

'Spelling Bee' at The Jewish Community Center of Kansas City elicits laughs with charm

By Bob Evans

Sara Cotur and Jewish Community Center of Kansas City



Fun and laughs await those who attend the Tony-Award-Winning musical comedy, "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" currently playing weekends at The White Theater of The Jewish Community Center of Kansas City.

The fun show, that features audience participation, focuses on six diverse, awkward students engaged in the finals of the county spelling contest. All have won previous contests at their schools and have now progressed to the next level of competition—the county finals. When the play opens, six contestants assemble for their first rounds of competition—and each displays a special talent for solving their spelling tasks.

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As they spell their words, the audience learns about the problems each faces, and, it's the same thing others deal with. One is a perfectionist; one lacks self-confidence; one needs a more stable home-life; one struggles with his physical changes from youth to adolescence. All of the problems in the show are kept light and fun-spirited but speak to the challenges teens face. And then there are the adults...they continue to have problems, but more adult problems which are also treated with humor and song.

Overall, the entire show features some playful characters who have learned to deal with their problems in their own special ways. As the show progresses, the contestants face elimination for an incorrect spelling. "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" ran for about three years on Broadway before closing, with over 1,100 performances.

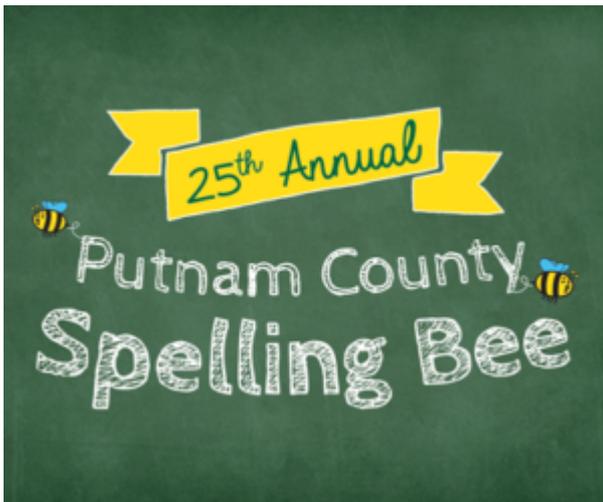
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Opening night jitters probably caused the show to miss the snap and sparkle generally associated with the show. The cast performed well, but the added spark just did not happen. As

the cast settles in to performing for an audience, this will correct itself. The cast features fantastic voices and some good acrobatic skills not expected. The show is strong. The performers are poised. Subsequent performances will shine.

The set design creates the idea of being in a junior high school gymnasium with the contestants seated on bleachers. A lot of the charm of the show is the awkwardness of the six misfits and their personal backgrounds. They all possess the desire to succeed and gain acceptance. Besides them, there is the leader/organizer of the Spelling Bee, a past champion who remembers her glory days as the Bee champion and a disgruntled vice principal who has suffered a breakdown in his past. The cast delivers these characters with fun and tongue-in-cheek-parody. Fantastic characters for actors to portray.



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Co-directors Steven Eubank and Zach Faust understand the show and know where the comedy lies. They have directed their cast well to hit all the lines to garner the most laughs.

The cast is: Korrie Murphy, Jayson Chandley, Colin Rohach, Sam Hesman, Erin Huffman, Jaden Tatge, Julia Masterson, Madelyn Padget, Bree Patterson. The crew is: Pamela Williamson, music director/conductor; April Lynn Kobetz, stage manager; Hunter Hawkins, assistant stage manager; Jayson Chandley, lighting/scenic design/facilities; Julia Ras, costume designer; Bill Christie, properties design; Alex Davila, sound

design; Joshua Gleeson, technical director; Molly Cady, run crew; Zach Peck, sound assistant.

Jayson Chandley and Jewish
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Hats off to a great cast and crew. Their combined efforts created a fun evening of musical comedy entertainment. “The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee” continues through February 18. Tickets are available by calling 913.327.8054 or online through [The White Theatre website](#).

Tags: “The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee”, The White Theatre, Jewish Community Center of Kansas City, The J, Kansas City Theater, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment