

Five Reasons to Support Your Community Theater

By Wade Bradford, updated March 18, 2017

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When I was still in my teens, a friend was directing a community theater production of *Once Upon a Mattress*, a musical retelling of *The Princess and the Pea*. They desperately needed a spotlight operator, so I obliged.

On opening night, as I sat up above the audience, I watched as the people chatted anxiously. I witnessed their hushed awe as the stage manager lowered the house lights. Then, after the curtains were drawn and the opening number began, I “spotted” one energetic performer after another.

After that night, I was hooked on plays. I didn’t simply fall in love with theater because of its entertainment value. That evening, I learned that community theaters benefit not just the audience, but the entire community.

So, why should you support your local playhouse? Here are a few ideas to consider:

NURTURE NEW ARTISTS

Many successful actors, directors, writers and choreographers have launched their careers in humble, small-town playhouses. Just by attending and applauding, audiences give up-and-coming stars the positive feedback they need to continue their artistic pursuits.

Many community theaters offer classes for children’s productions. The stage develops confidence and responsibility within young performers. In my experience, I have seen the shyest of children improve communication skills. When I directed children’s shows for a local civic light opera, I met a seven-year-old girl who only spoke in whispers. She didn’t have any friends at the beginning of rehearsals. However, the choreographer noticed that she moved very gracefully, so we gave her a special dance solo. It boosted her self-esteem, and soon she was an outgoing, talkative and friendly part of the cast.

SHARE VALUABLE SKILLS

Community theaters need more than just cast members. Anyone that can sew a costume, paint a backdrop, build a staircase or edit a sound effect is a desirable addition to the company. Novices of a particular skill, such as construction or lighting, can increase their ability by working alongside veteran craftsmen. Likewise, experts can enjoy sharing their knowledge and passing their craftsmanship to the next generation.

ADVERTISE LOCALLY

Small business owners should financially support playhouses, and not just for altruistic reasons. A good thirty minutes before a show, most audience members spend their time thumbing through the program, inspecting the actor bios. It's the perfect opportunity to advertise! Theater goers are essentially a captive audience while they scan through the program. Small business can use this time to reach hundreds of potential customers. Ad space is relatively inexpensive and will help the performing arts thrive.

SOCIALIZE WITH NEW PEOPLE

Whether you work as an assistant director, a chorus member, the "star" of the show or a stagehand, one thing is certain: you will meet new friends. There is something exhilarating about putting on a show. It brings people close together, tests their skills and enlightens audiences. Many lifelong friendships and relationships have been formed while practicing sword fighting, stage kissing or falling through a trap door. There is a strong bond with all who band together to put on a play. We become friends because we work as one to tell a story.

BE PART OF THE STORYTELLING PROCESS

Plays are an ancient form of storytelling. It's a creative ritual still very much alive, despite the age of Youtube. Most community theaters produce time-tested classics, such as *Man of La Mancha*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Some are lighthearted, some are deep and profound, all offer a message to the audience. Classic and contemporary plays speak to us because they explore what it means to be human. Those who participate in the storytelling process can feel proud, knowing they are spreading a positive message to their community.

So go audition. Offer up your skills. Advertise in the program. Contribute your time and energy, and by all means, go see a show! You'll become a part of the vibrant, long-cherished tradition of theatrical storytelling.

"The powerful Play goes on, and you may contribute a verse." Walt Whitman