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Courtesy of Best of Broadway

Best of Broadway's production of "Pippin" opens Thursday at INB Performing Arts Center.

Flippin' for 'Pippin'

High-flying, award-winning musical brings showy spectacle to INB stage

By Nathan Weinbender

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"Pippin" is an unusual show for its era. Premiering in 1972, it's a postmodern musical in every sense of the term: It's presented as a grand production by a troupe of performers who comment on the action with the insistence of a Greek chorus, and it breaks down the fourth wall and tramples over it.

The show has since become a musical theater favorite, and it was revamped for a Tony Award-winning Broadway revival in 2013. That version of "Pippin" has now been given a national tour, and it hits the INB Performing Arts Center next week as part of the Best of Broadway series.

What separates this new "Pippin" from the one audiences saw in the early '70s is its elaborate staging. This version doubles down on the original's formal daring by fully embracing its own showiness, marrying Bob Fosse's famous choreography with aerial stunts and high-wire acrobatics.

"It's the type of show where your eyes can't leave the stage because there's so much happening," said actress Housso Semon. "Once you see the show, you'll think, 'Why wouldn't anyone want to be in

IF YOU GO **'Pippin'**

WHEN: Thursday through Jan. 15; Shows Thursday and Jan. 13-14 7:30 p.m., Jan. 14 matinee at 2 p.m., Jan. 15 at 1 and 6:30 p.m.

WHERE: INB Performing Arts Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

COST: \$30-\$70; tickets are available through TicketsWest.

this?"

Boasting a rock score by Stephen Schwartz ("Godspell," "Wicked"), "Pippin" tells the tale of its titular prince, who is unfulfilled with his sheltered life of privilege. Wanting to experience the world beyond his castle walls, he first attempts to find gratification on the battlefield alongside his father, the haughty king known as Charlemagne, before venturing out on his own to explore his intellectual and romantic impulses.

Semon will be seen on the INB stage as the Leading Player, a role that was originated on Broadway by the great Ben Vereen. She describes the character as the ringmaster of the show's circuslike troupe, deliberately steering the story in unexpected directions, teasing the audience with

things to come and influencing the decisions Pippin ultimately makes.

"(The Leading Player) is in charge of everybody. Whatever she says, goes," Semon said. "She's very charming and seductive, but stern. She can charm anyone, but the minute she needs to put things in order, it will be done at the snap of a finger."

Semon, 25, was born in Ivory Coast and grew up in Ithaca, New York, and she says she developed a love for musical theater at an early age. She attended the American Musical and Dramatic Academy and has performed in several New York productions, but "Pippin" is her first touring show, and she says most of her co-stars are also new to life on the road.

"It's exciting," Semon said. "It's something that we've all really wanted to do, so we're all eager to see what becomes of our work."

All that hard work promises a finished product that's all flashy, splashy spectacle. But for all of its stylistic (and literal) gymnastics, "Pippin" has remained a staple of the stage because it tells an elemental story about the search for purpose. The show's themes may not be anything new, but they're being examined from strange angles.

"It's about wanting to do something fulfilling and seeking to be the best you can possibly be," Semon said. "Sometimes the most wonderful things are right in front of us, and we don't need to push further to look. I think it reminds people that what you have can be enough."

Evans' oils capture nature's calm

By Audrey Overstreet

Correspondent

Spokane artist Sheila Evans finds inspiration in nature, even when surrounded by highrises and highways.

When visiting Chicago a couple of summers ago for an art show, she ducked behind a hotel to take a walk down a little ravine with a wooded area.

"There was this mass of fireflies, and growing up here, I'd never seen a firefly in my life," Evans said. "It was amazing to see them in the dark forest."

Her resulting painting, "Night Forest," is one of the featured oils in her new show "Tranquility," opening at Dodson's Jewelers Friday with an artist's reception.

"Night Forest" has no obvious fireflies on the canvas, nor even trees. It's a Georgia O'Keeffe-like perspective of dried hydrangea petals, with large blue-and-green leaves,

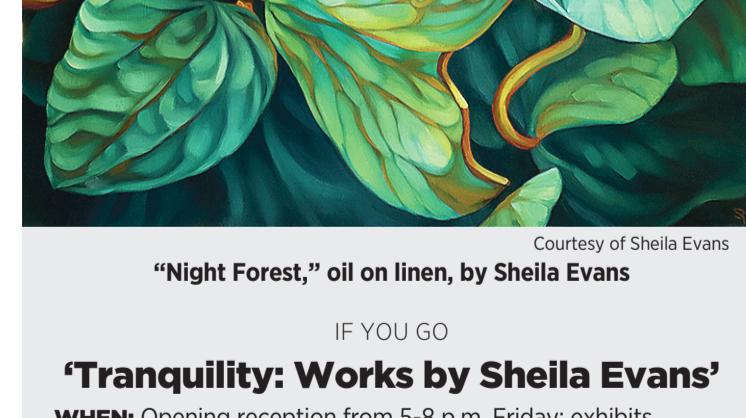
veiny and verdant. The viewer feels hushed by being thrust into the density and darkness of nature.

Another painting, "Aloft 2," offers the same close perspective, but employs a contrasting orange and gray palate. The petals against the sky are more reminiscent of a thunderstorm than a flower.

"To my mind, these paintings are almost abstracts, not meant to be representational," Evans said. "But I also wanted them to be relatable, inspired by nature."

While Evans' choices of composition and colors are mesmerizing, it's her focus on mood that stands out. The calming effect of being visually buried in foliage and fauna is immediate.

Evans has worked mostly with pastels in the past 20 years but has returned to oils again and again. The Dodson's show of her recent return to oil paintings harkens back to the classes she took as an art major



Courtesy of Sheila Evans

IF YOU GO **'Tranquility: Works by Sheila Evans'**

WHEN: Opening reception from 5-8 p.m. Friday; exhibits continues through January

WHERE: Dodson's Jewelers, 516 W. Riverside Ave.

CALL: (509) 624-4163

at Gonzaga University in the late 1980s.

"I later started doing pastels on my own in drawing classes because I didn't have a properly ventilated studio space, not a bunch of room or a lot of time for drying (layers of oil paints)," Evans said.

Evans now has her own studio in a quaint bungalow in the Perry District, where she has room to spread out. She works alone with a black cat named Lily and a collection of Buddha statues to keep her company.

A pantry full of vintage

barware and cocktail glasses is a reminder of Evans' recent exploration into the art of mixology. She produced two art and recipe books on the subject in 2014, "Mixology: The Art of Classic Cocktails" and "Mixology with a Twist: The Art of Modern Cocktails."

Evans' latest passion is creating painted enamels of animals. She credits Steve Gibbs, the Art Spirit Gallery owner who died on New Year's Eve, for inspiring her.

"I told him I had purchased a kiln and taken an enamels class, and he said if I could make five pieces in time for the spring group show (last year), I could be in it," Evans said. He liked what she produced. He scheduled her for another show set for next November.

"Luckily, I got a chance to thank him (in our last conversation) for pushing me to work in enamels," Evans said.

"He went so quick," she said quietly. "It's such a loss."

The tranquility and calm of Evans' paintings seem to fit the mood as this reporter said goodbye. Evans shook hands and turned back to work among her Buddhas and her images of nature.

Modern's schedule uncertain after closure

If you're a season ticket holder with the Modern Theater, be prepared for some changes. The musical comedy "A New Brain" was initially set to open at the Modern's Coeur d'Alene location, 1320 E. Garden Ave., on Friday, but showtimes for all upcoming productions (save for the June 9 premiere of "Titanic: The Musical") have been pulled from the theater's website.

The Modern closed its Spokane location, 174 S. Howard St., at the end of December, and announced it would be consolidating its resources at the theater's Coeur d'Alene location. According to members of the Modern's board of directors, the theater's upcoming season had to be reconfigured following the Spokane closure, and they are currently deciding which shows will be staged at the Idaho location.

No specific run dates or titles have been announced. According to the Modern's Facebook page, season ticket holders will be notified about the changes.

Nathan Weinbender