



The cast of *Independence* is, from left: Isabella Steele, Rebecca Rowland Hines (in chair), Abby Jones and Yelena King. SUBMITTED PHOTO

## Four-character play opens at KCC on April 15

By LYNDON ZAITZ  
Of the *Keizertimes*

*Independence*, a four-character play, will be staged by Trill Performing Arts at Keizer Homegrown Theatre's stage at the Keizer Cultural Center, opening Friday, April 15.

The play, by noted playwright Lee Blessing ("A Walk in the Woods"), is the story of four women struggling to create a sense of family.

Co-directors of the show are Joseph Silva, founder of Trill Performing Arts, based in Monmouth, and Valerie Steele; both have helmed a number of previous stage productions in the region. They drew their cast of women from the Portland-Salem area.

Rebecca Rowland Hines of Portland plays Evelyn, the mother of the three other characters. Yelena King of Hillsboro plays Kess, who comes home to help her sisters care for their controlling mother. The sisters are played by Isabella Steele of West Salem (Jo) and Abby Jones (Sherry).

After a four-year absence, old wounds open quickly. The four women try to fashion some sense of family. As the strain becomes greater, each woman must come to terms with who they are, and whether reconciliation is possible.

"The appeal of the show to directors comes from the unforgettable characters," said Silva. "It is a tightly knit script; the relationships are complex, but the story is easy to follow and always makes sense."

The strongest theme in the show is

the running question for each character: Who are they as individuals? How can they accept each other in the face of such strong differences? Can they unite into a true family?

Isabella Steele was attracted by the depiction of mental health in an unhealthy family dynamic.

"I play Jo. She is a fixer and romantic. She is the middle daughter and the world is on her shoulders," she said.

"She (Jo) is concerned about her mother's mental health and doing everything she can to provide for her family."

Isabella Steele said it was a challenge to pinpoint the transformative moments of Jo's character arc to believably depict her growth from being a victim to gaining courage and independence.

"I want audiences to feel like they just witnessed a pivotal moment in this family's life where they can finally break the cyclical familial abuse and walk away stronger than ever," said Steele.

King was drawn to the complexity and depth of the characters.

"These women feel real, and the story feels footed in reality, as well. You probably know someone in your life that resembles as least one of these women... or you will thank your lucky stars that you don't," said King.

All the actors in *Independence* have plenty of previous stage experience. Rowland Hines comes from a theatrical family. King won a best actress award in Portland for her lead role in *Rabbit Hole* at Mask and Mirror Community Theatre (Tigard). Jones, though relatively new to

acting, made her mark in Salem with her performance in Chicago.

All of the action of *Independence* takes place in the living room of Evelyn. The set was designed by Dave Berrier. Costumes are by Valerie Steele. The production crew are all volunteers of the non-profit Trill Performing Arts.

"Our mission," said Silva, "is to unite people and enrich communities through the performing arts."

*Independence* is being performed at Keizer Homegrown Theatre at the invitation of KHT founder and president Linda Baker.

"Keizer Homegrown Theatre has been generous in its support of this effort," Silva said. KHT board member Loriann Schmidt designed the lighting for the production.

*Independence* opens on Friday, April 15, and runs through Sunday, April 24. Performances are at 7 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, with 2 p.m. matinees on Sundays. Tickets are \$15.

Following Keizer Homegrown Theatre COVID protocols, vaccines and masks are required for audience members.



Rebecca Rowland Hines and Abby Jones in a scene from *Independence*. SUBMITTED PHOTO