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Aerial spectacular 'Pippin' closes 80th Marshall Artists Series

By DEREK HALSEY For The Herald-Dispatch
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The high-flying hit Broadway musical "Pippin," is set to take the stage at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center in Huntington on Tuesday, April 4.

Courtesy of Prather Touring

HUNTINGTON - The Marshall Artists Series closes out its 80th season in high-flying style as the big top of the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center hosts the circus-themed musical "Pippin" at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 4.

The revamped classic took home four Tonys in 2013 when it was revived on Broadway and has since hit the road for a national tour.



The award winning revival, which was directed by Diane Paulus, will be re-created by her longtime associate, Mia Walker. Walker was the assistant director on the revival production - from its birth at the American Repertory Theater to Broadway to the first national tour.

"Pippin" features choreography by Tony Award nominee Chet Walker in the style of Bob Fosse and circus creations of acrobatics by Gypsy Snider of the Montreal-based circus company Les 7 doigts de la main (also known as 7 Fingers), the creative force behind the nationwide sensation Traces. The play also features the songs and lyrics of Stephen Schwartz, whom many live theater lovers will know for his music in the hit play "Wicked."

Tickets range from \$61.78 to \$94.95 and are available by calling 304-696-6656, online at Ticketmaster.com or at the Marshall Artists Series Box Office from noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday in the Joan C. Edwards Playhouse on the Marshall University campus.

Described as "an eye-popping, jaw-dropping extravaganza" by NY1, "Pippin" tells the story of a young prince on a death-defying journey to find meaning in his existence. Will he choose a happy but simple life? Or will he risk everything for a singular flash of glory? The tale is augmented by acrobatics and magical feats in addition to popular songs like "Corner of the Sky," "Magic To Do," "Glory," "No Time at All," "Morning Glow," and "Love Song."

The popular revival closes out a Marshall Artists Series season which has included performances from jazz greats Tony Bennett and Wynton Marsalis, the comedy of Lewis Black, radio rocker Gavin DeGraw and the State Ballet Theatre of Russia's production of "Cinderella" in addition to touring productions of "Rent" and "42nd Street" and appearances by Freda Payne in "A Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald" and Helen MacDonald, author of the New York Times bestseller "H is for Hawk."



"The Series is known for its variety, but then again we have a lot of different audiences that come to the shows," said Angela Jones, director of marketing and external affairs for the Marshall Artists Series.

"We have the Marshall community, we have people who have been longtime supporters of the Series, and we have the Tri-State community at large. We have kids in the audience from the area who may have never seen a professional ballet troupe from Russia perform 'Cinderella.' So, we have different kinds of audiences who count on the Marshall Artists Series to provide a variety of entertainment."

Penny Watkins, executive director for the Marshall Artists Series, notes this year's season accomplished much in the way of partnerships and outreach in addition to its core programming, with educational projects around West Virginia reaching more than 6,000 children, representing an educational investment value of more than \$86,000.

"Also, it was a season that came with another year's support for the Huntington Symphony Orchestra trying to help build an audience, master classes with Wynton Marsalis and the jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and the State Ballet Theatre of Russia," she said.

Additionally, Watkins said the Series has embarked on a new partnership with the Marshall University Recreation Center to bring films from Canada's Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour to the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center at 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 5, the festival's first programming in West Virginia.

Diversity and range is a strong point of the Marshall Artists Series, which is one of the longest-running entertainment programs of its kind in the United States.

"With the Marshall Artists Series being 80 years old, it is good for the Tri-State and good for West Virginia," Jones said. "It is the second oldest organization of its type in the country. We are a university-based artists series that is second in age only to the University of Michigan. It highlights our legacy of the arts, not only here at Marshall University, but throughout the Mountain State."

This is a labor of love for Jones as she began her work with the Marshall Artists Series while still a student, and she has worked her way up into her current position.



"I began working here when I was in grad school," Jones said. "I got my undergraduate in the Marshall business school with a marketing degree and then I got my master's in advertising ... I love working with the students, and I love what the Artists Series brings to the community," she said.

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