

SISTER ACT

Three Cottage Grove sisters charm their way into the local theater spotlight

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY MEERAH POWELL

When young actors and actresses think of where to kickstart their careers, what often comes to mind is locations like L.A. or New York. Even though the Conforth sisters may be headed that way, they've already made a name for themselves right here in Lane County.

Sisters Cyra, Kenady and Campbell Conforth — ages 18, 14 and 11, respectively — live in Cottage Grove. The trio is heavily involved in dance and musical theater both there and here in Eugene, and the eldest two have taken part in The Shedd's Musical Theatre Training Academy.

Their mother, Amanda Conforth, is also the director of Cottage Grove's South Lane Ballet Academy.

"Yeah, we're kind of the weirdoes in town," Amanda laughs.

The three Conforth sisters sparked their interest in performance by getting involved in Cottage Grove's community theater, Cottage Theatre. From there, they started performing more actively in Eugene, specifically at The Shedd.

"Working at The Shedd has been so awesome," middle sister Kenady tells *EW*. "Before, we would work at the Cottage Theatre, and it was great experience and great learning, but it's awesome being in a place where — because you get paid for the shows here — you have to work hard because this is your job."



CAMPBELL
CONFORTH



KENADY
CONFORTH

ALL EUGENE'S A STAGE

Looking for fleeting drama in the upcoming theater season

BY RICK LEVIN

Theater is a battleground.

As the most atavistic of art forms — live drama in the age of digital clones — theater is in a continual struggle for relevance, now more so than ever. Film is indeed a beautiful medium, but it's more static than fluid; there will only ever be one *Citizen Kane*.

Theater, on the other hand, involves a beautiful risk, and that risk is fluid. Theater is a machine of perpetual motion, fraught with all the potential for grace and error of which the human animal is capable.

On any given night, sitting in the audience, you might just witness the best damn *Macbeth* you've ever seen — and then, brief shadow, it is no more. Or you might be subject to an utter fiasco. The anxiety of theater is inseparable from its potential for transcendence. Failure always nips at its heels, and this is what makes it so damn tantalizing.

Theater, in other words, is a continuously renewable product. And each coming season, theater companies attempt a particularly tricky act of artistic jujitsu, balancing commercial demands and audience expectation against

issues of artistic risk and the threat of becoming staid, stale and safe.

With community theater, the battle for relevance is complicated by concerns of a fiscal and pedagogic nature — like minor league farm teams in baseball, local theaters are the places where up-and-coming actors (paid modestly, if at all) cut their teeth beside veteran performers, all of them playing on stages and sets that can only hope to rival the imagination, minus the big budget, of lavish Broadway productions.

Sometimes I think Eugene's theater scene is thriving; other times, I'm frustrated by the conservative choices made by local directors. Obviously, business is business — I get that — but really, who needs to see yet another production of *An Enemy of the People* or *Waiting for Godot*?

I realize, of course, that I've just contradicted my assertion that theater is infinitely renewable, and I'm okay with that. I do believe that, should the human race survive another century, *Julius Caesar* will remain as relevant in 2117 as it certainly is today.

And yet, often, when surveying another coming theater season, I get a terrible sense of déjà vu: Didn't we just see *Little Shop* a couple years back?

When Lane Community College mounted Irish playwright and modern bad-boy Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* in 2015, I was over the moon (see "Bedtime Stories" *EW* 11/19/2015). This is a tough, challenging — nay, outright confrontational — play about totalitarianism. It was a fantastic risk for the college; it was a fantastic production.

The battle, then, is for balance: controversy vs. escapism, challenge vs. nostalgia, relevance vs. tradition, money vs. art. Looking at what's on tap at Eugene theaters this coming year, we see a little of everything: Some old standbys, a couple old saws, endlessly repeated; a handful of productions aimed directly at our current political climate of division, confusion and potential cataclysm; a pair of world premieres; and some interesting standouts.

Here, then, are some of the upcoming productions we're most looking forward to seeing in and around Eugene as the new theater season opens: