

Collaboration spells success for two Idaho theatre groups

IRT, Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre present "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee"

By Alan Solan Daily News staff writer

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In what is hoped to be just the first of many co-productions with Idaho Repertory Theatre, the Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre will present five performances of the musical "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" in Moscow next week to open the IRT season.

Performances are 7:30 p.m. Monday-Friday at the Hartung Theatre on the UI campus.

Kelly Quinnett of the University of Idaho theatre department, who will be co-creative director of IRT next year, said she and "Spelling Bee" director Roger Welch had talked about doing a co-production for years and that things finally fell into place.

"I think it's something we could really do," Quinnett said in an interview Tuesday. "It's the perfect vehicle for us to share.

"We're hoping it will create an environment where we can keep doing co-productions like this."

Quinnett said she has wanted to do "Spelling Bee" for a while, but it was on Broadway and then in a traveling show and was not available.

The 2005 Broadway play, which earned a Tony award for playwright Rachel Sheinkin, centers around a spelling bee and all the drama and adolescent angst of the six middle-schoolers (played by young adults) who are competing in it.

It shows "teen angst through an adult perspective, but the innocence is still there," Quinnett said.

"It's a great script, a great concept," Welch said in a telephone interview Wednesday. "It's really about these kids and their journey. It speaks to the kid in all of us. It's very funny and also very touching at times."

The show is light-hearted and fun, and that's just people need sometimes - especially in the summer, Quinnett said.

"It's entertaining and, frankly, what's wrong with that? We want to leave just feeling good about things."

"It's a different show every night" because each performance features different volunteer audience members, Welch said.

The play was rehearsed on the Coeur d'Alene stage, but always with the layout of the Hartung Theatre stage in mind, Welch said.

"There are a lot of details to be transferred, but I think we got it down."

One of the biggest reasons for the Coeur d'Alene company's success with the play is the "top national talent" that is in it. One of the play's actor's just finished a national tour of "Spelling Bee" and another is fresh off a national tour of "Jesus Christ Superstar."

Quinnett said the collaboration with the Coeur d'Alene group allows IRT to do something much bigger than it would be able to on its own and to create "the best possible piece of art, put on the best possible show."

"We can do that, and we're dedicated to that," she said.

The show, which is playing through Saturday in Coeur d'Alene, has received two rave reviews and audiences get larger each night, Welch said.

"It's very funny. People are enjoying it."

"They'll have a great time," he said of the Moscow audience. "I haven't heard this much laughter in a theater in a long time."

The next IRT production is "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown," directed by Quinnett. Performances are July 7-11, 18.

For information, call (208) 885-6465 or check www.idahorep.org

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If you go

- **WHAT:** Idaho Repertory Theatre/Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre's "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee"
- **WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Monday-Friday
- **WHERE:** Hartung Theatre, UI campus
- **COST:** \$20 adults, \$16 seniors, \$14 students