

'The Lark' opens Thursday at Minnesota State Mankato's Ted Paul Theatre

'The Lark' is now showing at Minnesota State Mankato's Ted Paul Theatre.

By Amanda Dyslin, Free Press staff writer [published in The Free Press, Mankato, MN]

With a theater department as busy as that of Minnesota State University, students often jump quickly from role to role.

Comedies, dramas, dramedies, musicals — these actors have to be ready for whatever. And they are, they say. With ample opportunities to play a variety of roles in the large number of productions [MSU Theatre](#) puts on, students are well prepared to go from singing and dancing one week to brooding and wailing the next.

Take Claire Wellin, for example. The sophomore musical theater major is transitioning from playing the sweet, lighthearted role of Wendy Darling in "Peter Pan" to a role of considerably more weight and depth — Joan of Arc in "The Lark," to open Nov. 9. Making such an abrupt aboutface must be challenging.

"In some ways yes, and in some ways no," Wellin said. "You want contrast, and you want to be able to do one sort of role and then jump into another kind of role."

Despite having the most experience with musicals, Wellin's having a great time playing such a fascinating, dramatic character. Oftentimes her parts in musicals lack the substance of someone like Joan of Arc, she said. It's a great opportunity for her to flex her acting muscles.

"A straight play has the opportunity to convey and communicate all these emotions just through acting," she said. "A lot of what 'The Lark' is is heavy dialogue. To be able to develop the ability to act just as well with less (flashiness) is important."

Senior Tharen Callanan, coming off of his role as Officer O'Hara in "Arsenic and Old Lace," agrees. He's playing the role of the Earl of Warwick.

"I personally like to do these straight shows that have real stakes in them," he said. "I like the role in 'Arsenic and Old Lace,' but there's not a lot to work with."

The play won't be completely heavy drama, though. There are humorous moments, he said.

"There's some pretty random comedy thrown in there," he said. Joan, for instance, is a pretty simple country girl and some of the things she says are ridiculous, he said. But those familiar with Joan's story know it doesn't end happily, so the play can't be all fun and games.

"The Lark" begins with Joan's trial and her account of how the voices prompted her to save France from the English. As she tells her story to the Inquisitor from Spain, the Earl of Warwick, Cauchon and others, flashbacks take the audience to the scenes Joan is recounting.

Wellin said she's doing research on Joan and the time period to ensure she does justice to the character.

"I'm working on her being very dynamic vocally and physically," she said. "She has moments of heroism and moments of great despair."

Performances of "The Lark" are 7:30 p.m. Nov. 9 through 12 & 16 through 18, with 2 p.m. matinees Nov. 12 and 19, in the Ted Paul Theatre.

Tickets are \$13 regular admission, \$12 for senior citizens, youth 16 and under and groups of 15 or more, and \$9 for Minnesota State students. The box office is open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday at 507-389-6661.