

Theatre Aurora's 'The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee' - A Review



By Scott Johnston

Theatre Aurora takes us back to our childhoods with 'The 25th Annual Putnam Spelling Bee.'

This winning musical comedy, set entirely during a spelling bee in a school gym, tells the story of six over-achieving 12-year old students.

Each have very different backgrounds and reasons why they are competing.

How badly do they want to win, what are the risks of coming second, do they even want to win at all, and perhaps more important; will young love triumph?

These and other questions are explored over the course of this entertaining, and strangely educational show (by the end of the evening, if you don't remember how to spell 'Weltanschauung', you'll at least know what it means).

There is a great balance of music and humour.

The tunes are catchy, and assisted through the on stage keyboard accompaniment. The choreography is very good, and all of the cast are excellent singers.

The humour can be found in both the lyrics, as well as the unusual words, amusing definitions and delightfully offbeat usage in a sentence examples.

As the students, David Cardinal, Alex Leahy, Patricia Dambrosio, Alyssa Blenkarn, Jeff McAlister and Neil Salinas bring each of their characters' varied backgrounds and associated quirks to life wonderfully.

As the moderator and the vice principal overseeing the bee, Sonya Grundy and Brian Hargan get some of the best lines as they respectively provide the unusual student achievements, and the wonky word definitions.

Abbas Hussain plays Mitch Mahoney, the ex-convict 'Official Comfort Counselor', and unofficial juice box distributor, to those that have misspelled their words.

An unusual and interesting feature of the play is the use of unrehearsed audience members as additional spelling bee participants. It is impressive how well they fit into the action on stage. And don't worry, you won't get chosen unless you agree in advance.

Director, and Theatre Aurora veteran, Sergio Calderon takes advantage of the quality play and cast, and keeps things moving.

While the winner of the bee won't be revealed until the end of the play, the real winner here is the audience, who will by that point have had such an entertaining evening.

Evening performances of 'The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee' continue at Theatre Aurora, 150 Henderson Drive, January 21, 22, 23, 28, 29 & 30, with a matinee January 24. Tickets are available through the box office at 905-727-3669.