

Press Clippings 3/24/2022

Chicago Tribune/The Courier-News Sparkling Diamond Satine from Broadway in Chicago's 'Moulin Rouge! The Musical' has Elgin theater roots --- 3/24/2022

By Kathy Cichon



Cast members Courtney Reed and Conor Ryan (left) appear with other members of the production to announce "Moulin Rouge! The Musical" on Wednesday, March 9, 2022 at the Nederlander Theatre. (Brian Cassella/Chicago Tribune) (Brian Cassella / Chicago Tribune)

The first show on Broadway Courtney Reed saw was the one she was cast in.

"I auditioned in Chicago, and I thought it was for the touring company of 'Mamma Mia!' and it was for the Broadway company," she said. "The agent called me the next day essentially after my callback and said "Do you want to be on Broadway?"

"I think I proceeded to jump up and down and scream for like an hour and call every person that I knew. I moved to New York two weeks later and was at my first rehearsal at the Winter Garden Theatre in the center of Times Square."

Since then she has had other roles on the Great White Way, including originating the role of Jasmine in the stage version of Disney's "Aladdin." Now though, the former Elgin resident is back home in Windy City, starring as the courtesan Satine in the touring production of "Moulin Rouge! The Musical," which opened March 19 and runs through May 14 at the James

M. Nederlander Theatre in Chicago. The stage music is adapted from the 2001 film starring Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor.

“I am such a fan of (the film’s director) Baz Luhrmann and his work, the visuals are so stunning, and I think ‘Moulin Rouge!’ does such a good job at honoring his vision for the onstage musical,” said Reed, who grew up watching Luhrmann’s “Strictly Ballroom” and “Romeo + Juliet.” “I also feel, I’m like ‘pinch me, I can’t believe I get to play Satine in the first national tour.’”

Reed said she feels like the cast and crew are creating a new show together, even though it already exists. Some slight changes to the set and blocking are necessary for the touring version, which opened in Chicago.



The first North American tour of “Moulin Rouge! The Musical” opened in Chicago in March at the Nederlander Theatre, starring Conor Ryan as Christian and Courtney Reed as Satine. (Nathanael Filbert photo)

“If you’re a big ‘Moulin Rouge!’ movie person, you’ll hear a lot of the same classics from the film, which are ‘Come What May,’ ‘Your Song’ by Elton John. ‘The Elephant Love Medley,’ a lot of it’s sort of the same, but then they add all of these new artists,” she said. “Sia, Beyoncé, Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, Rihanna. They’re all represented in the show. A lot of these tunes are very familiar. Then you also have ‘Roxanne’ from the film.

“So you’re getting the best of both worlds. If you don’t know anything about this musical or the movie, you’ll love it because you’ll recognize all of the tunes. It’s not random indie stuff. It’s big, No. 1 smash hits that are morphed into this really incredible love story. It’s so feel good, I love it so much.”

The 37-year-old Elgin native earned her first stage credit when she was 6 years old. After seeing her sister Tiffany Kendziora in a Children's Theatre of Elgin production of "Snow White," she asked her parents if she could get involved.

"I just wanted to do everything she did." Reed said.

Her first role was playing a mouse in the Elgin troupe's "Cinderella," a role that, coincidentally, Reed's niece is currently playing in the Children's Theatre of Elgin production of "Ella ... A Modern Cinderella Story."

"I did Children's Theatre of Elgin, which really had me falling in love with being an actor. That was the moment I knew I wanted to be an actor for the rest of my life. My poor parents, they were like, 'What?'" she laughed. "I did community theater for many years and fell in love with it."

Allison Cherry, artistic director with Children's Theatre of Elgin, grew up with Reed and they were childhood friends through the troupe. She remembers Reed playing Abu in "Aladdin," Sebastian in "The Little Mermaid" and the title role of "Annie."

"She was always very humble about everything and I have memories of at an 'Annie' audition her pulling me into the bathroom at ECC (Elgin Community College) and asking me 'does this sound good for my audition?'" Cherry said.

"Courtney was your typical theater kid like we all were — sweet, funny, goofy, talented," Cherry said. "And you see it in these kids now. Theater kids are definitely a brand of silliness."

Cherry noted there is actually another former Children's Theatre of Elgin member in this touring production of "Moulin Rouge! The Musical." Denzel Tsopnang is a member of the ensemble.

"It's kind of cool that there's two CTE alumni in this traveling Broadway production," Cherry said.

After Children's Theatre of Elgin, Reed later went to **Larkin High School Visual and Performing Arts Academy** in Elgin. From there, she went to the theater conservatory of the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University.

"It was Chicago where I had my first big break. I auditioned for "Mamma Mia!" and it took me to New York and I had never seen Broadway show and I had never been to New York City and here I was, moving two weeks later to the Big Apple to make my Broadway debut," she said. "That's kind of where it all began."

It was in 2014 that Reed originated the role of Princess Jasmine in the Broadway adaptation of Disney's animated film "Aladdin." She would play the role for four years and later reprise it in London's West End production.



"Moulin Rouge! The Musical" cast members perform on stage during a press conference March 9 at the Nederlander Theatre. (Brian Cassella / Chicago Tribune)

"It was so, so exciting, yet also very scary at the same time," Reed said. "Because I think that was the first time I was really in the limelight in that way and I really wanted to honor this beloved character in such a way that everyone felt like it was being portrayed accurately."

"I do realize that, you can't make everyone happy. I learned a lot of life lessons during that show. I think overall the show is such a success and people just loved it. I actually got to see it recently in New York, because when I was there, a friend of mine had taken over for Jasmine and I went and saw the show," she said.

"So many memories and still moved by the story. And it's got such a good life lesson: be true to yourself, don't lie, know who you are and appreciate who you are. I feel so lucky to be a part of the history of that show."

After 11 years in New York, Reed moved back to Chicago a few months after the pandemic shut down Broadway theaters.

"It feels very surreal," she said of being living and performing where she grew up. "I haven't been in the theater scene here since college. That was a long time ago. So it does feel very surreal and just so right at the same time. I'm just so grateful."

Reflecting back on her time with Children's Theatre of Elgin with fondness for "the community culture of it," saying "it becomes your second family almost" that comes together to make a show.

"I loved the onstage moments, but I loved the offstage moments as well. The dressing room shenanigans, putting the makeup and costumes on, singing with the orchestra for the first time. It's all of those things that I still really enjoy," she said

It's the same with those involved in this production of "Moulin Rouge! The Musical," she said.

"All of this company, this team, has to work together to make the show work. If you lose one person, that's it, it doesn't work. It takes a whole team to put together and make it happen. I love that part. I love the family and community of it all."

Last summer she gave back to Children's Theatre of Elgin, taking the time to meet with a student who was playing another Disney princess.

"We just did 'Beauty and the Beast' over the summer and she had a one-on-one with my young actress who played Belle, just to help get her into that Disney princess — to find herself, to find her Belle. One Disney princess to another," Cherry said. "It was really neat for the young girl who was a junior or senior in high school just to be talking to somebody who (played) a Disney princess. That was a really neat experience for her, and she's always been willing to do stuff like that."

Asked what kind of advice she would give to those in children's theater, she stressed the importance of being kind.

"Working really hard on your craft is one thing and I think that's sort of a given. I think if you're really driven and you really want to pursue acting as a career, I think the drive is already there," Reed said. "But you can't forget about being a good person."

"A lot of this business relies on connections and knowing people and word-of-mouth. And if it gets around that you're not a nice person and you're not easy to work with or you're kind of a diva or whatever that is, it gets around and I think that would prevent you from really moving forward in your career ...

"At the end of the day it's more than your talent. You are more than your talent and if you spread positive energy and you're a good person, that is really going to get you so far. Because at the sort of level we're at, everyone is ridiculously talented."

"What's going to put you above the rest is how you are as a person and how you behave backstage and onstage. But really backstage and how you interact with everyone. You want to spread your light and not the darkness."

Daily Herald

Scouting Fox softball --- 3/22/2022

By Mike Miazga, Daily Herald Correspondent

In case you missed the bulletin, the Fox Valley area is replete with high-quality high school softball teams this spring.

Where to start?

How about with the team that finished third in Class 4A in 2021. Huntley, under the direction of 19th-year head coach Mark Petryniec (16 wins shy of 400 for his career), went 35-7, won the Fox Valley Conference title and lugged that state trophy back to Harmony Road.

The bad news for opponents is the Red Raiders have nine players back from that team, including college signees Reese Hunkins (SS, Illinois), Jori Heard (P, Valpo), Zoe Doherty (OF-IF, Cardinal Stritch) and Katie Mitchell (OF, junior committed to Loyola). Also back are

senior Lauren Ryan (OF), juniors Clara Hudgens (CF), Madison Smith (3B) and Alyssa Ekstrom (OF) along with sophomore catcher Meghan Ryan.

"We will rely on our experience to achieve our goals this year," Petryniec said. "We have put together a very competitive schedule and look forward to playing against some of the top teams in the state."

To the immediate north, Jacobs won 23 games, was second in the loop to Huntley and won a regional in 2021. The Golden Eagles are led by returning all-conference players CiCi DiSilvio (SS-P, junior) and Kaitlyn Wysong (1B-OF, junior).

"We are returning the majority of our regional championship team and are looking to build on last season's successes," Jacobs coach Katie O'Brien said. "We are still a very young group with only one senior, so I am very excited for the next few years with this team."

Crystal Lake South has all-FVC selections Alexis Pupillo (C-3B) and Kennedy Grippo (P-SS) back from a team that won 16 games and a regional title.

Burlington Central seniors Rylie Duval (SS), Lauren Knief (3B), Savannah L'Huillier (LF) and Alyssa Becker (CF) along with sophomore second baseman Anna Sanders will lead the way for coach Scott Richman's squad.

"This is the Fox Valley Conference where quite a few teams will contend for top honors and not one team can be taken for granted," Richman pointed out.

Cary-Grove is led by senior Gwen Moran (OF-3B) and junior right fielder Allison Garski, but also has five sophomores returning with varsity experience, plus welcomes another sophomore and a freshman into the fold.

Dundee-Crown should be improved with McKayla Anderson (P, sophomore), Kendall Brents (1B, junior), Annabelle Pederson (SS, sophomore) and Kailyn Wiebe (3B, senior) back.

Hampshire returns senior pitcher Noelle Scott and sophomore infielder Abby Lentz.

Over in the DuKane Conference, all signs point to defending champion St. Charles East as the favorites. The 2021 regional-champion Saints return all-state third-team selections in senior Izzy Howe (P) and junior Nikki Johnston (utility). Howe struck out 139 in 92 innings, while Johnston hit .405. Sophomore Sam Gaca hit .347 with 12 extra-base hits (3 HR, 28 RBI). Sophomore Grace Hautzinger and freshman Holly Smith will also help in the circle. "With great pitching, we will also bring our most athletic team ever and be able to put pressure on opposing defenses," East coach Jarod Guetsha said. "We will continue to play in one of the best softball conferences in the state and play an extremely competitive nonconference schedule to prepare us for another postseason run."

St. Charles North won a sectional title last year and returns the likes of Butler signee Ashlee Chantos (OF, .390, 4 HR, 19 RBI), junior Winona State commit Leigh VandeHei (OF, .415, 5 triples, 19 SB) and junior catcher-first baseman Megan Bauwens (.400, 11 RBI)-- the three earned all-DuKane honors with VandeHei an all-state third-team pick. Junior Julia Larsen is committed to Illinois State. "We have a mix of speed and power up and down the lineup, depth and versatility defensively," North coach Tom Poulin said. "I am pumped about the hunger this group has to get back to and beyond where we were last postseason."

Geneva returns senior Bre Venditti (SS), along with junior outfielders Rachel Carlson and Emma Levin, as well as sophomore outfielder Ally Ward.

Shifting gears to the Upstate Eight, **South Elgin** (19-5, 18-1 UEC a year ago) is again considered one of the loop favorites with returning conference player of the year Sammy Jimenez (C-3B), conference pitcher of the year CeCe Bell (now a junior) and all-UEC picks Cara Cruthers (C-SS) and junior Hannah Harms (OF) back. South Elgin heads to the Southern Warrior Classic in Murfreesboro, Tennessee March 23.

"We have six returning starters from last year," said Storm coach Brad Reynard, who said Bartlett, Glenbard South, Fenton and West Chicago will be tough in the UEC. "I love our leadership."

Larkin and coach Anne Vogt will lean on junior all-conference selection Baylei Johnson (C-1B, .623 batting average, 3 HR, 28 RBI), Chelsea Herrick (P-3B, .372, 24 RBI) and Ariela Bermudez (P-OF, .326). Senior pitcher-outfielder Kailey Cronin returns after missing last year with a broken wrist.

"This has to the potential to be the strongest hitting team in my 12 years at Larkin," Vogt said. "We have lots of speed in the outfield and on the bases and three solid pitchers. We are still very young, but with that said, very experienced. This is a very hard-working team that will fight until the end to win a softball game."

Elsewhere, Aurora Central Catholic returns seniors Olivia Hernandez (C, Purdue Northwest commit) and Amanda Lohrey (P-1B, Columbia College-South Carolina commit), along with sophomores Natalie Sanchez (IF) and Amelia Lohrey (OF). Hernandez, a third-team all-state pick for the second time in three years, hit .474 with a 1.277 OPS and gunned down 15 runners trying to steal. Lohrey hit .403, while Sanchez batted .378 for the Chargers, who play in the Metro Suburban Blue where IC Catholic Prep, Riverside-Brookfield, Bishop McNamara and Ridgewood will be tough.

Rosary welcomes back the likes of All-Area and all-MSC Blue pick Emily Hurst (utility, .451, 6 HR), along with junior shortstop Kayla Montes (.320, 4 HR), junior catcher Brooke Pfeiffer (.360, threw out 70 percent of runners trying to steal), junior outfielder-pitcher Marissa Capparelli and pitcher-infielder Reagan Lightfoot.

West Aurora returns senior center fielder Callie Meinel, who hit .385 with 7 homers and 24 RBI en route to earning all-Southwest Prairie West honors last year. Pitcher-first baseman Alyssa Perkins hit .403 with 8 homers and 25 RBI, while Sara Archer (SS-3B) batted .382 with 3 homers and 10 RBI. Meinel will continue her career at Division I Evansville.

Fox softball outlook

Top teams: Huntley, Jacobs, St. Charles East, St. Charles North, **South Elgin**

Daily Herald

Scouting Fox boys' tennis --- 3/23/2022

By Dave Hess, Daily Herald Correspondent

The Jacobs boys' tennis program under the tutelage of coach Jon Betts has certainly enjoyed plenty of success over the years.

The 2021 season was a special one for Betts and the Golden Eagles.

Jacobs was 23-3 overall, won the Fox Valley Conference championship and was second in the sectionals.

The Golden Eagles capped a historic season with a fourth-place finish in the state and Betts was named Class 2A coach of the Year.

Jacobs, which had the top result at the state all-time for a FVC team, finished behind state powers New Trier, Stevenson and Hinsdale Central at the state meet.

"It was a historic season," said Betts. "We got a lot of attention around the state. We have the top returning singles players in the state. This is a tremendously talented, dedicated and hard working group."

Senior Thomas Nelson, a 4-year varsity performer and a Marquette recruit, finished fifth in the state in singles.

Nelson defeated teammate Kyle McNally (junior) in the fifth place match and McNally was sixth.

McNally and Nelson will get plenty of help from senior returnees Justin Cunningham, Jed Sia (Division III Trine College) and Justin Brzeski.

Newcomers junior Adrian Salgado, sophomore Austin Dinh and freshmen August Nelson and Ryan Fulton seek spots in the lineup.

Huntley, Cary-Grove and Crystal Lake South figure to be near the top in the FVC.

The Red Raiders, 7-1 in Fox Valley Conference dual meet action last season, tied with Jacobs for first place in the conference tournament.

Huntley, under the guidance of the 17th-year coach Barry Wells, was second in the 2A sectional and 21st at state a year ago.

"We graduated a lot of players from one of our most successful seasons," said Wells. "We return many quality players."

The top player back is senior Matt Grubbs, a state qualifier in doubles a year ago.

Joining Grubbs with experience are seniors Aaryaan Khalil and Varun Parath and juniors Ben Hein and Jonathan Stec.

Newcomers vying for playing time are senior Ani Mehra, juniors Frankie Scarpelli, Zander Mayle, Colin Stanley and Jack Coleman, and sophomore Ishaan Trevedi.

The Trojans, under 12th-year coach Amanda Schuetzle, were fourth in the FVC and fifth in the sectionals in 2021.

The veteran coach has dependable returnees including seniors Sam Kedzior, Brandon Burtschi, Dan Jauch and Tommy Fornell along with sophomore Noah Marrano.

Freshman Bryce Sheckman hopes to break into the lineup.

"We lost six starters and the players back are equal in talent," said the Cary-Grove coach. "We have grown and matured on the court."

The success of the Crystal Lake South program depends on the return of senior standout Jackson Schuetzle.

Schuetzle, who suffered a stress fracture in November, has been cleared to play, but won't be active to start the season.

Schuetzle, who will play tennis next season at Division III Case Western in Cleveland on an academic scholarship, was third in the state in Class 1A singles.

The Gators hope to improve on an 11-12 overall record and 4-4 FVC mark good enough for fifth. The Gators were fourth at the South 1A sectional and 11th at state.

Crystal Lake South, guided by Rick Bailey in his third season at South and 34th overall, has 8 key returners. They include seniors Cal Schneider, Cameron Slonneger and Will Bradstreet, juniors Aaron Koh and Willem Granzin along with sophomores Jack Dacy, Alex Smith and Dan Teetah.

Newcomers in the fold are senior July Sandra, sophomore Zenn Blasczyk and freshmen Kai Slonneger and Andy Huang.

"We hope for a big season from our key returnees," said Bailey. "Our newcomers are going to have learn on the fly. They are a great group of kids who are working hard."

Dundee-Crown, coached by Yuto Tsukida, hopes to improve in the FVC with seniors Ryan Holmer and Aidan Newett.

Hampshire coach Dylan Clark has junior Tyler You and Joseph Camsing back. Newcomers sophomores Cademon Steuber and Phoenix Phelps hope to contribute.

Illinois Math and Science Academy returns junior Akshot Gupta and sophomore Charles Ludwig.

"The players and I are overjoyed at being able to have a season," said coach Jim Bernardini. "We strive for a winning season and send some players to state."

West Aurora, 7-8 overall and 2-5 in the Southwest Prairie Conference, returns four seniors.

The Blackhawks veterans are seniors Yahir Espinoza, Johnny Runge, Andrew Simmons and Emri Eshtrefi.

Newcomers to the court are juniors Tommy Martin, Gabe Escobado and Ben Fisher along with sophomore Will Hipp and freshman Josh Hartman.

"We have heavy group of upperclassmen along with a solid group of underclassmen," said coach William Stanley. "We have a good mix. We hope to stay focused and improve throughout the season."

Kaneland returns seniors Josh Brunscheen, Aden Mumm, Caleb Hwang, Sam Rebelbrugge and junior Matt Manugas.

The Knights were 2-8 a year ago and fourth in the Interstate Eight Conference.

"We hope to improve the conference record and have an individual or doubles make it to state (1A)," said Kaneland coach Larry King. "The players put the work in in the offseason and really strengthened their fundamentals."

Aurora Central Catholic returns Class 1A state qualifying doubles team Adam and Elijah Hartford along with junior Justin Cebulski and sophomore Bryan Novack.

"The kids have worked hard the last nine months," said coach Mike Cowen. "We are hoping for a deep state run. The sky is the limit."

Fox boys' tennis outlook

Top teams: Jacobs, Huntley, Cary-Grove, Crystal Lake South, Kaneland, Batavia, Geneva, Bartlett, St. Charles North, St. Charles East, Aurora Central Catholic., West Aurora.

Top players: East Aurora: Alfonso Mendoza, Sr; Illinois Math and Science Academy: Akshot Gupta, Jr; Charles Ludwig, Soph; West Aurora: Yahir Espinoza, Sr; Johnny Runge, Sr; Andrew Simmons, Sr; Emri Eshtrefi; Batavia: Jacob Arulandu, Sr; Liam Keene, Sr; Kohl Winkle, Sr; Troy Lirot, Sr; Hank McClure, Sr; Liam Cheaney, Sr; Siriam Swaminathan, Jr; Sanjay Dave, Jr; Erik Warner, So; TJ Straus, So; Stuart Marchie, Sr; Brandon Knautz, Jr; Cole Conklin, Sr; Ryan Holmer; Dundee-Crown: Aidan Newett, Sr; Crystal Lake South: Jackson Schuetzle, Sr; Cal Schneider, Sr; Aaron Koh, Jr; Cameron Slonneger, Sr; Jack Dacy, Soph; Willem Granzin, Jr; Will Bradstreet, Sr; Alex Smith, So, Dan Teetah, So; Cary-Grove: Sam Kedzior, Sr; Noah Marrano, So; Brandon Burtschi, Sr; Dan Jauch, Sr; Tommy Fornell, Sr; Jacobs: Thomas Nelson, Sr; Kyle McNally, Jr; Justin Cunningham, Sr; Jed Sia, Sr; Justin Brzeski; St. Charles East: Quincy Moss, Jr; Sam Evans, Jr; Tiernan Price, Soph; Bartlett: Ronit Nagarupu, Sr, Nathan Mork, Sr; Mandar Brahmabhatt, Sr; Tej Shah, Sr; Matt Brendel, Sr; Sahil Patel, Sr; Jacob Kolano, Sr; Zach Kolano, Sr; Ethan Kolano, Sr, Agilan Gunashaker, Sr; Geneva: Joe Adams, Sr; Ryan Cedergren, Sr; Dan Capelli, Jr; Huntley: Matt Grubbs, Sr; Aryaan Khalil, Sr; Varun Parath, Sr; Ben Hein, Jr; Jonathan Stec, Jr; Kaneland: Josh Brunscheen, Sr; Adam Mumm, Sr; Caleb Hawang, Sr; Matt Managas, Jr; Sam Rebelbrugge, Sr; St. Charles North: Noah Bajuk, Soph; Jon Spicer, Soph; Mattas Calblas, Sr; Brady Barnes, Jr; Hampshire: Tyler Yu, Joe Camsing; Aurora Central Catholic: Adam Hartford, Jr; Elijah Hartford, Jr; Justin Cebulski, Jr; Bryan Novack, Soph.

Season skinny: Batavia certainly has the size and experience to enjoy a successful 2022 campaign.

Brad Nelson, in his 10th season at the helm of the Bulldogs, has carved out a 132-33-4 mark during his tenure.

Batavia was 15-7 overall, finished fourth in the Dukane Conference, and second at the Geneva 2A sectional in 2021. The Bulldogs return 4 singles players and 9 doubles players.

The top player back is senior Kohl Winkle, a state qualifier. Joining Winkle in the singles rotation are senior Jacob Arulandu (6-foot-1), Liam Keene (6-5) and Troy Lirot.

The experienced doubles players are seniors Hank McClure (6-1), Liam Cheney (6-7), Stuart Murchie and Cole Conklin (6-1). Juniors include Siriam Swaminathan, Sanjay Dave and Brandon Knautz. Getting valuable varsity playing time as freshmen were sophomores TJ Strauss (6-2) and Erik Warner. Senior newcomer Noah Johnson hopes to break into the rotation.

"We look more like a basketball team with our size," said Nelson. "We should have big serves and reach at the net. We hope to contend for the conference and sectional titles."

Sean Masoncup's St. Charles North North Stars are led by returnees senior Mattas Cablas, junior Brady Barnes and sophomores Noah Bajuk and Jon Spicer, Freshman Cole Weddle seeks playing time.

St. Charles East, coached by Rob Livermore, is led by junior Quincy Moss, who was a state qualifier in doubles last season, junior Sam Evans and sophomore Tiernan Price. Freshman Alex Sternowski joins the mix.

Geneva coach Ryan Barbasz welcomes back seniors Joe Adams, Ryan Cedergren, Joe Black and Donovan Del Mundo and junior Dan Cappelli. Freshman Tyler Masoncup, son of St. Charles North coach Sean Masoncup, is expected to play No. 1 doubles with Cedergren.

Bartlett is experienced and primed for a run at the Upstate Eight Conference championship. The Hawks' best player back is senior Tej Shah, an all-UEC selection with an 18-3 record.

Other all-conference selections for coach Colleen Brander's group are seniors Matt Brendel, Sahil Patel, Jacob Kolano and Zach Kolano. Other seniors with experience are Ethan Kolano, Agilan Gunashankak, Nathan Mork, Mandar Brahmhatt and Ronit Nagarupu.

East Aurora is led by senior Alfonso Mendoza.