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Broadway Academy of Performing actors Lexy Witcher of Manhattan and Haylee Hamilton of Tulsa, playing Cinderella's stepsisters, show a gaudy ring to their mother, actor Magen Witcher of Elkhart. The three appear in the musical "Cinderella," playing at 2 p.m. Saturday at the Showcase Theater at the college. L&T photo/Rachel Coleman

Theater camp infuses summer with magic, music

By RACHEL COLEMAN

- Leader & Times

No matter how lacking fairy-tale magic might seem in everyday life, Liberal audiences will get a powerful dose at 2 p.m. Saturday, when theater students at Broadway Academy of Performing bring "Cinderella" to life on the Seward County Community College stage. The production of

Rodgers & Hammerstein's classic musical will have taken exactly one week to prepare. And if that involved more sweat than fairy-dust, audiences won't know the difference.

Broadway Academy of Performing, said camp director Alison Bridget Chambers, "is kind of like Broadway boot camp. It's the closest thing to professional experience I've been involved with, because being in the show, learning the show, preparing for the show — it's your job."

Students from age 10 to 20 arrived at SCCC at 2 p.m. Saturday. Within an hour, they'd unloaded suitcases and bedding into their dorm rooms and assembled for auditions. By 5 p.m. that evening, parts had been assigned. After dinner in the cafeteria, everyone settled in for a first read-through with director Marilyn Gates and musical director Tony Claus.

Over the next six days, the campers would memorize lines and songs, go "off book" by Thursday, and refine choreography and staging for the Broadway musical. Rehearsals typically run through the mornings, afternoons, evenings, and, as the performance nears, into the night.



Echoing one of the show's songs, Chambers said the task of putting together a full-blown musical, nothing abridged, nothing simplified, can seem "impossible. But somehow every year, these kids make the impossible, possible," just like the lyrics sung by Cinderella's fairy godmother.

Claus, who keeps the music flowing with help from piano accompanist Becky Robison, said the students are right on track.

"We're exactly where we need to be, maybe even ahead," he said Wednesday. "It's amazing. I can tell the kids to take the music back to their dorm rooms and work on it in the evening, and

the next day they come back and they know it. They're here because they want to do it."

"Everyone loves music and theater," added Robison, who's conquering her own challenges by playing an entire orchestra's worth of music on one piano. "It's just a pleasure to work with them."

Their views support what Chambers said she knew.

"Cinderella has always been one of the musicals we wanted to do at BAP, and I was confident we could," Chambers said. "I knew we had the talent, the voices, even a fancy carriage."

As the stage swirled with actors in sparkling ball gowns at a Wednesday rehearsal, she said the casting had turned out to pose a problem — in a good way.

"This is an insanely talented group of students," said Chambers. "They're all pros. Some of them have been coming for years, and they get better every year."

The only drawback, she added, was that "we didn't have enough parts for all the talent."

"What about this jacket," asked one of the actors, displaying a hem that flared out at the back.

"Galloping horse," Gates assured him. "If you wouldn't notice it on a galloping horse, it doesn't matter."

"Bring in the carriage," the stage manager called out, and members of the ensemble rolled out a wrought-iron, pumpkin-shaped carriage, complete with a friendly-looking prop horse.

“Isn’t that great?” Chambers said. “We got it from the Old-Fashioned Limousine Service of Garden City. I just love it.”

Everyone has relished the lush, make-believe elements embedded in “Cinderella,” Chambers said. “We have the throne, the crowns, the fairy godmother’s wand ... and all my students brought their formal gowns for costuming. They were all so excited about doing this musical.”

College student Magen Witcher, who’s home in Elkhart this summer, plays the part of Cinderella’s stepmother in the show. Completing her 14th session of BAP is a little sad for Witcher.

“I’ve been here since I was 11, so it’s probably time for me to move on,” said the pre-law student. Theater work has “really helped me develop skills like confidence, public speaking. I kind of grew up on stage with all these wonderful people, and being involved with this has made me who I am.”

Witcher added that even if she’s “aged out” of summer camp, she’ll be back next year.

“I’ll be a counselor,” she said. “They can’t get rid of me!”

With that, it was back to rehearsal, with all its magic.

“This is a beautiful story everyone can relate to,” said Chambers. “I hope people come out to see us on Saturday.”

Cinderella begins at 2 p.m. Saturday at the SCCC theater. Admission is \$5 for children, \$10 for adults.

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