Perm, memorization make up ‘Oklahoma!’ role

By Elizabeth Dougherty

Shaving his moustache, having his hair perm and memorizing lines were all part of Michael P. Kelly’s preparation for the role of Curly in “Oklahoma!”.

Kelly said he was surprised to be cast as a lead role in the first musical to be performed in Creighton’s Interim Performing Arts Center because he is a freshman.

Prior to attending Creighton, Kelly sang for 10 years with the Kantorei Boys’ Choir from Rockford, Ill., his hometown.

Kelly traveled twice to Europe with the choir.

He was also active in community theater and his high school’s musical productions. His roles included Professor Higgins in “My Fair Lady” and Frank Butler in “Annie Get Your Gun.” However, when his high school did “Oklahoma!”, Kelly said he was on the wrestling team and too busy to audition.

“I don’t get that nervous during auditions,” Kelly said. “After I’m all done, I get nervous because I have no control over what is going to happen.”

Kelly said he is more excited than nervous about playing Curly.

“Curly thinks he’s God’s gift to women, but he’s still scared of women, especially Laurie (female lead),” Kelly said.

In comparison to his prior roles, Curly resembles Frank Butler the most, Kelly said.

“They’re both cowboys and egocentric, but Curly’s younger, more immature and more serious,” Kelly added. ““Oklahoma!” is an interesting play to do. The seriousness in it gives you a chance to do more characterization than other musicals.”

 Mostly a hobby

Kelly said music is mostly a hobby since he is thinking about majoring in math and plans to attend medical school.

He said he enjoys musicals because he likes to entertain people. Kelly said musicals also have social advantages, such as meeting a lot of new people.

Kelly said he would encourage people who are serious about making a commitment to a play, especially men, to audition for one. As a member of a cast, he said, “you put all of yourself into it.”

Academic work

Kelly said the musical has not interfered with his academic work because he studies during the day and rehearses at night.

“All the people I’ve worked with are really talented, a professional group of people,” Kelly said.

He said Suzanne Dieckman, the director, has a good relationship with the actors and actresses.

It is very important to feel comfortable with your blocking, Kelly said. He said Dieckman, associate professor of fine and performing arts, was flexible and open to suggestions from the cast.

In casting the role of Curly, Dieckman said she was looking for “a leading-man type: attractive and charming with a certain flair, someone who could be like this on stage.”

“As an actor, he works very hard and has come a long way,” Dieckman said. She views Curly as “a little bit of an egotist, but not offensively so. She said, “Curly is young and fresh, kind of innocent. But he matures in the play, especially after Jud’s death, which is a learning experience for him.”

Different methods

Dieckman said she used different methods of preparation to get Kelly and the other cast members to understand and feel their character’s motivations. The activities included improvising, constructing inner monologues, speaking song lyrics and learning gesture techniques.

She once had Curly and Jud (played by Business junior Brian Stough) arm-wrestle during one of their scenes in order to “feel the ebb and flow of tension and conflict,” Dieckman said.

Dieckman said she is proud of Kelly’s work and excited about him performing the role of Curly.