

Arts & Entertainment

Paper Mill Offers Another Version of Cinderella in *Ever After*

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and
The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

MILLBURN - Fairy tales aren't what they used to be...there isn't a damsel in distress anymore. Case in point is Paper Mill Playhouse's latest production, the world premiere of the musical *Ever After*, where the Cinderella figure named Danielle de Barbarac doesn't need saving. The song "Who Needs Love?" boasts Danielle's (Margo Seibert) philosophy, "A knight in shining armor is just one more thing to dust." She's not waiting around for someday her prince to come.

With music by Zina Goldrich and book and lyrics by Marcy Heisler, the storyline sticks closely to the movie version of the 1988 film starring Drew Barrymore. The movie is a comedy where an orphaned Danielle, a feisty, self-reliant gal, meets the Prince by accident and, like the recent Broadway version of the musical *Cinderella*, winds up helping him make-life altering decisions.

Foreshadowing is evident from the very first song with young Danielle's Dad telling her, "The only thing you can be sure of is that ever after loves goes on."

Danielle grows up quickly, taking on a servant's role in her own house. Ms. Seibert, as the adult Danielle, shows an impressive vocal range. No high soprano Cinderella here with tittering bluebirds in the background. A much lower range is a welcome, endearing sound. This is a contemporary would-be princess who quotes "Utopia" and, like Disney's Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, loves books.

She's a strong backboned gal who actually slaps her ugly stepsister and stands up against her beautiful but nasty stepmother Baroness Rodmilla de Ghent (Christine Ebersole). Ms. Ebersole shares a soft side of the character in the song "After All." Instead of the solely selfish stepmother generations have come to hate, Ms. Ebersole's version presents a tender,

loving, velvet voice, and the audience is almost led into liking her until reality of her last few words reflects a black heart.

But ever the resilient heroine, Danielle shows she can take care of herself, rescue the Prince and even fight off a band of bullying gypsies. In that Act I scene, the gypsy thugs defy gravity with amazing footwork thanks to Tony award-winning choreographer and veteran director Kathleen Marshall.

Prince Henry (James Snyder), movie star handsome in face and voice, has a dilemma: does he marry the Spanish Princess and make his parents happy or does he think for himself and avoid the arranged marriage? When he falls for Danielle, Mr. Snyder's passionate "Right Before My Eyes" is a show-stopping ballad. He is no cookie cutter prince: this is a thinking man who is later disappointed with his love and feels betrayed by her deception. There's no glass slipper left behind as in most versions, but in the song called "My Cousin's Cousin" clever lyrics get Danielle out of revealing her true identity.

Extravagant, beautiful costumes (pre-Renaissance time period) are lavish especially in the ballroom scenes. A skeletal two-tiered set on the perimeter of the stage is complemented with projections on the back wall by (Olivia Sebesky and Derek McLane) fleshing out the scenes of a bucolic farm, the palace, the woods, a library and a stunning cathedral.

No industrious mice making dresses or Fairy Godmother here. To the delight of adults particularly, a "genius" character named Leonardo Da Vinci (Tony Sheldon) plays Cupid/Fairy Godfather in getting Danielle and the Prince together. He's Merlyn-esque in making things happen due to his brains, not wizardry.

Ballads are plentiful and poignant in *Ever After* that ends happily as expected, but the show doesn't lag in tempo. This is a refreshing update of the age-old tale with a contemporary message: be yourself. If your prince likes you for yourself, then it's meant to be.

The show runs Wednesdays through Sundays through June 21 including a number of matinees.



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SEUSSICAL MUSICAL...The cast of Cranford's musical production *Seussical* presented their number at the Rising Star Awards. They were one of seven finalists named Outstanding Overall Production of a Musical and Outstanding Performance of a Chorus. In total, Cranford had seven nominations including Outstanding Achievement in Choreography and Staging (Michelle Massa).



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RISING STARS...Lauren Echausse as Little Sally (center) leads the cast in the performance of a song from *Urinetown* at the Rising Star Awards at the Paper Mill Playhouse. Ms. Echausse was one of the seven finalists for the category of Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role and the cast was one of seven finalists for Outstanding Overall Production of a Musical.

Westfield High School Receives Two Paper Mill Rising Star Awards

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY
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MILLBURN - The Paper Mill Playhouse's Rising Star Awards' 20th anniversary on June 2 announced this year's winners in a Tony awards-like affair. The Rising Star program adjudicates 100 high school productions from around the state to find the most outstanding in a multitude of categories. These awards have ignited the careers of teens who have later become TV and Broadway performers.

Westfield High School Theater Department's production of *Urinetown* and Cranford High School's *Seussical* were among the top nominees for the Best Overall Production of a Musical, so they and the other five contenders presented a song from their shows. Westfield had 14 nominations in total in various individual and collective categories. They walked away with two awards - Outstanding Performance by a Chorus and a Student Achievement Award was presented to Stephen Bubniak for his stage manager abilities. In accepting the Tiffany award for the chorus, seniors in that group went

onstage and thanked the Paper Mill and Investors Bank for the honor.

Nominations also included Outstanding Scenic Achievement included Scotch Plains/Fanwood's *Grease* (Jeffrey Allen), Westfield High School's *Urinetown* (Roy Chambers) and Honorable Mention for Cranford's *Seussical* (Lynn C. Berry).

Included in the 14 nominations for the Westfield musical were: Outstanding Performance by a Featured Ensemble Group (The Poor), Outstanding Hair and Makeup Achievement (Allie Safonov), Outstanding Costuming Achievement (Maddie Kevelson and OCSzwarc), Outstanding Lighting Achievement (Sharp Edge Lighting Design), Outstanding Achievement in Music Direction (John Brzozowski), Outstanding Achievement in Choreography and Staging (Samantha Hahn), Outstanding Achievement by a Teacher or Outside Director (Daniel Devlin), Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role (Lauren Echausse) and Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role (Julian Mone).

During the awards ceremony, Julian, as the character Bobby Strong, performed "Run, Freedom, Run" from *Urinetown*. The other seven nominees in that category presented solos with Nick Berninger of St. Joseph Regional High School winning with his rendition of "Why, God, Why?" from *Miss Saigon*.

Westfield's Madeline Hudelson as Penelope Pennywise in *Urinetown* had an Honorable Mention in the category of Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role. Her classmate Rita Murphy was earlier nominated for a Student Achievement Award for graphic design in *Urinetown*.

Cranford High School's nominations for *Seussical* included: Outstanding Achievement in Music Direction (Nick DeGregorio), Outstanding Performance by a Chorus, Outstanding Achievement in Choreography and Staging (Michelle Massa), Outstanding Achievement by a Teacher or Outside Director (Michelle Massa), Honorable Mention for Outstanding Performance in a Featured Role (Sarah Parlapiano as The Sour Kangaroo).

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