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**McLean High School theatre ready to make a splash** [by Kate Yanchulis](#) Staff writer

The McLean High School Theatre Company plans to make a splash at a prestigious high school theater festival with its production of the musical “Big Fish.”

McLean’s show was selected as one of 11 from across the country to take the main stage at the International Thespian Festival in Lincoln, Neb., next week.

“Big Fish” tells the story of a man who wants to become not a big fish in a small pond but a big fish in a big pond, according to Daniel Wallace, author of the novel-turned-movie-turned-musical. With its own version of “Big Fish,” the McLean High School Theatre Company is living the protagonist’s dream as it makes its way from the school auditorium to the national spotlight.

A group of 90 will make the trip to the Thespian Festival, an annual weeklong celebration of high school theatre presented by the Educational Theatre Association. The cast and crew of 70 students, plus 20 additional orchestra members and chaperones, will fill two planes Monday.

More than 3,700 people are registered for the event, which includes workshops, audition opportunities and of course, performances, festival director Nancy Brown said.

When the McLean company puts on “Big Fish” on Thursday, June 25, it will represent the culmination of a year-long effort.

A smaller group from McLean went to the national festival last June to perform a one-act show. While there, senior Alex Stone remembers his jaw dropping as he watched the full shows on the main stage.

“The main stage shows were just astounding and brilliant,” Stone said. “I never imagined being able to be on that main stage in front of this huge audience.”

Next week, Stone will do just that as the lead actor in “Big Fish.”

In contrast to Stone, McLean theatre director Amy Poe said she knew after watching last year’s performances that her group had a shot.

“I thought, we can do this,” Poe said. “I just knew we could be competitive. Just seeing the level of talent there, I knew we were at that level.”

Still, the theatre company faced stiff competition. The Thespian Festival sends out teams of judges to screen between 40 and 45 shows each year. Even if your show makes that cut, only about a quarter of the shows get onto the main stage.

“Basically, we’re just looking for the best,” Brown said. “We send our adjudicators out to find the strongest shows, the greatest acting ability, the most well-designed sets, the costumes that pay attention to detail.”

McLean put on “Big Fish” at the end of February, and a month later they found out they were chosen to perform at the national festival.

“We’ve all worked so hard for this, and we finally get the chance to show the whole country what we have,” said sophomore Jessica Scarano, one of four costume directors.

“Big Fish” features a large cast and elaborate staging, but the McLean High School Theatre Company put thought into every detail.

In each scene, every member of the ensemble plays a distinct character, not just “Townsperson No. 3,” Stone said. Even if an actor does not speak a line, he knows his character’s backstory and emotions.

“We’d practice different scenes so everyone could figure out how their character would react,” Stone said. “They’re not a part of the ensemble. They’re a person.”

To go along with that, each cast member has a minimum of five costume changes during the show, Scarano said, and each costume has specific touches.

“Each person has a personality, so adding a string of pearls or a little detail to bring that out more was so much fun,” Scarano said.

The cast and crew are thrilled to showcase their work on the national stage, but the opportunity does come with challenges.

They will be performing on a stage twice the size of the one at McLean High School, and as a result they have made tweaks to take advantage of the roomier space. The changes require extra practice.

“You can’t have your dress rehearsal on the national stage,” Poe said. “That’s not going to work.”

So the company is putting on two performances at George Mason University’s Harris Theatre this Saturday at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Tickets are available at [mcleandrama.com](http://mcleandrama.com).

After that, they will be ready to take center stage at the Thespian Festival.

“For us it’s a huge win,” Poe said. “Even just stepping foot on that stage for us, it’s like we have conquered everything.”

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