

# Capital Playhouse's 'Side Show' offers a universal message of acceptance

**Molly Gilmore**

For The Olympian

Thursday, March 13, 2008



The stars of Capital Playhouse's "Side Show" stick together like glue for their roles as conjoined twins.

There could be many surprises, it would seem, in a show about conjoined twins.

The biggest surprise in "Side Show," opening tonight at Capital Playhouse, might be that the actresses playing the Hilton twins aren't twins.

Or it might be that the actresses aren't attached in any way during the play, but they move together - as if they were joined at the hip - without difficulty.

But arguably, it's this: Megan Rozak and Elyssa Samsel, both of New York City, are so connected now that they stand like the twins even off stage.

"We put the sides of our hips together - my left shoulder and her right shoulder," Rozak said. "We're getting really good at it. We find ourselves doing that now. When we're in a group of people, we find ourselves standing next to each other. It's a nice comfort that we've become accustomed to."

"Side Show," which was nominated for four Tony awards, is loosely based on the lives of the real-life Hilton twins. In the musical, the twins go from working in a freak show to becoming vaudeville stars.

"It's a powerful show with a universal message," said Keith Andrews of New York City, who's directing the show. "The reactions people have to it are so strong."

"The message is that freaks are not really freaks. They're just people that happen to be in this situation. ... Everyone can relate to that in some way. We've all felt like a freak at one time or another."

The fact that Rozak and Samsel are playing conjoined twins - and aren't connected by a costume or prosthetic device - is both a strength and a challenge of the play, said Andrews, who cast the actresses, both of whom he'd worked with before.

"The most interesting challenge is the limitation of having these two girls literally stuck together for the whole time," he said. "The costumes are not attached. Nothing is attached. That's the way it's always been done, and it is much more powerful this way. You see two individuals being in this situation where they have to be joined together."

"You can't have one all of the sudden walk away from the other one if they are having a conversation," he said. "There is a lot of choreography in this show. You have to become very creative, so it's a lot of fun."

Not only have Rozak and Samsel learned to be connected physically, but they also have formed an emotional connection.

"We mesh so well in real life as well as on stage," Samsel said. "There was an instant connection."