

'Mary Poppins' set to hit stage

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By Nicholas Donaldson

The 1964 film may be a classic but the leads in this year's musical staged by Fort High students have decided to refrain from watching "Mary Poppins" until their own show is over.

"I've never seen it but I'll wait until after so it doesn't change my character," noted Macarthur Wilde, who plays the wealthy George Banks in the FFHS production.

Emma Dykstra, who will be portraying the famous nanny, "Mary Poppins," also said she has avoided watching the movie, which starred Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke, but has watched "Saving Mr. Banks" in preparation.

"Saving Mr. Banks" is a 2013 dramatic re-telling of Walt Disney's 20-year quest to obtain the movie rights for "Mary Poppins" from its original author, P.L. Travers.

"It showed me how the author wanted the character portrayed," noted Dykstra.

Meanwhile, the cast still was a little unsure of how they felt about performing.

"I am more excited than I am nervous, I think," said Dykstra.

"I'm an equal amount of both, I'd say," noted Brenden Laur, who will be playing the cockney jack-of-all-trades, "Bert."

"OK, I am probably a mix of both, too," Dykstra admitted. Dykstra, who is in Grade 12, previously has appeared in "Grease" (2015) and "Ghost" (2016), but in smaller roles. Wilde has been in one musical revue but this is Laur's first time in a high school production.

"I'm completely new to this," the latter remarked.

Laur and Wilde said even though neither of them has had any singing lessons, FFHS music teacher Lisa Loney told them to audition after hearing them play guitar and sing together in the music room.

"She said, 'I know you can sing, you should try out for 'Bert,' then I got the part," said Laur.

"I got 'George' but didn't realize it was such a big part," added Wilde.

With very little stage experience, the pair are feeling the pressure.

"It's getting to a point where I'm leaving class just to calm the nerves for a bit," Wilde admitted.

"To be honest, I think there is lots of stuff everyone can improve on, but I think nerves are going to be the biggest factor," echoed Laur.

The musical also will feature the entire cast performing with British accents.

"The decision was that all of us have to do it or none of us do it," Wilde explained.

The three said they had to audition with their accents and since then have been practising by using them as often as they can, trying to make it feel natural.

Even so, they apologize if they're not totally convincing.

"We will do our best to have our best British accents, but if there are British people in the audience, we will offend them greatly," Dykstra laughed.

Auditions were held in December and the cast has been rehearsing since January. But there also was a large amount of work to be done during the week before the show.

"People have been working non-stop to make this thing a hit," Laur stressed.



He added they are lucky to have a good “behind-the-scenes” crew to work with to make things easier on the actors.

“I've got to say there are some really smart people working behind the scenes,” Laur remarked.

“The set is very complicated compared to previous years I've seen,” he added.

The show's set includes a large house that can open and close completely, beds, chairs, and other furniture, trees, a chimney, and a special set-up to allow Mary Poppins to “fly.”

“The stage wings are filled to the brim.” Laur noted.

Costumes, make-up, lighting, and sound also get worked out just days before the show opens.

But this is all part of the entire show week experience, which always is a busy time for the cast and can be hard to balance with school and (for some) part-time jobs.

Sunday's rehearsal, for instance, ran from 1 p.m. until after 7 p.m. (with a break for supper), while full dress rehearsals took place on Monday and Tuesday nights.

The show will run tonight through Saturday at the Townshend Theatre, with the curtain rising at 7:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:30).

Tickets cost \$10 for adults and \$8 for students/seniors, which are available at Northwoods Gallery & Gifts and at the door.

Following last Wednesday's practice, director Susan DeGagne reminded the cast and crew to sleep well and eat properly during show week—something the young students may not pay enough attention to.

She also recommended students talk to their teachers and get extensions on large assignments, if possible, so as not to get overworked.

“We've been working a lot over lunch times, going over lines and preparing,” noted Wilde.

“We do feel behind but I think that happens with every show,” Laur reasoned.