

GUIDE

COOL PICKS

THINGS TO DO
IN THE
UPCOMING
WEEK

FRIDAY

AVERAGE WHITE BAND

The ironically named Average White Band — they were far from 'average' — ruled the airwaves in the 1970s with their infectious instrumental hits that dominated horn-based, radio-friendly R&B of the period. Good thing there is plenty of room to dance at Main Beach as AWB plays two shows as part of the Boardwalk's free Friday night concert series. Details: www.beachboardwalk.com.

THIS WEEKEND

NEIL SIMON PLAY

The Liliana Moraru Santa Cruz Jewish Theatre pops up this summer with Neil Simon's underrated jewel 'I Ought to Be in Pictures,' a funny and heartwarming story of a father and daughter trying to repair their relationship. The production opens this weekend for a two-weekend run at the Live Oak Grange. Details: www.santacruzjewishtheatre.com.



TUESDAY

QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE

The stoner-core band Queens of the Stone Age isn't the kind of band your mom's going to take a shine to, but the Queens have cut an angry swath across the rock landscape in the last decade with their gnarly, smashmouth style. QOTSA's tour takes them through the Catalyst in Santa Cruz next Tuesday. Details: www.catalystclub.com.

THURSDAY JULY 21, 2011

WWW.SANTACRUZSENTINEL.COM

THEATER

Blast from the past

Cabrillo Stage brings back an icon for the nostalgic 'Hairspray'

By WALLACE BAINE

wbaine@santacruzsentinel.com

It's a nostalgic play that is part of a nostalgic era for Santa Cruz County's — make that, one of the West Coast's — finest summer musical-theater companies.

The history of Cabrillo Stage doesn't go back quite as far as the setting for "Hairspray," its tent-pole production of its three-play 2011 summer season. "Hairspray," fans of the John Waters film or the Broadway hit that followed it will remember, is set in the heady days of JFK's America, pre-Beatles, pre-Vietnam, pre-everything. While Cabrillo Stage's earliest days evoke Ronald Reagan, "E.T." and Boy George.

When a theater company hits 30 years — because, let's face it, few of them do — nostalgia is the right frame of mind. In that respect, Cabrillo Stage is using "Hairspray" as an opportunity to look back fondly at its own history. Coming back to lead the live band this year is Lile O. Cruse, the iconic founding artistic director of the company who retired after the 2003 season. Long-time Cabrillo Stage stalwarts were always more familiar with Cruse's back — as he conducted the live band — than his face. But, for those same fans, everything feels right now that Cruse is back in the building — even if the building itself is the new Crocker Theater and not the old Cabrillo Theater where Cruse worked his magic for decades.

Cruse, sitting with the company's current head man Jon Nordgren, said that rehearsals for "Hairspray" have been a different experience for him without the burdens of being the final decision-maker in all things. "I know all the ins and outs of what he's going through," said Cruse, smiling and nodding to Nordgren. "And I see it all unfold, and I just sit back and keep my mouth shut."

Cruse is a fundamental figure in Cabrillo College's musical history and only partly because of his founding of Cabrillo Stage. In the 1970s, before Cabrillo Stage was established, Cruse built the widely heralded jazz program at Cabrillo College, and, as the arts division chair, was the go-to guy when the College

'HAIRSPRAY'

Continued from D1

wanted to rebuild its popular Summer Rep theater program, gutted by the passage of the Proposition 13 in 1978.

In 1981 came the first effort to reproduce the highest quality professional music theater at Cabrillo with Cruse's production of "Chicago." Since then, the company has built a towering reputation for big, muscular musicals from crowd-pleasers such as "The Sound of Music" and "Annie" to more adventurous, cutting-edge fare such as "Sweeney Todd" and "Honk."

Also back this year is Janie Scott, long-time member of the San Jose State University dance faculty, who has also been a part of Cabrillo Stage for most of its history. Scott, who is directing and choreographing "Hairspray," first worked with Cruse as choreographer in the Cabrillo Stage production of "My Fair Lady" in 1987. Since then, Scott has been an integral part of the company as director, choreographer and actor, playing the lead role in both "Peter Pan" in 2000 and "Annie Get Your Gun" in 2006.

"Hairspray" is the third production opening this summer at Cabrillo Stage, following "The Full Monty" and "The Last Five Years." Ironically, all three plays date back only to the beginning of the last decade, meaning they would be largely unavailable during Cruse's tenure at Cabrillo Stage.

Nordgren, who took over as



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Lile Cruse, center, comes out of retirement to work with Janie Scott and Jon Nordgren on the Cabrillo Stage's upcoming production of Hairspray.

artistic director for the 2006 season, has greatly expanded on what Cruse has built, adding a holiday show and more to the summer season as well. Under Cruse's guidance, the company was focused on one production per summer. Since 2007, Nordgren has overseen a summer season with multiple productions and this year, with the upcoming holiday production of "Plaid Tidings,"

Cabrillo Stage is presenting its most ambitious slate of productions ever, even in the face of looming budget cuts to higher education mandated by the state.

In the meantime, the company is presenting "Hairspray," the fanciful, music-filled play based on John Waters's nostalgic movie from 1988. The setting is Baltimore in the days of teen idols and sock hops.

IF YOU GO

'HAIRSPRAY'

PRESENTED BY: Cabrillo Stage
DIRECTED BY: Janie Scott
WHEN: Opening Friday, through Aug. 14
WHERE: The Crocker Theater on the campus of Cabrillo College
COST: \$16 to \$34 adults; less for children and seniors
DETAILS: For more information on exact dates and showtimes and ticket prices, go to www.cabrillostage.com or 479-6154.

The heroine in the play is the feisty Tracy Turnblad, a local teen whose ambitions includes dancing on the locally based TV show "The Corny Collins Show." After she does so and becomes a celebrity because of it, she embarks on a campaign to racially integrate the show in the days before the Civil Rights Act.

"There's really an 'American Bandstand' kind of feel to it," said director/choreographer Scott. "It evokes the girl groups of the time, the young crooners."

"This is a show that really moves," said Cruse who will take his accustomed seat leading the orchestra for the first time in the pit of the new Crocker [and who will also direct his successor Nordgren who is part of the band]. "The music really never stops throughout the play, which is the kind of show we like."