

SPELLING

From page 1

little kid looking way, way up. And the hanging lights ensconced in heavy half-globes that look as though they should be placed upon the shaved head of a condemned convict or lowered onto an abductee by a Martian.

The cast, a rag-tag group of 7th graders and their teachers, had just sung the first song, "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee." Then, POP! We were enveloped in blackness.

"I didn't do it!" said a petulant male voice from the stage. People laughed.

A few seconds later, the Hall's generator kicked in, and the auditorium became dimly lit.

Some thought it was part of the show.

Jennifer Simard, portraying Rona Lisa Peretti, a teacher, stayed in character, ad-libbing. She told the audience that she remembered this happening during the 14th annual Putnam County Spelling Bee when there was a hurricane.

But as the power stayed off, the cast was uncertain what to do. Simard told the crowd to talk to each other.

Then she announced they would take a break and leave the stage. Proclaiming "Whatever!" with perfect teenage exasperation and disdain, the actor in the Boy Scout uniform stomped off the stage and the rest of the cast followed.

People in the audience immediately whipped out cell phones while others went into the lobby. The word soon buzzing around the hall was that a transformer blew.

Unfortunately, a transformer blowing is all-too-common event in Southwest Florida. I constantly return home only to find timers blinking 00:00 and that my alarm clock is three hours off. It's like living in a third-world country where continual electrical power is an iffy proposition.

A woman came out and announced that the show would begin again, from the beginning, even though we were still without power. People on the main floor

cheered, and some in the balcony jeered.

The cast came trooping out, and Simard, keeping in character, urged everyone to move down closer to the stage. She was marvelous; all those improv classes were definitely working.

But one man in the balcony kept complaining in a loud voice. There's one in every crowd.

"This is a live spelling bee, and these things happen," Simard told us. "It's just a little dark. You're going to be the only people to get to see it like this."

That comment was met with more cheers and jeers.

The Hall was dimly lit, but there wasn't much light on the stage itself. I wasn't sure how I felt about it. A noir version of "The 25th Annual Putnam Spelling Bee"?

By now the fourth wall was not only broken, it was obliterated.

"Why are you talking into a microphone if there's no power?" someone shouted out to her.

Simard replied that she felt comfortable behind the mic, it helped her feel secure.

Others started shouting out comments.

"I feel like a comic at the Catskills!" Simard exclaimed, and then suddenly broke into gales of laughter as the absurdity of the situation overwhelmed her. It took a few tries before she could stop.

Then, the stage manager walked on-stage again, accompanied by Scott Saxon, the Hall's general manager. Saxon, dressed in a suit and carrying a megaphone, looked as if he were part of the show - a gym coach or a principal, perhaps.

He announced they were canceling the show and patrons could exchange their tickets for another night's performance.

The show must go on, but not until tomorrow.

Most people took the news good-naturedly. They realized it wasn't the hall's fault, and the cast had demonstrated that they were game to continue.

In the cast bio, Jennifer Simard says she's received one Lucille Lortel nomination, one Drama League nomination and three Drama Desk nominations "and is therefore, a five-time loser."

But in my book, she's a winner. ■

CONSPIRACY

From page 1

including members of the media, advertisers and patrons.

"We're not being the victim here," he explained. "We are not being offered a contract that will keep us in business."

Taylor went on to explain it was due to the board of directors of the Alliance for the Arts letting the theater space out to other interests to the detriment of the Theater Conspiracy's ability to prepare for shows.

Taylor said he had attempted to redress the situation and was given the same answer repeatedly.

"I was told it's what the board of directors wants," Taylor said.

The Theater Conspiracy has operated at the Alliance for the Arts Foulds Theater for over a decade.

Taylor went on to say the search had already begun for a new space and tabled an idea for the interim.

"We are considering doing 'found' theater projects," Taylor said. "The theater can be anywhere. Even a parking lot...However, we would need short productions. It would be a bad situation if we set up shop where there are not adequate rest-room facilities."

These "found" theater projects would be funded by donations at the site.

"It'll be 'pay what you will' type theater," Taylor said.

When Taylor opened the floor to questions one person asked if a nearby yard space on the grounds of the Alliance for the Arts was a possibility.

"Yes," Taylor said. "All doors are open."

He intends to have the "found" theater projects going at the end of May.

Audience members expressed concern and started offering ideas.

One member suggested the airport, saying you'd have a "captive audience" at which Mitch Haley, Media Director of Devious Design Studios, quipped, "Would you consider performing as an Arab?"

Taylor relayed that the Gulfshore Playhouse may be signed to use the

Foulds Theater for September and October.

Other ideas for space that were tabled were the use of the Kiwanis Club or a church.

The Kiwanis Club had performances in the past but Haley joked it would be difficult to drive there now due to the downtown redevelopment.

Taylor said the Unitarian Church on Daniels Road was being considered.

When asked if any downtown sites were being looked at, Taylor said, "Not right downtown. The rent is too expensive. But we're looking at the periphery."

In closing, Taylor said, "I'm not hitting anyone up for money now."

At which an attendee responded that that would come later.

On April 4, Kathleen Moyer, Publicity and events coordinator for the Alliance for the Arts, was asked if any business interests that were not arts related had taken the space that had been slotted for the Theater Conspiracy.

"I don't believe so," Moyer said. "Occasionally there are businesses that use the space usually for a day...sometimes it is let out to businesses for several days."

Moyer emphasized that there was no intention to drive the Theater Conspiracy out. On Bill Taylor's decision to press forward she expressed support.

"I think it's great that Bill's found this opportunity for growth," Moyer said. "It's great that they're finding this opportunity to do what they always wanted to do...and go year round...I think that what's happened is that the talent has outgrown the space here."

Moyer also said that there was no contract with the Gulfshore Playhouse at this time.

However, in an email on April 4, Taylor said that he was under the impression Gulfshore Playhouse had already been promised a time slot in September and October.

It read: "The only thing I can say for sure is Gulfshore Playhouse has the theater from Sept 14ish through Oct. 15..."

When asked, Moyer said that she did not want to say what parties were vying to rent the space at the

Foulds theater. However, she had some ideas.

"Chamber music would be cool in there," Moyer said. "It would be fun to see some children's productions."

Moyer went on to say that the Gulfshore Playhouse may put on children's productions.

Moyer is a volunteer at the Gulfshore Playhouse but said this represented no conflict of interest on her part.

On April 5, Kristen Couric of the Gulfshore Playhouse also stated there were no definite plans with the Alliance.

"We may put on a production for four weeks about mid September," Couric said. "...no contract has been signed."

Gulfshore Playhouse will have its own home in Estero in 2008.

Moyer went on to say she was confused as to why Taylor pulled out of the Foulds.

"We went from having a full time troupe to having none at all," Moyer said. "...he was concerned about building sets...but he could have used classrooms or the Edwards building for rehearsal space."

Moyer also said that the Theater Conspiracy was offered the same amount of time though the last contract offered did stipulate that the Alliance for the Arts would maintain exclusive use of the stage, backstage, amphitheater and box office from Sept. 17-Oct. 15 and from Feb. 4 to March 12, 2008.

Taylor maintains these restrictions hamper his ability to put on productions and stay afloat.

Moyer stated that these times were always subject to use by other parties at the Alliance's discretion.

However, there was no conflict until last year when Taylor was asked to take apart his set so that Gulfshore Playhouse could put on a production in between Theater Conspiracy shows.

Taylor said that produced strain.

"The Alliance offered volunteers to help with this," Taylor said. "...but I would have had to oversee the operation and put in my own time."

Both Taylor and Moyer maintain this situation does not represent a conflict between Gulfshore Playhouse and Theater Conspiracy. ■

10th Anniversary Celebration 2 DESIGNER TRUNK SHOWS IN APRIL

Rjean...

TRUNK SHOW

THURSDAY, APRIL 12TH - 10am-6pm

The designer, Robyn, will be at Mallie with her entire collection available for purchase.

DON'T MISS IT!

Show Special **10% off**



TARINA
TARANTINO

TRUNK SHOW

FRIDAY, APRIL 20TH - 10am-6pm

Jewelry, Purse & Hair Accessory Collections

Specially designed for this event

"The Mallie" Semi-Precious Piece

Plus drawing for Jewelry Box with \$500 of Tarina Jewelry! & FREE Gift with purchase of \$150+

SEE YOU THERE!



Mallie Montgomery
Boutique

On Daniels Pkwy. between Metro & Plantation • Ft. Myers

239-768-9982

www.malliemontgomery.com