

Kids journey into a lyrical forest

Olympia native casts youngsters in her first musical theater production

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OLYMPIA — At director Riana Nelson's cue, about nine 6- and 7-year-olds started rapping and dancing about witches and ghouls and other scary things.

The kids practiced the "Ghost Story Rap," one of six of Nelson's original songs for "Let's Go Camping!" a new musical for the Capital Playhouse's Tykes program for children younger than 7.

"Cross your arms like this, like you're really tough. This is rap," said Nelson, 21, striking a pose.

"OK, now, extra loud! And I need all the moves."

Olympia native Nelson, who is majoring in musical theater at the University of Michigan, is spending part of her summer directing her first children's musical, "Let's Go Camping!" She wrote the music, lyrics and script.

Nelson has been involved in Capital Playhouse since she was 8 years old and in previous years has assisted with the Tykes program.

Nelson said for her first musical, she set out to write one with a topic that kids as young as 6 could get interested in.

The songs range from a rap, to a blues song, to songs in a more traditional musical theater style.

"They play a bunch of kids as themselves, so they all have their own names," Nelson said. "They go on a camping trip and one of the girls sees a big footprint and they all go exploring."

The actors learn the songs by listening to a CD that she and her brother recorded, both with lyrics and without, at his home studio, she said. Most of her actors and singers have no musical theater experience, though some of them are in the singing programs at Capital Playhouse.

While the musical's plot is simple, she hopes that the actors learn more than how to sing songs in public.

“It deals with cooperation and friendship,” she said. “I hope they learn the importance of relationships between the characters. It’s absolutely important that the kids feel a sense of character.”

Katherine Lane, 6, who goes to Evergreen Christian School, said her favorite song is the “Forest Animal Blues,” which features a solo line for each of the actors.

“It’s really fun and you get to be an animal,” she said.

Ana Blazian, 7, who goes to Lincoln Elementary School, said she likes to sing “songs I make up.”

Her favorite song is “Ghost Story Rap,” because she kicks it off by shouting, “Hit it!”

“And it’s really cool,” she said.