

LIFE

Tuacahn's 'School of Rock' really, really rocks

Kaitlyn Bancroft At the theater

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JONATHAN WAGER as Dewey Finn
ELLIOT PETERSON as Ned Schneebly
MALLORY KING as Patty Di Marco

Jonathan Wager as Dewey Finn, Elliot Peterson as Ned Schneebly and Mallory King as Patty Di Marco in a scene from "School of Rock" at the Tuacahn Center for the Arts in Ivins, Utah. Submitted/For The Spectrum & Daily News

The audience behaves differently at Tuacahn's "School of Rock," running now through Oct. 22.

They do more than just clap at the appropriate times; they whoop and cheer, clapping along to catchy bass lines. "School of Rock," with its cast members playing live electric riffs and toe-tapping drum rhythms, often feels like a full-blown rock concert happening on Tuacahn's stage. And it's wildly, outrageously fun.





The cast of teachers perform in a scene from "School of Rock" at the Tuacahn Center for the Arts in Ivins, Utah. Submitted/For The Spectrum & Daily News

The story begins by introducing Dewey Finn (Jonathan Wagner), a wannabe rockstar mooching off friends while preparing to compete in the local Battle of the Bands. Only one problem: his band just kicked him out for not being good-looking enough. Then, his friend Ned Schneebly (Elliot Peterson, who plays LeFou in Tuachan's still-running "Beauty and the Beast") and his high-strung girlfriend Patty Di Marco (Mallory King) threaten to give Dewey the boot unless he helps pay rent.

So when elite private school Horace Green calls to offer Ned a teaching job, Dewey decides to impersonate his friend in order to earn the cash he needs to pay rent and keep his rock-n'-roll dreams alive.



Elliot Peterson as Ned Schneebly and Jonathan Wagner as Dewey Finn in a scene from "School of Rock" at the Tuacahn Center for the Arts in Ivins, Utah. Submitted/For The Spectrum & Daily News

Not surprisingly, Dewey fails abysmally in a strict, structured environment where students are being prepped to attend Ivy League schools.

But everything changes when he discovers that the students are classically trained musicians. Here lies the making of a new band, Dewey realizes. He just needs to help them loosen up a bit.

What follows is an uproariously hilarious series of lessons in growing up, rocking out and hastily hiding instruments when the principal walks in.

Jonathan Wagner is a total knockout as overconfident, underachieving Dewey. Wagner made his Broadway debut as the understudy to the original Dewey Finn, and his commitment to this role shines in every note and pricelessly funny line. He strikes some distinct emotional chords, too, as his character grows to care about the students' success more than his own.





A scene from "School of Rock" at the Tuacahn Center for the Arts in Ivins, Utah. Submitted/For The Spectrum & Daily News

But what really makes this show unforgettable is the overwhelmingly talented kids of Horace Green. It's an absolute delight to watch the students come alive as they shed the stifling expectations of their parents and teachers while learning to express themselves through rock-n'-roll. At the heart of it, "School of Rock" is about kids learning to stand up for themselves and become who they want to be. Rock music is simply the catalyst.

Of particular note is Ava Smith as Tomika, a Horace Green student who starts out shy and timid but who finds the courage to break out of her shell. Audiences will cheer as she literally and figuratively finds her voice — and what a gloriously star-powered voice it is.



A scene from "School of Rock" at the Tuacahn Center for the Arts in Ivins, Utah. Submitted/For The Spectrum & Daily News

The four students who make up the main band also deserve a special mention. It's nothing short of incredible that on top of their singing and dancing prowess, guitarist Brady Davis (playing Zach Mooneyham), bassist Sloane Griffith (playing Katie Travis), drummer Adrienne Amanda Morrow (playing Freddy Hamilton) and keyboardist Vince Ermita (playing Lawrence Turner) rock out live every night and do it as well as any group of professional musicians. These kids are simply that good.

So go on. Head bang to “When I Climb to the Top of Mount Rock,” shred your air guitar to “You’re in the Band,” stamp your feet to the rebel anthem “Stick It To The Man.” This show will appeal to anyone who’s ever dreamed of being a rockstar — and let’s be real, that’s all of us.



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