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"Seussical Jr." teaches kids the ropes of professional theater at the Bucks County Playhouse

Teenage thespians get a taste of professional theater for "Seussical Jr." at the Bucks County Playhouse.



The Cat in the Hat takes center stage in "Seussical Jr."

Bucks County Playhouse Youth Company

By Gwen Shrift

Pretending on a grand scale takes an enormous amount of work, whether you've got a lot of experience, or little.

The young cast of "Seussical Jr." in the Bucks County Playhouse Youth Company falls somewhere in between.

Any kid between 13 and 18 presumably has played plenty of let's-pretend, but the students selected for the summer program have already taken the game to its logical conclusion by performing in school productions, community or even regional theater, according to director and choreographer Jessica Bostock.



The cast of Seussical Jr.
Bucks County Playhouse Youth Company

The youth company drawn from 13 schools in the region immerses students in real theater. Members who audition in February are expected to have their lines memorized by the time rehearsals start in July. That's when the hard work really begins.

"We only rehearse for three weeks, during the day, all day, six days a week," said Bostock. Participants learn original choreography, delve into their characters' motivations and master music and lyrics. The project flowers into a production on the stage of the storied playhouse, performances interwoven with whatever the professional actors are presenting.

"Seussical Jr.," an hourlong adaptation of the Broadway musical from 2000, runs through Saturday, taking turns with the mainstage production, "Guys and Dolls." "Seussical" challenges the skills of making believe, as performers develop and play characters such as Horton the Elephant and the Cat in the Hat.

"Even though these are fantasy characters, the approach is the same as any other company: why and how these characters act, and their relationships with one another," Bostock said.

"The themes within the story are very relatable to children and adults — feeling isolated and alone, that nobody understands you, dealing with people who look down on you because they don't understand you, the importance of imagination and the magic of thinking new thoughts and new ideas."

Bostock said her 19 cast members are "the type of kids who love to be in rehearsal eight hours a day." It's a good thing they do. For all its whimsy, "Seussical Jr." is complex and demanding.

"It's almost like an opera for kids. I think in the whole script there are like, two pages of dialog. The rest is sung. It's not like they do a scene and then there's a song. The entire scene is a song," said the director.

She devised original choreography, requiring the cast to perform tap, ballet and jazz dancing. Drawing on some surprising skills kids arrived with, she incorporated acrobatics, contortion and juggling. Two performers were able to announce "I have my own unicycle!" and know how to ride them, so look for unicyclists onstage.

The cast includes Hudson Orfe of Titusville, New Jersey, Abby Harnum of Bordentown, New Jersey, and Gabrielle Takacs of Fieldsboro, New Jersey, Sophia Martino of Doylestown, Seth Wohl of Warrington, Andrew Bausher of Reading, Sam Hastings and Morgan Schragger of Pennington, New Jersey, Eric Bober of Ringoes, New Jersey, Nathan Esser and Matthew Tomlinson of Blue Bell, Ellie Kuhnle of Doylestown, Riley Bultemeier, Lola Dardzinski, Travis Gawason and Jonah Silberman of New Hope, Ben Johnson of Hellertown, Charlotte Goodman of Lambertville, New Jersey, and Lily Flynn of Doylestown.

Stephen Flaherty's score is adapted, supervised and produced by Bryan Louiselle. Music direction is by Joseph Ohrt, with sets by Tom Watson, lighting by Jacob Gilbert, costumes by Brian Strachan and sound by Ryan Walsh.

Show time is 11 a.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Tickets are \$10 for those ages 4 to 12 and \$15 for those 13 and older at the box office, 70 S. Main St. in New Hope; by phone at 215-862-2121 or online at buckscountyplayhouse.org.