

LAST RESORT PLAYERS DAZZLE WITH ELEGANT ‘GREY GARDENS’

**“Grey Gardens
The Musical”**
REVIEW BY BURNEY GARELICK

Even though it was named for dingy dunes, stone walls and dense coastal fog, Grey Gardens was not the ooky spooky residence of The Addams Family. Grey Gardens was a 28-room mansion in the Hamptons on Long Island in New York, the residence of the fabulously rich Bouvier Beales and the site of champagne parties with high society, the who's who of industry, finance and politics in the 1920s, '30s and early '40s. “Grey Gardens The Musical” is a big show and a rollicking ride scaled to concert size by the Last Resort Players (LRP) for the intimacy of three rooms on the flat floor at the Florence Events Center. Still, it's an expansive seating arrangement and a roomy stage with an excellent orchestra seated on a slight riser behind the actors. Props and sets are minimal but essential, and the actors are costumed, off script, on cue and in key. The show is bright, funny and achingly sad.

LRP, Florence's longtime troupe, does magnificent theater here, capturing with humor and compassion the

tragicomic lives of Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter Edie as Grey Gardens slides from its glory days into wreck and ruin, cohabited by cats and raccoons.

“Grey Gardens” was conceived for the LRP by extraordinary stage crafter Leah Goodwin. Rehearsals were underway when, in July, Leah was called to the heavenly stage. After intense grieving, LRP decided the show must go on as a tribute. Jason Wood, exceptional master of stagecraft, was asked to direct, to put flesh and bone and blood and voice to Leah's dream.

The rest is history.

There's no business like show business, and both Edith and Edie pursue a life on stage. Edith is a perennial singer with a penchant for opera arias, much to the chagrin of her obnoxious father. Edie is a cabaret singer and dancer who longs to play Broadway and Hollywood. Both affirm their independence, even though Edith requires male companions before and after her divorce, and Edie has a number of liaisons after her engagement is thwarted. Mother and daughter maintain a fractious relationship but remain together, back to back, side by side.

Compelling as it is, “Grey Gardens” is a true story. The lively dialogue and witty lyrics are filled with cultural allusions of the era. To enhance your experience

with the show, visit Wikipedia and learn things. “Grey Gardens” will grow on you.

LRP actors and their supporting crew are outstanding, one and all.

Crystal Farnsworth is brilliant in two roles — as Edith in Act One and as Edie in Act Two. Costumes, makeup and hair styling make for a remarkable transformation. Psychologically, however, it makes sense: children often become their parents! Farnsworth sings with gusto and clarity from “The Girl Who Has Everything” to “The Revolutionary Costume For Today.”

Joanie Schmidt as “Little” Edie in Act One sings with the voice of an angel in perfect harmony with the others. Her solo, “The Telegram,” is heartbreaking. Schmidt is a delight as the blushing bride-to-be.

The groom-to-be is Joseph Kennedy, played with Kennedy aplomb by Bruce Morganti, tall and handsome, ramrod straight, a president in the making, and a little priggish. Morganti and Schmidt exchange some sweet duets, “Goin' Places” and “Daddy's Girl.” Morganti returns in Act Two for a hallelujah moment as Norman Vincent Peale, preacher, author of “The Power of Positive Thinking,” friend of Richard Nixon, and a sort of mentor to Donald Trump.

Venerable LRP trouper Ken Janows-

ki returns to the stage as Brooks Sr., the butler. Janowski does it all right; he knows how to play it straight to get a laugh, and he blends his fine voice with the others.

Edith's companion in Act One is blasé, bored, inebriated pianist George Gould Strong, played by extremely versatile actor Mattieu Korsó, who inhabits his characters like a well-tailored suit and sings with panache. Gould knows when it's time to “Drift Away” from Grey Gardens.

James Wellington is an accomplished character actor. His outrageous Modern Major General in the LRP's “Pirates of Penzance” is hard to beat, but his turn as another major named Bouvier comes close. The irascible old codger favors his golf game, can't stand his daughter Edith's singing, and adores his granddaughters, Edie and her cousins Jackie and Lee Bouvier. The major advises the girls to “Marry Well,” a delightful ditty where Wellington is reminiscent of Polonius advising Ophelia and Laertes.

Sisters Jackie and Lee are played with poise and perfection by Chloe Aaron and Hailey Hilsdorf, age 12 and 10, respectively.

Apart from a brief moment in the Prologue, Sue Sweatt doesn't appear until Act Two as aging Edith gone from

riches to rags, recalling her glory days, feeding the cats, nagging Edie for pâté, and pampering Jerry, a young sculptor and reluctant companion. Sweatt, an engaging character actor, played a similar role as Grace in “Grace and Glorie” a couple of years ago at Class Act Theatre in Florence. Both characters were determined to age in place even in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

Michael Howry is a terrific Jerry, relishing Edith's corn and treating her with dignity and respect. Karyllynn Keppol is cheerful as Brooks Jr., butlering as errant staff and gardener.

“Grey Gardens” is not a story of resilience so much as it is about defiance and endurance. Mother and daughter are involuntarily but inextricably bound to each other and to Grey Gardens until death do them part.

Postscript: In 1972 when the municipal authority declared Grey Gardens unfit for habitation, Jackie Bouvier Kennedy Onassis provided funds to clean it up. Edith died there in 1977. Edie sold the mansion and settled in Florida where she died in 2002 at age 84.

“Grey Gardens” opened Thursday and plays through Nov. 4 at the Florence Events Center, 715 Quince St. For information, call 541-997-1994 or visit www.eventcenter.org.

Spirituali-Tea to talk politics, religion Monday night

Anyone interested in discussing diverse spiritual ideas in an atmosphere of respect and inquisitiveness is invited to “Spirituali-Tea,” a group that has been meeting for years at 875

Seventh St. at 6:30 p.m. each Monday.

This week's topic will be religion and politics.

Bahá'ís believe that religion and politics don't mix well,

with teachings clearly delineating religion and politics as two separate spheres of human activity: “Religion is concerned with things of the spirit, politics with things of the world. Religion has to work with the world of thought, whilst the field of politics lies with the world of

external conditions.”

People should come prepared to discuss.

At the end of the gathering, the group will read all the prayer requests that have been left in the Prayer Pole in the garden of the Florence Playhouse, 208 Laurel St.

Unitarians to bless the animals Sunday

On Sunday, Nov. 4, from 10 to 11 a.m. at the Florence Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (FUUF), member Deborah Larson will deliver the message titled, “The Blessing of Animals.”

Larson said, “We are celebrating the blessing of our animal companions today as part of honoring and respect for the interconnected web of life. We are affirming that all beings of the earth are important to us and are holy. Our animal

companions are members of our families and members of the larger family of the inhabitants of planet earth.”

FUUF, located at 87738 Highway 101 at Heceta Beach Road, is wheelchair accessible.

Each service concludes with refreshments and a dialogue circle to explore the questions that come up during each worship service.

For more information, visit www.florenceuuf.org.



Your good neighbor for banking too.

Sue Gilday, Agent
State Farm Agent
1275 Rhododendron Drive
Florence, OR 97439
Bus: 541-997-7161

Your financial health is about a lot more than insurance. That's why State Farm Bank® makes it easy to manage your money too, with 24/7 online banking at statefarm.com®. Ask me about Checking accounts, Money Market Savings accounts and more. CALL ME TODAY.



1706478 State Farm Bank, F.S.B., Bloomington, IL **MEMBER FDIC**



See Jim for your auto sales needs!

JOHNSTON
MOTOR COMPANY

 **2150 Hwy. 101 • Florence**
(541) 997-3475 • 1-800-348-3475 

TheSiuslawNews.com

Let me Showcase your property.



Brian Jagoe
Principal Broker
541 999-1314



316 Manzanita Dr – Enjoy living in the beautiful gated community of Florentine Estates. Don't miss this opportunity to pick your floor plan and place your new home on this gorgeous lot within a short walking distance to the clubhouse, pool, sauna, work out room and tennis courts. **\$64,000.**
#2775-17422491

TR HUNTER REAL ESTATE
541-997-1200

1749 Highway 101 • 541-997-1200



DONATE NOW!

Maximize your donation by donating to Cars for a Cause by Dec. 31st.

We accept cars, trucks, RVs, boats & motorcycles CALL NOW!



• *Helps those in need in Lane County*

- *Charitable donation*
- *We do all the paperwork*

St. Vincent de Paul
2315 Hwy. 101 • Florence • 541-997-8460

Holiday Gift Guide

Christmas Gift List

Toys • Books
Clothing
Houseware
Furniture
Gift Certificates

St. Vincent DePaul's
2315 Hwy 101 541-997-8460
Open Daily



SIUSLAW
Glass & Mirror

Glass for Every Purpose
1780 Kingwood St. / P.O. Box 144
Florence, OR 97439

541-997-8526 Fax **541-997-9132**
ccb#55030



PORT HOLE PUBLISHING
179 Laurel Street, Suite D
FLORENCE

LET US PUBLISH YOUR BOOK

PORT HOLE BOOKS
77567 Hwy. 101 • GARDINER



NEW-USED-RARE! WE HAVE IT ALL!
Suehy's, eBay Master Dealer and Appraiser for Discovery.com

Best-Selling Author, Ellen Traylor, Owner/Publisher
541-999-5725
portholebooks.com • portholepublications.com