
Letters to the Editor

A standing ovation for the OV Theater 's Jeff Hull

Mr. Jeff Hull and Walking Stick Theater have done it again. Even during a pandemic, this gem of a high school theater teacher is able to create over-the-top powerful content. Otter Valley High School is very fortunate to have such an outstanding theater director guiding our students in the art of entertainment. Plus, he is giving them a safe place to work through some of the pandemic anxiety they are going through in this upside-down world we all find ourselves in.

This past Friday, OV theater had a live broadcast of what in past years would have been their "one-act plays," short plays that are directed by the seniors of the theater program. Because of COVID, Mr. Hull, like all of us, had to pivot and make changes to the usual program and in doing so, gave the OV students an opportunity to engage in one more aspect of entertainment — the world of video. Tapping into YouTube as a resource, Walking Stick Theater was able to film and stream their live performance of the short plays that we usually get to see sitting in the OV auditorium. As in

the past years, the one-acts were good, bad, and ugly (spaghetti western shoutout) with some making you laugh, some making you cringe, but all of them making you appreciate the hard work these kids put into something they obviously love.

As in past years, the final piece is performed by the seniors and in pre-COVID years is performed in regional, state, and New England competitions, where OV is consistently a winner. This year, of course, there will not be the opportunity to compete for the graduating class of 2021, but I'd argue that Mr. Hull gave this class of seniors (and all those that watch) a more important and longer-lasting gift than winning theater competitions. He gave them an outlet for their COVID-induced stress and a life lesson on how to deal with adversity. The final piece, "Ebb and Flow," which can be found one hour and 24 minutes into the full show (find it on YouTube <https://youtu.be/xvfnazmzkgm>) are monologues performed by the students who wrote them describing how they have strug-

gled with the pandemic and how they have discovered the best way for them to cope with these struggles. As I've said, it's a powerful piece of theater and begs the question how is the pandemic affecting all students, parents, teachers, all of us and how are we dealing with it?

Over the past year, we have learned that masks and 6-feet aren't that hard to do and now with COVID-19 vaccines, we'll begin to see less illness and death, with that I hope we'll begin to look at the mental toll this has taken on our youth.

Schools are asked to do many things these days, but it would seem to be the ideal place to help kids with their mental health. As we begin to climb out of this pandemic, I hope we'll be willing to fund serious, innovative programs to help kids with their mental well being, but if we don't, at least I'll know that Mr. Hull will be there to help the OV theater students in a positive, creative and empowering way.

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