

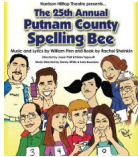
## What's Happenin': August 3 - August 18, 2010

Written by Mike Schulz

Tuesday, 03 August 2010 06:00

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### Theatre

#### ***The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee***

Harrison Hilltop Theatre

Thursday, August 12, through Saturday, August 28

Timber Lake Playhouse

Thursday, August 12, through Sunday, August 22

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Yup, you read that correctly: Davenport's Harrison Hilltop Theatre and Mt. Carroll's Timber Lake Playhouse will both open productions of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* on August 12. And this is one of those times when stepping down from my theatre-reviewer tenure seems like the stupidest decision on Earth, because I can't think of many other musicals I'd be quite so excited to see in two separate venues over the same weekend.

For one thing, the show itself is outstanding. Nominated for six 2005 Tony Awards, two of which it won, book writer Rachel Sheinkin's and composer William Finn's collaboration is a wildly hilarious and unexpectedly poignant reenactment of a middle-school bee; the *Wall Street Journal* called it "a super-smart show that is also a bona fide crowd-pleaser," and *Variety* magazine wrote that this musical "is so generously warm-hearted, only the most bitter misanthrope could resist its charms."

But for another thing, no two productions of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* will ever be identical ... not even those performed at the same venue. In addition to its pint-sized characters, the show employs a handful of audience volunteers at every performance to take turns spelling with the kids on stage, meaning that you - yes, you - might wind up the bee champion at the show's climax. Don't hold your breath, though. Words used to trip up past *Putnam County* contestants have included "hasenpfeffer," "diethylamide," and "weltanschauung," and I'll give anyone five dollars who knows how to spell those wo - .

Damn. I keep forgetting that just because these things are conversational, it doesn't mean we're actually *conversing*.

Timber Lake's production runs through August 22, while Harrison Hilltop's continues through August 28; tickets to the former are available by calling (815)244-2035 or visiting [TimberLakePlayhouse.org](http://TimberLakePlayhouse.org) and reservations to the latter can be made at (563)449-6371 or visiting [HarrisonHilltop.com](http://HarrisonHilltop.com).

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### Theatre

### *Curtains*

Prospect Park Auditorium

Friday, August 6, through Sunday, August 15

Quad City Music Guild wraps up its summer season with a production of *Curtains*, running at Moline's Prospect Park Auditorium August 6 through 15. I haven't seen the show before, but I understand that one of the characters in this mystery musical/comedy is a theatre critic, so I'm expecting lines of Music Guild patrons to reach around the block. After all, as

*Reader*

reviewer Thom White and I can attest, who doesn't love theatre critics?!

Nominated for eight 2007 Tony Awards - with *Frasier* star David Hyde Pierce earning the Best Actor trophy for his Broadway performance -

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### *Curtains*

was the last collaboration between the legendary duo of John Kander and Fred Ebb (the latter of whom passed away in 2004). It also blends the two subjects you'd most likely expect from the composer/lyricist team behind

*Cabaret*

and

*Chicago*

: the theatre and murder.

Both a parody of whodunits and the genuine article, *Curtains* finds a dogged detective (and major fan of the stage) trying to solve the killing of an untalented diva immediately after her curtain call. The suspects include her co-stars, her director, and her stage manager, but even if you can identify the culprit, chances are excellent that Music Guild's gifted cast - which includes Mark McGinn, Wendy Czekalski, Jim Seward, Tom Vaccaro, Andrea Millea, Shana Lavino, and more than a dozen additional, familiar Prospect Park talents - will keep you guessing as to who most successfully knocked the audience dead.

And if all that isn't reason enough to attend, let's not forget about the presence of *Curtains'* theatre critic, or the fact that it actually features a song *about*

theatre critics! I understand that it's called "What Kind of Man?", and it's sung while the cast is reading their show's review, and I just found its lyrics online. Let's see ... : "What kind of mom would raise her boy like that? / Who'd want her baby to destroy like that? / Who could be jerk enough / Hard up for work enough / To want a job like that?"

Wow. Have fun with *that* review, Thom.

For *Curtains* information and tickets, call (309)762-6610 or visit [QCMusicGuild.com](http://QCMusicGuild.com) .

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