

STAGE

Fairy Tale Comes True This Weekend at SHS.

Magical things are afoot (or a-slipper) at the Starkville High School Theater this weekend, with performances of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical “Cinderella.”

Bringing to life the classic fairy tale with song, dance, and spectacle are 21 young cast members, 16 musicians in the orchestra, and 12 offstage technicians and crew members, under the direction of SHS drama teacher Michael Dendy.

Dendy believes audiences can expect to see “magic” with this production, from the usual plot points of an enchanted ball gown and a fairy godmother to the practical challenges of building a fully-fleshed storybook world and its multiple locations inside a small 25 by 35 foot performance space.

“(The show) calls for this grandeur that we have to bring to the stage,” said Dendy. “Costume changes, there’s a golden carriage, there’s horses, there’s a lot of moving parts.”

The controlled chaos of those moving parts feels like home to SHS senior Liz Jones, who plays the title princess in “Cinderella.”

“I love the whole process,” she said. “Being onstage, the adrenaline rush, is great, but also the build-up, the months and months of hard work before that.”

Jones has been involved with every SHS production since her sophomore year, earning competitive acting awards at state and regional festivals earlier this year for her performance in “Eurydice,” though this is her first time with a lead role in a musical.

She is set to graduate high school in May and will be heading to Belmont University in the fall to study Music, with a concentration in Vocal Performance. In addition to performing in the show, Jones will be posing for on-set photos afterward – in character as Cinderella.

“I’m excited,” she said. “It fulfills my dreams of being a Disney princess. It’s not the same thing, but I’ve always been the girl who wants to go to Disney World and be Cinderella.”

“Being able to do this, to be the character for a little bit and interact with people, is going to be so much fun. I love kids, and I think Cinderella’s a great role model. I love that they’ll get to interact with her in real life.”

It’s been a revelation for Jones that theatre could be more than a hobby – it could be the bedrock of a life. “The best job ever would be working in something



Gabe Smith

where you get to play all the time,” she said. “I think it’s amazing that people can make careers out of something that’s fun.”

Sophomore Noah Knox, who plays Prince Topher, agrees with Jones that there’s something special about theatre that scratches an itch for him.

“Nothing gives you the same feeling as being onstage in front of an audience,” said Knox. “It’s exhilarating... You’re immersed in a character, and it’s awesome.”

Knox is a relative newcomer to the arts but says he’s felt welcomed by SHS Drama and the SHS Choir with open arms.

“A lot of people, especially teenagers in high school, struggle trying find who they are,” said Knox. “I think ‘Cinderella’ is an uplifting story about how everyone can figure out a way to be.”

“If you’re kind to everyone you meet, if you work for what you want,” he said, “anything can happen.”

Jones thinks everyone, “from 5 to 90”, will be familiar with the story and see something in it that they can relate to and enjoy.

“Everyone can identify with starting low and finding something magic,” she said. “Anything’s possible.”

For Dendy, the possibilities involve long nights after the rest of the school has emptied out, rehearsing with his performers, fixing technical glitches, and building set pieces from scratch.

But it’s worth it, he said, for those moments of magic with his students.

“I do it to see the final result and the smiles on their faces at the end of the show.”

“Cinderella” is appropriate for all ages and performs tonight and Saturday at 7 p.m., with a closing Sunday matinee at 2 p.m.. All shows will be in the Starkville High School Theater, with tickets sold at the door.

General admission is \$7, and the \$10 “Golden Ticket Package” includes admission and a post-show opportunity to meet and take photos with Cinderella herself.