

ANNIVERSARY

Continued from A1

The idea for the Studio Theatre came about when the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center was coming to life more than three years ago.

"(A black box theater) wasn't here in The Villages," Morse said. "I thought it would be nice to have that. I like the flexibility of the black box theater. You don't have permanent seating. You can move the seats around however the production dictates."

"Theater is about changing perceptions," Cooper added. "When you're in an intimate space, you can't help but enter the world of the play and the characters. It really feels like living a slice of life."

To get the people needed to bring these plays to life, the staff saw about 300 actors through auditions with the Florida Professional Theatres Association; they also held auditions locally.

Morse and Cooper picked out the four plays and assembled a team of 12 on the production staff. This season, a panel of 10 people read various plays and chose which ones to bring to life.

Morse had roles in "Next to Normal," "The Last Five Years" and "Proof."

"I like the intimacy of black box theater," she said. "Acting is scary no matter where you do it. I'm more at ease in a small space. It takes time to get used to the audience being so close to you."

Cooper, who directed all of the plays except "Next to Normal," spent about 151 days of the year in rehearsal.

"That's about every actor's greatest dream," he said.

Once the play reached opening night, Cooper's job was done, and he handed the creation off to the cast and stage manager for its multiple performances. Then it was on to the next play.

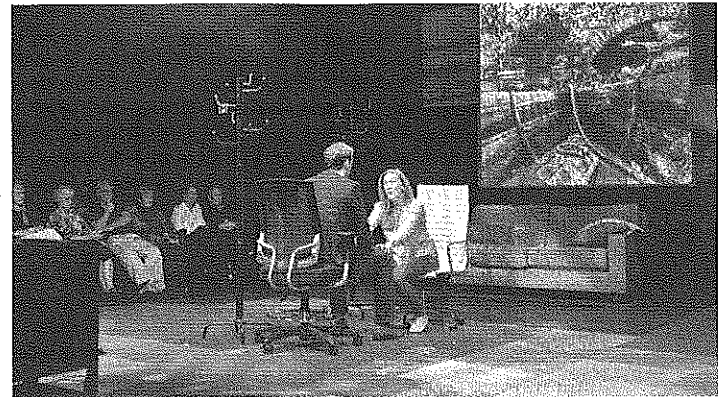
"The transition is jarring, yet exciting," Cooper said. "It's a new set of challenges."

As for his favorite of the plays he directed, "every play is like a child," Cooper said.

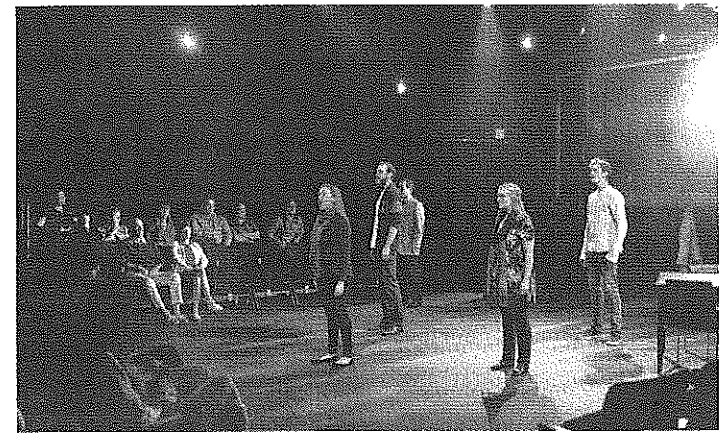


Submitted Photos

Emily Miraglia and Tyler Beauregard act out a scene in the second play of the inaugural season, "Private Lives," at the Studio Theatre at Tierra del Sol.



Brian Zealand and Whitney Morse act out a scene from "The Last Five Years," at the Studio Theatre.



The cast of the first play of the season, "Next to Normal," performs at the Studio Theatre at Tierra del Sol.

"Each was meaningful to me."

Morse said.

As for what the future holds for the Studio Theatre, it boils down to this: "Keep doing what we're doing — bringing thought-provoking theater to The Villages,"

Michael Fortuna is a staff writer with *The Villages Daily Sun*. He can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5273, or michael.fortuna@thevillagesmedia.com.

