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Based on a true story, show is one of a kind



Alice Murphy (Kimberly Doreen Burns) and cast rehearse for the TheatreZone’s production of “Bright Star” on Feb. 7 at the G&L Theatre in Naples, Fla.
CAITLYN JORDAN/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

TheatreZone ‘Bright Star’ shines with good music, authentic characters

Harriet Howard Heithaus
Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Alice Murphy has a story to tell that even she doesn’t want to know. It has been compartmentalized, stored far away from her life as a literary editor in Asheville, N.C. That is, until the appearance of a new young writer opens the lid — familiar features, a wave of similarity to the boy and the baby she was forced to give up, the same hometown area. But her son is dead. Murphy’s story, in the musical “Bright Star” currently at TheatreZone, is based on a true one. Its songwriters, no less than Steve Martin and Edie Brickell, have honored that with an infusion of bluegrass and Americana in orchestration with melodies that can travel anywhere. It was strong enough musically to win the Drama Desk musical award and score five Grammy nominations in a year that included “Hamilton,” “Waitress” and “School of Rock — The Musical.” Like its chief competitor, “Hamilton,” it’s one of a kind, according to Mark Danni, TheatreZone founding artistic director. “I just don’t know that there is another musical of this variety,” he said. “Bright Star” brings mandolin, fiddle and banjo into the pit, to inject twang into hummable tunes like “Whoa, Mama” and the title tune. “It’s really one of my very favorite musicals.” Danni has had some of the same serendipity that infuses the “Bright Star” story line in locating deep talent:

- Finding Kimberly Doreen Burns, whose parents live in Naples and who has been longing to play Alice Murphy since she was a finalist for the pre-Broadway, Old Globe Theatre production of “Bright Star.”
- The good fortune that Burns even brought her own villain — her hus-

See ‘STAR’, Page 2D

A guided tour of where to watch the Oscar nominees

Leanne Italie
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK – Looking to watch top Oscar nominees before the 94th Academy Awards air on March 27? There are many ways to get that done, including a trip to a theater in some cases. Here’s a few other ways, though it’s worth looking around as many have myriad paths to digitally buy, rent and stream:

Streaming

On Netflix

“The Power of the Dog” – The leading nominee with a dozen Oscar nods, including those for Kirsten Dunst, Benedict Cumberbatch, Jesse Plemons and Kodi Smit-McPhee. It also received a best picture nod and a best director nomination for Jane Campion. Cumberbatch is a rough-hewn Montana rancher with a menacing arrogance in a Gothic story brought alive on the Western plain.

“Don’t Look Up” – Adam McKay’s apocalyptic comedy nabbed four Oscar nominations, including best picture, original score and original screenplay. The climate change satire that stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence gives Earth six months before a massive comet destroys the planet.

“tick, tick ... BOOM!” – Andrew Gar-

These are the films nominated for the Oscar for best animated feature, from left, “Encanto,” “Flee,” “Luca,” “The Mitchells vs. the Machines” and “Raya and the Last Dragon.”

DISNEY, NEON, DISNEY, NETFLIX, DISNEY VIA AP

field earned an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of Jonathan Larson, who upended the theater world as the creator of “Rent.” The adaption of an autobiographical musical by Larson, who died suddenly and young in 1996, was Lin-Manuel Miranda’s feature directorial debut and also earned a nod for film editing.

“The Lost Daughter” – Starring Olivia Colman, Jessie Buckley and Dakota Johnson, it received three Oscar nominations, including nods for Colman and Buckley. The adaptation of an Elena Ferrante novel of the same name is a psychological drama that has Colman and Buckley in the same role as young and older versions of the sad and frustrated translator Leda Caruso, set on holiday in Greece.

“The Mitchells vs. the Machines” – The oddball Mitchell family must quell an uprising by the world’s electronic devices while on a road trip to drop off daughter Katie (voiced by Abbi Jacobson) for her first year of film school. Thank goodness for two friendly robots. The best animated feature nominee is directed by Mike Rianda, who made “Gravity Falls.” Also available at a cost on Apple TV+, Disney+, Vudu, Redbox and more.

On Hbo Max

“Dune” – It’s no longer streaming on HBO Max but worth watching for its return. Meanwhile, digital rentals and purchases are plentiful, including on Amazon Prime Video and through Apple TV+, iTunes and Google Play. The sweeping dessert sci-fi saga based on Frank Herbert’s classic 1965 novel received 10 Oscar nominations, including best picture and cinematography. It stars Timothée Chalamet and Zendaya. Denis Villeneuve directed.

“King Richard” – Directed by Reinal-

See OSCARS, Page 8D

‘Star’

Continued from Page 1D

band, fellow actor Jim Ballard. He plays the hard-hearted Mayor Dobbs, who takes both Alice’s sweetheart and her baby from her.

● Karen Batten, a nurse by career, but banjo player by choice — “When you play bluegrass music you need a day job,” she told Danni — for the orchestra. Batten plays in the duo Paddle Faster, popular for their bluegrass virtuosity at local spots such as Fit and Fuel. She’s also a picker for local bluegrass favorites, the Bugtussle Ramblers.

“I figured I’d find someone in regional Florida. But she was right here in Naples!” Danni marveled.

● A multi-talented fiddle-playing actress, Brittany Halen. She provides the fiddle licks on “Bright Star” and dashes onstage to become Florence, a member of the cast.

● And finally, Keith Thompson as music director for this musical. Thompson is a theater veteran from New York who works in Las Vegas now. But his first Broadway musical was a 1975 work, “The Robber Bridegroom,” based on a classic Southern tale by Eudora Welty and with similar instrumentation.

He’ll play piano as well as direct music.

Thompson, a former tour bandmate of Danni, also has Southern roots. He grew up in Alabama and Mississippi, where family members would bring out their musical instruments for impromptu hootenannies: “It’s in my DNA,” he said.

“And this one in particular — the way it’s set up with the banjo, fiddle, mandolin and guitar — is very beautiful. The combination of colors and sounds gives it authenticity.”

Thompson, who studied classical music at Juilliard, also thinks the music stands on its own, with numbers American songbook singers are likely to start incorporating into their repertoire.

“You could just add horns and winds. Those melodies are very beautiful. This is good writing.”

Harriet Howard Heithaus covers arts and entertainment for the Naples Daily News/naplesnews.com. Reach her at 239-213-6091.



Daddy Murphy (Peter McClung), Alice Murphy (Kimberly Doreen Burns) and Mayor Dobbs (Jim Ballard) rehearse for the TheatreZone’s production of “Bright Star” on Feb. 7 at the G&L Theatre in Naples, Fla. CAITLYN JORDAN/NAPLES DAILY NEWS



If you go

‘Bright Star’

What: TheatreZone production of the award-winning musical based on a true story

When: 7:30 p.m. Feb. 10-12, 17-20, 2 p.m. Feb. 12, 13, 19, 20

Where: G@L Theatre, Community School of Naples, 13275 Livingston Road, Naples. **Tickets:** \$50-\$85

To buy: theatre.zone or 888-966-3352 ext. 1

Margo (Rachael Lord) rehearses for the TheatreZone’s production of “Bright Star” on Feb. 7 at the G&L Theatre in Naples, Fla.

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PROUDLY PRESENTS


YOUTH of the YEAR CELEBRATION

Tuesday, February 22, 2022 5:30 pm

Club Pelican Bay
707 Gulf Park Drive, Naples, FL 34108

Naples Daily News LOCALiQ PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

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Youth of the Year is Boys & Girls Club of Collier County’s highest honor, celebrating our most inspiring members. Youth of the Year recognizes outstanding leadership, academic excellence and a commitment to a healthy lifestyle.

Achieving the title of Youth of the Year is no easy task. Candidates participate in a year-long program that fosters leadership development, communication skills, mentorship, and culminates with a presentation in front of a panel of judges where their public speaking and presentation abilities are put to the test.

Please join us for this special event, hear from our Candidates, and find out which of these inspiring teens will become Collier County’s 2022 Youth of the Year Winner!

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