

Smash Productions To Present 2 Compelling Performances

'A Heroes' Tribute' and a Haunted Theatre' take the stage at Savannah Center later this month.

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Smash Productions celebrates its 10th anniversary with two unique performances during a span of four days — one putting the spotlight on military and first responders, the other getting into the spirit of Halloween with a few old friends.

"It's exciting to see that, to reach a milestone like that," said producer and cofounder Susan Feinberg said.

First up, Pinky Bigley will debut "A Heroes' Tribute" at 7 p.m. Tuesday and 2 p.m. Oct. 14 at Savannah Center.

It's a one-woman show celebrating those who serve and protect the public, drawing from more than four years of interviews Bigley did with people in those positions.

Joining Bigley on stage is a five-piece band, featuring musical director Lina Koutratos and pianist Ron Drotos, both of whom are flying down from New York to be a part of the concert. The other musicians worked with Bigley in some of Alex Santoriello's productions.

Throughout the show, she will weave the soldiers' and first responders' stories and photos into a variety of songs from the 1960s to the present.

"It's not all military, it's not patriotic," said Bigley, of the Villages' Desoto. "It's honoring the members of the military and first responders. It's not your normal concert. It's an uplifting show. The stories tell a root, soon and gloom."

At one point, Bigley reads a letter she spotted at Eschenhocker Recreation to which a prisoner of war is writing to his wife. "Through discussions with the band, Bigley decided to start off with singing "P.S. I Love You," then reading the letter, then ending with "Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree."

Bigley spent four years putting the show together. The idea arrived when she spent three months as a performer with the USO up in the New York area. After



Submitted photo

The cast of Smash Productions dress up as the Addams Family as part of its upcoming show, "The Haunted Theatre," which takes place Oct. 15-16 at Savannah Center.

us that heroes on many levels are all around us. If audience members leave with a fuller heart and a deeper appreciation for the men and women who serve our country and our communities, then I've accomplished what I set out to do."

A portion of the proceeds of "A Heroes' Tribute" will go to Villages Honor Flight and the Tri-County Women Veterans.

Next up, the Savannah Center stage becomes "The Haunted Theatre" at 7 p.m. Oct. 15-16.

Feinberg asked Barry Corlew if he would like to write and direct a Halloween show for Smash Productions. He initially said "no," but Feinberg gave him a couple of days to think it over.

During that time, Corlew's mind went to work.

"I've worked in theaters, and I've worked in some that were haunted," Corlew said. "Why don't I write about a haunted theater? As soon as I told her that, the whole thing fell into place."

Instead of a plot, Corlew put together a series of distinct scenes. "The only connection is that the songs came from big-budget musicals that featured creepy situations."

"Every song and piece is its own act," said Corlew, of the Village of Amelia. "Each song has a twist to it. It's not quite what you remember."

Some of the songs include "Dunes from Pippin," "Jekyll and Hyde," "Hocus Pocus," "The Addams Family Beetlejuice" and "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

Toward the end of Act I, members of Thrill The Villages will bring back from the dead the iconic dance from Michael Jackson's "Thriller."

The crew will decorate the stage to resemble an old, run-down, haunted theater, complete with crumbling columns, torn curtains and cobwebs. They also will have on stage a lone ghost light that doesn't quite stay on throughout.

Corlew brought back 18 lead

actors from previous shows to perform, as well as five students from The Villages Charter School.

"I didn't hold an audition," he said. "I told them at the first rehearsal, 'You guys auditioned for this when you did a Smash production before.'"

Corlew has been a part of Smash Productions since its inception, where he was a part of its initial USO-style show. He has directed several shows, and he helped write and direct The Honeymooners Return To The Villages.

"I am so pleased that I was given the real creative freedom to do this," Corlew said. "The audience has never seen anything like this."

Tickets for the performances are \$39 and up, and are available at any Villages Box Office location or online at thevillagesentertainment.com.

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