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SUMMER AT THE STATE RETURNS FRIDAY

Uniontown, PA – Fayette County’s historic State Theatre kicks off its annual Summer at the State lineup this weekend.

Now in its sixth season, Summer at the State was founded by director/choreographer John Wagner III with a goal of creating a professional, musical theatre experience for local participants and audiences.

Producer and stage manager Kristen Tunney said final rehearsals and finishing touches are currently underway for both “Newsies” and “Mamma Mia!”

“This our third year doing two shows and I always really look forward to the audiences coming and enjoying what we’ve put together,” Tunney said. “This is the first year the rights to both shows have been made available, so they’re both very popular titles right now in the theatre community.”

Newsies will be staged July 12 to 14, with Mamma Mia! to follow July 26 to 28. Tickets are \$15 per show for adults, and \$10 for children 12 and younger.

Each show will feature 7:30 p.m. performances Friday and Saturday, with a Sunday matinee at 2 p.m.

Based on Disney’s 1992 musical film of the same name, Newsies tells the true story of New York City’s newsboys strike of 1899. With music by regular Disney collaborator Alan Menken, lyrics by Jack Feldman and a book by Broadway legend Harvey Fierstein, the original show won two of the eight Tony Awards for which it was nominated in 2012.

Tunney said the more than 35 local performers in Newsies’ extremely talented cast will amaze audiences this weekend.

“Not only is it a really interesting, true story, but it’s also a fun, family-friendly, uplifting show with some really big dance numbers,” she said.

Written by Catherine Johnson, Mamma Mia! is a jukebox musical based entirely on the songs of world-renowned, 1970s Swedish pop group ABBA. The show has grossed over \$2 billion since debuting on Broadway in 1999, and spawned multiple, long-running international productions, as well as a film adaptation starring Meryl Streep.

“For Mamma Mia!, we have a slightly smaller cast of about 30 people,” Tunney said. “Those that are familiar with the show know it’s a lot of ABBA music, which is pretty fun. It will really make for a great night out for adults and older kids.”

Preparations for each Summer at the State production includes casting of mostly-local talent, and about six weeks of rehearsals for both the cast and live orchestra. Some cast members appear in both shows, and professional lighting and sound teams enhance the musicals' Broadway production quality.

"We're really invested in our community and always want to provide opportunities for local talent to shine, so our casts are almost entirely made up of people from the local talent pool," Tunney said. "There are so many performers from Fayette County that are tremendously talented and deserve to be showcased."

In addition to Wagner and Tunney, this season's team includes scenic designer/tech director Zach Calloway; Newsies director Michael Rozell; and Mamma Mia! director Joe Andria.

Tunney said she and Wagner have "very high expectations" for their cast and crew members, as both have professional theatre backgrounds.

"I live in New York City most of the year, so I love coming back to PA, working on these shows with some of the people who have been with us for several years and meeting our new cast members," Tunney said. "It's both the support of our community and the amount that we're able to invest in our production value that really sets us apart and allows us to achieve things that aren't always possible in community theatre.

Summer at the State is primarily funded through grants and generous donations from Fayette County businesses and organizations. Additionally, all proceeds from both shows directly benefit future State Theatre productions.

While this season's musicals are "two very different shows," Tunney said both will make for "a great night out" and encouraged theatre-goers to consider seeing both.

"It's always such craziness trying to get these shows up and running in such a short time, but it's really exciting when it all finally comes together," she said.

For more information on Summer at the State and other State Theatre programming, visit www.statetheatre.info or call 724-439-1360.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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