



Puffs: the cast of 13 includes Keith Brockett as Oliver, Ryan Hawke as Wayne, Eva Seymour as Megan, and Rob Mills as Cedric.

IN PRAISE OF PUFFS

Teenage wizards on broomsticks may sound familiar, but *Puffs* shines light on a different group of students at a certain school of magic.

IN RECENT years the popularity of “tribute” and parody theatre productions has grown. These lovingly “reimagined” shows take popular texts and give them twists or highlight secondary characters with new intertwining subplots.

Now, in the tradition of *50 Shades: The Musical* and *Thrones: The Musical Parody* and *Forbidden Broadway*, comes *Puffs – Or Seven Increasingly Eventful Years At A Certain School Of Magic And Magic*.

Puffs is a successful Off-Broadway play that brings new life to the Harry Potter stories, focusing on a group of wizarding students in familiar scenarios, but having their own experiences, and making self-discoveries.

In other words, these are the kids you didn’t hear about.

Creating new stories around minor or unseen characters is not that unusual. Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*, a play about two minor characters from *Hamlet*, is probably the most famous example. The unfortunate fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is intrinsically linked to Hamlet’s and events well beyond their control.

Writer, Matt Cox felt the same way about the kids in *Puffs*. “The idea for the show came when

I thought about how terrible it would be to be one of those other students at this particular magic school where, for seven years, they just wanted an education, but things kept getting worse and worse,” says Cox.

“**The students at this particular magic school just want an education but, for seven years, things keep getting worse and worse!**”

“From that funny idea, it was a quick jump to name them Puffs, as pop culture has deemed them the not-so-cool kids. I grew up not exactly the coolest kid in school, so I was able to piece it all together into a hero’s story, but with a focus on those side characters. It’s the play for the characters not destined to save the world.”

Popular singer Rob Mills plays the handsome Cedric. “The play is silly,” says Mills, “but has a big heart. I think we’re all children at heart,

especially as actors. When our director asks us to tap into that child in yourself, with all its youthful and unbridled enthusiasm, it’s quite easy because we’re all big kids.”

At the centre of *Puffs* is the story of that humble and fragile part of the soul.

“Regardless of whether you’ve seen a certain boy wizard in a certain movie, our three main characters Wayne, Oliver and Megan are very loveable and they are also Australian,” says Mills. “It’s an underdog story and we love an underdog here in Australia. It’s very Steven Bradbury! These characters are so honest and fallible. People will relate to them because they are the nerds and dorks, the ones who just keep trying. As we say in the show, failure is just a form of practice. I think that’s what makes a real hero.”

Directed by Kristin McCarthy Parker (*Fly, You Fools!*) and with original music by Brian Hoes, *Puffs* has been hailed by many, including *The New York Times* review which said it, “Exudes a jovial, winking fondness for all things Harry!”

“It’s a celebration of people who don’t always feel like the main characters in their own life,” says Cox. “Everyone has a little pit of Puff inside them, and I hope everyone walks away embracing that – that kind and loyal person inside them. It’s a great part of humanity!”

MORE: *Puffs* plays at Melbourne’s Alex Theatre, St Kilda, from May 26. Go to puffstheplay.com