

## Variety keeps local shows entertaining

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VARIETY IS certainly the spice of life here in the Bay Area. This past weekend I saw a raucous, satirical musical, a sugar sweet fairytale and a poignant family story — all within 30 minutes or less from home.

If you have young children in your family, or can borrow some, take them to Contra Costa Musical Theatre's (CCMT) production of "Cinderella" at the Leshner Center in Walnut Creek. The beautiful set, special effects, and colorful costumes will keep even the youngest audience members enthralled. Megan Gallup is the perfect Cinderella with Nephi Speer as her prince. Patrick Michael Dukeman portrays the stepmother with gusto while Jessica Magers-Rankin and Amy Nielson are deliciously nasty as the stepsisters. I especially enjoyed the comic interaction between the King (a very funny John Hetzler), the Queen (the beautifully-voiced Leah Tandberg), and their steward Lionel (Scott Strain) with Kerri Shawn a delight as the slightly inept Fairy Godmother.

The large ensemble portrays a myriad of colorful characters who mingle with surprised young audience members during intermission. Director Scott Denison went out of his way to ensure that **theatergoers have a memorable experience**. Not only does the ensemble come out to the audience, the prince even tries the glass slipper on those seated in the front row. And, upon entering the theater after intermission, costumed pages announce audience members as if they were also attending a ball.

On the particular matinee I attended with my 8-year-old granddaughter Melissa, CCMT raffled off rides in Cinderella's carriage following the performance thanks to Tom and Connie Hodgson of Fancy Ferriage in Martinez. When I asked Melissa what she liked best about the show, she responded "everything, but especially the confetti coming down."