

'Big Fish' production offers something new for Chippewa Valley students

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Chippewa Valley junior Johnny Serra rehearses his part as young Edward Bloom for the school's upcoming musical production "Big Fish." The musical opens Nov. 10.

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From left, Chippewa Valley theater students Nina LoGrasso, Brooke Majewski and Daniella Grainger rehearse "Big Fish" on Nov. 3.

Photo by Deb Jacques



Chippewa Valley student Andrew Dubon plays adult Edward Bloom, and Brittany Girard plays the mermaid during a Nov. 3 rehearsal for “Big Fish.”

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Most musical productions done at schools around metro Detroit have been done for decades and are well-known by audience members.

This fall, the Chippewa Valley High School musical production students will present “Big Fish.” The story that started as a book has been made into a movie of the same name, and has been done as a musical on Broadway, but Chippewa Valley Director Nick Marinello said his students will be some of the first high school students to perform the show in Michigan.

“Big Fish” will be performed at 7 p.m. on Nov. 10, 11, 17 and 18, with a matinee show at 1 p.m. on Nov. 18, in the Chippewa Valley High School auditorium, 18300 19 Mile Road in Clinton Township.

“One of the big challenges being one of the first schools to do this show is, we can’t rely on what other schools have done,” Marinello said. “With productions, we reach out to the theater community and rent set pieces and costumes. We have to figure things out ourselves and it is a story no one knows, but it is one of the better musicals I have seen.”

“Big Fish” tells the story of Edward Bloom and his son, Will. Edward is dying of cancer as Will is expecting a child of his own with his new wife. The relationship between the two has been built on grand stories by Edward of kissing a mermaid and befriending a giant, which Will isn’t sure are real, as his dad is in the later stages of his life.

Marinello said the story is told through a lot of flashbacks, and sets will include a circus, among other things. Having older and younger versions of characters and cluing the audience in on what time frame it is have been some of the bigger challenges.

“How do we go back in time and show younger versions of the same person is something we had to solve and convey to the audience how the story is being told,” he said. “We built all our own sets, and this is one of the more ambitious set shows we have ever done, with a lot of moving pieces.”

Senior Jaydenn Knepp is playing older Sandra Bloom, the wife of Edward, while senior Nina LoGrasso is playing the younger version of Sandra.

LoGrasso said it has been a great experience to work with Knepp on developing a personality for Sandra across time while still having their own quirks while performing her different ages.

“We try to do similar things, but you get to see Sandra grow older,” LoGrasso said. “We try to be similar and different in our character. You are not the same person when you are 20 years old as you are when you are older.”

With the production not having been performed in a lot of places around Michigan, Knepp said “Big Fish” should provide a fresh experience for audiences.

“This is not a musical like ‘Annie’ or ‘West Side Story.’ It is something new and fresh,” she said. “It takes you on an emotional journey throughout it. It has fantasy aspects, but it is about a man dying. There are super happy points, but it is also a tearjerker with depth.”

Marinello said he does not cut kids from the production, so he tries to find shows that can fit a large cast and crew. This year, he has about 70 high school students who have a hand in the production, with a few middle schools kids helping from the district.

With “Big Fish” the movie coming out nearly 15 years ago, Marinello said most of his students didn’t have a firsthand experience with the play when they started working on the production.

For junior Johnny Serra, who plays the younger version of Edward Bloom, it has been a great experience that’s different than any other production the school has done.

“I think what makes this different is it is relatable,” Serra said. “There is some fiction that is not believable with some things exaggerated, but you are able to connect with the people and the themes.”

Tickets cost \$12 and can be purchased online at cvchoirs.seatyourself.biz.