

Area performers, artists dish on cannabis and creativity

BY DAVID JASPER • The Bulletin

Area writers and performing artists who use cannabis as a shortcut to creativity say it can be a tremendous help — with caution and experience using it, that is. Stephanie Von Aydan, the Bend playwright behind last fall’s “Evanescent,” staged at Cascades Theatrical Company in Bend, suffers from anxiety and complex post-traumatic stress disorder and sometimes struggles to focus on one task at a time. She finds that cannabis helps when she’s writing.

“When I’m at home, I’ll use it when I need to study up on something, when I need my creative juices. It kind of takes away the block that my anxiety creates,” Von Aydan said. “I have a severe case of complex PTSD, and I get a lot of blocks, and it’s really hard for me to be able to get into those creative moments — unless I can create something that takes that block away.”

Von Aydan, 32, who began using marijuana therapeutically in her late teens, said she began writing after separating from her spouse and moving to Central Oregon in 2014. She found that marijuana helped in that capacity, too.

Upon separating from her spouse and moving to Central Oregon in 2014, Von Aydan began writing. She found that “When I had the space and time to really grow into the human that I personally was, I was already using, and it really helped me get creative when I needed to,” she said.

Von Aydan said that when she was writing “Evanescent,” cannabis “helped me go a little overboard,” she said. “I think I just wanted to write this super complex story, and because I was able to lose myself in my mind, I was able to do that.”

The playwright also writes short stories in which, she said, “I tend to make puzzles, so I write pieces and portions of the story, and then I piece them together later. So I write sporadically. That’s how my brain works. When I’m using it helps me concentrate for a storyline.”

Also a musical theater performer who’s starred in local shows such as 2017’s “Disenchanted!” Von Aydan has used cannabis to calm jitters before stepping on stage.

“I really know my limits. I really know the things that I need to be careful with, and how much,” she said. “So for somebody like me where you have such a high tolerance, and you’re used



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Stephanie Von Aydan sits by a mural she painted in her Bend home during the COVID-19 pandemic last year.

to it and you know how to use it properly, it can definitely enhance.”

She urges against using cannabis to calm your nerves if you’re not experienced with it.

“If you don’t know what you’re doing, if you’re new to using, just stay away from it,” Von Aydan said.

Those would have been wise words for Central Oregon stage performer and director Scott Schultz to have heeded before he stepped on stage in “Working,” a 2013 musical produced at the erstwhile 2nd Street Theater in Bend.

Alas, it was marijuana he was offered, not helpful advice.

“Ironically, I was playing an angry stoner, and I was really new to all the weed stuff,” Schultz said. Prior to a performance, “Someone was like, ‘Here, do you want to take a dab?’ And I was like, ‘What is that?’ (A dab is a highly concentrated form of THC, the psychoac-

says that when it comes to writing, pot is more help than a hindrance.

“It really helps slow me down. I’m a chronic multitasker, not always effectively,” he said. “My mind’s usually several different places, so it helps me just sit down and write the task at hand.

His frequent writing process involves sending himself joke ideas that occur during his workday, “And then when I get the chance to sit and write, you know, toked up, and then just write it up.”

He’s a nighttime pot smoker, he said, and has used the drug to enhance his on-stage time, although never during family-friendly shows.

“I have found it really helps my cadence. I have a tendency to talk too fast, so it actually really helps slow me down,” Woodmansee said.

The comic said he hasn’t experienced any trouble on par with Schultz’s monologue mishap when going on stage high.

“I’ve been doing stand-up long enough I really don’t blank,” he said. “If anything, I might tell a story that I haven’t trimmed the fat off. . . . Like, I’ll be talking about family dynamics or something (and) spend way too much time describing the meal that we were eating.”

Though Bend comedian and comedy promoter Katy Ipock does not use marijuana herself, she is sympathetic to performers who do, whether it’s on stage, off or both.

“I absolutely see the benefit,” she said. “I support performers that find a benefit for both their writing and their performance, as long as everyone is partaking responsibly and not risking the venue’s OLCC license. Honestly, I wish the rules would loosen a bit so performers could more freely fuel their creativity in a performance space.”

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tive compound resulting in the feeling of being high.)

“They were like, ‘Here’s a little one,’” Schultz recalled. “I was SO high that when it came to my monologue, halfway through, like I was going through it no issue, and then it was just gone.”

He took a big drag on the joint he was using as a prop, as nothing but the F word came to mind.

“I’m going, ‘F---, say something, say something, say something!’ and then I found the last paragraph, so I skipped over half of that,” Schultz said, laughing.

Echoing Von Aydan, Schultz said, “Know thyself.”

“Experiment in the privacy of your own home. Definitely on your own time and not in a public place because if you don’t know yourself well enough, you don’t want people to find out if it just doesn’t go well.”

Bend comedian Jake Woodmansee