

Oconee Youth School of Performance nurtures local talent

For Shane and Terra Hannon, August is a month of anniversaries. In August 1998, the couple – who met while students at the University of Georgia – got married and launched a fledgling business, Oconee Youth School of Performance. Initially, Terra was the main employee – functioning as the manager and sole teacher, while Shane worked full-time as a sports writer for the Athens Banner-Herald. But as the performing arts studio quickly began to grow, the couple realized it would take both their energies.

Now, less than a decade later, the OYSP staff has grown along with the number of class offerings in all areas of the performing arts.

“The newest additions to our staff are Bill Gabelhausen, who will teach acting classes, and Drew Doss, who will teach an after-school musical theater class on Mondays,” says Terra, a UGA drama major who is also a certified dance instructor. “Both are well-known to the community. ‘Mr. G’ ran the drama program at OCHS for many years and Drew does the same at NOHS. They’re wonderful people who we’ve worked with in various ways, so we’re delighted to have them as part of our studio.”

Shane, who has an extensive performing background, will continue as the main teacher for OYSP’s popular musical theater classes offered to ages 3 and up.

“Shane has been on stage since he was nine and had the title role in a production of ‘Oliver!’ at Mell Auditorium in Athens,” says Terra. “He’s a natural performer and kids of all ages love his classes.”

Terra these days devotes most of her time to OYSP’s dance and musical theater companies. “These students, who are selected by audition each spring, are the ones who really love performing and want to devote a lot of effort to honing their talents,” Terra notes.

During the year, company members work on numbers to perform at the Access

Broadway regional talent competition held in the Atlanta area each spring.

“We started competing in this event in 2002 and have been named ‘Best Studio’ four of the last five years,” Terra says proudly. “That’s a real measure of how good our kids are.”

The students have also tested their talents at the national level, earning OYSP the “Best Studio” title at the 2004 Access Broadway national finals and coming in a close second this past July.

“We don’t go to nationals every year, but when we do go, we do really well,” Shane points out. “This year, we were up against 22 other studios from 12 states, including the national winners from 2005 and 2006. So we felt good about our showing.”

While offering opportunities for those who want to be involved in regional and national competitions, OYSP is also a studio where students at all levels can feel at home. “We strive to create an environment where everyone can experience the joys of the performing arts,” says Terra. “Above all, we want our students to have fun and enjoy their classes.”

With a growing reputation for nurturing local talent, OYSP has not only expanded its staff, but also its facilities. “We outgrew three different locations before deciding it was time to build our own studio rather than keep renting,” says Shane.

In August last year, the doors opened at OYSP’s new 10,000-square-foot facility at 1050 Jamestown Blvd. in Watkinsville, less than a mile from the Oconee County Civic Center. The proximity comes in handy for another of the couple’s endeavors – Oconee Youth Playhouse.

“Along with starting the studio, we wanted to provide a performing outlet for our students and others in the community,” says Terra, “so we launched OYP with a small show in October 1998.”

That venture, too, has grown significantly over the past nine years. “We’ve now



Members of OYSP's dance and musical theater companies celebrate winning the 'Best Studio' title at the 2007 Access Broadway regional competition. OYSP came in a close second at the national finals in Orlando in July.



The staff at OYSP includes owner Shane Hannon, from left, teachers Hillary Tidd, Kelly Ozust, and Janell Larson, and owner Terra Hannon. The studio is located at 1050 Jamestown Blvd., Watkinsville.

directed more than two dozen shows, most of which have been performed at the Oconee County Civic Center, which is a wonderful facility,” says Shane.

Through the years, OYP shows have become increasingly professional and casts have grown to accommodate the large number of local young people who audition for roles.

“It’s not unusual for us to have more than 100 kids in some of our bigger productions like ‘The Wizard of Oz,’ which we’ve now done twice – in 1999 and 2005,” says Terra.

This fall marks a big step for OYP – a special partnership with the Classic Center in Athens to present the popular Disney musical “Beauty and the Beast.”

“We have just finished holding auditions and are now moving into rehearsals,” says Shane. “This is going to be a fantastic show with Broadway-caliber sets, costumes and special effects. But more importantly, it will really showcase some very talented local young people, ranging in age from

third graders to college students.”

To help meet the costs of such an expensive production, OYP – which is a non-profit organization – will hold its annual fundraising event Aug. 18 at the Classic Center in Athens.

“This is a really fun way to kick off our season and get people excited about our upcoming shows,” says Terra. “It will be a seated dinner with entertainment provided by kids who have been in past OYP shows. We hope a lot of people from the community will come out to support our 2007-08 season, which also includes three shows at the Oconee County Civic Center.”

With all this going on, what will the couple do to celebrate their anniversary this year? “The same thing we do every year at this time – hold an open house Aug. 11 to register students for our fall classes and work on our upcoming OYP show,” says Terra. “The romantic getaway will just have to wait.”

For additional information about the

Oconee Youth School of Performance and classes offered, call 706-769-2677 or e-mail oconeeyouth@gmail.com.

Oconee Youth School of Performance Open House & Class Registration

Saturday, August 11
New students: 3-5 p.m.
1050 Jamestown Blvd. Watkinsville
Info: 706-769-2677
or oconeeyouth@gmail.com

Oconee Youth Playhouse Annual Gala Fundraiser

Saturday, August 18
Classic Center, Athens
Dinner & entertainment
Make reservations by August 15:
oconeeyouthplayhouse@gmail.com
or 706-769-2677