

Community theater's music man

Andrew Ferrie

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By Caitlyn Bahrenburg

Andrew Ferrie, a proud Point Pleasant Borough High School alum, first graced the stage as a shy 10-year-old in a PPBHS production of "Guys and Dolls," instigating a lifelong passion for music and theater.

He has played a wide array of roles, from Friedrich Von Trapp in "The Sound of Music" to Anatoly in "Chess: The Musical."

But Mr. Ferrie's latest role is far different from any he has taken on to date: directing a production of "Grease" at the Spring Lake Community Theatre.

SMALL TOWN SHOWS

Mr. Ferrie's love of theater was instilled in him as a child when he would accompany his parents to see productions at Point Pleasant Borough High School.

"I would always see all these people up on stage and I always thought it was so fascinating that they could sing, dance and act all at once," Mr. Ferrie recalled.

After his younger sister got involved in theater, he chose to follow suit. Little did he know that this childhood fascination would turn into a lifelong love.



Once Mr. Ferrie reached high school, he jumped at the chance to perform on the same stage as his childhood idols.

"I immediately joined everything I could with the performing arts," he said. "I was in show choir all four years, I was in chorus, marching band."

Freshman year, Mr. Ferrie performed in the ensemble of "Anything Goes," for which he was nominated for his first Paper Mill Playhouse Rising Star Award.

"[It] was so cool to be in a group of people who were nominated for this prestigious award, so as a freshman it was so amazing," he said.

As a sophomore, Mr. Ferrie transformed into Friedrich Von Trapp in "The Sound of Music" and received his second Paper Mill ensemble nomination.

"It's such a classic show that everyone in the world knows and to be a part of something that special was truly magnificent," Mr. Ferrie said.

During his junior year Mr. Ferrie performed as a member of the barbershop quartet in "Music Man," another nominated performance, and for his final performance during his senior year, Mr. Ferrie took the stage as Anthony in "Sweeney Todd," for which he was nominated as best supporting actor.

"'Sweeney Todd' was by far the hardest and one of the greatest shows I have ever been a part of," he said.

"Out of my high school shows, that was by far my favorite show," he added.

STAYING TRUE TO THEATER ROOTS

Photos

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Andrew Ferrie, the music director for the Spring Lake Community Theatre's production of "Grease," has studied piano since the first-grade and can play every instrument. *Photo by RYAN WELSH, STAR NEWS GROUP*

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After high school, Mr. Ferrie left behind his small town stage to pursue a career in music education at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pennsylvania, where he graduated with a bachelor of science in music education and a bachelor of arts in music performance with a concentration in voice.

Throughout his time at college, Mr. Ferrie grew increasingly focused on his classical training, eventually achieving the status of a classically trained operatic singer.

But he never strayed from his theater roots, participating in the school's student-run theater company.

"I was in 'Into the Woods, The Musical,' and I played Jack in the Beanstalk, which was a dream role," he said.

Playing Anatoly in "Chess, The Musical" was a sharp divergence from his typical role, Mr. Ferrie said.

"I always played either young roles, being a boy, or the love interest. I never played the villain, or a more dark role, so that was definitely something that I learned a lot [from]," he said.

It was during his time at Lebanon Valley College that Mr. Ferrie made his directoral debut, leading the theater company in its production of "Chicago."

"That was really cool because there wasn't an adult that was overseeing things or there wasn't a handbook," he said.

"It was really successful, it sold out. It was an amazing production. I learned a lot about teaching, about working with your peers, so it was definitely educational for me," he said.

Mr. Ferrie took that hands-on education and brought it to the Spring Lake Theatre Company, where he performed during the summers throughout college, after learning about the theater from a former teacher.

He auditioned for a familiar role – Friedrich Von Trapp – and soon began his first production with the company.

Eventually, Mr. Ferrie would go on to direct "Little Shop of Horrors" at the Spring Lake Community Theatre and now Mr. Ferrie is returning to the theater for the seventh year in a row.

"It was just such a welcoming, family friendly environment and everyone there was just so kind that I kept coming back every summer after that to do shows," Mr. Ferrie said.

A seasoned actor with the Spring Lake Community Theatre, Mr. Ferrie's skills will be applied off stage this season as he directs the musical that has made "Grease" so iconic and so beloved across generations.

"Grease has always been such an exciting show for everyone and any one," Mr. Ferrie said. "It's iconic, every human being knows 'Grease,'" he said.

Though Mr. Ferrie has been playing music since childhood – piano since first-grade, saxophone since third – and has a working knowledge of every instrument as a certified music teacher, Mr. Ferrie admitted that he was nervous about taking on the musical direction of the performance.

"It's something I was very nervous about at first because I've never actually played piano during the show, conducted the show, conducted the orchestra and all the vocalists," he said.

"There's a lot that goes into music directing that I think people don't even realize. So I was very hesitant," Mr. Ferrie said.

However, hesitation soon evolved into steady footing and by the first curtain call, any fears in leading his cast had disappeared.

"I'm so glad I decided to take the risk and take the plunge and join in. It's been such an award winning experience," Mr. Ferrie said.

Thus far, the theater's production of "Grease" has received accolades across all spectrums of the performance, from the direction, to the song choices to the actors.

But for Mr. Ferrie, the greatest compliment of all comes when the audience truly recognizes the skill of the actors up on the stage.

“Its vocally challenging, it’s a lot of harmonies, it’s things that people don’t realize,” he said.

“They [the audience members] watch the movie or they watch the ‘Grease Live’ version and of course these are professionals and they make it look so easy.

“Yet they’re sitting at the Spring Lake Community House watching kids in their 20s doing this for free and they’re doing it effortlessly,” Mr. Ferrie said, filled with pride.

“I think that’s the biggest compliment I can get.”

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