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2024 TRUE WEST AWARDS: DAY 11

Four self-starting producers laid it all on the line in '24 | John Moore

These four independent local women took on the risk of mounting four of the biggest musicals of the year

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True West
AWARD 2024

30 DAYS • 30 BOUQUETS



Four on the **FORWARD**

At a time when many theater companies are struggling to stay afloat, four women stood up and stood out by producing large, impactful and, yes, expensive musicals in 2024: Julia Tobey, Nancy Evans Begley, Jalyn Webb and Dana Cain. All without the benefit of public funding that supports nonprofit groups.

YEAR 24 • PRESENTED BY DENVER GAZETTE SENIOR ARTS JOURNALIST JOHN MOORE
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JOHN MOORE

The Denver Gazette

At a time when many Colorado theater companies are struggling to stay afloat, four women stood up and stood out in 2024 by self-producing four of the biggest (and most expensive) musicals of the year.

Some made their money back. Others took a bloodbath. But there's no denying they offered up four of the most impactful productions of the Colorado theater year, and often at their own great financial peril: Julia Tobey with Give 5 Productions' "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," Nancy Evans Begley (and Amy Condon in partnership with Parker Arts) with Veritas Productions' "School of Rock," Jalyn Webb (and Bryan Bell) with the new Beehive Productions' "The Rocky Horror Show"; and longtime event planner Dana Cain's big-time crossover into musical theater with the world premiere of "The Android's New Soul" at the Bug Theatre. And they all did it (well, mostly) without the traditional public funding sources that are the lifeblood of area nonprofit arts organizations.

To which, Begley says, huzzah. “I think there is something to be said for four female producers making a big splash on the scene this year. It’s pretty amazing to see women lead in such a powerful way.”



Opening night of "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," produced by Julia Tobey and Give 5 Productions, Aug. 1, 2024, at The Arch.
JOHN MOORE/DENVER GAZETTE

Julia Tobey

To give you an idea of what it takes to be a theater producer in Colorado, both in terms of dollars and chutzpah, consider that Tobey staked \$95,000 – much of it her own – to bring Denver a resounding new staging of John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask’s counterculture classic rock musical “Hedwig and the Angry Inch.”

That figure was “just” \$70,000 – at first. But that was before Tobey’s contracted venue (the former Herman’s Hideaway) was pulled out from under her at the last minute, which forced her to either pony up or fold up. Tobey rode that pony right on over to a hipster modern industrial events center called The Arch in the trendy RiNo Arts District. The show only went on because she put in more money, a host of local businesses including Meow Wolf kicked in, and crowd-sourcing brought in another \$5,600. The gamble paid off, and Tobey says she recouped much of her investment.

"But I've never worked so hard in my life," she said.

So, I asked her the big, obvious question: Why even bother?

“So many people view the performing arts as an optional element in life, and I view it as an essential nutrient,” she said. “Nothing brings me more joy than producing a show that allows folks to come inside and escape their troubles for a few hours.”

Next up is a much more financially safe endeavor: Mary Poppins, in partnership with Parker Arts, from Jan. 17- Feb. 9 at the PACE Center.

“There is something to be said for four female producers making a big splash on the scene this year. It’s pretty amazing to see women lead in such a powerful way.” – Nancy Evans Begley



Director Katie Reid Milazzo, left, and Veritas Productions Executive Producer Nancy Evans Begley on opening night of "School of Rock" at the PACE Center in Parker in January 2024.

JOHN MOORE/DENVER GAZETTE

Nancy Evans Begley

The financial risk is mitigated when one joins forces with Parker Arts because, at the city-owned PACE Center, Parker Arts determines the theater season, then takes bids from local companies that want to produce those titles, like Give 5 and Veritas. Parker Arts sets the non-negotiable budget for the winning team – “School of Rock,” for example, was assigned a \$125,000 budget. Veritas was expected to deliver a show that would sell around 85% of all available seats. (Musicals there pretty much always do.)

In other words, it’s a dreamy relationship, and one completely unique to the Town of Parker.

Evans Begley started Veritas with Condon in 2019, but “School of Rock” was their first big Broadway musical. “So, why not go big?” Evans Begley thought.

“I had dreamed of presenting musicals at the PACE Center since the building opened in 2011,” she said. “I had to submit a 52-page ‘Statement of Qualifications’ to the Town of Parker in 2022 to be awarded this partnership at all.”

Her goal with Veritas, she said, was not to compete with the Arvada Center or Denver Center. “It was to raise the bar in Colorado theater at this level by giving audiences the same kind of expectation and experience, but on a semi-professional, nonunion level.” And, in the lead-up to “School of Rock,” she said, “the network of people who wanted to join us got bigger.”

“School of Rock” hit its sales target, and Veritas banked a 20% profit. Not bad for an essentially new company.

“Nancy Evans Begley is a one-woman production wonder,” said local actor George Zamarripa. “Veritas has come flying out of the gate with some great work since its inception.”



The cast of Beehive Productions' 'Rocky Horror Show,' which played Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Halloween night at the Comedy Improv in Northfield.

JOHN MOORE, THE DENVER GAZETTE

Jalyn Webb

[The gospel of dinner theater according to Pastor Bruce | John Moore](#)

Jalyn Webb, a Colorado theater veteran whose day job is as marketing director for the thriving Candlelight Dinner Playhouse in Johnstown (and starring in many of its shows), gave herself even more to do in 2024 by co-launching a new theater company called [Beehive Productions](#). It debuted in the fall with a live, 50th anniversary staging of “The Rocky Horror Musical,” with a couple of twists: The show was presented at the Denver Improv, and only on Tuesdays and Wednesday nights, when the comedy club would otherwise be closed.

The unusual performing schedule came with a windfall: The all-star cast included highly sought actors who were busy performing in some of the area's other biggest fall productions at the time. But because, like the comedy club, most theaters are closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, this arrangement made them available to do two shows at once.

“I really wanted to create something for actors and audiences to do in the in-between,” Webb said of midweek nights. And I wanted to do something that allowed people to try something different in an interesting new space and with a vast array of talent.”

The show cost about \$40,000 to mount. Webb and director Bryan Bell raised about half of that; they both kicked in; and they led other fundraising efforts. They pretty much made it all back, Webb said, “and we were very proud to raise \$1,800 for two prominent local charities.”



Dana Cain surrounded by everyone she created a job for in staging "The Android's New Soul," a \$150,000 undertaking at the Bug Theatre.

Dana Cain

Then there is the colorful Dana Cain, who is a comic-book character come to life. Cain was a “Let's put on a show!” kind of kid in the 1960s, grew up a “Star Trek” Trekkie and, in her words, teleported into major event planning in 1977. She's now the owner of Dana Cain Events, which sports a huge roster of fun times that spans the Denver County Fair (which she cofounded in 2011), a variety of chocolate festivals, the Denver Dog Fair and even a Unicorn Festival.

But 2024 brought Cain fully into the land of musical theater with a passion project that goes back 50 years: a sci-fi rock musical, which she began writing when she was in high school. “The Android's New Soul” was the most expensive undertaking in the history of the century-old Bug Theatre.

Cain's clever, tongue-in-cheek homage to sci-fi TV of the 1970s takes place in radiation-plagued, mutant-filled, post-apocalyptic California, where a scientist reprograms an android to be her boyfriend. It became a bright, brief sensation in the local theater landscape, and audiences went nuts for it. Longtime KWGN TV personality Chris Parente called it “Wonderfully weird: Led Zeppelin meets ‘Rocky Horror’ meets George Jetson.”

Problem was: “Android” cost \$150,000 to stage. And it only made \$20K back, Cain said.

So ... why did she do it?

“Well, because I didn't know how much it was going to cost, that's why,” she said with a laugh. I didn't know because I'd never actually worked in theater.

“But honestly, sometimes in your life you have a goal and it just won't go away. This thing has been on an unstoppable trajectory since I was in high school more than 50 years ago.”



"The Android's New Soul" director Jeff LaGreca, producer Dana Cain, and actor Suzanne Slade-LaGreca at The Bug Theatre in December 2023.

DANA CAIN ENTERTAINMENT

The good news? Dana Cain Events is an incredibly successful company, and Cain went into the project coming off her most profitable year. “By September, I realized that's why the universe was funneling all this money to me – because they knew I was going to need it for this,” she said.

While “Android” created jobs and income for a large Colorado creative contingent, “it wiped out my bank account,” she said. “I incurred tons of credit-card debt, and now I'm in the process of stabilizing my finances. But, I mean, I'll build back. It'll all be OK.”

And the project is only now about to yield its greatest reward – just in time for Christmas. “Part of my end game all along was to come out of this with a film version of ‘Android,’” she said. “I had a crew come in and film four or five performances, and we are now in the final phase of editing it. It's got all the closeups, the sets, the songs, the dialogue, the long shots, the pans – all of it. So, yes, \$150,000 is a lot of money to put on a stage show – but it's nothing for a film.”

Bottom line? Totally worth it, she said.

“It was worth it because it was a completely new experience for me at age 66, and I am so proud of the way it came out,” she said. “I just dove into something completely new that I had no knowledge of, and just going to rehearsals every night and hanging out with the kids was so great. To be recognized as a songwriter and a science-fiction creator, that was worth it. It was all worth it.”

Webb, for one, loves seeing women emerge as leaders in the producing field.

“Oftentimes, at the highest executive levels, women, even as recent as 20 years ago, were still not listened to a lot,” she said. “I think in a world where women are called ‘bossy’ as a pejorative instead of ‘assertive,’ it feels nice to look out on the horizon and see other people doing what we are doing.”

Note: The True West Awards, now in their 24th year, began as the Denver Post Ovation Awards in 2001. Denver Gazette Senior Arts Journalist John Moore celebrates the Colorado theater community by revisiting 30 good stories from the past year without categories or nominations.



Charlotte Campbell, left, as Patsy Cline and Jalyn Webb as her friend, Louise, in Candlelight Dinner Playhouse's "Always, Patsy Cline," which was performed this fall in Johnstown. This was the fourth time Webb played Louise, including this photo from the now-closed Midtown Arts Center in Fort Collins.

DYANN DIERCKS

Unsung hero of the day

For years, local playwright Mike Broemmel has quietly carved a niche by writing and producing one-actor plays that tell the life stories of famous people like Truman Capote, Helen Bonfils and Hedy Lamarr.

In August, when Broemmel brought "[The Bonfils Girl](#)" to the historic Elitch Theatre stage, it constituted the first full, live ticketed theater performances on that hallowed stage since 1991. It took place 90 years after Bonfils herself debuted as an actor on the Elitch stage.

When famous TV actor David Hyde Pierce spoke in Denver last month at a fundraiser for the Visionbox acting studio, Broemmel rose to address Hyde, colorfully explaining that he is no longer an actor while also charming Pierce's socks off.

Before answering his question, Pierce urged the ebullient Broemmel to give acting another try.

John Moore is The Denver Gazette's senior arts journalist. Email him at john.moore@gazette.com

2024 TRUE WEST AWARDS TO DATE

- Day 1: Jo Bunton Keel
- Day 2: Christopher Boeckx
- Day 3: Standing for Humanity
- Day 4: Anne Terze-Schwarz
- Day 5: Caitlin Lowans
- Day 6: Broadway, Babies
- Day 7: Oh, Brothers!
- Day 8: Kid(s) Rock!
- Day 9: Sand Creek
- Day 10: Annie Dwyer and Traci Kern Piper
- Day 11: Four producers

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