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The Music of Spring

By Lou Fancher



Olivia Da Silva and Holly Sass at a rehearsal Photo
Doug Kohen

and seniors in Concert Choir-a prerequisite for participation-study the libretto, then vote. This year, the kids liked all three options, making for a tight race. "I had to recount the ballots three times!" says Lengacher. There are approximately 50 in the cast, plus 35 instrumentalists. For choir members whose calendars are too jam packed with sports, student council, part-time jobs, not to mention hefty academic loads, Acalanes offers options. "We have student production teams so the kids can be a part of the musical without being at all the rehearsals," Lengacher explains. With a tight, two month production schedule and four rehearsals a week, it's little wonder students refer to the final week before opening night as "hell week."

Miramonte High School assigns the overall director's chair to Sarah Downs, the school's Director of Music. She selects the musical, hires the producers and directors and conducts the auditions, open to all drama and music students. Downs chose *Into the Woods*, with definite goals in mind. "The music is very challenging. This group of seniors, especially-I have a talented group of kids and this musical will take them to the next performance level." Once the preliminary decisions are completed, the musical becomes a student-based production. "Students learn and run the lighting, students learn and do the marketing, set construction, really, every aspect," Downs says. Miramonte's cast is this year's smallest at 32, but Downs' ultimate goal is as big as the *Titanic*: "[Participating] teaches them to make a commitment and follow through to achieve the end product."

Successful high school musicals, contrary to the hilarity of television's "Glee," and the Hollywood smash hit "High School Musical," are mostly the result of roll-up-your-sleeves-and-get-dirty work. Expectedly, parents volunteer their time and skills; whether it's building sets on Saturdays at Campo or tutoring in the homework room next to the theater at Miramonte. The musicals are more than just a song and a lark; they become a community event and a chance for students and their families to create lasting memories.

"I don't remember a lot about high school," Lengacher admits, "but I remember every rehearsal and every show I was in." The impact of his own high school performances keep him motivated during the long hours and late nights. Pinkham, whose two children were in past productions, also got hooked on theater through personal experience. "It's an artistic outlet for me," he says. With a nine year history, he gets an added boost from watching individual students develop: "It's so much fun to see the amazing changes and growth," he says. And, Downs, sounding serious beyond her years, speaks with candor and purpose when she says, "The musicals give the kids a different genre of music to learn. And it gives the kids the experience of working together."

Collaboration and Learning could be the title of the annual productions, if it weren't so dreary, and well, unmusical. The three high schools may fall into different patterns as they bring a musical to the stage, but there are two things they all have in common: kids are the stars, and fun performs nightly.

Lamorinda's 2010

High School Musicals

Acalanes: Cinderella, March 3-6

Campolindo: The Titanic, March 11-13, tickets www.campochoir.com

Miramonte: Into the Woods, March 18-21 and 25-27

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