



“Mamma Mia!” will run at the Dakota High School auditorium from Feb. 1 to Feb. 3 and from Feb. 8 to Feb. 10 at 7 p.m., with 1 p.m. matinées on Feb. 3 and Feb. 10.

Photo by Erin Sanchez

Dakota Cougars stage ‘Mamma Mia!’

By: Dean Vaglia | **Macomb Chronicle** | Published January 25, 2024

MACOMB TOWNSHIP — Romance, secrets and the songs of ABBA. If that combination is what you seek, look no further than the Dakota High School theater.

For its winter production, Dakota is staging the 1999 jukebox musical “Mamma Mia!” Written by playwright Catherine Johnson with support from ABBA members Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, the show is one of the longest-running Broadway productions and has been adapted into two movies.

“Mamma Mia!” is the story of Sophie Sheridan who, in Greece for her wedding, discovers there are three men who her mother, Donna Sheridan, knew who could be her father. This guides Sophie on a journey to determine who her father is and which of the three will walk her down the aisle.

Christian Boni, the show’s executive director, selected “Mamma Mia!” because of its focus on family, friendship and music.

“It has a lot of comedy and lightheartedness in the show, but it does deal with a lot of very interesting introspective topics about family, what it means to be a family and what it means to have people in your life,” Boni said. “Family is what you make of it. It’s not always by blood. Ultimately, it’s a show about your found family and the people that you have around you and sharing the music, the experiences with those people that are around you.”

Boni has been fascinated by the show for some time, but the Dakota production marks his first time with it.

“I had never participated in it before,” Boni said. “I had never seen it before. I, of course, heard ABBA’s music and heard of it and I know how popular it was. When it came to choosing the shows and looking at options of shows I was not familiar with, in coming across the show and learning about it, I thought it was the perfect fit. Every day I grow to love it more and more. Out of all the shows I’ve done, it’s probably become one of my favorites ever. It’s just the music, the people and the experiences. Having been going through this production since September now, each day my heart grows three sizes more and more as we go through the day.”

With the music of ABBA being such a big part of the show, great effort has been taken to make it sound as good as ever. The characteristically large casts of Dakota shows are being used to meet the dynamic demands of the ABBA numbers, and a pit orchestra including two guitars, a bass, drums and a keyboard will give the score a proper pop feel. But you don’t need to be an ABBA fan to appreciate the show. Boni says that, unlike many jukebox musicals, the setlist for “Mamma Mia!” feels natural.

“Not every jukebox musical is positively acclaimed because a lot of people perceive them as throwing songs into a random mix and trying to make a show out of that,” Boni said. “I think why this show differs is that the music feels very fitting for what the show is. It feels like there was a story crafted and the songs line up better with the story that was already created, rather than (saying), ‘Here’s some songs — let’s try making a story out of it.’”

Despite ABBA’s peak years being before the turn of the century and the original high times of “Mamma Mia!” being 10 to 20 years ago, the show and its music were not unfamiliar to the cast. Some members were even more excited to participate knowing “Mamma Mia!” and its ABBA connections.

“ABBA is one of my favorite bands,” said Keegan Amez, a 12th grader playing Sam Carmichael. “I grew up listening to it because of my parents, who also grew up listening to it, so I got a bunch of different, older songs. It’s still my favorite type of music.”

After over four months of working on the show, everyone involved is ready to make it the best it can be.

“We all have one goal in mind, and it’s that we want the show to be good,” said Alyssa Sharp, a 12th grader playing Donna. “There’s this sense of unity and partnership that we all have in order to get this job done in order to make the show the best that we can.”

“Mamma Mia!” will run at the Dakota High School auditorium from Feb. 1 to Feb. 3 and Feb. 8 to Feb. 10 at 7 p.m., with 1 p.m. matinées on Feb. 3 and Feb. 10. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at dakotachoirs.com or at the box office an hour before showtime.