

'Crimes of the Heart' leads off theater's 30th year

Adrienne Bischoff | Posted: Thursday, March 8, 2012 12:00 am

New York Magazine once wrote of Beth Henley's Pulitzer Prize- and Tony Award-winning "Crimes of the Heart," "From time to time, a play comes along that restores one's faith in our theatre."

The Southern tragicomedy about three sisters reuniting after one has just shot her husband that inspired that breathless review will be on display at Mountain Community Theater, which opens its 30th season March 16 at Ben Lomond's Park Hall.

Mountain Community Theater is Santa Cruz County's longest-running theater, an outfit that has operated mostly with all-volunteer casts and crews.

To commemorate 30 continuous years of producing shows of, by, and for the community, MCT has brought back some of its most successful works to create a Best of Mountain Community Theater season, starting with "Crimes of the Heart."

Steve Brenner, who's been with MCT for nearly its entire run, reprises his 2003 directorial role with a cast a little different from his others.

"Most of my shows have somebody who's never been in a play before," he said. "This one is an exception."

Indeed, not only does the entire cast have previous stage experience, but more than half has acted with MCT, including Shannon Marie Kerr (Meg Magrath), who first acted with MCT when she was 12. That her mother performed alongside her in one of the productions reflects one MCT's original goals.

"We wanted a family-oriented theater experience," recalls Rita Wadsworth, a local playwright and one of MCT's founding members. "Mountain Community Theater was formed because a group of thespians didn't want to leave the shire in order to be in a play. Many had families, and several were single parents."

"Crimes" is also about family members reaffirming their commitment to one another. However, no one does it quite like the Magrath sisters — Lenny, Meg and Babe — who have been incapable of maintaining intimate relationships.

But while the plot revolves around Babe shooting her husband, the script is no downer.

"It sounds like a serious subject — and it is — but Henley's skillful writing presents all of these things with great humor," said Brenner.



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Actresses, from left to right, Shannon Marie Kerr of Ben Lomond, McKenzie Brock of San Jose and Jocelyn McMahon of Ben Lomond practice their lines together. Courtesy of Lyle Troxell

After “Crimes of the Heart,” the 2012 season continues with a one-night-only fundraiser featuring Elf Empire’s murder-mystery dinner theater. Then follows the comedy “Harvey,” “The Rocky Horror Show,” a reading of a new play by a local playwright, and lastly, MCT’s own “Miracle on 34th Street,” the play.

On June 16, MCT will host a special midseason anniversary celebration, paying tribute to all the productions and people that have kept the organization running — and helped maintain local faith in theater.

“Crimes of the Heart”

When: March 16 to April 7, Friday and Saturday, 8 p.m. and a Sunday, April 1 matinee at 2 p.m.

Where: Park Hall, 9400 Mill St., in Ben Lomond

Cost: \$18, students and seniors, \$15

For information: www.mctshows.org