

## 'Rock of Ages' opens Friday



Neil Underwood (right) as Hertz Klinemann has an altercation with his son in the production, Franz Klinemann (left) played by Joey Nuhfer and Anna Green as Regina during a dress rehearsal of "Rock of Ages," which opens Friday at the Lincoln Cultural Center.

**MICHELLE T. BERNARD**

**Staff Writer**

The stage at the Lincoln Cultural Center will become the legendary Sunset Strip, complete with a glam heavy metal band and rock stars, for the next two weeks with the opening of "Rock of Ages" on Friday at 7 p.m. The musical comedy, presented by the Lincoln Theatre Guild, tells the story of a small-town girl Sherrie who meets city boy Drew while pursuing their dreams of stardom. Sherrie and Drew's story is set to the music of hit rock bands of the 1980s, including Night Ranger, REO Speedwagon, Pat Benatar, Twisted Sister and others.

This is the first time "Rock of Ages," which is directed by Lincoln Theatre Guild president Pete DeGregory, has been licensed to show in North Carolina. It was released to community theaters just a year ago. Like with "Thunder Over Carolina," one of DeGregory's challenges with this play was putting such a large production, this time featuring heavy metal rock music, on such a small stage and venue.

"It's a lot like Thunder but in a different way," he said. "It's going to be an absolutely phenomenal show though."

All of the sound equipment and lighting effects used in "Rock of Ages" are professional and state of the art. Like with the 1980s music which he grew up with, working with the sound and lights is like returning home for DeGregory who at one time toured the country making rock and roll music.

"It's sort of a regression back to my youth and I got to call back on some of my old friends that I did it with to help with Rock of Ages," he said.

Like DeGregory, the music takes G.E. Massey kindergarten teacher Paige Rice back to her younger days. Rice plays Justice or "Momma" who owns Venus, a gentlemen's club on the Sunset Strip. It's been 20 years since Rice has acted in community theater.

"Fifty years old and a lot overweight, it's been a challenge but I love being back on stage," she said. "I love the music – I was an 80s girl so I know every song."

The production includes numerous area high school students. Anna Green, a North Lincoln High School student, plays Regina, a flower child in the wrong era fighting against the proposed tearing down the Sunset Strip by a wealthy real estate developer.

"She's loud and out there which is totally different from my character which makes it fun," Green said.

Recent Blumey Awards competitors, Zak Parton and Elizabeth Lackey, are also from North Lincoln High School. The Blumey Awards highlight the best local high school musicals and Parton and Lackey were selected to represent North Lincoln.

"The Blumeys were incredible," Parton said. "It was a lot of hard work but well worth it. It showed me that there's a lot more to theater and it helped me realize how much I like it."

Parton plays Joey Primo, a rock star wannabe and Lackey a waitress. Lackey's character is a flirt and does all she can to take Sherrie's guy away.

CJ Bradshaw plays Drew, also known as Wolfgang von Colt once he realizes his rock star dreams. Bradshaw has been involved in theater his whole life and he said this show is unlike anything he's ever done. Drew is the city boy that Sherrie falls in love with.

"I don't listen to 80s music, I'm a Broadway baby, I sing show tunes in the car" he said. "This is not the typical character that I play but I'm loving the heck out of it."

Sherrie is played by Hailey Smith. She grew up in the Lincoln Theatre Guild while her mother, Anna Lisa Johanessen-Locke, took part in productions. Smith graduated from Lincoln High School and while she's never been in a musical before, she's done a lot of choreography, modeling and cheerleading. This is the first time she tried out of a theatrical part.

"I felt a real connection to Sherrie," Smith said. "I was a product of the 80s, my parents were rockers so when I saw the soundtrack and listened to the music. A lot of the cast members have known me since I was born. It's like coming full circle."

It's like a homecoming for Neil and Joanna Underwood, who are both cast "Rock of Ages." It's been many years since the Underwoods have acted in a Theatre Guild production and they've not only returned to the stage but are also working with cast members that they either taught in the past at North Lincoln High School or acted with past productions. Joanna Underwood plays the keyboard in the band.

"I don't ever play in public," Underwood, who is also the music director for "Rock of Ages," said. "I played for 30 years for my kids in school but never in public so this is very much out of our elements."

Neil Underwood plays Hertz Klinemann, a wealthy and intimidating German real estate developer who is trying to tear down Sunset Strip.

"This is out of both of our elements," Neil Underwood said. "Pete asked Joanna to direct the music and I decided that if she was going to be involved with this much of a time commitment I might as well be there so I read the script. I saw that there was this really mean German guy who didn't have a huge role but might be fun to do. We've learned throughout the years that the only time to spend time with each other is if we're doing the same thing."

This is a funny and entertaining trip back to the 1980s but DeGregory warns that there is some mature content and language and may not be appropriate for young children. There are also a lot of atmospheric effects and strobe lights in the production.

"Rock of Ages" opens Friday, June 16 at 7 p.m. and runs for two consecutive weekends at the Lincoln Cultural Center in Lincoln. Other showings are June 17, 18, 23, 24 and 25. Friday and Saturday showings are at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$15 and \$10 for students and seniors and available on-line at <http://www.lincoltheatreguild.com/tickets> or at the Lincoln Cultural Center, located at 403 East Main Street, an hour before showtimes.

Image courtesy of Michelle T. Bernard