



Serious about comedy

BIGFORK COMMUNITY PLAYERS

# BACKSTAGE

November 2014

## Part of the Community

By David Vale

I'm not sure what motivated the Bigfork Community Players to recruit me to their board of directors and then to elect me as president, but I'll have to say that, slightly over eight months into office, I'm having the time of my life: Lighting designer, budding director, newsletter editor—the roles are endless.

We, the Players, do community theater. This means that the shows we do are produced by the community for the community. The actors, all volunteers, are members of the community. And the audience is also made up primarily of members of the community. The experience that results is—well, community.

We're different from the two other theater companies in town, the Bigfork Summer Playhouse and the Bigfork Playhouse Children's Theater. The Summer Playhouse recruits actors from around the country and produces professional music theater for three months each year. The Children's Theater recruits enthusiastic local kids and produces theater for kids and adults, usually musical, during the other nine months. We recruit mostly adults and produce non-musical theater, primarily comedy. All three companies produce their shows in a common venue, the Bigfork Center for the Performing Arts.



Players president David Vale

Live theater isn't a movie. There are no spectators. Everyone, whether they be members of the cast, members of the audience, or the guy in the light booth, has a critical role in making the event what it is. A good performance onstage spurs an enthusiastic response from the audience. And that enthusiastic response inspires the actors onstage to even better performances.

Community theater done well is a significant asset to a community. If community theater is sometimes thought of as a place anyone off the street, with minimal preparation, can get up on the stage for a moment of glory, that's unfortunate. It's also untrue. I watched as the actors who ultimately appeared onstage in our recent production of *The Odd Couple* auditioned for their roles, rehearsed several nights a week for more than two months, and wandered the streets talking to their iPods as they learned lines. I watched as the director coaxed and cajoled the cast members to better and better performances. I observed as experienced consultants coached the director and the actors to fine tune those performances. And I saw the ultimate result.

We're determined to do community theater well. A performance should leave the actors proud for having left the audience delighted. Hearty laughter at the comic lines is essential. Tears at the touching moments are appreciated. Rapt silence at the climactic conclusion is expected. But that's not enough. When the final lights go out or the final curtain falls, the audience has to be changed for the better. Changed in the sense of being excited to live life fuller or relieved that, compared to the characters onstage, their own life decisions have been wiser. Shared experience makes us closer, makes us a community. Community theater provides shared experience.

Many of the actors in community theater begin their acting careers as adults. And acting is more than standing onstage reciting lines. Fortunately, though, it's a skill that can be learned, rather than an innate talent. And we work on those skills. We had a two-day workshop on directing in early Fall, directing both from the perspective of the director and that of the actor. We have an advanced directing workshop planned to begin in December. Continuously working to enhance what we offer our community; it's what we do.

Bigfork is a community and there are many ways to get involved in a community. Acting onstage in full view of your friends, neighbors, relatives, and coworkers is a quick, total immersion method for getting involved in community. Granted, being greeted everywhere you go by people you're sure you've never met can take some getting used to. But it's a good feeling, that feeling of knowing you're part of something bigger than yourself. We're intent on enhancing the Bigfork Community Players' contribution as a significant part of our community. We welcome everyone to join us in that effort.

## Michele Shapero Reflects on *The Odd Couple*

Michele Shapero is no novice when it comes to entertainment. Working for 25 years as a business manager for several professional bands, singing professionally herself in popular dance bands, and acting in roles as diverse as the tough girl Rizzo in *Grease* and the good witch Glinda in *The Wizard of Oz*, Michele has certainly earned her stripes in the field.



LeAnn Kalstein as Olive: "8:20 is not late!"

But this season she directed Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* at the Bigfork Center for the Performing Arts produced by the Bigfork Community Players. And it was the first time she'd taken on the role of director.



Director Michele Shapero

"We as a board of directors decided this year that we were going to concentrate on comedies," she began. "So we started out reading a lot of plays, looking for a few that we thought would tickle funny bones in Bigfork. Of all the plays I read, I liked this one best. We also decided that it was time we took control

of our own plays. It was probably a bold step to offer to direct it. But I knew that Neil Simon is a solid playwright and it's difficult to go wrong with one of his scripts. And I also knew that I had Karen backing me up."

Karen Kolar was the executive director of *The Odd Couple*, mentoring Michele in her first directing experience. "I got into directing through a relatively low-risk route," she offered. "I used to be a fourth-grade teacher at Bigfork Elementary and every year we'd write and perform an opera. As the teacher, I naturally assumed the role of director. But then I acted in a few plays in Kalispell with the college and here in Bigfork with the Players. And eventually I tried my hand at directing them. Last season I had the opportunity to direct *The Nerd* by Larry Shue for the Players."

"It's important for a theatre company to have good directors as well as good actors," Karen continued, "people who have the opportunity to learn trust and share technique by working together. I'm happy with the path we are headed down in developing a complete and balanced theatre company and also with the enthusiastic participants I'm finding within our company, like Michele."

"I had a great time," said Michele. "The play was hilarious. Our two leading ladies were excellent, our supporting cast of women was solid, and the two Spanish brothers—well I know comic relief isn't usually considered an element of a comedy, but when those two were added to the mix, the humor really went over the top."



Odd Couple cast members James Vale, Stephanie Venrick, and Josh Ruebenson



Odd Couple cast members Allison McCarthy, Shannon Bagley, Stephanie Venrick, Lee Proctor, Meghan Rogers, and LeAnn Kalstein.

"I enjoyed the opportunity to direct," she continued, "developing a vision of how a play should go and then implementing that vision. Of course there were parts that didn't come easily to me. Blocking, for example. That is, figuring out who should move where and when. Although it should look like everyone is moving naturally on the stage, there's a lot of planning that goes into making those movements look natural. Every move needs a motivation and every location on stage has a different effect."

"And I wasn't just the director. I was also the set designer, the construction

foreman, and my husband Steve was the producer and the sound guy. Community theatre is really a family affair. Oh, and did I mention that my son Josh was one of the Spanish brothers?”

*The Odd Couple* played in late October at the Bigfork Center for the Performing Arts to larger than usual audiences. It opened the Players' 2014-2015 Season of Neil Simon plays, which will continue with *Rumors* in February and *Jake's Women* in April.

## Advanced Directing Workshop

This year's winter play for the Bigfork Community Players will be *Rumors*, a comedy written by Neil Simon. The story revolves around four New York society couples who have been invited to the tenth wedding anniversary celebration of Deputy Mayor Charley Brock and his wife Myra at their country home north of the City. But, as the guests begin to arrive, something is amiss. All of the house staff have disappeared, Myra Brock is nowhere to be seen, and Charley is found in a stupor on the edge of his bed, covered in blood, and holding a recently fired handgun. In a classic comedy of errors, the first arrivals (a married couple, lawyers by trade) are unsure of what's happened, but are determined to cover it up. As successive pairs arrive, each with their own personal and/or political agendas, the intrigue deepens. With each couple maneuvering to simultaneously support the coverup and distance themselves from it, it's a sticky morass demanding a truly magnificent and miraculous resolution. Will Neil Simon deliver? We'll see.

But the intrigue and excitement facing the Players with this production isn't limited to Neil Simon's plot twists and comedic timing. In an effort to simultaneously produce the best play possible and enhance the capabilities of the company itself, the Players have engaged veteran producer and director Jim Caron to essentially direct the direction of the play. For anyone unfamiliar with Caron, he was the founding director and artistic director of the Missoula Children's Theater for forty years. In that time, the MCT grew from a handful of performers to a company of 160 paid professionals who produced 1,200 plays each year in locations around the world using local children as actors. Although Caron has experience in all aspects of theater, ranging from acting to directing to set design to theater management, it is his experience at teaching others to produce quality plays that caught the attention of The Players.

“We've taken off in a different direction this year,” said Players president David Vale. “We've decided to focus our efforts on non-musical comedy, to commit our efforts to producing entertainment that will delight our audiences, and to develop the theatrical talents of our company to the level necessary to properly carry out that mission. In line with that, we've decided we will not seek outside talent to do our work for us, but will readily engage outside expertise to help us do our jobs better. That's where Jim comes in.”

“Jim Caron certainly has the capability to brilliantly direct a play like *Rumors*,” Vale continued, “but when it's over and he goes home, we'd be left needing to hire someone like Jim again for the next production. You heard the expression, ‘Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day ...,’ well we're hungry but we're more interested in learning to fish than just enjoying a satisfying meal. The *Rumors* Workshop is our second step in that direction.”

“The first was last October when we invited Jim up to teach the rudiments of directing,” Vale explained. The workshop, “Directing for Actors,” covered both directing basics, such as when to block, when to coach, when



Master director Jim Caron, as mentor, will essentially direct the direction.

to watch; technical things, such as shorthand notation for blocking and efficient communication of blocking directives; and less obvious things such as respect for actors, personal boundaries, and techniques for dealing with common problems. “Jim’s nine-hour workshop so impressed all of us that we knew we wanted more,” Vale added.



David Vale, known around Bigfork as one who takes his rolls seriously, directs his first comedy.

The Rumors Workshop represents an opportunity for those who are seriously interested in directing or even acting to observe and participate at close range in the directing process. Vale, new to directing, has volunteered to be the subject of Jim’s advice and consternation as he directs the play. Vale will perform the traditional job of director: Analyzing the play, casting the play, blocking the play, coaching the actors, envisioning the sets, overseeing rehearsals. But throughout the process, Caron will be on his shoulder, so to speak, telling him what he might consider differently, how he might do something better, and when his approach is just plain wrong. And the participants in the workshop will get to observe.

“Yeah, it’s a little scary,” admits Vale. “And it’s a bit of a challenge because I have to proceed as if I know I’m right, yet with the knowledge that any moment I can be told I’m not. I guess I’m fortunate to have been wrong often enough in the past that I can accept being wrong again without it damaging my ego.”

Caron, of course, has his own perspective. “I’m both impressed and terrified by the brass of the Players. Having done this for forty years, I know how much there is to know and how long it takes to learn it. The Players, and especially Dave, are jumping into deep water with their intention of rapidly developing these skills. On the other hand, I know that a lot of community theaters around the country routinely mount productions with untried actors and even inexperienced directors. I think the real difference here is that The Players are determined to step up their game quickly and are ready and willing to accept assistance. And while I constantly advocate caution in their actions, I’m thrilled to see this much enthusiasm in a wholly amateur company and am pleased that they asked me to play such a significant role in their development.”

The Rumors Workshop begins Sunday, December 7, 2014. In the first session, Vale in the role of director will present his analysis of the script, covering what he hopes the audience will see and take away, who the characters are and how they interact, and what his overall visual plan is for implementing the play. The participants will assume roles in the play and then read through it. Caron, in his mentorship role, will question and challenge Vale’s plans and interpretations and the participants will be invited to ask their own questions and add their comments. Workshops will continue the next weekend as a casting session is planned and executed. Rehearsals will begin in earnest in early January. The workshop will continue as participants are invited to attend key rehearsals, along with Caron, as they progress.

Auditions for *Rumors* are scheduled for Sunday, December 14, starting at 1:00. There are roles for five men and five women ranging in age from late twenties to late fifties. Individuals auditioning for parts are welcome and encouraged to attend all portions of the workshop, but will not participate in the casting discussions that follow the auditions. The workshop is open and offered free of charge to all members of the Bigfork Community Players. Membership in the Players, with a \$10 annual fee for a family, may be one of the best entertainment values in the Flathead Valley.

“We’re part of the Bigfork community,” said Vale. “We exist to benefit the community by providing both engaging entertainment and the opportunity to participate in it. We hope that everyone will experience the pleasure of live theater, as we do it, and that those who enjoy delighting an audience will find us a viable vehicle for pursuing that enjoyment.”

*Rumors* opens for one weekend only on February 27, 2014 at the Bigfork Center for the Performing Arts. Tickets will be available starting in January. To sign up for the workshop or to audition for *Rumors*, please send an email indicating your interest to David Vale at [dave@PocketstoneCafe.com](mailto:dave@PocketstoneCafe.com).

## Rehearsals at Marina Cay

When we produce a play, it usually plays for four to six performances at the Bigfork Center for the Performing Arts (the “theater”). And although the public presentation may last no more than a long weekend, each production usually has at least two months of rehearsals leading up to that weekend. Where do those rehearsals take place? You could be forgiven for thinking that they occur in the same theater we use for performances. But fact is, the theater is a precious commodity, used by several companies. We usually only have it one or two weeks for each production. So where do we rehearse?

That can be a challenging question. Since we have no appropriate space of our own, finding rehearsal space is left to the diligence of the director, producer, or odd board member who can identify a generous, community spirited individual or organization with space that we can get, usually for little or no cash outlay. (Although from all outward appearances, we may seem a thriving, successful, well-managed organization, in financial reality we operate on a shoestring.) Usually, we find space in a church basement, a temporarily unused restaurant, or the Senior Citizens’ Center.



Marina Cay Resort

But this year, we’ll be rehearsing in the conference room of Marina Cay. Marina Cay is a popular resort right here in the heart of Bigfork on Bigfork Bay. It includes a number of privately owned condominiums, often rented to the public during high season. It also includes a bar, a restaurant, a conference facility, a marina, and full time facility management. Were we producing plays during the summer months, Marina Cay would almost certainly be unavailable to us, as it’s a popular tourist destination for those vacationing on the lake. Fortunately, for us, the winter tourist crowd has yet to discover Bigfork and many of the busy summer tourist facilities are—well, less busy.

And lest you assume the conference room is a small room with a large table and no room to move, when the folks at Marina Cay refer to the conference room, they’re referring to a large, open, 40’ x 60’ meeting room. Which is just what we need for rehearsals.

If you haven’t participated in a Community Players play, you may have the wrong concept of rehearsal. We don’t just sit around a table reciting lines and making faces at each other. Rather, almost from the outset rehearsal involves working through all the planned movement, or blocking, that has to be both natural and

meaningful when the play is produced. That means we need a stage-like area with furniture and props so we can practice the stage movements at the same time we practice the script lines. Thus, we need some semblance of a stage. The stage at the theater is 35' wide and 25' deep. Allowing a little space for an "audience," that requires a room at least half the size of the Marina Cay conference room. Now try to find a room of that size that's available four nights a week, requires minimal cash outlay, and where our occasional use of language you won't hear in Sunday School goes unnoticed.

In other words, Thank you Marina Cay! We'll be rehearsing both *Rumors* and *Jake's Women* in this facility and we're ecstatic. The address is 180 Vista Lane, Bigfork, and the phone there is 837-5861. But perhaps the best part: Guest Service Manager Jessie Schrade's comment, "We really look forward to hearing the happy sounds of you folks rehearsing in there."

## Announcements

### Directing Workshop in Bigfork

The Bigfork Community Players are pleased to announce that they have engaged veteran theatrical director Jim Caron to conduct an extended up-close workshop on play direction in Bigfork. The workshop follows onto Caron's previous workshop with the Players, "Directing for Actors." However, while the previous workshop was primarily theoretical, this one engages the participant in the actual production of a play.

The Players have opened up their winter production, Neil Simon's *Rumors*, to this workshop. *Rumors* will be directed by first-time director David Vale, who has agreed to allow participants in the workshop to observe as Caron applies his significant skill and experience to guide him in the direction of the play. Participants will, at appropriate times, have the opportunity to question and comment on the process. Three sessions are scheduled for 1:00-5:00 p.m. December 7, 13, & 14. These sessions will carry the process through auditions and casting. Approximately eight additional sessions will be scheduled in January and February as the production reaches critical points where Caron's mentorship skills can be applied.

Note that the December 14 session will include auditions for the play, *Rumors*. Those planning to audition may find the prior sessions helpful, even those not interested in directing.

The workshop, to be offered in the Bay Club at the Marina Cay Resort in Bigfork, is free of charge to members of the Bigfork Community Players. Membership in the Players may be had by the payment of the \$10 family membership fee. For further information, see the Players website at [www.BigforkCommunityPlayers.com](http://www.BigforkCommunityPlayers.com). To sign up for the workshop, send an email indicating your interest to David Vale at [dave@PocketstoneCafe.com](mailto:dave@PocketstoneCafe.com).

### Auditions for Neil Simon's Rumors

The Bigfork Community Players will present the Neil Simon comedy, *Rumors*, on February 27 and 28 and on March 1. The play requires five men and five women, playing roles of characters ranging from their late 20s to their mid 50s. Anyone interested in acting is invited to audition. Those selected must be or become members of the Players (at a cost of \$10/year).

Auditions will be held from 1:00 to 4:00 on Sunday, December 14 in the Bay Lounge at Marina Cay Resort in Bigfork. Participants will read selected portions of the script and possibly participate in a few acting exercises. All should expect to stay for the full session. Details are on the website, [www.BigforkCommunityPlayers.com](http://www.BigforkCommunityPlayers.com).

There will be one cast read through in December. Rehearsals will begin in earnest January 5 and will continue approximately four nights each week and one weekend day until opening on February 27. Although efforts will be made to accommodate schedules, once made, actors will be expected to attend all scheduled rehearsals.

## BCP Backstage

*Bigfork Community Players Backstage* is the newsletter of the Bigfork Community Players. It is published online every few months, or when its editor feels it's time. Some of the articles included have been or will be published elsewhere. Readers are encouraged to make copies of this newsletter and to distribute it, free of charge, to friends, family, neighbors, long forgotten relatives, and anyone with a love for theater, Bigfork, or the style of writing rarely found other than in these pages.

Editor -- David Vale

Designer -- Saga Design (Sandy & Monte Sanford)

Bigfork Community Players Officers and Directors

David Vale, President  
Scott Roskam, Vice President  
Karen Kolar, Secretary  
Michele Shapero, Treasurer  
John Goroski, Director  
Mary Whitney, Director

The Bigfork Community Players is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation with the mission of great community theater within the Bigfork community while allowing community members to act, direct, and otherwise participate in the production of quality entertainment. Everyone with an interest in theater is invited to join. Annual family membership dues are \$10. Membership can be attained by sending a check to Bigfork Community Players at P.O. Box 23, Bigfork, MT 59911.

The Players maintain a website at [www.BigforkCommunityPlayers.com](http://www.BigforkCommunityPlayers.com) and read emails sent to [BigforkCommunityPlayers@gmail.com](mailto:BigforkCommunityPlayers@gmail.com).

## Upcoming Events

December 7	Advanced Directing Workshop begins, 1:00, Marina Cay
December 14	Auditions for <i>Rumors</i> , 1:00, Marina Cay
TBA	Auditions for <i>Jake's Women</i>
February 27	<i>Rumors</i> opens
April 10	<i>Jake's Women</i> opens

## Sponsors

Although we profess to have very little interest in money, others in the industry (including playwrights, theater owners, etc.) feel differently. Thus, we truly appreciate our sponsors who provide us with money, food, building materials, and other things essential to the work we do so that we don't all have to get second jobs to support this endeavor. Please remember our sponsors every time you think of our program. We do.

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