

# "Magic" and good memories for the cast and crew of Mary Poppins



The show begins with the Banks family in desperate need of a new nanny. Leave it up to the children, Jane and Michael played by Carmen Hebert and Christian Wiedenhoeft, to come up with their own advertisement - and leave it to Mary Poppins to answer it!



A boring walk in the park with the children's new nanny Mary Poppins turns into a "Jolly Holliday" where statues come to life and everyone knows the same dance routine.



Poor Mr. Banks, played by Macarthur Wilde, can't seem to find any relief from his stress at work. The only thing he puts his hope in is "Precision and Order."



Callahan Wiedenhoeft plays the revolutionary Mrs. Corry, the woman with all the keys to conversation. She and her pay homage to their new word creation, "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious," in a dance sequence that is nearly as fun and outrageous as the word itself.



A duel of the two nannies, played by Emma Dykstra as Mary Poppins and Maria Gilbert as Miss Andrew.



Never underestimate the amount of fun a group of chimney sweepers can get into! Cartwheels, clicking heels, and an impromptu percussion solo is just the half of it.



One of the quintessential moments of the production had to have been when the Bank Charmain, played by Jaykob Ryll, shook his face like a raging cartoon bulldog. Was he angry? Was he excited? Maybe a little bit of both.



Like the cast sang, "Anything can happen if you let it." As the story would have it, two bratty children in one unhappy family could begin to love each other, thanks to a little help and imagination from their nanny.



Hardly ever stopping to stay still, Emma Dykstra proved she had the chops (and the lung capacity) to keep Mary Poppins bright, quick-witted, and "Practically Perfect."

by Melissa Friesen

After months of memorization, hours of choreography practice, and a few trips gliding through the air, the FFHS production of Mary Poppins has come to an end. As I filed out of the dimly lit theatre on Saturday night with hundreds of others, we were greeted by the cast and crew - all smiles and rosy cheeks. They were elated, grateful, and a little disappointed it was over. By Monday morning, life was back to normal for the cast and crew. No more sweaty dance numbers, no more quick backstage changes, no more British accents. So I spent some time with Mary Poppins, nanny extraordinaire (aka Emma Dykstra), Bert the Chimney Sweeper (aka Brenden

Laur), and Jane Banks the Spoiled Brat (aka Carmen Hebert) to tell us about the musical from their perspective. "We were all very sad and very emotional on the final night. It was a difficult time, but we're smiling that it happened," said Emma, full of positive enthusiasm. "A lot of stress is taken off the shoulders but I gotta say, it is quite sad. I don't know what to do with myself," admitted Brenden. Where Sunday afternoons were normally dedicated to rehearsals, there was no longer anything to practice for. The show was over. "I just slept all day," laughed Carmen, who finally caught up on some much needed rest. The cast have been attending two practices



Just like that, Mary ascends into the sky as the winds change, leaving behind the Banks family.

every week since the end of January. Daily practices with the full crew began last week in order to tie up loose ends. This kind of experience tends to knit people together, as individuals must rely on each other for a collective success. "I made a lot of good friends, and we made some pretty gosh darn strong bonds," said Brenden of his experience. He was part of the tech team in last year's musical, but this year, he wanted to challenge himself. "I learned I could sing! I learned I could dance a little bit," he says with a smile. Emma, having been through two musicals prior to this knows how sentimental the whole process can be. "These are people and moments you will never forget. Being up

there is so fantastic - making people laugh, and enjoying yourself, the costumes, everything. I just think you'll never meet a finer group of people than those who are working in the musical." For newcomer Carmen, her experience surpassed all her expectations. "I was told how fun musical was and it turned out to be really, reeeeeeally fun," she emphasizes for clarity. Making new friends seems to be a natural consequence of participating in the musical. While team sports and band are often separated in Junior and Senior levels, the musical combines all grades together. As such, it unites people who otherwise may not have interacted together. But despite a final show



And just like that, the show is finished, complete with a standing ovation for the actors, the orchestra members, the tech crew, the backstage crew, the costume designers, the sponsors, the set construction workers and artists, and everyone who helped make this show pretty magical.

that suggests otherwise, bringing together a cast and crew of high school students and professional musicians, seamstresses, artists (who created a beautiful, dynamic, and versatile set), and teaching staff isn't easy - or seamless. At least not initially. I asked these three if there was any doubts in their mind that the show might not come together before opening night. "Sunday's tech rehearsal - just days before the opening night - made us realize we were not ready," Emma makes a bewildered face and laughs. "Stress gets ahold of you and you know know you need to step up your game and everyone does it. All of a sudden, it just comes together," she says, with a sweet kind of relief

in her voice. The result is a typical kind of last minute magic that many shows experience. The whole show was indeed quite magical, but not without minor blunders that the cast and crew had to overcome each night of performance. For instance, before the "Spoonful of Sugar" scene, the script calls for Carmen to crack eggs rather carelessly into a bowl. During one performance she accidentally cracked an egg directly onto the table. "It went everywhere!" Carmen laughs, as she couldn't clean the egg up in the middle of the scene. With no time to clean it between scenes, it accidentally ended up in the next scene. For Brenden, a few subtle



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lyric mix ups were about the only trouble he got into. "It was very minor, but a lot of my songs sound the same so sometimes I forgot which one I was singing." An unexpected and mistimed curtain close before the end of a scene also caught the cast off guard. "You're almost so scared that you have to stay calm," said Emma. All in all, any blunders were largely unnoticed by the audience, but it didn't mean that the performers weren't sweating.

The entire show itself was particularly physical. Whether gliding through the sky, climbing up chimneys, or leading a dance number as a statue come to life, people were moving. The dance numbers, of which there were several, were often fast paced, sometimes frenzied. On top of that, everyone still had to sing. "I didn't have the choreography for 'Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious' until the week before!" Carmen admits. "It was a stressful dance. It took us months to learn," added Emma before Carmen chimed in again, "-but it was my favourite!" They all agree, having felt a pretty significant sense of accomplishment once they mastered the moves. Beyond that, each of the actors had the British accent to contend with. Although the students received a workshop before auditions regarding some basic pronunciation skills (and the difference between British and Cockney accents), Emma relied on her own personal sources of inspiration. "When it came to singing, I thought of Julie Andrews. When it came to speaking, I thought of Mary Crawley [from Downton Abbey]." Both girls credit the copious amounts of Downton Abbey they watched as critical research for the musical.

But the show wouldn't have been quite what it was if not for Emma's sassy relationship with the audience. With a pivot of her body and a quick look or raised eyebrow after a zingy one liner, we instantly became her co-conspirators, always on the inside of her jokes. Her magic was our magic. I gush to Emma about her exceptional comedic timing, how the audience collectively vibrated with laughter every time she looked our way. I naturally assumed she had practiced these quick looks in the mirror at home until they became as choreographed as the dance routines. In

reality, the signature looks only became a part of her character once she had someone to look at. "It's so funny because I never did it in rehearsal! Once we had an audience, I looked out at them once and people started laughing - and I didn't know why! I was very confused, but I thought, 'Whatever it takes for a laugh!' And so, we too laugh when she says this. "After hearing the music so often, you just know right when to do it. It was fun, but I never planned on doing it."

But that is perhaps why the role unfolded itself to her in stages. Having never been in a leading role, auditioning for the main character was intimidating in itself. "I was nervous. We have a really talented group of kids here and I recognize that. Once I got the part I was, of course, really excited, and then as it went on I realized how much this was the role I wanted to play." The role of Mary Poppins required a lot from Emma, including the ability to sing a high C (a full two octaves above middle C on the piano).

But that's not all - Emma also had to learn to fly. I ask the three of them to share with the public what kind of contraption Emma rode on as she famously ascended and descended with her raised umbrella. "It's magic," they say almost in unison. The girls look at each other as if they're tempted to confess, but Brenden stands his ground. "It's magic," he repeats and they shrug their shoulders with a smile.

But the magic for the cast and crew will be the little moments they recall, the ones the audience members will likely never have

been a part of. I talk about the production as a gift, with the audience only ever witnessing the outside wrapping paper. Everything inside - the long hours, the hard laughs, the stress, the pranks, the hair and makeup - that's the gift they get to keep. Here they give us a peek into their inside world.

"Just before the kids and I would go onstage, we were always hiding and laughing at each other. It was so hard to come on, especially during 'Brimstone and Treacle' when we had to be dead serious," said Emma, before adding another thought. "Also, a lot of people don't know that inside Mary Poppins' locket there actually was a silly picture of the three of us. It was fun knowing it was in there and opening it up every night." Carmen also mentions the times with her theatrical nanny and brother as her highlights. "Being backstage with Emma and Christian [Michael Banks] was the absolute best," she says, with a grin that might stretch from ear to ear. "All of it was pretty amazing, but I gotta say, getting to see Mr. Jaykob Ryll's jowls was a highlight," he says, referring to the hilarious facial gesture Jaykob made every time his character appeared.

So, anything else you guys want to say about the show? I ask before leaving. "It was 'Supercalifragilistic-expialidocious,'" smiles Emma. "It was 'Practically Perfect,'" echoes Carmen. "Spit spot," concludes Brenden in his tried and true Cockney accent. If you were fortunate enough to have a seat at any of the performances, you know they weren't kidding.