

School Show

‘The Wizard of Oz’

The Production Team

J Neill and H Morrison

August 2023 – the brief – RSM – “The mission should you choose to accept it, is to get as many children involved in a School Production as possible.”

HM and JN – “So a School Musical with 362 pupils involved and 29 members of staff then? Well, what else would we be doing of an evening?!”

Ps. Never work with animals or children they said...

And so began the tale of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, Banbridge Academy’s School Production for 2023. With the help of a merry band of willing and very able teachers, Mrs Morrison and Mrs Neill along with the lovely Mrs McCurdy (who returned to mentor our new Music Department led by Mrs Munton and supported by Mrs Qua and Mrs Parton as they began their initiation into their first musical in Banbridge Academy) instigated the process of bringing their vision for the Lands of Kansas and Oz to the stage.

Following auditions at the beginning of September, with the cast selected, we began to rehearse for what would be an extravagant explosion of colour, music and dance the like of which had not been seen within the halls of Banbridge Academy since the pre-covid era (coincidentally the last time HM, SMcC and JN decided to pack as many children onto a stage as they could!) Not really known for their ability to follow instructions, work to a script and not go off piste, the delightful duo of Mrs M and Mrs N took it upon themselves to refocus the script, rework the image of the Witch of the West and rewrite most of Act 2 – because there wasn’t enough that needed done already! Thus, with the addition of two extra songs and the need for a much larger chorus, work began in earnest.

Tuesday afternoons were fraught – from the millions of Munchkins from Years 8-11 to the hundreds of Ozonians from Years 11-14, as well as the Kansas Crew and our Fab Foursome, 3.30pm – 9pm the Drama Studio, Assembly Hall and Sports halls were a riot (sometimes quite literally). Thank heavens for the talents of Miss Warnock, Miss Galashan

and Miss Forsythe who were always on hand to demonstrate a move, a gesture, a facial expression and to generally calm the troops or keep their spirits up. A particular word of thanks must go to the inexhaustible Ruth Reid – our fabulous choreographer whose talent, dedication and professionalism are truly admirable. As an ex-pupil, Ruth is all too aware of the benefits of a school show and her willingness to return and give back to school, is something we do not take for granted. Most Tuesday afternoons were spent rehearsing with the Munchkins before the arrival of the Ozonian chorus, whose interest and maturity were a delightful contrast to the exuberant enthusiasm of our Munchkin hoard!

Main cast rehearsals, whether it was with the Kansas Crew or Dorothy and her hapless trio, were a real labour of love – with some rehearsals more lovely and others more laborious! Our Senior girls dance chorus were a marvellous support, whether they were flying monkeys, dancers in Oz or a Storm in Kansas, they were the embodiment of reliability and professionalism. A special mention must go to our Senior male chorus whose presence on stage was under the somewhat disingenuous promise of ‘a 5-minute Haka’, which turned into a 10-minute dance, two costume changes and an award-winning Chorus number. The Senior Chorus, male and female, were so easy to work with and their dedication – rehearsing three hours on a Monday evening afternoon, Rugby, Hockey, Netball and Choir was a real testimony to their enjoyment of the process and the thrill of performance.

A special word must go to our actors, who were the mainstay of the performance. Violet Coen as Dorothy was a consummate professional, who learnt her lines, attended every rehearsal and required so little direction, that it would be easy for us to lose sight of her talented performance as Dorothy Gale. Violet moved audiences with her tender portrayal of Judy Garland’s classic, ‘Over the Rainbow’ and we look forward to seeing her in lights on the big stages of the West End and beyond in the future! The Kansas Crew of Gordon Porter, Jack Morrison, Corey Hamilton, Reese Greene, Darcey

Mulligan and Ella Scott were such good fun that rehearsing with them was a pleasure and not a chore. Whether it was poor Gordon and the cartwheel, or Jack kicking the bucket, Corey’s giggles, Ella’s determination to ride a bicycle through the halls, Darcy’s biscuits and Reece’s gentle strength; these folks were full of charm and good humour.

The Land of Oz represents so much of the fun and fear of growing up and in our playful reinterpretation we tried to bring together as many people from across the age range of school as possible. Among our list impressive debutants Reuben Hill as the Lion, Jamie Ramsey as the Tin Man (alongside our budding directors Warnock, Forsythe and Galashan) deserve a special mention for the hours that were spent rehearsing their characters and whilst Reece Wilson as the Scarecrow appeared effortlessly lithe and comical. Alongside the fearless Dorothy our terrific trio lead a fabulous cast of characters in Oz including Gemma Harris as Glinda, who glided blithely on stage whilst Ellie Robinson as the Wicked Witch cast a charm spell over everyone and deserves a particular mention for her amazing rendition ‘Ruby Shoes Blues’!

The sheer numbers dancing on stage, the huge variety of costumes (steamed, sorted and cared for by Miss Jess and Mrs Kernaghan and their merry band of costume warriors) assisted in creating a visual feast. The Art department led by Mrs Patricia McKenzie and Miss Emma McCullough spent evenings and weekends painting the Emerald City and recreating the amazing Kansas Farm House, with its windmill and cart all beautifully crafted built by Mr Philip Gray, assisted by Mr Richard Currie and the Technology Department. A special mention must go to Amelie Dobson, the very talented daughter of Dr Dobson, who took time during her year out to paint the beautiful settings of Munchkinland, the Witch’s Lair and the Forest in OZ, providing the perfect backdrops for our production. Team Blackout led by Mr Gavin Robinson, with the help of Mr Sam Leslie (no, not that Sam!) and the dedicated team of sound and light students worked tirelessly to ensure

that not a moment on stage was missed. Whilst Miss Anderson and Mr McGuinness wowed everyone with their Set Design Slideshows, slick stage crew and wicked sense of humour - not only do we have a magic Sarah in school we are most grateful to now have a magic Keith! The fact that Mr McGuinness only joined school in October and fast became a valued member of the team, is a real testimony to the powers of a school show to forge firm friendships and create a sense of belonging. Thanks too must go to Mrs O'Shaughnessy and Miss Burgess for their work on the programme, a worthy memento for our cast to look back on fondly

in the years to come and to Miss McConkey and the members of staff who helped to sell tickets and seat guests on the evenings of the performances.

It is almost impossible to list all the members of staff who have helped to contribute to the success of the school show - it is a real team effort, from the headmaster Mr McLoughlin, to the teaching staff who manned classrooms on the nights of performance to the caretaking team lead by Simon and John, to the office staff lead by Mrs Claire Neill and Mrs Doreen McRoberts, to our wonderful classroom assistants Mrs Barabara Hampton

and Mrs Noelle Stewart who made flower umbrellas, to Mrs Helen Singer and Mrs Caroline Bolwell who didn't blink when they were asked to make tree costumes, hem trousers or sew jackets. We realise that in our efforts to thank everyone we will inevitably leave someone out - this is not intentional, but it is a testimony to the sheer number of staff who are willing to give up their free time to help our students have such wonderful memories. As a school we are very lucky to have staff who feel this way. Thanks to all involved, we very much look forward to working with all of you again soon (but not too soon)!

Wizard of Oz

Daisy Coen

In 2023 our school decided to put on a production of 'The Wizard of Oz'. This was extremely exciting as the school hadn't put on a production since 2018. I love musical theatre so I was beyond excited, but being in junior school meant we weren't allowed to audition until the seniors had done so. Luckily for me, I was a member of the Junior Dance Team meaning we had been cast as dancers in the show. My friends and I could not wait for the play rehearsals to begin.

At first the rehearsals were just us dancers and we all were so happy to be there. The first thing we did was learn the dancers' part of the first ensemble musical number in the show, 'Ding Dong the Witch is Dead' / 'We Welcome you to Munchin Land'. These dances were different to the ones we would do in school dance as they were very theatrical and extremely fun. These dances had lifts and a lot of character; we had a partner section with one dancer playing a male munchkin and one playing a female munchkin, this partner section included exciting things such as lifts and we all loved it so much. As rehearsals went on we began to stage the rest of the dance with the leads and the other members of the munchkin ensemble. Getting to know

these people from different classes and even year groups was an experience like no other. Many people went outside their comfort zones and did something brilliant, not only for the school but for themselves.

Later in the term we began rehearsals on our second dance, the Jitterbug. This was my favourite dance from the show as it was jazzy, technical and a masterpiece choreographed by Ruth. Rehearsals for this dance were different, as we got to work with the main cast. Even though they were older than all of us we still had great craic, incredible moments and many laughs; of course this didn't happen when we were 'working hard'. This dance was tough for us dancers to learn and it was also a tough job for the members of the main cast who weren't dancers, but we all persevered and it turned out to be a major highlight of the show for those who were involved.

For our time as munchkins, we were given unbelievably extravagant costumes. The costumes were big, colourful and most certainly amusing, not only to look at but to dance in. We had bright colourful puffy skirts, beautiful waist coats and of course the

most uniquely gorgeous hats - because after all we were munchkins. Our costumes for the Jitterbug were sparkly jazz costumes with sequins and gorgeous red tassels.

Show week came along faster than we expected, and I cannot lie it was stressful due to the many late nights, a few technical issues and a lot of nerves. Although it was tough, the moment we set foot on that stage all of our worries disappeared, and it was impossible for us not to enjoy ourselves. During the entire experience, both on and off stage, we had the best time ever: making friends, getting our faces painted and supporting everyone through some hard times. Being a part of the school play was the highlight of my time on the Junior dance team, as it was not only an unbelievably amazing show with incredible talent, but it also brought all of us closer with each other and with the amazing teachers involved.

I want to say thank you not just to the co-directors, Mrs Morrison and Mrs Neill, but also to our choreographer Ruth, as the 'Wizard of Oz' was a once in a lifetime experience that I will never forget!



Extra-Curricular

Wizard of Oz

Edie Scott and Poppy Smyth 10E



Hi! Our names are Edie Scott and Poppy Smyth; we are in Year 10. Last year, we had the amazing experience of participating in Banbridge Academy's Christmas performance of 'The Wizard of Oz.' It was such a fun adventure filled with laughter and creativity, as we brought to life our characters, The Munchkins, on the stage. The rehearsals were long, but every moment was worth it, especially the friendships we formed and the incredible memories we made along the way!

Looking back, one of our most favourite memories has to be the mid October break time that we spent racing swiftly around empty school corridors to and fro from Mrs Morrison's classroom with bundles of sparkling munchkin dresses, petticoats and butterfly headdresses. It was truly the most fun and chaotic morning! It really felt like the whole thing was finally starting to come together and the show was really starting to take shape as we tried on our beautiful costumes for the very first time.

Another unforgettable highlight of this absolutely incredible experience has to be the truly electric atmosphere in the assembly hall, packed full of the cast, crew and the audience as we watched the show finally come together during the fantastic, if somewhat stressful, dress rehearsal. The excitement was utterly contagious as we watched our hard work spent practising songs, setting up the stage and trying on our munchkin costumes over the last few exciting months pay off. We were surrounded by the muffled rustling of last minute costume adjustments

and hushed chatter of fellow cast, along with a few unprecedented technical difficulties! The hard work spent in the joyful chaos of rehearsals was finally coming together as we crept onstage for our final practice before the big moment!

Looking back, we would wholeheartedly recommend this experience to anyone, whether involved in drama, dance, singing or not, there really is something for everyone. Whether it be lighting, set painting or looking after costumes we are both so grateful for all the effort put into this incredible show by all the cast and production crew. We are so thankful to be a part of this experience. Without everyone's endless effort it truly couldn't have been more

brilliant!

In conclusion, no matter how long the nights spent rehearsing in the assembly hall were, they were filled with so much joy and laughter, thanks to the unforgettable memories and friendships we made along the way-under the watchful eye of Mrs Neill and Mrs Morrison, to keep us in check of course! To changing Dorothy into her ruby slippers or sharing our experience of the show at Open Night, we have loved every minute of this amazing experience. We both have been involved in drama and performance for much of our lives and have been involved in primary school plays before, but none nearly as fun as this. If we had the chance to do it over again we would do it all in a heartbeat!



Extra-Curricular



Wizard of Oz

Ella Scott

It's crazy to believe that I am now in my final year of school and have been fortunate enough to have participated in two amazing school productions (it may even have been more if COVID hadn't gotten in the way)! I've had the incredible opportunity to perform two very different, yet equally thrilling roles: Lavender in the Matilda section of "The Greatest Show" in Year 8 and Miss Gulch in the most recent production, "The Wizard of Oz" in Year 13. Playing the part of Lavender was an absolute joy because I loved portraying Lavender's mischievous personality and attitude which mirrors my own—just a little... On the contrary, Miss Gulch, who later transforms into the Wicked Witch of the West, is a character driven by bitterness and resentment. Initially, I was worried that it was going to be quite challenging to try to channel my villainous side but, surprisingly, it came quite naturally to me (with the help of Mrs Morrison's and Mrs Neill's brilliant demonstrations of course!)

Rehearsals were intense but so much fun at the same time. The most amusing part when rehearsing as Miss Gulch was interacting with the irrepressible Toto (aka Mrs Neill's dog): let's just say, he didn't always play ball! One area which deserves a special mention was the unbelievable costumes. Over a quarter of all Banbridge Academy pupils were involved in these productions and each cast member had their own fabulous bespoke costume.

The dedication and planning required to ensure school musical productions run smoothly is simply mind-blowing. Whether I was helping Matilda take on Miss Trunchbull or making Dorothy's life a little more difficult, I was part of a huge team creating something magical on stage. The school productions have undoubtedly been the highlights of my time at Banbridge Academy, and I wish I could relive them over and over! I developed many new skills such as how to perform confidently in front of an audience and how to work with pupils across all years to reach a common goal. My favourite aspect of the school plays was getting to meet new



people and developing new friendships.

To any pupil wondering if joining a school production is worthwhile, I say go for it! You will never know how much fun you'll have until you step into the spotlight.

Violet Cowan

Come with me down the yellow brick road while I tell you all about my experience as playing the lead role of 'Dorothy' in last year's school production of, 'The Wizard of Oz'!

In September of last year when it was announced that the school was putting on a production, I immediately knew I wanted to be a part of this! So I signed up to audition and after a tense wait, I was awarded the role of Dorothy. I was absolutely delighted and couldn't wait to get started. I knew this show was going to be very special to me with amazing people from the beginning as two of my best friends, Reece and Ellie played the roles of The Scarecrow and The Witch alongside me. We rehearsed every night after school and sometimes during school; although rehearsals were tiring, they were filled with so much laughter and joy. We all wanted to produce the best production we could, therefore everyone involved put in so much hard work and dedication. Not only did we want to do this for ourselves, but we wanted to do it for all the teachers involved. They gave us their time, expertise and support—all at the expense of sacred family time.

As the show was approaching, the excitement throughout the school was building up and we were all so excited to show our friends, family, school community and the local community what we had been working so hard on over the past 4 months. The first show was everything and more! It was a joy to share the stage with pupils from all different age ranges, performing our hearts out and having the time of our life! Although there were hundreds on the stage there were so many other pupils and staff helping backstage, with lighting, props, sound, costume etc. My closest friends helped backstage and during every show, they helped me change into my Oz dress and out of my Kansas dress in about 30 seconds; this is just one example of how much effort so many people put into making this production the extravaganza that it was.

We were all prepared to do anything to make this show great. I had to wear ruby slippers that blistered and cut up my feet for 4 days straight and once our show was done, I was so excited to destroy them with my partner in crime, Mrs Neill. I also had to learn how to work with a dog, which was a struggle at the



beginning but by the end of it Barney and I finally bonded and were able to portray the loving relationship between Dorothy and her dog, 'ToTo'.

'The Wizard of Oz' was definitely the highlight of my school career at Banbridge Academy and it is something I will remember for life. I left the experience with only happy memories and new friends. The school play united the whole community of Banbridge Academy, but this would not have been possible without the enthusiasm from all pupils and staff, committed to their individual role in bringing Oz to life.

Extra-Curricular

Wizard of Oz

Reece Wilson

As Dorothy says: 'There's no place like... school?' Especially during Banbridge Academy's production of 'The Wizard Of Oz!' With only 3 months to prepare, we knew we had to put in a lot of hard work and preparation to dazzle our audiences, which is why when I was given the role of the kooky and clumsy Scarecrow (arguably Dorothy's closest friend in Oz!) I was overjoyed, but also full of nerves. Nonetheless, I was prepared to give the show of a lifetime!

Our rehearsals were definitely one of, if not my favourite part of the show, being surrounded by some of my best friends like Violet- who played Dorothy and the rest of the amazing crew was hilarious. Throughout the entire experience there were many laughs and to be honest many arguments as well! But it was all worth it in the end when we got to see the audience's reactions to our passionate performance! The hardest part was preparing for the musical number, 'Merry Old Land of Oz'- a group performance in which we were accompanied by our talented senior choir, with lots of challenging music cues and stage actions, it took us a whole week to nail it! Not to toot my own horn, but my favourite number to perform was definitely the Scarecrow's song, 'If I only had a brain!' Having the opportunity to combine singing and complicated dance tricks like aerials was great because I was able use my solo moment in the production to really show my abilities.



It was also stressful because we only had 1 day to stage the scene. Due to the length of the play, we ended up having to create many scenes in the last week before the show!

However, the production would have been nothing without our fabulous set and props team, directed by Miss Anderson and Miss McCullough, who (with the help of her art students and Miss Dobson) painted extraordinary backdrops like the dark and creepy forest, the haunting witches castle and the bright green walls of Oz! This truly helped us to transform into our characters and immerse ourselves in the action of the

play. With the sets finished, it was not long to go until opening night and I couldn't have been more nervous.

On the first night of the show, the energy was high with everybody eager to go, excited to show off our hard work and dedication. Thankfully, everything went perfectly! The last 2 months of our life had finally paid off and we couldn't have been happier with the results. Not only did the school play get me a few periods out of class (Sorry teachers!) but it also gave me a confidence I didn't have before, and I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity.



Wizard of Oz

Ellie Robinson

'The Wizard of Oz' was never really something I imagined myself taking part in. I didn't think it would be for me, but with some convincing from one of my best friends, Violet, I plucked up the courage to audition with her for some fun back in September 2023. Little did we know that we would ironically be cast as the protagonist and antagonist - Violet as Dorothy and myself as The Wicked Witch of The West. With a very easy 'YES!', the busyness began.

My role, in my opinion, was the most fun to play about with as it was open to interpretation. The iconic directing duo, Mrs Morrison and Mrs Neill encouraged me to adapt the role to be more 'elegant' than a typical witch would be, but I still possessed the contemptible qualities every witch should have. I'm still unsure whether I should have been grateful or offended when offered the role! As an amateur, the singing lessons with Mrs McCurdy and Mrs Munton and the dance classes with Ruth were most certainly needed, not to mention the green face and body painting skills of Miss Anderson and Miss McCullough... It is safe to say that this experience brought me closer with many teachers and other cast members!

As this was my first time participating in any kind of production, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. Nothing could have prepared me for the three months of dedication, hard work and many late nights that lay ahead but the laughs at rehearsals and the feeling of accomplishment I gained afterwards made it all worthwhile. Acting, singing, dancing and most importantly, cackling was never



something I could have imagined myself doing (especially in front of senior boys!) but it has evidently developed my ability to work in a team and grown my confidence to be the person I am today. The role helped me to discover my passion for singing and has since given me opportunities to perform in other events, such as the Spring Concert back in April 2023 where another one of my best friends, Imogen Hunter and I took on the role of a Tina Turner tribute act and created a jazzy rendition of 'Proud Mary', alongside the incredibly talented Wind Band. With over 300 pupils involved in the production, this opportunity allowed me to interact with pupils ranging from Year 8 to Year 14, of whom I most likely would have never met, had

it not been for this engaging experience. As well as its thrill, it soon became a beneficial distraction from the intense studies of AS Levels that Year 13 consists of.

The production's success was recognised by standing ovations from four audiences in December 2023 and our School has since been selected as one of The Lyric Theatre Belfast's Affiliated Schools for the upcoming year. To my surprise, this production has also claimed the title of the highlight of my school career so far. I am so thankful to have been granted this opportunity and for those extremely patient teachers who believed in me and I look forward to seeing what the 2024/2025 year holds!

