

## PG LOCAL ARTIST INTERVIEW

### *Tina Fontana*

This month, we speak with Tina Fontana, a prominent member of the local theater community.

Tina's experience in music and theater productions has led to amazing opportunities working with theater groups throughout Utah County. She is the resident set, costume, and prop designer for the local Pleasant Grove Players community theater and has designed sets and props for other community theater groups as well. In addition to designing, Tina acts, sings, and dances in productions around Utah County as often as her schedule permits.

### **Where are you from, Tina?**

I am from the Bay Area in California. I was born in Redwood City, but I grew up in Los Gatos where I spent most of my life. I also spent some time abroad in Switzerland. I've been in Pleasant Grove since 2011 and now call it home.

### **What are some of your earliest memories of the arts?**

When I was young, my parents would take us to theater in San Francisco and San Jose, CA. We would dress up in our finest clothes and enjoy a very formal experience, which I absolutely loved. As a child, my mom enrolled me in tap dance and ballet classes. My siblings and I would create and perform our own mini-plays and movies. I had a very active imagination.

I played the piano, violin, and viola in elementary and middle school. I also started participating in speech and debate competitions in middle school. These experiences influenced my interests in becoming involved in performance at a young age.

### **Did you continue in the arts as you grew older?**

I absolutely did! In 8th grade, I auditioned to perform in the musical comedy, *Once Upon a Mattress*. To my delight, I was chosen to be a part of the ensemble! Unfortunately, I made the decision to drop out of the production. I often wonder how my theater performing experience would be different today if I had not made that decision.

In high school, I was not involved in theater. I focused on speech and debate and cheerleading/dance. I was head of my cheerleading squad and won many speech tournaments my senior year. Winning the speech tournaments gave me the opportunity to speak at my high school graduation – the 100th graduating class of



our school. Fun fact - the actress, Olivia de Havilland (a former graduate of my high school), also spoke at the graduation.

## How did your interests in the arts change when you went to college?

I had some rather personal and insightful revelations during my early college years at BYU. One of the first revelations came while I was sitting in a calculus class. I was studying Business and Accounting at the time. I remember feeling that this educational path was not right for me. A friend from the class invited me to attend a theater show he was performing in on campus.

During the performance, my eyes were opened to something I had never actually considered before - theater could be a valid field of study and major. I grew up with a love for theater, but I never considered it to be a career path. I made the decision to make Theater Arts my major and Business Management my minor since I'd already earned so many credits in that field. I'm grateful to that friend for rekindling that fire and love for theater within me.



A second revelation occurred to me once I started studying theater. I realized that many of the individuals in the theater program had been performing since their childhood. They were very experienced, and I felt that I had a lot to learn to catch up and to compete on a similar level. I was up for the challenge, but I am also a realist. I determined if I wanted a consistent job working in the theater, that career would be found on the technical side – directing, designing, building, stage managing – not necessarily the performing side. I decided to focus my major on-stage management.

I did perform in several stage productions while at BYU. I took acting and dance classes (ballroom, modern, tap) and even voice lessons. I built props for BYU shows (The Magic Flute), studied scenic painting and make up design, worked in the BYU costume shop sewing costumes, constructed sets. I managed several BYU main stage theater shows and some off- campus summer theater shows at the Castle Amphitheater in Provo. I also had a roommate who was the Master Electrician for BYU theater, and I spent time by her side learning how to plan show lighting requirements, hang lights, and other related tasks.

## How has theater influenced your career?

You might think the high-tech industry and theater don't have much in common, but they do! I've been involved in the high-tech industry as a Senior Change Manager and instructional designer for nearly 20 years. I believe the experiences and skills I've gained through working in theater have been an asset in my professional career in ways I would never have imagined. My creativity and ability to pick up skills quickly and retain information are assets.

On a regular basis, I coach and train employees (directing), and I must get along with many different personality types. I have learned how to read people and to build connections in the corporate world to be successful. I also believe every meeting is an acting and improv opportunity. I have been able to do voiceovers for marketing and training materials.

## What has been your experience in the arts here in Pleasant Grove?

In 2013, I was a parent volunteer for an elementary school field trip to Heehaw Farms. I met Cyd LeMone (City Council Member), and we got to talking about our backgrounds and experience. After learning about my background in theater and business, Cyd encouraged me to get involved with the Pleasant Grove Arts Commission, as they were in dire need of board members with experience not only in the arts, but also with an understanding of general business practices. As we talked, she piqued my interest about getting involved. I've been volunteering with the Arts Commission ever since. I even served as the Art Commission chair for many years.

## How did you get involved with the PG Players?

In 2016, the costume designer for the PG Players was preparing to step down for personal reasons. She became aware of my background in costuming and theater from my daughter and from the detailed costumes I put together for the local comic convention, FanX. After some conversation, I took over her role and began managing all the costume acquisitions, design, and alterations for the PG Players.

Shortly after that time, the person involved with prop design stepped down, and I took on that responsibility as well. In 2018, I recognized there was an opportunity to create a set designer role. I began creating more elaborate and thoughtful sets for the shows to enhance the patrons' theater experience and better tell the story of the show. For me, theater design is all about the story or message you are trying to tell. I've been the primary Production Designer for the PG Players ever since.



## What direction do you see the PG Players going in our community?

Currently, the PG Players perform three shows a year, and we'd love to do more on a consistent basis. This would give people more opportunities to perform, learn about the technical side of theater, and be involved on a deeper level with the business side of theater.

Part of the theatrical experience is an opportunity for volunteers to learn about what it takes to produce a theater show. We want to drive new growth for the PG Players through additional volunteers - locals who have an interest in helping with design and building the show, performing, general administration, and more. Being involved is a great way to gain hands-on experience in the theater. If you have ever wanted to learn more about the field of theater production, we encourage you to get involved and volunteer!

## How did you get back into performing?

While I love theater design, I missed performing. With design, you are in the background, and you can be involved in every production. The trick about performing is you might not be the right actor for every show. It's much more hit and miss. It's a special experience when I get to perform in the shows I design.

Looking back on my post-college life, though not specifically performing in theater, I was still performing and building my skills. While my kids were young, I sang with the Santa Clara Chorale, a semi-professional choir, in Santa Clara, CA. I have always been good at hearing harmonies in music - probably because of my stint as a second violinist in middle school. That experience in addition to my current private vocal lessons was great vocal training and gave me the confidence to try my hand at musical theater after a 28-year hiatus from regular theater performing.

My first musical theater role was Mrs. Paroo in *"The Music Man"* at the SCERA Shell Outdoor Theater the summer of 2020. Because of Covid, all PG Player productions were shut down, so I had time to dedicate to performing. Since then, I have performed in many musicals (because they are more plentiful than non-musical plays in our area): *She Loves Me* (PG Players), *Sister Act* (Hale Center Theater Orem), *High School Musical on Stage* (SCERA), *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (SCERA), and *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* (Regalo Theater) to name a few favorites. I've also performed in the play, *And Then There Were None* (PG Players). I look forward to performing more as the right roles present themselves.

## What about performance arts has kept you interested for so long?

Theater is so much work. It takes a considerable amount of planning, organizing, casting, directing, rehearsing - there is so much going on at any given time. Why do I do it? Theater is about telling a story and pulling the audience into your world where they forget themselves, even if for a brief period of time. It can be such an immersive experience full of magic and wonder, and I enjoy being a part of providing that experience - whether it's from the designing or from the performing perspective. With design, there's a unique opportunity to build a new world for every show. You can become a literal creator of the world in which the whole story takes place! I get so much satisfaction in bringing the many elements together within a show that helps shape that world.



There's a strong community in theater. Everyone on that stage is working together to keep the story moving forward for the benefit of the viewers. There's occasionally improvisation required as well, and knowing the strengths and limitations of the members of the cast can lead to unpredictable or unexpected moments that occur in a performance that are never replicated. It's such a joy to be a part of something like that. The actor Jason Alexander once said, "The one with the greatest imagination wins." It's fascinating, but true. As people, we love to imagine, and we love to play. If I can get the audience to believe and see what I am "seeing" as a performer, it's a win. If we can bring a story to life in a way that the audience has never seen, it's a gratifying experience.

## Where advice would you give to anyone in the community interested in performance arts?

If you are interested in performing, put yourself out there and try. First (and something I tell myself as well), you get into 0% of the shows that you don't audition for. You don't have to be experienced to get involved. Community theater directors are happy to help coach those with less experience and help them build their experience. Everyone starts somewhere, and there are many roles to play in a production.

Second, you can volunteer behind the scenes to learn how a production works from start to finish. There are many exciting opportunities to get involved, and there is so much to learn. Volunteer to be involved - even small steps can grow into larger opportunities over time.

## Where can people learn more about your work?

I love connecting with people! You can check out my website to learn more about my experience or connect with me on social. Better yet, come volunteer with the PG Players, and we can talk about our mutual interests while painting a set for the next big production.

## CONNECT WITH TINA FONTANA



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