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| SECTION C

The show must go

ON

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IT'S A WELL-KNOWN THEATER adage: The show must go on.

But whoever coined that phrase must not have ever had to deal with a monster hurricane and its effects: flooding, water and wind damage, evacuated casts and staff, lack of power, phone and internet

SEE SHOW, C4 ►

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC RADDATZ / FLORIDA WEEKLY

The post-Irma update from area theaters

SHOW

From page 1

service.

But the phrase does accurately describe the willing spirit of theater folk to continue on, no matter what.

Unfortunately, due to Hurricane Irma, some area theaters had to postpone or cancel shows. Venues are regrouping, figuring out what life is like post-Irma and how to best move on.

According to its Facebook page, Artis—Naples was running on a generator and did not open its administrative offices until Monday, Sept. 25, when *Florida Weekly* went to press. “Initial information indicates that Irma was kind to us” and that “damage was minimal” the site said, but a full inspection had not yet been performed.

Scott Saxon, general manager of the Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall in Fort Myers, reported that the hall lost power for a few days. “There’s some minor leaks, nothing major, so the hall came through perfectly fine,” he said. “So relatively speaking, thankfully everything was good.”

Gulfshore Playhouse

Gulfshore Playhouse in Naples had to cancel its fifth annual New Works Festival, which was already in progress when Irma bore down on the Florida peninsula Sept. 10. That meant grappling with the logistics of getting flights for eight actors and four playwrights who had to return to Washington D.C., New York City, Los Angeles, Portland, Ore., and Montana.

In addition to cancelling its New Works Festival, the company has cancelled its opening play of the season, “Paradise.” Chosen from last year’s New Works Festival, it was supposed to open Oct. 14.

“We should have been in rehearsals already,” said Kristen Coury, company founder and producing artistic director. “Additionally, we hadn’t received our lumber order and we weren’t sure we could call back our shop workers (on order to build the set in time).

“It was like a giant house of cards of all living pieces that couldn’t work.”

Additionally, The Norris Center, where Gulfshore Playhouse holds its plays, didn’t have power for a week and a half after the hurricane. While the theater is structurally fine, some rehearsal spaces and other parts of the center have mold.

“We’ve cancelled our education programs as well,” Ms. Coury said, “because we have nowhere else to do our programs.” As of late last week, she added, she was waiting to see when it would be OK to get back into the building. “Will we be able to rehearse for the next show, ‘Leading Ladies,’” she wondered.

The comedy by Ken Ludwig is supposed to open Nov. 11, but Ms. Coury would love to start performances a week earlier with \$10 previews “to give back, for people who need to laugh,” she said.

In the meanwhile, the theater’s administrative offices are hampered by lack of phone and internet service.

“We saw a significant loss of potential income, an inability to create the art we promised to create, and we’re not on the other side yet,” Ms. Coury said.

It’s been a rough time for the theater.

“Every aborted act of creativity is a little death,” she said.

Laboratory Theater

In Fort Myers, Annette Trossbach, Laboratory Theater founder and artistic director, had to cancel opening weekend of “Sordid Lives.” Now that the show is up and running, however, two performances have been added to accommo-

date ticketholders.

“Sordid Lives” was supposed to open Friday, Sept. 15. Instead, Ms. Trossbach gained permission from playwright Del Shores to have a dress rehearsal open to the public on Sunday, Sept. 17. One week to the day after Irma, an audience of about 50 people came to the free rehearsal.

“Everyone had a good laugh,” Ms. Trossbach said about the appreciative audience. “They all really needed to laugh. They were under a lot of stress, and the actors had been under that same stress or evacuating and returning. It made everybody feel better,” she added. “That was nice.”

She had been concerned about the theater itself, as they recently purchased the building. “I was so worried. After almost nine years, we get to purchase the building, and now this.”

But they were lucky: The former church-turned-Kiwanis-hall near downtown sustained minimal damage. Hurricane Irma even blew down “one crappy fence we had planned to remove anyway.

“I don’t think we actually even lost power,” Ms. Trossbach said. “It’s just incredible.”

Florida Rep

Florida Repertory Theatre had to cancel its previews of “Outside Mullingar” but still opened as scheduled on Friday, Sept. 22 (see review on page C12).

The historic building in downtown Fort Myers suffered no structural damage, according to Jason Parrish, associate director and ensemble member. “The only thing we really lost was time.”

But in theater, time is precious.

The four-person cast of “Outside Mullingar,” along with the show’s director and stage manager, evacuated to Gainesville, where the Hippodrome Theatre housed them and gave them space to rehearse.

Back in Fort Myers, however, the shop/set crew lost valuable time, with some evacuating to other parts of the country.

“It’s been complicated getting people back,” Mr. Parrish said. “Many of our staff had just started, and then had to leave after being here two days.”

But, he added, “We were very lucky and are very much aware of that.”

TheatreZone

At press time, TheatreZone in Naples was still unable to determine the full extent of the damage done to its home in the G&L Theatre on the campus of Community School of Naples.

“We’re still waiting for air-conditioning to come on, which will help more,” founding Artistic Director Mark Danni said late last week. “We had some wind blowing through the hallways that took our photographs off the wall. Some water got in ... The rug will need to be replaced.” Once power returns, he added, “We’ll assess things like soundboards and lightboards.”

The first show of the season doesn’t open until December, but Mr. Danni had scheduled auditions for the season Sept. 9-10. Irma, of course, forced cancellation. Auditions were rescheduled, and the company is accepting video auditions for out-of-state actors who could not reschedule their flights or who had other commitments.

Marco Players

The Marco Players sent out an email on Sept. 19 to let patrons know the community troupe and its home at Marco Town Center made it through Irma relatively unscathed. “We didn’t flood or have extensive building damage, so we’re feeling lucky,” the message said. “A tree near the post office took out a power line that feeds service to the theater. So, unfortunately, we were without power (until Tuesday, Sept. 19.) Today, we are back in business!”

Rehearsals are underway for “Sex Please, We’re Sixty,” which runs Oct.



COURTESY PHOTO

Groovin': The 60s and 70s Musical is playing at Broadway Palm through Oct. 7.



BRYELLE DAFELDECKER / COURTESY PHOTO

Viki Boyle, Martin LaPlatney and Rachel Burttram in “Outside Mullingar” at Florida Rep.



COURTESY PHOTO

“Sordid Lives” playing at Lab Theater.

25-Nov. 12.

Alliance for the Arts and Theatre Conspiracy

“We had some bumps and bruises, but I couldn’t help but feel grateful to walk in on Monday morning, the day after Irma, to see the building still standing and no glass broken,” Lydia Black, executive director of the Alliance for the Arts in Fort Myers said.

She hadn’t been sure what she’d see when she returned to the campus. “It was a huge relief,” she said.

Internally, some classrooms had minor flooding, while externally they lost at least eight trees, including five palms and two oaks. The community helped with cleaning debris and trees.

Irma’s winds moved the “You Are Here” sculpture on the center’s lawn facing McGregor Boulevard off its base.

The Foulds Theatre, where Theatre Conspiracy puts on its plays, is fine.

“The theater was the safest part of the building,” Ms. Black said. Staff moved equipment, furnishing and artwork to the elevated stage to be safe from flooding and fortified the doors to the theater with sandbags. The theater also has a reinforced roof.

“Buyer & Cellar” is slated to open Oct. 6. Theatre Conspiracy is offering a “buy one, get one 50 percent off” deal for tickets to Thursday and Friday night performances.

Broadway Palm

The Broadway Palm opened its first show of the season, “Groovin’: The 60s and 70s Musical” on Sept. 7, the Thursday before Irma hit, but then closed the theater and didn’t reopen until Friday, Sept. 15.

The theater is “great,” Melissa Vogt, director of sales and marketing for the dinner theater, said. “We had some leaks, but nothing major ... Obviously, we lost a lot of food, but that was it.”

Knowing they’d probably lose power and phone service, they proactively switched their lines over to their sister venue, The Dutch Apple, in Pennsylvania, so staff there could field calls.

“We are all good; performances are moving on as scheduled,” Ms. Vogt said.

“Groovin’” runs through Oct. 7 on the

main stage. In the Off-Broadway Palm, “The Odd Couple: Female Version” plays through Oct. 29. Through both runs, the theater is donating \$5 from every ticket to the Irma Relief Fund established by the Southwest Florida Community Foundation.

The theater wants to help the community in any way it can, Ms. Vogt said. “We’ve been here for 25 years, and we’re focused on doing whatever we can to get things back on track for our neighbors and our community,” she said. “We have ways we can help.” Anyone who sees a way the theater can be of help is encouraged to reach out via the Broadway Palm’s Facebook page or by sending an email to Ms. Vogt at Melissa@broadway-palm.com.

The Naples Players

Associate Artistic Director Jessica Walck said the Sugden Community Theatre, home of The Naples Players on Fifth Avenue South, experienced some minor leaks and flooding in the orchestra pit and one rehearsal room.

“But other than that, we’re very fortunate,” she said. “The building held up pretty well.”

Power was out for a week after Irma, however, and as of press time the theater still didn’t have phone or internet service. “In this business, that’s important, especially when you’re trying to sell tickets,” Ms. Walck said.

The venue has opened its doors to any who might want to enjoy the air-conditioning or recharge cell phones and other devices.

The theater closed on Tuesday night before the storm, giving staff time to evacuate if they wanted. But that meant they lost two weeks of rehearsal time for “She Kills Monsters,” scheduled to open on the main stage Oct. 11.

“It put a dent in our rehearsal process,” Ms. Walck said. She added the company has offered its space to other local theaters if needed and it volunteers or other places that need help with recovery and repairs after Irma, including The Naples Zoo and Naples Botanical Garden.

“We have a healthy volunteer base that likes to help,” she said. “We have so many great people that help us all the time, why wouldn’t we do that for others?”

“We’re not just a theater at this point, we’re a community. We’re here for anybody who needs anything,” she added. ■

in the know

Area arts festivals still happening

Plans for four big annual arts events have not been derailed by Hurricane Irma.

>> **The Island Hopper Songwriter Fest** started as planned on Friday, Sept. 22, and runs through Oct. 1 in downtown Fort Myers and on Fort Myers Beach. For more information, go to www.island-hopper.fortmyers-sanibel.com.

>> **The Ringling International Arts Festival**, an avant-garde celebration of various performance arts, is still on for Oct. 18-21 on the campus of the John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art and at the Asolo Theatre in Sarasota. For more information, go to www.ringling.org/events.

>> **The Sanibel Island Writers Conference** will take place as planned Nov. 2-5 at BIG ARTS, with keynote speaker Alice Hoffman and various evening readings, talks and concerts. For more information, see www.fgcu.edu/siwc/.

>> **And the Sarasota MOD Fest**, the fourth annual midcentury modern architecture festival, will still happen Nov. 10-12. This year’s events celebrate acclaimed Sarasota School architect Edward J. “Tim” Seibert. For more information, go to www.sarasotamod.com.

— Nancy Stetson