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John F Kennedy Centre: pineapple bun!

Students of the John F Kennedy Centre (甘迺迪中心) are in many ways just like other students in Hong Kong. They enjoy having fun, mingle (交往) with their friends and are under huge pressure because they have to take public exams.

The only difference is that they have physical disabilities. However, neither wheelchairs nor crutches (拐杖) would prevent them from fulfilling their potential. In *I Love Pineapple Bun* (《我愛菠蘿油》), their first musical, they are going to show the world everyone has a "superpower" and whether it works depends on whether you have the chance to use it!

Text and photos: Sandy Seztó

(above) Students of the John F Kennedy Centre will put on their first musical. They will sing, dance, act and demonstrate their superpower in *I Love Pineapple Bun*!



▲▼ Students with disabilities work hard during a rehearsal.



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The "superpower" the show is about can be interpreted (理解為) as "the power people have to change themselves or people around them". Indeed, the children demonstrated they had much superpower when they made preparations for the upcoming musical.

Ho Yuen-kei (F1), who plays the principal role of "Pineapple Girl" (「菠蘿妹」), was born with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (脊髓肌肉萎縮症). Though her legs and arms are weak, she's going to sing and dance (in her wheelchair) in the play. "I've learnt a lot in preparing for the show, for example, about communication and cooperation. I've also learnt much about acting. It's really interesting!" said she.

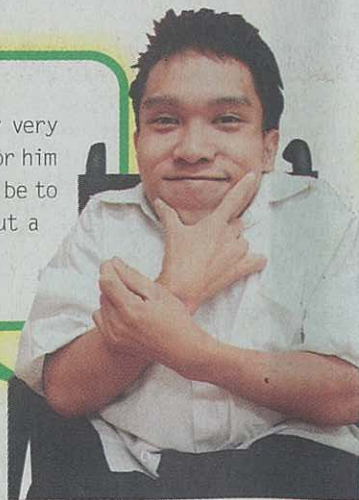
A learning curve for all

Ms Joy Yau, a music teacher at the Centre, proposed to stage a musical about a year ago. She is glad that her students grew up as they prepared for the show. All the hard work — finding sponsors, drama teachers and volunteers willing to help them for no or small fees — was worth it.

She said, "Drama and onstage experience could change people a lot. Our students have become so much more assured (自信) in the presence of others. They've learnt much about discipline and their obligations (責任) towards the drama team. They've really grown up a lot."

The musical involves not only students but also teachers and parents. It is a project of the whole school. Mrs Amy Fu, whose son, a Centre alumnus, suffers from Cerebral Palsy (大腦麻痺), said she

Oh, he ("Stingy Fu") is a very very stingy (吝嗇, 小器的) chap. For him to give away fifty cents would be to give away the WHOLE WORLD! But a kidnap would change all that...



Cheng Kai-man (F7) as "Stingy Fu" from the "Stingy Trio"

wished the play would increase concern about the school's students and other disabled people.

Mr Luk is a physiatrist (物理治療師) who has worked at Centre for about four years. He will play a part in the show as one of the hilarious "Stingy Trio" (「孤寒三人組」). "I love working with the kids. Actually, I've learnt much from them. They are so dedicated to the play and have put such effort into it. I admire them!" said he.

Students have already received basic drama training. As the big day is drawing near, they now have two 3-hour rehearsals a week. "Time is running out. We will soon have to rehearse even more frequently," said Ms Yau.

"We wouldn't ask less of them"

Cheng Kai-man is a F7 student at the Centre. He has Hydrochondroplasia, a kind of dwarfism (侏儒症). People with the condition have weak spinal muscles. He will sit for the A-level exam next year. "I study Economics, Business Studies and Accounting apart from Chinese Language and Culture and Use of English," said he. It takes him about three hours every day to do his homework and revision, but he has learnt his lines and lyrics. "It's worth it! It's been a totally new experience to me," said Kai-man excitedly.

Though they are physically disabled, their teachers do not expect less from them. Ms Maria Wong, their Principal, explained, "We encourage them, but we wouldn't ask less of them. Only if they are given a benchmark will they fulfil their true potential. That is our mission."

We are surely working hard. Sometimes when they are with me for their physiotherapy, we sing and read lines.



Luk Sir (Staff) as a member of the "Stingy Trio"

innocent and naive. Everybody thinks she's stupid but she isn't. She is always happy because she knows she has got SUPERPOWER! (laughs)" What's that? See the show and find it out yourself!



Ho Yuen-kei (F1) as "Pineapple Girl"

Oh, it's not easy to remember the lyrics. It's been a real challenge!



Mrs Amy Fu (a parent) as a member of the "Housewife Trio"

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I Love Pineapple Bun 《我愛菠蘿油》

Show Date:

5 & 6 December 2007

(Wed and Thur) 8:00pm

Venue: Hong Kong City Hall Theatre

Ticket Price: \$100

For ticketing enquiries and reservations, please call 2734 9009