

Elgin Opera House returns — on screen

Buy tickets to view 'High School Musical Jr.' online

By Lisa Britton
Go! Magazine

ELGIN — Terry Hale was tired of life without theater.

"I'd just reached the point where I knew we had to do something," said Hale, the executive artistic director at the Elgin Opera House.

He reached out to youth actors around the region and found that they too were craving the stage.

In early December he decided to try "High School Musical Jr." He held auditions three weeks later.

He expected a dozen people. "I put out a little audition call and we were blown away. We've got actors from four different counties," he said. "Everyone was desperate for an opportunity to get together again."

The cast numbers 70.

When he started rehearsals, Union County was considered "extreme risk" in the state's pandemic rating system. This risk level restricted group gatherings, so Hale and his team had to be creative.

They divided the cast into groups of 10 actors.

"It was a puzzle," he said. "We had to go through the entire script, every song, and break it up into seven pieces."

Rehearsals for each small group required masks, temperature checks and extra sanitation.

Rehearsals weren't the only challenge. At the extreme risk level, there couldn't be an audience, so Hale decided to film a performance that would be watched online (see box at right for details).

Hale and his team have created a film version of the production with the goal of replicating a live theater experience as much as pos-



Courtesy of the Elgin Opera House

The performance, which was filmed in small groups to follow health guidelines, may be watched online at scheduled times April 24-May 2, 2021.

sible. The licensing company Music Theater International stipulated that the production had to seem as "live" as possible with the entire show recorded in the theater space.

"We recorded everything as individuals or very small distanced groups," Hale said. "The entire cast

has never been together in one room."

Those recordings were mixed to sound like one cohesive group performance.

"Some of those songs have 70 different voices," he said.

For instance, the song "Status

Quo" is set in a high school cafeteria and features every teenager in the cast.

"Each one is at their own table, — we filmed each table separately," Hale said.

The set is a mixture of the stage from "Newsies" (the last production held at the Opera House) and "Matilda," which was canceled in the spring of 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Although this musical will be different from traditional Opera House shows, Hale said everyone has worked extra hard to make it happen.

"The same amount of passion, work and dedication went into this show — if not more," he said. "It's a huge commitment and a big investment of their time and energy."

Tickets are \$17 for a single viewer. There are other price options for group viewings.

"This show costs me as much as any other show," Hale said. "It was a big investment. It's a labor of love."

HOW TO WATCH

Purchase tickets for a specific date and time. You have to log in at the time on your ticket — the show cannot be paused or watched later.

Watch parties to view the recorded production will be held at the Elgin Opera House for up to 100 people on a first come, first served basis. Tickets must be purchased in advance. (This is subject to change — call to confirm.)

SHOWTIMES

- April 24: 4:30 p.m., 7:30 p.m.
- April 25: 7:30 p.m.
- April 29: 7:30 p.m.
- April 30: 7:30 p.m.
- May 1: 4:30 p.m., 7:30 p.m.
- May 2: 4:30 p.m.

PURCHASE

Go to elginoperahouse.com and click on "order tickets."

If you have questions, call the Elgin Opera House's box office at 541-663-6324.

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ON THE COVER: Abigail Hale (right) gestures to another actor during mic checks at the Elgin Opera House Friday, March 19, 2021, during rehearsals of "High School Musical Jr." (Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group).

GO
WEEKEND OUTLOOK



FRIDAY

High 66 Low 39

Partly sunny



SATURDAY

High 65 Low 38

Showers around



SUNDAY

High 58 Low 38

Showers possible

Be safe, wear masks,
stay distanced: we will
get through this.
Thank you. Mae



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