

'Mermaid' to splash onstage at PPAC

The student theater production of "The Little Mermaid" is Friday and Saturday at the Pike Performing Arts Center

by Kyiah Bostic

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Junior Lauren Blackwood (front) portrays Ariel the mermaid in the upcoming production of "The Little Mermaid." Senior Ender Holohan (back, left) is Jetsam the eel, senior Blessing Welbeck is Ursula the sea witch and freshman Lydia Hoover is Flotsam the eel. Photo provided by Sarah Vilensky

From an early age, senior Nate Dalman wanted to entertain people and make them feel joy. He started taking theater classes as a freshman. Now, he is part of a school production that is in the process of being shared with students, family and friends.

Dalman plays a sailor in the upcoming musical “The Little Mermaid,” which shows at 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the Pike Performing Arts Center. Tickets are available at pikepac.ludus.com.

Director Sarah Vilensky said the musical is based on the Disney movie but has some surprises and twists to it. This musical is different from the film, she said, because it has a lot more songs and side stories; for example, some characters turn out to be related and others reveal a crush on someone. Plus, there is a different ending.

Producing a stage version of the story meant the theater department had to figure out a way to show characters swimming through the sea.

“We have a company coming in to set things up to make some characters fly,” Ms. Vilensky said. “For each flier, there are two people controlling the person. One controls the height, and one controls the direction. Every flier has to wear a safety harness.”

Ms. Vilensky described the process for preparing the show. When it came time to choose the cast, Ms. Vilensky said she picked people based on their personalities and how they matched a character in the movie. She taught the students a song and they sang it for her and other judges; she taught a dance and they performed it for the choreographer; she gave them a scene from the play to act out.

All directors have a favorite part of their plays. Ms. Vilensky said she is “most excited for the cast, community, generating buzz, and the flying scenes.” Ms. Vilensky directed last year’s play, “The Addams Family,” and has directed seven other productions, but “The Little Mermaid” is her biggest play yet because of how many cast members there are, she said.

The hardest part about working with a big cast is incorporating what every member needs such as costumes and vocal treatments, she said. It’s also challenging to keep track of everyone. She added that positives are hearing everyone’s voices come together and seeing everyone get along.

When junior Lauren Blackwood secured the lead role of Ariel, she said she felt proud.

“I really didn’t want to get that part,” she said, explaining that playing a lead role comes with a lot of work and responsibility. Lead actors learn most of the songs, dances and lines. Even the scenes where Ariel can’t talk are challenging, Blackwood said, because she still has to remember what to do.

Blackwood also said she faces “distractions from people who didn’t get the part, and it’s hard to balance school and theater.”

Blackwood said people should go see “The Little Mermaid” because they’ll recognize the songs from the movie version, and because the story has plenty of life lessons in it. The main life lessons in this play are to seek your true self and enjoy life to the fullest, she said.

Adapting a movie into a musical means some aspects will be different. Blackwood said that in the Pike musical, Ariel’s dreams and willpower differ from how they were in the movie. In the movie, Ariel went on land to find Prince Eric and to start a life with him. In the play version, she goes on land to find herself, so to speak, not to find Eric.

Dalman, who plays the sailor, said his favorite parts of the show are when he gets to sing, “which is my favorite thing to do when I’m acting.”

Dalman said he learned how to love his role in the play, even though he had some minor bumps along the way. An example was dancing, which he said is not his strong suit compared to acting.



Sophomore Layla Kanazeh plays Scuttle the seagull and senior Wesley Cole plays Prince Eric in the upcoming production of “The Little Mermaid.” *Photo provided by Sarah Vilensky*