

Shakespeare Festival Spotlights Diversity

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These are big questions that have been seriously addressed by festival staff, which in the past several years has steadily built programs to attract audiences of color from nearby urban areas and conduct outreach into the growing Latino communities that dot the region.

Ashland — a postcard scene surrounded by rural farming communities and population from statewide and California — could be just another sleepy stop along I-5, but since 1935 their love of theater has set it apart from their neighbors.

Now, in a world where attracting just one type of audience doesn't quite cut it, the festival seeks other ways to set Ashland apart by expanding their playbill, cast and audience. In the words of Diane Holt, director of audience development, OSF understands that to represent the world you must understand the world's diverse cultures.

Holt explained the beginnings of their diversity program, dating back to the late 1990s, when they began to place greater emphasis on hiring actors of color and launched campaigns to find new audiences.

Historically, the word diversity hasn't been synonymous with southern Oregon — but OSF has worked hard to build a company of world-class actors, directors and artists that mirror the array of classic, contemporary and Shakespearean plays. Attracting theatergoers from Portland, the San Francisco Bay area and beyond, they've embodied the idea that theater knows no race or gender, only the integral lessons of love, family, tragedy and comedy.

Eventually, actors of color came to represent at least 25 percent of the company comprised of around 80 members. But at the same time things were slightly one-sided:

"Now that we had more than a third of the staff with actors of color, we looked out into the audience, which was mostly white," Holt recalled.

Holt began to hear, through feedback from actors and staff, a perception in the African American community that southern Oregon wasn't a safe place to stop.

Not long after the revelation, Holt said a white man from Myrtle Creek, a small community outside Ashland, paid her a visit after seeing an August Wilson play.

He said it broke his heart to see such wonderful African American plays, but no African Americans in the audience.

The man gave the festival a small grant, their first funding to attract people of color, and in 1999 they received another larger grant for outreach in the local Latino community. In 2001 another campaign broadened their audience, moving right along in expanding beyond their rural boundaries.

This past year, festival officials joined Portland's Partners in Diversity to recruit new board members and sent an actor to the quarterly Say Hey, NW networking event. A couple times this year, actors have led community discussions about the plays, held most recently at a church in northeast Portland.

With full momentum, OSF recently hired a new artistic director, Bridget B. Sullivan, whose job, which starts next month, will be to continue reaching out into surrounding communities and Portland as well as into California, Seattle and Vancouver, Wash.

Originally from upstate New York and a longtime Atlanta resident, Sullivan has the dual perspective of being a minority in a rural and white setting and having lived in one of the



PHOTO BY SARAH BLOUNT/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Representatives of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland are known for introducing theater and Shakespeare to low-income high schools. Pictured from left are OSF Development Director Diane Holt and company actors Nancy Rodriguez, René Millán and Armando Duran.



The audience development director with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Diane Holt (left) meets with actress Greta Oglesby, who appears in this season's "Gem of the Ocean" and "The Tempest."

most diverse cities in the country. Now, as a relatively new Oregonian from Portland, she is receiving a crash course in southern Oregon culture after visiting for the job interview.

"My short time in Ashland allowed me to see there was a certain energy," she said. "It could be the creative energy but I also got the sense that Ashland was serious about accepting diversity in their community."

And from what her new colleagues have told her, the timing couldn't be better.

"Everyone has made reference to

"the time is now," she said. "The time is perfectly aligned to make diverse changes across the board. OSF is committed to making changes that will benefit Ashland and region as a whole."

Sullivan is already busy generating enough ideas to make your head buzz, including plans to jazz up weekend getaway tours that already originate from Portland and Oakland, Calif. She'd like to see brochure's printed in Spanish, partnerships with local theaters and radio shows, and she plans to build a relationship between the festival

and inner city kids in communities with schools that may not have art programs.

It's unclear how exactly Sullivan will affect the festival, but as our state adapts to cultural changes in attitudes and acceptance, it's good to know Ashland can look to its greatest strength, the festival, to nurture this ideal.

Catch "Gem of the Ocean," or one of 10 other performances, including Shakespeare's "As You Like It" and "The Tempest" during the 2006-07 season running through October at OSF.

Portland Observer Auto Review

2007

Infiniti G35

BY KATHLEEN CARR

The Infiniti G35 sedan has been reconfigured for 2007. The body of the four-door sedan is updated, giving it a tight, more buff look but without forfeiting its signature styling cues. Inside, there's a richer, warmer look and feel, with performance-oriented enhancements that add to the driving experience.

The substantially reworked 2007 engine may entice a driver to have a heavy right foot, delivering its added power smoothly and strongly right up to the borderline motorcycle-level, 7500-rpm red line. The benefit is that estimated fuel economy for the 2007 model is up over the '06, by one mile per gallon, at least for those who can resist the impetuous.

The G35 buyer can choose from four versions: a nicely equipped entry-level model with leather trim and automatic climate control; the Journey model with dual-zone air conditioning, a navigation system, a premium audio system, and a self-adjusting cruise control; the G35x with all-wheel drive; and a revised Sport model with upgraded front seats, active four-wheel steering with variable ratio power steering and a firmer suspension that turns the G35 into a serious sports sedan.

The new, 2007 Infiniti G35 sedan comes in four models, all powered by the same 3.5-liter V6 engine making 306 horsepower. Two transmissions are available, a five-speed automatic with manual-shift mode and a six-speed.

Ride and handling stay consistent in the G35 with the notable and commendable exception of the Sport models with four-wheel steer. The automatic model changes gears the quickest and, interestingly, the



Specifications: 3.5 Liter 24-valve V6 Engine; Five speed automatic transmission with manual shift mode; 19 mpg city, 26 highway mpg, \$33,450 MSRP, price tested \$36,800.

smoothest with either the shift lever or the column-mounted paddles and under full throttle; it's like a power shift but without the clutch. The transmission has the ability to handle the powerful engine. Infiniti has made changes to 80 percent of the engine's major components which were redesigned. Variable exhaust valve timing has been added, for example. A beefier engine block, modified pistons and, of course, new coding in the engine management computer have endowed the engine with a higher rev limit, now 7500 revolutions per minute versus last year's 6600 rpm.

Standard across the model line up are leather-appointed upholstery; automatic climate control; power driver and front passenger seat; power windows, outside mirrors and central locking; AM/FM/CD/MP3 stereo with auxiliary audio input; multi-function trip computer; seven-inch, color, center-dash, LCD monitor; tilt and telescoping steering wheel; analog gauge cluster that tilts with the steering column; aluminum interior trim; RFID-based, keyless ignition; HID, bi-xenon

headlamps; fold-down, rear center armrest with lockable, trunk pass-through; and painted, aluminum-alloy wheels.

The Navigation Package consists of a GPS-based system employing a 30GB hard disc drive (which displaces the in-dash, six-CD changer to the trunk and contains a 9.5GB partition for user-recorded audio tracks); MP3-capable compact flash media slot (also used to copy audio to the HDD and update the map database); lane guidance, which preps a driver for a left or right exit ramp from a freeway; voice recognition for climate control, audio and navigation; and a three-month trial subscription to Sirius or XM satellite radio, the latter including real-time traffic information where available.

The 2007 Infiniti G35 offers a highly competitive sports sedan class. And it's definitely competitive, with its slick styling, comfortable interior, power and handling on par with any of its peers. For people wanting a sports sedan that's as accommodating of its passengers as it is rewarding for its driver, the new G35 is hard to beat.

Shattered

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THE ALL-NEW EDGE



* EPA estimated fuel economy is city/hwy. 18/25 FWD. ** Class is Medium Crossover Vehicles with 6-cylinder engines standard.