

# AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT A DATING GAME - MEDIEVAL STYLE

The Peninsula Association of Performing Artists brings the comedy musical 'Once Upon a Mattress' to its summer stage

Story by MARILYN GILBAUGH

Photos by DANNY MILLER

**A** feisty girl, a mama's boy with an overbearing mother, and an itty bitty pea — the popular

reality television show "The Bachelor" doesn't hold a candle to this tall tale. This summer the Peninsula Association of Performing Artists is set to delight audiences with "Once Upon a Mattress," a mad-cap musical take on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Princess and the Pea."

Fall under the spell of make-believe from July 8 through Aug. 7, a five-week run for the nonprofit theater troupe, with performances Friday and Saturday evenings at 7 p.m. and Sunday afternoons at 2 p.m.

The theater's location is a scene stealer itself. Situated in a wooded wonderland, it sits high on the rocky promontory of Washington's 593-acre Fort Columbia State Park overlooking the mouth of the Columbia River. The former World War II military center, which started being used as a theater in 1930, may be a little off the mark of a 10th-century medieval setting, but it's easy to make a leap of faith and envision a long-ago magical kingdom.

PAPA preparation for the summer show began in April when the cast and crew started gathering to learn lines, block scenes and rehearse dance numbers. As with other PAPA productions, preliminary rehearsals for "Once Upon a Mattress" took place at PAPA president Cindy Flood's Flood Farm Bed and Barn on the Long Beach



"Performers act during dress rehearsal for "Once Upon a Mattress."



Prince Dauntless, played by Ron Thompson, swings Princess Winnifred, played by Brooke Brown, in a dancing scene in "One Upon a Mattress."

Peninsula before shifting to the Fort Columbia stage. The Flood Farm Bed and Barn is a several-acre wooded setting bordering Loomis

Lake that could easily lend itself to its own magical storyline.

"Once Upon a Mattress" is the classic tale of royal courtship

Peninsula legend Barbara Poulshock directs the show. During rehearsals she is seated royally on an overstuffed chair. The adoring and appreciative cast is at her beck and call — her own bunch of ladies in waiting, so to speak.

"Musicals aren't great because they have great actors in them; musicals are great because they have the ability to coax the greatness out of the actors," said Megan Fechter, PAPA's director of marketing. "Barbara Poulshock, for example, finds what makes the actors tick. She knows exactly what to say to get them to hit the mark. Something like, 'Pretend it's a soap opera, people.' She can see the emotion more or less that's needed and how to draw it out, often from real life experiences."

On an 8.5-by-11-inch yellow notepad balanced on her lap, Poulshock is constantly making notes that, if she can decipher her own handwriting (her words), she will share with the cast during their break.

"Just a little more movement, but not too much," she tells one actor.

"Slower," she offers to another.

"Add a little more excitement, a little more fun to your lines — but that will happen when you play to an audience," Poulshock coaches.

This play is rumored to be one of her favorites. And that's saying a lot. At 89, Poulshock has, over her decades-long career, directed a multitude of musicals and more.

"During our performances, there are no prompts. You memorize your lines backward and forward, or you make something up," said longtime PAPA veteran Brook Brown, who plays Princess Winnifred the Woebegone in the musical. "If you accidentally drop a hanky or a button, you make it a part of the play."

The storyline to "Once Upon a Mattress" in a nutshell — or should that read pea pod? — centers around a royal family. It includes Queen Aggravain, played by Cindy Flood: a mother, wife and a way-too-bossy queen with a mean streak (think helicopter parenting to the max). Queen Aggravain's kind but mute and curse-ridden husband is King Sextimus the Silent, played by Jonathan Cole. King Sextimus is unable to speak due to an evil curse that can be lifted only when "a

## 'ONCE UPON A MATTRESS'

7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, July 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23, 29, 30, Aug. 5 and 6  
2 p.m. Sunday, July 10, 17, 24, 31 and Aug. 7

Fort Columbia Theater  
Chinook, Washington  
papatheater.com

Tickets also available at Okie's Thriftway Market in Ocean Park by cash or check

\$20 or \$17 for adults,  
\$10 or \$7 for children

A Discover Pass is not required to park for the show

turned topsy-turvy via a tight, fast-paced and often laugh-out-loud funny script.

Multi-talented Long Beach