

## Young cast of 'Dr. Awesome' shows creativity is no baloney

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From the fertile minds of 35 Young Actors Workshop students, under the gentle guidance of YAW founder Auri Naggar, comes the strange tale of “Dr. Awesome and the Mushroom People” — which might make audiences think a little.

Dr. Balonius Awesome (Dan Johnston) and his group of scientists travel from school to school putting on science shows. Some people find the scientists disturbing, since they practice a strange religion called “Baloneyism.” It teaches adherents that no matter what others think, it’s important to be who you are.

At the Port of Bello School, the scientists present “The Human Mind.” As a demonstration, Dr. Awesome uses hypnosis experiments, hypnotizing a student named Tony (Logan Jaeb) to fall to the ground when he hears the word “Baloney” and other students to sing of their love for bologna. Thinking the scientists are trying to brainwash the students, an upset Nurse Matilda (Julianna Bencze) kicks them out of the school and calls the FBI.

On the road, (happily singing their signature song, “99 Jars of Brains on the Wall,”) the scientists debate whether to hide their religion in order to be seen as normal, despite their wish to worship freely. Pursued by the FBI, they reluctantly decide to hide it.

Their next show, about gene splicing, is at the Port of Bello Science Club. Scientist Steve (nine-year YAW student Ben Cassel) shows his SpiderMonkey, CatFish and PigDog, which turn out to be those animals duct-taped together.

When the Science Club wonders if this is possible with humans, Dr. Awesome describes experiments using human and mushroom DNA to produce Mushroom People. An experiment is done with a machine in which the Science Club president turns into a Mushroom Person. Before the scientists can reverse the process, the FBI bursts in and takes them away, but leaves the machine behind. The Mushroom Person gets the idea that the other club members can be made into Mushroom People, to take over the world.

The Mushroom People start by abducting Tony, Nurse Matilda and attendees of the Port of Bello Mushroom Festival, including a television reporter and her crew who are following up on rumors of an invasion of Mushroom People. The FBI calls in the military, but the Mushroom People overwhelm them too. The scientists, still in FBI custody, appear, note the situation and turn to their religion. They pull out their ritual slices of baloney, to the terror of the Mushroom People.

Dr. Awesome seizes the opportunity to hypnotize the leader of the Mushroom People and get him to lead his followers back to the machine to reverse the process. The world is saved, thanks to Baloneyism. Nurse Matilda and the FBI agents all agree with the scientists that it is important to be who you are.

The YAW students get their ideas not from strange practices like Baloneyism, but from their own creativity — and a little input from the real world around them, said YAW founder Auri Naggar.

“I think some of these things are in the air and the kids pick them up,” he said.

But there are benefits for the kids when this happens and they see their ideas on the stage, he added.

“This is the kind of thing that empowers them,” he said. “They know what they create has value. Things that come from inside them are appreciated.”