

TOP STORY

'Newsies' opens Thursday at Kenston High School

By ANASTASIA NICHOLAS

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Kenston Center Stage will open Disney's "Newsies: The Broadway Musical" at 7 p.m. April 20 at Kenston High School's Robert A. Lee Auditorium, with performances 7 p.m. April 21 and 22, and 2 p.m. matinee on April 22. Tickets are available online.

On Thursday, Kenston High School's drama program, Kenston Center Stage, will hold its opening night of Disney's "Newsies": The Broadway Musical.

Choral Director Julia Green and Director Shannon Wirthwein, who are co-directing "Newsies," have been working on productions together at Kenston for the last 15 years.

One of the reasons they chose "Newsies" is because they like the wholesomeness of this Disney show, Mrs. Green said.

Also, it is a great, historical story, and suits the current high school talent quite well, she said. The show has many male parts, and they happen to have many male cast members.

The show is also inclusive.

“Because we have girl Newsies, boy Newsies and all of the Newsies,” Mrs. Green said.

In this play, which typically features girls playing boys, the directors opted to dress everyone in the same type of costume, which includes pants, a waffle shirt and vest. Characters have names such as Rake, Buttons and Specs.

Mrs. Wirthwein said that cast members come from “all walks of life” throughout the high school – athletes, musicians and more.

Mrs. Wirthwein and Mrs. Green are also using a full student pit orchestra, which some area high schools are unable to do. The student pit orchestra plays the same scores that are played in the Broadway production.

The technology used in the play – from microphones to lighting – is also entirely student-run.

“We have more than 80 kids with an opportunity to participate: onstage, in the pit, at the board, backstage,” Mrs. Wirthwein said.

The cast ranges from seniors to middle schoolers, which is not typical of plays put on by Kenston Center Stage.

“Every once in a while, we’ve thrown a younger kid in when we needed to play someone younger,” Mrs. Wirthwein said. “But this was about volume. There’s already a big bunch of kids.”

They wanted the number to be overwhelming.

The play features 71 high schoolers spread throughout the cast, chorus and crew, and 11 middle schoolers.

Mrs. Wirthwein and Mrs. Green both work with drama kids from sixth grade to graduation. Mrs. Green recently directed the middle school production of “Matilda.”

Several seniors playing leads in “Newsies” have been involved in school plays since sixth grade, including Victor Como, who plays Pulitzer, and Jacob Spencer, who plays Davey.

“Once we get to the high school, we have a fall show and a spring show,” Mrs. Wirthwein. “Lily Tatara, who is playing Katherine, also a senior, has been in every show since she’s been in sixth grade,” Mrs. Wirthwein said.

Junior Dominic Blogna, who plays Jack Kelly, has been involved since seventh grade.

Mrs. Wirthwein said one of the most fun parts of the directors’ job is to work with the same kids year after year, watching them grow as actors.

It is equally fun to watch a kid who has never been in a play before, she said. A senior who participated for the first time this year told her it was his favorite thing he has done in high school.

“In this show, we have five or six who are brand new to doing shows,” Mrs. Wirthwein said. “In some cases, they have tried out before and haven’t had an opportunity to participate. One thing that’s really cool about this show is we were able to cast every single high school kid who auditioned.”

In other words, every student who wanted to be part of the show was given a part.

“‘Newsies’ is a show that lends itself to that because you can have such big numbers,” she said.

Mrs. Wirthwein said the drama program has a mentoring system in which students help each other and offer guidance to “newbies.” Kids automatically have a cast member they can go to for support, Mrs. Green said.

The atmosphere among cast members is like family – extremely positive and supportive, Mrs. Green said.

“These children are kind,” she said.

So far, the play has been joyous to work on, Mrs. Green said.

“There’s a little more dancing in this show than there’s been in some past shows. The kids are having a great time, the songs are fun to sing, and they’re catchy,” she said.

“The first act ends with Jack singing ‘Santa Fe,’ and it ends with this big, high – high for anyone in the world – note,” Mrs. Wirthwein continued. “When Dom hits it, the whole room just erupts in applause. The rest of the cast is so excited for him that he did it well.”

When the kids tap dance to “King of New York” and it goes well – “which it generally does,” she said – the cast cheers them on.

They “can’t wait to support each other in the moment,” she said.

Mrs. Wirthwein said students have had a ball learning “Newsies” high-energy dances and working with a new choreographer this year.

Jailyn Harris has been phenomenal to work with. She has positive energy, a positive attitude and helps the kids to believe they can do hard things, Mrs. Wirthwein said. “There’s a big tap dance number in this show, and out of the dozen kids in that tap dance number, about half of them hadn’t tapped before. Now, they’re just tearing it up.”

Because of the show’s size, Mrs. Wirthwein said that it has been a huge team effort from all of the adults, parents and kids involved.

“But it’s so much fun that it absolutely makes every piece of work worthwhile,” she said.

“Newsies” will be onstage at 7 p.m. April 20 and 21, and 2 and 7 p.m. April 22 at Kenston High School’s Robert A. Lee Auditorium.

Tickets are available online through the Kenston Box Office or by calling Kenston High School at 440-543-9821.