

'Midvale' actors shine in Lewiston

By Amanda Cullen
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LEWISTON — The sold-out Sunday matinee showing of The Public Theatre's newest production, "The Midvale High School 50th Reunion," was followed by a post-show "talk back" with the cast and director Christopher Schario.

The play, about two adults who meet at their 50th high school reunion, showcased the importance of memories and how past events continue to shape who we are. Two single adults, Tom Terres and Bettina Belknap, run into each other at their reunion and strike up an instant spark. Even though they were in the same class of 1954, they never interacted during school.

The show takes place during the current-day reunion and features memory segments of their younger selves and defining moments in their life. "Memory is a tricky thing," Belknap says early on in the play. "It's very unpredictable."

The four-person cast of Mel Shrawder, Joyce Cohen, Nisi Sturgis and Torsten Hillhouse stuck around after the performance to answer questions from the audience.

Schario said the theater is a "professional theater with professional New York actors."

The first audience "question" was simply a thanks "for bringing such a talented group of people to Maine."

Cohen said what the play really captures is that "when you're in high school, people place you in a role. And then your life goes a certain way and when you get to a certain age, you see things can change."

Sturgis said she had a 13-year-old talk to her after Saturday's show who said he hoped he could break out of that formula.

One question was whether anyone in the cast had been to a 50th reunion, and Cohen said she attended hers recently so she "definitely thought about that" for her performance. Another audience member said the actors, who played either the younger or older version of the same characters, had a natural affinity for one other, and that Cohen and Shrawder danced well together.

Cohen said their choreographer, Adam Blais, "understood what we could do and couldn't do." She said that was important because "the dance is a continuation of their whole story."

She also said that the four of them have been living together here while preparing for the play, and for the run of the production.

"Every chance we had, we were dancing together," she said.



Mel Shrawder and Joyce Cohen go through their dance call before Sunday's performance of The Midvale High School 50th Reunion at The Public Theatre in Lewiston. (Andree Kehn/Sun Journal)

Schario said they also practiced the dancing for two hours a day every day to prepare. He said from the time they picked the play, he has been most worried about the dancing.

He added that this is only the second professional production of the play. "The first was not what the writer expected and he lost faith in the play," Schario said. "But he saw ours and said he was very happy with it."

"The Midvale High School 50th Reunion" has showings scheduled through May 13. That schedule is available at www.thepublictheatre.org.