



# FSU School of Theatre's

# THE DRESSING ROOM

## A Theatre and Performance Review

### How to Put on a Musical in 11 Days

By Dessie Stant: Editor-in-Chief

Summer stock. Summer internships. Summer camp? This past summer, I spent the better part of my break at a co-ed summer camp in Raymond, Maine. I had never really been up north, with the exceptions of New York City and Chicago, which don't exactly count when you figure in fresh air and pine trees. Following the realization of how I wanted to spend my summer, I applied for the position of drama director at Kingsley Pines Camp. After I was offered the job as co-director of the drama program at Kingsley Pines, my co-director, Maegan Mishico and I chose two musicals that we would be producing that summer. We discussed numerous musicals that would be suited for children between the ages of eight and fifteen and we finally decided to direct *Grease* and *High School Musical*. Along with directing the aforementioned musicals, we also got to direct a Broadway cabaret. Directing musicals can be a task all in itself, but to put up a musical in eleven days, from auditions to dress rehearsals, can be overwhelming.

On the first day of a particular session, we would hold auditions. This audition process usually consisted of the kids singing "Happy Birthday" or one of their favorite songs. The best audition piece I heard all summer was by an eight-year-old girl when she sang "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah" with more



energy and enthusiasm than I have seen in many of my peers when they have auditioned. That same day, the cast list would be posted on the bulletin board. Like all thespians, the cast list was

rushed by a herd of children and ended with tears and disappointment.

The next ten days of rehearsal consisted of teaching choreography, music, and blocking to anywhere between fifteen and thirty-five children. The first two periods of the day, my co-director and I would block scenes, teach ensemble music and teach choreography. Third period, I would make up the choreography to a song, which would be taught to the kids the next day. Fourth period, I would either make copies, buy costumes, paint sets or learn the piano music so I could accompany the kids in learning their music. Fifth period was an optional period and the children could choose any activity they wanted from a pre-arranged list. I, of course, was teaching. I would commonly use fifth periods to teach solos and duets. By the end of the day, I was glad my bedtime was 9:15 p.m.

Along with directing a musical in eleven days, we had to build the set, paint the backdrop and make or buy costumes for the cast. Our technical director, Meghan Dougherty (a theatre major at Penn State) not only built the sets but taught a drama tech class



which taught everything from scene painting, to lighting, to run crew. Our productions were complete with head mics, walkie-talkies, a stage manager, two assistant stage managers and a costume designer. Considering we had eleven days to put on a musical, whereas community theaters and regional theaters have anywhere between six weeks to three months to put up their musicals, the process went rather well.



Theatre in and of itself can be daunting and challenging at times, but to convince children that they have to apply that much dedication to a production at a summer camp when everything is supposed to be fun and exhilarating can be quite tricky. Many days would pass where the kids were thoroughly exhausted and mentally taxed from the rehearsals that day. I never realized the importance of my own energy level until I had to face thirty-five tired and worn-out faces. When you have that many children relying on you, you suddenly recognize that this production isn't about you, it's about the kids and how much fun they're having. Teaching children has to be one of the most rewarding experiences of my career thus far. There's no other job that allows you to sing silly songs, to play leap frog spontaneously at any given point in the day, to dance in the rain to "It's Raining Men," or to prank someone's office by toilet papering the outside (without going to jail, that is). My days at Kingsley Pines not only consisted of teaching drama, but also of being a mentor and friend to my campers. Teaching children has not only taught me how to communicate more efficiently, but it has also taught me to love life. Someone told me before I got to Kingsley Pines that camp changes you. I could not agree more. If you have the opportunity to work at a summer camp, do it. Camp is an adventure you will never forget.