

The evil inside

Musical 'Jekyll & Hyde' takes the stage at Mendel Center

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO

HP Features Writer

BENTON HARBOR — What evil lurks within us all?

That is the question raised by Robert Louis Stevenson in his 1886 novel, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." It's that same sentiment that permeates "Jekyll & Hyde," the musical incarnation about a doctor whose experiments unleash his dark side.

A new company, Touring Theatre Associates, has put together a cast of non-equity actors from New York City and Minneapolis for a national tour of "Jekyll & Hyde," which was conceived for the stage

by Steve Cuden and Frank Wildhorn, with book and lyrics by double Oscar- and Grammy-winning Leslie Bricusse and music by

Tony- and Grammy-nominated Frank Wildhorn. The touring show is directed by Paul Stancato, who was resident director for the first tour of "The Lion King."

"The show follows the trials of Dr. Henry Jekyll, who is trying to come up with a scientific formula to separate the good from the evil in everybody," says Conor McGiffin, who portrays Simon Stride, the secretary of the Board of Governors in the TTA production, which makes a Sunday afternoon tour stop at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre. "At a hospital where he works, he's trying to get permission from the Board of Governors to continue on. They shut him down and my character, Simon Stride, is the secretary to the Board of Governors, who wants to shut him down because he has a vested interest in Jekyll's fiancée."

An epic struggle between good and evil ensues when Dr. Henry Jekyll, driven to find a chemical that can solve mankind's most challenging medical dilemmas,



McGiffin

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Photo provided / Nick Tremme

Aleks Knezevich stars as the title characters – Henry Jekyll and Edward Hyde – in the national touring production of “Jekyll & Hyde,” which will be performed Sunday afternoon at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

JEKYLL & HYDE

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uses himself as the subject of his own experiment, accidentally unleashing his inner demons and the raging madman, Edward Hyde (both played by Aleks Knezevich). Lucy Harris (Laura Helm) and Emma Carew (Eryn LeCroy) are the women in love with different sides of the same man and unaware of his dark secret.

“Simon is a little bit of a drunk because he hasn’t gotten his way before,” McGiffin says. “The only time he gets his way is when the board shuts down Jekyll’s experiments, but he tries to woo Emma away from him and tries to embarrass Jekyll and that doesn’t go his way. He’s certainly an antagonist, which is a treat to play.”

McGiffin, who graduated from the University of Michigan in May, says this

IF YOU GO

What: “Jekyll & Hyde”

When: 4 p.m. Sunday

Where: Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

How much: \$30-\$58

Contact: 927-1221 or www.lmcmainstage.org

is his first post-graduate professional theater experience. He was asked to audition after performing a showcase for agents and casting directors in New York City. He’s been on tour with the show since September.

“I started doing theater when I was 8 as sort of an after-school care program,” McGiffin says. “I fell in love with it and started taking dance classes, and the rest is history.

For me, the best part about this tour is discovering these very small towns who have these absolutely beautiful performance centers. It just goes to show no matter how cozy your community is, there is a want for theater.”

McGiffin, who largely credits the musical theater department at the University of Michigan for preparing him for this role, is particularly pleased to be performing the show back in the mitten state.

“The program at the University of Michigan is one of if not the best programs for musical theater,” he says. “You have teachers who are not only teaching you the craft but are teaching you how to thrive. They are so caring with their students. Each show I did, there was a different step in getting me ready for the real world. I wouldn’t be in this show otherwise.”

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