

# DRAMA OF DECEPTION

Jean White-Rice makes directorial debut at Coaster Theatre

By William Ham  
For EO Media Group

Deception, revenge, double-crosses and a nice, healthy dose of murder: Yes, it looks like February in Cannon Beach again. And so it is, as “Fit to Kill,” by Victor Cahn, kicks off the Coaster Theatre’s 2018 season.

The play, originally produced in 2003, runs through Feb. 24, with performances 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$20 and \$25.

A noirish tale of infidelity and murder with elements of black comedy, “Fit to Kill” hinges on a love triangle among Janice (Heather Neuirth), a self-made millionaire and CEO of an exercise empire; Adrian (Aaron Harris), a self-indulgent trophy husband who gets by on his charm and chess-playing skills; and Amy (Jessica Harris), who claims to be a reporter writing a profile of Adrian.

But all triangles aren’t created equal: None of these characters are quite what they seem, and the stage is set for a series of dubious alliances and homicidal schemes that keep the twists coming right up to the final curtain.

“It’s full of deceit, and no one knows who’s telling the truth to anyone at any given time,” Neuirth said. “I don’t want to say that it’s a play for our times, but it definitely fits our moment in certain ways.”

Director Jean White-Rice said the characters are playing a game of chess against one another. “Each of them is trying to out-think the others.”

The unusual sense of role-playing extends to the play’s casting.

“My real-life wife is playing my mistress,” said Aaron Harris, seen most recently in the Coaster’s 2017 production of “9 to 5: The Musical.” “Not only that, but I’m doing my first on-stage kissing with both Heather and Jessica, while being a deceitful bastard to both of them at different times. It’s a bit of a challenge.”

“I see a lot of counseling in your future,” Neuirth laughed.

**First-time director**

This production represents both a new chapter and a final bow for one of the Coaster’s most stalwart participants.

Jean White-Rice has been part of the Coaster family since 1998, when she made her first onstage appearance in “On Golden Pond.” Since then, she has worked ev-



“Fit to Kill” cast, from left: Heather Neuirth, Aaron Harris and Jessica Harris

erywhere from backstage to the lighting booth, served a term as president of the Coaster’s board of directors, and established herself as one of the theater’s most recognizable performers.

“I’ve done at least one play a season since I started, from tiny supporting roles to leads,” she said. “One year, I was in six out of seven productions!”

With such a range of experience, it was only a matter of time before White-Rice took on the only role she hadn’t yet played: “Fit to Kill” is her directorial debut.

“I’ve worked with a lot of really good directors, and I’ve been able to take a little bit from all of them and put it to work for myself,” she said. “I have to say it’s a lot different from being an actor. I get to see the form as opposed to just walking it, which is kind of cool. And it helps that my first play is small — there’s only three characters, and, except for one scene, only two of them are on stage at a time. So I don’t have to deal with a lot of actors and a lot of movement; I can concentrate on the performances. Which helps, because — well, they’re all such unlikable characters! They all want to kill each other! I have to find some way for the audience to come along with them.”

**Swan song**

White-Rice’s first turn at the helm doubles as her swan song. “Fit to Kill” will

### IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** “Fit to Kill,” a play by Victor Cahn

**WHEN:** Through Feb. 24  
7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays

**WHERE:** Coaster Theatre Playhouse (108 N. Hemlock St., Cannon Beach)

**TICKETS:** \$20 and \$25, call 503-436-1242 or visit [coastertheatre.com/box-office](http://coastertheatre.com/box-office)

**BOX OFFICE:** Open 1 to 5 p.m. Wednesday to Saturday; and 1 p.m. to curtain time on performance days

be her last stand with the Coaster Theatre before she moves to Indiana this summer.

“Jean’s been awesome to work with,” Aaron Harris said. “We’ve really been working hard to make her proud, especially since this is her last show with us.”

“Until we fly her back here to do another one,” Coaster Executive Director Patrick Lathrop added.

“You heard him,” White-Rice laughed. “It’s on the record! They’re flying me back!”



Thistle and Rose

## Pony Red concert benefits Cannon Beach Academy

Show to feature debut songs from Bill Steidel

By Brenna Visser  
Cannon Beach Gazette

The local band Thistle & Rose is holding a fundraising concert as a way to support the Cannon Beach Academy in its first school year.

The concert will showcase primarily the work of Bill Steidel, a Cannon Beach artist and ardent Cannon Beach Academy supporter. The show, titled Red Pony after one of Steidel’s songs, begins 7:30 p.m., March 3 at the Coaster Theatre. The proceeds will go toward funding the academy.

“The fundraising money raised goes directly to support the school’s operating budget. We receive 80 percent funding from the school district and we are responsible for fundraising the gap, or the other 20 percent,” said academy director Amy Moore. “So this will go directly toward that 20 percent gap.”

The idea came from Paul Dueber, one of the musicians involved in the folk band Thistle & Rose, who said the band has put on fundraising events like this in the past during the early days of the academy’s formation.

“We’ve lived in Cannon Beach for years. We raised our kids here, and they went to the elementary school,” Dueber said. “So when the school closed, we were passionate to get a school back in Cannon Beach. It’s hometown music benefiting a hometown entity.”

Doing this concert also intersected with the band’s desire to debut some of Steidel’s lesser-known songs in response to a high demand for them from audience members. Many of the songs are locally inspired, like “Cedar Home,” based on the historical Lindgren Home at Cullaby Lake or “Timber,” based on the tales of the Cannon Beach logging mogul George Van Fleet of the late 1940s and ’50s.

Others are personal to Steidel, Dueber said, like the concert’s title song “Red Pony,” which is a metaphor for his disapproval of the Vietnam war.

“We’re kind of walking back in time and reflecting on what he’s contributed to the community,” Dueber said. “He’s done so much for this town, including his work for the school. This is our attempt to give something back to Bill, too.”

Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased at Maggie & Henry, the Cannon Beach Academy, Cannon Beach Hardware or at the door.

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