

A PG-13 foray into Monty Python

Children's Music Workshop's TeenStock troupe to present 'Spamalot'

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BENTON HARBOR — When you're cast in a medieval period musical that's filled with flying cows, killer rabbits and high-kicking Las Vegas showgirls, a little bit of research is definitely in order.

All these images are part and parcel of "Monty Python & The Holy Grail" (1975), an affectionate parody of King Arthur's quest that also jump-started the musical "Monty Python's Spamalot," which the Children's Music Workshop's TeenStock troupe will present this weekend at Lake Michigan College.

Max Daniel, 14, plays the original film's quintessential "good guy," Sir Lancelot. He's performed with CMW since 2007 and hopes to pursue an acting career professionally. Like about half the cast members, Daniel was familiar with some of the British comedy troupe's groundbreaking work — in his case, "Monty Python Flying's Circus," which ran for 45 episodes on the BBC network from 1969-74.

"When I was a little younger, we loved to watch the little animations between their sketches," Max says. "When I'm researching a role, I don't get (inspiration) from just one source — I watch Broadway clips on YouTube, or I study the actor, or how that actor por-



Joe Rondone / HP staff

The Knights of the Round Table perform a number during a rehearsal for the Children's Music Workshop's production of "Monty Python's Spamalot" at the Hanson Theatre at Lake Michigan College. The show runs this weekend.

trays Lancelot."

When director Susan Matheny started rehearsing with her 26-member cast — whose ages range from 13-20 — she found herself having to explain a few things, since the all-male Python members also played the female roles, too.

"My girls were like, 'It's not a girls' show, this is all boys,' and I said, 'There's plenty of girl roles, there's plenty for you to do,'" Matheny says. "But now, they're like, 'Oh, this is fun.' There's just so many bits — and gags — there's so much more than the lead people and what they do."

The result, from Max's viewpoint, is a more nu-

anced characterization that doesn't leave the laughs on the cutting room floor.

"I do have to say, Lancelot has a very interesting storyline," Max says. "There's some very in-depth kind of characters that — as you go along — you learn more about them."

Matheny also had to do a little bit of homework as she started preparing for the show.

"There were a couple points where I was reviewing the script, and I said, 'I don't know what that means,'" Matheny says, laughing. "I do have a handful of few British friends, and had technical advisers on the literature — but I

think this particular version of the show has been Americanized enough for audiences to understand it."

"Spamalot" is taken from the original screenplay by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin — with books and lyrics by Eric Idle, while the music is by Idle and John Du Prez.

"It's PG-13. It's definitely a little more mature content. To get younger people exposed to this show, they've given us permission to make a few short changes, if we need to clean it up slightly," Matheny says. "They're pre-approved options, basically."

as their castmates.

"What happens is that all these kids are getting another stage to work on — a new experience to try," Matheny says. "Backstage, the crew is all teenage. They've helped move everything, they've helped build everything."

Besides Daniel, principal roles are played by Joey Huizar, Chad Roden, Nathan Neidlinger, Conor Rockhill, Patrick Hill and Julia Farrell Diefenbach. When all's said and done, though, it's the punchlines that stick longest in peoples' memories, and Max is confident that the show will deliver.

"Everybody can find the comedy funny," he says. "In many cases, their humor is not super clever. But there are a lot of moments that really go in depth — and they find those moments, where they can add something that's sophisticated and funny, while being simple enough for the audience to understand."

However, the players have grown with the space — along with the crew, whose members are the same age