

LETTER: Reader bewitched by "Wizard Of Oz" musical

To the Editor:
 "There's no place like home" was a fitting theme for a wonderful event I attended on Mother's Day. I am referring to the York Durham Academy of the Performing Arts' recent presentation of the *Wizard of Oz* at the charming Uxbridge Music Hall. This version of *Wizard* was the second production of the year for this fledgling theatre company, which is resident in Stouffville. The group also presented Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* to five packed houses at the Vaughan City Playhouse just last month.
 This show, a charmingly different rendition of the same comfortable story we all know and love, was skillfully blocked by Neil

Bennett of Glad Park musical fame. For me, the singing was a highlight and was supported by a live band, conducted by Wayne Hill, the YDAPA's Executive Director. Choreography, designed and taught by Nadine Lepera, was varied and enthusiastically presented. Chris MacBride's sets were brilliant and along with Nancy Carter's props, succeeded in transporting the audience to an "Ozian" wonderland. The costumes, designed and created by Ada Seebach and Dorothy Clark, were absolutely stunning. From apple trees to Munchkins, the whimsy of the story was supported by shimmering cloth and vivid colours, and Christine Hill's sparkling

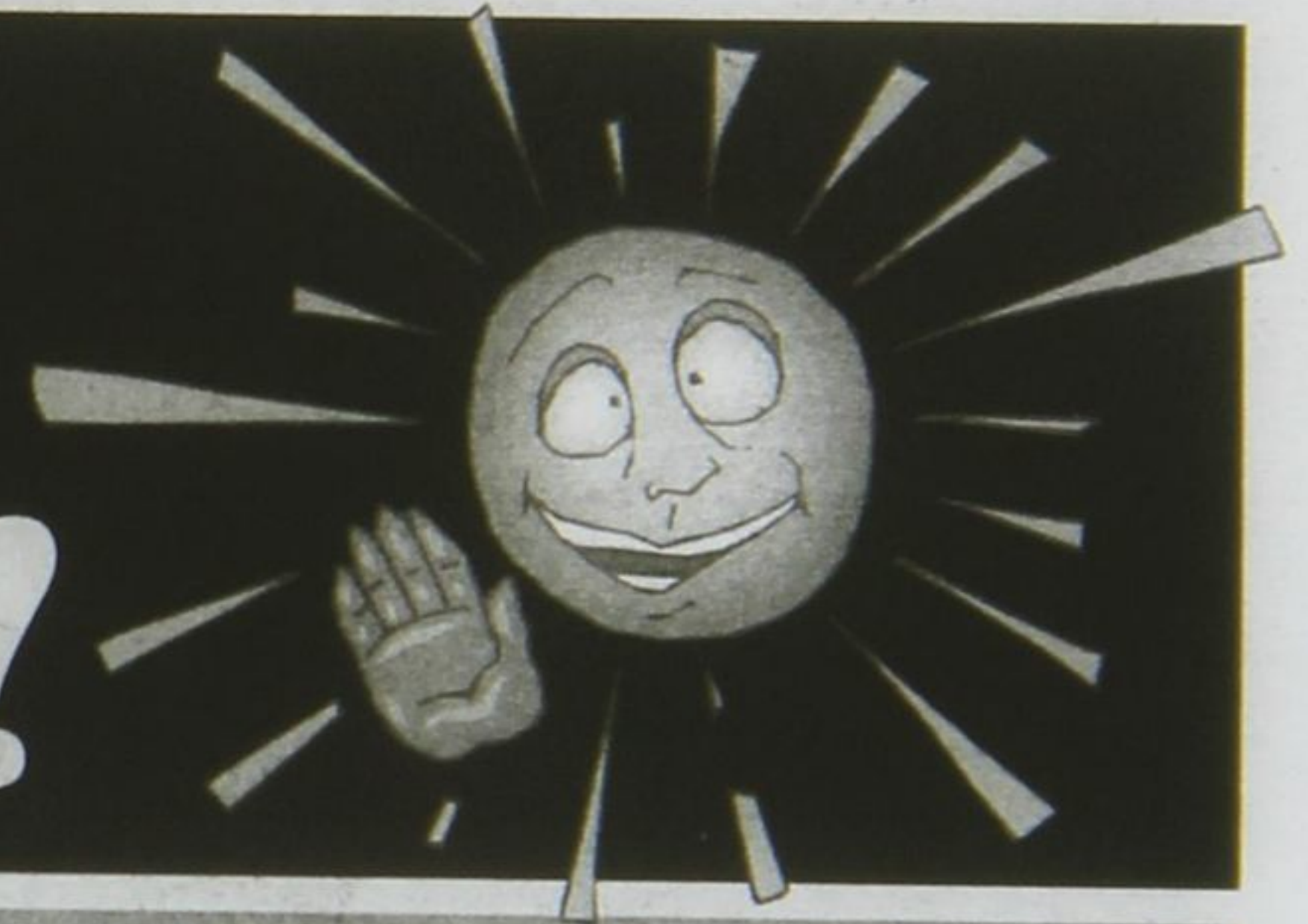
make-up perfectly contributed to the fantasy. Set changes, curtains, lights and audio were used effectively by Christie O'Reilly's stage crew to magically transform the tiny stage at the Music Hall into the incredible scenes from the story. This was no small task given the size of the stage and the size of the set pieces. Many of the supporting cast members had multiple roles which brought them back to the stage several times, as jitters, ghosts, guards and citizens of Munchkin City. Kudos to Ellen Godson-Keen and her backstage "parent crew" who organized the constant costume and make-up changes..... they were efficient and pre-

cise. Not an entry was missed or late. But it was the kids that we all went to see, and we were certainly not disappointed. The 30 or so six- to eight-year-old Munchkins sang with gusto and enthusiasm; their *Ding Dong the Witch is Dead* still rings through my head. Kimiko Carter played Dorothy to perfection, and I thoroughly enjoyed Will Powell as the Scarecrow; he acted the part with skill. Ryan Scarborough as the Tin Man was heartsick and lovable while Geordie Hill was a favourite as the Cowardly Lion, the comic star of this wonderful story. Excellent casting choices were evident with Jessica Reesor, who acted wonder-

fully in the challenging role of the Wicked Witch and Lauren Wallis who was the perfect contrast as Glinda the Good Witch. Jesse Owen was superb as the great and powerful Oz, and was even better after he was revealed as "not so great" a wizard. I personally applaud the York Durham Academy's efforts to bring much-needed exposure to the arts to the young people of Stouffville and surrounding communities. This is the chance of a lifetime for these children, who otherwise would not likely experience the wonderful pride and self-confidence that this medium provides. At a time and in a community where the activities of

young people are so often questioned, it was truly wonderful to see so many of them involved in such an enriching experience. I understand, through Gordon Brown, chairman of the YDAPA Board and producer, that they had over 100 families actively involved with the organization this year, and that next year's plans include three musicals and the creation of a student concert band and children's choir. Many residents believe that Whitchurch-Stouffville Council should pay more attention and perhaps provide a facility, dare we say a theatre, for this up-and-coming new group.
 E. Benwell
 Stouffville

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