

Olympia's Broadway incubator opening

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The theater season tends to slow down after summer solstice. Of Olympia's year-round theater companies, only Harlequin Productions (with "Sixties Kicks") and Theater Artists Olympia (with "Othello") have productions on stage this month, and both wrap up July 18.



But this weekend, South Sound's answer to summer stock is just getting started. Capital Playhouse's Kids at Play program offers a summer season of musicals, with cast members who are younger than 18 but production values shaped by professionals.

"I've never run into somebody who wasn't surprised the first time they saw a Kids at Play production," said Heidi Fredericks, who appeared in Kids at Play's first production when she was 16 and who is directing this summer's "Seussical." "The quality is comparable to just about any production in town.

"We get artisans from all over the country who come to work on the sets, to work on the lighting, to work on the costumes."

The program offers five plays per summer, and many students perform in more than one. "By the time they are ready to play a lead, these kids are seasoned performers themselves," Fredericks said.

While most of the productions have all-youth casts, the season-opening "Willy Wonka," with songs from the well-loved film, is the honor/reunion show and features a mixture of youth and adult actors, including Kids at Play alumni.

Among them: Wonka himself, played by 19-year-old Eddie Carroll of Olympia. Carroll, a sophomore working toward a bachelor's degree in acting at Montclair State College in New Jersey, got his theatrical start with the program.

"Capital Playhouse has pretty much been the core of my theater training, but also, I've made lifelong friends here," he said. "Putting up a show with 40 other kids is not an easy feat. You learn to work with other people, and it's not always people that you know."

The student actors are held to professional standards, Fredericks said.

“I was telling the kids in my play that the day we teach something, the next day it comes back memorized,” she said. “That’s how it is in the real world. We’re giving these kids a hands-on experience that they can use in the real world.”

COMING UP

The rest of the summer season:

“The Sound of Music” (July 22-25): Rodgers and Hammerstein’s final collaboration — about a young woman’s journey from the convent to stepmotherhood, complete with an escape from Nazi soldiers — is arguably the best-known Broadway musical.

“Seussical” (July 29-Aug. 1): “Horton Hears a Who” is the inspiration for the central plot of this musical celebration of Dr. Seuss and the power of imagination.

“Aida” (Aug. 5-8): The Elton John-Tim Rice collaboration is based on the Giuseppe Verdi opera.

“The Mikado” (Aug. 12-15): The Gilbert and Sullivan operetta about love, romance and the threat of execution.