



NEWS RELEASE

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Media Contact

Jeremy van Meter
507-467-2905 x211 or
marketing@commonwealththeatre.org

Box Office

800-657-7025 or
www.commonwealththeatre.org

COMMONWEAL THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS *THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE*

LANESBORO, MN — It's a wildly funny musical romp and it's coming to the Commonweal Theatre in historic Lanesboro May 4th through September 24th. *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* is a Tony Award-Winning musical that follows the lives of six quirky sixth-graders as they battle their way to the coveted title of Putnam County spelling champ. Told through hilarious and touching tunes, each new word reveals the passions, fears and dreams of each combatant. Call the box office at 800-657-7025 or visit www.CommonwealTheatre.org for exact performance dates and times.

The production is the second in a lineup of five productions marking the Commonweal's 30th season of providing professional, live theatre to the region. Further marking the occasion is the return of Alan Bailey to the director's chair at the Commonweal. Bailey directed the immensely popular *Sylvia* in 2011

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and, most recently, the Florence Foster Jenkins bio-musical *Souvenir* in 2016. Joining Bailey as music director for the piece is Commonweal resident ensemble member and star of *Souvenir*, Stela Burdt. “I was a five-time champion on *Jeopardy!*,” says Bailey, “and just getting on the show was a lifelong dream. I use that experience to remind myself and the cast that this hilarious musical that we’re having so much fun with also has real emotional underpinnings; we’re talking about dreams and goals here. And in order for you to win,” he states, “others have to lose. We laugh in rehearsals at how cutthroat some of these characters can be, but I can definitely relate to how big the stakes feel.”

One of many crowd-pleasing elements of the piece is the fact that each of the sixth-graders is portrayed by adult actors. Among the Commonweal professional resident ensemble those are Lizzy Andretta, Abbie Cathcart, Elizabeth Dunn, Philip Muehe, Brandt Roberts and 2018-19 apprentice class member Brandon Cayetano. “To me,” states director Alan Bailey, “the most fun people to be around are kids from about the fourth grade to the sixth grade. They’re still at an age where they love to talk, they’re interested in everything, and they’ve got a great sense of humor. It’s really been fun in rehearsals to tap into those years with grown-up actors. We all get to revisit an unfiltered version of ourselves.” The adult characters in the play are filled by Minneapolis based actress Betti Battocletti, and Commonweal ensemble members Hal Cropp and Eric Lee. Ms. Battocletti returns to the Lanesboro company having portrayed Clairee Belcher in last season’s *Steel Magnolias*.

Stage Manager Bailey Otto and Production Manager Thomas White lead the production team consisting of designers Stephanie Mueller (costumes), Kelsey Heathcote (sound) and Megan K. Pence (props). Mr. White will also be designing the lights and set for the piece.

All performances are at the Commonweal Theatre, 208 Parkway Avenue North, in downtown Lanesboro. Ticket prices are \$35 with discounts available for students, seniors, “under 30” patrons and groups of ten or more. Employees and residents of Fillmore and Houston Counties are offered free admission to the County Free Night preview performance on Thursday, May 10th. For ticket reservations or information about any Commonweal event or program, call 800-657-7025. To purchase tickets online, visit www.CommonwealTheatre.org.

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