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15 lucky dogs will be spotted on this stage

Humans, too, in musical 'Dalmatians'

By Elysa Gardner
USA TODAY

Musical theater is going to the dogs — a whole chorus line of them.

Fifteen canine performers will kick up their paws in *The 101 Dalmatians Musical*, a show based on the children's novel by Dodie Smith, which also inspired the classic animated Disney film.

In the stage version, which begins a national tour Oct. 13 at Minneapolis' Orpheum Theatre, live pooches will figure prominently both at the end of Act One and in the closing number.

"The finale is going to bring the house down," promises lead producer Lee Marshall.

Dog trainer Joel Slaven, whose credits include the movies *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* and *That Darn Cat*, will choreograph the four-legged troupers. A majority will be rescue

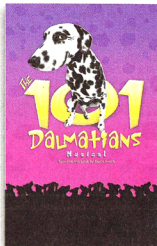
dogs, and they will make their showbiz debuts in comfort and style.

"They'll travel (by) bus, with a trainer for every four animals, who will always be with them," Marshall says. "Dalmatians are pack animals by nature, so they like to live as a family."

Since dogs, however gifted, cannot sing lyrics or recite dialogue, principal characters will be played by humans. That includes canine couple Pongo and Missus and their puppies, who are dog-napped by Cruella De Vil.

"It's a great story," says director Jerry Zaks, a four-time Tony Award winner. "It's about a family being ripped apart and put back together. It's going to have kids and adults weeping, and then happy."

The actors playing humans "will be moving about 15 inches off the ground, so that they seem larger than life. The humans playing dogs will move around like adults, only cos-



For details

Tour dates and ticket information are available at www.the101dalmatiansmusical.com.

tumed. The whole idea is that we see things from their point of view."

Zaks is working with a libretto adapted by B.T. McNicholl and a score by Styx frontman Dennis DeYoung, who co-wrote lyrics with McNicholl and had previously written a musical version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. "The dogs will have songs with a contemporary pop sensibility," DeYoung says. "The adults will seem ensconced in a different time" with songs that pay homage to traditional Broadway music.

There aren't yet plans to bring *Dalmatians* to Broadway — instead, there's an extended New York engagement at Madison Square Garden in 2010 — but "it will be marketed as a Broadway musical," Marshall says.

Whatever happens, the rescue dogs needn't worry: A happy ending awaits after the final curtain.

"Either we'll find fabulous homes for them, or Joel will take them to live on his farm," Marshall says. "They won't be going back to the shelters."