

Youth bring new life to the hills in The Sound of Music



By Brock Weir

The Sound of Music has been a holiday staple for over 50 years, but Aurora's Marquee Theatrical Productions has kept the festive cheer rolling right through the New Year.

There are still a few chances to catch Marquee's young company, ages six through 13, bring a special youth version of the classic Rodgers & Hammerstein musical to life after its opening Friday evening.

The Sound of Music brings together five casts of talented youngsters who have been rehearsing twice a week since September to mount the production, which closes January 31.

Most of your favourite songs are there, but the junior production is tailor-made to its actors, about 90 minutes in length from its original three hours, and making some of the heady topics tackled in between the rousing and toe-tapping songs easily digestible for young audiences.

?The delicate historical situations are handled very, very brilliantly,? says Marquee's Sheryl Thomas, noting while tensions between Austria and Germany in the lead-up to the Second World War are handled without explicitly mentioning the Nazis. ?The story is about family, it is about love, it is about keeping together and forgiveness, so many things people can relate to as humans, both young and old. That is probably why this touches so many people emotionally in so many places in so many ways. The music is fun, memorable and lovely and I think that is probably why the overall show is a hit.?

There is no doubt that the Sound of Music is a classic. Off-stage, its movie adaptation starring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer has been seen by just about everyone and, if you're one of the few people who don't know the movie, it's more than likely you don't know at least one or two of its featured songs.

The youngsters, says Ms. Thomas, were often in the latter category.

?It is interesting because a lot of these kids actually did not know the show before, but their parents did,? she says. ?It is introducing the story to them and watching them get excited about putting it on and practicing the dances as they sing these classic songs ? even off to the side when they don't have to be practicing. It is always very, very fulfilling.

?I think [once the show closes on January 31] that the kids will have left with such a sense of accomplishment because they are very involved in the show and we find creative ways to make sure the kids are involved even more than what the script suggests you do. It is a huge team and by the end of it they are just feeling so celebratory about what they have been able to do. Many of them were afraid at the very beginning or even a little nervous during dress rehearsals, overcoming these personal obstacles that we even have as adults. It usually leaves them wanting more ? and this show is just simply fun.?

Once The Sound of Music has wrapped, Marquee is not resting on their laurels. These same character building programs will continue right through to the beginning of February with the second term of the intermediate program tackling The Lion King Jr ? and there are only a few spaces left in the program.

In addition to that, planning for their popular March Break programs are in full swing, focusing on ?a twisted fairytale? featuring Jack & The Beanstalk.

?People should give the March Break camp a try because it is only a five day commitment and then parents have a great chance to see whether or not it is something their kid is interested in because they get to taste the whole thing ? the rehearsal process, and the performance,? says Ms. Thomas. ?It might not be a full scale show like our school year programs, but it will give them a taste [of the programs]. Generally speaking, people are sold on it once they give it a shot and it is a lower financial commitment, a lower time commitment, and they don't have to think about signing up for the entire school and find out it's not for their child.?

For more on Marquee Theatrical Productions' upcoming programs, including The Lion King Jr and the March Break fun, visit marqueetp.com.