

COMMENTARY

Get the most out of local, live theater

Oscars, Tonys, Emmys and I go way back.

My first venture into the performance arts was met with rave reviews; culinary, that is. I was a turkey in a hysterical and all-too-realistic preschool Thanksgiving re-enactment. Tony Benedetti, Oscar Cramp and Emily Rodgers – well, you know the rest when it comes to hungry pilgrims. Oh, to die for your art!

Remember your first play in the garage, your neighbors' back yard or school? It had that special zing in the transition from dreaming into action whereby ideas, melodies, dance or words took flight.

Performing arts take you



Kevin Ryan

on a magic carpet ride from the depths of pathos to the soaring heights of passion.

Playwrights, choreographers, actors, stage and tech crew, musicians, composers, directors and dancers beckon audiences through a doorway to

the thoughts and emotions of the most curious of species: man.

Theater has flourished since antiquity because of its umbilical connection to the real world. We are all healthier when we choose to create, and in some manner, perform on the grand stage of life rather than die languishing in the mezzanine.

Superb, exhaustive and

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Ryan: There is a diverse artistic menu in Solano

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scholarly studies by the Urban Institute, the Performing Arts Council and Pew Charitable Trust tell us community theater is pivotal for a vibrant, happy and well-educated community. More people attend live performing arts events per year than professional sports.

Through community theater, people are given opportunities to grow emotionally, spiritually and physically. The evidence convincingly shows that community theater not only offers enjoyment, but stimulates critical thinking, increases cultural understanding, preserves ethnic heritage, encourages personal and community creativity and pride, and contributes to lifelong learning in adults and the well rounded education and development of children while strengthening local economy. Whew! All that and a bag of popcorn!

There is an enormously diverse and tasty artistic menu in Solano County owing to the laudable efforts and gifts of many. Whether it is Broadway extravaganzas, poignant mainstream dramas, light-hearted fare, youth theater, groundbreaking original work, culturally sensitive gripping portrayals, on a shoe string snappy

home town productions or heady cutting edge stimulation, Solano has it.

The most memorable arts related experience growing up is participation as opposed to only attendance. Furthermore, data shows that when access, price, venue safety and spare time are not the primary obstacles to engagement, it is due to unfamiliarity and comfort with performing arts.

The theater is often regarded as the domain of the artsy-fartsy. Perhaps; but it is also a home for the courageous. Auditions are ego numbing. Few can walk on stage and lay it on the line; memorizing words and convincingly living and breathing emotions someone else wrote.

It is teamwork where any one single member can sabotage the entire affair – publicly. Courage, memory, literacy, dis-

cipline, critical thinking, boatloads of humbling experiences, verbal and non-verbal communication and crucial teamwork sounds a bit like life! The seductive allure of it all has kept artisans and audiences in an embrace as old as man.

So, here is a primer of how to savor all the spices in Solano County theater gumbo. Show up and share. Arrive a little early. Tour the digs, study the photos and people watch the other guests. They are just you in costumed skin.

Read the program before you go in. Those programs are as much a biography as a book of dreams. Review the show in advance. You are only a Google away from the same excitement of deciding to go on a family trip.

This time, you pack your minds, your hearts and your soul. Learn about the writer,

the storyline, the conflict, the twists and the resolutions. Download a tune or two. You direct your life; so how would you direct the cast and crew to engage enthral and entertain? Share yourself.

Perhaps you can try your hand as a critic. I use the "MAN" scale. "M" for myocardial fiber – how much did it pull on your heart? "A" for adrenals – how much did it excite, invigorate, arouse and squeeze those hormones – adrenaline and otherwise. Lastly, "N" – how many neurons in your brain did it tickle or tire?

In the grand stage of life, ultimately, the balcony seats are reserved for God. Get engaged.

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