

Clarence Bee Article – March 2021

The Show Goes On

There are thousands in our community who have had the pleasure of being in the audience for the middle school musicals since the first performance in 1969. In all the years producing the show, none have seen the challenges that the production faced this year. It is nothing short of amazing what Doug Kohler, Heidi Kohler, Mary Lynne Kautz, the entire production staff, and the students were able to accomplish this year with *Getting to Know the Sound of Music*. Somehow, through enormous effort and dedication, the cast, crew, and producers put together a musical that showcased the talents of one hundred middle school students in the middle of a pandemic.

The middle school musical has always been about maximizing participation, providing the kids with a great theatrical experience, and having a whole bunch of fun doing so. The difference this year was meeting those goals while students were in a hybrid learning schedule and running up against all the safety precautions associated with COVID.

Consider everything that had to change this year to make the musical happen.

Two full casts (nicknamed Salzburg and Vienna) were assembled to accommodate rehearsals on the days students in a particular cohort were in school. Creating two full casts also meant that props, costumes, and other elements had to be doubled. To accommodate Department of Health guidelines, the actors were always masked and socially distanced on stage. The fact that the actors had to be distanced left no room for traditional sets on stage.

The auditions and call backs had to be performed virtually using Zoom. Rehearsals began in December, also virtually using Zoom. The setup allowed splitting up the parts of each cast with a separate director. Heidi worked with the choral aspect, Doug and Mary Lynne worked with line reading.

The directors moved to in-person rehearsals in late January. Once it became clear that an in-person performance would not be possible, the directors sought permission from the musical rights company to stream a virtual show on a private YouTube channel. Spectators purchasing a virtual ticket were emailed a link to the private channel, which was only active on a specific night of the performance.

Each scene in the show was filmed on stage in front of a gigantic green screen. The student vocal parts were recorded individually, so they could sing without a mask. The directors utilized iMovie to compile backdrops, stage video, and original audio parts. A separate performance video was created for each cast.

The final result was magnificent. I want to thank Heidi, Doug, and Mary Lynne for their passion and creativity, and for keeping the tradition of the middle school musical alive and well.