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It's OK to be different

Thursday, June 08, 2006

By Monica Scalf

Contributing Writer

Honk if you love Hans Christian Anderson's classic story The Ugly Duckling.

Acting Up, Young Performers Community Theater of Mason, brings the tale and its message of accepting differences vividly to life in an updated musical version titled Honk! Jr., to be performed this weekend at Mason

Middle School.

Recently the cast performed a segment of the show for children staying at the Ronald McDonald House in Cincinnati. As children in wheelchairs or without much hair watched the cast sing and dance,

the message of the show seemed even more important. And their performance provided residents with a little comic relief.

"I laughed so hard I cried," said Tammy Anderson of Maysville, Ky., who is staying at RMHC while her son Ronnie, age 2, undergoes chemotherapy. "He laughed too and clapped his hands. They did a wonderful job."



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As the segment opened, one may have expected to see performers waddle out in duck costumes or don feathers. Instead, the cast dresses in clothes that suggest their duckness. The little ducklings wear bright yellow ball caps with orange bills, white shirts and furry yellow shorts.

The Ugly Ducking, played by Ian Hill,

14, of Mason, embodies awkwardness — his costume consists of flood pants with suspenders as he moves around the stage in exaggerated motions. The show is especially important to Ian since he has dealt with his own issues of being different while growing up.

Ian, who was born with problems of the central nervous system, had trouble communicating as a child. He was eventually diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Sensory Integration Disorder. After intensive speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy at Children's Hospital, his condition improved. But acting brought all of these therapies together in a form he loves.

He finds that the obstacles in his past provide him with the means to convey his emotions in a compassionate way. The best thing about being part of the production is "just delivering the message: It is OK to be different," he said.

Ida, played by Kristen Korb, 16, shines as the dedicated Mother Duck.

"The show sends a good message. It's very fun and cute," said Korb of West Chester Twp.

As she sings and dances on stage, it's easy to forget that this is a young performers' production. Many of the actors and actresses seem to be seasoned veterans.

The cast consists of 48 actors ages 5-17 from various communities and schools across the Northeastern Cincinnati area. Max Monnig, 16, of Springboro, plays Drake, the Father Duck. He said Acting Up provides him the opportunity to be a part of something. "I like hanging out with the other kids," he said.

The cast began rehearsals in April. They have two-hour practices four days a week. Brent Peebles, the director of Honk! Jr., said the rehearsals also focus on giving the kids a good theater experience where they learn the basics.



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Honk! Jr. is derived from

an original full-length award winning show titled Honk! that beat out both Mamma Mia and Lion King for London's version of the Tony Award. The show is full of dry humor and wit that promises to keep teens and adults entertained while being appropriate for the whole family.

"When you're different," said West Chester Twp.'s Madison Bridges who plays the duckling Fluff, "you should love it because that's the way God made you."

For more information on Acting Up visit www.ActingUpOnLine.org

Performance Info:

Where: Mason Middle School Theater, 6370 Mason-Montgomery Rd.

When: 7 p.m. Friday, 1 p.m. and 7 p.m., 1 p.m. Sunday

Tickets: \$8 / \$6 seniors

More information: 588-0183 or www.ActingUpOnLine.org

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