

Behind the scenes: The true meaning of Christmas - and theater

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"The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" is a favorite holiday story for producer Davien Gould because she believes it depicts "the true meaning of Christmas." She and other Falmouth Theatre Guild officials hope their production also depicts "the true meaning of theater."

One of the guild's missions is to make theater accessible to people who have never participated in it before, and Gould says this show — with its cast of 58, mostly children — fits that idea perfectly. The guild wanted to involve "people who don't necessarily get parts in or are intimidated by the bigger shows. ... During auditions, we billed this as, 'If you always wanted to get on stage, this is your chance.' "

And she hopes "Christmas Pageant," Barbara Robinson's tale of how an unruly family of kids helps a town to realize anew the story behind a child in a manger, will become an annual holiday tradition for Falmouth. It works both as a community endeavor — the cast is building a float for the Christmas parade — and as a way to get more people and more age groups involved with the guild.

The script includes a few adult roles, with less than a dozen speaking parts for kids. The bulk of the young cast is part of a choir, which has rehearsed separately with retired music teacher Jeanne Kuzirian. Then there are the baby angels — 17 children, all ages 3 to 6.

"They're really cute," Gould says. "We even got a couple of boys."

With so many actors on stage, costuming was a challenge, and the guild won a \$500 Arts Foundation of Cape Cod grant to help dress the children. Some of that went for red choir robes, which will be embellished with white collars, then kept for use from year to year. The angel costumes were made from pillow cases, with parents asked to add sleeves and trim.

Gould has been pleased to see the enthusiasm of the parents, with many taking on tasks so that the production became a true community effort: "We farmed out almost everything, and everyone took a part of it," she says with relief, recalling days when it seemed like just a handful of guild stalwarts had to take on most of the work. Getting young parents to participate has also been part of a continuing effort to grow the guild's ranks, which have successfully swelled with the troupe's recent family-friendly fare of "Annie," "Peter Pan" and the just-closed "Oliver."

Involving the community also extends to the audience. To open up "Christmas Pageant" to more patrons, the guild has reduced ticket prices by about 25 percent to \$10 to \$12 — just a bit more than a movie, Gould points out.

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