

Steamboat Skating Club presents 'Mary Poppins On Ice'

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The cast of the Steamboat Skating Club's production of "Mary Poppins On Ice" will take to the ice at 6:30 p.m. Friday, March 29, and at 2 and 6:30 p.m. Saturday, March 30. The doors will open 30 minutes prior to the start of the show, and tickets can be purchased online at steamboatskatingclub.org two hours before the show time. (Photo by John F. Russell)

John F. Russell

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — When Celina Taylor was a growing up as an ice skater in Detroit, a director of her skating club there introduced the idea of the skaters performing theatrical ice shows each spring.

"That was my favorite part of skating," she said. "It's probably why I fell in love with skating to begin with."

Taylor is now the director of figure skating for Steamboat Skating Club and putting the finishing touches on the club's second annual musical theater production on ice.

On Friday, March 29, "Mary Poppins On Ice" premieres at Howelsen Ice Arena, the first of three shows that weekend.

The more than 50 local skaters in “Mary Poppins On Ice” range from 3 to 18 years old. The majority of them belong to Steamboat Skating Club, while several are coming from ice hockey backgrounds. One commutes from Craig, where she was inspired to participate during a program in which experienced figure skaters from Steamboat Skating Club worked with younger skaters at Moffat County Ice Arena.

The show is composed of 38 cuts of music from the original “Mary Poppins” film, the soundtrack of the Broadway play and from the 2018 movie “Mary Poppins Returns.” The clips are arranged by Taylor to unfold logically and coherently. Each number was adopted by a skater or a group of skaters, who worked with Taylor to choreograph a skating routine to the music.

“It’s always a priority for me that the children enjoy the songs they’re skating to,” Taylor said.

In a typical figure skating competition, each number stands on its own, like a dance recital format. But in a musical theater ice show, the skaters are dancing in a specific way for a specific purpose – to convey a storyline, Taylor said.

Besides choreographing the pieces, skaters contributed to every element of the show, including painting, figuring out costumes and designing and building props.

The ice show also brings plenty of opportunity for skaters of different ages to interact.

i If you go

What: Steamboat Skating Club presents Mary Poppins On Ice

When: 6:30 p.m. Friday, March 29 and Saturday, March 30; 2 p.m. Saturday, March 30

Where: Howelsen Ice Arena, 285 Howelsen Pkwy.

“I like helping with all the little kids, because they’re so fun,” said Kaelyn Radway, 13, who plays Mary Poppins. “I’ll entertain them, tell them to be quiet and direct them.”

“(The skaters) have a lot of ownership of the show, which is wonderful,” Taylor said.

Evie Sachs, left, plays the part of Michael and Barbara Saebz plays Jane in a rehearsal the Steamboat Skating Club's production of "Mary Poppins On Ice." The Banks children were being held by Mary Poppins' toy army, which has put them on trial for losing their tempers one too many times. (Photo by John F. Russell)

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Local theater teacher Stuart Handloff worked with the skaters on character development.

"Even though there are no words spoken in the show, the skaters really get into character and portray their character on ice in other ways," Taylor said.

"(In this kind of show,) it doesn't matter as much your (skating) abilities, only whether or not if you can embrace your character," said 14-year-old Eliana Brown, who plays Topsy.

Brown has been ice skating for a decade and has been part of the club for the past six or seven years.



Ice skating clubs are generally more competition-driven, and most don't put on musical theater shows, Taylor said.

With the nature of figure skating generally being a singles sport, with every athlete competing and being rated against every other athlete, the sport can sometimes feel competitive and solitary.

"In a sport where you are constantly compared to your friends, it's a welcome relief that you get to have two months of the year where you focus on really coming together and working toward a common goal," Taylor said. "It really allows the skaters to lean on one another and find ways to create a team atmosphere."

Performers from the Steamboat Skating Club, including Kaelyn Radway, center playing the part of Mary Poppins, and fellow skaters Eliana Brown, Ava Maynard and Neve Wade, pictured from left, rehearse for "Mary Poppins On Ice." (Photo by John F. Russell)

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"Rise or fall, we're in this together," she added.

"The fact that we're all working together is so much fun," Brown said. "My entire team is basically my family."

"The show is way more artistic and more fun than regular competitions," Radway said.

Musical theater on ice also brings a positive change from the usual format of figure skating in terms of their audience. When the skaters compete in competitions, they drive to the Front Range to do so, which means fewer local supporters are able to cheer them on. But with last year's first musical theater skating production, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory on Ice" — which sold out both evening shows — the skaters have been able to feel new kinds of support.

Pacey Kuhlman plays the part of the Bird Woman during a rehearsal for the Steamboat Skating Club's production of "Mary Poppins On Ice." (Photo by John F. Russell)

John F. Russell

"(Putting on the ice show) has given the skaters a space to share what they do with the community in a way that they couldn't do before," Taylor said. "The experience of having the stands packed has been really gratifying."

"It's exciting that the whole town can see what our club can do," Radway said.

"There are no judges (in musical theater ice shows)," Brown said. "It may be a lot of people, but if I mess up, they can't tell. Skating with all my friends, wearing a cool costume, skating to music I know, making it a whole storyline ... with characters and lights, it's so much more fun."

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