Green Hut, 15314 St. Patrick Road, Woodstock. Theatre on the Green Co. of Young Actors presents Tim Kelly’s comedy.

Schedule: 7:30 p.m. Oct. 1; 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Oct. 2; and 7:30 p.m. Oct. 3. Tickets: \$8 adult advance, \$10 at the door, \$7 students/seniors, \$6 groups of 10 or more. Veterans and military personnel are free. Kids who come in costume get a treat. Portion of the proceeds will benefit Helping Paws. Info: sites.google.com/site/theatreonthegreen or 815-354-7435.

IMPROV PRESENTED BY GREENROOM PRODUCTIONS

Oct. 2, Cosman Theater, 12015 Mill St., Huntley. A Broadway Cabaret fundraiser featuring an hour and a half of complete improvisation, a la "Whose Line is it Anyway?" Takes audience suggestions and true-life audience stories and turns them into funny pieces for both young and old.

Schedule: 7 p.m. Tickets: Only available at the door, \$12 adults and \$8 students/seniors. Info: www.greenroomtheater.com or 847-483-4839.

"A NIGHT AT THE OPERA HOUSE"

Oct. 2, Woodstock Opera House, 121 W. Van Buren St., Woodstock. A special event to benefit the historic Woodstock Opera House. Features a performance of "Way Off Broadway," presented by DeVar Creative who will perform songs from a variety of musicals. Hors d'oeuvres, wine, champagne, silent auction and dessert included.

Schedule: 6:30 p.m. Tickets: \$60 individuals, \$100 couples. Info: www.woodstockoperahouse.com or 815-338-4212.

"LOVE, SEX AND THE I.R.S"

Fridays, Oct. 8-22, Saturdays, Oct. 9-23, Sundays, Oct. 10-24, Woodstock Opera House, 121 W. Van Buren St., Woodstock. Presented by Woodstock Musical Theatre Company. A wild farce with twists of fate, sight gags, mistaken identities and comic lines. John Trachtman and Leslie Arthur are out-of-work musicians who room together in New York City. To save money, Jon has been filing tax returns listing the pair as married. The day of reckoning comes when the Internal Revenue Service informs the "couple" they're going to be investigated by a Mr. Spinner.

Schedule: 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; 3 p.m. Sundays. Tickets: \$23 adults, \$20 students and seniors. Info: www.woodstockoperahouse.com or www.woodstocktheatre.com or the Woodstock Opera House box office at 815-338-5300.

"I AM THE MACHINE GUNNER"

Oct. 9-10, **Raue Center** for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake. The Chicago premier of a contemporary Russian one-man play by Yuri Kladiève. Features actor James Knight.

Schedule: 8 p.m. Oct. 9, 3 p.m. Oct. 10. Tickets: \$35. Info: www.rauecenter.org or call the box office at 815-356-9212.

THEATER UNDERGROUND'S IMPROV SHOW

Oct. 9, Olive Black Martini & Wine Lounge, 5607 Broadway St., Richmond. A free show designed to start and stop throughout the evening so people can come and go as they please. Performances of 30- to 40-minute sets of improvisational games.

Schedule: 8:30 to 10:30 p.m. Reservations are strongly encouraged (although not necessary), and can be made by calling Olive Black at 815-678-7370. Info: www.theaterundreground.com or e-mail theaterundreground@gmail.com

“THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST”

Oct. 14, Oct. 16-17, Oct. 23-24, Cosman Theater, 12015 Mill St., Huntley. Presented by GreenRoom Productions. Set in England during the late Victorian era, Oscar Wilde created one of the most delightful and memorable social comedies with “The Importance of Being Earnest.” It’s a comedy of manners that satirizes Victorian manners and customs.

Schedule: 7 p.m. Oct. 14 and Oct. 16; 3 p.m. Oct. 17; 7 p.m. Oct. 23; 3 p.m. Oct. 24. Tickets: \$15 adults, (\$18 at the door), \$12 students/seniors (\$15 at the door). Info: www.greenroomtheater.com or 847-931-4233.

“STILL NOT QUITE WHAT YOU EXPECTED”

Oct. 22-23, 29-30, Memorial Hall Civic Theatre, 10308 Main St., Richmond. Presented by Theater Undreground, a sequel to last year’s show “Not What You Expected.” Once again, it’s a comedy about some rock bands, only this time they are competing in a battle of the bands when more unexpected antics reveal themselves. “Still Not Quite What You Expected” is written by local writer Katelin Stack of Woodstock; it is directed by first time director Jeremy Greenfield of Johnsburg; and it’s produced by Theater Undreground founder and regular David Baker.

Schedule: 8 p.m. all shows. Tickets: \$10 with \$2 of each ticket sale donated to the Crystal Lake American Little League. Info: www.theaterundreground.com or 815-757-3696.

“HONK!”

Oct. 29-30, Nov. 5-7, Huntley High School Performing Arts Center, 13719 Harmony Road, Huntley. Christian Youth Theater presents a musical adaption of Hans Christian Anderson’s “The Ugly Duckling.” Journey with Ugly as he encounters colorful characters, including a flock of wayward geese, a larger-than-life bullfrog and a domesticated hen.

Schedule: 7 p.m. Oct. 29 and Nov. 5; 2 and 6 p.m. Nov. 6; 2 p.m. Oct. 30 and Nov. 7. Tickets: \$12 adults (\$14 at the door), \$9 children (2-17), seniors and groups of 15 or more (\$11 at the door). The 2 p.m. Oct. 30 show is Family Day with tickets at \$9 (\$11 at the door). Info: www.cytchicago.org or 847-516-2298.

“CAROUSEL”

Nov. 4-7, Sun City, Huntley. The Sun City Theatre Company presents its fall production of the Rogers and Hammerstein musical.

Schedule: 7 p.m. Nov. 4, 5 and 6 and 1:30 p.m. Nov. 7. Tickets: \$15 adults, \$10 children. Info on Thursday and Friday tickets call (847) 515-8545. Info on Sunday tickets, call 847-515-1583.

“AND THEN THERE WERE NONE”

Nov. 4-6, 11-13, 18-20, Black Box Theatre, McHenry County College, 8900 Route 14, Crystal Lake. The college’s fall play features Agatha Christie’s captivating murder mystery involving a group of 10 strangers lured to a remote island off the coast of Devon.

Schedule: 7:30 p.m. all shows. Tickets: \$10 for students, faculty/staff, seniors and alumni, \$15 for general public. Info: For reservations, call 815-455-8746 or e-mail jgeller@mchenry.edu.

“THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD”

Nov. 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20 and 21, Woostock Opera House, 121 W. Van Buren St., Woodstock. TownSquare Players present this musical mystery in which a loony Victorian musical troupe stages its flamboyant rendition of an unfinished Dickens novel.

Schedule: 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday shows; 3 p.m. Sunday shows. Tickets: \$23 for adults, \$20 for students/seniors. Info: www.tspinc.org, www.woodstockoperahouse.com or call the Woodstock Opera House box office at 815-338-5300.

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