



(Left) Kris Coffelt and Steven Chambers in *Private Lives* by Noel Coward; (Right) *Aladdin* children

Curtain Call Playhouse Celebrates One Woman's Vision

BY SUSAN F. DAVIS

You can say “a decade” or you can say “ten years.” But, no matter which you choose, you simply have to say “Congratulations!” to Curtain Call Playhouse. From 1996 until today, this dynamic group has thrived while providing quality entertainment for our community – and all because of one woman's vision.

Kris Coffelt was that woman with a vision. And now, after having worked with more than 2,700 artists and students in Broward County and parts of Palm Beach County, her vision – of bringing a theater company to the area which would allow highly creative actors of all ages to hone their skills and express their creativity – is as clear as ever.

“Yes, it's all about perseverance and hard work,” Coffelt observes in explaining what keeps this company going. “I learned not to take short-

cuts, but most importantly, I knew I had to stick with my vision.”

That vision changed drastically after the company's first year in business, as it became clear that the traditional one theater-one venue concept was not going to work as it sought to make Pompano Beach its home. Scheduling became very difficult in the popular Civic Center venue and, as artistic director, Coffelt could see that there would be no growth for her fledgling program without some sort of alternative.

“The city was very helpful, and that allowed us to be able to make a new plan, without giving up our goals,” Coffelt explains. “It became clear that other cities needed something as well – something artistic and dramatic.” So from this slight complication was born the idea that has since flourished into what Curtain Call Playhouse is today, a

touring theater company. Another city – another opportunity. “And yes, it was hard on us in the beginning – and a little more costly. But now, we have learned to be flexible, and we have found this is a very rewarding way of life,” Coffelt continues.

This traveling performance group has certainly given the participating artists and performers some very rewarding opportunities. First, the actors get to work in magnificent venues, and second, they are afforded the chance to perform for a much more diverse group of people.

As the area's most active local touring company, Curtain Call stages its productions in two counties – Broward and Palm Beach – in partnership with the cities of Pompano Beach, Miramar, Sunrise, Hollywood, Oakland Park and Boca Raton. Performances also have taken place in the Township Center

for the Performing Arts, the Posnack Jewish Community Center and facilities in the City of Tamarac and at Kings' Point.

The goal of the group is to continue to grow by adding additional touring venues. "We hope to develop relationships with other cities to establish interest in bringing theater events to ArtsParks, and of course we are anxious to work with new city personnel to develop other new programs," Coffelt explains.

Having only recently added musicals to the Curtain Call Playhouse repertoire, Coffelt acknowledges that they are very successful. "Audiences still love a show filled with good song and dance!" she says. The well-known and well-loved *My Fair Lady* is its current touring production. Coincidentally, this musical is celebrating an anniversary of its own – its 50th!

Coffelt points out that each season the company performs a musical, a classic and a contemporary play or comedy. "This lets us bring something for everyone," she notes. The formula has proven to be both popular and successful.

As if all of this were not impressive enough, Curtain Call Playhouse has developed an extremely productive and positive program for children. Its touring educational programs have allowed hundreds of Broward

County children to experience the world of theater and to grow in all of the ways this experience allows. Recently, the Children's Workshops have expanded to include McNab Elementary School in Pompano Beach and programs in Boca Raton.

The Playhouse offers three 10-week after-school programs. The children first learn the basics of acting. Then they learn how to audition – ultimately auditioning for specific roles in their upcoming show. The third segment of the series allows them to do a "real" show. Some of their greatest successes have come from traditional and well-loved childhood favorites – *Cinderella*, *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*. Summer camps of three weeks are also provided, so area children have the opportunity to become both actors and good consumers of theater.

As both executive director and artistic director, Kris Coffelt is quick to credit Broward County for its help in nurturing her organization. "Broward County has the best support system I have ever seen for cultural affairs. They are dedicated to keeping the arts moving forward. We appreciate them more than we can even say," she says. From the County, Curtain Call Playhouse receives a General Operating Program Grant, which funds the stipends actors receive and helps offset the huge costs of

royalties as well as presenting productions in multiple venues.

Curtain Call also has a strong volunteer base comprising approximately 70 determined and dedicated people. The volunteers oversee fundraising, marketing, bulk mailings and play selection, among other roles. Maintaining the group's busy schedule and business affairs is only a small portion of what the volunteers can do. Their goal, much like Coffelt's, is simply to expand the programming and the reputation of this productive, innovative group!

One has only to spend a minute in conversation with Kris Coffelt to quickly recognize her creativity, her unbridled enthusiasm for the Playhouse and her love of theater in general. Her energy seems boundless as she laughingly admits that her husband has become involved in the projects of the theater as well.

Not only is Coffelt a teacher at her own workshops, but she is an actress herself. Later this spring she is appearing in *Blithe Spirit*, the Noel Coward classic. She does allow herself a month off in the summer to "recharge."

So, for this birthday celebration, you don't need to bring a present. Just buy a ticket; the shows are gifts enough! Bravo, Curtain Call Playhouse! ★

Susan F. Davis is a writer and retired teacher.



(L-R): Anne of the Thousand Days, An Ideal Husband, My Fair Lady, Blithe Spirit.