

Gibbons spring musical in bloom

Madcap comedy hits the stage April 4-5

By Geoff Mosher
NEWS STAFF WRITER

From disaster comes good fortune.

That's the theme of "Musical! The Bard is Back!" — the Gibbons Middle School theater program's annual spring musical, which is being held April 4-5 at 7:30 p.m. in the school's auditorium.

Written by Stephen Murray, a playwright and composer from Worcester, this madcap musical comedy follows Hilltop High School's crisis-laden attempt to stage a musical version of "Romeo and Juliet."

Hilltop hasn't put on a musical since the disastrous production of Shakespeare's "Scottish Play" 20 years back, and the director, who starred in that musical as a student, believes the school is still cursed. Worse still, she is being pressed into service by a principal eager to please a school committee that is threatening to make cuts to the arts department's budget.

"It's kind of funny given the budget issues facing our schools right now," said Jeanne Harvey, the show's producer.

Much to the director's dismay, everything that can go wrong with the musical does: the set for the balcony scene collapses; Juliet breaks her leg; her replacement develops laryngitis; and the hearing-impaired costume designer picks out cowboy outfits — she thinks the play is called "Rodeo and Lariat."

The mayhem doesn't stop

there. Other characters include a hellish stage mother and a cult-like group of theater techies who sing an ode to duct tape.

"Who knew when we started

the show that duct tape would be so big?" said Harvey.

Harvey is a member of the Westborough Players' Club's Play and Casting Committee. She played Miss Hannigan in

the WPC's production of "Annie" in March of 2001 and performed at the Stageloft Theater in Sturbridge last summer.

About 60 students auditioned for the show's 35-member cast in January. They have been rehearsing for about two months.

"They've been working really hard, and it's all come together well," said director and choreographer Arwen Lowbridge.

"It's a big project. There's a lot more for them to do than a traditional Broadway musical," she said.

A Westborough High School graduate, Lowbridge has a bachelor's in acting from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She has produced and directed her own professional theater in Orlando, and performed professionally in Pennsylvania, New York and Arkansas.

The star of "Annie," seventh-grader Jenna Papaz plays the first Juliet who breaks her leg in "Musical! The Bard is Back!"

"I've never really had a role like this before," Jenna said.

In addition to the cast, there is a 30-member tech team working behind the scenes on lighting, sound, props, sets and makeup.

Spokesperson Jane Papaz, the mother of Jenna, said things have really started to click for the cast and crew now that dress rehearsals are in full swing.

"It's just great to see the excitement up there when they put on their costumes and everything starts to come together for them."



STAFF PHOTO BY MARSHALL WOLFF

Marge, left, played by Amanda Winer, and Mallory, right, played by Emily Krulewitz, sing and dance in Tuesday's play rehearsal.