
Sorcerer Apprentices materialize in Petaluma

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“Sometimes, when I’m really happy, I can shoot sparkles out of my fingers!”

So recites Rhiannan Powell, excitedly, rehearsing a very funny scene from the satirical “A Very Potter Senior Year: the Musical,” in which she’s playing a version of Tom Riddle, the boy who grew up to be Lord Voldemort.

Wow.

Who knew that He Who Must Not be Named could ever be so ... sparkly?

And that, it turns out, is only the beginning.

Eli Judd, doing a broadly-drawn take on Albus Dumbledore, begins singing now, playfully encouraging the psychopathic young wizard to try expressing his true inner self.

“Shut your mouth and stop your yapping,” sings Judd. “Take your foot and get it tapping!”

“I was born a magic boy. I’ll leap and twirl and prance,” sings Powell, leaping and twirling, then adding, “And I will always dance!”

Wow again.

Who knew the villain of those popular wizard books would ever become such a good dancer?

Or that the beloved story would make such a good, weird, twisted, funny, PG13, not-for-children Saturday-Night-Live-style musical? The third in a series of spoofs created by writers Matt Lang, Nick Lang and Brian Holden, with songs composed by Clark

Baxtresser, Pierce Siebers, A.J. Holmes, and Darren Criss, AVPSY (as it's affectionately known) was first presented in 2012 as the main event at LeakyCon, an annual gathering of Potter fans.

This weekend, April 28, 29, and 30, the students of Music to My Ears — a music school headquartered in Cotati — will present "A Very Potter Senior Year" at the Phoenix Theater.

But first, they have to get to the end of this late Saturday night rehearsal.

"Good work!" shouts director Aja Gianola-Norris, co-founder of Music to My Ears. "Let's let the band go, and then we'll rehearse the opening number on our own!"

The students all rush about, some helping the musicians pack up their instruments, while others fetch magic wands and bits and pieces of costumes.

Happily observing the activity taking place all around her, Gianola-Norris explains that most of the teenage cast are returning to Hogwarts with this show, having already staged the two previous shows in the series — "A Very Potter Musical" and "A Very Potter Sequel."

"I wasn't originally going to do the third one," she says. "But at the cast party last year, I basically lost a bet, and agreed to do "A Very Potter Senior Year" after all. Now I'm glad that happened. It feels right to finish what we all started together."

Gianola-Norris, with her husband Daniel Norris, established Music to My Ears nearly eleven years ago. The school — which counts Petaluma students as between a third and one-half of the cast of the musical — currently employs fifteen teachers, and has more than a hundred students. A younger group, it so happens, are simultaneously preparing for their own spring show, a vibrant production of Disney's "The Lion King," running May 7 and 15 at Liberty Elementary School in Petaluma.

Both founders grew up in the North Bay — Daniel graduating from Tomales High School, Aja from Rancho Cotate — but didn't become a couple till they met again at Cal State Hayward. After relocating to Baltimore, where Norris earned his Masters from

Peabody Conservatory, they first encountered the tradition of music schools for children and adults.

“Schools like this are common on the East Coast,” Gianola-Norris says. “Places where the whole family takes lessons at the same time. They walk in and one kid goes off to take a piano lesson, while another goes down the hall to take a singing lesson. One of the parents might be learning to play guitar, while the other is working on some other instrument.”

After returning to California and settling in Sonoma County, they decided to launch a school of their own, and with funds borrowed from Norris’s grandmother, they opened Music to My Ears in Cotati, in June of 2006. The school has been steadily growing ever since.

“At our ten year anniversary, we officially paid her off in full, the final payment,” laughs Gianola-Norris. “That was a great way to celebrate.”

For a number of Gianola-Norris’s students, this weekend’s performances at the Phoenix are also a great way to celebrate, as some of them will be graduating from the program after this year.

“It’s really fitting, in a way, because this is a show about these magical kids and their senior year,” Gianola-Norris says, as Alice Brookstone (playing Luna, appropriately adorned in a Hogwarts T-shirt), practices casting spells with her wand as she prepares for the show’s opening number, titled, “This is the End.” Brookstone is joined by Kiernan Edwards (Neville), Rebekah Pehur (Ron) and Livy Almy (Harry), and several others, as Elaine sits at the piano.

“Been a long time comin,’” they sing, “but tonight is the end of the war my friend, tomorrow only one side will remain. We will win or we will lose the fight, either way it’s the end, no use to pretend, It’s the final show! We gotta go! And meet our destiny. This is the end!”

As the rousing, slightly coarse number progresses - and various wizards, villains,

werewolves, and heroes fill the section of carpet currently standing in for the stage of the Phoenix - the entire cast joins in the song.

"This is the end!" everybody sings. "This is the End! This is the End!"

When it's over, the enthusiastic group of singers all spontaneously cheer.

"Good job! Let's keep going," encourages Gianola-Norris, laughing as she adds, "This may be the end ... but we still have a lot of work to do!"

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