

'Finding Nemo Jr.' Goes Swimmingly At The Sharon

Campers at The Sharon Performing Arts Academy showed off what they learned during drama camp.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND
Daily Sun Senior Writer

Campers got to explore the big blue world in The Sharon Performing Arts Academy's production of "Finding Nemo Jr."

On Saturday, The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center hosted the production where first through eighth graders showed off what they learned at The Sharon's annual summer drama camp. Presented in partnership with the Orlando Family Stage, the camp allows children to make friends, build new skills and take their turn in the spotlight.

"The Sharon has been hosting children's summer camps centered around theater and the arts since 2018, and the camps have gone through several changes to get to the very successful format we enjoy today," said Sierra Weiss, booking manager for Significant Productions and camp coordinator. "These summer camps, along with all the other programming at The Sharon, are presented by Significant Productions as part of our mission to bring high quality arts to every member of our community."

"Finding Nemo Jr." is a 60-minute musical adaptation of Disney's 2003 Pixar movie "Finding Nemo," with new music by award-winning songwriting team Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert

Lopez. Like the movie, the musical follows a clownfish who embarks on an ocean-wide journey to find his kidnapped son.

An array of choreographed dances, homemade props and clever stage directions tell the familiar tale of Marlin, Nemo, Dory, Crush the sea turtle and the tank fish of P. Sherman, 42 Wallaby Way, Sydney.

The show opens with a 15-minute concert by the first- and second-grade campers before transitioning to new parents Marlin and Coral. Blue and green lights create a ripple effect, submerging the stage deep beneath the ocean's surface, and campers twisted themselves into strange shapes in an imitation of the corals that make up the Great Barrier Reef.

Later on in the musical, gigantic diving goggles reveal Nemo's location and large umbrellas with metallic tendrils are used to create a terrifying jellyfish forest.

Many of the camp drama teachers and parents expressed their appreciation for how far the group progressed from where it started. But before the campers dazzled their parents, grandparents and other Sharon patrons on opening night, they practiced in front of a different audience.

At the dress rehearsal, the stars of "Finding Nemo Jr." did their first full run of the show while the younger campers watched. More than a dozen small heads peered over the rows to observe their seniors' form and technique — as well as to giggle at all the jokes.

"I really liked it," said 6-year-old Darby Hutchins. "I liked



Photos by George Horsford | Daily Sun

The cast of "Finding Nemo Jr." rehearses a scene during The Sharon Performing Arts Academy's summer camp program Friday. The performance of the show took place Saturday at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

when Marlin found Nemo."

Darby's 5-year-old brother, Cameron, agreed. The siblings said the performance has them considering trying out for a lead role once they grow old enough to join the older group of campers.

Cameron said he would like to be a shark, but Darby would like to follow in the footsteps of her cousin Reilyn Yancey, 13, and play Dory.

Reilyn has been attending The Sharon Performing Arts Academy for the past six years. Last year, she played Marty the zebra in "Madagascar Jr."

"All of my roles have been really silly," she said. "It's fun to do because I'm moving around a lot."

Reilyn said the best thing about going to summer drama camp is all the new friends she meets. The other lead actors, Maxwell Jarquin, 10, and Jacob Ballecer, 12, agreed.

"It was all fun," said Jacob, who plays the role of Marlin the clownfish. "I met new people and I made a bunch of

new friends."

Like Reilyn, Jacob has been attending the camp for years and has performed lead roles before, like when he was Alex the lion in "Madagascar" last year. Maxwell, who plays the titular character Nemo, only attended the camp twice before and this is his first time getting to play a lead role.

"I think it's a really nice environment and all my friends are here," he said. "My brother, Anderson, is here too."

The Sharon Performing Arts Academy's next show is "Annie Jr." at 2:30 p.m. Saturday at The Sharon. Tickets are \$15. To purchase, go to thevillagesentertainment.com.

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Reilyn Yancey, 13, rehearses a scene from The Sharon Performing Arts Academy's "Finding Nemo Jr." on Friday.

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