

# 'The Outsiders' rumbles to a start in Havre

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By Kelly Otterness



Ryan Welch

Dever Everingham, 13, left, playing Ponyboy, stands up Tuesday to Gryphon Guyant, 18, who is playing Bob during rehearsal for "The Outsiders" in the Little Theatre.

"The haircut has definitely made a big difference," Kaelyn Kaftan said.

The incoming University of Montana freshman ran a hand through her short, greased-back hair as she described her transformation into Johnny Cake, a lead role in "The Outsiders."

Montana Actors' Theatre is opening the play, adapted from the novel by S.E. Hinton, Thursday in the Little Theatre in Cowan Hall at Montana State University-Northern.

It will run for two weekends, ending Aug. 4.

The play tells the story of Ponyboy, a young "greaser" mixed up in his friends' territory battles with wealthier teenagers.

Kaftan, who started acting as a senior in high school, plays Ponyboy's best friend. She relates easily to Johnny, she said.

"We're both kinda quiet but we'll do what needs to be done," she said.

Kaftan said being a quiet person has not been an obstacle to playing a lead role.

"I know most of the people I'm acting with," she said, adding that, on the stage, "it doesn't matter where you come from, it matters who you're becoming, as the character."

During rehearsals, Kaftan said, she learned to yell and walk like a greaser boy. She also got a crash course in male stage makeup. The hardest part for her was "leaving Johnny in the theater and going back to a normal life. It's been really fun, it's just - I get really into it."

Kaftan said she may relate too well to her part and is learning techniques to separate herself at the end of the day.

"I have different mannerisms for Johnny that I find I've taken out of the theater. ... Running my hand through my hair has been a big thing. I slouch more now." She turned to a castmate, laughing. "We've made me a guy."

The cast has been rehearsing daily for a month. The young actors range in age from 11 years old to incoming college sophomores.

As Dever Everingham demonstrates, however, experience is just as significant as age. Everingham, who is going into eighth grade, plays the lead role of Ponyboy.

Everingham has been acting with MAT since he was 5 years old and struggled less with differentiating himself from his character.

"Ponyboy is ... kind of whiny. He's the youngest out of all of the greasers," Everingham said. "He doesn't really like fights."

Everingham said about their similarities, "I'm around the same age as Ponyboy would be and he is really angsty." He added with a laugh, "I'm kind of angsty."

In spite of his acting experience, Everingham explored new territory rehearsing "The Outsiders." One of the play's directors, Brandon Bergren, taught the actors the repetition exercise, a Meisner acting technique.

Bergren said he hoped the exercise, where actors repeat observations about each other, would help to "loosen 'em up again as if they were doing the scene for the first time."

"It made me feel more emotions," Everingham said - he used the technique during a challenging hospital scene. The actor added that he has experience with Bergren, who is a MAT veteran actor himself.

"I've been in a couple plays with him, and now he's my director," Everingham said. "Brandon has worked me."

"He's learned you as an actor," Kaftan agreed, laughing.

The two actors credited the play's two directors, Katie Burke and Bergren, with improving their focus, diction, projection and breath control. The actors learned to plant their feet on the stage rather than swaying as well.

"The Outsiders" also naturally includes a lot of stage fighting.

"That was really fun," Kaftan said. "It took a while, but we're getting there. Getting punched in the stomach's pretty easy, too."

"There's a lot of that," Everingham added.

The two directors are MAT summer interns and are working the KidsMAT Summer Camp in August. Burke and Bergren said they are learning their own lessons from rehearsing "The Outsiders."

Both directors quickly agreed to casting Kaftan as Johnny, for instance, despite her gender.

"You were too good for us to not cast you as Johnny," Bergren said he told Kaftan, "and that is why I'm upset with you."

But in other ways, the directors said they read the play differently. Learning how to disagree and come to decisions together privately is a skill Burke said she'll take away from rehearsals.

Bergren said directing is teaching him to stay organized and to vocalize his ideas. He also said he enjoyed helping the younger actors begin to see relationships as less black-and-white.



Dever Everingham, 13, in the middle, playing Ponyboy, is held at knife point by Donovan McLain, 16, on the left, who is playing Randy, and Gryphon Guyant, 18, who is playing Bob during rehearsal for "The Outsiders" in the Little Theatre Tuesday, July 24, 2018.

He added, "We get to help control ... the ups and downs. We've had bad rehearsals, we've had good rehearsals, as any show does." Bergren said he enjoyed "working through those challenges and trying to make the next rehearsal a good one."

"Everything about this is fun," he said. "The yelling ... ."

Burke laughed and agreed that the fun outweighed the struggles.

"It's super fun to have this community and to feel like a part of something." Burke said, adding that a lot of the play "is about isolation and then finding your group. ... With theater you can find your group and your people, and that's really important at this age."

The actors agreed. Kaftan said that the greasers taking Johnny Cake in and becoming like a family to him paralleled the "theater family" welcoming her in this year.

"It's definitely a heavy show," Kaftan said, referring to "The Outsiders" themes of abuse and violence. "It's made us a lot closer as a cast, just because, like, some of the struggles are familiar to some of us."

She added with a smile, "We've become a support system. ... That definitely helps."

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