

Alumna takes to stage in 'Once Upon A Mattress'

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Sean Patterson and Tulane graduate Ashley Smetherman Lemmler are Prince Dauntless and Queen Aggravain in Summer Lyric Theatre's *Once Upon A Mattress*. (Photo by Michael Palumbo)

Behind every sweet-natured, wasp-waisted princess helplessly falling in love on stage or screen is an evil queen waiting to backstab her.

In [Summer Lyric Theatre](#)'s production of [Once Upon A Mattress](#), playing through Sunday (July 12) in Dixon Hall on the Tulane University uptown campus, local jazz

singer/stage performer/music educator and alumna Ashley Smetherman Lemmler tackles the role of the machinating monarch Queen Aggravain.

The plot is a musical retelling of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Princess and the Pea* : A scheming queen tries to prevent her son, the prince (Sean Patterson), from marrying by subjecting princesses like Winnifred (Leslie Claverie) to tests that are impossible to pass.

Lemmler describes the character as “overbearing” and “verbose”; nonetheless, she looks for Aggravain's more human moments that audience members can identify with. She has a unique perspective on Aggravain, too: Her mother played the same role in the 1990s, in another Tulane production.

There's also some overlap between Lemmler's jazz training and musical theater experience. “To work as a singer you have to be adaptable, kind of a chameleon,” she says, adding that jazz improvisation enabled her to be a more confident and nuanced musical theater performer.

Lemmler earned a master's degree in voice in 2000 and is a Summer Lyric veteran ? and fan. “I'm always happy to do whatever they have to give me, big or small,” she says. “Everyone's always so talented and the shows are always so high quality.”

“To be asked to direct this [show] is a dream come true,” says director Ricky Graham, another Summer Lyric veteran. “It's blessed with a marvelous cast made up of some of the funniest singing actors in town.”

And patrons can see Lemmler develop a new chemistry with Patterson in the role of the prince. “Last year,” ? in Summer Lyric's production of *Les MisÃ©rables* ? “he played my husband,” she says. “This year he plays my son.”

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