

In 'The Mousetrap'

By Nancy McCarthy
For Cannon Beach Gazette

The Coaster Theatre Playhouse began its season with not only the opening of a new play, but a newly remodeled space.

With new seats, curtains, carpeting and paint, the Coaster is celebrating its 45th anniversary this year. The theater was a dream realized by early Cannon Beach builder Maurie Clark, who purchased the Waves Roller Rink and remodeled it in 1972.

The 180 seats installed in the theater 45 years ago came from Lincoln Hall at Portland State University. Although they were refurbished at least once during the past four decades, the seats needed repairs, and parts were no longer available, said Patrick Lathrop, the theater's executive director. The new seats are dark brown and black with gold tones.

Gold velvet curtains replaced the red, water-stained stage and side curtains, and carpeting in shades of tan and chocolate has been installed.

"We tried to take the natural wood in the walls of the theater and bring out its warmth," Lathrop said.

Lathrop also is excited about the mural that will be painted on the theater's back wall. Against a dark green background will be a menagerie of gold animals familiar to the North Coast — elk, deer, salmon and even a bunny or two romping in leaves.

The theater's 45th anniversary also is being celebrated by bringing back some of the plays that proved popular in previous years. They include "Barefoot in the Park," "Steel Magnolias," "Clue: the Musical," "Blithe Spirit" and, what

was the Coaster's tradition for many years, "A Christmas Carol."

Opening the season is Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap," which first opened in London in 1952 and has run almost continuously since then. The play will run at the Coaster through April 15.

Lon time North Coast director Susi Brown attributes the play's popularity to its playwright. Agatha Christie, said Brown, created characters who are familiar to her audiences.

"People can see themselves in her plays or in her books," Brown said. "She's quite the trickster, and people like to be surprised."

In "The Mousetrap," a group of strangers is stranded in a guest house run by newly married couple. When a murder occurs, suspicion is cast on everyone there: a spinster with a curious background, an architect who enjoys cooking, a cranky jurist, a retired army major and an uninvited guest whose car overturned in a snow storm. It's up to a police sergeant, who skis to the manor, to find the killer who whistles "Three Blind Mice."

Since she was asked to direct the play, Brown has been sleuthing for clues herself, cleverly played out in Christie's script through the actors' movements and dialogue. It has been fun, she said. "I like mysteries."

A frequent director at the former River Theater and owner of the former Pier Pressure Productions in Astoria, Brown approaches the play academically, probably due to 27 years of teaching literature, theater, speech, dance and art in the Knappa School District. She also has a master's of fine arts degree in theater direction.



SUBMITTED PHOTO BY GEORGE VETTER/CANNON-BEACH.NET

As with any murder mystery, everyone in "The Mousetrap" has a secret, and Detective Sergeant Trotter is trying to determine what those secrets are. From left, are Mrs. Boyle (Toni Ihander), Mollie Ralston (Emily Dante), Trotter (David Sweeney), Mr. Paravicini (Don Conner), Giles Ralston (William Ham), Miss Casewell (Heather Neuwirth), Major Metcalf (Frank Jagodnik) and Christopher Wren (Tim Garvin). Not pictured is Richard Bowman, who also plays Christopher Wren.



PHOTO BY NANCY MCCARTHY

Mollie Ralston (Emily Dante) has a heart-to-heart talk with her guest, Christopher Wren (Richard Bowman), who is feeling insecure.

She read the play at least five times and wrote notes on it before casting it. She also consulted a stack of books about "The Mousetrap" and Agatha Christie.

Although she directed the play at Knappa High School and saw performances of it in London and again in Astoria, Brown still had "tons of questions" about Christie's intention. "There were a lot of details," Brown said. "I had to ask, 'Why is that happening?'" While she prepares herself

thoroughly as a director, Brown still wants her cast to bring their own insight into the characters they play. Her cast includes actors ranging from Nehalem to Washington's Long Beach Peninsula. All have appeared on the Coaster stage before.

Uppermost in her mind is maintaining the surprise for the audience. To do that, the actors must get "underneath" their characters' multi-dimensional personalities so their responses to each other are natural onstage and contribute to the



PHOTO BY NANCY MCCARTHY

Heather Neuwirth, as Miss Casewell, dances to the "Flight of the Bumblebee," to annoy the cranky Mrs. Boyle, played by Toni Ihander in the murder mystery "The Mousetrap," opening March 3 at the Coaster Theatre in Cannon Beach.

story being told, Brown said. The audience, then, can enjoy picking up clues of its own.

The cast members — both the seasoned and those who are less experienced — have absorbed the personalities Christie developed. They will keep the audience interested — and guessing — until the

big reveal, Brown said.

Brown literally wears the play on her collar at every rehearsal: She attaches three mouse pins on her jacket or blouse. Her mother also collected mouse pins. "I would be completely unnerved if I showed up one day without a mouse," Brown said.

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