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Last weekend for Encore's 'Hairspray'

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It's a great weekend anywhere when a large group of dedicated, stubborn and seemingly tireless volunteers put their talents and efforts together to make theater happen.

This weekend, Morristown gets to enjoy the fruits of months of labor invested by more than 140 volunteers with the Encore Theatrical Company as "Hairspray" rounds out its threeweek run.

The cast of characters, the production team and the "Hairspray" band will give four more performances of the comedy musical that enticed Dr. Dennis Elkins back to the Morristown stage for his dream role as Edna Turnblad.

Elkins brings with him a talent honed on stages that include the Clarence Brown Company, the Colorado Shakespeare Festival, the Utah Shakespearean Festival and the Single Carrot Theatre in Baltimore. Elkins has also directed a number of productions and performed one-man shows, in addition to currently serving as professor of the Practice of Humanities and Theatre with Milligan College. He holds a PhD in theatre from the University of Colorado, an MA from the University of Tennessee and a BA from Milligan.

From Elkins on down the cast list, the talent remains endless.

Taking the lead as Edna's daughter, Tracy, during three of this weekend's performances is Courtney Fix. Faith Rader will play the role during the Saturday matinee.

Thomas Cook debuts on the Encore stage as Tracy's heartthrob, Link Larkin. Encore veteran Lindsey Decker shows off her comedic bent with her performance as Penny Pingleton, and Paige Monroe-Mattocks play her mother, Prudy, with worrisome finesse.

Chad Brooks and Randall Nored debut in the shared role of Seaweed J. Stubbs (Nored will perform in Saturday's matinee), and Drew Ogle takes over the role of the suave Corny Collins for the remaining shows. Ogle will have to compete with Yolanda Treece for stage presence, however, as she amps up the performance level in her interpretation of Motormouth Maybelle.

Nancy Duckles and Kaysi Knight are a pretty blond pair with their performances as narcissistic mother and daughter, Velma and Amber Von Tussle. More comedic gold is mined with Sharon McGinley and Matthew Mimbs, who play dual roles.

Talent, however infused into the bloodstreams of performers, must always be maintained. To keep their performances fresh, many of the young show stoppers gave up late night summer fun for more dance rehearsals and enough sleep to make the matinee shows pop.

Their sacrifice paid off with teamwork exemplified by the Dynamites, featuring stage favorite Jessica Eckenrod, along with Ashley Barger and Chelsea Swain, both making impressive Encore debuts.

Encore prides itself in fostering new talent, and director Micah-Shane Brewer raised the bar with Lincoln Heights Middle Schooler N'asia Bewley. She plays her character, Little Inez, with sly sweetness, then tops it off with pristine vocals.

Musical director Amanda Campbell and choreographer/assistant director Stephanie Barnes teamed up to provide the local audiences with plenty of great musical numbers for both the main characters and members of the two ensembles, including the impressive "waltz" between Elkins and Mike Johnson, who plays Wilbur Turnblad.

A limited number of tickets are still available for this week end's shows which are: Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2. Tickets are available by calling 423-318-8331. All shows will be held in the Humanities building on the Morristown campus of Walters State Community College.

Once inside the theater, while thumbing through the playbill, pay close attention to page 8. The companies and individuals listed are also what community theater is made of.

Without their financial investment and support of local talent, Encore could not continue to raise the bar.

Drew Ogle, center, takes over the role of Corny Collins for the remaining four performances of Encore's "Hairspray" on the Morristown campus of Walters State Community College which will show at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. For tickets, call 423-318-8331.

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