

Jackson Heights This Week

School Readies Performance of 'Seussical'

Students from grades 5-8 at Louis Armstrong Middle School in East Elmhurst have been hard at work rehearsing for their upcoming performances of the musical "Seussical."

Led by Kate O'Neill, director and choreographer, the students rehearse two days per week for two hours. O'Neill said the entire rehearsal process will last four months.

O'Neill and her staff — Anthony Femino, musical director; Kate Thomason, set and

prop designer; Tallin Lamonoca, sound design — brainstormed last spring about what musical to select for the following year's performance. The decision came down to the Stephen Sondheim musical "Into the Woods" and "Seussical." After reading both scripts with Femino, O'Neill realized "Seussical" would be a much better match for their students.

Students who auditioned for the show took part in a two-week process. First, they

were asked to sing one minute of the song "Oh The Things You Can Think!" from "Seussical." If they received a callback based on their singing, O'Neill said the students did cold readings from the script.

"We rotated students between parts to focus on acting ability," O'Neill said. "We then taught a dance combination to see how well they would be able to keep up."

"Seussical" includes characters and settings from many of Dr. Seuss' most famous books, including "Horton Hears a Who," "The Lorax," "The Sneetches," "Green Eggs and Ham" and the "Cat in the Hat."

"I love how the show is very funny and sarcastic with enough intelligence to make it go over people's heads," said seventh-grader John Mauro, who plays the lead character, the Cat in the Hat.

Mauro said he has always had an interest in performing and has been on stage since kindergarten. He has charisma on stage, and O'Neill said you can see that it is his dream and passion to be a star on Broadway.

"The most challenging part of performing is taking a different character in front of a crowd," Mauro said. "You have to be able to deal with criticism and trust your talent."

O'Neill said it takes a special personality to get up and perform in front of people, be it fellow classmates or friends and family.

"I am so amazed at all their accomplishments and courage every day I watch the in action," she said. "This is such a stepping stone for all of them, and I hope they continue to act and perform in high school."

O'Neill herself has been performing in

plays since her senior year in high school. She minored in theater at SUNY Albany, and while there, she learned her favorite type of performance is improvisational comedy.

"It gives me a chance to think creatively on my feet," she said.

In addition to her acting, she has experience with dance, which she said gives her the chance to share another of her loves when choreographing the show.

"Seussical" debuted on Broadway in 2000. It closed in 2001 after 198 performances and 34 previews.

The show will be performed in the school's auditorium for the other students on March 5-7. The final performance will be held on Friday, March 8, at 7 p.m. Tickets cost \$5.

Louis Armstrong Middle School is located at 32-02 Junction Blvd. For more information, visit armstrong227q.com or call (718) 335-7500.

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—Jason Pafundi



Sean Eustace (left) and John Mauro rehearse "Seussical."

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