

STICKIN' IT TO THE MAN

Upstart Crow stages the Broadway hit musical *School of Rock*

Eugene audiences have a rare opportunity this summer to see *School of Rock*, a hit musical still running on Broadway.

Eularee Smith, executive director of Upstart Crow Studios, says it's unusual for a show still on Broadway to be licensed for nationwide production. Upstart Crow Studios is a local nonprofit youth-oriented performing arts association.

Upstart Crow was awarded the license on the merit of the studio's work with kids, Smith says. "The stipulation," she explains, "is everyone in the show has to be 18 and under, and they have to be able to play live on stage."

Based on the popular 2003 film of the same name, *School of Rock* tells the story of Dewey Finn, a substitute teacher with frustrated rock 'n' roll ambitions, portrayed in the movie by frenetic man-boy Jack Black.

In a classic underdog story, Finn teaches his kids the value of nonconformity and self-expression while prepping for a "battle of the bands" competition.

Upstart Crow's production, directed by John Deline, will feature live music also performed by musicians under the age of 18. Joe Ingram is the nonprofit's musical director.

Like the movie, *School of Rock* features famous rock songs, but unlike the movie, the musical has additional material from acclaimed Broadway writer Andrew Lloyd



Webber (*Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*).
 "We have 30-plus kids in the production," Smith continues, "all ranging from the age of 18 on down. The youngest is 10."

Smith admits it was challenging to fill the cast with youth performers.

"We really recruited through band directors here in Eugene and Springfield," she explains, "and local rock 'n' roll-centered organizations for kids," including Allstar Rock Foundation, Grrlz Rock and Music Masters. Over the course of two weeks, cast and crew will partake in intensive, all-day rehearsals.

Smith says that, like rock 'n' roll, *School of Rock* exhibits a vitality that never stops. "It's the energy of the music itself," she says.

Smith continues: "It's very empowering for the kids. It lets kids know it's okay to speak your mind. There's a wonderful song called 'If Only You Would Listen.' It's letting the kids have that moment to say: 'I wish you would listen to me,' to stand up and say, 'Dad, I would rather play drums.'"

But Smith says *School of Rock* also has valuable lessons for parents and guardians of underage children. "It gets them to see their child as not an extension of themselves," she says, "but as a creative ball of energy that needs a place to let it go, let it out. Kids do have the ability and accountability to be responsible when they're empowered." ■

Upstart Crow's School of Rock runs 7 pm Friday and Saturday and 2 pm Sunday, July 22-24, at LCC's Ragazzino Theatre; \$20, tickets available at upstartcrowstudios.org or at the door.

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