

A Drunken Dorothy and a Night of Community in Fort Collins

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The lights dim, the curtain rises, the uproar of applause fills every nook of the theatre and a familiar buzz simmers among the audience. The wait is over, Dorothy finally stumbles onto the stage, slurring her words, belching instead of breathing, uttering anything to hopefully make enough sense.

The Wasted Wizard of Oz is a production that carries the nostalgic feeling the classic story brings, yet is intertwined with a senseless plot that focuses on getting the cast as drunk as possible throughout the night.

The theatre company, Acting Topsy Theatre Co., is home to Fort Collins, Colorado, and has left their mark on the local community as a one-of-a-kind performance that leaves the audiences' stomachs hurting from the endless laughter. The Wasted Wizard of Oz was the first of its kind for the theatre company, trying to branch out and start a new rendition of a familiar favorite: Shit-Faced Shakespeare.

Through the United States, United Kingdom and all over the world, Shit-Faced Shakespeare is an incomparable experience, taking one of Shakespeare's famous works and intertwining drunk actors throughout – hoping the show might make sense at the end. For Acting Topsy Theatre Co., the team knew it might be difficult to perform the Wizard of Oz in its entirety, causing the director, Kaleb Hacker, to take matters into his own hands. Hacker decided to rewrite the story, leaving in all important moments, but eliminating any unnecessary “fluff” that could delay the success.

At the start of every show, five potential Dorothys would line up on stage and wait in anticipation for their name to be pulled out of a hat, deeming them Dorothy for the night. Although one might be riddled with joy as the main character, this rendition would require Dorothy to take five back-to-back shots of their preferred liquor onstage as the audience hollers in approval. Even though Dorothy might have had the spotlight, the rest of the cast was not safe yet.

“Every single show everyone was drinking, not just Dorothy,” said Ethan TenBarge, one of the actors who portrayed either Dorothy or Scarecrow depending on the night. “(We) were drinking every show – IPAs, shots, shooters, like, not casual.”

As the typical Scarecrow, TenBarge tended to be safe from the dreaded role of Dorothy – although that wasn't always the case. During one Friday night performance, TenBarge heard his

name be called for the role of Dorothy, finally getting his chance to take a stab at the seemingly impossible feat.

“It was insane being Dorothy because the whole time you’re trying to conceptualize the whole thing,” said TenBarge. “It was one of the craziest experiences because, for me at least, it hit me immediately.”

With drinking challenges – such as shotgunning a beer or chasing each other around the audience – intermittently scattered within the show, there was never a dull moment for the audience, as it felt like a winding journey down the yellow brick road that simply never ended.

“I’m personally not a huge theatre person, but this was honestly one of the funniest things I’ve watched,” said Evan Baier, an audience member. “I’m not sure if it’s because I was also a little bit drunk, but everything about this felt like a fever dream – and not in a bad way at all.”

Performing at The Lyric Cinema allowed the Acting Topsy Co. to provide drink and snack deals, ensuring their audience would be able to match the level of Dorothy, if that’s something they truly wanted.

“Me and my friends bought the \$5 mystery shots before the show and during intermission to just keep the buzz up,” said Baier. “The first one was pretty decent, but man, that second one killed us. I’m just happy they’re performing somewhere where you can actually get real drinks to keep up.”

With an excited, buzzed audience, the theatre began to feel like a group of friends coming together to play a game – rather than a group of strangers coming together to watch live art.

“It just (felt) like a very little community,” said TenBarge.

The performing arts are often overlooked, especially in local communities, yet some don’t realize the power art can hold in trying times. Art has always been used as a way to communicate certain morals, beliefs, identities and compassion for others that you can’t receive by simply living your daily life.

The arts, specifically performing arts, have always been a home base for many individuals itching for some sort of familiarity and comfort in their challenging lives. By gathering in a space to witness either a senseless drunken play or a solemn drama piece, a slice of the community is still coming together to support one another and find joy in the little pieces of life.

“With big corporations pumping out a ton of media everywhere all the time, ...I think (performing arts) is just more memorable, there’s more involvement, more uniqueness,” said TenBarge. “(It) brings community to people.”

In a world where artificial intelligence and corporations “slop” fill our feeds and everyday routines, it’s never been more critical to support local arts. Without the inclusion of a community, it can be so easy to feel isolated and hidden. The performing arts have always been a home for every person of every identity, and it’s important to keep that sacred space safe.

The Wasted Wizard of Oz serves as a perfect example of how arts can bring joy to anybody. Art does not always need to be a seemingly profound, thematic message, it can simply serve as an avenue to spread happiness in a dark world.

With the success of multiple sold-out nights, the Acting Topsy Theatre Co. has decided to begin their next project: Plastered Peter Pan. As rehearsals start and the actors find themselves drunk again, it serves as a reminder to branch out to your local community and find the small pieces of joy in your life – even if that means watching a drunk Dorothy stumble around onstage.

Plastered Peter Pan will debut at the Bas Bleu Theatre starting in early April and run through the end of May. With the new journey beginning, the team of Acting Topsy Theatre Co. will be tasked with fresh drinking challenges, scripts and a neverending hangover.

“Drinking and acting, what can go wrong?” said TenBarge.