

OPINION

editor@dailyastorian.com



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OUR VIEW

The show goes on — with a passion

'Beauty and the Beast' is a remarkable achievement

There are just three opportunities left to catch one of our region's most sparkling local theater productions in recent years.

"Beauty and the Beast" is being staged this summer by the Peninsula Association of Performing Artists, an all-volunteer troupe based on Washington's Long Beach Peninsula.

It plays at the Fort Columbia Theater in Chinook on Friday and Saturday nights with a final matinee Sunday.

To perform the musical, director Brooke Flood recruited a cast of 30. Remarkably, for many, it is their first foray into amateur acting.

The troupe has about a decade of successful productions under its belt, but none demanding the scale of this one. Even "Fiddler on the Roof," which leaders chose to reprise because it was so popular, cannot match the scope of "Beast."

Talents onstage have been matched by hard work behind the scenes. The show provided Angela Grote, PAPA's creative costume designer, and her crew with their biggest challenges. When the prince character is magically turned into a beast, his servants are transformed into household objects like tea cups, candles and even wardrobes. Several heavy costumes were borrowed from a school in California and shipped north by truck



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Cast members perform a dance routine during a scene in 'Beauty and the Beast.'

'BEAUTY AND THE BEAST'

Musical by Peninsula Association of Performing Artists at Fort Columbia Theater.

Final performances: 7 p.m. Friday, Aug. 3, Saturday, Aug. 4, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 5.

Tickets are \$18-\$23, or \$7.50-\$12.50 for children, available online at papatheater.com/tickets, at Okie's Sentry Market in Ocean Park, or by calling Penny Ripley at (360) 836-4448.

A Discover Pass is not needed to attend the show, which is in a Washington State Park.

especially for the show.

This project is the brainchild of Flood, a talented woman who began taking piano lessons from longtime PAPA director Barbara Poulshock when she was 6. Her mother, Cindy Flood, is a former Los Angeles dance teacher who founded the group and serves on its board. She plays Mrs. Potts, a charming supporting role which was voiced by

Angela Lansbury in the Disney movie on which the stage musical is based.

A product of Ilwaco schools and Clatsop Community College, Brooke Flood honed her craft at George Fox College in Newberg, savoring the private Christian college's unusually edgy drama curriculum. She has returned to the community to lend her talents to PAPA while harboring dreams some day of a profes-

sional career in the performing arts.

Knowing that, it is fun to reflect that Angus Bowmer, the driving force behind the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, made his start in Chinook — in the school barely a mile from where Flood's troupe is performing.

Another plus is the collaboration with Fort Columbia State Park. The 593-acre facility played a role in the region's history as a small part of the expansive Army coastal defense system at the mouth of the Columbia River.

The theater building was sensitively restored by Washington State Parks, and now is among the agency's assets most appreciated by local residents. Visitors might enjoy taking time before or after a play to stroll around the fort, which offers glorious views of the estuary.

"Beauty and the Beast" is based on an ancient French fairytale, but offers timely lessons about acceptance. Angry villagers sing "The Mob Song" — "We don't like what we don't understand, and in fact it scares us. . . . Let's kill the beast!"

To offset this, the upbeat director Flood shared a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. with her cast: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Whether you attend for the message, the merriment or the sheer spectacle, "Beauty and the Beast" is a remarkable achievement in community theater. We fully predict anyone who attends the final three shows will be entertained, if not uplifted.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Questions and answers in Cannon Beach

What questions are on the minds of first-time visitors?

As Oregon Coast residents, we hold certain truths to be self-evident. In Cannon Beach, these can include — but are not limited to — knowing about Haystack Rock, traffic gridlock in the summer and always being skeptical of a weather report.

But what truths are evident — and not so evident — to the tourists who walk into the Cannon Beach Visitor

Information Center at the height of summer?

Last year, more than 42,000 people made a trip into the center, which averages to about 90 to 120 people a day.



BRENNA VISSER

In the age of apps, Yelp reviews and social media, I couldn't help

but wonder what questions were left on the minds of those 42,000 people by the time they entered city limits. What questions does the firsttime visitor have, and what does it take for the staff to field them?

To find out, I shadowed center supervisor Laura Kaim and spent a day in the life at the visitor center. Here are some observations:

'Where's Haystack Rock?'

This is by far one of the most popular questions asked, only second to "Where's the beach?" By 1 p.m. on a recent Friday, both of these questions were asked almost 20 times.

Known as one of the most recognizable landmarks on the Oregon Coast, it seems odd for someone to lose track of a 235-foot rock.

"If you're driving south and take the first exit, you can see the rock poking up above the trees," Kaim said. "But once you get into downtown, it disappears."

The visitor center is only two blocks from the beach, so on the surface it may seem peculiar how often Kaim has to give directions to the iconic rock. Part of the confusion may be that there aren't signs anywhere in downtown pointing to the beach.



Photos by Brenna Visser/The Daily Astorian

Laura Kaim, the supervisor of the Cannon Beach Visitor Information Center, helps a tourist find her way through town.

"They would probably still come in and ask, but some signage pointing west would probably help," she added.

Other questions Kaim didn't expect to answer as often as she does are mostly related to Cannon Beach's natural wonders. Many ask the difference between low and high tide, how to find a tide pool and how to find the area's notorious elk.

"I usually tell them (the elk) weren't kind enough to give me their schedule for the day," Kaim said. "But I did have one person ask me if the elk in the city park were wild. I think she thought they were the city's."

'We have no idea what we're doing'

In the age of the internet, it would be easy to assume that visitors have Googled near everything they need to know about the town before even arriving.

This is rarely the case. "People will come in saying someone told them they just had to come to Cannon Beach, but told them nothing else about it," Kaim said.

In visitor center land, there are two types of vacationers: those who plan,

and those don't.

For the latter, the information center does its best to accommodate by keeping a constantly updated list of available rooms and campsites for those strolling into town, thinking a reservation is not necessary in the summer.

On Friday, there were fewer than 30 rooms left in town for the weekend. Most were taken by the end of the day. Often, Kaim has to be the bearer of bad news for families that had the misconception they could camp on the beach or in town.

"To assume is vacation doom, as I say," Kaim said.

For the planners, the center serves a different purpose: to offer local perspective.

"Most people are wanting the firsthand, local knowledge, not something you could easily find with a search online," Kaim said. "It's not just 'Where should I go to get fish and chips?' It's 'Where would YOU go to get fish and chips?'"

Unfortunately, this is probably the most difficult question Kaim faces.

"Because I don't eat fish and chips or clam chowder," Kaim said. "But I tell them everywhere in town (that) sells it,



By midafternoon, more than 160 people had strolled into the Visitor Information Center to ask questions about Cannon Beach.

and food for people like me who don't eat it."

Keeping it light

Fielding the wide array of questions that comes their way takes a balance of humor, patience, and every so often, some creative communication techniques.

With international tourism on the rise, it's increasingly common to see tourists whose first language is French, German or Japanese.

"I really wish I would have taken some German or French in school," Kaim laughed. "But between hand gestures and maps we get by."

No matter what language the question is formed in, finding a way to creatively answer similar questions dozens of times a day is a challenge — but one Kaim looks forward to taking on daily.

"We like it to feel like we're telling you this information for the very first time," Kaim said.

Sometimes that means instead of describing how far Tillamook Head Lighthouse is from the shore, Kaim just tells people you can only get to it with wings, fins or a friend in the U.S. Coast Guard — a line she uses multiple times a day.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm practicing a standup comedy routine, but no matter what, I like to keep it light," she said.

Almost 240 visitors later, Kaim called it a day. No matter how repetitive questions may be, getting the chance to help and share the stories of the North Coast with new people every day makes this the most fun job she's ever had.

"If at least one person says 'That was helpful, then the day was successful.'"

Brenna Visser is The Daily Astorian's South County reporter.