

Broadway beckons in the light of the Half Moon

John W. Barry, Poughkeepsie Journal 12:07 a.m. EDT October 23, 2014

A new partnership between Half Moon Theatre and the CIA underscores a priority for regional arts organizations - collaboration.



(Photo: Paula Siwek/Courtesy photo)

Actress Cady Huffman grew up in Southern California, with two older brothers, her mother and her grandmother.

The family was Italian — Huffman's grandmother was not born in Italy, but several of the woman's siblings were natives and she spoke Italian as her primary language.

"I grew up in an Italian household, so food was very important and very fresh," said Huffman, who lives in Brooklyn. "Home-cooked meals were very important — sitting around the table talking, arguing, whatever it was."

Huffman is a culinary aficionado. She is a member of two cooking groups. And she appeared as a judge on the Food Network's "Iron Chef America" television program over the course of 10 seasons.

Huffman is also a Broadway veteran and Tony Award-winner, recognized with the theater industry's top prize for originating the role of Ulla in "The Producers," opposite Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane in the classic story by Mel Brooks.

On Saturday, Huffman's love of theater and her passion for the culinary arts will come together when she performs an original show based on these two cornerstones of American culture.

The venue will be a Dutchess County landmark with a global reputation for its sophisticated approach to turning the four basic food groups into a showcase of dazzling dietary moments. Backed by a three-piece band, Huffman will perform a cabaret-style show at the Culinary Institute of America's 800-seat Ecolab Auditorium, inside the Hyde Park school's Marriott Pavilion, which opened earlier this year.

Huffman's show will feature performances of the culinary-inspired songs, "That's Amore," "Jambalaya (On the Bayou)," and "A Spoonful of Sugar," along with other selections. The show will also feature her musings on "relationships with people, with food ... and just about food and how it makes all of us feel — cooking, eating, sharing, the family dinner table, cooking with people, how food brings us together — my own personal stories of how it has affected relationships and how it brings comfort."

Huffman's performance is the centerpiece of a gala being held to celebrate a new partnership between the CIA and Half Moon Theatre in Poughkeepsie, which will stage performances in the Ecolab Auditorium. In the wake of Huffman's performance Saturday, Half Moon Theatre, founded in 2006, will present performances of "The World Goes 'Round" in November; "It's a Wonderful Life: The 1946 radio play adapted by Anthony Palermo" in December; and "Fully Committed" in January 2015.

For upcoming shows, not including Saturday's gala, the CIA at its Bocuse Restaurant, American Bounty and Ristorante Caterina de' Medici eating establishments will offer a special pre-show, three-course, prix fixe menu prior to Friday and Saturday evening Half Moon performances, for \$39 per person.

Some of Half Moon Theatre's productions will feature food themes and the CIA's chefs will create menu items and concession offerings for specific performances.

"When this idea came up and we opened the Marriott Pavilion, part of what we wanted to do with the addition of the theater was to use it to reach out to the community, and make this more visible to the community and more part of the local community," said Waldy Malouf, senior director, CIA Food and Beverage Operations. "And to give back and to have something to offer the community."

As Half Moon Theatre and the CIA embark on their new partnership, they are also offering one perspective on an approach to presenting the arts that a team of researchers at the State University of New York at New Paltz has identified as pivotal to the Hudson Valley arts community, which helps drive the regional economy.

According to a recent study by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at SUNY New Paltz, the arts across Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester counties generate nearly a half-billion dollars in economic activity and are linked to 4,970 jobs. Also, audience spending on lodging, food, recreation, retail and transportation accounted for \$498 million injected directly into the region's economy.

That study also identified collaboration as a priority for the arts community.

"It's a creative organization — it's the Culinary," said Molly Renfroe Katz, executive director of Half Moon Theatre. "What's more creative than the art of gastronomy, the art of cooking? We feel like they are a kindred spirit."

Huffman said the same is true for food and theater, and the way these kindred spirits complement each other. Whether you are indulging in a fancy dinner before a show, or a late-night bite at a diner afterward, Huffman said culinary expression and theatrical performance fit "hand-in-hand" together.

"It's all entertainment," she said. "It's all artistic expression, made for you right there and then. It's immediate. It's live."

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IF YOU GO

What: Half Moon Theatre and Culinary Institute of America Inaugural Gala Benefit featuring Tony Award-winner Cady Huffman, directed by Will Nunziata

When: 6 p.m., Oct. 25, cocktail reception; 7:30 p.m., performance; 9 p.m., dessert reception

Where: Culinary Institute of America, Marriott Pavilion, Route 9, Hyde Park

Tickets: \$200 for the cocktail reception, performance and dessert reception; \$75, admission for performance only.

Information: Visit www.halfmoontheatre.org or call 1-800-838-3006 for tickets. Call 845-235-9885 for information on upcoming performances. Visit www.ciachef.edu and www.ciarestaurantgroup.com for information on the CIA.

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