

Staging of 'Sweeney' canceled by high school

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CARROLL SCHOOLS

* The students will perform the stage version of Footloose instead.

SOUTHLAKE -- Carroll Senior High School officials have canceled plans to stage Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street just 12 days before student auditions, citing the script's "dark theme."

Officials told students Wednesday that they won't perform the musical about the barber who slits the throats of customers. Sweeney Todd was revived in the 2007 Tim Burton film starring Johnny Depp.

Students will instead produce the stage version of the 1984 Kevin Bacon-vehicle Footloose, Carroll theater co-director Stacie Martinsen said.

The cancellation has saddened some students who had been looking forward to Sweeney Todd, after coming off the success of Carroll's November production of The Phantom of the Opera. Martinsen said Carroll's theater department had been working on Sweeney Todd since March.

"I was really upset," said Allyson Dean, 15, who planned to audition and said she had memorized nearly all the script. "I didn't know anything about Footloose. I had never heard of it."

The sophomore has launched a petition drive, "Save Sweeney Todd," and said she had collected 80 signatures by midday Thursday.

Timing

Carroll Senior High School Principal Daniel Presley said Thursday that he had originally approved Sweeney Todd but pulled the show this week.

Julie Thannum, school district spokeswoman, said emotions are running high in the community after the recent death of a former Carroll student who is also the child of a Carroll staff member. The Tarrant County medical examiner's office reported the 15-year-old's suicide Sept. 5.

"I felt that for our school community at this time, we needed to do something that was thematically a little more lighthearted," Presley said.

District officials have not ruled out producing Sweeney Todd in the future, Thannum said.

"Timing is the key issue here," Thannum said. "We understand that there will be people who are disappointed."

'Footloose'

Carroll students were told in mid-August that Sweeney Todd would be the musical, and hopefuls began preparing for auditions, which were scheduled Sept. 22 to 26.

Some teens worked with private voice coaches to learn the musical's songs, parents said.

Theater students had been reading the Sweeney Todd script aloud in class and were watching a DVD of the Broadway production, said Petra Dean, Allyson Dean's mother.

Natalie Genco, whose son Christian had planned to audition, wrote to Carroll school trustees Wednesday to ask that the show be reconsidered.

"I don't think you realize what you are doing to the kids by canceling this show," wrote Genco, whose son is a senior. "This is a truly heartless thing to do to the kids, and especially since they were already hurting with the loss of one of their classmates. Sweeney was the one thing many were looking forward to."

Students have been asked to return sheet music for Sweeney Todd. Auditions for Footloose are scheduled for late October, the high school theater Web site said.

Footloose will open Jan. 30, under the original performance schedule, Martinsen said in a letter posted on the Web site.

"We needed to pick something fairly quickly. It was based on the restrictions I was given and what I was able to get the rights to," said Stacie Martinsen, who co-directs the theater along with her husband Roald Martinsen.

Staff writer Mark Agee contributed to this report. Carroll Senior High School theater

The senior high school's theater program was recognized as one of the best in Tarrant County in spring 2007. At the May 2007 Betty Lynn Buckley Awards at Casa Mañana, the school's January 2007 production of The Pajama Game won best musical, direction, orchestra, scenic design and choreography. Last fall, Carroll became the first high school company to stage a production of the Broadway musical The Phantom of the Opera. The show required months of rehearsals.

The shows

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, debuted on Broadway in 1979 and has been a popular production through the decades. The Stephen Sondheim musical tracks the misfortune of Benjamin Barker, who loses his wife and child to a corrupt judge in Victorian London. Barker's despair and thirst for revenge leads him to set up shop as a murderous barber whose tale ends with many slit throats.

Director Tim Burton converted the stage production into a 2007 film starring Johnny Depp, and Helena Bonham-Carter as the barber's accomplice.

Students in the Guyer High School theater in Denton are performing the high school adaptation of the musical through Saturday. Audiences were told that the musical is not appropriate for young children.

Footloose, the stage musical is based on the 1984 film starring Kevin Bacon, John Lithgow, Dianne Wiest and Sarah Jessica Parker. The story of teenage rebellion follows a city boy who moves to a small town where, at the behest of a Bible-thumping preacher with a beautiful daughter, dancing is banned. Bacon famously breaks it down in a barn, then wins public support and the girl.

Online: www.dragondrama.net

Sources: Star-Telegram archives, the Internet Movie Database

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