

# "Encore!" Local K-8 School Celebrates 15 Years of Musical Theatre

BY LYDIA INGRAM

It's opening night. Children wait with bated breath for entrance cues. They step onto the stage, blinking under bright spotlights. And when all the lines are delivered and all the songs are sung, they breathe deeply and feel their chests swell with pride as the audience roars with applause. The children clasp their peers' hands, bow, and exit the stage, feeling an emotional high, but never suspecting the impact that moment would have on them and their confidence levels for years to come.

Maybe you know that feeling: the joy that comes when you conquer fears, reach for the stars, and succeed. Teachers at St. John's Lutheran School want all children to experience that as often as possible. That's why, in 2000, St. John's began staging major productions such as "The Wizard of Oz," "The Pirates of Penzance," "Annie Jr.," "Godspell Jr.," and others.

Since then, hundreds of students have had the opportunity to shine in these shows, and many have gone on to participate in the performing arts in high school, college, and beyond. Alumni regularly attest to the significant impact the SJS theatre program had on their lives. **"Without St. John's theatre program, I would never have discovered my love of theatre and would not be where I am today. Now I do lighting for 1200+ seat theatres, but I always remember where I started,"** said Will Witner, SJS graduate ('08) and lighting technology major at UNCSA.

The St. John's musical theatre program is more than just a great way for children to build confidence and get excited about the arts; it also helps develop valuable skills such as public speaking and teamwork. Brooke Gartley, SJS graduate ('06) and English teacher at West Forsyth H.S., said, **"I attribute much of my success as a teacher to skills I began to master as a cast member in middle school. The program not only improved my singing and acting abilities, but also taught me how to be comfortable in my own skin."**



The St. John's theatre program is under the direction of Stephanie Guelzow, 3rd grade teacher and frequent stage manager of productions at Twin City Stage. Now in her 20th year at St. John's, Guelzow is passionate about building community through the arts. **"Theatre allows people—not just students—to work together to create something unique,"** Guelzow says. **"Everyone has something to contribute. Everyone is important."**

From making costumes to helping students run lights or paint sets, parents and teachers work side by

side with children. Everyone is invested, and the hours of work produce more than just a great show; they produce a wonderful, close community. That community is part of why St. John's is so special, and why this year's upcoming show is so exciting.

This spring St. John's invites the Winston-Salem community to experience that family atmosphere and see those talented children firsthand. On March 18–20, St. John's middle school performs "Encore!" —a unique selection of scenes and songs from some of the biggest shows St. John's has ever staged. **The Saturday show will also be a special reunion event, serving as a homecoming for alumni who fondly remember shining like stars on that stage.**

If you love supporting children in the arts, or have a child who would benefit from being part of a loving school family that believes in **"Developing minds, serving communities, growing in faith"** and letting kids shine, **St. John's warmly invites you to attend "Encore!"** to see their families and arts program in action. Call 725-1651 or email [pfriel@stjohns.wv.org](mailto:pfriel@stjohns.wv.org) for information, to schedule a school tour, or to purchase "Encore!" tickets.



**St. John's**  
Lutheran School

Developing Minds.  
Serving Communities.  
Growing In Faith.

Preschool, Kindergarten, Grade School & Middle School

**Call Today (336) 725-1651**

**Visit [StJohnsFalcons.org](http://StJohnsFalcons.org)**