**Student DRAMATALE AS OLD AS TIMEColony Middle School to perform Beauty and the Beast starting Friday**

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**Photo courtesy Rachael Maher**

**'Beauty and the Beast'**

Jasmine Stevens and Kobe Kramer rehearse their parts as Belle and the Beast in Colony Middle School's upcoming production of Disney's Beauty and the Beast.

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PALMER — Colony Middle School students already know the beauty and the beast of being an actor or actress.

They’ve recognized the difficulty of memorizing a lot of lines. They know learning to dance isn’t easy. They know three costume changes for one character in one play requires speed and rapt attention to others’ lines. Now, they’re ready.

Beginning at 7 p.m. Friday, more than 50 of Toby Lambert’s music students — and a handful of Finger Lake Elementary students — will perform in Colony’s production of “Beauty and the Beast.”

“This is the second-largest show we’ve ever done,” Lambert said.

The school’s production of “The Little Mermaid” two years ago was their biggest show in terms of numbers, he said, but the Beast has taken just as much time and effort to prepare. Lambert said he started working on costumes, choreography, blocking and scripts with dance choreographer Emma German, costume designer Claire German, and Finger Lake director Kelly Rentz at the end of last school year.

All these aspects were essentially finished when auditions rolled around, and the selected students started rehearsing the first day of school.

“We’ve been working really hard, and Mr. Lambert has worked his butt off,” said eighth-grade student Jasmine Stevens. “I think he really believes in us.”

Stevens played Ariel’s sister Arista in The Little Mermaid as a sixth-grader, participated in Roger and Hammerstein’s Cinderella as a crew member painting sets last year, and she plays Belle in the upcoming show.

“With her it was really obvious,” Lambert said, of casting Stevens as Belle. “She’s a good singer, she’s done some good acting, especially in Little Mermaid.”

“She kind of already has the characteristics of Belle,” he said. “She likes to read books, (and she’s) soft-spoken with an edge, which you kinda need for Belle.”

Despite Lambert’s confidence in her, Stevens said she remains surprised by his choice.

“I don’t know why I got a big part,” she said. “I have two left feet. If Mr. Lambert looks away, I fall.”

Stevens said she’s “very clumsy” and not really “a dress person,” but seems to be a perfect Belle — after dying her hair reddish brown from natural blonde, at Lambert’s request — based on her relationship with the Beast.

“Love-hate” was the term he used to describe it.

“The first time I meet her I get all mad ’cause she’s in my castle,” said seventh-grade student Kobe Kramer, who plays Prince Adam/the Beast. “I don’t like people who trespass in my castle.”

Kramer said he and Stevens live near each other in real life, and have ridden the same bus to school for a number of years. He also played the herald in Cinderella and a fish in Little Mermaid, as a fifth-grader, so they’ve been in a few shows together.

The two would probably be best described as brother and sister rather than anything else, given Kramer’s favorite part of playing the Beast: dragging Belle around.

“I love yelling at her,” he said.

But Kramer is serious about his acting career. He’s already been in six other plays, one of which — At the Bandstand — occurred during a summer camp hosted by Valley Performing Arts this year. Although he said he still has trouble remembering his lines and staying in character sometimes, he hopes to continue his career in musical theater, first with Colony High’s upcoming production of Shrek, which is open to middle school students wanting to audition, and eventually on Broadway.

“I’m always sticking with beast characters now,” he said.

Stevens doesn’t plan to take her acting quite as far, though she does have artistic aspirations. She’s been in choir since second grade, she said, and she enjoys making friends onstage, but theater and music come second to drawing.

“I wouldn’t call it my first love,” she said, of acting. “I love art more.”

If not a cartoonist, Stevens said her second career choice would be as a voice actor.

“As much as I like being onstage, I really like using my voice for the acting,” she said.

But Kramer is not alone in dreaming of becoming a Broadway star. Alexis Mattson, who plays Madame de la Grande Bouche in Beauty and the Beast, shares that dream.

“I actually kinda want to be in a Broadway show,” she said. “I have big dreams of being a singer like Ariana Grande.”

Mattson prides herself on being able to sing the soprano notes in the show as an alto, which she said probably helped her secure the role.

“My mom said Mr. Lambert knows what my voice can handle,” she said. “I can last really long with my voice.”

Then there’s seventh-grader Katelynn Rogers, who plays the Aristocratic Lady and wants to eventually be a music major at the University of Alaska Anchorage, and eighth-grader Elissa Sandstrom, who plays Silly Girl No. 2 and wants to become “really good at playing violin.” Eighth-grader Annalise Byrd — Silly Girl No. 1 — wants to be a singer, and sixth-grader Victoria Wensell — Silly Girl No. 4 — wants to follow in her aunt’s footsteps and go to the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, though she’s not sure she’ll go for theatre. Seventh-grader Madison Salinas said she just wants to continue to be in plays through high school, a motivation to keep her grades up.

Lambert also complimented Cannon Fidler — Lumiere — on his energy; Steven Sutcliffe — Gaston — for his feigned arrogance and snobbishness; Isaac Cooley — Lefou — for his goofiness that fits his role “perfectly”; and Grace Eldridge — Mrs. Potts — for her practiced English accent.

“All our cast (members) have qualities in them that really have shone out,” Lambert said. “It’s kind of amazing how far they have come, especially in the last three weeks.”

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