
'A Very Potter Senior Year' opens at Petaluma's Phoenix Theatre

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT | April 27, 2017



Petaluma's Phoenix Theatre has played many roles during its long history — opera house, movie theater, rock 'n' roll concert hall — but this weekend the venue plays a different part, as Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

"A Very Potter Musical," produced and performed by the Cotati-based private music school Music to My Ears, opens tonight at the Phoenix, and organizers hope magic will happen.

"There is a wizard duel. There's a flying car and a giant spider," said Aja Gianola-Norris, founder and owner of Music to My Ears. "The wizards send their curses back and forth. Half of the curses are from the Harry Potter books, and half of them are nonsensical jokes."

"A Very Potter Senior Year" is the third chapter in a popular StarKid Productions trilogy of musical parodies, all big hits on YouTube and originally based on the novels. The previous entries were "A Very Potter Musical" and "A Very Potter Sequel," presented by Music to My Ears in 2015 and 2016, respectively, at the Phoenix.

The cast of 27 performers ages 12 to 18, recruited from all over Sonoma County, is led by Livy Almy, who played Harry Potter in the two previous local productions and returns in the role this weekend.

"This is Harry Potter's generation," Gianola-Morris said. "These are the kids who waited in line to buy the books."

Since Gianola-Norris started Music to My Ears 10 years ago, the school has staged four shows a year, many of them based on Disney stories, at various venues around Sonoma

County, including Glaser Center in Santa Rosa and Spreckels Performing Arts Center in Rohnert Park. "I dream of having my own theater," she said. "We have space for lessons and rehearsals in Cotati, but we have to rent theaters for performances."

Music to My Ears employs 15 teachers and provides private lessons to 170 students per week, Gianola-Norris said,

Those who attend one of this weekend's performances might want to take a close look at the live instrumental trio accompanying the cast. That'll be Gianola-Norris on keyboards.

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