

stumbled into this theater, met Kristi and Jonathan (Theatrikos' two full-time employees) and knew this is where I wanted to be," quips the new—and amazingly talented—technical director, John Bowles.

Most of us come to Theatrikos to fulfill our love of theater. Most of us stay out of love for each other. Box Office Manager Kristi Long confides, "Jonathan and I try to create a warm, friendly, nurturing environment to bring volunteers back." They succeed. Of course, it's not just the staff, but the volunteers and the whole experience that makes Theatrikos magical. From an education perspective, it's invaluable experience because most participants are needed to help out everywhere—testing their skills onstage, backstage or at set construction. From a social perspective, the close-knit network of supportive friends and family created in this theater has helped numerous participants get through hard times or just find a place to belong. "Once you're a part of it, you stay a part of it" says 16-year-old Amber, a member of the PEACE project.

PEACE Project (Prevention Education and Creative Expression), a teen issue-based acting troupe, is just one of the many programs Theatrikos offers outside of its main stage productions. Of Color, Community and Culture is another annual program aimed at educating the community through addressing relevant social issues. The annual Oscar Night party is always a hugely fun success, and this past year has seen two new additions to the list of fun annual events: the "Moulin Rouge" theme party and "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." If you missed them in 2001, make sure you catch them this season!

Also, improvisation classes are offered seasonally, with summer sessions aimed specifically at teens. D.D. Jay teaches the improv (aptly called Improvikos) in addition to directing the theater's Mystery Dinner Theater. That subject unleashes another onslaught of laughter and stories from the brunch group. The last Mystery Dinner Theater, entitled Evening of International Intrigue, was held at the Pulliam Airport on New Year's Eve 2000. Imagine the shock of unsuspecting passengers who flew in on that evening's flight to find the luggage carousel delivering several ethnically costumed actors sitting on suitcases. The newest installment in the series will be performed downtown at the Alley, with shows Feb. 24 and March 3 and 10.

The Mystery Theater series is comprised of original scripts, as several previous Theatrikos productions have been, further allowing locals to showcase their talents. This past year, NAU professor Joe Turner-Cantu had the opportunity to direct his original and powerful "Rock and Betty Dance" upon the Playhouse stage, a script which has received national critical acclaim. Ever see the movie "Men of Honor?" One scene shows Robert DeNiro alone with a doctor, played by Rick Turner, who acted and directed numerous times in his many active years with Theatrikos. Many other members of this theater have gone on to pursue professional acting careers.

The current location on the corner of Beaver and Cherry was acquired in 1988, 10 days before opening night of "The Rhymer's of

Eldridge." The cast and crew had 10 days to make a theater out of a previously abandoned library, create the stage and set, and make the space suitable for an audience.

Though a permanent location was certainly a blessing, many obstacles came along with the old building—which originated as the Babbitt Homestead in 1898. There was no heat or air conditioning in the building until the late 1980s. The current comfortable and permanent theater seats were purchased in 1995. Prior years boasted cheap chairs which had to be removed for technical and cleaning purposes several times throughout the course of each show. Props and costumes are still often stored on the shelves of what was (from '71 to '87) the public library. The

ceiling fell in one year, causing the cancellation of a weekend of performances and several thousand dollars worth of property damage. Extensive changes over the past year have greatly enhanced the functionality and aesthetics of this now professional-quality theater.

Of course, there is still the occasional ghost (every good theater has one), dog or wayward audience member who wants to take center stage. Thorson remembers feeling he was in the midst of the best performance of his life—he had the audience rolling with laughter; or perhaps it was the large dog that wandered over to sniff the

actor's behind. That particular pup, Jester, belongs to Long. Being a virtual Theatrikos mascot, Jester made his first approved, but brief debut in last month's "Nonsense."

In one performance, two actors were on stage having a heated discussion, when a slightly confused audience member stood up to help out the angry actor and instruct him as to the error of his ways. The show went on, as it always does through every unexpected flaw, illness, cast member fainting or lights going out.

After many hours of listening to hysterical mishaps, I inquire about the occurrence of positive miracles. Beller answers: "Miracles happen with every show."

Since 1972, Theatrikos Theatre Co. has given Flagstaff 125 wonderful miracles to witness. Thirty years of great theater for the community was only made possible by the community. "So many individuals and businesses have contributed over the years to make this vision a reality; I only wish we could mention them all," sighs Beller. Theatrikos plans to thank all its supporters this year with a 30th anniversary gala. With more than 400 current season pass holders and expected attendance from several previously involved theater folk now in other areas of the country, it promises to be one grandly fun and heart-warming evening. Longtime set builder Dennis Dreher recalls one director, Clifford White, who said if lasting friendships, romance or real emotions were created from a particular show or experience, it was successful. Theatrikos Theatre Co. has proved a great success. [mim]

Executive Director Jonathon Beller (left) poses with scrapbooks filled with 30 years of memories. Props and costumes are stored on shelves (above) in what Beller calls "prop alley" (Photos by Heidi Freke).



The Theatrikos family is all about two things: great art and great fun.