Nordonia Drama Club returns to the stage with spring musical

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by Laura Bednar

The pandemic kept students from staging a musical play for two years, but the Nordonia High School Drama Club will return by presenting “Once Upon a Mattress.”

In this musical, based on the classic fairytale of the Princess and the Pea, King Sextimus, played by Richie Nyce, falls under a curse and is unable to speak. His domineering wife, Queen Aggravain, played by Leah Jackson, rules the kingdom and decrees that no one can wed until a suitable princess is found for Prince Dauntless, played by Jacob Filisky. Prospects look bleak until the arrival of Princess Winnifred the Woebegone, played by Libby Herberth. Will she be able to pass the queen’s test?

NHS Drama Director Chris Simmons said the club performed a few fall plays since the onset of the pandemic, which are smaller productions with the ability for social distancing. Students performed individual songs from musicals as part of a 2021 cabaret show, but performances were recorded and posted on the web.

“This is our first return back to an onstage musical,” Simmons said. “It’s just as exciting for me and the team as the kids.”

In line with safety guidelines, practices were held in small groups with full cast rehearsals taking place closer to the actual show date, according to Simmons.

A couple of drama club families raised money for the department during the down time, as the club's revenue comes from ticket sales. "The funds helped kickstart us back into programming," Simmons said.

After a two-year lull, Simmons said he was unsure how many students would audition for "Once Upon a Mattress," but the response gave him the flexibility to add as many knights and ladies in waiting as he wanted, in addition to the main characters. There are 25 cast members, in addition to nine main characters, and 40 students working in the crew, running technology and playing in the pit band.

The drama club will also participate in Playhouse Square's "Dazzle Awards," in which a panel of judges views a production and provides feedback and scores to determine award nominations.

This is Nordonia's seventh year participating. The drama club was nominated for four awards in 2019. "It's refreshing to have that level of support for the arts," Simmons said.

Simmons' hope is to have an appreciative audience. "People don't realize how much work it is on the kids' end," he said.

The musical runs Friday and Saturday, April 8 and 9, at 7:30 p.m., and Sunday, April 10, at 3 p.m. Tickets are $15 for reserved seats and $10 for general admission. Visit nordoniadrama.com for ticket purchases and more information. ∞

NOrdonia students Leah Jackson (Queen Aggravain) and Libby Herbeth (Princess Woebegone). Photo courtesy of Chris Simmons.

Featured picture: Nordonia students (l-r) Stella Naymik (the Jester), Nichie Nyce (King Sextimus) and Ella Bozan (the Minstrel).