

# Review: OCT's 'Mary Poppins' flies high

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In every great Broadway musical, there is an unforgettable moment when the audience is enraptured by a performance of such virtuosity that it takes on a life of its own. Such a performance is known as a "show-stopper" — the show literally comes to a momentary halt while the audience enthusiastically applauds the outstanding effort that transcends the show itself.

In the Olean Community Theatre (OCT) production of "Mary Poppins: The Musical," there are actually two of these happenings, both involving large ensemble musical numbers. The first revolves around that famous Mary Poppins word (and song), "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious," as the ridiculously bulky word becomes a, smart finger-snapping tune in a brilliantly choreographed number by OCT's Laurie Donner. Act 2 features an even more creative number featuring a group of chimney sweeps singing and dancing to "Step in Time." Both are destined to produce a chorus of "Wows!"

The excitement of these large ensemble numbers in no way detracts from the quality of individual performances. Just as new nanny Mary Poppins proclaims herself "Practically Perfect" when she meets

the Banks children, Tanaka VanDruff easily meets that standard in the title role. Her singing, acting, dancing and flying are all exquisite. Clay Nolan is especially impressive in dancing sequences in his role of Bert, the chimney sweep and Mary's sidekick.

David Campbell is properly stuffy as the banker George Banks, and Janet Nolan very ably plays his wife, who sheds her mousy passive role to become feisty as the show progresses. The Banks children, Jane and Michael, as portrayed by Olivia Emley and Andrew Sherburne, are suitably bratty and sweet, insufferable and lovable, as the situation demands. Both handle a large number of lines and lyrics with the poise of seasoned performers.

The Banks family servants, Mrs. Brill and Robertson AY (Kyle Leslie and Tim Hollamby), infuse the household with some lighter moments, and Sharon Myers is downright scary, promising "Brimstone and Treacle" to the children as Miss Andrew, the gruff and astringent nanny. Skyler Schapp makes a great statue in the park, both on and off his pedestal.

Director William J. Steffen has not only assembled a distinguished cast for this light-hearted production, but has also put together a creditable production staff. "Mary Poppins" is a complex show, involving numerous

set changes, lighting effects, period costumes, and, of course, the flying business.

Deserving special mention, in addition to choreographer Donner, are music director Luke Yerpe, orchestra conductor Ruth Fuller (with a host of musicians) and veteran tech director Ken Roberts.

The interesting and varied costumes are credited to Jennifer Simpson, Charlotte Roberts, William Steffen and several commercial establishments.

The set design, credited to Steffen and Ken Roberts, is functional and effective, consisting of various moving parts. Most impressive are the five large, painted theatrical drops providing the background for both interior and exterior scenes. The flying system, from ZFX Flying Effects, adds an element of fun to the proceedings — when Mary pops open that umbrella, it's just a matter of time until she hits the airwaves.

With all the singing, flying and dancing, there's a lot going on in this play. As the cast explains in the second act, "Anything Can Happen," and it often does.

"Mary Poppins: The Musical" will open at 7:30 p.m. today in the Allegany-Limestone High School auditorium, with additional performances set for 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday as well as 2 p.m. Sunday.