

Student dancers learn from pros in new initiative

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

More than 20 young people performing alongside professional dancers and actors in Motus O's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The dance, drama and musical theatre students will be part of the magic woven on stage through sometimes extreme movements, outrageous costumes, over-the-top acting and avant-garde props and lighting.

Motus O has become world-renowned, touring throughout North America and the South Seas.

The show runs at the Markham Theatre Oct. 22 and 23. Both performances are at 10 a.m.

Most of the youngsters, who are between 13 and 21 years old, come from the Newmarket, Aurora, Whit-church-Stouffville and Mark-ham areas.

In auditions held last June, "age wasn't an issue," Motus O artistic director James Croker said. "We were looking for talent. The amount of talent in this area is amazing."

He and fellow artistic directors Jack Langenhuizen and Cindy Croker analyzed the play to see what can be interpreted through movement.

They also enlisted the help of a teacher and Shakespearean actor who has performed at Stratford to help develop the script "to tell the complete story," Mr. Croker said.

Most of the young performers, such as Stouffville's Kate Knox, portray the fairies prominent in the Shakespearean play. The 17-year-old is in Grade 12 at Unionville High School's Arts York program in dance.

Working on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* put her 14 years of ballet classes to good use.

Parts of the performance require dancers to be on pointe and she has to portray a lot of dramatic expression," Ms. Knox said.

Some of the choreography was difficult at first, she found,

"but after you get it, it really sticks with you."

She has watched in awe as the seasoned performers play on props and do acrobatics on the ropes during free times. "It seems like nothing but play. I didn't expect them to be so light-hearted and relaxed about it," Ms. Knox said.

When it comes to rehearsals, however, the students have the same constraints as the professionals.

Attending the eight-hour rehearsals is mandatory in order to be part of the production. "They (the rehearsals) are few," she said, "but they are long."

After graduation, Ms. Knox plans to attend Toronto's Ryerson University, majoring in dance.

Sarah McQuestion, from the Newmarket area, became interested in dance when she started high school and took lessons at a dance studio.

It is an excellent experience. Without it, I wouldn't have insight into what it is like to do a professional show.

The 17-year-old is in Grade 12 at Huron Heights Secondary School, where she studies jazz, dance and ballet.

During auditions held in Newmarket, she recalls only about one third of the hopefuls were chosen to work with Motus O.

"It is an excellent experience," Ms. McQuestion said. "Without it, I wouldn't have insight into what it is like to do a professional show."

Ms. McQuestion finds the unusual use of the props, such as the acrobatic twists and climbs on the ropes by Puck, portrayed by Mr. Croker, fascinating.

Another eye-opener was the amount of preparation time needed for this type of produc-



STAFF PHOTOS/SSJOERD WITTEVEEN

Stouffville Motus O's James Croker helps dancers go through their steps for the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Markham Theatre's rehearsal hall. From left, Carlynn Reed, Melanie Mendes and Jack Langenhuizen.

tion. Ms. McQuestion hopes to eventually become a teacher after graduation. "I want to show people this one art form I love," she said.

The Stouffville-based company's aim is to give young amateur performers a chance to work with the professionals.

Since formed in 1990, Motus O has put on seven full-length productions of classics from *Alice in Wonderland* to *Petrouchka*.

Collectively, the artistic directors have backgrounds in ballet, jazz, musical theatre, voice, flute and mime. They originally put on plays with students in elementary schools.

Performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which will be seen by more than 3,000 young people, are partly sponsored by a Trillium Foundation grant.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

is part of the Markham Theatre's professional theatre series in April 2004.

Information on the company and performances is available by calling 905-640-8647.



Motus O's Cristina Mancini goes through her motions for the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Behind her are, from left, Jennifer Dzialoszynski, Christine Karczmar and Melanie Mendes.

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