Children's Theatre rings with 'The Sound of Music'

By Paul Hyde
Arts Writer
phyde@greenvilleonline.com

"The Sound of Music" is an irresistible movie, beloved by millions, so it's no surprise that the stage version also invariably proves popular.

"It's got a great message and everybody knows the movie," says stage director Betsy Bisson. "Most people can probably recite the whole thing and sing along with every song."

Bisson is directing the South Carolina Children's Theatre production of the Rodgers-and-Hammerstein musical classic, which opens Friday for 10 performances through Sept. 23 at the Peace Center's Gunter Theatre.

The Children's Theatre last performed "The Sound of Music" in 2009 and the response was so strong that theater decided to bring it back.

"It did extremely well in 2009," says Bisson, who serves as artistic and education director for the Children's Theatre. "People said it was the best show we've ever done."

In anticipation of a similarly

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Julia Higginbotham (Gretl), left, and Lisa K. Bryant (as Maria) are featured in the South Carolina Children's Theatre's production of "The Sound of Music." MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/STAFF

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strong turnout, the theater has not only scheduled three weekends of performances but has allowed for the possibility of an extension, Bisson says.

The 1959 musical follows the irrepressible governess Maria who is hired by the irascible Captain Von Trapp to care for his seven children. Against the backdrop of the growing Nazi menace, Maria teaches the children to sing and falls in love with Von Trapp.

The score includes several familiar Broadway standards, including "Edelweiss," "My Favorite Things," "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" and the lyrical title song.

Bisson says the musical offers some poignant thoughts about family and following your dreams.

"That's such a great message at a time when everyone is concerned with the economy and politics and we lose sight of the things that really make life worth living," Bisson says.

The character of Maria holds a special appeal for Bisson.

"I love the feistiness of Maria," Bisson says. "The captain has finally found someone who is his equal and she breaks through his tough exterior."

Actress Lisa K. Bryant, familiar to Flat Rock Playhouse audiences, is both choreographing "The Sound of Music" and starring as Maria.

"She was choreographing for us and ending up playing the part of Maria," Bisson says. "She's exceptional."

North Greenville professor Cheryl Greene portrays the Mother Abbess and closes Act I with the soaring ballad "Climb Ev'ry Mountain."

"Cheryl is an opera singer," Bisson says. "She's got some great pipes."

As for the seven Von Trapp children, Bisson says: "The kids are so good and so adorable."

The production includes towering new sets by Patrick Rizzotti.

"The scenery is very large," Bisson says. "We're dealing with a villa in Austria. It's massive."

The 38-member cast includes Brian Boughner as Captain Von Trapp. The Von Trapp children are played by Margaret Butler (Liesl), Jamie Riedy (Friedrich), Kaitlyn Hamilton (Louisa), Eric Lane (Kurt), Selah Boughner (Brigitta), Anna Knobel (Marta) and Julia Higginbotham (Gretl).

YOU CAN GO

What: "The Sound of Music," produced by the South Carolina Children's Theatre
When: 7 p.m. on Friday; 1:30 p.m. on Saturday; 1:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. on Sept. 9; 7 p.m. on Sept. 14; 1:30 p.m. on Sept. 15 and 16; 7 p.m. on Sept. 21; 1:30 p.m. on Sept. 22 and 23
Where: Peace Center's Gunter Theatre
Tickets: $26 for adults; $17 for children 18 and under (special price of $16 per person on Sunday, Sept. 9 at 5:30 p.m.)
Information: 864-467-3000 or www.peacecenter.org