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'Young Frankenstein' comes to University of Alabama's Marian Gallaway Theatre

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Special to Tusk

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Frankenstein's monster has traded his hobnailed boots for a pair of dancing shoes. Based on the classic 1974 movie by the same name, the musical "Young Frankenstein," with book by Mel Brooks and Thomas Meehan, and music and lyrics by Brooks, is coming to the Marian Gallaway Theatre stage starting Tuesday, as a production of the University of Alabama Department of Theatre and Dance.

The parody of classic horror films of the 1930s follows the grandson of deceased mad scientist Dr. Victor Von Frankenstein, Frederick Frankenstein, as he travels from New York to Transylvania to resolve newly-inherited-property issues. Upon arriving and meeting a gaggle of guests at Castle Frankenstein, Frederick, formerly ashamed of the family name to the point of insisting it be pronounced "FRONK-en-steen," decides to continue his grandfather's laboratory work reviving the dead, with the help of new-found right-hand man, Igor.

Through a series of comic twists, Frederick and his newly created creature switch brains, saving each other's lives from village mobs, and ultimately tap-dancing — as in the film, to "Puttin' on the Ritz" — upon a happy ending.

Jamie Schor, public relations and marketing manager for UA theatre and dance, said "Young Frankenstein" can entertain multiple audiences. Brooks, the comedic engine at the heart of "Young Frankenstein" — the screenplay for the film was co-written with Gene Wilder, who also starred as Frederick — has acted, written, produced, directed and composed for more than 50 years, with hits, often but not always genre parodies, including "The Producers," "Blazing Saddles," "The Twelve Chairs," "Silent Movie," "High Anxiety," "Spaceballs" and more. Before entering film, he worked in stand-up, as a writer for Sid Caesar's "Your Show of Shows," and cut best-selling albums with Carl Reiner as "The 2000-Year-Old Man." With Buck Henry, Brooks co-created TV's spy-genre spoof "Get Smart."

"'Young Frankenstein' succeeds on two levels," Schor said, "an older generation of Brooks fans, and a newer generation."

The musical stays in the same vein as the original film, but with a few minor differences, including of course more musical numbers, and characters arriving at different times, or being involved more in certain scenes.

"The special effects are on a larger scale than what the department has produced in the past," he said. And of course, the acting pool draws from a younger age group, but Schor said that's not a disadvantage.

Daniel Hulsizer, who plays Frederick's devoted servant Igor — grandson of the Igor who served Victor — said one of the biggest challenges he has faced is overcoming the physical challenges, namely the large hunchback Igor suffers under. A mixture of the costuming students and faculty, and his acting professors have assisted in discovering successful support, breath control and proper posture for a character that walks with a physical disability.

As challenging as that has been, Hulsizer said he's learned tremendously.

“The most important lesson I have been taught is to keep the story, characters and plot absolutely honest,” he said, “Because without honesty it (the role) doesn't truly exist.”

Stacy Alley, the musical's director and choreographer, has ingrained that lesson into every member of the cast, Hulsizer said.

The young Dr. Frankenstein, the monster, companions and villagers hit the Marian Gallaway Theatre in Rowand-Johnson Hall at the University of Alabama Tuesday through Nov. 20 at 7:30 p.m., with a closing Nov. 22 Sunday matinee at 2 p.m. Ticket prices are \$20, \$17 for faculty, staff and seniors, and \$14 for students.

After numerous hours of preparation and rehearsal, the “Young Frankenstein” cast and crew are ready to put this Ritz on display.

“With a show like this, there is an overly heightened sense of reality,” Hulsizer said, “I am excited to tell this heartwarming story.”

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