

[theatre]

# Community Players Sure to Provide Plenty of 'Proof'

by Louise Tetreault

“We’re three weeks away, and we’ve got a show,” said Eric Barbato, director of The Community Players production of *Proof*. “*Proof* is going extraordinarily well. I’m excited. It’s just a magnificent cast. My work is so easy with this cast. When I don’t have rehearsal, I’m bummed.”

It’s an understatement to say that Barbato is ready for audiences to see the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by David Auburn. The show also marks Barbato’s first full-length directorial effort in 30 years. A theatre major in college, Barbato said he did the “New York thing” and left theater behind. That was until a colleague’s wife said they needed men for a production on 1776.

“She basically said they need men, so if you breathe you’ll

pretty much get in,” he said with a chuckle. During the past several years, he also served as an assistant director for the production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, both Motif Award-winning productions at The Community Players.

When the call went out for directors to submit plays they’d like to take to the stage, Barbato said he submitted four different choices, all of which were rejected.

“I didn’t really know the show. I said I’d need to read it. Upon first reading, I fell in love with it. I am a lover of language and this play was easy to fall in love with,” he said. “The play talks about elegant mathematics. This is really elegant language and that appeals to me. There’s no fluff in this script, not fat. It’s all muscle.”

*Proof* tells the story of Catherine, the daughter of a mathematical genius who also

suffered from mental illness in his waning years. Catherine, a mathematical whiz in her own rite who gave up college to care for her ailing father until his death, struggles to come to terms with her father’s legacy both academically and mentally. She fears falling onto the same genetic path.

Enter her sister, Claire, who worries about her sister’s fate. Her attempts to be helpful only serve to reinforce the Catherine’s fear. And then there’s Hal, the graduate student who starts out interested in the professor’s work but expands his interest to Catherine.

Ultimately, each character is looking for proof. Proof that the equations can be solved. Proof that mental illness isn’t always hereditary. Proof that love can triumph and that dreams can be realized.

“It’s a powerful and intense drama,” Barbato said. “But like any well-written drama, there



are places in the script that are downright funny and give audiences respite.”

Barbato said he worked with set designer Brian Mulvey, who also plays the father in the production, to create a set with a black box feeling – even though the Jenks Auditorium seats 300.

“The idea was to bring the audience physically closer to the stage,” he said. “I want it to be within reach physically and emotionally.”

Cast members include Eve Marie Webster as Claire, Kelly McCabe as Catherine, Kevin Killavey as Hal, and Mulvey as Robert. All are experienced actors with McCabe having earned a Motif Award nomina-

tion for portraying Catherine in Traveling Theater’s production last year.

“They have a lot of experience collectively,” Barbato said. “Their work ethic is great. We’re still almost three weeks out and we have a show because they’ve done everything I’ve asked and more. And we’re having a ball at the same time.”

Barbato, however, thinks that besides heavy acting resumes, what makes this show particularly enjoyable is the rapport the actors have established.

“They like each other. That’s big.”

*Proof* plays June 10-19 at Jenks Auditorium. [thecommunityplayers.org](http://thecommunityplayers.org)

## 'Spelling Bee' Learn ABC's of Seaside Production

by Robert Barossi

With many musicals produced repeatedly, it’s likely that a cast will have varying levels of experience with the production. Theatre By the Sea opens its summer season with a production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* that features five actors performing the show for the first time.

Director Amiee Turner says that there are some benefits to having cast members with little to no prior experience with or knowledge of a show. “Benefits are that they typically come to the piece without any deep-rooted ideas about who the character is and how they may behave and

grow throughout the story. A naiveté if you will. They also typically have a great deal of excitement about ‘learning the role.’”

These cast members can also bring challenges. According to Turner, the biggest challenge hasn’t come from the actors as much as it has come from the time frame they have to work in. “With two weeks to learn all the lines, music, blocking, choreography and create the chemistry of each individual show, it can be a lot of hard work for everyone.”

It’s the actors themselves who help her overcome those challenges, “by hiring top-notch, professional actors that have technique as well as instincts. We have a lengthy audition process that helps to find actors that are

good at what they do, in rehearsal and in the performance.”

One of those actors is Carey Michele Miller, who describes her character, Olive Ostrovsky, saying, “She loves words and reading her dictionary. Words bring her comfort and so does the fact that the dictionary contains so much information about the vastness of the world. She is a newcomer to the *Bee*...She starts off a little on the quiet side, but gains confidence and voice for herself.”

Although this is Miller’s first time performing in the show, she had some experience with it. “I saw the show when it was on Broadway, but it was so long ago...I went to the Performing Arts Library in New York the week before rehearsals to view

the Broadway archival video to refresh my memory. I was reminded how funny the show is. It’s really heart breaking at parts too. It’s a perfect combination of emotions. Rehearsing this show this last week has just made me love it more.”

When asked whether she prefers actors who are new to the show or who have done the show before, Turner says it depends on the show. “Spelling Bee is so much about spontaneity, improvisation and audience interaction that having cast members with experience with the show has been very helpful to really think through all the possible scenarios...it has also been great that the newbies have brought a renewed sense of innocence and exploration to the cast

as well.”

Though the show contains spontaneity, improvisation and fun, there are important themes as well. Miller says, “One theme is self-discovery...that everything they thought was true up until this point in their life may or may not be true...that they are more than what the people around them tell them they are....These children are different than the other kids at school. I think being at the Spelling Bee, they finally feel like they fit in and feel that there is a place for them in this world.”

*The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, Theatre by the Sea, Card’s Pond Road in Matunuck, runs June 3-19. Visit [www.theatrebythesea.com](http://www.theatrebythesea.com)*