



LINCOLN STUDENTS DEVELOP TALENTS, NEW TWISTS ON RUMPELSTILTSKIN

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COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

Storytelling can often be a collaborative endeavor. Many tales are spun and then altered, expanded upon, and retold over centuries. Rumpelstiltskin may be one of the most recognizable examples. The Brothers Grimm first collected and published Rumpelstiltskin in 1812 but some scholars believe the story originated thousands of years before that. Taking on new influences with each retelling, it has been adapted for screen and stage, most recently by Lincoln High School.

Lincoln's theater director Mark Marple said, "I was looking at doing 'Half-Past Wednesday,' which is a Rumpelstiltskin musical that Dom DeLuise did, but I couldn't get the rights, couldn't find the rights, couldn't find it anywhere." In his search, Marple stumbled upon 'Rumpelstiltskin the Musical' written by poet Matt Harvey and composer Thomas Hewitt Jones. The show originally premiered in England in 2014 and, thanks to Marple and his theater students, it has crossed the pond for its American premiere in Tallahassee.

"I called Thomas Hewitt Jones up and said I was really interested in potentially doing the show, and we clicked," Marple said. A new collaboration was born, and the show was expanded from the original cast of four to accommodate more actors. Tenth-grader Covey Washington, who plays a village fisherman, said, "Mr. Marple gave us our own chance to create the roles ourselves."

Delving into the creation of these new characters and the way they might interact with one another allowed the students to exercise interpersonal skills. "Every single show that I've been in, we've all come together and learned more about each other," Covey said. "A

PHOTOS BY AMANDA THOMPSON
TOP: Steve Gunn-Hall in his role of the King. ABOVE: Students rehearse one of the scenes in Lincoln High School's adaptation of "Rumpelstiltskin the Musical."

big part of theater is listening and applying that to what we do on stage. If we don't do that, the whole show is messed up. That's true outside of theater, too. If we don't listen to one another we're not going to get anything done."

Though Covey has been acting since elementary school, for his cast mate Steve Gunn-Hall, a 12th-grader, theater is an entirely new experience. For the past seven years, Steve has dedicated much of his focus to football, but the theater has always intrigued him. "I joined it to have something different to do my senior year — you know, why not?" To Steve's surprise, he was cast as the King and he said that "this is the most fun I've ever had, pretty much in anything. Mr. Marple has allowed me to be as creative as I can. With his guidance, I've had basically free rein on what I can do with the character."

Aside from artistic freedom, Steve has also enjoyed the camaraderie. "I just met these guys this year and I consider them to have the same impact as the football team. I look at the football team like they're my brothers, and these people have been so receiving, they've helped me so much. I give them the same credit as I would my own team." Steve believes it's important to try new things and he said, "You never know what doors can be opened."

Jeremie Michael, the music director, and Ben Howard, the choreographer, have also encouraged the students to explore the unknown and contribute their own concepts. Michael has worked on Broadway and off-Broadway and he just concluded work on an FSU production of another beloved fairy tale, "Beauty and the Beast." Howard graduated from the FSU School of Dance in 2013 and, since then, he has worked as a dancer for Celebrity Cruises Productions and the Tallahassee Ballet.

Michael said, "Working with the students themselves, the actors are all very enthusiastic and they're bringing their own unique vocal instruments to the score to bring it to life." Howard agreed and added, "Trying to tell the story through movement has been fun and to see the kids really adapt their characters, provide input and create great ideas through the process has been exciting."

That collaborative spirit extends to the community and the considerable buy-in from local business like McDonald's, which will provide

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Drama club

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healthy lunches for the dozens of school groups scheduled to attend the show. Tallahassee Dodge Chrysler Jeep Ram Fiat, iHeartRadio, and Electrotech are also supporting the production.

In developing relationships with sponsors, Marple wants his students to understand the theater's business side. "The whole idea is to get them into the professional world," he said.

As the executive producer of Capital City Playhouse, a professional theater company, and with an acting and directing career that spans four decades, Marple is eager to share his knowledge and experience with his students. His classes include training in theater management, technical theater and performance. "They learn about contracts, the unions, the job structure. They do the sound and lights. They did all the fliers for this show, all the PSA spots, all the press releases. I've gotten them commercials, I've gotten them agents, they're getting work."

Tiffany Bass is one of those working actors. She was recently hired for a commercial and is serving as the assistant director for Rumpelstiltskin and the president of Lincoln's drama club. Though she's a 12th-grader, Tiffany only has two years of stage experience.



AMANDA THOMPSON

Mark Marple and Tiffany Bass lead a rehearsal of "Rumpelstiltskin the Musical."



"My very first show, I was an understudy of an understudy because I hadn't really been in theater before. I had to

If you go

What: "Rumpelstiltskin the Musical"

When: 7:30 p.m. April 29 and 2 p.m. April 30

Where: Lincoln High School Auditorium, 3838 Trojan Trail

Cost: \$8 for students and \$12 for adults

Contact: For more information, call 850-921-2516 Ext. 1302 or visit <http://www.lincolnhstheatre.com>

fill in, super last minute. I was standing on stage, and the moment I got laughter I was like 'Wow, this is what I want to do.'"

The theater has become Tiffany's second home, and she is candid about its benefits. "I suffer from depression and anxiety, but the second I get on-stage, it's all gone because I step into another world. It's the best feeling when the audience is so quiet you can hear a pin drop. That's how you know you've captivated everybody." She strives to help other actors see their own potential. "There are students that don't really realize that they have talent. Everybody does, it just a matter of showing it, coming out of your comfort zone, just one little step and it's amazing how it makes you feel."

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the assistant director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).