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Blossoming stars

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Isabella Castillo (left) and Sarah Lau (right) sing one of the musical numbers in Skyline Studios' production of "The Music Man Jr." on May 30 at the Glenview Park Center. JEREMY TURLEY/22ND CENTURY MEDIA



I & A COVER STORY

River City rock stars

Glenview kids star in 'The Music Man Jr.'

JEREMY TURLEY
Freelance Reporter

Glenview's youngest actors transformed into crafty conmen and stubborn Iowans on May 30 in Skyline Studios' production of Meredith Willson's "The Music Man."

The stage at the Glenview Park Center, 2400 Chestnut Ave., hosted back-to-back performances of the five-time Tony winner. The first production featured novice actors, ages 5-7, while the second starred more experienced performers, ages 7-12.

Both groups performed shortened versions of the Broadway classic with the former lasting approximately 25 minutes and the latter approximately 45 minutes. Though condensed for time, performers sang many of the original's most iconic musical numbers, including "Gary, Indiana" and "76 Trombones."

Sisters Olivia and Emily Stern showcased their acting prowess and versatility in the second performance, starring as mother and daughter. Olivia, 10, who played Mrs. Paroo, and Emily, 12, who played Marian Paroo, are veterans of Skyline's Glenview productions with five plays now under their belts.

"I like showing what you know and what you've learned to an audience," Olivia said. "[Acting] is like a whole different world you're in."

Director Cami Philgreen has put on nine productions with Skyline Studios

throughout the Chicago-land area in her four years with the company. Philgreen said she most enjoys watching the young children, like the Sterns sisters, progress as actors and become more confident in their abilities.

"I've had some of these kids for three years, so I've been able to see them come in with two lines, and now they're in big lead roles," Philgreen said. "It's really cool to see that kind of growth."

The original Broadway production of "The Music Man" tells the story of a con man who attempts to extort money from the townspeople of River City, Iowa, by founding a largely fictitious boys band. Skyline's adaptation for children's theater followed a similar premise and even incorporated many of the most memorable lines from the 1957 hit.

Philgreen believes there is great educational value in encompassing some of the lines and songs from the famous original. She hopes that teaching young actors about highly acclaimed plays gives them a greater understanding of the history of theater.

Adapting to the experience levels of the actors, Philgreen took a decidedly different approach to each of the two performances. The director stood at a lectern to the side of the stage during the juniors performance, often reminding the beginners of their lines. However, during the second show, she disappeared backstage, giving the more seasoned actors a chance to perform free of much direction.

"My goal as a director is just to let them do the show by themselves, and I just sit back and watch," Philgreen said. "I'm really trying to instill a sense of responsibility in them."

Nearly 40 proud parents, siblings and friends attended each performance with bouquets of flowers to give their blossoming stars. As Sarah Lau, who portrayed Professor Harold Hill in the lead role, belted out the final notes of "Til There Was You," the supportive audience erupted in applause.

Erica Zuhr, a teacher at South Elementary School in Glencoe, has co-owned Skyline Studios for 15 years and continues to see children benefit from performing on stage.

"We love the confidence and self-esteem that it brings to students," Zuhr said. "Most of the time, all the kids are on stage together. We have an ensemble-based approach to the show, meaning whether you're a lead character or a smaller role, you'll be on stage for all the songs together. We try to have that so kids feel confident and learn about teamwork."

Skyline partners with the Glenview Park District to put on productions like "The Music Man."

Besides Glenview, Skyline operates programs in Winnetka, Kenilworth, Barrington, Skokie, Wilmette, Highland Park and Northbrook.

The studio will put on an adapted version of the classic American musical "Annie" in September. For more information, go to www.skylinestudioschicago.com.



Actors (from left to right) Penny Chiado, Madelyn McCaughey, Erin Kim and Elaine Jiao play imaginary instruments in Skyline Studios' production of "The Music Man Jr." on May 30 at Park Center. JEREMY TURLEY/22ND CENTURY MEDIA