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A romantic comedy, “Barefoot in the Park” opens Friday, Oct. 7 for a three-week run at Astoria’s home for comedy, the Astor Street Opry Company.

The plot is a simple one, like most Simon plays (two dissimilar men become roommates; a man sublets an apartment and finds it occupied by a woman and her precocious teenage daughter, etc.). What makes the play is Simon’s spirited dialogue and witty repartee.

Here is the nutshell version of “Barefoot in the Park”: Newlyweds Corie and Paul move into their first apartment. Corie is an impetuous romantic, while Paul is a conservative, even stuffy young attorney more intent on his career than on continuing the honeymoon. This leads to the obvious conflicts, complicated by a double date with Corie’s widowed mother and their eccentric neighbor, Victor (known as “The Bluebeard of 48th Street”). The couple decides to divorce. They fight over the settlement. Corie’s mother and Bluebeard find true love. Corie and Paul reconcile and promise to live happily ever after.

Would that Simon had written a sequel to this improbable plot, but he didn’t.

Redford will not reprise his Broadway role — he’s a little old for the part — but local favorite Ben VanOsdol plays Paul with Alicea Settlemoire as Corie.

“Barefoot” has a small cast, just five actors, which makes it perfect for local productions. Neen Drage plays Ethel Banks, Corie’s loopy mother, and Jason Hippert is Victor. Nate Bucholz rounds out the cast as the telephone repairman.

The problem with doing “Barefoot” is that it has such a stellar history that producing the play can be intimidating. This doesn’t seem to apply to our local talent. The Astor Street Opry Company gave Lisa Fergus, who usually directs at Cannon Beach’s Coaster Theatre, the opportunity to choose the show she would direct, and there was no doubt in her mind. She acknowledges that Mike Nichols’ are “big shoes to fill,” but, “It’s a show I have always loved,” she says.

“Barefoot” is set in the 1960s, and if that were all there was to the play it would be dated, but as Fergus says, “The opposites attract relationship is a theme that is pretty timeless.” The ASOC production will have, “a different spin from the movie, a bit more true-to-life, a more modern twist” to the story line.

“I was lucky to get a top-of-the-line group of actors,” Fergus says. “They are really personifying their characters. It’s fun to work with a new group, with new dynamics. I’m having the time of my life.”

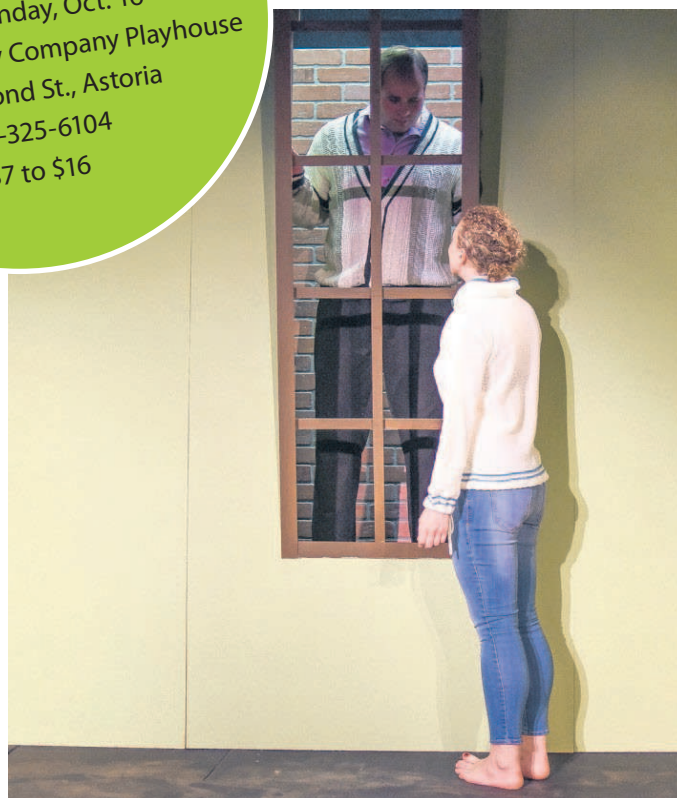
And so will you. Check out one of Neil Simon’s greatest hits and be prepared to laugh and clap.



In “Barefoot in the Park,” Corie sets her mother, Ethel, played by Neen Drage, left, up on a date with her eccentric neighbor, Victor, played by Jason Hippert.

### ‘BAREFOOT IN THE PARK’

7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Oct. 7,  
8, 14, 15, 21 and 22  
2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 16  
Astor Street Opry Company Playhouse  
129 W. Bond St., Astoria  
503-325-6104  
\$7 to \$16



Free-spirited Corie, played by Alicea Settlemoire, right, wants her stuffy lawyer husband, Paul, played by Ben VanOsdol, to be more spontaneous in Neil Simon’s “Barefoot in the Park.”



Jason Hippert, right, plays Victor, the eccentric neighbor of newlyweds Paul and Corie, played by Alicea Settlemoire, in the Astor Street Opry Company’s production of “Barefoot in the Park.”