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MTSU Theatre students gain life-changing experience from musical's unexpected 'Terrible, Horrible, No Good' fate

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. — **MTSU Theatre** students were ready for a "Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day."

They didn't realize it would break their hearts, too.

The cast and crew of the university's big spring musical, "**Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day,**" prepared for months for their April 2-5 production with games, songs and adventures, plus special training in children's theater. They aimed to show their all-ages audiences how much fun a child's worst day, even one with lima beans AND a dentist's appointment, can turn out to be.

On March 16, they learned that the university had decided to cancel the show to help protect them and their audiences amid the ongoing COVID-19 virus threat, leaving all their unique rehearsals, sets, costumes, lighting design and music unseen and unheard.

The students, directed by senior **Virginia Tipps** of Murfreesboro with internationally recognized children's theater professor **Jette Halladay** as assistant director, romped through pre-production, concentrating on shaking their sillies out while learning lines, painting sets and hitting cues.

Their distinctive MTSU training and experience gave them new insights into traditional theater prep and may also be a catalyst for new career directions and diversions.

"Through this show, I totally discovered that I want to do children's theater forever," said junior **Liv Hendrix** of Franklin, Tennessee, who was cast in the lead role and was relishing the opportunity to show Alexander's ADHD as a trait rarely depicted for young girls often dismissed as "fidgety."

"I transferred here because I wanted to do more musical theater, and ... now that I have children's theater, it all clicks. I was thinking, 'How can I share my love of education and theater for young audiences and my love of performance? Oh, I can do children's theater!' Now I've kind of discovered it and I don't ever want to stop doing this."

Senior **Brian Jones Jr.** of Chicago, whose audition and casting as the loyal Kangaroo was his first theater experience, said "Alexander" gave the group an opportunity to "bring more of that inner child out of us, the one that as we grow, we try to channel in."

"I want all the kids and the adults to leave with hope that the next day will be better than today," he said, "even if it was a very horrible, terrible, bad day. Just know that you will

always have a bad day, but the next day will always be better, and the day after that, and you will always have people there for you.”

Tipps, who is graduating this semester, was honored to prepare for her final MTSU production the same way she began her student career: with Halladay.

“It is such a unique opportunity,” Tipps said. “She has told us before that children's theater is a sacred opportunity to affect these children's lives in such a huge way, in ways that we don't really think about as adults, more than other types of theater. ...

“I think Alex's journey throughout the show becomes a hopeful one ... And I hope that (audiences) who see it feel more inclined to treat everybody better in the real world so we don't have as many terrible days, and that they connect to their inner child and allow themselves to play and imagine and grow with each other.”

A complete list of the “Alexander” cast and crew is included in the show program, available at <https://mtsu.edu/theatreanddance/programs/Alexander.php>.

For more information about MTSU's theatre program in the **Department of Theatre and Dance**, visit <http://www.mtsu.edu/theatreanddance>.

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