



ANDREA MYERS PHOTOS, FOR THE STAR-HERALD

Lauren and Patrick Newell practice their performance for the upcoming "Broadway in the Bluffs." The fundraising performance will be held Saturday, March 4, at the Judy Chaloupka Theater at Western Nebraska Community College's Performing Arts Center.

# Behind the scenes

## Accompanist fine-tunes Broadway in the Bluffs

ANDREA MYERS  
For the Star-Herald

The best vocalists in the area will gather Saturday, March 4, for the annual "Broadway in the Bluffs" performance and Theatre West fundraiser. If you attend, you'll recognize local talent, enjoy new voices from the college, and, hopefully, will pay attention to the accompanist who brings the whole thing together. The performance will be held at 7 p.m. in the Judy Chaloupka Theater at Western Nebraska Community College.

Accompanists are often the forgotten piece of musical performances. "Broadway on the Bluffs" accompanist Maren Chaloupka is not just the pianist but she is also one of the producer/directors of the event and has been for most of its 23 years. Accompanists rarely step into the spotlight, but while Chaloupka, a local attorney, was driving across the state for her "real job," as a trial attorney, she talked to the Star-Herald about her role as the backbone of the upcoming event, its history and a glimpse behind the scenes.

Since 2000, Theatre West's "Broadway in the Bluffs" has gone through a few different incarnations. Originally featuring just a single performer, it has morphed into an evening of invite only vocalists and the winners of the Vocalists in the Valley competition. Chaloupka has accompanied them all.

"Accompanying is a unique supporting role," she said. "It's important to listen to, and react to, each performer to give them confidence and help them tell the story they're trying to tell."

Raised in Scottsbluff, Chaloupka has been playing the piano since a young child. First taught by her mother, Judy Chaloupka, she transitioned to formal instruction by Bud Barta from first grade through high school. While at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she studied



Maren Chaloupka, of Scottsbluff, practices with "Broadway in the Bluffs" performers during a recent rehearsal. Chaloupka has been accompanying the performance for most of its 23 years, as well as at other Theatre West performances.

under Auden Ravna and transitioned to a local piano teacher, Becky Kugler, when she returned after law school.

Chaloupka has a seemingly endless supply of energy. She runs a successful law practice, sits on the board of the Riverside Discovery Center, attends church locally, and somehow finds time to learn numerous pieces and rehearse for four to six weeks before every "Broadway in the Bluffs" performance.

"I love my job. Being a trial lawyer can be all-consuming but 'Broadway in the Bluffs' gives me an excuse to play," she said. Her favorite types of music to play are either classical or New Orleans jazz, but "to play at the level I'm accustomed to would take a lot of time."

Performing is not the only aspect of "Broadway in the Bluffs" where Cha-

loupka shines. She helps cast the show, collaborates on the set list to ensure there are few, if any, repeats from previous years, and creates the order of performers to ensure the show has momentum and flows from the high-energy pieces to the melodic ballads logically.

"We have so much talent in this valley," Chaloupka said as she shares a score of names of those who have performed over the years and pauses to highlight the Hebbert family. "They've been involved since the beginning and I'm so thankful for that family."

The feeling from the Hebberts is mutual.

Tim Hebbert said, "I've had the pleasure and privilege of collaborating with

# Bluffs

From A1

Maren for nearly 20 years. Maren brings an artistry and a passion to the piano that has always brought out the best in me as a singer. Working with Maren has always been something I look forward to because it's just pure enjoyment."

His brother, Matt Hebbert, echoed those thoughts.

"Maren has the uncanny ability to just know where I'm headed in a song. Her music makes it possible to really move a song beyond what I would normally attempt. Our music collaboration has evolved into a cherished friendship. I know I'm a better singer when she is at the keys," he said. "Maren is an amazing pianist but so much more she has a beautiful heart and an unstoppable passion. I'm a better person because of our friendship."

Her commitment to preparation for the show extends even into her law practice. Tucked in the back of her new office on Broadway is a rehearsal space, complete with a piano and enough space for the entire cast to join. Her weekends are often spent working, but she carves out a few hours weekly for the performers to join her in polishing their pieces. You can sense the comfort in the room as Chaloupka listens for moments that the performer might just need a little more guidance or rehearsal on a single phrase or transition.



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John Simmons rehearses for Broadway in the Bluffs.

She is passionate about "Broadway in the Bluffs" and reiterates that this is a huge fundraising event that supports Theatre West.

The performance was virtual in 2021 with donations encouraged which limited the crowd and the income.

Theatre West was dealt another challenge when their show "Million Dollar Quartet" was shut down due to a COVID-19 outbreak among the cast.

"The pandemic was a body blow to us, and everyone," she said. "We really need the support of the community."

For more information and tickets for the show call the Kelley Bean box office at 308-635-6193, visit the Theatre West website at [twneb.com](http://twneb.com), or contact a board member.

Tickets are \$25, adult; \$10, student; or \$50, family (up to five). Your ticket includes a chocolate reception after the show.