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PRODUCTION DEVELOPMENT:
A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO DIRECTING FOR EDUCATIONAL
THEATRE

by

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B.A. Florida State University, 1998

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis was to develop a process-based approach for a theatre production with an emphasis in musical theatre at the secondary education level.

Many times, a high school theatre instructor is faced with challenges when selecting materials for productions that go beyond the standard mandated curriculum. In a perfect world, the program would have strong enrollment, overflowing funding and community support. This is usually not the case, so how does the director prioritize the necessary practice to find success for a production? What does the instructor do to select material that will be appropriate for the curriculum standards? How does the director adapt production elements to satisfy both academic and community requirements?

By establishing clear goals for the production, I utilized effective research methods and proper selection of materials to create a successful production. Drawing from my experiences as a stage manager, educator and director in a wide variety of settings, I used my thesis to devise an effective pedagogical approach to directing a production of *Mamma Mia*.

For Mom.

Evelyn Fiona Cameron Ciciarelli

I love you and will miss you.

May 09, 1945 - Nov 09, 2019

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I would like to thank my students for supporting me in my continued education to become a better educator for them.

Finally, to my family. To my husband Graham, my son Cameron, daughter Catherine and my father Ron. Without your love and support this would not have been possible. Thank you for helping fulfil one of my dreams while striving to be a loving mother, a supportive wife and a caring daughter.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND INSPIRATION

Project Overview

Working in secondary education, theatre instructors are challenged with creating both an academically-sound production but also having some level of commercial success to keep the program sustainable. Therefore, instructors must develop both an effective strategy when selecting material, while at the same time addressing the challenges that mounting their production will face. For our program, the first step in making a production selection is looking at casting and technical needs for a script. Obviously, in educational theatre, you are limited to the students available and willingness to audition and the fact that as each cohort graduates, your demographics change. Taking these considerations into account, it was decided to pursue a production that would offer students the chance to demonstrate working in an ensemble and effectively communicate to an audience.

First area of consideration: casting. Based on the experience of students returning to the program and the results of vocal and movement assessments at the start of the academic year, the artistic team knew we would be better served to find a production that would allow the new cohort the opportunity to develop their skills and would focus on female leads. We knew we wanted a script that would have a contemporary sound, since we would be using audio tracks for accompaniment, limited male vocals and a good selection of large ensemble numbers. In addition, we wanted to pick a production that had name recognition and not yet had been produced locally.

Second area of consideration: production requirement. For script consideration, we were looking for librettos that were contemporary and would allow for a fixed set. A contemporary

design would allow the program to source materials and design elements that could be acquired more easily and reduce the financial footprint while still exposing the students to developing a design that would be suitable based on given circumstances. A fixed set design with some moving pieces would allow the space to still function as a shared school and public venue.

After long discussions with both the music director and choreographer, we were able to narrow down show selections based on our current requirements. It was determined *Mamma Mia* would be our best option for both casting and technical needs. Working with the licensing house Music Theatre International, we were able to secure the rights and begin the production process for an opening date of February 14, 2020.

Until this point, this project was being viewed through the lens of a teacher, but a couple weeks after we were granted the rights, I went through one of the hardest experiences of my life, the loss of my mother. At the time, I didn't know how I could carry on doing this show until I remembered an article in the New York Times where Stage Manager Sherry Cohen was reflecting on her rehearsal the day after 9/11.

“On Sept 12, when we showed up at the studio, later than our usual 10a.m. rehearsal time because we knew people would have problems getting there, we brought the company together and sat and thought: How do we move forward? How do we start singing “Dancing Queen”? We shared and we cried, and people said, ‘What do we do?’ We said, ‘People are going to want to go to something where they can be entertained and lose themselves’ That’s how we were able to continue rehearsal (Pipenberg 2).”

- And that is exactly what I needed. This show not only suited our educational needs, but it afforded me a space to be entertained and lose myself. My inspiration was to find joy and create a place where the audience would escape.

Research Methodology

Before beginning any project, given circumstances must be identified. These may include budget, creative team and performance space being utilized. These factors may influence creative elements and force your research to go in certain directions. It is imperative that these factors are clearly laid out before research can begin. In educational theatre, the creative team may be limited to the faculty on staff. You may be required to use the school's dance teacher as the choreographer or the chorus teacher as the musical director, and they may not be best suited to execute the vision for the production. For our production, we are given the freedom to hire outside the school for the musical director, choreographer and scenic designer. This flexibility allows me to have a clear direction for research to begin. Since *Mamma Mia* is classified as a jukebox musical, a show using popular music for the score, it was essential to understand the source material for the music and the artists. It also was essential to understand the creative process of manufacturing this genre of musical and the original production. Using guided research, this informs the director and creative team on casting, rehearsal and production elements for this production of *Mamma Mia*.

CHAPTER TWO: CREATING THROUGH DRAMATUGY AND HISTORY

History of ABBA

At the start of the project, I, like so many people, was very familiar with the songs of ABBA that make up the music from the musical *Mamma Mia*. I remember as a teenage girl getting the CD box set of ABBA Gold, their greatest hits. I had no clue of the history of the band or even that they were from Sweden; I just knew the songs were great to blast in the car while driving around with my friends. My next encounter with these songs would come in London in 1999 when a friend of mine got us some complimentary tickets to the new musical *Mamma Mia* at the Prince Edward Theatre. Like so many at the time, I found the show fun and a good night out, but I could not see how this show would last; the premise of the story seemed lacking integrity. At the time, American reporter Matt Wolf of *Variety* stated:

In the old days, a musical's book and score attempted some kind of unity, so that one flowed naturally and liltingly from the other. No more: if the audience at "Mamma Mia!" greets most of the numbers with affectionate chuckles (and occasional applause), that's due to the essential incongruity of a show that works (or not) by its very absurdity (Wolf).

So, how does a jukebox musical with a limited book manage to become one of the longest-running shows on the West End and Broadway and become a world-wide phenom with over 65 million audiences (Mamma Mia.com)? I needed to learn more about the writers and the band to understand how to approach this production.

I always tell my students to search for the given circumstances when conducting research or working on a role; start with who, what, when, where, why and how. So, what exactly did I need to know about these songs and musicians to guide me as a director? I learned the musicians

were from Sweden and all born between 1945-1950. The band was comprised of four members: Bjorn Ulvaeus, Benny Andersson, Anni-Frid Lyngstad and Agnetha Faltskog. Ulvaeus and Anderson met in 1966 and started writing together because they shared a similar sensibility in music. In just a couple of years, they met Lyngstad and Faltskog, who provided the missing vocal sound needed to bring their lyrics to life. But the group did not formally join forces until 1973 for the Melodifestivalen contest in Sweden. This contest is the most popular television show in Sweden, and the winner is selected to represent their home country in the Eurovision song contest. This experience gave them the springboard and the audience to start on their journey to worldwide success. Their manager gave them the name ABBA, to eliminate audiences trying to manage their given names and focus on initials, and it was also the name of a Swedish fish canning company, so it showed their sense of humor. In 1974, they won the coveted Eurovision song contest with their song “Waterloo” (Farber). I found this discovery most interesting as the song “Waterloo” is the song in the musical not included in the storyline but rather the anthem during the curtain call. Maybe the song did not work in the show or maybe its omission was intentional. Since “Waterloo” was the origin song for ABBA’s success, maybe they wanted it to stand on its own and not be formally connected with the musical production, serving as a tribute to the foundation of ABBA. The sound of ABBA’s music is unmistakable, beautiful harmonies, instruments on top of each other, joyful music, and even with solemn lyrics. In an interview for *The Guardian*, Bjorn points out:

“...most remarkable about the song’s (Dancing Queen) magic – the piano trills the spiraling strings, the way it encapsulates a sense of uplifting joy – is that it sounds utterly effortless.”

So effortless, that critics at the time complained that the band was nothing more than a cold, clinical hit factory writing songs to order, with no heart. It's a criticism that Bjorn says used to make him mad, and possibly still does.

'Waterloo, Mamma Mia, Fernando, Dancing Queen, The Winner Takes It All . . . are they made to a formula?" he asks. "What is that formula?! It's totally the opposite. We never repeated ourselves. We worked so hard to find different styles every time (G2: Film & Music: THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC).'

This statement reminded me I needed to look at each song as independent text and not to look at this body of work as a collection but rather as moments in time. It is widely noted that as both Anderson and Ulvaeus improved their English skills, their lyrics developed more depth in meaning and structure. Both claimed their songs were based in fiction, but Ulvaeus admits as both, now married couples, were breaking up, those experiences influenced the work. For the song "Winner Takes It All," Ulvaeus wrote about divorce as a competitive act featuring triumphant winners and fallen victims. The fact he then arranged for his former wife to sing it has sometimes been portrayed as an act of sadism, although he begs to differ:

"No, not at all. I think she loved those words."

"She did," agrees Frida. "And remember that song was for so many people, not just Bjorn and Agnetha."

"And it was fiction, remember," says Bjorn. "There were no winners in our divorce (G2: Film & Music: THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC)."

After Faltskag and Ulvaeus divorced in 1979, and Anderson and Lyngstad divorced in 1980, all four members continued to work together, but in 1982, the group decided to take a break and have never recorded since (Farber).

I did find it interesting that the year their marriages ended corresponds with when our lead character Donna leaves the Dynamos to become an unexpected single mother. Donna must

leave the life she dreamed about and face life alone. It becomes a new phase for her -- a new chapter. The year 1979 was a new chapter for ABBA, as their marriages were coming to an end and as Lyngstad learned to be a single mom to Andersson's children, she felt abandoned. This discovery led me to wonder was Catherine Johnson inspired to use 1979 as the fictional starting point for this musical since this was the time when their marriages were ending? Was Johnson trying to project the fact that Lyngstad was becoming a single mother at the same time as our fictional character leaves the stage to become a single mom? These too might be coincidences, as in reality Catherine Johnson most likely had the projected opening date of the musical to be 1999 and went "back" twenty years for the start of the story. However, as a director using this origin story to understand why Donna no longer wants to sing creates a truth for Donna and why she avoids her past. It also provides a clear timeline for Donna's growth and maturity.

The years that followed their "break," Anderson and Ulvaeus took their first steps into the world of theatre with Tim Rice to create the musical *Chess*, which opened in London's West End and ran for three years. Lyngstad and Faltskag both worked on solo projects but have never had the same international success. It has been rumored the group has turned down one billion dollars to go on tour, but the ever-pragmatic Swedes remind the world they have more than enough money, and as Ulvaeus states to Tim Jonze of *The Guardian*:

"But I realize it's a young man or woman's work to write pop music (Jonze)."

History of Collaboration

Having a better understanding of the band and their style of music leads me to my next curiosity. How did the songs written for a four-member band eventually end up in a musical? On the surface, their songs all have a light-hearted sound, even if what they are singing about is deeper, darker. So, who would think you can take music that “feels” the same and create tension and a rise of action to a resolution? Well, Judy Craymer thought it could work, and as fate would have it, she would become the keeper of the *Mamma Mia* domain. She was fresh off a job stage managing *Cats* in London when she was asked to go pick up Ulvaeus, who was in town for a meeting about the new musical *Chess*. She struck up a friendship with Anderson and Ulvaeus and pitched an idea for their music to become what is now the highly profitable stage show that has grossed more \$2 billion since it opened in London’s West End and two major motion pictures (Keegan).

The next step was to find someone to weave the songs of ABBA into a story. That opportunity landed in the lap of Catherine Johnson. Craymer met Johnson in 1997 and told Anderson and Ulvaeus she found their playwright. Initially, Johnson was not convinced this would be a financially-sound endeavor, but she needed a paycheck, so she took the task to heart. The songs could not be altered, so Johnson had to find a way to make these songs live in context of her characters.

Johnson was a single mother herself, so she found a voice in Donna. Johnson discovered many of the early songs were lighthearted and naïve, whereas the latter songs had a maturity and depth to them. This created her two worlds of the young daughter and her mother. The writing and revision process took two-and-a-half years, and she always was mindful that the songs must

fit in the story. Johnson always carried a lot of self-doubt about her work and did not think the show would last three months but working with Craymer and female director Phyllida Lloyd this team fought to create a believable world of real women (Coates).

History of Original Production

After ten years of developing the musical, it was time to bring the idea to life for an audience. On March 3, 1999, *Mamma Mia* greeted its first preview audience and officially opened April 6, 1999 at the Prince Edward Theatre. This was in the same theatre in which ten years earlier *Chess* had opened and twenty-five years since ABBA won the Eurovision Contest (Mamma Mia. com/history). At the time, a New York Times article reported Craymer as saying, “I don’t think anybody anticipated how well we would be received...and perhaps a trip to Broadway (McKinley).” At the time of the article, the theatre was selling out its 1,650 seats nightly. The production was joined by Anthony Van Lasst, choreographer, and Mark Thompson as production designer. According to the official *Mamma Mia* website, the production has been produced all over the world and translated into several languages, including Russian, German, Swedish, Spanish and Chinese. It was the 8th-longest running show on Broadway when it closed on September 12, 2015 and is still running in London’s West End after transferring to The Novello. Following the unprecedented success, it was turned into a Hollywood film, starring Meryl Streep, with a sequel released in 2018 (Mamma Mia.com). There has even been an immersive dinner show that opened in Sweden and at the London’s O2 arena (Paulson).

So, how do I take a show with immense popularity and find a story to tell? I go to the script.

Script Analysis

Before working on any production, I personally read the script multiple times. I do not look at a script with any agenda. I read for enjoyment and start looking for the given circumstances. Who are the characters, where are they, what are their relationships, education, beliefs etc. After making notes, I start looking at the script from different points of view. As an educator, I have to look at the material in terms of accessibility for students and if the material is suitable for the school. If this script is approved by administration, I then move to breaking down the plot and characters better. To direct and cast a production, it is essential I understand the arc of the story and the characters, but, more importantly, I must guide the students to better understand their character and the world of the play. I decided for this production to try and apply an organizational method introduced in our acting class. I modified the process so students could complete the work as part of our curriculum. This requirement forced students to dive deeper into their script and, in turn, have a better understanding of how to live truthfully on stage. Students performers and technicians were asked to identify given circumstance for their character or for their area of design. By learning about the character, the technicians are able to learn about the characters style, interests, lifestyle. The following, as shown in Figure 1, is the handout issued to the students:

Production Preparation – Mamma Mia	Student Name: _____
Areas to address/discuss:	Role/Responsibility: _____

Time:
Place or Physical Environment
Society
Economics
Intellect and Culture
Background
Protagonist
Antagonist
Other Characters
Relationships
The Main Idea
Atmosphere
Style
Backstory
Dramatic Action
Structure
Inciting Action
Main Climax
Falling Action

Other:

Figure 1: Given Circumstances Handout
Created by Jill Cicciarelli

Students also were expected to do a scene break down to include scene/character/location/song/action. This is the style I personally create, as shown in Figure 2, when working on a show. Students tend to just focus on the mechanics of memorization but must be reminded to research and develop their character to tell the story. I scheduled a lunch meeting with each principal to discuss their character and the given circumstances found in the script. They are also reminded to research words or references they do not understand. For example, the reference to a white wedding had more to do with the style of dress but more about

Sophie's choice to restrain from having an intimate relationship with Sky. The students did not know this reference.

Mamma Mia

ACT I

Prologue- SCENE 1	SCENE 2	SCENE 3	SCENE 4	SCENE 5	SCENE 6	SCENE 7	SCENE 8
Post Box/Courtyard	Courtyard	Courtyard	Donna's Room	Courtyard/Evening	Courtyard/Evening	The Jetty	The Courtyard
Sophie Song #21 Have a Dream	Tanya Rosie Donna Sophie Sky Pepper Eddie Ensemble	Harry Bill Sam Sophie Add Donna/Ensemble	Tanya Rosie Donna	Sophie Sky Add Eddie/Pepper Male Ensemble	Tanya Rosie Donna Female Ensemble	Sophie Bill	Sam Sophie Harry Ensemble
Sophie Ali Lisa #3 Honey, Honey	#4 Money, Money, Money	#5 Thank You For the Music #6 Mamma Mia w/ensemble	#7 Chiquitita #8 Dancing Queen	#9 Lay All Your Love On Me (flipper song)	#10 Super Trouper Add Harry/Bill/Sam #11 Gimme, Gimme, Gimme	#12 The Name of the Game	#13 Voulez Vous

Mamma Mia

ACT II

SCENE 1	SCENE 2	SCENE 3	SCENE 4	SCENE 5	SCENE 6	SCENE 7	SCENE 8
Sophie's Nightmare/Bed	Courtyard/Early	Courtyard (lounge chairs?)	Donna's Room	Courtyard Wedding	Courtyard/Jetty	Bows	Finale
Sophie Nightmare Chorus 3 Dads in tuxes Sky – in wedding dress #14a Under Attack	Sophie Donna Add Sky Pepper Eddie Add Sam #15 One of Us #16 S.O.S.	Pepper Tanya Harry Add Rosie Bill Lisa/Ally/Eddie Dance Ensemble #17 Does Your Mother Know? Add Sky Sophie Add Sam #18 Knowing Me, Knowing You	Donna Harry #19 Our Last Summer Add Sophie #20 Slipping Through My Fingers Add Sam #21 The Winner Takes it All	Rosie Bill #21 Take A Chance Add Company Priest Donna Sophie Sam Harry Bill Rosie Sky #23 I Do, I Do	Sophie Company #24 I Have a Dream	Full Company #25 Bows #26 Mamma Mia Bows #27 Dancing Queen Bows	Full Company #28 Waterloo

Figure 2: Scene Breakdown

Created by Jill Ciccirelli

CHAPTER THREE: CREATING THROUGH DESIGN

Director Concept

As a director, I always have found imagery as the catalyst for my “concepts.” These images may come from the script, the music, or something visual, but I create pictures in my mind that guide me to creative decisions. *Mamma Mia* is about womanhood, independence and sacrifice. It is a story about “what ifs.” The what ifs of Donna the mother and Sophie the daughter.

Donna:

- What if I had married the man - Sam?
- What if I had never been a mom?
- What if I lived out my dreams of the Dynamos?
- What if Sophie gets married?
- What if Sophie leaves?
- What if Sophie finds out who her dad is?
- What if Sophie isn't happy?
- What if Sophie gets hurt?
- What if Sophie doesn't forgive me?
- What if I still love Sam?

Sophie:

- What if my possible dads show up?
- What if I never find out about my dad?
- What if I don't get married?
- What if I don't say yes?
- What if my mom is right?
- What if the men reject me as their daughter?
- What if I hurt my mom?
- What if she doesn't forgive me?
- What if Sky calls off the wedding?

When breaking down these questions, you start to see the commonality in these two women: the fear of the unknown and the fear of hurting the other one. All the characters in the show are serving as a mirror for these two women. They show Donna and Sophie who they were and who they want to be, but until Donna and Sophie are willing to let go of the what ifs, they cannot find true peace. The show is about regrets and unanswered questions, but it is the discovery it is never too late to find the answers and the resolve within ourselves.

Design Concepts

For our production of *Mamma Mia*, we had to first identify given circumstances provided in the text in order to start the design process. The following was determined:

- Location(s): Mediterranean Island -Greece. Taverna/Beach/Bedroom/Wedding
- Time Period: 1999

- Length of Time: Weekend – three days, two nights
- Time of Day: Varied. Morning/afternoon/evening
- Mood/Atmosphere: Joyful/happy/celebratory/reflective
- Specials or Effects: Fantasy Under Attack/ Party Scene/ Night and Day

Since I direct educational theatre, students are involved in the concept and decision-making process. Students completed applications to be considered for different departments or roles:

- Stage Management
- Props
- Scenery
- Costumes
- Lighting
- Marketing

After applications were submitted and reviewed, students were placed in different departments, with some students taking on leadership of that group was then asked to read through the script and create lists for their department and asked to create mood boards to present for consideration. We work with a professional scenic designer, but student ideas are always included in the brainstorming meeting. Students understand both the director and scenic designer will have final say.

Props

For the prop lists, we start with the script and then add anything that is requested during the planning or rehearsal process as shown in Figure 3. The team identifies rehearsal prop needs and begins acquisitions. After a determined time period for located props that we may already have in storage or that can be borrowed, the team is tasked with creating a purchase order for the items. Students are asked to source the item and the cost so a budget can be determined. If the items needed cost more than the initial budget, students are expected to find money from a different department or look for cost-saving measures.

For this production, most props were easily acquired; however, there were a few specialty props that needed to be made. In Act II, Scene 2, the character Eddie brings in broken bagpipes that Donna had kept belonging to Sam. Since the prop did not need to be in working order, it was decided by the prop team to save money and try to make their own “broken bagpipes.” Another late addition to the prop list was identified during the rehearsal process. At the start of the musical, Donna’s daughter is seen mailing letters to her three possible dads. This information is discovered after she finds a diary her mother kept the year Sophie was born, leading to the conclusion who her dad may be. This diary represents a chapter ending for Donna, a time when her life was free and her possibilities were endless, so I felt it would be a wonderful full circle moment if Donna presented Sophie with a diary before she left to explore the world

and all its opportunities. This addition was a perfect example for the students to understand how the creative process starts with the script but evolves over the rehearsal process.

Final Prop List

Act 1

Prologue

- 3 letters

Scene 1

- Ali and Lisa suitcases
- Diary

Scene 2

- Tanya and Rosie luggage
- Money
- Champagne bottles
- "Crate"
- 3 fabrics to fold & Lauren's cleaning scrub

Scene 3

- Dads suitcases
- Guitar

Scene 4

- Tanya and Rosie luggage(preset)
- Hairbrush
- Hairdryer
- Curling Iron
- Poster, costumes, boas in trunk

Scene 5

- Blindfold
- Flippers
- Floaties
- Inner tubes

Scene 6

- Party Cups
- Bridal Party Decor
- Dynamo microphones

Scene 7

- N/A

Scene 8

- Sashes
- Pearl necklace

Act 2

Scene 1

- Flashlight
- 4 Flowers
- 2 Umbrellas
- Sky Bouquet

Scene 2

- Bagpipes
- Sketch book & stool

Scene 3

- Tiki Bar Cups
- Fishing (bucket, Bill's hat, fishing rod)

Scene 4

- Hats & Scarves - preset
- Harry's Check

Scene 5

- Bill's note from Sophie
- Sophie's bouquet
- Camera

Scene 6

- Sophie and Sky backpacks
- 2nd diary

Figure 3: Mamma Mia Prop List

Costuming

Before the students create their inspiration boards for discussion, we talked about the needs of the production. Since *Mamma Mia* is set in 1999, we needed to take advantage of the fact that the majority of the costumes easily could be acquired and minimize our costuming budget, but that colors palettes needed to be established so the design had a cohesive vision. In addition, since the show is derived around the songs of *ABBA*, we knew we had to pay tribute to both the band and their costume designer Owe Sandstrom. His designs always were inspired by the nature of Sweden, particularly blue, purple and white. These tributes would be used during “Super Trouper” and the finale. We also identified special needs for the production, budget and ideas for acquisition. Areas identified:

- “Super Trouper” – Donna, Rosie, Tanya
- “Under Attack” – Female Ensemble/ Dads Tuxes/ Sky Bride
- Wedding Ceremony – Sophie
- “Finale” – Donna, Rosie, Tanya, Sam, Bill, Harry

Our program does not have access to a costumer or seamstress, so this department always is student led. For this production, three students were selected to serve on the costume team. They were tasked with creating the costume breakdown and designing the mood boards as shown Figure 4. They presented their ideas to the production team, and the first of many discussions and adjustments were made. With most educational productions, design ideas must account for flexibility, as most costumes and accessories are acquired by the company. After identifying the specialty costumes, we organized the production into three groups: male principals, female

principals, and the ensemble. Except for the opening scene, *Mamma Mia* takes place over the course of two days, so we decided to break the costumes down into parts of the day and activities. We started with words or descriptors for each character to inform costume selections:

Day 1 - Arrival Day

- Morning
 - Arrival Lisa & Ali - Sophie's best friends – travel attire
 - Young/comfortable/bright/happy
 - Arrival Tanya & Rosie – Donna's best friends – travel attire
 - Tanya – sophisticated/well-travelled/expensive with a bit of tacky/40yr old
 - Rosie – relaxed/creative/bohemian/40yr old /comfortable
 - Arrival Bill, Harry, Sam – Sophie's possible dads – travel attire
 - Sam – architect/ structure/good style/ cool colors
 - Bill – travel writer/well-travelled/practical/comfortable/neutral colors
 - Harry – stockbroker/tailored/formal/warmer colors with blue tones
 - Donna – comfortable/worker – we debated about using the iconic overalls and, at first, we were going against the idea; but, in the end, we felt it was the right thing to do.
 - Ensemble/Workers – we decided that for the ensemble in “Money. Money, Money” and “Mamma Mia” we wanted to play on different shades of denim. Denim is associated with durability and work, so that seemed like a good fabric choice and would work with Donna's overalls. The blue also gives us the water tones of island life.

- Greek Yiayia – we thought it would be fun to have the traditional Greek Yiayia in the opening and closing scenes. Black dress/black tights/black shoes/black head cover
- Late Afternoon/Early Evening:
 - Tanya, Donna & Rosie – Part I: Dynamos-inspired costumes - specialty
 - Part II: Party outfits
 - Specialty costumes – ponchos/berets inspired by ABBA performance costume
 - Bill, Harry, Sam – relaxed evening attire
 - Sam – architect/ structure/good style/ cool colors
 - Bill – travel writer/well-travelled/practical/comfortable/neutral colors
 - Harry – stockbroker/tailored/formal/warmer colors with blue tones
 - Male Ensemble - Part I: “Lay All Your Love on Me” – for this song, the male ensemble kidnaps Sky for his bachelor party. The iconic design for this number is usually having all the male ensemble in wetsuits and flippers, which would not be safe or suitable for our production; however, we worked with the choreographer and dancers to see if a couple of them were able to wear the flipper. We decided to limit them for two of the dancers to avoid spacing issues. Ideas: fun swimsuits/ tux t-shirts/ swim shoes/ fun swimming accessories.
 - Male Ensemble/Sky – Part II: “Voulez Vous” – evening relaxed attire with dark tones. Slinky. Groom sash

- Female Ensemble/Sophie - Bachelorette Party – for this scene, we decided for deeper tone primary colors for their party outfits. Groom sash.

Day 2 – Wedding Day

- Early Morning
 - Specialty – “Under Attack”
 - Sophie – pajamas
 - Dads – tuxes
 - Sky – wedding dress with thick veil
 - Selected Female Ensemble – fantasy bridal party – circus meets wedding
 - Ideally black and white borrowed jester outfits with white tutus – want elements to glow in dark. Disproportionate sized props and accessories.
 - Donna - relaxed - denim
 - Sam – relaxed – contrast color with Donna for confrontation
- Mid- Day – Beach Scene
 - Ensemble/Tanya/Rosie/Bill/Harry – Sun/beach clothes: no swimsuits only and no cut outs or bikinis.
 - Tanya must be able to dance
 - Fun neon colors
 - Beach accessories: hats/sunglasses/fans/cover ups/towels
- Early/Evening/Finale
 - Specialty – Sophie wedding dress

- The original concept was cool tones. Taupe/blush/grey blue – however, as we worked to acquire costumes in this original palette, we realized this was proving more of a challenge. As we started choreographing the finale, it was decided to change the palette and use “sparkle” as our unifying element. That decision moved our wedding to “evening” and then the finale became the party.
- Specialty – clergy outfit/accessories.
- Specialty – Dynamos/Dads glam rock/disco inspired.



Figure 4: Student Designed Mood Board – Color Scheme

Scenic Design

Mamma Mia takes place on a remote Mediterranean island. For the set design, I wanted to reflect a romantic quality in the colors and décor, looking for cooler tones and soft textures. It needed to look as if it had seen better days but was well-loved. I wanted there to be levels and doors/entrances and windows to represent beginnings and endings. Before conferencing with our scenic designer, I wrote a list of locations/design elements required by the text. I then visualized how these items would live in our space and move on and off. I tried to determine how literal the set should be versus one that is more interpretive. I love when design allows for the audience to fill in the blanks, to complete the picture. An unfinished wall or an alternative unexpected material creates another dimension to the story. Our venue, as shown in Figure 5 is a 750-seat proscenium stage with adequate wing space. There is no fly system, and our stage height is limited, which must be considered when designing upper levels. Our space is used weekly for an organization that rents the space on Sundays, so we must also keep enough floor space for their set up.



Figure 5: Empty Space

Photo Credit Jill Ciccirelli

Areas to address based on the script:

- Mailbox Area
- Dock/Arrival Area – do we extend out over the pit?
- Taverna – tables/chairs
- Donna’s Bedroom – bed/vanity
- Beach/Lounging Configuration
- Wedding Configuration - seating

I am not a scenic designer or skilled in the construction of a set, so annually I budget for the hiring of a scenic designer. In the past, I was able to work with parent volunteers, but that does not always prove reliable, and your vision may not be fully realized. Therefore, working with a professional is better for the production, and the process is more educational for the students, because they get to work with someone in the industry and develop proper skills. For this production, I hired Tori Oakes, a private design contractor, to serve as our scenic designer. After my initial script analysis, I set up a production meeting to discuss the needs of the production and my directorial vision. During this meeting, we walked the space and talked about staging needs. We both agreed we did not want a rounded set with the blue roofs, as seen in many other productions. We also discussed the use of silhouettes and “incomplete” scenery to reflect the unstable, incomplete lives of both Donna and Sophie. The set and furniture should feel unmatched and discovered. Donna’s life is one of survival, so we wanted the set warm and loved but pieced together. Her life is chaotic, so we wanted the set to feel that way. Nothing too matchy, matchy. She finds treasures and repurposes for her Taverna. The main challenge identified was the build would need to take place over 5-7 days and only be done two weeks

before we open, but this was a challenge I was willing to work with to have a professional work on our production. We agreed on a maximum budget for labor and materials and an agreed proposed rough ground plan date (Fig. 6) with front elevations (Fig. 7) confirmed later.

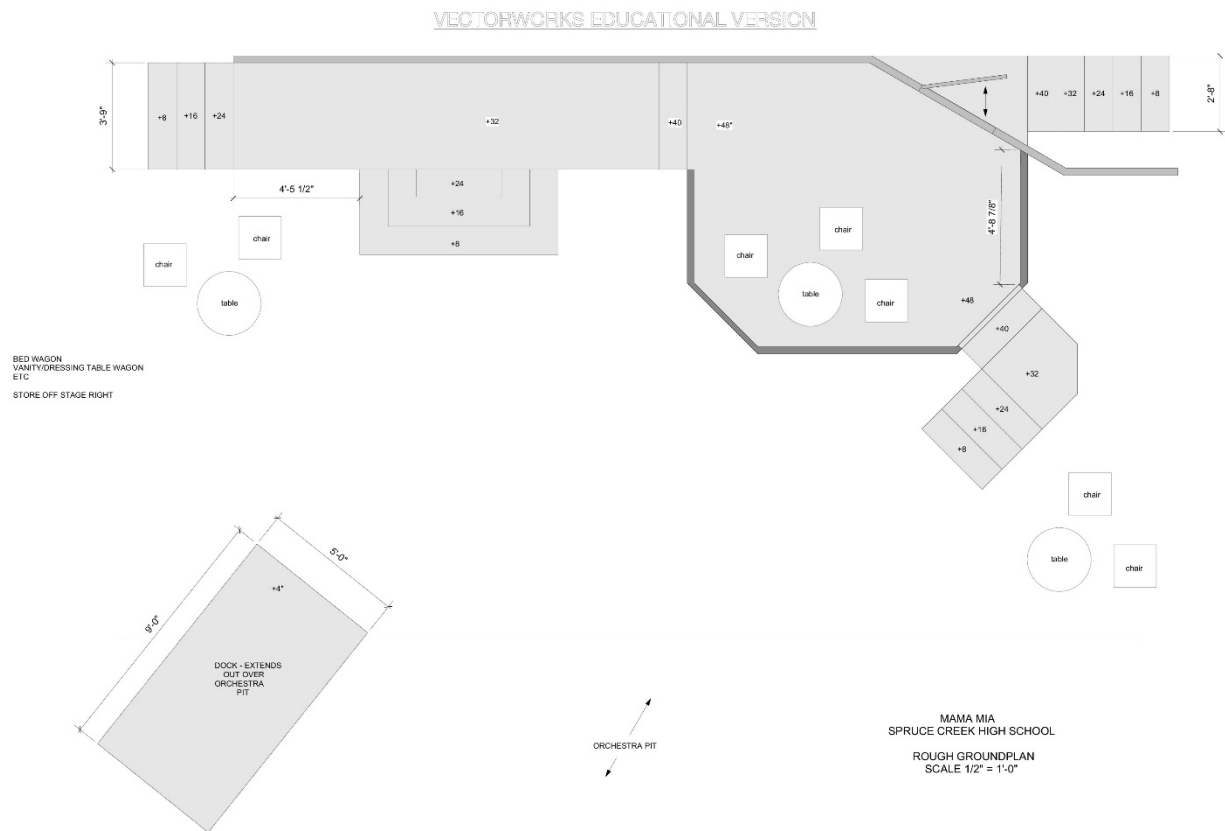


Figure 6: Proposed Ground plan Mamma Mia SCHS

Credit Scenic Designer Tori Oakes

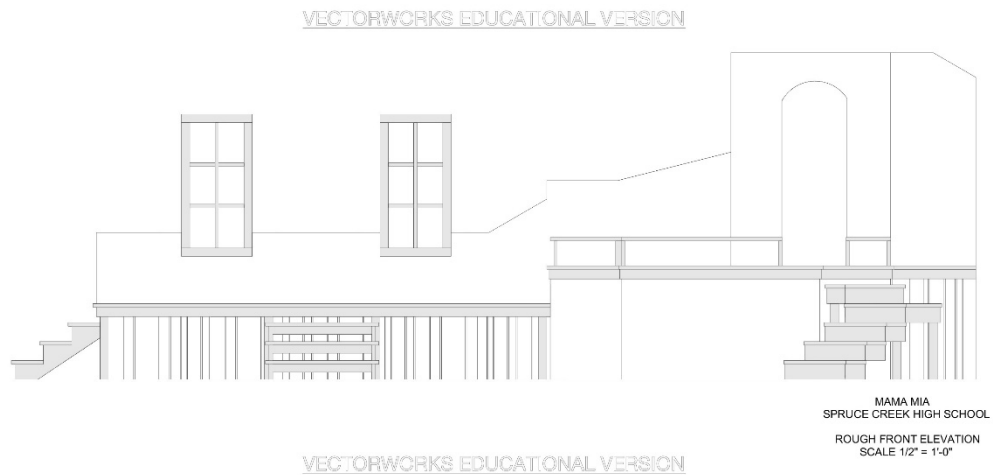


Figure 7: Proposed Front Elevation Mamma Mia SCHS
Credit Scenic Designer Tori Oakes

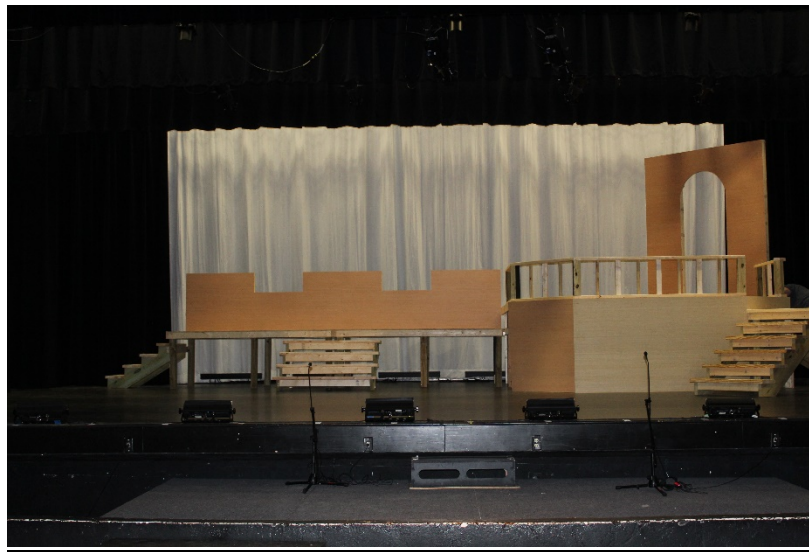


Figure 8: In Progress
Photo Credit Jill Cicciarelli

The proposed designed and the finished project were very close, but, in the end, some adjustments had to made because of the time constraints. We did not get to utilize the hanging

shutters or the dock out over the pit. These two adjustments meant we needed to make changes to some of the planned blocking in the final days. I really wanted some of the workers to “pop” out of the shutters during the chorus in the song “Mamma Mia” but, in the end, we had to adjust to popping out of the window, panes and door arch. It worked, but I do not think it was as effective for the audience. Overall, the design was effective in creating Donna’s Taverna and the audience response was positive. It was wonderful for the students to have different levels to play on, and this design was the most sophisticated we have had in recent years. In the end, Tori Oakes created a beautiful set for our production, and it was such a pleasure to work with her.

Set Dressing

Working with a professional scenic designer, sometimes the students do not feel as hands on in the design process, but Tori and I worked together to let the students have a stronger hand in the design elements. Students were given guidance on areas to set dress and reminders about suitable time/place. Students also were reminded that some elements would be discovered as the set was being constructed. Areas needing addressing and inspiration included:

- Entrance/Lobby Design
- Dock Area - SR
- Mailbox/Welcome Area - SL
- Bedroom – trucks bed and vanity
- Bridal Party – decorations to be added on set during scene
- Finale – disco/confetti cannons

Since we ended up being restricted on time, there were several final set dressing choices we really didn't get clear direction on and we had to experiment with what would work best. Though this was a creative experience for the students, since we were getting close to opening, it ended up taking time away from other areas that needed our attention. Looking forward, we need to set up an earlier deadline for completion and build and a longer time for construction, so we do not feel so rushed towards the end. This will permit the students to have more time to get comfortable on the set. Overall, I think the set dressing worked, as shown in Figure 9 perfectly and all the individual areas really created different moments and places for the audience.



Figure 9: Final Set Dressing Insert Images of Final Dressing

Photo Credit Jill Ciciarelli

Sound Design

We have terrible acoustics in our venue, so we rely heavily on electronic amplification. We usually have twelve body microphones for use on principals/speaking roles and four Microboom microphones at the foot of the stage. In addition, we utilize one or two offstage microphones for ensemble vocals. For *Mamma Mia*, almost every song has backing vocals, so this was essential. We were unable to utilize a live orchestra for this production, so we ran musical tracks in QLab. All of our sound was run through our Allen and Heath GLD 80 sound board, which is located in the theatre house for production.

Working with our music director and technical director, the students were trained in preparing and running the board. We created scenes in the sound board to help with mic transitions. The sound technicians also were expected to run daily checks on the microphones, place microphones on the performers, and properly care for the equipment. They ran daily sound checks and had basic training in problem solving. While we hoped for a smooth run, we knew we would most likely would have a drop out, which is when a signal from the transmitter on the actor is interrupted to the receiver and the audience temporarily cannot hear the performer, or microphone “popping,” so we had to be prepared to replace/move microphones at times. Unfortunately, sound design is a challenge that most secondary schools struggle with, as it is a specialized skill that most educators do not have a lot of experience with and training is not easily available. I am just grateful we can equip the students with working equipment and teach them some of the proper procedures when using these microphones.

Lighting Design

As a theatre educator in secondary schools, I am expected to wear almost every hat in a production team, including lighting designer. Many years ago, when training as a stage manager, I became fascinated with lighting when working on cue-to-cue. I was so intrigued how these little pieces of “plastic” (gels) could change an entire show. It would bring the work alive. Yes, the performers served as the storytellers, but lighting was the energy in which they lived. I only took a basic lighting class in my undergrad but never was able to attend formal training. As an audience member, I always found myself judging a show on its lighting. Did it enhance the story or the environment of the characters? Did it ground the show, or did it take the characters to a fantastical place? Where else can you get a spotlight, so you are the center of attention except on the stage. Therefore, when I started working as a theatre educator, I knew this was my chance to learn a new skill and find another creative way to express myself. I was able to attend training with ETC in Orlando twice to help understand programming and the fundamentals of lighting. The course did not cover anything about colors or blending (design) so the past few years have been a real learning process. I also have been lucky enough to work with a local graduate student when programming lights for the past four years. Together we have been developing our design and programming skills and have made great advances to this area of design for my productions. We have been very lucky in getting some investment in recent years to our lighting rig and have acquired the ETC IonXE light board and some new LED fixtures, including pars, ellipsoidals and cyclorama lights. We also were able to purchase four moving lights so students would have a better opportunity to learn lighting skills for the 21st century. In addition, for this production, we rented a few more lights to cover the full stage and house as *Mamma Mia* needs to be a joyful

celebration as shown in our plot on our magic sheet in Figure 13. We needed more options for color and movement in our design and we always need more wash light to see the performers. This year we decided to try out four moving lights on the front bar that have pixel mapping capabilities. We didn't really utilize this new technology as we didn't have time to learn, but now that we know we have access to these lights, this will be something we may consider for future productions.

For some reason designing for this production caused the most headaches. We kept coming across problems with equipment, which would limit our programming time. Since the space is shared by a rental, we kept coming in to find problems, such as DMX addressing being changed on instruments, lights being moved from their focused positions, even our second universe was unhooked. In addition, two of our instruments fried their mother boards because we suspect they were using the non-dimmable channels incorrectly. These unexpected problems ate into valuable design and programming time. The final challenge was due to the late build of the set. We only have a small window of time each day to work on lights, and we just struggled to get our groove going.

Since the show takes place over the course of two days, we wanted to set a "Taverna" look that would evolve throughout the different times of day, morning, mid-day and evening. It was our base. Then we started to look at moments of the story we wanted to isolate. Since the world of Donna is unbalanced, we wanted some of the isolations to be off-center. We also wanted to replicate lights for Sam and Donna to mirror their feelings. I took the color palette described by ABBA's costume designer of Sweden (purple, blue and white) as our primary base and added in magenta for joy and love. These colors became focal points for some of the

musical numbers and a color theme for the production. All musical numbers being in a state of heightened reality usually require the lighting to change to create mood and atmosphere. Two songs we spent a lot of time designing were “Money, Money, Money” and “Under Attack”.

“Money, Money, Money” is the first song that Donna sings where she shares her fantasy and frustration of her life, so we wanted to use the obvious color of green but to add movement to the number as shown in Figure 10. We wanted the movement to reflect her physical movement on stage and her “control” of the situation by having lights mirror some of her physical movements in the number. We also wanted to make light shifts in time with the percussion beats of the song – it represented her desire and urgency of what she demanded; it reminded me of a toddler stomping their foot to get what they want. The second song we wanted to explore was “Under Attack,” which is the first scene of Act II. This song represents a nightmare for Sophie as her scheme to bring her possible dads to the island starts to get out of her control. Since this song is supposed to be her nightmare, we knew the sky was the limit with the design, but it needed to support the story. I knew we were playing with the idea of bridal nightmare in the costume design and “possessed” choreography, so I really wanted to play with black light effects.

Dreams are full of vivid colors and the darkest shadows, so we wanted it to look “pretty” but distorted as shown in Figure 11. After we focused the lights, we had to work with the students on hitting the right marks for the effects to work as planned. For the finale, we wanted the lights to build over the three songs. First was *Mamma Mia* and the bows for most of the cast. For this part, we designed the lights to be joyful expressions, the party had begun. For part two, *Dancing Queen*, we created a color palette to mirror the Dynamos costume colors of blue, magenta and silver. For this number, the disco ball and disco shimmer walls were introduced, so we made

sure to focus on those effects. It needed to feel like a dance party. As the song concluded, the ensemble had moved into the house for the final number “Waterloo” as shown in Figure 13. By this point, we had all the moving lights running effects into the house and on stage. We also had the colors rotating through the rainbow effect. We also had two kaleidoscope lights hitting the house from the spot tower to add one more dimension. And in the final cue, we hit the point where the confetti cannons were released. The show ended exactly how we hoped. A celebration of fun.

Overall, the lighting was very effective; but because we were very delayed in getting the programming going, we had to make some sacrifices to our design and some of the effects we needed to create. We made the huge mistake of not setting up all our palettes earlier, and that made the design process take much longer than it should have. I am so proud of what we accomplished in our educational setting, and I hope to have the opportunity to take an actual lighting design class in the future. In the end, our design had over two-hundred and fifty cues, and both our student stage manager and lighting board operator did an amazing job executing the timing of them all.



Figure 10: Money, Money, Money Lighting

Photo Credit Mike Kitaif



Figure 11: Under Attack - Lighting

Photo Credit Mike Kitaif

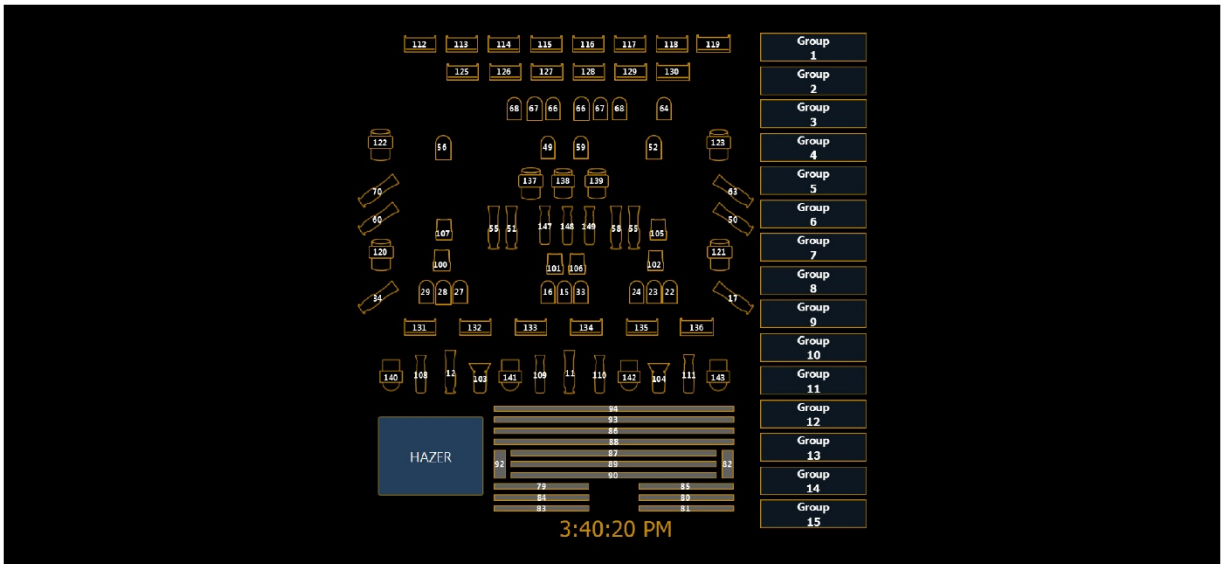


Figure 12: Lighting Plot Magic Sheet



Figure 13: Waterloo - Finale Lighting

Photo Credit Mike Kitaif

Pre-Production

After all the initial design meetings, there are several steps that need to take place for our production to take place. Once a script has been selected, I must submit to administration a plot of the musical and any potential challenges. Administration needs to be assured that the production will support the academic growth of the students involved and avoid any material that may not be supported in the community. Every school is different, and every administrator has a different tolerance to certain material. I always remind the administrators that for theatre to be effective, there must be a conflict to allow for a resolution and sometimes these plot points may involve an element of “offense” to a certain member of the community. However, I always will do my best present the material and the students in a way that is age appropriate. Even going so far as to reach out to the rights holder to see if any alternatives may be available when some of the more “controversial” elements are presented. For example, when we produced, *We Will Rock You*, we were one of the first high schools in North America to perform the show, and therefore the script hadn’t really been tested. We put in several requests for alternatives or omissions, and we were supported with every one of our requests. In fact, they informed me that some of the changes would be permanent for the high school version. I know in my school we will never do a show like *Spring Awakening* as the community would not support the material, but when we wanted to do *9 to 5*, I reminded them of the relevance with the #MeToo movement and how this generation may be shocked to see how the work place looked just forty years ago.

The second area for discussion is the estimated cost for the rights. We are very fortunate that our administration supports our program and works to cover some of royalty costs for our productions. I will present the proposed contract and schedule of show, including the in-school

showcase. When I took over the program, I made a point to work with administration to gain approval for in-school performance. Our school is ranked nationally for their academic merits with the International Baccalaureate program and preserving academic time is on the forefront of the faculty. I know a number of students may not have the resources to attend live theatre or have never experienced live theatre before. Theatre teaches empathy and I will always fight to make sure as many people as possible are given the opportunity to experience live theatre. After this is confirmed, I make sure all the teaching staff is informed of the scheduled date and time of this performance so they can plan accordingly.

Publicity

For *Mamma Mia*, we were granted the rights but with a very unusual restriction. We were only permitted to advertise on our school campus. Like most productions, the licensing house is set up to help maximize the success of a production. For example, if there is a Broadway tour in your area, or a show is still running on Broadway, you may not be able to get the rights. When trying to acquire the rights, I was informed by our licensing agent that there were other theatres that would fall under the 100-mile radius restriction, but they would reach out and try to get approval since we are an educational program and likely not going to be a competitor to another production. Apparently two out of three of the conflicting theatres agreed for us to get the show but one theatre would only grant us the rights if we restricted only to advertising on the school grounds. Needless to say, I was a bit surprised that a theatre would be so mean-spirited. I could understand another local high school not wanting to compete, but for a professional, semi-professional or community theatre to feel threatened by our production was

upsetting. However, I agreed, as I knew this was the right show for both me and the students at the time. Ironically, this limitation has made the kids be even more creative with their publicity, and as I told Music Theatre International, I cannot stop people from sharing about the show, first amendment rights and all.

Budget

For all our school productions we are not provided any funding from local or state resources. As stated earlier, we do get some support in paying for the rights because of our weekly rental, but without that income our program relies entirely on our own fundraising. Like many programs, we do have a \$50 performer participation fee, and students are expected to get sponsorships from local businesses to help subsidize the costs of production. However, no student will ever be turned away because they cannot afford the fee. I will work with students to come up with an alternative plan for them to help support the program. I hate charging the fee, but batteries alone for the microphones cost hundreds of dollars a year. We have a few fundraising events throughout the year that help support the program, but most of our funding comes from ticket sales. At the start of the school year, I run a report on our account and set a budget for the production. Only the money in the account can be applied to the budget. I never run the books making assumptions on what we will make. Therefore, the success of this production will set the budget for our production next year. I work very hard to design shows to utilize items we already have in stock or can be easily acquired or borrowed. Our budget for this show was as followings:

- Creative Team – Music Director/Choreographer/Scenic Designer/Tech Director

\$8500

- Scenic Design Materials and Dressing

\$3000

- Lighting Rental

\$3300

- Props/Costumes/Miscellaneous

\$3000

- Advertising/Marketing

\$500

Total Amount Budgeted: \$18,300

Total Actual Costs Expended: \$13,045

Even with the limitation of our official advertising abilities, this restriction motivated the company to work harder to share the show with their friends and family. In the end, we had a very successful return on our investment which will be our seed money for the production next year as well as funding student scholarships. We are very lucky to have the support of our community, students and families willing to work hard to bring these experiences to fruition.

CHAPTER FOUR: CREATING THROUGH PRACTICE

Casting

I have had the privilege of working on many productions in my career, and when working as a stage manager, I saw first-hand the process a director or casting director faced, and I did not envy the pressure. When casting as an educator, you face different challenges because you must be willing to accept limitations in the students, understand the social implications for the students and always try to do what is best for a production when assigning roles. In professional theatre, it is always what is best for the production, and you don't have to sit in class the next day with the auditionee who didn't get the part. I have worked hard in my program to always remind students casting is about finding the best person to embody the qualities of the character and abilities needed for the role. It is not personal, and if you don't get the part you wanted, think about why. If it is a skill you can work to improve, find ways to improve your skills but understand that sometimes you are just not the right person for the part and try not to take it to heart.

I knew the biggest challenge for this production would be finding high school students who are able to be the "adults." Audiences are willing to accept outrageous casting in educational theatre as they accept the pool of students are limited by their age and experience. However, when casting, you must find elements of believability in the student chosen to play their assigned role. Casting for this show was easy and hard at the same time. Each student cast had a skill or asset needed but they also had a missing link. For example, the young lady cast as Donna had a great voice but struggled with the lower notes and needed to be looser on stage, more grounded.

The young man playing Sky had the ability to sing the part but was smaller in stature than what I had wanted for the character; he never really was able to embody the heart-throb character that Sky should be. In high school theatre, there is always a lack of male participants and as in the case of *Mamma Mia*, there were several male principals, so I had to look at their strengths versus their weaknesses and cast from that lens. The role of Sam needed someone who could act the part but also put in the extra time for vocals. Harry needed to sing one tenor song and be a little awkward onstage. Bill needed to have personality and confidence. Sky needed to be able to sing but have a kind heart. For the female principals, I was lucky to have enough strong vocalists to choose from for the parts, so I focused on chemistry and “look” between the female and male actors.

The process for casting begins long before the first official audition. Theatre students are given the opportunity to participate in vocal and dance master classes throughout the Fall. In addition, students are given the chance to sign up for a vocal assessment. This allows the students to sing a song they feel represents their voice and personality and with our musical director, we give them feedback. These experiences start to plant some seeds for the creative team but at no point do we “pre-cast” a show. We also consider who we know will audition but always keep an open mind for new or unknown students during the auditions process. In order to audition, students must complete a multi-page application that includes several conditions that must be accepted by both the student and the parent/guardian. Students also are able to share their experience and answer a few questions. All students are provided the rehearsal schedule, and they must include any known conflicts. We clearly state an excess number of conflicts may result in a student not being cast or removed from the production. I like to be very clear with

students about the time involved in our production, and students sometimes must make tough decisions because they cannot do everything that our high school has to offer. All our rehearsals take place after school for two hours until the final two weeks and some Saturdays for rehearsal or tech preparation. All students cast are expected to put in hours helping with set construction or other needs of the production.

For their audition, students must submit online their biography and resume. Each student then must prepare sixteen bars of a song from the production. They can pick any song from the show that best represents their abilities. The closed vocal audition is observed by the director, musical director and technical director. At the same time as the vocal audition, some students will be in the dance call learning a combination from the choreographer. After the first day of auditions, a callback list is posted and students are asked to return the next day to read scenes or to be given more vocal assessments. During these sessions, I like to observe the students and how they handle the process. Are they are having fun? Are they talking to other students? Are they being supportive and helpful to others? How do they respond to requests for adjustments or modifications, are they directable? After callbacks, we meet to discuss casting and the list is posted. Students are informed that there will be no discussion about casting or their auditions, nor will any parent/guardian emails be answered to discuss the auditions. There is no doubt a few tears were shed, but I have no doubt we made the right decisions in casting our production from the 80 students who auditioned.

This cast of 33 proved nothing but determined, supportive and hard working. At times, it is very easy to forget how young they are by how well they have taken to the material. We must always be mindful that we are working under the lens of educational theatre and we are there to

teach and encourage these young people to grow as artists and to encourage continued growth for the program.

Rehearsal Process

For any production I meet with the school's calendar committee and reserve all the dates needed for the production. This usually takes place in the Spring semester the previous year. I reach out to the creative team to block out the dates they will need for music and choreography rehearsals. From there, I work backwards from opening night to determine how to divide up the schedule. Since auditions took place at the end of October, I knew we would start music rehearsals in December with a few choreography days. After winter break, we would use Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for blocking and Tuesday and Thursday for choreography and vocals. We used four Saturdays for catching up and cleaning the musical numbers. I rough-blocked the show over the course of six rehearsals, keeping the pace to about twenty pages a day. I find with student actors is it best to get the show up on its feet and get them out of their scripts. We then adjust blocking as needed during the rest of the rehearsal process.

As we get closer to opening night, we start to integrate all the technical elements. We start with rehearsal props, costumes or set pieces to establish the setting of the production. I prefer not to do a Q2Q over a long day; instead I prefer to push back the date in the calendar to introduce tech elements and we drop them into the rehearsal process. Day one we add microphones; day two we add lights Act I; day three we add lights Act II; day four we add any special effects or any elements that had been adjusted during the week; day five we have a full tech run. This year, after speaking with stage management, they asked to add costumes on this

final day to start practicing quick changes and backstage traffic. There were several costume changes, but they had a handful of especially tricky quick changes at the end of the show which were still causing problems until the final dress rehearsal. The students worked with the crew during lunch to practice and to adjust the quick-change process. In the end, they were successful in these high stakes' moments.

By opening night, the show was handed over fully to the stage manager. Other than unlocking the doors and handling the money, the students run everything for the production. The technical director and I are there to support and assist if something unexpected happens, but by working out all the details during the rehearsal process, by show night I say to the Stage Manager, "The show is now yours." This handoff is truly one of my proudest moments as an educator; I know I have taught them how to lead and run the show. During the run, notes are still provided, and we have a pick-up rehearsal in between the two weekends. For this production, I decided to have a full run for our pick-up rehearsal as I felt there were a few timing issues from the first weekend that needed to be adjusted. The final responsibility of the cast and crew is strike. After the conclusion of the final matinee, we spend the evening taking apart the world we created. For many, this is an emotional night, but I remind them when we finish the space is now a blank slate for something new and wonderful to be created and the blessing of live theatre is that it lives in our memories forever.

Music Direction

For this production of *Mamma Mia*, Austin McElwain was hired to serve as our musical director. We have worked together in the past and have started to build a good sense of

communication. I personally have never been formally trained in reading music, but over the years I have worked with several wonderful music directors and taken a few classes on vocal and music analysis, so I have picked up enough of the basic elements to understand the structure of a score. I have learned never to be afraid to ask for help in understanding the musical elements and always try to have students who read music as part of the stage management team. The first thing I do when directing a musical is to follow the score while listening to a recording of the show. I also take note if our version of the libretto matches the recording. When I listen to music, I find myself being drawn to moments of dynamics (softer or louder). As a director, these changes in volume make me think of the emotions a character may be feeling at that point in a scene. I tend to approach the music with two points of view: the emotional being of a character and how the music makes me feel. The change in time will be an initial indicator for me as a director as that may impact movement on stage or even how lighting will be utilized. How I approach the music is going to be very different than the musical director, as they are responsible for making the performers sound the way it was intended by the composer and lyricist. My job is to take that technical work and then layer on the emotional motivation for each character.

When speaking with the music director, one of the biggest challenges Austin said he faces with this style of music is the fact that since this is popular music, students already think they know the songs; but, in reality, they have no idea how the songs break down and how detailed the melodies actually can be for these songs. Another area to address when working with the students is to remind them it is more than just singing a pop song but is intended to tell a story. This is where phrasing is so important when teaching a song and analysis of the script the students do in advance to understand the context and mood in which the song is being delivered,

the intent of the song to move the story forward.

- 1st rehearsal sing in the natural voice to hear where they are comfortable

1) Analyze the song to determine the following info:

- A) What voice parts have the melody throughout the song
- B) Any rhythmic anomalies that occur in the song
- C) Counter melodies or harmonies that are important to the sound of the song
- D) Any specific lines that are assigned to specific character by the composer (e.g. Ali & Lisa's riff line in "Does Your Mother Know")

2) Determine how many people should be on each vocal part to make sure all parts are heard.

3) Divide the song into chunks of 2-3 phrases at a time. Teach each part in its entirety, voice part by voice part, in the following order: Melody, then closest harmony line below the melody, continue moving down the voice parts and end with the highest harmony line. (If sopranos have melody, teach that...then alto...then tenor...then bass. If altos have it, teach that...then tenors...then bass...then soprano. Etc.)

4) Once one chunk is done, move onto the next chunk. Once it is learned, do both chunks together. Continue running all chunks together as each chunk is learned.

5) Make sure that all musical elements are learned at the same time: dynamics, articulation, lyrics, time

6) Add solos only after all chunks are learned by the ensemble

Song Example: *Voulez Vous*

Chunks:

- Measure 5-19
Men 1 first, then Women 2, then Women 1

- Measure 20-36
- Women 1, then Women 2, then Men 1, then Men 2
- Measure 39-45
- Men 1, then Women 2, then Women 1
- The remaining chunks are all repeats.

In our program, we are very lucky that there are several students with the resources to take private voice lessons; but, for most of the cast, these music rehearsals may be their only formal days of training besides the master classes we offer. We work very hard to try to identify students who have natural ability and encourage them to have additional training so they can grow into stronger performers. This year, for example, the young lady playing Donna has had years of classical voice training but really needed to work with someone with more musical theatre training, so it was arranged for her to work with another voice teacher at a local university. These additional lessons helped the student develop her lower register, especially for “Money, Money, Money” and “Mamma Mia,” and to find more of the vocal phrasing needed for this character. The other point we try to instill in the students is that time and hard work can help all of them improve their skills. I remind them that the young man playing Sam could barely sing a note when he auditioned four years ago as a freshman but as he gained more experience and took time for more vocal lessons, he now is able to play a lead male role to a very high standard. For performers at this age, we must remind ourselves their voices are still changing and for many they are just starting their journey in the performing arts.

Choreography

For our production we have the great fortune of working with choreographer Kim Ball. Kim Ball is a professional choreographer who works with companies all over Central Florida and is especially skilled with working with dancers of varying abilities. When working with Kim, you not only get to work with an amazing and creative choreographer, but she is an amazing instructor. She does an amazing job teaching the students her choreography by finding ways to enhance their own abilities. When we begin the process of working on a production, we first meet to discuss the calendar and which songs will be on her list and which songs I may need her to help clean after I do the initial staging/moving. During this production, she was working on two other shows locally, so we had to really utilize our time and schedule properly. We also discuss costumes, in case that will impact her choreography. Once the song assignments for *Mamma Mia* were determined, we spent time discussing each song and how the song moves the plot forward. We brainstormed words or feelings to find descriptors to draw from and then Kim broke down each song. Below is her example for *Under Attack*.

Under Attack (inspiration words for choreography)

- Prowling
- Dark
- Reaching/Grabbing
- Confusion
- Underground/Tunnel
- Push/Pull Force (opposition)
- Spiral
- Ghosts/Spirits
- Watchful
- Chase
- Nightmare
- Attacked

- Rigid/Rigor Mortis
- Bridal Party
- Drowning/Treading water (lift)
- Dad's there to rescue, but still confusion as to who is the dad
- Scream

For the finale, we decided we wanted the auditorium to be full of joy and life, so we brought out the ensemble into the aisles of the house. Because I have more dance experience than vocal training, I try to spend time with the choreographer discussing the following elements so that the show as a cohesive vision.

- Layering
 - Patterning
 - Punctuating Movement - levels
 - Accentuating the music with movement – I love movement to punctuate music.
- Syncopate
- Varying levels of technique – will we use principal dances/ how to effectively use all the students.
 - Moving the story forward – the choreography must enhance the story. I see so much musical theatre choreography stop the action of the story and perform a dance routine.
 - Transitions – challenging: working with the ensemble in going from one point in a song to another. Teaching them to anticipate and not be waiting
 - Recording performance and playback for feedback
 - Mirror – getting students in dance room to use the mirrors to see spacing and form
 - Spacing – working with stage management to mark the stage and utilize the set.

- Adaptation with lighting – we discuss how the lights may work and build in time to adjust once lighting has been added.

Speaking with the choreographer, here are her thoughts on her approach to *Mamma Mia*:

“I wanted to keep the choreography in *Mamma Mia* energetic, fluid, and fun. We had students with many different levels of dance experience in the cast. Some students have never danced before, while several have had years of training. The goal is to make the choreography seamless and utilize the individual skills of each dancer while still trying to keep the story moving forward. To do this, I will layer the choreography and use simplistic and stylized movements combined with broader and more technical movements. Using the varying skillsets of the performers, along with the use of effective staging and patterning, it will help to create a visually more interesting piece. I’m a believer of creating choreography that is more personalized to a student, especially at the high school level. I like to challenge a performer, but I also feel it’s important to make a student feel successful in their craft. When they can execute movements within their skillset, they will feel confident and will therefore perform better. And, furthermore, I hope to spark an interest in acquiring future training (Ball)”.

Working with such a talented choreographer gives our students a professional experience and makes every production better. Her work inspires the students to be their absolute best and her work ethic is unmatched. Every piece of choreography for *Mamma Mia* enhanced the story and was designed to enhance the students in their abilities. Her ego never supersedes the needs of the show and the performers. Kim Ball does not get rigid with her choreography but rather lets it evolve with the students to make her choreography shine. She makes the students look their

best and uses all her talents to make her choreography function with the skill levels she works with.

Acting Methodology

When working with young actors, I spend a lot of time on script analysis with the students. Since I am working with students from all grade levels, they are not all approaching the work from the same point of view based on classroom curriculum. Students cast from the upper levels have been introduced to different acting methods such as Stanislavski and Meisner, but, for most, they do not have any consistent formal training. Even those with some experience with acting techniques do not get to explore these techniques in any real depth so the techniques and exercises just become reference points. Therefore, we tend to focus on the given circumstances, such as:

- Who are these people and what does the script teach us about them?
- What are their fears?
- Where are their desires?
- How do they relate to each other?
- What are their personality traits?
- What walls do they keep up?
- What can they relate to personally with their character?

Even with ensemble characters, we work on creating a back story that fits into the world we are trying to create. I also spend time making sure everyone in the cast understands basic

stage directions. Some students have never been told to cross stage left or walk upstage, so it is vital we spend time creating a common vocabulary. We talk about choices. We talk about motivation. One thing with student actors is they carry a lot of self-consciousness, so getting them to experiment is a challenge. They do not like to feel vulnerable or wrong in a choice so sometimes they become paralyzed and don't try anything. They do not understand they must be willing to fail to succeed. I remind them an audience will believe whatever we put in front of them as long it comes from a place of truth.

For this production, I spent a lot of time compartmentalizing the work. I focused on the principals, the ensemble and intimacy.

One relationship that needed a lot of attention was Donna and Sam. Young actors tend to lean towards the emotion of anger and sometimes get stuck there. With Donna, we had to work on the fact that it has been twenty years of living without Sam and always wondering what if. Though she has frustration, we agreed she wasn't angry at him per se; she was angry at herself and frustrated with her situation. I had to keep reminding the students that within two days they go from strangers from 20 years ago to agreeing to get married. That is a big arc. I also reminded them this is not some great Shakespearean tragedy, even though there is pain and the lyrics to some of the most upbeat songs have a darker side, we needed to find the joy for the concluding scene. Hope is found and questions now have answers.

In Act II, Donna has three scenes in a row in her bedroom the afternoon of her daughter's wedding. First, Harry comes in to reflect what his time with Donna meant to him, but in their duet, we get a taste of the darkness found in ABBA's music. I needed both Harry and Donna to take a beat during this exchange in the middle of the song. Harry sings to Donna:

Harry: *I was so happy we had met*
it was the age of no regret
oh yes
those crazy years, that was the time
of the flower-power
but underneath we had a fear of flying
of getting old, a fear of slowly dying
we took the chance
like we were dancing our last dance (Mamma Mia 76)

Next, Donna helps Sophie get ready for the wedding and she sings *Slipping Through My Fingers*, which is no doubt one of the hardest songs for a young actress to relate to since they are still children themselves. We talked about her feelings of leaving home for college, watching her little sister grow up, and the relationship she has with her own mom. I talked with her about my experience saying goodbye to my mom and watching my little girl leave for school. Together we were able to find the thoughts to motivate the song and, in the end, it turned out beautifully and there was not a dry eye in the house.

Finally, Donna addresses Sam with the song *Winner Takes it All*, which I would argue is the 11 o'clock number in the show, the number towards the end of Act II before all the loose ends of the plot are wrapped up. Besides the vocal challenges of the song, we needed to address three points within this scene:

1. Donna finally gets to say all the things she has been holding onto towards Sam for twenty years.

2. Sam must decide how to take this information. Does this push him away or does this reinforce his desire for them to love each other...remember the next time they meet he asked her to marry him. Donna sings: *The game is on again. A lover or a friend* Is she stating her feelings are still there, but, because she thinks he is married, the *rules must be obeyed*. In addition, Sam never says one word during this song, so as an actor, he must feel and hear every line of the song. He must be connected to Donna. He cannot just stand there.

3. Donna cannot be too angry in this song. We discussed the different levels and dynamics of this song. She gets everything off her chest. Her conscience is cleared, and the ball is now in Sam's court.

The second area that needed to be addressed in a production of this size is the role of the ensemble. Besides their vocals and choreography, they are responsible for creating the surrounding atmosphere. They are the workers of the village; they are the guests at the Taverna; they are the friends and family of the bride and groom. In each scene, they have a purpose for being there, and they must be "heard" and seen by the audience. I reminded them to react to moments in the wedding when Donna and Sophie reveal about the dads being at the wedding. I reminded them to react when Sam asks Donna to marry him. Just because they do not have specific lines in the script, they must vocalize as the people they are. We also spent a lot of time working on ensemble entrances and exits. It could not just look like they were told to go on or off the stage. We worked on spacing and timing. We worked on ripple effects. We worked on

the business of living on stage; but, most importantly, we discussed not to herd with each other (go into clumps). They must move as individuals and work on finding their own reasons for being in each scene. This show fails without a strong ensemble, and they were reminded of this on a regular basis. I reminded them someone was always watching them on stage even when the focus was clearly supposed to be somewhere else.

Finally, intimacy. In this production, we are supposed to see two young characters, Sky and Sophie, madly in love and getting ready to marry. In most professional productions, these two characters are physically close and intimate. However, working with the young students cast in these roles for our production, I quickly discovered neither was very comfortable with each other. It also was brought to my attention privately that one of the actors had not yet had their first kiss in real life, so I met with both of them privately and told them over the coming weeks we would work to find a place that was comfortable for both of them. If they did not feel they could kiss, I would not be forcing that to happen. The choreographer and I would show them how to touch one another for their song *Lay All Your Love on Me* so we did not touch them directly. I gave them homework to work on becoming closer friends with each other, and as they got more comfortable, together they should work on holding hands and giving each other friendly supportive hugs if they were ok with that. Since their physical intimacy was not critical to the plot, I was not going to push them into something that made them uncomfortable. In the end, they became closer as friends, which allowed them to get closer on stage. There were times where it was still a little awkward, but from where we started, they moved mountains. The only other area of intimacy to address was when Donna and Sam get married. We needed a kiss. Both students have worked with me for the past four years and both have done a stage kiss

before, so I didn't think this was be much of a challenge. They have both been friends since they were in kindergarten, so it was more about them getting over the idea of kissing the other one than the actual act. I reminded them it was just one kiss at a wedding and not some big passionate kiss. I told them to talk and when ready find a time to practice the kiss. I told them I could be there to support them or if they would rather try in private that would be fine too. At some point they tried in private and when they were ready, they kissed in rehearsal.

I spent a lot of time on this production getting the students to work on their storytelling skills. Several of the characters spend time reflecting on something from their past and sharing their memories. I find it is helpful to get the student to find personal examples to draw from. Getting them to identify how they feel with remembering their real-life experiences versus trying to fabricate stories from the script. I encourage them to be grounded. For example, the character Harry discovers his old guitar he bought from Donna. At first, the young man playing Harry would overexaggerate this discovery – it was like he came across a dead body – so I decided to get him to describe for me a favorite toy from his childhood. As he explained a scooter he got for his birthday, his whole demeanor changed, and I told him to try and think of that story as he explained to the other men about this guitar. His performance improved.

We also had to spend some time working on projection, pace and enunciation. Young actors get too reliant on microphones and forget we still need to understand each word. I say over and over to the cast in notes that they must remember the audience is hearing these words for the first time, and if they don't understand what you are saying, they will miss the plot and may even disengage with the show. They also must be reminded that once they have an audience, they must allow time for their reactions and not to be distracted.

We worked very hard to find meaning in a script that at times can feel very superficial. These wonderful young actors put their heart and soul into their roles to create a believable world. The most satisfying experience to see was how these students kept discovering their character's voice throughout the entire run. There were moments when you could tell they forget they were in front of an audience and they become the people they were portraying.

CHAPTER FIVE: PERFORMANCE AND REFLECTION

Performances

We opened on Friday February 14th for five public performances over the course of two weekends and one in-school showcase. Unlike a community or professional theatre where the director usually disappears after opening night, I was there for every performance as the supervising teacher. Therefore, I continued to take notes for any major concerns and to help keep the young cast consistent. Before each show, we have developed rituals that help get the cast and crew focused on the task at hand but also to remind them to savor this experience. They have worked extremely hard on their production and for some this will be their last experience at their high school. Yes, they have a job to do but they also need to be reminded to have fun and enjoy themselves.

Most of the performances went on without any major problems. There are always energy dips and the odd problem with a prop or costume piece, but the most frustrating problem we faced were with the wireless microphones. Due to the number of costume changes and interference from cell phones, we had to add in several offstage microphones and an intermission reminder for cell phones to be switched off or put to airplane mode. As stated earlier, I am not an expert in sound, but there is nothing more frustrating for an audience than not being able to hear a performer, even if only for a short amount of time. We did our best with the equipment we have, and I will be reaching out to some sound companies to provide another assessment of our venue and equipment. I will get another estimate to present to the board to see if we can improve our sound equipment. Our venue is over forty years old and was not built for these types of

equipment. Luckily, these problems were minor and only intermittent, so it did not take away for the overall performance.

We had wonderful feedback from the audience, and even though we were limited with our advertising capabilities, we saw the largest turnout for our audience since I have worked at this school. We earned enough seed money for our mainstage production next year and to provide some additional resources to our students.

In addition, we are very lucky to have the support of our administration to provide an in-school performance for some of the student body. For several students in the audience this may be their first experience with live theatre, so we made sure to make a special announcement before the production about theatre etiquette, and the audience behaved wonderfully. This is both the most exciting and nerve-wracking performance for the kids. They love to perform for their peers and at the same time are terrified. I remind them that the quality of their work speaks for itself and that the audience will respond to their work. As expected, the 700 students listened to the story and applauded them for their efforts. It was great to hear them leave the show excited, stating their surprise at the quality of the work and how much they enjoyed the show. I even noticed some of those same students returned for the evening performance. The final unexpected turn was of a more personal nature as I unexpectedly had to have emergency surgery and missed the final performances. Even though this was all shocking and scary, what was so amazing was I was never worried about the show. I knew the students were trained; I was just terribly upset I would miss their final shows. Both the students and my colleagues stepped up and reminded me what a community theatre builds and how we come together when times are difficult. The final performances went off without any problems, and I was even able to sneak

into the last act for the matinee. As they say, “The show must go on!”

Reflection

This production has no doubt been one of the hardest of my life. It wasn’t because the material was particularly challenging, or we couldn’t get the vision to come to life, but rather overcoming my own personal challenges this year. This was a big show with a big cast, and, at times, I really questioned if I could pull it off to the standard I expect. In the end, we made it. However, it wasn’t because the show was perfect, it wasn’t. It was because these young artists worked harder than I have ever seen a cast work, and they lifted me up when I was struggling to keep my footing. They never gave up and they never stopped smiling.

..... This production served both the students and our community while giving the students an educational experience aligned with our curriculum. Working together, we were able to approach the material from both a performance and technical point of view. Students were able to analyze a text, develop a character and create design elements to tell a story. In addition, students learned rehearsal and organization skills and problem-solving techniques. These skills can be transferred to other academic subjects and real-life experiences. We produced a high-quality production and raised the bar for future productions at our school.

Being a theatre educator can be one of the most difficult jobs, as everything is on your shoulders. But I have learned to surround myself with an amazing group of colleagues who want to give these young students a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and that is what they got with *Mamma Mia*. There is absolutely nothing more satisfying than watching students grow into their performance. For me, some of these students have been in my life almost daily for the past four

years, so it was very bitter-sweet on closing night. But I know they will carry this training and experience with them into the world, and that makes all the hard work and sacrifice worth it. Art feeds the soul and this production fed mine. The show must go on, and this show certainly did.

APPENDIX A
LETTERS OF PERMISSION

1/24/2020

Victoria Oakes
Scenic Designer
Orlando, FL

Dear Tori:

This letter will confirm our recent conversation. I am completing a master's degree at the University of Central Florida entitled "Production Development: A Practical Approach to Directing for Educational Theatre." I would like your permission to reprint in my thesis/dissertation excerpts from the following:


- Spruce Creek HS *Mamma Mia* Set Plans Rough Ground Plan
- Spruce Creek HS *Mamma Mia* Option 2 Ground Plan
- Spruce Creek HS *Mamma Mia* Ground Plan with dimensions
- Spruce Creek HS *Mamma Mia* Front Elevation

I've attached a copy of the plans that I will be using.

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my thesis/dissertations, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own, or your company owns the copyright to the above-described material. If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below.

Sincerely,
Jill Cicciarelli

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

By: 

Date: 1/24/2020

2/28/2020

Mike Kitaif
Photographer
Port Orange, FL

Dear Mike:

This letter will confirm our recent conversation. I am completing a master's degree at the University of Central Florida entitled "Production Development: A Practical Approach to Directing for Educational Theatre." I would like your permission to reprint in my thesis/dissertation excerpts from the following:

- Spruce Creek HS *Mamma Mia* Rehearsal Photos

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my thesis/dissertations, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own, or your company owns the copyright to the above-described material. If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below.

Sincerely,
Jill Cicciarelli

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

By: Mike Kitaif

Date: 28-Feb-2020

APPENDIX B
STAGING/CHOREOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT

Mamma Mia Staging/Choreography Assignment

I Have A Dream	Jill
Honey, Honey	Jill / Kim Clean
Money, Money, Money	Kim
Thank You for the Music	Jill
Mamma Mia	Jill
Chiquitita	Jill
Dancing Queen	Jill/ Kim Clean
Lay All Your Love on Me	Kim
Super Trouper	Jill/ Kim Clean
Gimme, Gimme, Gimme	Kim
The Name of the Game	Jill
Voulez Vous	Kim
Under Attack	Kim
One of Us	Jill
S.O.S	Jill/ Kim Clean
Does Your Mother Know?	Kim
Knowing Me, Knowing You	Jill
Our Last Summer	Jill
Slipping Through My Fingers	Jill
The Winner Takes It All	Jill
Take a Chance on Me	Jill / Kim Clean
I Do, I Do, I Do	Jill
I Have a Dream	Jill
Mamma Mia Bows	Kim
Dancing Queen Bows	Kim
Waterloo	Kim

APPENDIX C
CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Casting Needs SCHS – *Mamma Mia*

Casting

Cast Size: Must include 20 + per MTI Contract – ideally hoping for 30+

Cast Type: Ensemble Cast

Dance Requirements: Will need a core group of principal dancers but ideally all must be able to move.

Character Breakdown

Sophie Sheridan

Born and raised on the island.

Gender: Female Age: 20 to 25

Vocal range top: E5 Vocal range bottom: F#3

Donna Sheridan

Sophie's mother.

Gender: Female Age: 40 to 50

Vocal range top: A5 Vocal range bottom: E3

Sam Carmichael

Might be Sophie's father.

Gender: Male Age: 40 to 50

Vocal range top: Ab4 Vocal range bottom: D3

Bill Austin

Might be Sophie's father.

Gender: Male Age: 40 to 50

Vocal range top: F#4 Vocal range bottom: Bb2

Harry Bright

Might be Sophie's father.

Gender: Male Age: 40 to 50

Vocal range top: F#4 Vocal range bottom: C#3

Sky

Sophie's fiancé.

Gender: Male Age: 20 to 30

Vocal range top: D5 Vocal range bottom: Eb3

Tanya

Former Dynamo.

Gender: Female

Vocal range top: E5

Age: 40 to 50

Vocal range bottom: E3

Rosie

Former Dynamo.

Gender: Female

Vocal range top: D5

Age: 40 to 50

Vocal range bottom: E3

Lisa

Sophie's friend.

Gender: Female

Vocal range top: Db5

Age: 20 to 25

Vocal range bottom: G3

Ali

Sophie's friend.

Gender: Female

Vocal range top: D5

Age: 20 to 25

Vocal range bottom: G3

Pepper

Barman at Taverna

Gender: Male

Vocal range top: F5

Age: 20 to 25

Vocal range bottom: A4

Eddie

Helps Sky with Water-Sports.

Gender: Male

Age: 20 to 25

Chorus

Consists of the Islanders, who work at Donna's, Wedding-Guests.

Gender: Any

Casting will require creating three groups.

1. Mature characters – Donna, Tanya, Rosie, Sam, Bill, Harry
2. Youthful characters – Sophie, Sky, Ali, Lisa, Pepper, Eddie
3. General ensemble – Priest/include principal dancers

*Reference www.mtishows.com

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