

# Depth, soul populate CT's 'Quilters'

*Diverse cast turns in a powerful performance*

BY JON STINNETT  
*The Cottage Grove Sentinel*

In a message shared with the Cottage Theatre audience in the program for CT's most recent production, "Quilters," Executive Director Susan Goes mentions some of the issues that faced the cast of 10 women and crew as they worked to bring the play to life.

"Along the way to opening night, this cast and crew dealt with aging parent issues, major surgery and the replacement of a cast member just eight days before opening," Goes wrote, continuing that "The emotions brought forth through those challenges add depth and soul to the sharing of these stories in 'Quilters.'"

The words 'depth' and 'soul' do much to describe the allure of this production, an at-times astonishingly complex story of relationships, hardships and joys, love and loss that was handled with much grace and elegance by a diverse yet cohesive Cottage Theatre cast.

Set on the American prairie in the 1800s, "Quilters" tells the tales and showcases the

struggles of the women that helped win the West, with familial bonds shaping a story set against an often stark, harsh and unforgiving landscape.

The play revolves around the last days of Sarah, mother to many daughters, who tells the story of her own life and times through the quilts she has lovingly created since her own childhood. Throughout the play, a quilt's many panels stand for the pioneer woman's many loves, losses and triumphs. "Quilters" manages to touch all bases with regard to these struggles, and to its credit, there is no attempt by writers Molly Newman and Barbara Damashek to daintify the harsh realities of living, loving and dying in an unfamiliar wilderness.

Those previously unfamiliar with "Quilters" (this reporter included) learn early on that a central aspect of the production will loom large — its music. The play is laced throughout with a stark and haunting score and effects played by musicians Patricia Mayhue, Avery Pratt and Delia House Lopez. Its (very) complex harmonies often involve the entire cast and



photo by Matt Emrich

**Sarah (Eliza Roaring Springs) talks of quilts and life with her daughter (Madeleine Sisson).**

do much to tell a story of depth and passion. Mayhue, who also served as music director for "Quilters," deserves much credit for bringing the stories of these pioneer women to life in sound, and each cast member can be commended for a singing job well done.

Kudos are also most certainly due to Director Eliza Roaring Springs, who brings Sarah to life with humanity that's written all over her aged face. Roaring Springs may also be commended for shepherding a truly cohesive cast through such a demanding production. Standouts

from the cast included Steffani Anderson, who plays an engaging and earnest daughter, and Madeleine Sisson, already a CT veteran at age 16, who brings much elegance and heart to the play's action.

The quilts of many in Cottage Grove adorn the Cottage Theatre for this production, and many historical quilts will also be on display at the Cottage Grove Museum for "Cottage Quilts: Piecing Together our Past" throughout the month of August. "Quilters" continues its run at Cottage Theatre Aug. 20-23 and Aug. 27-30.