

Laughter is best medicine

Marianopolis student saw competition to get into McGill med school was freaking out her classmates, so she wrote a musical about it

BY ANNE SUTHERLAND, THE GAZETTE MARCH 9, 2010

When life gives you lemons, make lemonade. When everyone including you is stressing about getting into pre-med, write a satiric musical.

This would seem to be the logic that second-year Marianopolis College student Alexandra Markus employed when she saw her classmates frantic to make it into the McGill University pre-med program.

The competition at the private CEGEP was so intense and competitive that Markus, 19, decided she could defuse the situation, write a play, make people laugh and get her point across that people should follow their passion and not the steps that others tell them to take.

And that sometimes people who do an undergraduate program first make better doctors than those who go straight to pre-med.

"People at the school are so obsessed with health science and the competition for things like medical science club president is insane. People think if they don't get into the pre-med program it's the end of the world," Markus said.

As each student applies to pre-med independently, Marianopolis has no record of how many of its students applied to pre-med at McGill, but in the 2008-09 school year, 31 of its students were accepted. In 2009-10, there were 21 students from Marianopolis accepted. Overall, 580 applicants were vying for 80 openings.

At the end of the winter semester in 2009, Markus decided to channel the craziness she saw at school into something creative.

"I sat down and wrote this in about a week, and then refined it for a couple of months," Markus said.

Musical help came from friends Lili Zeng, Dmitri Zrajevski and Maxime Gaboriault.

Markus, who is studying arts and science, got her theatre class involved. Auditions were held in the fall, 70 people turned out and, with the exception of one faculty member, direction, set design, choreography, etc. were all in the hands of students.

There are four main characters in this play that mimics real life at the CEGEP: A young student who is the first member of his family to enter post-secondary education, the only child of two science intellectuals whose path seems pre-ordained, a young Asian who strives to be No. 1 and a perfectionist fixated on grades and standings.

"The part of Jake, the Asian, is based on my (Asian) friends, so it is not insulting or politically incorrect," Markus said.

Markus is the producer and the writer, but she is not part of the cast.

"I'm not pompous enough to act in my own play - there are people who are so much better actors and singers," she said.

St. Mary's Hospital helped out with costumes, lending the students scrubs, lab coats and smocks. If there are any profits after all the costs are covered, the money will go to St. Mary's.

With 11 songs and two reprises, it certainly won't be a dreary show and Markus said there are certain messages she wanted to impart along with entertaining the audience.

"Medicine should be about compassion and co-operation, not competition.

"Don't let the expectations of others influence you, follow your passion; and pre-med is not for everyone."

Pre Med: The Musical, at Marianopolis, March 24 & 25 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$5. Contact premed.the.musical@gmail.com

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