

UATP Wheelchair Makes Theatrical Debut in '33 Variations'

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Katherine laughs with her daughter and friend in 33 Variations.

Photo courtesy of Waldron Creative.

LOGAN--Devices from the Utah Assistive Technology Program have been granting Utahns independence for many years, but this may be a first: one of our power chairs has made its theatrical debut.

The Utah Festival Opera Company is using a UATP wheelchair in its production of *33 Variations*. The play is the story of a scholar's quest to understand why Beethoven wrote 33 variations on a little-known waltz by music publisher and amateur composer Antonin Diabelli. Dr. Katherine Brandt (Suzan Hanson), undertakes this project in Bonn, Germany, during the final months of her life. She has been diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).

As her disease progresses, Brandt eventually needs a wheelchair—a need that UATP fills [almost daily](#) in real life for Utahns who come to our locations in Salt Lake City, Logan and the Uintah Basin. This time, the need was filled for a prop in a production. (Don't worry, we have more for those who need them!)

But while the play is fiction, it touches on very real themes that families who have faced down a degenerative disease will recognize. A parent is determined to remain independent. A protective adult child, Claire (Vanessa Ballam), struggles to make the most of the time she has left with her mother. And a disease keeps progressing,

relentless, with no regard for the lives it is... twisting? ... derailing? ... changing.

If it sounds hard to watch, that's because sometimes it is. But playwright Moisés Kaufman deserves credit for creating a real, raw story—and for throwing in the unexpected smiles and moments of beauty that sometimes shine through a family's private crisis.

Through it all are snatches of Beethoven's genius, burning bright through his own illness, deafness and crankiness in the closing years of his life. For the composer's fans, this play is a chance to soak in the history surrounding the period when he wrote some of his most famous works, including his Ninth Symphony. Beethoven (Michael Ballam) often takes the stage, sometimes to bluster, sometimes to create, always to entertain.

To find out when you can watch *33 Variations* in Logan's Utah Theater, visit the [Utah Festival Opera website](#). The production runs through July 29.

To find out more about borrowing or owning a refurbished and repurposed wheelchair, visit UATP's [device reuse page](#). To learn more about many other independence-giving devices, visit our [demonstration and loanpage](#).