

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Ten Bucks' 'Cuckoo's Nest' is full of surprises



Courtesy of Ten Bucks Theatre

The cast of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" rehearses in Eddington.

By [Emily Burnham](#), BDN Staff
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As far as villains of novel, stage and screen go, one of the best and most-loathed has to be mental health Nurse Ratched of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." She's the cruel, sociopathic tyrant that everyone loves to hate — and she symbolizes what can go wrong in institutions, when the wrong individual is given too much power.

She's played with what director Julie Lisnet called "fearless" gusto by Ellsworth actor Katie Toole in Ten Bucks Theatre's production of the original 1963 Broadway adaptation of "Cuckoo's Nest,"

which opens at 7 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 3, at the Eddington-Clifton Civic Center. In keeping with Ten Bucks tradition, the fall show is one that challenges both actors and audience, with serious subject matter and more difficult roles — though as fans of both the book and movie known, “Cuckoo’s Nest” has as much wild humor as it does edgy, demanding content.

“This is the show that really jazzes us as artists. We need to flex our muscles,” said Lisnet. “But this show, I think everyone thinks it’s just nonstop depressing stuff, when in reality there’s an awful lot of wonderful humor. It’s a demanding show for multiple reasons, and it’s something that comes out being well worth the emotional effort.”

For those who aren’t familiar, “Cuckoo’s Nest” is based on Ken Kesey’s 1959 book about the patients at an Oregon insane asylum, in the days when mental patients were treated far more brutally than they are today, with heavy use of sedatives, restraints and things like electro-shock therapy and lobotomies. In the story, the otherwise perfectly sane Randle Patrick McMurphy (played in Ten Bucks’ production by Allen Adams) checks into the asylum as a way to get out of serving prison time. During his stay, he shakes up the lives of the other patients, who have been coerced and intimidated into docility by Nurse Ratched. Those patients range from the deceptively silent and stoic Chief Bromden, played by Randy Hunt, to the fragile, stuttering Billy Bibbit, played by Adam Cousins.

Lisnet is familiar with the world of mental health, as her brother worked at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center for a number of years.

“I thought about having him come in to talk to the actors about personality disorders, but in the end, I decided against it, because our actors were doing such a great job at figuring out their characters,” said Lisnet. “The great thing about both the book and the play is that the characters are so beautifully drawn. And I’ve discovered that the trick to being a good director is to cast the right people. And I know we did.”

This production is set in three-quarters round, as the small stage at the Eddington-Clifton Civic Center made it hard to contain all 17 performers in the show, but the auditorium itself is quite large. It made sense for the actors to come off stage, into the crowd.

“Hopefully the audience will feel like they’re part of the action,” said Lisnet. “It blurs the line between performers and audience. It’s such an intense show that I think that really adds to it. It makes you feel part of their world.”

“One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” will play at 7 p.m. Nov. 3-5 and Nov. 10-12, and at 2 p.m. Nov. 6 and 13, at the Eddington-Clifton Civic Center, located at 1387 Main Road (Route 9) in Eddington, approximately 10 minutes north of the Bangor-Brewer bridge. Tickets are \$10 at the door. The show contains strong language.

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