

A different look at fairy tales

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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GHS presents 'Once Upon a Mattress' April 30, May 2-3.

Whimsical, funny, yet challenging.

That's how a couple of performers in Gothenburg High School's upcoming musical describe preparation for "Once Upon A Mattress."

The performance is Friday, April 30, at 7 p.m.; Sunday, May 2, at 2 p.m. and Monday, May 3, at 7 p.m. in the performing arts center.

"Once Upon A Mattress" is based on the famous fairy tale "The Princess and the Pea" but involves a queen who takes control of the kingdom after the king loses his speech because of a curse.

Queen Aggravain (Elisa Meridith) decrees that the only princess who can pass her test can marry her son.

Director and music teacher Ernie Blecha said the rollicking spin on royal courtship "comeuppance" provides hilarity and a different look at fairy tales.

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Joanna Blecha, who has performed in the last three musicals, said the production is like “Cinderella” that students performed two years ago.

MUSICAL CAST	
Sir Henry	Jessamine VanAcker
Sir Charles	Ryan Ostendorf
Sir Studley	Colton Bebensee
Minstrel	Brenna Costello
Wizard	Chris Block
Princess Penelope	Jessica Wiggins
Lady Rowena	Ashlee Brantiz
Lady Merril	Jessica Wolf
Lady Lucille	Kelsey Houchin
Prince Dauntless	Zac Franzen
Queen Aggravain	Ella Meridith
Lady Larken	KaSondra Kohnan
King Sextimus	Alex Schultz
Jester	Brandon McMichael
Sir Henry	Joshua Clark
Princess Winnifred	Joanna Blecha
Sir Luch	Cody Goggar
Lady Mabelle	Sidney Thompson
Sir Charin	Eric Cole
Nightgale of Samarkand	Sidney Thompson
Lady Helena	Roni Putnam
Lady Lucy	Leah Lostrum
Lady Maude	Liz Graham
Emily	Madison Costello
Lady Leona	Vanessa Linggar
Lady Isadora	Bailey Gibbons
Lady Lottia	Stephanie Rubensthaler
Ladies in Waiting	Emily Max, Rebecca Miller, Maddy Costello, Barb Adney, Crystal Moore, Kelsey Mahoney, Korie Sikkema, Tynn Haynes, Kristi Block, Brianna McDowell, Desirae Weststewald, LaTasha Howell, Karla Gillinspie, Aree Brown, Brittany Ostergard, Rachel Walker, Becca Elze, Makayla Franzen, Tarina Beenblosson, Cournee Walker and Jenna Erb

“But it has a bigger cast with more songs,” said Joanna who plays Princess Winnifred.

Zac Franzen, who is Prince Dauntless, said actors have more freedom with characters, setting and other things compared to “Cinderella” in which he also performed.

Franzen has also been in the musical each of his high school years.

The songs in the latest musical are also more challenging to memorize and sing.

Director Ernie Blecha said the notes “jump all over the place,” pointing to a melody Franzen sings with his father King Sextimus (Alex Schultz) that is difficult.

For Ernie, the scene is also one of the best parts of the musical when Sextimus, who is mute, tries to explain the facts of life to his son.

A challenge for Blecha is trying to schedule rehearsal time around all of the spring activities—golf, track, FFA and district music this weekend. When practice began in March, Blecha had to also work around speech.

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Joanna said she's enjoyed developing Princess Winnifred compared to a wicked stepsister she played in "Cinderella."

"It's more fun. She's a character everyone enjoys," Joanna said, adding that the character is one with which the audience can grow.

Playing Prince Dauntless has been a new role for Franzen.

"He starts out as a soft-spoken Momma's boy and by the end, he's more mature and assertive," Franzen explained.

What Franzen and Joanna have learned through their characters is the importance of being oneself.

"My character isn't afraid to show who she is even though she's not up to the queen's standards," Joanna said.

Through Prince Dauntless, Franzen said he's discovered that people will still like you for what you are.

Joanna said the community should come to the musical "to witness the younger generation doing what they love and developing into more confident adults."

"Being in a musical is different from sports in that people show how they are in a different way than in sports," she explained.

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That will help her confidence in speaking roles in the future, Joanna said.

Franzen said performance events, like the musical, gives the community a chance to appreciate the work theatre students do to present a major production.”

“And this will be our last curtain call,” he said about himself and Joanna who are seniors this year.

Another reason to watch the performance, Ernie said, is to see beautiful and colorful costumes.

For the production, the school rented 90 costumes from a company in Omaha.

“Once Upon A Mattress” marks the fifth high school musical Ernie has directed.

Tickets are available at Gothenburg State Bank, First State Bank, TierOne Bank and the high school office.

They will also be sold at the door the date of the performances.

Adults tickets are \$7 and students \$5.

Music performed in the musical is by Mary Rodgers with lyrics by Marshall Barer. The story is based on a book by Jay Thompson, Dean Fuller and Marshall Baker.

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