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SOLOS AND SWASHBUCKLING

No.Co. students practice arias, action at Willsboro Festival of Theatre Arts

BY ALVIN REINER
Press-Republican

WILLSBORO — North Country students from the sixth grade through high school participated in several workshops presented by professional actors, singers and musicians during Willsboro's Festival of Theatre Arts.

Starting the day with mock battles, the young thespians, in addition to exhibiting athletic prowess, were encouraged to emote as they engaged with one-another. Among the scenarios was the challenge issued by Macduff to Macbeth: "I have no words: my voice is in my sword: thou bloodier villain than terms can give thee out!"

Other aspects of the workshop included engaging the voice, acting, song coaching and theater technology, and culminated with a question and answer period.

SO MANY FACETS

After the event, Depot Theatre Executive Director Kim Rielly, commented: "I think the festival was a wonderful success. Jennifer Moore's vision for the day's curriculum worked very smoothly, and the many collaborating professional instructors were magnificent. The kids especially enjoyed the stage combat portion of the day."

Rielly continued, "It was great to see how committed the participants were to experiencing so many facets of theatre arts. In fact, during the question and answer period at the end of the day there was much discussion about navigating the road toward potential careers in the industry; from acting to sound design. The event aligns perfectly with the Depot Theatre Academy's plans to expand our education and outreach into regional schools."

Several students lent their talents in solos as well as received professional critique from Kenny Greene and Adam Michael Telford. Among the most profound suggestions were: Finding material you really like, which is very important; knowing what's going on with the song; Doing, if you know it, you can do it; And, the power of stillness.

Ella Lobdell of Boquet Valley Central School, who sang "Right Hand Man" from "Something Rotten" said she felt "like the event went super well and was super informa-

tive; especially for people just starting out in musical theater. I think with singing, learning how to open your airways and being able to place your voice to create a bigger sound was super helpful and something I'll use in future performances."

Mallory Arnold from Willsboro CS said "it was great to have so many kids from all over the area participate. I learned a lot at all the workshops and everyone seemed to have so much fun. It was a great day. The stage combat techniques that I learned were especially fun. I haven't done anything like that in a long time and learned lots of new moves. My favorite part was definitely acting out the duel from the end of Macbeth. Thank you so much to Mrs. Moore for pulling this together and the Depot Theater, and all the wonderful people who came to teach."

TEACHERS 'BROUGHT AN ENERGY'

"I loved this festival so much" said, Erica Klein of Willsboro. "It was great seeing the way people from so many schools could unite under a similar interest and learn more about it, and the teachers there brought an energy that is almost impossible to replicate. I enjoyed trying my hand at stage combat and improving my monologue skills."

Discussing the impetus for organizing the festival, Jennifer Moore said, "Theatre has played such a significant role in the lives of many of our students and their families here at Willsboro for decades. For over twenty years, Derrick Hopkins has directed numerous productions while I've taken care of the musical preparation and direction, but he now teaches at AVCS and we've needed to re-imagine theatre education at WCS without him at the heart of the program."

"While we could not launch a full-scale production this year, we did not want to pause the program entirely. With this in mind, I reached out to Depot Theatre Executive Director Kim Rielly and the Depot Theatre Academy program to partner on this Festival of Theatre Arts project. The idea was met with genuine enthusiasm and a commitment to quality programming that could support the students, school theatre programs throughout the region, and serve as an introductory experience for the Depot Theatre's extraordinary



ALVIN REINER/P-R PHOTO

Kenney Green (left) and Adam Michael Tilford collaborate with Erika Klein prior to her singing "Consider Yourself" from "Oliver".

summer Academy program. Once the decision was made, all of the pieces fell into place. We had expert practitioners from the Northway to Broadway providing workshops in voice, classical stage combat, song coaching, monologues, and college and career advice.

These partnerships are particularly essential for small rural schools as a means of enriching the educational opportunities for their students. They allow students to look outward and explore viable career options in the arts. If COVID has taught us anything, it is that we depend upon the arts to get us through difficult times. There is room for everyone who is willing to do the work and it's a rewarding life if you are supported along the journey. That was, I think, the big takeaway of the day. Professional educators and teaching artists are here in our own backyard to help students develop the skills needed to live into those dreams.

Students from eight different schools were represented, which amazed me. I felt that both professional communities — our regional school music/drama teachers and the professional theatre community affiliated with the Depot Theatre — had confidence in our ability to create something transforma-



ALVIN REINER/P-R PHOTO

Ella Lobdell receives professional advice from Kenney Green on singing "Right Hand Man" from "Something Rotten" before continuing with her solo.

tion for our students, no matter their level of experience. I'm humbled that people seem to trust that when we present an opportunity for students, they can be sure that kids of all ages will receive the very best instruction we can offer in a safe and enjoyable learning environment.

We had the usual range of theatre kids; those who have

been "doing" theatre for most of their lives in school and community productions, those who have been able to take private lessons and really focus on skill development (primarily voice lessons), and those who have little experience but are seeking a welcoming community that supports them as they are.

We had all that and more, so all things considered, the day was

a great success."

In addition to organizers Jennifer Moore and Kim Rielly, credit was given to Gigi Mason, Adam Michael Tilford, Kenney Green, Alisa Endsley, Kathy Recchia, Lindsay Pontius, Paul Schnabel, Scott Gibbs and Sally Urban for their contributions in making the workshop successful.

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