

arts & culture

Spelling Out A Touching Musical At Tierra Del Sol

A few audience members get to spell with the cast of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee."

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Four members of the audience didn't have to spell "audience participation," but they found themselves in the middle of a spelling bee.

As part of the afternoon performance of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" held Thursday at the Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol, friends Marj Becking and Ann Fagan sat in with the cast as contestants in the musical comedy, with music and lyrics by William Finn and a book by Rachel Sheinkin.

On the back of their player number cards were some instructions in case they got lost in the moment, including asking for the definition of their word and how it's used in a sentence.

Kimberly DiPersia found herself as the last audience member standing in the spelling bee. As she correctly spelled a word, she was immediately called back to spell another, which unfortunately she didn't spell correctly.

"It was very fun," said DiPersia, who lives in Orlando. "I didn't want to get the words wrong. You felt the challenge, you felt the suspense."

Her grandfather, Frank Hills, came to the musical with her.

"It was a very good show," said Hills, who lives in Wildwood. "I was really happy (with her time on stage). She's good."

The black box theater turned into a school gymnasium, with a stage set up on one side of the room for the contestants to spell their words. Nearby was a table displaying the large trophy, as well as another table for the two judges, Rona Lisa Perretti (Antoinette Holman-Nebinger) and

Vice Principal Douglas Panch (Mark Kirschenbaum).

The audience sat on either side of the court.

The contestants included Leaf Coneybear (Easton J. Curtis), Olive Ostrovsky (Rachel Hope Ihasz), Chip Tolentino (Joel T. Hunt), Logainne Schwartzandgrubenniere (Solmarie Cruz Martinez, filling in for Kristin Yates), Marcy Park (Anneliese Moon) and William Barfee (Canter O'May).

If the contestants flub up a word, the comfort counselor Mitch (Russell Stephens) hands them a juice



Submitted photos by Ashleigh Ann Gardner

The cast of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" performs a scene from the musical at the Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol. Some members of the audience were brought up to be a part of the spelling bee.



Kristin Yates plays Logainne Schwartzandgrubenniere in Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol's production of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee."

box and gives them a hug. The cast also sings a little goodbye song.

As the spelling bee progresses, the audiences gets glimpses into the contestant's thoughts and motivations for being in the competition, mostly in the form of songs like "I'm Not That Smart," "My Friend, The Dictionary" and "I Speak Six Languages."

The audience learns that Barfee uses his "magic foot" to trace out the letters on the ground, while Leaf

landed a spot in the bee after the previous winners at the local level had to back out.

"It was very dynamic," said Fagan, of the Village of Fernandina. "There were a couple of great harmonies in there."

The musical had a soft spot for Becking, who used to run spelling bees in her working days.

"It's nice to be on the other side (in the audience)," the Sumter Senior Living resident said.

"The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" is

a part of the theater's "Mini Summer Vacation" before the start of its eighth season. You can still catch the musical with performances 2 and 7 p.m. on select dates through Aug. 26. Tickets start at \$45, and are available at any Villages Box Office location or online at thevillagesentertainment.com.

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