

Random Farms Kids' Theater Comes of Age

By Janie Rosman



Left to right, Jasmine Canziani, Blair Brownstein, Hanna Work, Rebecca Simpson-Wallack, Daniel Hammond, Hillary Ginsberg, Rebecca Simpson-Wallack and Brianna Gentilella, some of the cast members in last weekend's production of "13" presented by the Random Farms Kids Theater.

Evan Goldman faces a teenager's nightmare when his parents divorced and he's forced to move away from his friends during a crucial time in his life.

His plight was re-enacted last weekend when mostly high school-aged actors were part of the Random Farms Kids' Theater, Inc. performed "13" at the Tarrytown Music Hall.

Random Farms producer and artistic director Anya Wallach couldn't have been happier.

"It's exciting to do a Broadway production the cast can relate to age-wise since there aren't a lot of (performance) offerings for kids," she said.

In "13," protagonist Goldman, nervously approaching his Bar Mitzvah, moves with his mother to a small town in Indiana. In his new surroundings, he has to choose between being himself and getting the cool kids to attend his rite of passage.

"Kids there (in Indiana) don't know what a bar mitzvah is," Wallach said.

"The show is a great representation of what it's like to be a teenager," said Rebecca Simpson-Wallack, who plays the character Patrice. "It covers much of the pressure we feel during this time in our lives."

Random Farms resident director Marc Tumminelli, who owns an acting studio in New York City, said his professional partnership with Wallach is a perfect match. "We have the same mindset and dedication," he said. "I've never met someone like Anya, who puts her all into everything she does."

Several years ago Wallach and Tumminelli created The Edge, which gives students from ninth grade and into college a

chance to explore more challenging roles. Its premiere production in December 2008 was the risqué "Cabaret," a show that isn't particularly suited for youngsters but the cast was able to pull it off.

"It (The Edge) is about teenagers and what they're dealing with mid-section," Tumminelli said. "They get to sit in as young adults and just be with each other."

Hanna Work, of Chappaqua, a member of the ensemble, agreed. "I've been in all four of The Edge productions and "13" is the most unique because I can relate to it most," she said.

The commitment for a production is approximately eight to 10 weeks with an average of one to three rehearsals per week. The group performs two shows yearly, one each in the spring and fall, with other events planned during the year.

Wallach and Tumminelli cast two sets of teens for "13." There were about 40 youngsters who were involved in the production with roughly 20 in each group. A few of the actors participated in both shows.

"We wanted to keep the groups small so each person gets individual attention," Wallach said. "And it lets us involve more kids, too."

A graduate of NYU, Wallach grew up in Chappaqua's Random Farms development and started the theater group 15 years ago as a neighborhood troupe for children. While its first production was performed at the complex's clubhouse with local children, the group expanded and now stages shows professionally throughout Westchester County.

Since 2006, Random Farms Kids Theatre has been the resident children's theater group

of the Tarrytown Music Hall. Members range from kindergarten through college and work directly with professional directors, musical directors and choreographers.

"Random Farms is the best environment for kids and teens like me and makes working fun," said member Brianna Gentilella.

Auditions for The Edge's spring production, which has not been decided, will be held April 22 and 23 at the Random Farms Performing Arts Center, 77 Executive Boulevard, in Elmsford. For more information, visit www.randomfarms.com and click "Auditions" in the left margin.



Cast members of Random Farms Kids Theater's "13," left to right, Jasmine Canziani, Rebecca Simpson-Wallack, Blair Brownstein, Hanna Work, Daniel Hammond, Rebecca Canziani, Hillary Ginsberg and Brianna Gentilella.