

Bridgetown Conservatory to launch musical theatre programs in Salem



Rick Lewis, artistic director and founder of Bridgetown Conservatory of Musical Theatre, and Marvin Holmes, the conservatory's board treasurer, were getting Bridgetown's new Salem conservatory located on the mezzanine level of the Salem Arts Building at 155 Liberty Street N.E. ready to open next month (Joe Siess/Salem Reporter)

by Joe Siess - Salem Reporter on August 6, 2024

Beginning next month, aspiring performers, youth and adults alike, will begin a journey toward self-realization through acting, dance and vocal performance.

Bridgetown Conservatory of Musical Theatre is beginning programs in Salem, filling the void left by the closure of Enlightened Theatrics earlier this year.

The conservatory, founded in Portland, is expanding with a new theater training program in the Salem Arts Building at 155 Liberty Street N.E. beginning Sept. 7. Rick Lewis, the conservatory's artistic director and co-founder, said spots to get into the program are already filling up.

"Our teen program, which starts in September, is already sold out. We are on a waitlist for the teens. And our adult program is already half filled," Lewis said. "So, I think we are doing something right."

Bridgetown began offering one-day workshops once a month to the theater community at the Verona Studio Theatre inside the Reed Opera House at 189 Liberty Street N.E. in May which will continue through the fall. The conservatory is planning its first Salem production from Dec. 12-15 with a production of G.I. Holiday Jukebox.

Lewis said the new 2,400 square foot conservatory in downtown Salem is for anybody who wants to pursue musical theater as a career. The organization's Portland programs have helped nearly 80 students get into theater programs in colleges around the world since it was founded in 2017.

Classes are separated for teens, ages 12 to 19 and for adults, ages 20 and older, Lewis said. He said he has had students young and old come to the conservatory to learn and to come into a better sense of self-realization.

"We concentrate most on, 'Who are you?' Who walks in the room in an audition?" Lewis said. "Everything that we do is really geared towards trying to get the work or trying to get the program you want. Our students know how to walk into the room."

In addition to the classes, the conservatory will put on at least four performances per year, Lewis said. He said next year there will be shows in February, April, July and December. More information on performances can be found online.

Lewis said there are some primary differences between students and adults who pursue the performing arts. He said for the younger ones, it is about helping them be confident in who they are. The program is about building confidence just as much as creating opportunities for aspiring performers to gain entry into the industry, Lewis said.

"The byproduct of this is not just good performers, we also create really great human beings. It's kind of neat," Lewis said. "For the young performers, it is getting them to understand and discover that who they are is viable regardless of what imperfections they have, that they are castable in the industry. But also that they are worthwhile human beings."

When it comes to adults, Lewis said he has people coming to the conservatory who are in their 40s and more so mired in their ways and perceptions of who they are. He said many adults find it helpful in their personal and professional lives to shed the notions of who they think they are through the performing arts.

"We all wear these masks. This sounds so prosaic, but trimming that down and getting the adults to understand who they really are in the room and what is the material they should be performing," Lewis said. It is really wonderful and powerful to really see them break that down and then become a viable actor, singer, dancer. Because it has an impact on every facet of who they are."

The fall term goes for eight weeks until Oct. 26 with classes from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. each Saturday.

The conservatory is offering a special introductory rate of \$475 to enroll in the program for Salem students. Students can register with a \$100 deposit online. More information is available on the conservatory's website.

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Joe Siess is a reporter for Salem Reporter. Joe joined Salem Reporter in 2024 and primarily covers city and county government but loves surprises. Joe previously reported for the Redmond Spokesman, the Bulletin in Bend, Klamath Falls Herald and News and the Malheur Enterprise. He was born in Independence, MO, where the Oregon Trail officially starts, and grew up in the Kansas City area.