

the Weekly

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FEATURE
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Bayou Playhouse Raises Curtain for Fourth Season

BY TERRY TRAHAN JR.

Tributes to film divas and the Big Easy steal the spotlight as the Bayou Playhouse raises its curtain for a fourth season in historic downtown Lockport.

Vocalist Lyla Hay Owen explores the songbooks of Betty Grable, Bette Davis, Betty Hutton and Betty Bacall in "The Queen B's," Owen's one-woman show based on songs made popular by the four film and stage divas.

"It's a beautiful evening of cabaret," said Perry Martin, the theater's founder and producing artistic director.

To capture the right mood, Owen did her homework by reading the biographies of the women and incorporating their stories into her show. She and her musical director, Jim Walpole, chose their favorite songs to share with audiences during the show's two-night run in the heart of Cajun country.

A week later, Bob Edes Jr. and Elizabeth Pearce join Walpole in "Down the Hatch (A Cabaret in Two Cocktails)," which tells the tale of New Orleans and what gives the Southern city its unique flavor.

The first act details the city's history using Sazerac as a guide, while the Hurricane handles the second half of the show. With so much talk about spirits, audiences get an opportunity to sample a taste of the city as well.

"The first ingredient in Sazerac is sugar, so they tell about the history of sugar in New Orleans," Martin said. "New Orleans is a town that requires a two-drink minimum to just walk through the streets."

Martin's wit adds an extra act of charm to the "little theater that could" nestled along Bayou Lafourche. As the director reflects on the past three seasons and the reality that a fourth is even happening, he laughs at its road to success.

When the Bayou Playhouse first opened its doors in 2008, Hurricane Gustav forced the small theater to board up and call off the play about Hurricane Katrina it had scheduled to perform. In the past few years, the playhouse has experienced a snowfall, medical problems among staff and even a transition in management, but Martin sees to it that the show goes on. And that dedication to the stage could be a fundamental reason why the doors remain open three years later.

"While other theaters are closing across the country, we're flourishing," Martin said. "When we first opened, I said that one thing we wouldn't go down on is quality. People don't know what to expect when they get here."

What they should expect, and actually get, is professional theater. Martin and Mary Bliss McCrossen, the playhouse's producing managing director, hand scripts to both professional and local thespians when casting roles for the productions. It's their way of bringing that caliber of theater to a smaller community like Lockport, centrally located between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

As the fourth season opens, Martin has expanded the playhouse's direction as well. Before, he only selected plays that reflected Louisiana's culture and lifestyle. The focus has now broadened to include works rooted in the South.

The move has kept the box office busy and ensured that the Bayou Playhouse will be around for another year to invite theatergoers to be entertained for a few hours as they experience the punch a small theater can pack.

"Once people get here, they come back," Martin said. "I think our best friend is word of mouth."



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The Bayou Playhouse, 101 Main St., Lockport, begins its fourth season with two special engagements, "The Queen B's" and "Down the Hatch." Performances of "The Queen B's" will run from Sept. 16-17 and begin at 7:30 p.m., and performances of "Down the Hatch" will run from Sept. 23-24 and begin at 7:30 p.m. For a complete schedule of upcoming performances, or to purchase tickets for a show, visit the playhouse's website at www.bayouplayhouse.com, or call 1-888-992-2968.

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