

# Cottage Theatre's latest is T-O-O funny

BY SAM WRIGHT  
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I didn't expect to be tickled as much as I was while watching "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee." The whimsical frustrations of middle school were delivered accurately and comically by both the younger and older members of the cast, and quite frankly, hit close to home.

The title is as much of a synopsis as you could really search for. The play is about a spelling bee in Putnam County where contestants have previously won other bees and look to win this one as well. The characters' hopes are portrayed through various emotions such as hopeful, desperate and extremely boastful. Executive Director



courtesy photo

(from L to R): Logainne Schwatzandgrubennierre (Madison Baker), Chip Tolentino (Joel Ibanez), William Barfee (Donovan Seitzinger), Leaf Coneybear (Kyle Carrillo-Enders), Olive Ostrovsky (Brittany Dreier), and (on the floor) Marcy Park (Maeve Dahlen).

Susan Goes describes the play as a "hilarious romp through middle school," and I couldn't agree more. Within the play you find pubescent struggles, first crushes and principals driven to alcoholism — it was almost a flashback.

There are five original contestants of the spelling bee, but three more are added from audience members who are unsuspecting and have no idea of the dialogue or choreography of what was to come. When each person's name was called up to spell, announcer Rona Lisa Perretti (played by Tracy Nygard)

would tell a fictional fact about the character's life which always ended comically and uncomfortably for the contestants from the audience.

The top performance was definitely by Ward Fairbairn, who played the cynical and often annoyed Vice Principal Douglas Panch. Panch was the character that would call up the spellers, say the word they had to spell and give a definition or use the word in a sentence should the contestant ask for it. It was those instances that were the main generator of humor. It was Fairbairn's eloquent, pe-

dantic and sarcastic responses to these questions that really put the audience in an uproarious laughter.

However, we cannot forget the performance of Joel Ibanez, who played the character of Chip Tolentino, a typical anxiety-ridden middle school boy who struggles with puberty. His song about his unfortunate erection during the spelling bee was the most outstanding number of the play. Any adult male could understand the plight of Chip Tolentino.

The female characters were not outdone, however. The voices of Madison Baker, Brittany Dreier and Maeve Dahlen truly put the music in the musical. Dreier's character, Olive Ostrovsky, perfectly pinpoints a middle school girl having her first crush on Willame Barfee (Donovan Seitzinger). Seitzinger, too, presents an outstanding standoffish personality (and sinus infection) in "the tough kid" of any middle school.

Overall, the play was an absolute success. While the writing is undeniably a great piece of work, the story is truly brought to life by an extremely enthusiastic and talented group of cast and crewmembers.