

AZ Giving Spotlight: Laurie Cullity of Desert Stages Theater

Written by Joanna Brathwaite

Desert Stages Theater has continued to produce popular plays for families since 1995. This nonprofit organization is dedicated to providing the community with a fun, safe, and magical experience that is suitable for all ages. Laurie Cullity, the wife of late Gerry Cullity, shared her passion for the theater.



AFM: What inspired you to start Desert Stages Theatre?

LC: Desert Stages Theatre was co-founded by myself, and my late husband Gerry Cullity along with my mother-in-law, Joan Thompson. My husband was a prolific playwright, songwriter, lyricist, actor, stage designer and director. My background is in theatre and dance. Gerry and I saw the theatre as a wonderful vehicle to educate youth, to give youngsters a creative outlet that allowed them to develop skills such as confidence and teamwork, skills they would use throughout their lives no matter their career field as an adult.

AFM: Do you offer theater classes for aspiring actors?

LC: We offer a complete schedule of classes for aspiring actors, youngsters through adults. DST Academy has a number of different annual camps such as Summer Camp and Summer Camp Jr. which are three-week sessions where children learn a variety of theatre skills, culminating in a performance for friends and family. Similarly, we offer a Winter Camp series, Fall Break Camp and Spring Break Camp. In addition, Center Stage is an eight-week session every Wednesday, 4-6 p.m. that delivers singing and dance classes as well as other acting courses. In addition we host a number of seminars for more advanced actors such as our recent workshop led by Broadway star Ben Crawford, as well as our recent "Stage Combat" class where actors learn how to safely simulate stage fighting. The list goes on and on. Actors can stay connected to the latest and greatest class offerings, camps and workshops by visiting www.DesertStages.org and signing up for our e-newsletter as well.

AFM: What kind of productions do you showcase?

LC: Desert Stages Theatre has a tradition of producing some of original productions by Gerry Cullity each year – especially for the youngsters. Also, we produce several Broadway musicals in Cullity Hall, our main stage theatre-in-the-round. This season, "Bye Bye Birdie" plays April 11-May 4, followed by "Disney's Aladdin Jr.," May 16-June 22, and finally our season closer is "Cabaret," July 11-August 3. We also offer a highly eclectic mix of theatre offerings in our very wonderful Actor's Café, our jewel of a 65-seat venue delivering an intimate experience with the actors. Shows range from suspenseful mysteries to emotional dramas to witty comedies.

We actually have four theatre series, making Desert Stages Theatre perhaps the busiest community playhouse in the Southwest:

OnStage – youngsters making their first venture into the spotlights

NextStage – 12-18, obviously the next step in talent and theatrical material for this group [though first-timers participate here as well.]

MainStage – Major theatrical productions for adults – mostly musicals, and an occasional drama too

Actor's Café – is that cool elective mix of mysteries, drama, comedy in an up-close-and-personal setting

AFM: How has Desert Stages Theatre affected the Valley?

LC: DST has impacted the lives of hundreds if not thousands of youngsters, offering them a creative environment to develop life skills of all kinds, perhaps most important in that is confidence. It's our welcoming atmosphere with clear guidelines that allows them to learn the creative, collaborative process all while they are simply having a good time. Plus, as a nonprofit community theatre, DST also provides a terrifically creative outlet for ages 21 to 90 as well. We consider DST to be a community treasure in the theatrical outlets it provides to all ages.

AFM: What are some of your plans for the future?

LC: We have two fabulous shows coming this summer, Biloxi Blues brings comedy to the Actor's Café and Cabaret offers a tantalizing musical in Cullity Hall. Then in August we're back at it! Our 2014-2015 season will wow guests of all ages with timeless classics and modern favorites

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spanning more than 80 years of theatre; it'll have drama, comedy, musicals, mysteries, big dance shows and family shows! We kick off the season with tradition, opening the season with our On Stage children's theatre production of "Gerry Cullity's Alice in Wonderland" in Cullity Hall's theatre-in-the-round. The Actor's Café will open with the thought provoking, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."