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ENTERTAINMENT

To bee or not to bee

By Bobby Garcia Updated March 20, 2009 12:00 AM



The cast of The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee

MANILA, Philippines - Can you spell I-R-R-E-S-I-S-T-I-B-L-E? That's what I thought of the Tony Award winning musical *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* when I caught it in New York a couple of years ago. It was that rare musical that was smart, funny, heartbreaking, uplifting and totally unpredictable (thanks to the participation of audience volunteers).

I immediately began negotiating for the rights as I knew it would be the perfect musical to launch Atlantis' 10th anniversary season. And, as luck would have it, we secured the rights thanks to our friends at Music Theatre International.

Some New York critics have compared *Spelling Bee* to another one of my favorite shows, *Avenue Q*. And I can understand why. Both shows are about the realities of life, growing up as a result of life's challenges and treasuring important moments in our life because they don't last forever. But *Spelling Bee* goes one step further and invites volunteers audience members (and some surprise celebrity guests) as on-stage spellers who will compete for the

coveted trophy.

Spelling Bee centers around a fictional spelling bee in Putnam County, New York. Six kids in the throes of puberty face off in the battle of their lives. They compete against each other as well as members of the audience. Three adults help adjudicate the proceedings: A nostalgic former spelling bee winner, a mildly insane Vice Principal and The Official Comfort Counselor completing his community service to the state of New York. *Spelling Bee* has a Tony Award winning book by Rachel Sheinkin and music and lyrics by Tony Award winner William Finn.

For our first show this year, it was important to us at Atlantis that we gather a cast of singers and actors who have all worked with us as a way of celebrating our 10-year journey together. The terrifically talented cast of nine are Cathy Azanza-Dy, Pheona Baranda, Johann dela Fuente, Rycharde Everley, Carla Guevarra-Laforteza, Noel Rayos, Felix Rivera, Thea Tadiar and Joel Trinidad.

We have also gathered a topnotch creative team with choreography by Chari Arespacochaga, set design by Tuxqs Rutaquio, costume design by Twinkle Zamora, lighting design by Johnsy Reyes, vocal coaching by ManMan Angsico and musical direction by Jojo Malferari.

As we experience a global recession, we are ever so more thankful for the sponsors who continue to stand behind us, most especially **The Philippine STAR**. Our 10-year partnership is the stuff that dreams are made of. We couldn't have made this journey without you and we are grateful for your support. Isaac Belmonte, Miguel Belmonte, Ricky Lo, Millet Mananquil and the late Max Soliven have showered us continuously with kindness and generosity. It has been an honor taking this 10-year adventure with you and we look forward to the next 10. Studio 23, Portofolio, Astoria Plaza, Make Up Forever, Crossover 105.1, MBC, XFM 92.3, Mellow Touch 94.7, Capricciosa, Superbowl, Chili's, Yoshinoya, Burger King, Brooklyn Pizza, Blim's Fine Furniture, GA Printing, Videogear, Crystal Clear, HIT Productions, Digipost, RCBC, The City of Makati, and our very loyal showbuyers have also supported us time and again, and for all that you've given, we humbly thank you Last, but certainly not least, we thank anyone who has ever bought a ticket to our shows. It has been a privilege having you in our audience.

We have been having great fun at *Spelling Bee* rehearsals. It is one of those shows that brings you joy at every rehearsal. It has reminded us of how amazing musical theatre truly can be. And we hope that, when the time comes for us to open the doors for all of you, it will bring you all great joy too.

We look forward to seeing you at both of our 10th anniversary shows, *Spelling Bee* and, later this year, *Spring Awakening!* Thank you for continuing to come to the theater.

Spelling Bee is presented in co-operation with **The Philippine STAR** and starts tomorrow, March 20 until April 4 at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium, RCBC Plaza, Makati. For details, call 892-7078 or 840-1187.

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