



Local Theater Company Celebrates 10 Years with "Wizard of Oz" Retelling

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - This weekend's storms might have passed, but there's another twister coming in the form of "The Real Land of Oz."

The theater company 3 Purple Coats Productions is celebrating its 10th anniversary with a new, elevated production of the musical that made them famous in the Alton area. "The Real Land of Oz" is a retelling of "The Wizard of Oz" and was written by Leah Becoat, the founder of the production company.

“You want people to be touched by your work,” Becoat said. “I think people will be moved or touched because there are so many things that speak to adults and youth.”

Becoat began writing at age 8 to cope with severe eczema, and it quickly became her passion. She opened 3 Purple Coats Productions with her two sisters in 2013; the company’s name is a nod to their surname. In the 10 years since then, Becoat has written a youth show every summer, with additional productions throughout the year when possible.

In 2016, Becoat wrote the first version of “The Real Land of Oz” in a day and a half. The company produced it that summer. This 2016 production was exciting, but Becoat was eager for a chance to redo the show in 2022 with some rewrites. She said the second production was well-received and “almost unrecognizable to , which was a good thing.”

“My oldest son was so impressed. He’s like my biggest critic, and he says, ‘Mom, this is the show. Keep tweaking it.’ And the audiences, hands down, were like, ‘Leah, this is the one,’” Becoat said. “It’s exciting to see others find the value in the work.”

Becoat has decided to focus on “The Real Land of Oz” for now, and the 2023 production, set to premiere July 14–16 at Lewis and Clark Community College, will reflect this dedication. But she’s not the only one who has been inspired by the show. With several returning cast members and a growing audience, both the musical and the production company are gaining traction.

A husband and wife team, who enjoyed last year’s production, volunteered to build the set for this year’s. Becoat also makes the costumes and takes promotional photos.

Meanwhile, the cast ranges from ages 8 to 58. College students, an attorney and a mental health professional are trading in their normal lives for a weekend of lions, tigers and bears. (Oh, my!)

Becoat explains that a lot of “The Real Land of Oz” is inspired by her time in Los Angeles, where she used to live. The story follows Dorothy and her father, who have moved to Kansas from California. As Dorothy navigates the magical land of Oz with new friends and enemies like Poppyrazzi and Neverly Hills, she begins to redefine home.

For Becoat, the reception to her writing is still a little surprising. She explained that writing comes naturally to her, and it’s not until her work is in front of an audience that she can gauge it. What started as a private passion has become a pillar of her life.

“I started writing as a way to find peace with myself as a little 8-year-old girl, just asking God, ‘Why me? Why am I different?’” Becoat said, adding, “My dad would always talk about, ‘Leah, do you know what it takes to bring your imagination to life, to bring it to the stage?’ He was like, ‘Everybody can’t do that.’”

That’s what makes her different. As 3 Purple Coats Productions prepares to celebrate its tenth anniversary, Becoat is reflecting on her work. Her catchphrase is “I turned scraps into scripts.” This motto has driven both her writing and the production company.

“Sometimes, depending on your station in life, maybe if you don’t have a lot, you might get the hand-me-downs or the scraps or scrap pieces of paper. And you take those things and you reimagine, refurbish or turn them into a beautiful work. So I take the scraps of life and then I turn them into scripts, into stories,” Becoat said. “It hasn’t been easy, but I can say that it’s been worthwhile.”

“The Real Land of Oz” is playing at 7:30 p.m. on July 14 and 15 and 3 p.m. on July 16. All shows are at the Hatheway Cultural Center at Lewis and Clark Community College. Tickets are \$10. A’myah Pittman, who plays Dorothy, and William Harris, who plays Ray/Scarecrow, will receive scholarships after Sunday’s show.

For more information, including how to buy tickets, visit the [3 Purple Coats Productions Facebook page](#).