



taking the stage

The Children's Theatre of Mason celebrates five years of showcasing talent and entertaining the community

BY JEANETTE MCCLELLAN

We all know children have vivid imaginations, but the staff at the Children's Theatre of Mason harnesses that creative power to make something special.

Celebrating five years in March, CTM has nourished teens' thespian dreams, given kids a place to let out energy, and provided Mason with many great productions such as *Holes*, *OLIVER!*, *The Music Man Jr.* and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*.

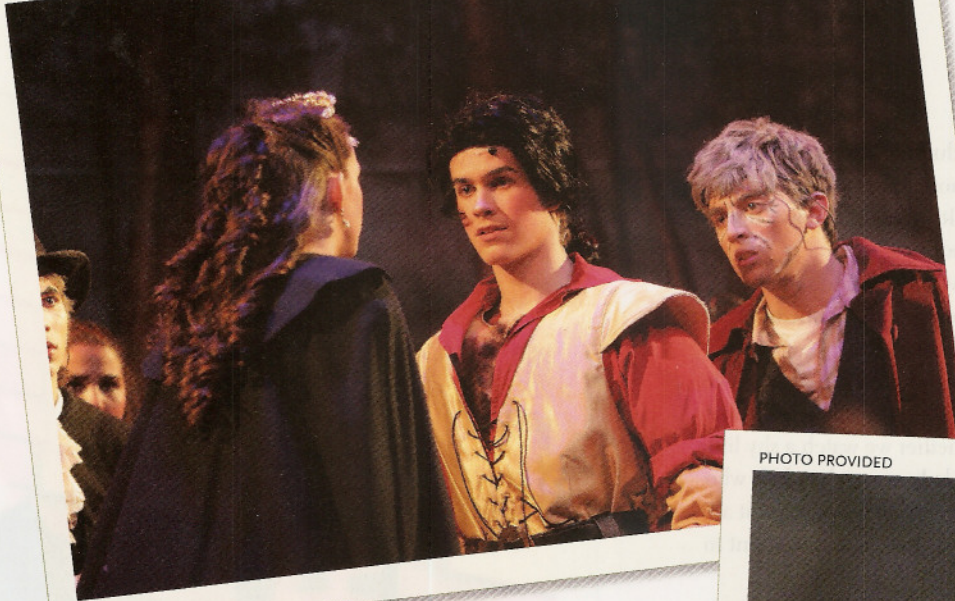
With the first few years behind them, it's time for the staff of Children's Theatre to take a bow and relish the limelight while Mason residents have a chance to see even more great shows.

"We hoped but never thought we'd get this far," says Clare Dowrey, managing director of the Theatre. "We love bringing family-friendly theater to Mason and the surrounding areas as well as theater education through classes, workshops and summer camps."

From taking on-stage roles to playing a part behind the scenes, kids are the driving force behind the Children's Theatre. With two fully-staged productions each year that typically feature between 50 and 75 children in addition to workshop performances and other events, there are plenty of opportunities for all to get involved or enjoy the shows.

"We have been fortunate to work with more than 500 area

PHOTO PROVIDED



YOURCOMMUNITY

The Children's Theatre of Mason's recent production of *Disney's Beauty and the Beast* featured **Charity Farrell** as Belle and **Noah Grubb** as Gaston.

children on the 12 large-scale productions we have produced during the past five years," says Rick Montgomery, vice president of CTM's board of directors. "Auditions are always exciting because we look forward to seeing who will walk through the door. We have a large group of talented children who come back again and again, and that reassures us we are doing something right."

He adds that new faces are also encouraging because "it proves that more and more families are learning about our organization and wanting to become involved in the performing arts."

Because the Children's Theatre is based in Mason, it's bringing performance arts close to home for many who otherwise may have to go downtown to see live shows. This is great for parents who want to introduce their children to the arts and for those whose children want to play a hands-on role—without having to go far.

Indeed, the impetus behind the founding of CTM was the lack of a children's theater group in the area. "One of the moms who helped start the Children's Theatre moved here from Arkansas where they had a great children's theater," says Clare. "She and I met while our kids were in another production and decided to do something about it. We all began together when our kids were in the first production but our kids are growing up and we're still doing it. We're committed to continuing this and making it something permanent here. Everything is all about the kids. We're a non-profit so everything we make goes back into productions and workshops and to continually improve."

This dedication is evident in the results. "When children are involved with us, it really builds their self confidence, especially comfort performing or speaking in public," says Clare. "The friendships they build with one another are also amazing. They work so hard for the months it takes to mount a show, spending hours together and developing great friendships with students >>

PHOTO PROVIDED



Zac Coleman starred as Oliver in CTM's 2006 production.

YOURCOMMUNITY

in their own school and others, including Lakota, Kings, Mason, Mars Hills Academy and more. They just want to continue hanging around together. It's great to see over the years how they have kept those friendships."

Laura Telford, president of CTM's board of directors, says she agrees that watching children develop is one of the pleasures of working with the organization.

"One of the benefits to volunteering with CTM is being able to witness firsthand the impact we have on children who take part in our programs," she says. "Whether we watch a shy little girl blossom into a confident young lady or watch as kids who might never have met one another cultivate friendships, it all inspires us to continue dedicating our time and our talent to helping CTM grow."

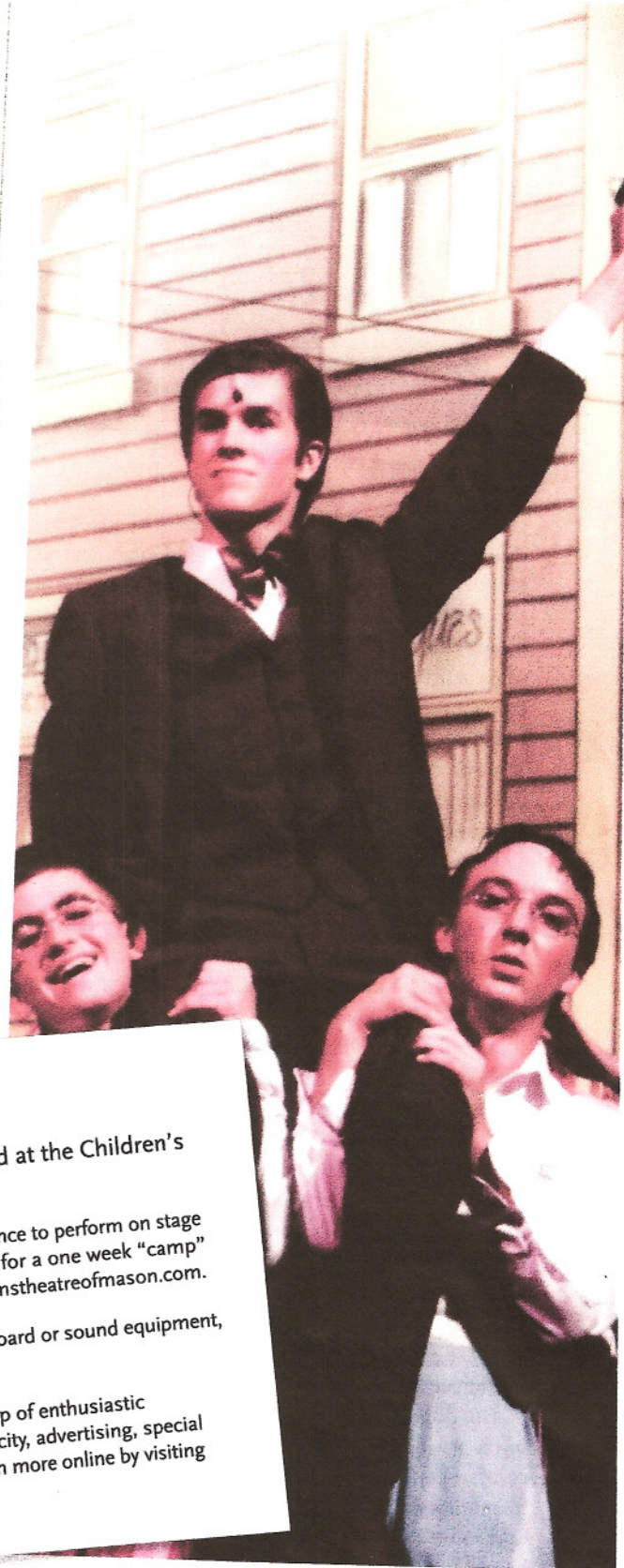
If you'd like to get your children involved, try taking them to a show or to an audition. You can find information at the CTM Web site about both. "In addition to our two fully staged productions," says Clare, "we have two performance workshops with the Missoula Children's Theatre. They do a one-week residency and take up to 60 children. Unlike the other shows, the kids pay to participate, but it's a great way to have the experience in a short amount of time and all the children get a part. We audition on the Monday prior to shows and rehearse the rest of the week. Then, there are two shows on Saturday."

If you'd rather just be in the audience, the perfect chance is coming up.

"In honor of our five-year anniversary, we are bringing our premiere production, *Twelve Dancing Princesses*, back to the stage in March," says Laura. "We are excited about all of the plans we have to make the show even bigger and better than it was the first time around, including more elaborate sets and costumes, and a live jazz band to accompany the performers. This will definitely be a production to remember."

Noah Grubb also starred in the *Music Man Jr.* as Harold Hill.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY MECHANICALBUGPHOTO.COM



play a part

For children and adults alike, there's always a way to get involved at the Children's Theatre of Mason. Here are a few ways:

- Is your child a budding star? Have her attend auditions at CTM for the chance to perform on stage or sign him up for an upcoming Missoula workshop that involves kids for a one week "camp" culminating in two performances. Information available online at childrenstheatreofmason.com.
- Behind the scenes, kids can help build and paint sets, operate the light board or sound equipment, become a makeup artist and more.
- There are plenty of ways for adults to volunteer. The Applauders, a group of enthusiastic volunteers who help CTM year-round is a great place to help with publicity, advertising, special events, concessions during shows and production-related activities. Learn more online by visiting childrenstheatreofmason.com.