

Members of Otter Valley Union's Walking Stick Theatre Company are in the final weeks of rehearsal for their upcoming trip to Scotland and the famed Fringe Festival, a month-long, international celebration of performing arts.

In Edinburgh, the Vermont students will perform "Anon(ymous)," a 90-minute stylized adaptation of Homer's Odyssey. Performances in Scotland will be at the historic Church Hill Theatre on August 16th, 18th, 19th and 21st.

The students will also stage one special performance before they leave on Friday, August 7th at 7:30pm at Otter Valley Union High School.

Each August, Edinburgh's medieval streets become crowded with theater-lovers as the Scottish capital plays host to the largest arts festival in the world. This year there will be 3,314 shows from 49 countries, performed at 313 different venues.

Otter Valley's Theater Director Jeff Hull, says his students will be among several dozen high school theater companies performing at the Fringe. "It's a huge honor," says Hull. "We were invited to apply to take part in the festival two years ago based on the quality of our work. We had to go through a rigorous application process," he says. "But we did it!"

But the application process was only the first hurdle, admits Hull, who says funding the \$6,500 per student cost of the trip was a big challenge.

But Hull and parent volunteer Leslie Mitrano say they've been blown away by the amount of support they've gotten from the local community and beyond.

Vermont's own St. Andrew's Society donated to the cause as did The American-Scottish Foundation, which is based in New York City. Foundation Chairman Alan Bain even invited Jeff Hull and his family to New York City so they could march with foundation officials in the city's popular Tartan Day Parade.

Hull says his kids loved it and the family had a chance to meet Scottish film and television star Graham McTavish, who led the parade. Hull also met Nicola Sturgeon, head of the Scottish National Party and the first female leader of the Scottish Parliament. Sturgeon invited Hull and the Otter Valley students to tour the Parliament building while in Scotland and arrangements have been made for this.

Alan Bain also worked with contacts in Scotland to create a grant for the students to help enhance their Scottish experience. Those funds will enable the group to take a tour of Edinburgh Castle, visit parts of Edinburgh's famed Underground City, purchase tickets to shows and enjoy a farewell dinner at the acclaimed Royal Overseas League. The League is a private members organization

committed to supporting international understanding and friendship through social, music, arts and welfare programs.

Bain, who was born in England to Scottish parents, says he had the good fortune to spend a year of high school as an exchange student in Connecticut and describes the experience as transformative.

He says his support for the O.V.U.H.S. trip to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival comes in part from his own experiences traveling abroad as a teenager. "I am confident and have a heartfelt conviction," says Bain, "as do the program's donors, that if approached with an open mind, confidence, and a strong measure of curiosity, this trip will give all those involved a life-long and treasured memory that is likely to be in some significant way inspirational and life transformative."

In addition to the American-Scottish Foundation, many local individuals and businesses provided invaluable help to the student group as well. Café Provence and the Brandon Inn went above and beyond to host a number of fundraising events for the trip. In total, students and their families were able to raise over \$35,000.

In part to say thank you, Otter Valley's Walking Stick Theatre will put on a free performance of "Anon(ymous)," Friday, August 7th at 7:30pm at Otter Valley Union High School.