

‘Doo-Wop Red Riding Hood’ a joyful experience for Northbrook actors



The cast performs a song.

Sarah Haider, Freelance Reporter
12:49 pm CDT April 10, 2018

Bright Star Theatre Company set the stage for everyone to shine at its recent production of “Doo-Wop Red Riding Hood.”

The musical featured 12 actors with special needs from Glenview, Northbrook, Deerfield, Glencoe and Highland Park paired with 12 companions in two performances Saturday-Sunday, April 7-8, at Northbrook Theatre.

The theater company, in permanent partnership with the Northbrook Park District, is one of the many subsets of the Northern Suburban Special Recreation Association, an organization that provides year-round recreation programs and services for North Shore children, teens and adults with disabilities.

“This is really an important program here that a lot of people don’t know about,” Director Julie Gibson Lay said. “Everybody deserves a chance to be seen by the world ... in a way that they feel they belong and show what they are capable of, rather than always being defined by what other people see them as.”

Gibson, in her fourth year with the program, chose “Doo-Wop Red Riding Hood” for the yearly production due to its catchy music and high energy. She described the show as a roller coaster of fun.

For Gibson, her main goal as director was creating a way for the 12 special-needs participants and their companions to explore the benefits of theater and have a “joyful” time doing it.

“When you are doing music and doing a show, you aren’t thinking about ... anything that bothers you,” Gibson said. “You enter a state of flow and are mindful of being there in the moment. ... I don’t think our [cast] is offered that gift often enough, and when they are experiencing flow and mindfulness, their disabilities fall away and they feel confident.”

The musical followed the journey of Little Red, Big Green and Medium Purple Riding Hood in their search for love. Full-cast musical and dance numbers outlined the comically troublesome plight of the three sisters, including an improvised song when actors used their imagination to create choreography with inflatable instruments.

On stage, each actor stood side by side with a companion, who served to assist with lines and moral support.

Glenbrook North student Rachel Bernstein has been companions with Glenview resident Lisa Krupinski for six years. Krupinski, playing Little Red Riding Hood, said her favorite part of playing the lead was all the singing.

“A lot of people don’t realize we have been working since September,” Bernstein said. “The actors spend so much time outside of rehearsal learning their lines and choreography. They put a lot of effort in. It’s a feel-good thing. We enjoy putting on a show for everyone, and I think that everyone who comes really enjoys the show.”

For Glenview resident Katie McManus, acting as the show’s Evil Queen and Grandmother made this year her favorite production.

“Katie’s been working really hard and it’s been great to see her grow throughout the few months,” said Marlee Fradin, McManus’ companion. “Katie and everyone worked so hard, and every week they came here with a smile on their face.”

According to Gibson, the show is a “life-changing experience” for the actors and the companions. She credits the program’s success to the community’s interest in the special recreation association and the resources provided by the Northbrook Park District, which lends the stage, staff, technical design, equipment, props and costumes. The continued support for the growing program is fueled by the actors’ dedication and passion for exploring the world of theater.

“We have a real special group of people that are interested in the theater company and we do productions that match what they need, instead of looking for people that further the goals of a certain show,” Gibson said. “The goal overall is to find the experience theater brings to their life. ... It’s about sharing the gifts that come from theater.”

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