

# Behind the scenes at the Coaster Theatre

*How should the actor playing a bum lean against a trash can?*

By Nancy McCarthy  
Cannon Beach Gazette

Only two weeks before opening night for the summer season, the Coaster Theatre Playhouse is abuzz with activity.

Summer is different at the Coaster than other times of the year because two plays are performed at the same time. This year, "It Could Be Any One of Us," a British comedy murder mystery, opened June 12 and will run until Sept. 5. "Little Shop of Horrors," a musical, opened June 19 and closes Sept. 6.

While behind-the-scenes activity goes on all year at the small theater, which is staging seven shows in 2015, the summer season is subtly frantic.

Rehearsals for both shows began in March, and with just two weeks to go before opening night, the directors, actors and set and light designers fine-tuned each play.

During an evening rehearsal for "Little Shop of Horrors," director Patrick Lathrop (who also is the Coaster's executive director), worked with two actors to perfect a tricky tango while the three women in the "girls group" harmonized on a song.

"Little Shop of Horrors" is about a blood-loving plant named Audrey 2 and the love story of a nerd, Seymour, and a tawdry girl, Audrey, who work in a Skid Row florist's shop.

The nine cast members live in Cannon Beach or Seaside and work in other jobs during the day. Some have formal education in theater; all of them have acted in past productions.

Before opening night arrived, numerous details had to be sorted out. It's not enough

to nail the dialogue, the songs and the dances. During this rehearsal, Lathrop went over his notes: How should the actor playing a bum lean against a trash can? Who will close the curtain after act one? Are all the props ready to go, and how do the costumes fit?

"The thing we have to consider for summer is the length of the run," Lathrop said. "The costumes and props have to last throughout the play."

The actors — all volunteers — also must be committed to a long run, but Lathrop has worked with them in other plays over the past several years and isn't concerned. "They're very passionate about what they do," he said.

They also must be flexible. With two plays being produced at the same time and other events taking up theater space, the directors alternate their rehearsals in the theater or, when they can't use the stage, they go elsewhere — on the second floor of the U.S. Bank Building or at Tolovana Hall or even in a small apartment behind the theater known affectionately as the "Buddha."

At only 10 days to go before "One of Us" opened, the six cast members had pegged their characters and their British accents. They were "off book"; they knew their lines and didn't need their scripts.

It was time for the play's director, Ryan Hull, to tweak the small stuff: He assigned an actor to create the "crash" behind the curtain before another actor screamed. He reminded everyone to pronounce their words clearly. He changed the way one character entered a scene.

But even that close to opening night, Hull still encour-



PHOTO BY NANCY MCCARTHY

A chorus, much like the "girls groups" of the 1950s, moves the story along in "Little Shop of Horrors." They are, from left, Aly Hanson playing Chiffon; Amanda Payne, who is Ronnette; and Cindy Karr as Crystal.

aged the actors to take chances by experimenting with their characters' personalities.

"I still like seeing people trying new things," Hull said. "We're still working through things and seeing how they look."

The directors and actors weren't the only people on a timetable. After consulting with Lathrop and Hull, lighting designer Mick Alderman set the lights for both productions and programmed

the light cues on the theater's light board in the control booth. Two or three volunteers work the lights and sound all summer.

Meanwhile, Krista Guenther also did double duty by helping to design and build the stage sets for both plays. Her challenge: Build a set that could act as a backdrop for 1950s New York Skid Row

one night and become the drawing room of a Victorian mansion in rural England the next night.

With rehearsals at the theater nearly every night for three months, Guenther had to work when the actors weren't on stage. She would come in mid-morning, clean up at 4:45 p.m., then return at 9:30 p.m. and work until midnight. "I like

working at night," she said.

Before she started with the Coaster late last year, Guenther said she had no idea how much work went into each production.

"There are so many talented people who can do so many things," she said. "It's definitely community theater, where everybody does everything."



PHOTO BY NANCY MCCARTHY

Ryan Hull, director of "It Could Be Any One of Us," gives a few notes following a rehearsal. Hull records his notes on his phone, then plays them back. With him is Gretchen Koekstre, who plays Amy Polegate, the daughter in the play.



ABOVE LEFT: Krista Guenther paints the set of "It Could Be Any One of Us." Guenther was involved in designing both stage sets for the two plays running this summer at the Coaster Theatre Playhouse. ABOVE RIGHT: Seymour Krelborn, played by Todd Payne, urges a plant he has named Audrey 2 to bloom during a rehearsal of "Little Shop of Horrors." All his blood, toil and trouble brings Seymour success, at a price.

PHOTOS BY NANCY MCCARTHY



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