

Alton Little Theater is poised for a shining summer performance of 'HAIR'

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Alton Little Theater is poised to showcase the summer production of “HAIR” under the energetic guidance of Musical Director Kurtis Leible and Choreographer Mary Grace Brueggemann July 13 through July 22.

There will be 18 featured performers, including Joseph File, Margaret Sommerhof, Anthony Michael Shepard, and Gabriel Generally. Director Kevin Frakes embraces the "anthem" of glorious music that united a generation of youth 50 years ago - and believes that the message of hope and peace and love - and creating a more welcoming community are just the right messages for today's turbulent times.

“For the past several summers, ALT has produced a youth oriented musical in the summer and while we absolutely loved the response to 2017 family-friendly production of ‘Beauty And The Beast,’ we wanted to do something that would ignite the interest and energies of the college students and young adults in our area who may not know what ALT has to offer,” Alton Little Theatre’s Lee Cox said. “So while we booked several family-friendly events this summer like the Harry Potter dinner and a big Disney Concert, HAIR does have some adult themes - and such relevant themes to the times we're living in.”

Cox said so many of ALT’s season ticket holders and loyal base lived through the turbulent 60's and 70's.

“We remember and yes, we all grew our hair over our collars and rebelled a bit..some of us joined the Peace Corp and marched for peace and equality - and yes, our generation took on the challenges of the sexual revolution and drugs and the draft - but we were still insecure kids who just wanted the Vietnam War to go away and who wanted the world to be a better place,” she said. “So I think ALT will attract an audience who took HAIR as an anthem of our youth and I hope we will attract a new generation of fans who are currently dealing with gun violence in schools and political fears - the cast is so good because they care so-much about their world and they want to talk-about their fears and their outrage - so they are singing and dancing their hearts out every night!”

“The message of the iconic musical was challenged the establishment, questioned authority and demand change,” she added. “Now a new mounting of the production seeks to enter into the consciousness of a new generation while it entertains with some music that has become part of our cultural history. Plus the music is great! Aquarius hit #1 on US Billboard Hot 100 and US Billboard Adult Contemporary as well as was # 1 Canada RPM Top Single and Canada RPM Adult Contemporary. .

“The score is fabulous and the cast and the audience may be dancing in the aisles together-the authors knew that music makes us feel and think in a way that just dialogue can't - so indeed, there is sparse dialogue and non-stop relating with dance and songs. We've been able to do some very interesting staging and lighting and using a unique set to stage this show.”

When: July 13th, 14th - 7:30 pm; July 15th 2pm; July 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st- 7:30 pm; July 22nd 2pm Everyone attending MUST be 18 or older (and we will card). Tickets are \$25

Cast members: Nathan Beilsmith, Tiffani Bowen, Mary Grace Brueggemann, Ty Dunn, Joe File, Gabriel Generally, Jalyn Jordan, Tiffany Knighten, Pat Kulish, Karlana Lahey, Kurtis Leible, Jessica Mccawley, Sydney Martin, Hal Morgan, Anthony Michael Shepard, Margaret Sommerhof, and Kat Wissler.

“I love ALL the young adults in the cast - but we have to acknowledge the talents of Kurtis Leible (Music Director), and Mary Grace Brueggemann (Choreographer) who have put their spirits and energy into the whole production in such creative ways,” Cox said. “They are both such talented performers - and they will be relocating to Florida in August to work in the “Disney” world - so HAIR is their Swan Song for now and Director, Kevin Frakes, has listened and supported so many of their great ideas for the production.

“It is a joy for the seasoned directors to see the future of ALT taking shape. Margaret Sommerhof will be teaching Youth Acting Classes with President Frakes, beginning in

September - and many of the HAIR cast members go right into Disney Concert rehearsals as soon as HAIR takes a bow. ALT has built up a Scholarship and mentoring program for High School Seniors and Nathan Beilsmith (costumer), Ty Dunn (guitarist and performer), Joseph File (performer) Anthony Michael Shepard (performer and Rehearsal Pianist), Brianna Justine (dancer), and Sommerhof are all majoring in theater programs at SIUE and around the country. We are so proud of them and their dedication to Alton Little Theater!"

Cox closed by saying that HAIR has always had a bit of controversy swirling around , it may be a few moments of "shock" but what the performers are saying is " Look at me, listen to me, I matter and I have something to say! “

“The performers and the script talk about the internal struggle of allegiance to country and figuring out how to change those things they don't understand or feel need to change. We've had some very touching moments as part of our "character" work. Two of the cast members and two of the production team members lived through everything in the late 1960s. The kids listened- and were eager to actually talked to a Vietnam veteran about his perception of the ‘changing’ world he returned to in 1971. Whether we're in our 60's or in our 20's, we're just human beings who want to connect and feel safe and who worry about the future instead of a generation gap. I think a production like HAIR can bridge that gap and help us all feel a bit better.”

Tickets available through the ALT Website: www.altonlittletheater.org and through the box office (618-462-3205). Signed T-Shirts that commemorate the message of "letting the Sunshine in" will be available afterward for \$20 in the Dorothy Colonius foyer.

Alton Little Theater (ALT), in its 85th year was founded in 1933. ALT is the longest running community theater in the state of Illinois. With more than 460 productions to date, ALT is a vital resource for theater arts and entertainment and takes pride in community partnerships and collaborations with other arts organizations that enrich the lives of those residing in the greater Riverbend area.

