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## Shoreham teen calls cast members 'second family'

Sunday November 6, 2011 10:07 AM By T.C. McCarthy

Jesse Wickey, who has Down syndrome, wins praises from his castmates and teachers for his weekend performance in "Beauty and the Beast" at Shoreham-Wading River High School. Videojournalist: T.C. McCarthy (Nov. 5, 2011)

For as long as his neighbors remember Jesse Wickey has spent his mornings singing and dancing on his front lawn for no other reason than it makes him happy.

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The 18-year-old Shoreham teen has always wanted to be on Broadway. And even though Wickey has Down syndrome, that hasn't stopped him from impressing audiences with his fancy footwork and enthusiasm.

"I love to be with everyone," Wickey said, before Saturday's matinee of "Beauty and the Beast" at Shoreham-Wading River High School.

**More:** [newsday.com/shoreham](http://newsday.com/shoreham)

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As his cast members trickled into the school's auditorium for curtain call, they stopped to say hello to him and encouraged him saying that Saturday's performances would be his best of the weekend.

"He gets a lot of support from the cast," said his mother, Joanne Wickey. "You know sometimes he'll freeze on the stage and one of the cast members will just walkover and rescue him."

His cast members are Wickey's childhood friends and are one of the reasons he has the confidence to perform, his mother said.

"Beauty and the Beast" is the second musical Wickey in which has performed. When he started high school, he signed up for Mary Hygom's theatre class. Joanne Wickey said Hygom, the show's director, is one of the few teachers who didn't close her door.

Over the last four years, Wickey studied the performing arts in her class and last fall Hygom decided he was ready to have a part in his first high school show, "Fiddler on The Roof."

"Jesse started out in one of my theatre classes and I knew he really loved theatre and singing so it was natural that when he got a little more confidence he decided he wanted to be a part of the production," Hygom said.

In "Fiddler on the Roof," Wickey was a dancer. This year Hygom gave him more responsibility.

In one scene of "Beauty and the Beast", Wickey drops to his hands and knees to trip one of the characters. In another, he is dressed as a candlestick dancing across the stage to the song "Be Our Guest."

"Jesse's a phenomenal actor ...," Hygom said.

His on-stage success wouldn't have been possible without the help of his castmates, his mother said. Since rehearsals began, Emily McNally, 17, has worked with him on his dance moves.

"He's a very quick learner with dance moves, I never had a problem with it [teaching him]," said McNally, who was Wickey's polka partner in one scene. "He's a pretty good dancer!"

For Bryan Antonoff, 17, who plays Gaston, a lead character in the show, seeing Wickey dance on stage made him happy, but didn't surprise him at all. Antonoff describes Wickey's success as inspiration for people with disabilities everywhere.

"People think at first glance that 'special people' can't do things but they can if they're given the chance," he said. "I'm so happy that he was able to

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do it. Most schools wouldn't allow someone like Jesse to do this and I'm so happy that we do here."

Since he will be graduating this year, Wickey has been thinking about the future. He said he'd like to be on Fox's hit show "Glee" one day, or see his name in lights in New York City.

But even if that doesn't happen he has loved his time on stage at Shoreham-Wading River.

"Thank you to the cast," he said. "They are like the second family I never had."

Tags: Shoreham-Wading River High School , Jesse Wickey

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