

Doha Players

Are Off To See The Wizard

By Christina Maria Paschyn

QH taps our ruby slippers all the way to the Doha British Montessori School as the Doha Players gear up to bring their rendition of L. Frank Baum's classic adventure tale to life.

One early Friday morning, a lion, a tin man and a scarecrow stood together chatting as munchkins frolicked with a tiny white puppy. A pretty girl in a blue-and-white dress sat primping her chestnut hair, while a green witch with a pointy black hat crouched in a corner to practice her cackle.

Welcome to Oz, a merry old land filled with magic, music and adventure. To get here, all you have to do is follow the yellow brick road - after you've purchased your boarding pass from Villaggio or Landmark.

This month, Doha residents will have the chance to see one of the greatest children's stories ever told come to life in the Doha Players' production of 'The Wizard of Oz'.

The classic tale, written by L. Frank Baum in 1900, tells the story of a Kansas farm girl named Dorothy and her feisty dog Toto, who are swept away by a tornado to a fairytale land. On their quest to return home, Dorothy and Toto join forces with a scarecrow, a tin man and a cowardly lion to battle a wicked witch and find the mysterious wizard who can make all their dreams come true.

"It's been around forever and forever and forever. Who doesn't know the story of the Wizard of Oz!" said director Angela Walton, who has led rehearsals for the show for the past five months.

Most audiences will remember the film version of 'The Wizard of Oz', the 1939 Technicolor hit that made actress Judy Garland a star. But the Doha Players' rendition stays true to the original stage version, which features a number of songs and scenes probably unfamiliar to the movie's fans.



Bruce Cross, who plays the Scarecrow, is thrilled to be making his performing debut with the group. Although new to Doha, Cross is confident theatre lovers of all ages here will enjoy the show. "I think the age groups that come and see this, everybody from age three and upwards, will enjoy seeing Dorothy succeeding. It's a good ending, a warm story," Cross said.

The show is a first for many in the cast. Mark Slade and Donald Rikley, who play the Cowardly Lion and the Tin Man respectively, are also newcomers to Qatar and to the Doha Players.



"It's made us feel quite at home, doing something we're both quite familiar with and bringing that to Doha, and working with a lot of expats who have come from all over the world," Slade explained. "It's helped me to settle much quicker." Rikley echoed his sentiment: "I think people who come to see the show will see how much fun we're having; we get along with each other, and that will come across in the show."

Indeed, even at this rehearsal, it's hard not to get carried away by the cast's boisterous mood. The 50 munchkins are the most intriguing to watch. Bubbling with anticipation, the school-children are eager to put on their Emerald City costumes: glitzy green dresses and suits that were handmade for the production.

But right now, they are captivated by another star of the show: Henry, a five-year-old white Bichon Frise who is quite possibly the happiest puppy this reporter has ever seen. He may not look like the original Toto, but the kids don't seem to mind. "He's as fluffy as a cloud," exclaims a little boy as he scoops up the pooch in his arms.

Word on the street is Henry may unintentionally steal the show. His owner says the pup can't seem to stop barking when the Scarecrow falls down, the Wicked Witch cackles or the Lion roars. But 16-year-old Katie Potter isn't too

worried; she always has dog snacks ready in case Henry can't keep still on stage. The young beauty is playing Dorothy, her first lead role, and she hopes audiences will notice her unique twist to the character.

"I'm not exactly like Dorothy in real life, I'm more moody. So sometimes I guess I can bring a kind of sarcasm," Potter explained. But she won't mind if her character's subtext is beyond the grasp of some of the audience.

"There are jokes in the show that adults will get and jokes that kids will get, and the play is just really bright, happy and fun," she said.

Director Walton thinks the production will satisfy the Doha community's craving for live entertainment: "We're just starved of live theatre in Doha. And [this show] is great because people can come and be transformed to Emerald City and to Kansas and to Oz. For two and a half hours you forget your troubles."



INFORMATION

The Doha Players' production of The Wizard of Oz will run from **March 14-24th** at the Doha British School. Tickets range from **75-100 QAR** and can be purchased from The One at Villaggio and Landmark malls.