

First KidsMAT production opens tonight

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By Derek Hann



Havre Daily News/Ryan Welch

Alexis Daulton, 7, reads a script Tuesday in the Little Theatre as she and other kids attending KidsMAT practice their lines for tonight's play.

"Dinosaurs in Space (with a couple of puppies)" is the first production of this year's KidsMAT theater program series, set to run tonight in the Little Theatre on Montana State University-Northern's campus, one day before auditions for the Montana Actors' Theatre youth production.

The play was put together by local children, volunteers and the interns hired by MAT to run this year's summer children's programs. In the KidsMAT summer camps, the interns help the kids come up with the story, which the interns turn into a script, and produce the play.

"Dinosaurs in Space" has a one-night run tonight at 7.

Abigail Kucera, 12, a second-year participant of KidsMAT, said she is very excited for this year's production.

Kucera said she is enjoying the program and is excited to play an astronaut in this year's play. She said it takes a lot of hard work to be an actor, having to memorize lines, speak clearly and loudly so the audience can hear, and practicing.

Kucera said actors have to take practice very seriously because that is how they improve, and she finds the hardest part of the life of an actor is memorizing the lines.

Kucera said her parents are excited to see her in this year's production and that it is "her time."

She is overall confident in her roll and in the production, she said, although she still has a few butterflies. She has enjoyed the past week in the program and has enjoyed rehearsing with the other kids participating in KidsMAT.

Kix Bender, 10, first-year participant in KidsMAT, said he is confident in his role - the "human galaxy." He said his favorite part is the funny lines in the play such as by the clumsy astronaut, performed by his friend Mason.

Bender said they are making their own costumes and building their own sets, and he is enjoying his time with the other kids. He added that he will be doing this again next year. He was in a performance in the past with his school and ever since then has been excited about acting, he said.

KidsMAT is run by three interns.

Rebecca Severinsen, an Augusta High School graduate, is studying elementary education at Northern in pursuit of becoming an English teacher in South Korea. This is her first year with KidsMAT, and she said she would be interested in participating again in the program.

She said it is best to set a clear set of rules for the kids, and she has learned from the program how to improve her teaching of children. In the past, she said, she has done a little acting with Missoula Children's Theatre and participated in speech and drama classes.

Severinsen said the children are amazing and she is confident that they will do well today. She said the greatest benefit of the KidsMAT program is to show kids the abilities they already have and build their confidence. She heard about the program through her professor at Northern, Valerie Guyant, and she said she is glad that she was able to be involved.

Katie Burke from Tucson, Arizona, said she had heard about the program from her sister who lives in Havre, and decided to come visit and participate. She said programs like this are important for kids; they are learning important skills such as memorization and public speaking, and, she added, theater is important for everyone at any age.

She said they have had a crazy time writing "Dinosaurs in Space" and the kids had lots of creative ideas. This is her first year with KidsMAT, and she said she is learning a lot and it is a good first theater experience for the kids. She added that she loves working in a high-energy environment and that she loves working with the kids. During the program children get outdoor time to play and get out all their "wiggles" she said, adding that the program is mostly about having fun and getting kids excited about theater.

Burke is currently studying for a theater degree.

Brandon Bergren, a 21-year-old Havre native, has been involved with MAT before and was involved with KidsMAT last year. He said he is having a great time working with the kids and getting them able to express their creative sides. Bergren said the interns write the play, but the children pitch the ideas. The interns divide the kids into two groups and hear ideas the kids have in addition to some line ideas. The interns then take what the children say and write a play that they will enjoy. Bergren said he enjoys seeing the kids having a good time and the interns always share in the excitement.

Bergren, who is a theater major at University of Montana in Missoula, said that although the program has the kids work together a lot, they do break up into smaller groups and work in sections. He added that this group is unique in that they really like the crafts. Bergren said the program gets many returning kids each year and this year has been interesting because it has many first-year kids and is a smaller group.

He added that the program has a 40-kid limit for each week so that kids get more of a chance to interact. He said it's nice to be able to show the kids what show business is like and that the program focuses on the experience of the kids.

Bergren said the arts is a big part of his life and it's exciting to pass on the creative energy to the younger generation, keeping the arts alive and having the kids explore their own creativity.

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He added that this is the first camp of the summer and they will also be doing KidsMAT camps in Chinook next week, June 18-21; Rocky Boy July 9-12; Box Elder June 25-28; Hays-Lodge Pole July 30 to Aug. 2, and two other camps in Havre and July 16-19 and Aug. 6-9.

People who are interested in registering their children in the program can pre-register on the MAT website at <http://mtactors.com> by clicking on the "KidsMAT - Acting up" link or registering on site the first day of the camp. The charge is \$50 for one child and \$30 for every additional child.

Bergren added that he is also excited for the upcoming "Outsiders" show for the middle school and high school age kids. Auditions will be held Friday and Saturday this week.



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