

## In Their Own Words: Area Talents Share Memories of the 2007 Theatre Season

Written by Mike Schulz

Wednesday, 19 December 2007 02:47

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So enough of my opinions already. The following are reflections by Derek Bertelsen, Tyson Danner, Kristofer Eitheim, Kimberly Furness, Jennifer Kingry, Mandy Landreth, J.C. Luxton, Jackie Madunic, Angela Rathman, Jalayne Reiwerts, Susan Simosky, and Doug Tschopp - local-theatre artisans who enjoyed a memorable 2007.

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***Two years after director Susan Simosky's and performer Angela Rathman's participation in Richmond Hill's comedy Over the Tavern, they returned to the lower-middle-class world of the Pazinski family for its sequel, King o' the Moon, which - Rathman excepted - featured returning Tavern characters being played by new actors.***

**Angela Rathman:** I was thrilled to find out Richmond Hill Players was producing *King o' the Moon*, the sequel to *Over the Tavern*

. I love playing Ellen Pazinski. Oftentimes, the thrill of acting lies in playing a character unlike yourself and playing it well. With Ellen, it is more like playing an extension of myself.

It was easy to fall back into the role. I understand her. I respect her. However, there were some difficulties for me during *King o' the Moon*. I came into the show with a fully fleshed-out character, as well as a firm idea of who Ellen's children were ten years later. My interpretation of the Pazinski children didn't always match the interpretation of the adult actors playing them.

As a mother I have watched the dynamics of my own family over the years. I have different relationships with each of my three very different children, but there has been continuity within each relationship. Ellen and her kids are the same, and I wanted to really sell that continuity in the second show. As an actor, I had to work hard to find reasons (that Ellen could believe) that would justify the changes that were brought by other actor's methods and beliefs. I had to let go of some of my preconceived notions and allow the Pazinski family to recreate itself as an ensemble. In the end, I feel we did that successfully and I'm proud to have been a part of it.

I sincerely hope Richmond Hill includes the last show in the trilogy [*The Last Mass at St. Casimir's*] in its 2009 line-up. If they do, I'd love to be part of that family again... in one way or another.

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**Susan Simosky:** I love the Pazinski family! Every time I create a world for them to interact in, I feel like I'm coming home to my own family. From the very beginning of these projects it has been vitally important that the actors cast to portray the Pazinski family feel the same way, and actually become a family.

*King o' the Moon* was an extension of *Over the Tavern*, and I think that we created a more mature family to work with the darker themes in the sequel. This show was an honor to work on, and it was exciting to see different actors bring these same characters to life in ways that were different, but still totally Pazinski.

At the heart of these stories, regardless of who plays the characters, is a family that is flawed and crazy and one that you want to be a part of. I hope I get the chance to bring to family to life again in the final installment of the trilogy, *The Last Mass at St. Casimir's*.

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***Among several designs for the recent production of Charlotte's Web at St. Ambrose University, associate professor and scenic artist Kristofer Eitheim created a 12-foot by 12-foot web for actress Emily Christiansen to crawl on.***



**Kristofer Eitheim:** The web design for *Charlotte's Web* began as a discussion that I had with the director Madeline Dudziak. She told me that she wanted Charlotte to actually climb around on her spider web. My original idea was a painted, two-dimensional web that could light up and be a reflective surface for the stage lights. After Madeline suggested a three-dimensional sculptural web, I got excited about the prospect of having students welding a number of steel structures.

The process for the steel web started with the size. I worked through several looks for the web and ended with a 12-foot square frame with the web coming from the center outward. The web also had to move around stage for the fair scene, so as much as I wanted to secure it to the floor, I couldn't. It was mounted to a rolling platform and heavily weighted so as not to flip over while Charlotte was working on the web.

Part of the design had to also include the words that Charlotte writes in the web. Initially, the director wanted the actress to create the words by hanging yarn or some other material. We quickly decided that was not practical. So lights permanently mounted on the web was the decision that became final, hoping that we could disguise the lights well enough to fool the audience for a while. The stage lighting became important for the web as well. We used moving lights to accent the steel lines and colors to help the painted web look less industrial. The moving lights with colors really helped the web to take on a fun psychedelic appearance.

It was also great that Emily Christiansen was able to work and sing on the structure without any fear - a 12-foot-tall steel ladder on weird angles would be daunting for anyone.

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***Prior to her performance as Hamlet in Scott Community College's The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged], 18-year-old Mandy Landreth made her debut at the Playcrafters Barn Theatre in another role not undertaken by many young actresses.***



**Mandy Landreth:** For theatre, this has been my best year so far, because I had the chance to not only work with some very amazing people, but also to play two very unusual roles: Sylvia, a dog, and Hamlet, a Dane.

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In *Sylvia*, I played a dog, a very challenging role, yet really fun. I actually had to observe my dog for weeks to get the right energy going. As for my favorite part, I got to do a scene where I freaked out on a cat across the street. Although we did cut some of the more colorful words that Sylvia yelled at the kitty. However, kids and adults alike seemed to thoroughly enjoy the show.

*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]* was a whole different story. Besides the awesome cast, our fabulous director, and our rockin' stage manager (and only technical member), rehearsals were more like a bunch of deranged lunatics running around with limbs cut off throwing words and props everywhere. It was the most energetic play I have done, and if given the chance I would totally do each play over again!

***J.C. Luxton wrote the adaptations for the three works in the Prenzie Players' series of Henry plays, titled The Henriad: October, 2006's King Richard the Second, February's King Henry the Fourth, and May's King Henry the Fifth.***



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