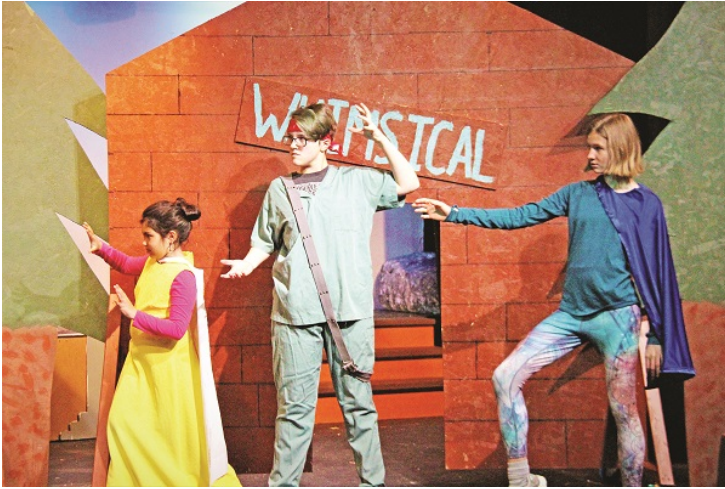


Youth actors find their voices at Theatre Aurora this week



By Brock Weir

They have entertained and inspired generations with their daring feats and spellbinding stories, but Robin Hood and modern-day superheroes have something else in common: they are helping youngsters find their voices through theatre.

This Thursday through Sunday, members of Theatre Aurora's 'Theatre Kids' and 'Young Company' groups will be showcasing their talents in 'Robin Hood & The Merry Men' and 'Camp Super.'

The fun begins this Thursday with Robin Hood & The Merry Men, a gender-bending spin on the traditional tale, which takes the stage May 9 & 11 at 8 p.m. The Theatre Kids' production of Camp Super steps into the spotlight May 11 and 12 with shows at 1 p.m.

While both productions offer fresh takes on time-honoured stories and concepts, the development of these stories, driven by the young actors, has served to help kids and youth find their respective voices.

'Camp Super is a comedy about a group of kids who are superheroes at this summer camp who have to team up with this villain who wants to burn the entire world,' says co-director Joey Ferguson. 'It's a very campy show, it's very fun and the kids did everything from creating their characters, to their costumes, to writing some of the scenes. It is very much their show and they are super-excited about it. The older kids, the Young Company, are doing Robin Hood & The Merry Men, which is a gender-bent tale. King Richard has taken all the men to war and his brother, John has been left in charge and says any man who is left and doesn't go and fight will be executed, so the men decide they don't want to go and fight and dress up as women. Meanwhile, the women in the country, they are told because only men can own land all the land now belongs to the king. They decide to dress up as men and

that is how Robin Hood is formed, by this group of ladies who are rising up against the king.?

The idea of taking the well-worn story of Robin Hood and skewing the genders involved is something Mr. Ferguson says was brought to the table by the youth.

Theatre is a 'very safe space,' he said, and kids were free to explore these ideas and concepts in this safe setting.

'We really worked with the students and they talked to us about the whole idea of gender identity and what it means to identify different genders and how they don't have to be part of the typical roles,' says Mr. Ferguson, who has been involved with Theatre Aurora since his own days as a member of the youth group. 'Looking back ten years ago, while it wasn't that these topics didn't exist, they weren't as present in our everyday life and for many of these students, they are topics that are present in their lives. For them to be able to come here and have a space to discuss it and use these experiences to create a story, whether they are experiences of their own or experiences of those around them, I think it is a very powerful thing. The idea of acceptance is very present in both of our shows.'

'We're all very impressed with what they have been able to do. We really enjoy having them around. It is a very unique thing for a community theatre to have, not just a Youth Group but a very active Youth Group. We're hoping our audiences and people around Town support them like they do for all our other shows.'

For more information on Robin Hood & The Merry Men? and Camp Super, including tickets, visit www.theatreaurora.com, or call 905-727-3669.