

Ladies and Gentlemen

Corbett Childrens Theater presents a Jane Austen classic, 'Pride and Prejudice'

BY ROB CULLIVAN

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Shauna Signorini, producer of the Corbett Childrens Theater's upcoming production of "Pride and Prejudice," says there's a good incentive for people to come out and see the play.

"The ticket price is worth it just to see teenagers dressed up and acting like ladies and gentlemen," she says with a smile.

The theater troupe consists of young people, ages 11 to 18, from Portland, Gresham, Troutdale, Corbett and Welches, and was founded in 1998. The nonprofit theater puts on three shows a year. It will tackle the Jane Austen classic the last two weekends in February at Corbett High School.

Based on Austen's 1813 novel, "Pride and Prejudice" tells the story of the independent-minded Elizabeth Bennet and the efforts made by her mother to find husbands for her and her sisters. Elizabeth meets the handsome but enigmatic Mr. Darcy, and the play details the battle between his pride and her prejudice.

Aaron Hughlett, 16, a sophomore at Barlow High School, is playing Mr. Darcy, whom he describes as "kind of a nice guy," at least on the inside, but one who's been hurt in the past and has learned to wear conservative armor.

"I kind of point out to people their faults and stuff and make them realize it," Aaron says of his character.

Elizabeth Johnson, 18, a Corbett High senior, plays Elizabeth Bennet.

"I think I can read everybody else's feelings and keep mine hidden and in the end, though, everything winds up coming out," she says of her character.

Jenny Layton, 15, a sophomore at Corbett, plays Elizabeth's mother, eager to find her daughter a match. Her character is well-meaning but a little self-serving, Jenny says.

"She thinks she's a great mother and a great person and fun to be around and witty, but she's really annoying."

The three young thespians say they particularly enjoy the highbrow 19th-century dialogue, a far cry from the way people speak today.

"The sentences are so much longer when you were just trying to get a simple point out," Aaron says.

Elizabeth adds that the actors had to stop and translate some of the dialogue into modern English for themselves to ensure they actually understood what they were saying. The teenagers also say they enjoy acting in general.

"You kind of get a feeling for different lifestyles," Aaron says.

Jenny says she's been in 20 Corbett productions and enjoys the camaraderie of the cast and crew.

"It's such a family atmosphere," she says. "It's kind of shaped me into the person I am."



JOHN KLICKER / THE OUTLOOK

Corbett Childrens Theatre members Elizabeth Johnson and Aaron Hughlett rehearse a kissing scene between lead characters Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in the play "Pride and Prejudice" as fellow performers, from left, Cierra Williams, 14, Jessica Winters, with hat, 16, Katie Shonk, 14, and Andrew Norlen, 13, pay close attention on Saturday, Feb. 9, at Springdale School.

When she was younger, she notes that she was shy.

“I’m so much more outgoing than I used to be.”

An athlete at Corbett, Elizabeth says the theater is a different world for her.

“It has stretched me in so many different ways.”

Behind the scenes, Bianca Signorini, 11, Shauna’s daughter and a sixth-grader at Corbett Elementary School, is working the lights for “Pride and Prejudice.”

“I like sitting back in the booth and hanging out with the (technicians.)”

Angel Williams, the play’s director, a mother of two Corbett High School students, has been with the theater since its inception, and says she grew up like many of these students participating in plays.

“Acting is a place where you can see the world through someone else’s eyes,” she says. “My passion is to show these views to the kids. For me, the theater growing up was a safe place to experiment. I want these kids to have that safe place, too.”

She adds that while it’s called the Corbett Childrens Theater, even patrons without children should consider coming to “Pride and Prejudice.”

“I would put our shows up head to head with local community theaters.”

Pride and Prejudice

What: “Pride and Prejudice”

Who: Corbett Childrens Theater

When: 1 and 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 23; 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 28; 7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 29; 1 and 7 p.m. Saturday March 1.

Where: Corbett High School Multi Purpose Building, 35800 E. Historic Columbia River Highway.

Tickets: Cost \$9 for adults, \$7 for students. Call in advance for a special group rate of \$5 person for 10 or more.

Info: 503-550-9520 or visit [www.corbettchildrens theater.com](http://www.corbettchildrens-theater.com)