



VIRTUOSO
Performing Arts

Behind the Scenes of Stage Production at VPA

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Producing a theatrical performance is complex and it includes: direction, writing, composing, casting, performers, choreography, coaching, costumes, makeup, scenery, lighting, procurement of props, stage management, house management, sound, technical crew, box office and audience...sounds like a lot of moving parts right?! The director is in charge throughout the process, delegating and overseeing everyone involved.

We can't forget about who starts off the entire process...the **writers and composers!** When it comes to acting and theater, it all starts with the script. The script is the starting point, and from the words on the page, a design is created, built and fully completed in time for the show. For dance and singing, the process is a little different. Music is usually the first element we deal with when we are working with a music student or creating a piece of choreography. Music must be age appropriate and sometimes needs to be edited to the right length.

Most professional companies will choose a play or piece of music first, and *then* hold auditions for **casting** -- looking for the best actors, dancers or singers for the job. VPA takes a different approach, however. Instead of choosing the script or music first, we have to consider the students we are working with. At VPA, all of our students have the opportunity to perform, so we have to consider each and every class and student at hand. Our scripts and music are carefully selected to suit each unique group of students.

One key element that really helps performers get into character is **costuming**. Costumes not only communicate the historical era of a piece, they reveal a lot about who a character is. For a performer, putting on a costume can be one of the most exciting aspects of a performance. Costumes are chosen and designed, usually months before show time, by the costume coordinator in collaboration with the director. Costumes are designed, sewn, shipped, fitted and sometimes altered by a seamstress. Add stage makeup and voila! The performer is transformed and ready to take the stage!

Like costumes, theatrical **scenery** also helps transport the audience to a different place. For acting and musical theatre performances, VPA's set designers create and build a set for each production. Sets can be as simple as a rustic bench or as elaborate as a castle throne room. For dance, the set can be as simple as a blank cyclorama or backdrop, or as elaborate as an intricately painted backdrop with set pieces. Space is of utmost importance for dancers, which is why a stage free of set pieces and obstacles is typical. Construction and painting of scenery is usually the most highly specialized and time consuming aspect of preparation for a production, especially for plays and musicals.

VPA is proud to employ professional designers and artists to work on their productions; thus every show has to be a well-planned group effort! VPA maintains a large off-site costume shop and an on-site scene shop and storage facility. After over 12 years of performances, VPA has amassed an impressive collection of resources!

Beautiful costumes and elaborate sets are nothing without **performers** to breathe life into them. The most powerful aspect of any performance are the characters developed by the actors and dancers!



One of final elements to any theatrical performance is **lighting**. Lighting provides a way for the directors to highlight certain aspects of a performance. Lighting also helps audience members feel a certain mood the director is trying to portray. Lighting designers are responsible for communicating with the directors and crew, choosing lighting equipment, hanging lighting equipment, focusing lights, deciding if colored gels are appropriate and operating the light board during the performance.

The **sound engineer** is crucial for acting and vocal performances in particular since microphones are usually involved. Sound is carefully leveled and balanced to achieve the right volume. The sound engineer also communicates with the stage manager.

The **tech crew** helps with theater load-in (setting up prior to the show), moving sets during the show and strike (dismantling sets after the show). The crew does most of the heavy lifting.

The **stage manager** is a very important person behind the scenes of any performance. He or she is in close communication with the director or choreographer prior to the show and basically calls the shots to any person working on the production. The stage manager “calls cues” during performance, which means he or she dictates, usually over a Clearcom communication system, when everything happens regarding lighting, sound and scene changes.

The **house manager** oversees anything going on in the “house” where the audience sits as well as “front of house” in the theater lobby. The house manager is responsible for communicating with the audience members when it’s time to start the show, communicating with the ushers & stage manager when it’s time to close the doors and start the show, handling any issues that may arise in the house or front of house.

The **box office** handles selling tickets and seating. Tickets usually go on sale a month to several months before a show. The box office usually will be on site for performances to sell tickets at the door.

Lastly, the **theater** itself is a crucial part of any performance. The stage must be right for the type of performance. There are all sorts of theater venues with varying sizes, set-ups, flooring and audience seating. VPA is proud to house its very own Black Box style theater, which seats about 100 audience members and makes for a wonderfully intimate venue. For dance productions, VPA rents a local auditorium with a larger, proscenium stage.

This season, VPA will produce six productions:

- VPA Dance Company Preview Show at the VPA Theater (Spring)
- School of Music Recital at the VPA Theater (Spring & Fall)
- Acting Showcase at the VPA Theater (Spring)
- Dance Production at Niles West High School Auditorium (Spring)
- Pinocchio the Musical at the VPA Theater (Summer)

Whatever the case, be it dance, acting or music, producing a theatrical production is quite the undertaking! It’s important to acknowledge all of the many people involved behind the scenes just as much as the performers and audience members. The show simply could not go on with one of them missing. On with the show!