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Between Two Stages

Alley Repertory Theater takes residence in new territory

By Amy Atkins



Hollis Welsh breathes the AiR in ART's new rehearsal space.
Laurie Pearman

When Alley Repertory Theater was first introduced as the newest member of Boise's theater scene, it wondered where it would fit.

Would it add to Boise's already rich community theater collective? Would it compete for theater goers attention under a professional theater umbrella? Or would it fill some space in between?

From the inaugural performance (*The Little Dog Laughed* by Douglas Carter Beane) in its new home at the Visual Arts Collective in Garden City last year, it was clear that they'd taken up residence in the more nebulous, less established third category. The company's mission statement is itself a bit amorphous: "[ART] is an inclusive, innovative theater producing year-round new and established works ... committed to providing professional opportunities to local and national performance-based artists." It's open to interpretation, but it that openness that is turning this company into a viable addition to Boise's thriving arts community.

Co-founders Buffie Main and Hollis Welsh consider themselves professional, not in regard to what tax bracket ART falls in, but in terms of the experience they hope to provide theater members and audience members. They do use equity actors, but not exclusively, and say that even if they could afford to, they probably wouldn't anyway. They want theater tenderfoots—from directors to graphic designers—to have place to grow and hone their crafts.

"We want everyone involved to have a professional experience, no matter what level, emerging or established," Main said. "That's been really important to us."

ART has also gone against a common theater grain by having seasons that run from January to December opposed to a typical fall-to-spring run. Though scheduling at VAC won't always make it possible, ART tries to run opposite Boise Contemporary Theater.

"We're not here to compete," Main said. "We're here to create more opportunities."

ART was recently awarded a spot in BoDo's new AiR (Artist in Residence) program which will, for at least the next three months, give the performers a dedicated audition and rehearsal space in which to work on the

first production for 2009, *Love Person*, a play by East Indian playwright Aditi Brennan Kapil. The play combines English, Sanskrit, American Sign Language, text messaging and e-mail to address how communication affects relationships.

"We auditioned a deaf woman who is a professional actress, a translator who has dabbled in acting and an intern at BCT, what we would call an emerging talent," Welsh said. "To honor this play, we would be remiss if we didn't find or didn't attempt to find a deaf actress."

"The more I live with the script, the more I understand [the deaf role] has to be played by someone who speaks ASL fluently. If we're truly going to be an inclusive theater we have to do this," Main said. "I've learned [so much]. For this particular cast, it's going to be wild. We're blending ... Boise's Indian and Sanskrit—a whole other thing—and then bringing in a deaf actress. We're going to explode as people."

Love Person opens at Visual Arts Collective in March. For more information, visit alleyrepertorytheater.clamcity.com or call 208-388-4278.

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