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EDITOR'S PICK

Starring in 'Menopause' is full-circle for Clinton native

Amanda Hancock ahancock@qctimes.com Updated Jul 14, 2016



Sarah Hayes can't relate to some of what she sings about in "Menopause: The Musical," now at Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse.

But changes? The 34-year-old knows all about those.

In fact, one of the biggest ones happened right on the Circa '21 stage, where Hayes continues her role in the musical this week.

Hayes, a Clinton native, "basically grew up on the Clinton Showboat" and participated in the Quad-City theater scene until she moved away for college in Arizona. Sitting in the crowd of shows at Circa '21 as a teenager, she remembers thinking, "I wish I could be up there."

"I definitely idolized this place," Hayes said. "If they were on stage here, I wanted to be them."

That door seemed to close after moving away and attending Mesa Community College and University of Arizona. And after almost walking away from musical theater altogether because of a bad bout of stage fright.

"There was a moment when I thought I'd never be in a musical again, because I got way too nervous singing in front of people," she said. "I couldn't get through an audition."

She could face auditions and rejection with monologues, but singing? Not so much.

"My throat closed up, my muscles tensed, and I just couldn't do it," she said. "And I thought, that's probably it for me. I just can't be a musical theater person."

That is, until she returned home five years ago and got a job on the Circa '21 wait staff, The Bootleggers — or “The Booties,” as Hayes refers to them.

Part of the job description is providing a pre-show song for the audience, so Hayes expected her usual freakout to happen.

But it didn't.

“Because of how that job goes, I had no time to build up the nerves,” she said. “You're on the floor doing last-minute refills, and all the sudden, you have to go on stage and sing — you don't have time to think, you just do.”

This two-year stint at her dream theater was Hayes' “miracle drug” for battling her nerves.

“That changed my life,” she said. “And now, most of the time, I'm all good.”

Since then, Hayes has found success, including a three-market tour with “Menopause” to dinner theaters in Florida, Pennsylvania and Rock Island.

“Coming back is really full circle,” she said. “It feels like home.”

And she hopes to pass along that homey feeling to the audience.

The show, which has been a crowd-favorite for at least 15 years, goes like this: Four women randomly cross paths in the underwear section of a department store, and through singing parody-esque songs about going through menopause, they become best friends. They transform lyrics from popular songs from the '60s, '70s and '80s to suit the symptoms of “the change.” Songs include “Stayin' Awake,” “Change, Change, Change,” “My Thighs” and “My Husband Sleeps Tonight.”

In teaming up with three actresses and treating the audience as “the fifth girlfriend,” Hayes learned something about being a woman — there are always changes.