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RIVER'S EDGE THEATRE PRESENTS *NEWSIES*

Staff Reporter Stephanie Obadia

Over the years, **Ms. Nicole Roberge**, the creative director of River's Edge Theatre, and her Musical Theatre class have performed many musicals. Awesome performances, such as 'Rent' in 2018 and 'Rock of Ages' in 2017, have entertained the Riverside Community. Coming up with which musical to do, however, is sometimes difficult.

"This year, for the first time we got the students to help pick our musical, I put the word out in late May for a selection committee. I had four different shows in mind and after getting 17 students to research the pros and cons of each, the students vote was Newsies," said Roberge. "I'm very glad they chose it because I was looking for a great ensemble piece, with lots of dancing and movement, and Newsies is perfect!"



Roberge and **Ms. Glenda Ottens** (Riverside's music teacher and Roberge's teaching partner) are working very hard to make the musical a shining success. With Roberge taking a leave of absence starting late January to late June, to renew her artistic output, Ottens and a teacher-on-call will take on the large responsibilities of opening Newsies at River's Edge Theatre in late February. Roberge says she is very excited to work on Newsies alongside Ottens until the second semester starts. "I'm very impressed with the cast so far because they are very strong and committed, but one of the toughest challenges I'm currently facing is taking my leave of absence. But I will have everything completed, including choreography, costumes, design and building in order for the cast to put on the best show possible," said Roberge.

Newsies is made up of two diverse casts with only a few actors double cast. All the leads are performed by grade 12's. Jack Kelly, a struggling newspaper hawker in New York City will be played by **Javid Nouripour** and **Logan Willis**. **Kirsten Clark** and **Brielle Chan** will share the role of Katherine Plumber, an interning journalist looking for her big break. As for the role of Crutchie, a dedicated newsie with a 'bum leg', it will be shared by **Jeffrey Luong** and **Sloane Schultz**. "Casting is one of the hardest parts of our job because not everyone will be happy. Ms. Ottens and I cast based on skill level, commitment level, experience, look, grade level, and much more," said Roberge. "We are not casting based on if we 'like them' or not; we love and care for all of our students equally."

All of Newsies cast and crew are working very hard and are thrilled to be bringing this musical about the 'triumph of the little guy' to the stage February 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, and March 1 for the final show.

NEWSIES: A HISTORY

Staff Reporter Hannah Marais

The musical Newsies is based on the 1992 film with the same name, starring Christian Bale (at the beginning of his career) and Robert Duvall. *Newsies* is a bit of an anomaly; most of the time, the movie follows the musical to make the story more accessible to audiences who do not live in New York City. However, the Tony Award-winning musical released its movie version first, and while it is now hailed as a modern classic, it had a rough start.



The original idea for *Newsies* was inspired by a review of David Nasaw's *Children of the City*, in which the reviewer mentioned that Nasaw had unearthed a movie-worthy story in the Newsboys Strike of 1899, an idea that screenwriter Bob Tzudiker immediately jumped on. Over the course of the next few years, Tzudiker and his writing partner Noni White developed the idea and eventually presented the idea to Finnell/Dante Productions. The film did not become a musical until the mid-1990s when Finnell/Dante Productions presented the idea to Disney. Inspired by the success of their animated musicals, the company decided that 'Newsies' would be the perfect project to become a live-action movie musical.

While hopes were high for the release, the debut of the movie in 1992 was not the success that everyone had expected. In fact, it only grossed \$2.8 million at the box office. However, the movie began to gain popularity through its release on VHS and by the early 2000's, Disney began to consider the possibility of transforming the film into stage musical. The original writers began to rework the movie script, translating it to the stage. As with any adaptation, several changes had to be made. These changes involved mostly fleshing out the characters and adding several new songs to the score.

The stage production had its debut at the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey and was an immediate hit, resulting in the producers extending its four-week run. In fact, the production was such a success that a 12-week run at the Nederlander Theater on Broadway, beginning in 2012. The two weeks quickly became two and a half years, which then became an extended two-year tour of the United States.

The Broadway production was nominated for eight Tony Awards and won two: Best Original Score and Best Choreography. And now Riverside can enjoy it here at River's Edge theater.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED: THE NEWSBOY STRIKE OF 1899

Staff Reporter Sara Parker

The musical *Newsies* is based on a true story. It is a tale of overcoming adversity and the power of friendship, and it has absolutely nothing to do with Christian Bale. Instead, it is about a group of young people who accomplish the impossible: forcing rich white men to compromise.

Due to paper sales skyrocketing because of the Spanish-American War, news kingpins Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst elected to make an even more enormous profit. At the time, the main method of selling evening papers was through newspaper hawkers, or "newsies", who would buy the papers in bulk and sell them on busy street corners in the afternoons. These packages, containing 100 newspapers, could be bought for 50 cents, and each paper would sell for a cent a piece, resulting in a meagre profit of a half a cent. However, gaining 50 cents meant the world for the newsies: many were orphans with no other source of income, and even more came from poor immigrant families. Newsies were young (few were over the age of 20 and it was not uncommon to see a ten-year-old on the corner shouting "Extra! Extra!") and unqualified for any other employment, so when Pulitzer and Hearst announced that the cost of newspaper packages would rise to 60 cents a piece, the news hawkers exploded in rage. On July 18, 1899, newsies in Long Island declared a strike against The New York World and The New York Journal (papers owned by

Pulitzer and Hearst) until the price of papers was reduced to their original price. Newsies in Brooklyn and Manhattan quickly followed suit, and suddenly boys across New York were refusing to sell newspapers and assaulting those who did.

On July 24, the Newsboy Strike Committee held a rally. Almost 8000 boys attended to listen to speeches from local businessmen, politicians, and their own leaders, such as union president David Simmons, Brooklyn union leader Ed "Racetrack" Higgins, and the face of the newsboy strike, Louis "Kid Blink" Baletti, who won a floral horseshoe for the best speech. Newspapers unassociated with *World* and the *Journal* later reported that the young union leaders undoubtedly wield a considerable amount of power over the other newsboys, and one reporter from the *New York Times* event went as far as to remark that Higgins was "a born leader of boys and may yet be of men."

Following the rally, the strikers' tactics became non-violent. They no longer had to beat up the grown men who the *World* and the *Journal* had hired to sell newspapers, or turn over distribution wagons, or even burn newspapers because the public had ceased to buy them. The people were on the side of the newsies, and Pulitzer suffered greatly: circulation of the *World* dropped by 70%, a fact that probably encouraged him and Hearst

to concede to the newsboy's union. On August 2, a deal was struck between the papers and the boys: a package of newspapers would remain at 60 cents, but the distributors would buy back any unsold papers, preventing the newsies from losing money.

The Newsboy Strike of 1899 had worked, but more importantly, it made waves throughout the country. Newsboy strikes popped up all over the country, and the publicization of the living conditions of the boys probably influenced the establishment of child welfare laws in North America. Worker's revolutions were uncommon but not unheard of, and it was inconceivable that one led by children would ever succeed - but it did, and it now serves as one of the earliest examples of the power of youth. Young people have an extraordinary power to influence the future, and the success of the newsies strike is a testament to this power. It was young people who forced some of the richest men in the country to re-evaluate their business practices, who inspired a wave of advocacy for child labour laws, who set a precedent to youth all over the country that they could effect change if they worked hard enough. The young people won in 1899, and they have continued to do so almost 120 years later. The newsies should be an example to us teenagers who are angry about so much: we are capable of incredible things, and if we apply our passion to action, we may just shape history - and maybe even get a musical written about us.



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