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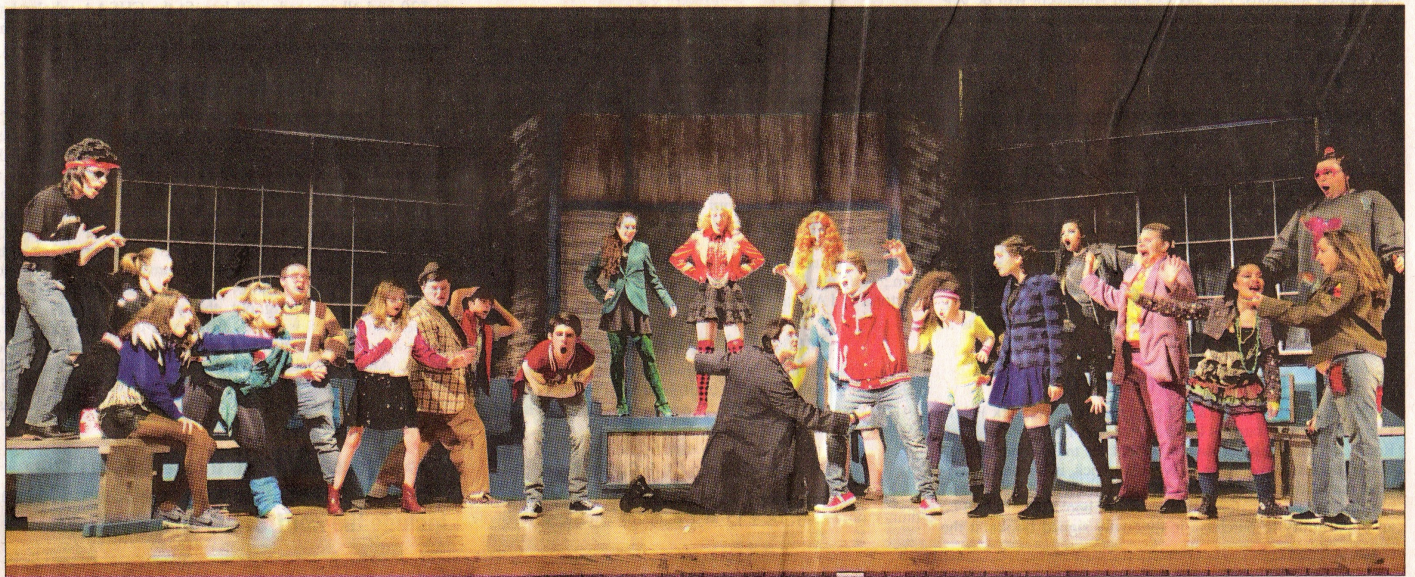


Photo by Kendra Lolio

The cast of Coventry High School's "Heathers: The Musical" (High School Edition), which debuted for the first time in Rhode Island on Thursday night, and is playing Friday and Saturday evening.

Coventry debuts high school edition of 'Heathers'

Drama students at CHS take on bullying, suicide and guns in musical based on 80s cult-classic

By KENDRA LOLIO
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COVENTRY — Teen suicide and bullying are just some of the topics addressed in the Coventry High School Drama Department's production of "Heathers: The Musical," which opened Dec. 7. The high school edition of the show is being performed for the first time in Rhode Island by high school stu-

dents.

The production is based on the 1988 film and dark comedy "Heathers," starring Winona Ryder and Christian Slater, which follows three teenage girls at Westerberg High School in Ohio, all of whom are named Heather and all of whom are part of a feared clique at the school.

The show deals with suicide, bullying, murder, guns and homo-

phobia, in-depth topics and subject matter that, although relevant to high schoolers, is dark, thought-provoking and quite mature.

Director Mychael Wilkinson is known for selecting edgy pieces that push the limits and this production is no exception, but "Heathers" came primarily at the request of the students. He said the high school edition of the play

was released earlier this year, a toned down version in terms of language and material but still very dark. It was created by Kevin Murphy and Laurence O'Keefe and based on the film written by Daniel Waters. The show is produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

"This is what they all wanted to do and I agreed," said Wilkinson. "I hid it from them for two months

and announced it at our annual cookout. You could hear them through three counties screaming."

Main character Veronica Sawyer is played by Lauren Kennelly, who says the show presents obvious stereotypes that are still present in schools today.

"There's also vulnerability in that you see the characters come into themselves," she said.

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Photo by Kendra Lolio

"Heathers: The Musical" (High School Edition) is playing at Coventry High School Friday and Saturday night at 7:30 p.m.

Heathers

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Hannah Lanoue takes on the role of Heather McNamara, Elisabeth Shortall is Heather Duke and Allison Vanasse plays Heather Chandler.

"It's so awesome to be doing this show because it's been my favorite musical since I was in the 8th grade and I've always dreamed about doing this," Lanoue said. "For it to finally become a reality and to be able to do it in high school because it's so risqué is just amazing."

For Shortall, a senior, this will be her last show at CHS.

"This is my favorite musical," she said. "To be doing my favorite musical as my last one is the best way to leave. It's so fun to play these different stereotypes and it's not every day you get to be a mean girl."

The role of Jason Dean (JD), Veronica's sociopathic love interest, is handled by Marcus Evans.

"I have never played an antagonist in a show before, and especially with the level of depth that this character goes into," Evans said, adding that the show touches on themes that have been in the news lately, like school shootings and gun violence. Although it is based in the 80s the themes seem to transcend time.

"To play this character — to truly dive into the mind of the distributed — gives you such a perspective on how many kids manifest these types of angers," he said. "When I leave this show I have friends who have experienced hardships in their lives that can make them spark up like that, and to really recognize that in daily life it could save a lot of people from doing bad things."

"It pushes a lot of the boundaries for what a school is capable of doing," said Casey Dabreo, a member of the ensemble. "The regular play is heavily inappropriate and even though we have the high school adaptation, we're pushing a lot of limits and that's what drama is — pushing limits to see how far you can go despite your restrictions."

Jeanne Evans plays one of

the adults in the cast, Ms. Fleming, or Veronica's mother.

"The authors make a point that the adults are so disconnected to being part of the solution," she said. "They're self absorbed and they have their own agendas and it's up to the kids to make their way and rely on one another."

Other 'adults' in the cast include Kyle Pendola and Jason Gomes.

"We're trying to send out an anti bullying message," said Ray Thibeault, part of the ensemble. "The three main characters are these ultra-bullies but what we're trying to send across is it's okay to be different."

"This is very different from other plays that other schools are doing," according to Aidan Lamont, who plays Ram Sweeney. "Kids can connect with it a lot and I think that's very important, but it connects more kids to musical theater with a lesson along the way."

"I love that it's not the normal high school play or musical you typically see," said Delaney Ryan. "It's not average — it's extraordinary and I love that about it. It's not something people are used to seeing."

This is the first production for Sarah Molinares at the high school, a member of the ensemble. She said she is proud to be able to work with Wilkinson, who is known for his work with Broadway pro-

ductions.

"He lets us go outside the box and do more than what people would expect," said Molinares. "He has higher expectations of us."

According to Kyle Dante, stage manager alongside Caleb Robitaille, the show is large not only in its cast and set but also in terms of lighting and sound.

"It's taken a long time to put everything together — the singing, putting the lights together, there's a lot happening in production and I've been proud of all the work the actors have done, too," Dante said.

Assistant Stage Manager Remy Thibeault, working with Amanda Carr, said the show is similar in style to "Rent" and other rock musicals.

"The tempo is high and you'll surely be energized," said Thibeault.

"You will never look away from this play. It keeps you," said Joseph Rollan. "You are just into it the

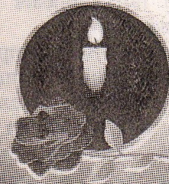
whole time and it's going to bring out such a great message. It's just a fantastic play and, honestly, I'm so disappointed we only get to do it three times because it is that good."

Other members of the ensemble include Thie Bui, Jessica Gannon, Morgan Carr, Tyler Keener, Keith Moors, Alexis Cole, Anthony Lautieri, Emma St. Martin, Audrey Fuest and Julee Mohr. Alaina Furtado plays Martha Dunnstock and Jacob Card plays Kurt Kelly. Kristen St. Saveur oversaw musical direction and sound design and Mikayla Branning and Jessica Nietupski designed the choreography. Hannah Booth headed the lighting and costumes were organized by John Palmer.

"Heathers: The Musical" (High School Edition) opened Thursday, Dec. 7 and is playing Dec. 8 and 9 at 7:30 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$15 at the door.

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