

'Babies' take center stage

By Stacy Trevenon [stacy@hmbreview.com]

Imagine how hard it would be to lead your baby along by one hand — when the infant is twice your size.

Or, just try to put a jacket on a baby who is twice as tall as you.

That's the situation sketched out by the thespians — many barely more than pint-sized themselves — of Young Actors Workshop, in YAW's 16th original, student-created play "Babies," which runs this weekend in the multipurpose room of Half Moon Bay High School.

In a sweetly comical story, conceived and developed by YAW's four classes of 40 students age 6 to 17 (34 will be in the play; the remainder will serve as crew), there's been a mistake at the baby factory causing the babies for the adults of this particular neighborhood to come out way too big — and already able to talk! There's a formula to shrink them back to normal infant size, but factory workers need time to remember it.

While they're thinking, the stork is delivering the babies to their parents, who are ecstatic if a bit bewildered by their cooing, oversized bundles of joy.

Following YAW's time-tested formula of what director Auri Naggar coined "guided improvisation," the main storyline was thought up by senior YAW students — in this case, Eva Cassel, 13, who in one class was pretending to be a baby and played it as "a baby," laughed her peers. Consequently, the oldest YAW students are playing the babies.

"We have to turn back the clock," said Talia Findley, 12.

Naggar helped with that process, noted Cherissa Woudenberg, "because we couldn't remember how to suck our thumbs and waddle about."

The youngest students play their hapless parents.

"Being the parent of a giant baby is so hard," said Elisabeth Wallace, 7.

"It's out of control."

Playing a parent "is fun. It's hard. It's awesome," said Allison Hawkins, 9.

The parents must continue their normal obligations, leaving two teenage babysitters to mind the colossal cherubs. But the babies, anxious to return to their own size, escape and invade a Halloween party. There, they are mistaken for kids in costume amid a flurry of mistaken identities.

One of those mistaken identities is the stork, who arrives at the party with good news for the big babies.

Typical of YAW plays, "Babies" is permeated with infectious fun and youthful creativity, which the process of guided improvisation is designed to encourage, Naggar said.

"I believe that the thoughts and ideas that each person has, including the young and the very young, are unique and have value," he said in his director's notes.

Scattered through the story are catchy, original songs written by the young actors and accompanied by Kevin North, Naggar's assistant who will be introducing his own classes this summer for aspiring young performers.

Originally from Vermont, North, 35, is a musician skilled on guitar, keyboard and percussion, who has played professionally for 20 years, including stints in a bar band with adults in their 40s when he was 15.

He had worked with Naggar for a year, "watching Auri, how he teaches the kids and shapes the whole thing," he said.

His goal is to present "Young Rockers Workshop" this summer for aspiring rock musicians age 7 to 18.

“Babies” will run at 7:30 p.m. Friday, May 8 and Saturday, May 9, and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 10, on the large stage in the high school multipurpose room. Admission is \$5 at the door.

For information, contact YAW at 726-1304.