



PEOPLE
Bilingual musical theatre
group hits the stage

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ACTING UP

in more than one language

Cyndi Turtledove's Bilingual Musical Theatre class gets ready to bring down the house during a performance in Spanish and English

By **NANCY TOWNSLEY**
Of the Times

Not only can Cyndi Turtledove write a song that teaches about tolerance, but her drama students can sing it on stage in two languages.

As a finale to the playwright's Bilingual Musical Theatre program, a special play will debut Saturday morning at the Cedar Hills Recreation Center.

"La Trompa Del Elefante"



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BIG DEBUT — "La Trompa Del Elefante" will be staged Saturday at the Cedar Hills Recreation Center. Above, teacher Cyndi Turtledove leads 7-year-old Jacob Schrif (center) and other cast members in a rehearsal. At left, Natalie Paik stretches her arms in preparation for her role as a giraffe in the bilingual play.

JONATHAN HOUSE / The Times

service," she said. "So I'm helping out with the kids as well as acting in the play. It's fun."

Wooden helps the young-

said. "It seemed like a good thing — first we signed Jacob up and after a few weeks the whole family was involved."

Kyle, who will enter kindergarten next fall, likes playing the fly the best.

"I like the wings — they're better than the other flies' wings," he said, stroking the glittery, netted appendages.

"Aqui estoy!"

His favorite line was one he practiced at home with his parents.

"Aqui estoy -- here I am!" he said dramatically. "Estoy alto en cielo -- I'm high in the sky!"

How the Elephant Got its Trunk" is due to light up the gymnasium stage at 11 a.m.

Three elephants, two chimpanzees, a snake, an ostrich, a crocodile, a giraffe and several pesky flies will tell the tale about the always-curious Elefantito and his misadventures.

Based on a story by Rudyard Kipling, the play features six original songs and a Mexican folkloric dance.

It's hardly the first time that Turtledove, a Beaverton resident, has used her creativity to entertain and educate people. Her one-of-a-kind approach integrates drama, dance, art and music, welcoming English and Spanish-speaking theater enthusiasts at the same time.

"This is just so much fun," the energetic 68-year-old said between scenes as the troupe practiced last weekend. "What I especially love is the way the kids just light up when they're telling the story."

Baby Elephant (Elefantito), played by 7-year-old Jacob Schrifft, was having a little trouble with an itchy rubber nose. He worked on projecting his voice toward the back of the gym so everyone could hear.

"Louder! Slower!" coached Turtledove, encouraging her protégé to make his lines heard. She strummed her guitar to accompany her songs as the cast rehearsed for a final time.

The Barnes Elementary School second-grader responded with grand hand gestures, making the point that despite

Through the Arts and classes offered by Cyndi Turtledove, log on to www.lesta.net. Turtledove, a Beaverton resident, is a professional theater director and teacher who tutors students in music, drama, art and dance.

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the Mommy and Daddy Elephants' pleadings, he wasn't about to stop being inquisitive.

"What does the crocodile eat?" he asked. "Que come el cocodrilo?"

"Porque es azul el cielo?" he continued. "Why is the sky blue?"

For Jacob, whose entire family is involved in the production, being the star of the show was a big draw.

"I like it because I'm in the lead, and it's pretty cool," he said.

Jacob is enrolled in Barnes' Spanish Immersion Program. His mother, Nicole Levitt, was pleased to find an extra-curricular extension of what he's learning at school.

"This is just so wonderful — we're all excited about presenting the play," noted Levitt. She plays Mommy Elephant alongside her husband, Mike (Crocodile) and younger son Kyle (a Fly and the Sun).

No one left out

Turtledove, who grew up in Los Angeles and taught bilingual theater in Mexico for nearly two decades, is passionate about integrating the English and Spanish-speaking communities. She brings her Learn English and Spanish Through the Arts programs to schools throughout the



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Portland area and privately tutors both languages to Anglo and Latino students.

Because she writes her plays by alternating lines in Spanish and English, no one is left out.

"One of my goals is to help Anglos learn some Spanish and help Latinos learn some English," said Turtledove. After she returned to Oregon from Mexico in 2004, she started the Cornelius Bilingual Theatre Club at Echo Shaw and Cornelius elementary schools, performing several plays at Centro Cultural.

The daughter of a Hollywood film agent, Turtledove comes by her talent and ambition naturally.

"I've been doing theater and dance my whole life," she said. "My grandmother was born in Spain, so I guess that's where my interest in Spanish came from."

She's passing on the family's thespian genes to her own granddaughter these days. Kalie Wooden, 15, a sophomore at Southridge High School, plays the Ostrich in "La Trompa Del Elefante."

It's a double bonus for Wooden to work beside her grandmother on the production.

"In order to graduate, I have to have 60 hours of community

service, so I have to adjust my costumes, coaches them on their lines and nudges them onto the stage when it's time to perform.

Jenny Cisneros, who plays Papa Elephant, is grateful for Wooden's role. While she's busy performing, the teenager adjusts her 6-year-old daughter's mask.

Nicole Paredes, who attends Agape Christian School in Beaverton, is Cousin Chimp in the play.

"My mother-in-law was an actress in TV commercials," said Cisneros, whose first language is Spanish. "My husband wanted to involve Nicole in theater. When I read 'Bilingual Musical Theatre,' I was really excited."

Levitt liked the family-oriented aspect.

"It's nice that families can do this together," she said. Rehearsals started in mid-January, and her husband and two children have dedicated two hours to the performance every Saturday morning since.

Mike Schrifft, who dons "teeth" made of felt when it's his turn to swim in the play's polluted "river," makes sure his younger son, who has dual roles, is always in his proper place.

"Kyle and I hang out together," he said.

The family got involved after perusing the Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District course catalog.

"We were looking through the classes, and there it was, between soccer and gymnastics and everything else," Mike

With cast members singing songs like "Solamente Una Pez — Only One Fish" and "Elefantito Moderno — A Modern Baby Elephant," the play encourages audience participation.

"It's really great because everyone participates," noted Turtledove, who writes, directs and produces the play. Debbie Schoen, director of the Cedar Hills Recreation Center, and Karin Madsen, program coordinator, gave her the chance to bring her talents to Beaverton.

"They've been absolutely wonderful and very supportive of my ideas," said Turtledove, who will teach another segment of Bilingual Musical Theatre beginning April 8 at the Cedar Hills center.

Turtledove also expects to lead two summertime camps at the center, June 26-30 and July 31 through Aug. 4.

Parents who simply will act as part of the audience Saturday were happy for Turtledove's involvement.

Helen Paik said the opportunity for her 7-year-old to learn Spanish was too good to pass up. Natalie, a Findley Elementary School second-grader, plays the Giraffe in "La Trompa."

"Having exposure to a second language is really nice," said Helen, watching her daughter bounce around the stage.

"And Natalie obviously loves to act."