

VILLAGE SQUARE THEATRE

Fears

OF ENTERTAINMENT AND EDUCATION

by Emily Carter



Community theater is one of the many creative arts that provides locals with a platform in which they can express themselves freely in a safe space.

As more people are exposed to the arts in any given area, creativity, innovation and awareness flourish.

Self-expression allows the privilege of exploring language and the emotions that make it effective in a way that can permanently influence the lives of the actors and the audience, breaking through barriers of age, culture, race and gender, as well as economic status.

“Anyone can be involved in our community theater,” says Debra Leopard, Artistic Director of the Village Square Theatre in Lexington. “It’s more important than ever in today’s world to build confidence, find a place to belong, learn to communicate and work as a team, build lasting friendships. You always fit in at the theater and it’s an important part of society.”

Originally named the Lexington Recreation Committee, Village Square Theatre was the brainchild of a group of parents desiring creative activities for their children. They held dances in churches and schools, formed youth sports teams, hosted festivals featuring local musicians. The Armory on Northwood Road housed art and craftwork. In 1972, they expanded into a traveling theater company, bringing *You’re a Good Man Charlie Brown* and *Babes in Toyland* to a packed house at the old Lexington Elementary School.

As the Lexington Recreation Committee and its offerings grew and the mission evolved, 1975 brought a natural division of the sports and arts sides, birthing a name change to Lexington County Arts Association. The sports offerings moved to Lexington County Recreation Commission. In 1987, Lexington County Arts Association purchased Village Square Movie Theatre, giving brick and mortar to the organization, and continuing its dream. The old screen still backdrops the stage, a piece of history kept intact for the community to remember a time of long ago. A long running tradition has been the performance of decade reviews, bringing a creative examination of occurrences and history within a recap of a ten-year time frame. These reviews portray a broad and local look at time and culture, narrated and portrayed by local acting talent.

Much like the Dorothy character in their popular feature, *The Wizard of Oz*, Village Square Theatre has survived its share of lions, tigers, bears, and flying monkeys, yet stayed the yellow brick path to make sure something and someone was behind the cur-



tain. Tornado damage and flooding brought need for repair and realignment, but the building still stands proud on Caughman Road, slightly hidden behind Firestone Tire and Village Square Shopping Center. “I’ve had so many people tell me over the years that they didn’t know we were back here,” comments Leopard. “We’re just off Main Street, in the heart of downtown Lexington. We’re here and everyone is welcome.” And in that building, Leopard is confident that people can find their place. “Anyone can be involved in theater,” invites Leopard. “Village Square has a lot to offer. We laugh. We have fun. You make friends for life.”

Leopard, who holds a Master’s of Theatre Directing Specialty from University of South Carolina, reflects on the significance of Village Square to families and communities. “You are never too old or too young to be in a play. There aren’t many things in life that are multi-generational.” During the 60th Anniversary celebration Review performed in February, Leopard notes that there were highlighted excerpts from twenty-three musicals, fifty songs, involving fifty-five performers ranging in age from eleven to seventy.

“Village Square Theatre brings discipline, dance, song – the dramatic arts to the community. It’s an important part of who we are as a society,” says Leopard.

As with most of the world, Covid 19 brought hardship to Village Square Theatre. The building and organization shut down for over a year unable to perform or gather for classes. Dependent on donations and ticket sales, it was a struggle to stay afloat, but the long-standing history and determination of the board and its service to the community provided the framework for a firm commitment to the role of Village Square Theatre and the people of Lexington.

This past February as the opening of the Anniversary Review approached, an unexpected surge of Omicron variant forced the group to be creative and think out of the box. “It was a true por-

trayal of the adage the show must go on,” says Leopard. “We never had a full cast due to exposure and illness, but we kept going, covering for one another, determined to perform and celebrate.” After all, the show MUST go on!

**“Village Square has a lot to offer.
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Village Square Theatre provides classes in acting, directing, voice, dance, public speaking, audition prep, and more. Taught in a group or private setting, these classes allow for freedom in self-expression and prepare students for success with an openly free-range of modalities. With sixty years in the rearview mirror, 2022 has Village Square Theatre moving full speed ahead. “If you aren’t involved in a play or attending a show at Village Square





Theatre,” says Leopard, “You are missing out. There’s so much for everyone. Every generation can participate.”

We, as humans, love to be entertained—sports events, concerts, parties, movies, etc, and there is nothing that can compare to live acting. Acting performances can be a gentle or a harsh reminder as to how we should work together as a society. While we can watch all of this through digitalized reel, the magic atmosphere elevates when delivered in live, human form. Alongside a cast we can experience happiness, sadness, disappointment, regret, excitement – all in one two-hour block of time on the edge of a cushioned seat, senses heightened and responsive to the rise and fall of a scene curtain and dramatic music– all orchestrated by family, friends, and neighbors. What we absorb from these experiences mentally, physically and emotionally can make a direct impact on our lives and the lives of those we love for generations.

As spring thaws and Covid restrictions relax and the world excitedly engages in assembling once again, you don’t need to travel very far to find amazing productions. Visit the Village Square Theatre’s social media pages or website for show times, volunteer opportunities and educational classes. ■



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