

Don Fuhrmann: Virginia City Players & Brewery Follies, 1996-2023

Don Fuhrman [00:00:06] I first came here in 96. I got hired by B.J. Douglas to be with the Players, and I did two seasons with them. I'm on my 20th season with the Brewery Follies. I'd heard of Virginia City, but I hadn't really been here till like 94. Mike Ryan and Lisa Mauch a couple people like that were interns at the Players. And I came and wasw like "Wow, what the heck!" I never really expected that I would have spent so many seasons, you know, at that time. And anyway, it's just a magical place. So, I came here here in 96, my really first professional job. I'd been paid for a couple things prior to that, but B.J. hired me on the say so of, I think, Lisa Mauch, I want to say. And I did two summers with them. and... a, played Dracula, that was kind of fun. What else? Anyway, just doing the vaudeville thing, you know, and the variety show and the melodrama and it was a lot of fun. A lot of fun. I was just so glad that somebody would pay me to jump around onstage, you know, and , God, what did we do? We did. We did some... Shoot. We did Dracula I remember that one. But we also did Sweeney Todd. She had a great version of that she did, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street. Gosh, I can't think of what all we did. Anyway, it's when I first, you know, did my first drag numbers and stuff on that stage. I've got some pictures somewhere. I came around and did this Carmen Miranda thing where I had all this fruit on my head. It was just silly. And that's where I first met Glen Simon. And then, I went to the Brewery Follies one night and just knew that there's no way I could ever do that. Then Mike and Jill hired me and I started doing that. But yeah, I'd heard of Virginia City. In fact, my folks owned the book about Alder Gulch, you know, and I'd read it, it's like, well, why have I never been there. I mean, I grew up in Helena essntially, and that's a couple hour drive from here. I don't know, but I'm sure glad I found this place because it kind of saved my life, in a certain respect.

Daniel Schindler [00:03:40] How is that?

Don Fuhrman [00:03:42] Well. I don't know. I've been a crazy guy over the years. But this place kind of leveled me, Dan. I don't know. You get to come here every year and everybody treats you so well. Like you're from here. I'm not from here. But I'm a Montana boy. You know how that goes. But, yeah I often think that without this place, I don't know where I would have ended up. I just don't know what would have happened. You know? It's just a magical little place. I love being with the Follies. I loved being with the Players. Yeah. B.J. went out on a limb, she needed somebody and I don't know who recommended me. I want to say it was Lisa Mauch. But, she brought me in and...then I had a season off and then Mike says, "Hey you want to come play with the Follies?" and I said "Hell, yeah, let's do it! Then, had several seasons off several summers because I was in Missoula working at M.C.T. And then I came back here in 2005. We did the complete works of William Shakespeare and then just added a second Follies show. We, went to two casts and been doin' it ever since. It never seems end. Not that I want it to. Everybody says... "So when you gonna quit doing that, Don?" and I always give them its the NRA answer, when they pry my cold, dead fingers from it, I might quit. But otherwise I'll do this stuff forever.

Daniel Schindler [00:06:09] You had said when you when you first saw the Follies, you were like, "I don't know that I can do that?"

Don Fuhrman [00:06:14] I know and Glenn was the same way.

Daniel Schindler [00:06:17] What's what's the difference between them?

Don Fuhrman [00:06:19] I don't know. It's just it's the pace that Mike puts thing at, you know, It just. It snaps. And we were doing vaudeville down there. It's kind of essentially the same thing at the Players. But, I don't know. It's just the pace. I mean, one second you're this guy, and the next second, you're that guy and the next second, you know, you got a dress on and your crawling on somebodys lap. I know. It's just a different animal, it just is. I'm sure glad I'm here, you know. But I wouldn't be here without the Illustrious Virginia City Players they got me into town and that's all on B.J. Sure appreciate it, Mark. Robbie, too those guys? I just learned how to do harmonies. Yeah, just quick changes, things like that. It's all really good theatre we were doin'. Really grateful for that. Yeah, I don't know what I would have done, man. I was ready to move out of Bozeman. You know, you were living there. I got this chance and I literally packed my truck and drove here. Overnight in 1996. To do the Players. Now, they had met the night before, and decided they were meeting later in the day. I was down there, you know, ready to rehearse. And one guy said, "What are you doin'?" It was Roger Williams. I'm just waiting for the players. He said "Oh, I think they're meeting later." Because everybody in town knows what's going on, you know? He said "Did you see the eagle?" Pardon me? "The eagle?". And he puts down to the south end of the sump and there's a stinkin bald eagle in the tree. Sitting there. I just sort of thought. That's some kind of an omen I think. And it was sitting there looking at us like, you know I'll chew you up. Stinkin' bald eagle up in the tree up there and that's how I started here. Everything I owned was packed into that little Mazda pickup truck that I had and I was down in Bozeman. And that was those days when people were saying, Oh, their Aspenizing Bozeman or whatever, you know, Well, shoot, its gone way more since then. But yeah, the people who work there can't afford to live there, you know? And I'm still here. It's crazy.

Daniel Schindler [00:09:49] What is it about this little town? It seems like the people who come back, come back for long stretches of time.

Don Fuhrman [00:09:56] Oh, I know. I know. Um, I don't know. I think it's the hospitality, for one thing, and then it's just. Just. It's pretty. You don't come here for the weather. I can tell you that right now. Man, It's cold, rainy and everything else, I don't know, It's just a great little place. And... People are nice and they, I don't know if you is you say they treat you with respect but I mean, you're just one of their own. They let you be part of the populace. Which is not, there's not a lot of populace, but you know. You know what I'm saying, they just treat you nice, And you know. Treat you like you belong here. I never tire of it. They just treat us so well.

Daniel Schindler [00:11:11] What do you think this show means to the audience that comes?

Don Fuhrman [00:11:16] Well.

Daniel Schindler [00:11:17] Either local community or there's a lot of tourists that come in. What is it mean to them?

Don Fuhrman [00:11:22] You know, especially, you know, we had the pandemic and all that. And I just think, so we spent the one season where we had to keep people kind of socially distanced and we would wear the masks and then you could take the mask off to drink beer, which I still don't understand how that works. If you're drinking a beer you can take your mask off. You know, whatever. But the summer after that, people... People showed up in droves and they were just anxious to get to sit at the Brewery and watch our dirty little cabaret show again. And. And they were just terrific. And I don't know, it's sort of.

I don't know I want to say it, it just sort of up up the game, you know? And, I just, If you don't mind a off-color joke or two and drinking a beer while you're watching the show. They keep coming back for some reason. I do some Rodney jokes and Mike comes up and plays every president we've ever had. Then we get some laughs. I think it's important. You know, people leave and, you know, they cash out and say, "We really had a good time." I always say, well, that's the mission, you know? Drink a beer and laugh your butt off for a couple hours. There's nothing wrong with that. I'm really proud to be part of that.

Daniel Schindler [00:13:30] Are there any specific moments in the time you've been here that sort of stand out for you? That's a hard question. I know.

Don Fuhrman [00:13:37] Yeah, I know, but. I know. Hmm. Well. Uh, you know, Mike and Glen wrote that cheese number. Cheese. I loved the cheese. So we. We brought it back when Glen passed away. That thing is, fun. There's the one where we stick the pen lights in our nose. He did it with Benji originally. And we do, Dueling Banjos...do, do do do, do, do, do do. That's a big one. One of my favorites is Mike just being Mr. Rogers, just a demented Mr. Rogers and, you know, he'll just pick on people. There's Breezy, you know, Breezy. Yeah. I kind of learned that from him, you know. He had Breezy and I had Helga, and she was not quite as elegant as Breezy. These poor dumb bastards we crawl on their laps and put our skirts over their heads and kiss them on the forehead and things like that. I just. I don't know. It's just. I can't imagine doing anything else, Dan. I love it here, I love it. And I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for B.J. and the Players. I wouldn't be here. I'd heard of Virginia City, I had friends working in Virginia City, and this, that, and the other thing. Yeah, she hired me and I've more or less been here ever since. This is my 22nd summer in Virginia City. Which pales in comparison to Michael. He's on his 36th or something. But I love it here. I love it here. Yeah. And when you pry my cold dead fingers from it, I'll quit coming.

Daniel Schindler [00:16:20] Is there anything else you would tell people that asked what this show is and what it's about?

Don Fuhrman [00:16:25] Well, I would say it's not for the faint of heart, you know. But, you know, if you have that kind of sense of humor... My mother, she kind of probably cringes and bears it. But my whole family, they're coming next weekend. Mom and my brother and his wife and my sister and her husband and my nephew and his girlfriend are coming. My son's gonna be here. And, you know, they come down here and we have a little picnic in the park and they come and see the show and we laugh and and we hug, it's something to look forward to every year it's Fuhrman family fun day Sunday. Yeah, it's more fun than mere mortals should be allowed to have. That's all, just sayin. I think that's a Letterman quote... way more fun than meer mortals should be allowed to have. But yeah, I'd recommend it to anyone if you're not too uptight. You know, take that stick out of your butt and enjoy stuff for a couple hours and we'll get along fine, you know?