

Paper Mache for 7-24-26 by David Read

When I moved to Yuba County in 2009, I enjoyed discovering the various arts and culture assets in the Yuba-Sutter region. I signed up for the Shakespeare Readers' Theater program at the Burrows Center for the Arts which was my gateway to learning more about Yuba Sutter Arts & Culture, the local arts agency I now help manage. I volunteered as an usher for Joaquina Calvo Johnson's last opera at the Burrows, *The Marriage of Figaro*. I saw David Wheeler's last production at Yuba College, a wonderful staging of "*Othello*" in the recently remodeled theater. I attended a performance by the Yuba Sutter Symphony.

Admittedly, I am somewhat biased, but if you ask me what makes a great community along with good schools, safe neighborhoods, beautiful parks, thriving businesses, and maybe even a great local restaurant or two, I'd suggest adding one more essential ingredient to the list: a stage or two or three or more! All of those other things certainly matter, but live performances in theaters are the heartbeat of a community.

It doesn't need to be a grand Broadway-style theater with velvet curtains and glittering chandeliers. Sometimes all it takes is a modest platform, a few lights, and an audience willing to applaud. Every town needs a place where stories can be told, music can be shared, dancers can soar, and ordinary people can become extraordinary for an evening. Throughout history, communities have gathered around live performances. Long before movie theaters, television, or streaming services, people came together to hear storytellers, musicians, poets, and actors. Those shared experiences helped define a community's identity. They still do. They certainly did for me when I arrived.

A stage is one of the few places where generations naturally come together. A seven-year-old making a nervous debut in our current production of *Aladdin, Jr.* might share backstage space with a more seasoned performer helping to guide them. High school musicians perform alongside seasoned professionals in our Yuba Sutter Community Band. Grandparents cheer for grandchildren while children discover that the arts aren't something distant or intimidating. They're something they can actually do. That's an important distinction.

The arts are often described as entertainment, and they certainly entertain. But they also educate, inspire, challenge, heal, and connect. A live performance demands something increasingly rare in today's world: our full attention. For two hours, we put away our phones, silence the constant notifications, and experience something together that can never be duplicated exactly the same way again. No livestream can replace that.

Communities like ours with active performing arts organizations also tend to have vibrant downtowns. Look at Plumas Street in Yuba City. Theatergoers arrive early for dinner, linger afterward over coffee or dessert, browse nearby shops, and often return for other events. The arts become more than performances, they become an economic catalyst, encouraging people to spend time and money close to home while strengthening the sense of place that makes a town unique.

In our own community, we're fortunate to have more than one place where creativity takes center stage. From intimate performances and youth productions to concerts, plays, lectures, and community celebrations, these venues provide opportunities not only for professional artists but for neighbors, students, volunteers, and first-time performers. They remind us that culture isn't something imported from somewhere else. It's created right here.

As our region continues to grow, so should our commitment to spaces where people can gather, imagine, and celebrate together. A community's stages are every bit as important as its athletic fields, libraries, museums and parks. They are where memories are made, talents are discovered, and lifelong friendships begin. So yes, every town needs a stage. If it's fortunate, it might even have two or three or more.