

Anxiety abounds as actors, crew prepare for ‘Big River’

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BOB FRANK, For The Times

When actors and actresses audition for productions, a healthy amount of anxiety is all around. Auditioners are anxious but so are the staff who have to select the right actor for the role.

The Reisterstown Theatre Project’s upcoming production of “Big River,” a musical based on the book, “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” by Mark Twain, was no exception.

When the doors to Franklin Middle opened and auditioners started arriving in droves to showcase their skills one evening three weeks ago, there were boys and girls, women and yes, even a wealth of what can be the most difficult actors in musical theater to attract, talented adult men.

The production team of June Frank, Billi Dale, and Laura Holland quickly had the auditioners sign in. A picture of each auditioner was taken and they were ushered into the theater to begin the audition.

Auditioners were introduced to the production staff. The first five auditioners mounted the stage and sang a rousing rendition of the “Star Spangled Banner” or another patriotic song. Everyone did fine. It was fun to watch as the men struggled to hit the high notes.

With the group sing completed, each auditioner sang solo. They sang songs from “High School Musical,” several classic show tunes, and a smattering of childhood classics like “Happy Birthday” or “Ring Around the Rosie.”

After the singing session, the acting took over. The potential Huck Finns and Paps bantered while potential Widow Douglasses and Mary Jane Wilkeses performed. Two more nights of auditions produced three dozen or so actors to choose from. Things were looking up.

There were plenty of actors, so it was a matter of choosing which actor was best for which role as opposed to some sessions where the main lament is, “We need more actors!”

The week closed with a cast in place that looked the part, sounded the part and was ready to get started. Three days later the cast gathered for the first time to meet each other, sing a song or two and do an initial reading of the script.

“Big River” is to be performed at Franklin Middle School March 13-28 on Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m.

The musical’s director is Bob Frank, director. Kathy McCrory is stage manager. Matt Elky is music director. Liz Meuse-Cummisky is music director and vocal consultant. Alyssa Poole is the

pianist.