

Peter Pan is Coming to Town!

Written by Debbie Gregory
Tuesday, April 9, 2013



There is a world of activity going on in the auditorium at Macon County High School as the cast and crew of *Peter Pan* prepare for opening night on Thursday, April 11, 2013, at 7:00 p.m.

There were open auditions in December of 2012 for anyone in school, according to the theater arts teacher, Kelly Blackwood, who has been putting on plays here since 2009. The play director says that she organizes the productions every year, and she opens it up to everybody, not just the drama club, so that the best person gets the part regardless of what grade they are in or who they are.

“This is the biggest production we have ever had,” said Kelly, who has a degree in Theater from MTSU. “We have never had this many students involved in one of our plays.”

Kelly says these are the hardest working kids that she has ever worked with, sometimes spending ten to twelve hours a day practicing. “We get to know these kids, on such an individual basis, I mean it’s not just like students in our classrooms, we eat with these kids, we go and do things with these kids. We’re truly like a family.”

“We are proud of these young people, and we tell them exactly when they are not doing something right and we are hard on them sometimes, but they still know we are tremendously proud. They look at us for approval. I think these kids have a really good understanding at how hard we work too and that we do this for them. I think they know that, and that is why they are here.”

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The director said that this was a very expensive show to do, and it was kind of intimidating, because they didn't have a lot of funds, (they did really well on last year's production of the *Wizard of Oz*

) but they are building up a program that hasn't been around here in years. "Being able to do a show like this, that even larger schools aren't able to do, is truly unbelievable," she said. "This is the most expensive show that has ever been done in this school."

Assistant Director Hannah Centers says these students are amazing, because they are athletic and they can run and jump and dance and sing, all at the same time. "They amaze me; they are really incredible."

Centers said that you can be anything you want to be in theater. "In our program we have students represented from every grade except Kindergarten and second. But we only have seven boy actors, so a lot of our girls are playing boys and everybody is doing a great job."

The initial part of the play is set in early 1900s England, but when they get to Neverland it doesn't really have a time period. "Victorian England is very prim, very proper, and very high class society," noted Centers. "The play has three acts and it is very similar, although not identical, to the story people have heard or the Disney movie. Of course, the same characters are around."

Mrs. Centers says that since Kelly Blackwood has been here the productions have been expanding and the program is really going somewhere. There are 22 kids 8th grade and younger in the cast & crew, 18 high schoolers, 12 in the band, and five adults who are working on this program.

"We rented a fly system for the production," Hannah said, "and the rental fee included insurance, insulation, and we get to keep the equipment for the duration of the play. "They also had a man come whose title was aerial choreographer and he has worked on Broadway. He worked with our kids, helped them learn how to fly, and he had taught us how to prepare the system as well as disassemble it."

According to Centers they had to raise literally thousands of dollars just to pay for the fly system and the rights to the show. "We've worked really hard at trying to raise money to do the production and there were times when I didn't think it was going to happen, but this community has really pulled through and they have been very generous to us and we really appreciate it."

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Blackwood agrees that the community has been very responsive. "They have given us supplies for our set, material for costumes, and they have donated their time. Marcus Smith donated his time as well, to come and show us how to build some things appropriately. People have sent us checks showing their support for us and it's been very warming to all of our hearts."

"There are so many people to thank that it is impossible to name everyone," said Director Blackwood. "We are hoping that these kids get a feeling at how wonderful they are and I hope that this auditorium is full, because they have worked hard. The community needs to see what good things are coming from this high school. We have all worked really hard and these kids and their families have donated more than money and time, they have donated their lives to this for a few months now. We want the kids to know that we love them and this has been rewarding for everyone involved. The community needs to see that."

This group of young people possess a charismatic quality and a flair for showmanship, which is the ability to excite an audience. I have a feeling by the end of the play there will not be a single person in the audience who is left in doubt that the performers have produced magic on the stage at Macon County High School.

Dates: April 11-15, 7:00 p.m. Thursday thru Saturday & Monday; 3:00 p.m. matinee Sunday only. Location: MCHS Auditorium, 2550 Days Road. Admission is \$8 before April 5 and \$10 after April 5. For more information contact: Kelly Blackwood at kblackwood@k12tn.net or Hannah Centers at hholland@k12tn.net