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Willy Wonka's on his way

Nicholas Mercer  
(nicholas.mercer@thewesternstar.com)  
(mailto:nicholas.mercer@thewesternstar.com)  
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None



Shown in this scene from Willie Wonka, (standing, from left) Julia Bursey, Lindsay Burke, Dan Lasby and Amanda Piercey. (Kneeling) Jessa Vokey and Shawna Gallagher.

Over the last three weeks, sightings of Oompa Loompas and golden tickets have increased at Holy Heart of Mary High School as it prepares for the opening of its production of "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory."

This is the first student performance at the St. John's school since "Little Shop of

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St John's

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Horrors” in October 2009, and Holy Heart theatre teacher John Rao says he and music/technology teacher Grant Etchegary were eager to do something that involved more people.

“We were looking at a bunch of different shows,” says Rao, adding the school has a musical theatre course and they were anxious to build on the success of their “Little Shop” production.

“We were eager to do something with that same kind of vibe,” he said.

It wasn’t long before “Willy Wonka” came to mind.

“As soon as I mentioned the name to the kids, the place just about went up,” says Rao, who figured the students’ love of the Gene Wilder movie version was behind the reaction.

He says that a lot of the students had also read the book, penned by British author Roald Dahl in 1964.

“It was an opportunity to work with acrobatics and flying. We added choreography,” says Rao, noting there is no choreography in the original movie.

The role of Charlie is played by Grade 11 student Jacqueline Higgins, who believes the production is incredibly happy and outgoing.

“Amazing in every possible way,” she says of the show. “It’s so much fun to do. Mostly because it is a kid show. It’s so energetic.”

There are differences between Jacqueline’s version of Charlie and the version in the original movie. For example,

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2 of 8

2018-10-11, 1:12 PM

Charlie has been given dance steps thanks to the choreography of Victoria Wells-Smith.

One challenge for the theatre production was the scene in which Charlie drinks a fizzy liquid and starts to float. Rao doesn’t elaborate on how the group managed, but says they’ve ironed it out.

Willy Wonka is being brought to life by professional actor Daniel Lasby, who plays a dual role in the show. Rao brought him in to mentor the younger actors, allowing students to receive input from a professional as well as from Rao, Etchegary and vocal director Susan Quinn.

“(Lasby) has been great to get along with,” says Jacqueline. “He has been very outgoing and keeping us on top of things.”

Lasby and Rao met during a previous production Rao helped organize at Holy Heart, TaDa! Events’ “Alice in Wonderland” last fall. Rao invited him to read for the role.

“He was great, and he has been great with the kids,” says Rao.

Where “Alice” relied heavily on aerial acrobatics, “Willy Wonka” features only a couple of scenes with aerial tricks. Students had only three weeks to learn their parts, the choreography and other intricacies of the performance, whereas “Alice” operated on a six-month schedule.

“We didn’t want to take over the kids’ lives,” says Rao.

Rao’s version of “Willy Wonka” was adapted in 2004, pre-dating the Tim

parsons-9047)



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Passed peacefully away Health Science Centre on October 7, 2018. Predeceased by his parents Robert (MOE) and Theresa Dunn, Also brother Randy. Leaving to mourn his children Angie (Billy), Andrew ...

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Burton-directed, Johnny Depp-led version of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," and takes its music from the original movie.

"All songs that are in the Gene Wilder version from the '70s are in here, plus a few others," Rao says.

As with all Holy Heart productions, a portion of the ticket price goes toward the purchase of new theatre seating.

Leslie Martin, operations manager of Holy Heart, says the neighbourhood had concerns about losing the school, which had been scheduled to close. But the community and politicians rallied around the school, saying its facilities and vibrant 52-year history should be considered.

"Wherever a new school would be built, whatever they called it ... it would never compare to what we have here," says Martin.

"We have amenities here that a new school wouldn't have, the theatre being one of the main ones. It's not the main reason they saved the school, but it factored in."

Theatre renovations are going well, Martin says. The restoration of the lighting and sound systems has been completed, new drapery has been added and the bathrooms have been upgraded.

The major issue now is replacing the seating, some of which is close to 80 years old and was bought from the old Cornwall Theatre when the Presentation Sisters built the school.

"They're really old and tattered," says Martin. "We're real busy, probably as busy

as the Arts and Culture Centre, if not busier."

Martin says the goal is to raise \$400,000 to cover the cost of the renovations, which also includes replacing the flooring.

Charitable status is something that is being considered as a way to raise funds, Martin adds.

She hopes that the school will be looked at differently due to the fact that it is the only school in St. John's with a theatre.

She figures more people would be inclined to donate to the theatre if they could receive a receipt.

With the excitement building for "Willy Wonka," audience members may not even notice the tattered seats.

"Audiences can expect a lot of colour and energy," says Jacqueline Higgins.

"Lots of smiling — everything is big with big sets, lights and animation. It's a great kids show."

"Willy Wonka" runs April 7-9 at 8 p.m. Matinees are planned for Thursday, April 7 at 9:30 a.m. for students, and Saturday, April 9 at 2 p.m. Your golden ticket can be purchased by from the Holy Heart Theatre box office by phone at 579-4424 or online at [www.holyhearttheatre.com](http://www.holyhearttheatre.com).

[nmercerc@thetelegram.com](mailto:nmercerc@thetelegram.com)

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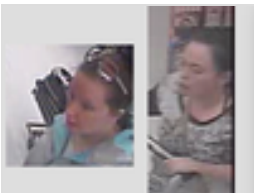
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