



*Performers take the stage in Enlightened Theatrics' 2021 "Broadway Dreams" production  
(Courtesy/Enlightened Theatrics)*

COMMUNITY

## Enlightened Theatrics programs will live on under Portland nonprofit

by Rachel Alexander — on March 21, 2024

Enlightened was founded in 2013 and offered a mix of professional shows and theater workshops for both students and adults, performing at the Historic Grand Theatre.

“We found a way that we hope will preserve the programs that Enlightened started in Salem,” said board President Tiffany Carstensen. “We don’t want the people of Salem to lose the theater opportunities that Enlightened has been able to provide.”

Enlightened will begin the process of legally dissolving, Carstensen said. Anything they own that Bridgetown might be able to use, like costumes and props, will be transferred.

Leaders of the two organizations knew each other through the small world of Oregon theater. Conversations about a possible Bridgetown takeover began last fall, said Rick Lewis, Bridgetown's artistic director and founder.

Enlightened's board will continue volunteering to help with the transition. Lewis said Bridgetown staff will be in Salem in April for the Oregon Thespians State Festival to connect with the local theater community.

Bridgetown will begin theater workshops in Salem in May.

Workshops will continue over the summer and fall, and the company is planning its first Salem production for December — a holiday musical.

Enlightened Theatrics began in Salem as a production company but expanded its educational programs during the Covid pandemic.

Bridgetown has been the opposite, Lewis said, initially focusing after its 2017 founding on training students in acting, singing and dance, the "triple threat" for musical theater performance.

Many of their students began coming down to Salem to perform with Enlightened. About a year and a half ago, Lewis said Bridgetown began producing its own shows, realizing students needed an outlet to put their skills on display.

Their staff have Broadway and New York City connections and help students move forward in their theater careers. Their students have landed at top drama programs, like the The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London, or Boston Conservatory.

“We know where these kids want to go,” he said.

In Salem, Lewis said the Bridgetown team plans to find key people in Salem who can keep Enlightened’s vision going. They’ll first operate Salem programs as a satellite but hope to eventually have a dedicated Salem staff, he said.

Enlightened’s closure came about because of financial challenges. Carstensen said the economics of small local theater companies, which have always been precarious, became more challenging after Covid. Many audience members haven’t returned to live theater, and while grants for theater education programs for students exist, there’s little funding available for adult productions or education.

Lewis said Bridgetown is financially stable and has “amazing benefactors” who make their programs work. He’s eager to take on the Enlightened legacy.

“Stepping into their shoes is not going to be an issue for us at all,” Lewis said.

*Contact reporter Rachel Alexander: [rachel@salemreporter.com](mailto:rachel@salemreporter.com) or 503-575-1241.*

SUPPORT OUR WORK – We depend on subscribers for resources to report on Salem with care and depth, fairness and accuracy. Subscribe today to get our daily newsletters and more.

## [Rachel Alexander](#)

Rachel Alexander is Salem Reporter’s managing editor. She joined Salem Reporter when it was founded in 2018 and covers city news, education, nonprofits and a little bit of everything else. She’s been a journalist in Oregon and Washington for a decade. Outside of work, she’s a skater and board

member with Salem's Cherry City Roller Derby and can often be found with her nose buried in a book.