



stage

THEATER » DANCE » PROFILES

BY AMY KEPFERLE

Of Death and Dance

LEAVE MY SHOES BY THE DOOR



BIG QUESTIONS don't always demand big answers. Sometimes, in fact, it's better to listen.

That's the decision Pam Kuntz made when the four kids she was ferrying around in her vehicle brought up the subject of death. They'd just passed a cemetery, and the youngsters, ages 3 to 6, started pondering what exactly happens after you die.

"The conversation was really compelling and scary," Kuntz says. "I realized they don't know and I don't know, but they were brave enough to forge ahead and make a claim on what they think happens."

Serendipitously, the dancer and choreographer had been mulling over approaching the topics of death and dying in one of her community-based performance pieces. Past staged shows have included topics as varied as parenthood, aging, body issues and incarceration, and she'd been wondering if she was ready to tackle such a harrowing topic as the great beyond.

But as she listened to the youngsters discuss if they were going to see people they knew after they died—not to mention what the place they'd end up at would look like—she knew it was the right time to tackle the touchy subject.

"Their conversation had more to do with what happens after the moment of death," Kuntz says. "I just listened. There was a moment of disagreement that started to feel like they might get upset, and then I changed the subject."

As she has with past projects, the next step was to find community members willing to share their stories and collaborate with Kuntz and the dancers who'd help move their narratives along. She sent out a general email, and it wasn't long before she had a roster of participants signed up.

While audiences will have to attend one of the performances of

"Leave My Shoes by the Door" to find out the particulars of their three-month exploration, Kuntz says the multimedia show focuses on everything from what happens

after a loved one dies to general theories of what takes place at the moment humans depart their physical bodies.

"There's also a bit of exploration on how death is hidden in our culture and how, in other countries in the world, death and its attending rituals are very much a part of the daily experience," Kuntz says.

Lest you think the performance will be one big downer, Kuntz notes that in addition to discovering that there are as many beliefs and definitions about death and dying as there are people on the planet, they also found ways to explore humor within the topic.

"I knew I wouldn't be able to spend three months doing this if it was all going to be dark," Kuntz says.

She's also hoping the performances spark discussions and bring the taboo subjects closer to the light. In addition to the moderated discussions that will follow all three Saturday performances, there'll be a "Moving the Bones" community conversation about death and dying with members of Whatcom Hospice Sept. 14 at the YWCA and an all-ages concert Sept. 22.

Props also go out, Kuntz says, to community members whose stories will be on display during the performances—as well as past participants who've joined up with Kuntz and Company.

"They are generous and brave," she says. "They're willing to share something personal, and do so through dance, a medium I'd say 99 percent of them haven't done before." ☺



ATTEND

WHAT: "Leave My Shoes by the Door"

WHEN: 7:30pm Sept. 16-17, 23-24 and Sept. 30-Oct. 1; 5pm Sept. 18, 25 and Oct. 2

WHERE: Firehouse Performing Arts Center, 1314 Harris Ave.

COST: \$15

INFO: www.kuntzandcompany.org

WHAT: "Moving the Bones: A Community Conversation About Death and Dying"

WHEN: 7pm Wed., Sept. 14

WHERE: YWCA, 1026 N. Forest St.

COST: Free

INFO: 223-0890

WHAT: "Moving the Bones: A Lively Concert of Songs About Death and Its Many Moods"

WHEN: 7:30pm Thurs., Sept. 22

WHERE: YWCA, 1026 N. Forest St.

COST: \$10-\$15; proceeds will support development of programs for end of life planning in Whatcom County

INFO: 676-8915

STAGE

THURS., SEPT. 8

GOOD, BAD, UGLY: Watch "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" at 8pm every Thursday at the Upfront Theatre, 1208 Bay St. At 10pm, stick around for "The Project." Entry is \$7 for the early show, \$4 for the late one.

☎ 733-8855 OR WWW.THEUPFRONT.COM

SEPT. 8-14

BARD ON THE BEACH: William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, and *As You Like It* will play in repertory throughout the summer as part of the annual Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival at Vancouver, B.C.'s Vanier Park. Tickets are \$21-\$40.

☎ WWW.BARDONTHEBEACH.ORG

SEPT. 9-10

QUICKSHOT FEST: Witness the works of six teams of filmmakers who created short films based on the recent 48 Hour Theater Festival theme, "What Happens at 2am," at the Quickshot Film Festival at 8pm Fri.-Sat. at the iDiOM Theater, 1418 Cornwall Ave. Entry is \$10.

☎ 201-5464 OR WWW.IDIOMTHEATER.COM

LEGEND OF JOHN RAH: View stories based on horror, sci-fi, Shakespeare, soap opera and more when a new format, "The Legend of John Rah," shows at 9pm at the Upfront Theatre, 1208 Bay St. The improvised action follows five different stories, each in a different genre. Tickets are \$8-\$10.

☎ 733-8855 OR WWW.THEUPFRONT.COM

DIXIE SWIM CLUB: The challenges of aging and friendship will be on full display when the comedic play *The Dixie Swim Club* shows at 7pm at Mount Vernon's RiverBelle Dinner Theatre, 100 E. Montgomery St. Tickets are \$20-\$40 and additional showings happen every Friday and Saturday through Sept. 17.

☎ WWW.RIVERBELLEDINNERTHEATRE.COM

SEPT. 10-11

RIVER AUDITIONS: Men and women can audition for upcoming performances of *Over the River and Through the Woods* from 2-5pm Saturday and 5-9pm Sunday at the Anacortes Community Theatre, 918 M Ave.

☎ (360) 679-6754 OR WWW.ACTTHEATRE.COM

TUES., SEPT. 13

VIEWPOINTS AUDITIONS: Drue Robinson of the Bellingham Children's Theatre will hold auditions for a Viewpoints Theatre Ensemble production of *Poke • Chat • Friend: An Exploration of Relationships and Technology* at 6pm at 1412 Cornwall Ave. Training will be part of the audition process.

☎ 734-9999 OR WWW.BELLINGHAMCHILDRENTHEATRE.COM

INTRO TO IMPROV: Sheila Goldsmith of Improv Playworks will lead a free introductory improv class at 7pm at 302 W. Illinois St. New ongoing classes will begin in the fall.

☎ 756-0756

SEPT. 14-15

ALICE AUDITIONS: Students ages 8 to 12 can audition for upcoming performances of *Alice in Wonderland, the Musical* from 4:30-6:30pm Wed.-Thurs. at the Bellingham Arts Academy for Youth, 1059 N. State St.

☎ 306-1543 OR WWW.BAAY.ORG