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*"The play's the thing" wherein we make
our contribution to the artistic culture
of the Northwest.*

We Awaken The Sleeping Beauty

HARRIET K. WALKER

"The thickets are turning to roses!" cries the brave and handsome Prince, as he plunges through the forest of matted thorns that have grown up for a hundred years around the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. And this was likewise the cry of the Mountaineer Players last spring as they breasted through the difficulties which the lapse of five war years had allowed to grow up around their project. For it had been decided to try to revive the annual Forest Theater play at Kitsap, an activity begun by our Club in 1923 and carried on through twenty successful years before being halted by the war. With the thousands of people who had flocked to our plays had come the realization that here the Mountaineers were not only providing wholesome recreation for themselves but were making a unique artistic contribution to community life. And so on December 3, 1946 the Players met to reorganize, elect a Chairman, and get the Spring Play rolling again.

Our first move, which turned out to be our first thorny thicket, was a party we planned for a clubroom night by way of introducing ourselves again to the general membership. We had the party, to be sure, and had plenty of fun, but it was on one of the nights of the big snow, January 29, and our group was small and the program abbreviated. When we actually got down to work on the play, one or two of our thickets yielded readily. A splendid production committee was assembled with ease. Mrs. Lois Sandall was glad to assume direction again, and Mrs. Frances Spalding to plan and teach the dances. Also it was not too hard to find a play, for *The Sleeping Beauty of Loreland*, which we had done in 1938, would not be too difficult to costume and stage and hence would be an ideal vehicle for a revival.

Whether we would find enough actors to complete the cast was something else again, but the try-outs on March 3rd and following brought forth an excellent assortment of talent, both old players and new, and we were able just to get by, although it was a lucky thing that the health of the cast remained excellent throughout the spring for we had absolutely no "spares." And not until the last days were we sure of an adequate choir for Gail Baskerville's lovely musical arrangements.

The production staff, on the other hand, was dogged by illness, either of the members or of their families, and at times it looked as if the work would never get done. Plenty of work there was, too. It is amazing how far and how firmly a Puget Sound forest can encroach upon a clearing in five years. Snow and storms had brought down trees across our stage, shattering the wings of cedar bark that had stood for years, while ferns and trees and grass had taken over the terraced hillside of the amphitheater. Our theater was returning to the forest. Art Winder took unto his heart the reconstruction of the stage, and Harry Myers determined that now was the time to carry out a project long dreamed of but never accomplished during the years of the depression, namely, the correct terracing and shoring up of the amphitheater.

All this, as remarked above, meant work. Some of the first clearing began as early as the Valentine party at the Cabin in February, and it looked as if it would be easy, but when Art and Harry really got down to work in April there were never enough helpers. Former enthusiasts had dropped out during the five years or become involved in other interests, and among the hundreds of new members only surprising few had ever seen a play or were aware of its significance. In consequence Harry and a small group, including T. D. Everts, Herman Wunderling, A. H. Hudson, and Harry Eastman, spent repeated weekends at the theater, with others helping as they were able.

Several large cedar snags were felled and bucked and good sized chunks riven from them. This was heavy man's work, but the women could make themselves useful by lugging the timbers to the theater, where more heavy labor was required in setting them edgewise into the hillside as risers for the steps of the terracing. Play day rushed upon us before the upper terraces could be finished.

Meanwhile, under Art's direction, the valleys were scoured for cedar bark, an extremely scarce commodity nowadays, and the theater wings were rebuilt. Time did not allow rebuilding of the mound, much as that is needed. Working under difficulties, Norbert Schaal got our special scenery up and devised a beautiful palace gate.

Also meanwhile the work in town went forward. We are still marveling at Dorothy Lahr's ingenious artistry in creating lovely and amusing costumes from such a limited supply of materials as were available, and at a minimum of expense. Almost every member of the staff found himself pioneering in a new field because of the changes that five years had wrought. Especially was this true with our publicity. Frieda Bickford and her helpers succeeded nevertheless in getting many notices into the smaller sheets and securing an excellent notice and spread for us in a Sunday paper—although we wish we had space to recount the planning and rushing about that were entailed in meeting the deadline. Among the problems was that of locating the Mountaineer piano on loan to the USO for the duration. Nobody could remember which piano was ours, but the USO generously bade us come in and take our choice, and thus we had a piano for rehearsals. Finding a portable organ for the play was a sticker when it was learned that the Salvation Army organ we had used previously was no longer available and there seemed to be none anywhere. Then by lucky chance one was located for rental at a generously low rate.

The three rehearsals at the theater and the several work parties were all blessed by that heavenly weather that only the Charmed Land can conjure up for its devotees. For the cast and all the other workers those beautiful days at the theater—the sunlight, the blue sky, the great trees, the rhododendrons, the uncurling ferns—all will blend in lasting happy memory. That was all roses.

Then came the week-end of June 7 and 8, the last great difficulty before the palace gate could swing open. A furious downpour on Saturday afternoon sent stage workers to crouch under the narrow shelter of the make-up shelf backstage and put a summary end to an important rehearsal before it began. Next morning the sun would shine hopefully one moment and a deluge would darken the world the next. Should we or shouldn't we? What to do? We rehearsed in the Cabin and put on our make-up. It became evident that a good-sized audience was arriving on the grounds. We gulped lunch. The sun and the rain played turn and turnabout. Then at one the sun peeped out briefly. Well, we might as well chance it. Let's go! And down the hill we tramped, carrying our costumes and properties, to get ourselves ready. An hour later, close to four hundred brave souls had arranged themselves on the new terraces of the amphitheater, the gong sounded, and sweet music floated through the woodland. Act I fell into one of the happier phases of this checkerboard day, but upon Act II descended the deluge to end all deluges, as the lovely Princess donned her wedding gown, got her finger pricked, and laid her down in a pool to sleep. The rest of the royal family and their attendants likewise lay down in ponds and puddles, while the spectators huddled closer in their raincoats, but the play proceeded as calmly as on any balmy afternoon. The storm passed and the rest of the day was drippingly dry. The second Sunday, June 15th, brought back all the warmth and beauty of the forest fairyland—with an audience of close to a thousand.

So once again our beautiful creation of nature and art, a Mountaineer Forest Theater play, was awakened from sleep, to laugh and live again in our wooded valley, and to delight us we hope for many scores of years to come.



**WE AWAKEN
THE
SLEEPING BEAUTY**

Larry McKinnis and Don Brown

