

Dear Parents,

We were delighted with all the efforts of the On Stage MT students. Having now watched all shows, either in person or on video, as we always do, and after our post production debrief, with all the teachers this week, we thought that it was important to highlight a couple of things:

It is our job to educate and it is of real importance to offer up differing styles of Musical Theatre to work on, in order to provide exposure to the art form; greater opportunities to experience performance within a wide and varied range of Musical Theatre genres.

We ask you to please not compare last years show of Honk with this years version of Annie – It is an altogether different show with different requirements, challenges and teaching aims – please see this production as separate to that for the following reasons:

Length of Show - Firstly, Honk was a slightly longer show, as that was the *Junior* version and Annie was the *Kids* version, so slightly shorter in length. The *Kids* version is perfect for this age group to work on and is ideal with the amount of weeks available to us in rehearsal and student commitment. Although Honk was longer and Annie shorter, Annie was in many ways a more demanding piece of theatre, providing different and greater challenges in particular for 8-12 year olds to pull off well.

Characters - The characters in Annie are far more complex than in Honk, with the majority of the roles in Annie being adults, which is always difficult for children to portray convincingly. Not only are they adults, but these characters are complex with many layers and have complicated back stories which are much harder for children to understand as well as relate to and therefore a real challenge to succeed in representing these truthfully. The drunk, cynical, 'life worn' bitter, comedic Miss Hannigan, for example. Also, these adult characters require a comedic skill, sophistication, knowledge and understanding that is way beyond the years and life experience for a young 8-12 year old. And yet, every Miss Hannigan, Rooster, Lily, Grace, Warbucks, Roosevelt we saw, gave it commitment, gusto and energy – which is all that can be asked of them – commitment in particular is something which we work hard for our students to understand, learn and achieve.

Musical Numbers - The music and numbers in Annie come straight from a big Broadway show and although the show is condensed for children to perform, it is still left with big 'Razzamataz' numbers, much more demanding vocally and in interpretation, than the more simple score and lyrics from Honk. These classes often with 12/14 students max were aiming to pull off big 'belting' numbers in Annie, with a small cast and yet they did this again with focus, sincerity and with commitment.

Themes - The more complicated themes, lyrics, story line, back stories and dialogue in Annie meant that to explore, understand and furthermore convey this fully and realistically, in a reduced time frame, for these young actors of this age, was a very hard ask – in comparison to the charming heartwarming, simplicity in Honk which was realised and achieved with greater ease, as it was far more relatable to the children playing it.

Small Casts - It was particularly demanding for the groups with only 6 and 7 students in a cast - namely Friday East coast class and Saturday afternoon - who managed to be double cast **and** play multiple roles with such professionalism and confidence and should be congratulated.

Result - No, it wasn't all perfect and yes, all casts and each individual have aims and targets to work towards, both personally and as an ensemble player as with every year. However, we cannot fault their enthusiasm – confidence and commitment. In the end of year reports you will receive feedback on your own child in class and their attitude and work towards the rehearsal process and show. These will highlight your child's individual achievements as well as areas and targets to aim towards for improvement. In class they will have a cast de-brief and talk about this show from the point of view of the rehearsals, process, cast and the ensemble.

Rehearsals - Both Students and Teachers - Do a great job with the amount of time in rehearsals available to them, with cast missing throughout the rehearsal period to work around – due to everyone on different school time table/family commitments etc – often running a whole rehearsal period without a full cast! Something many places could not and would not even contemplate doing. A huge achievement to navigate these limitations, restrictions & challenges!

Cost - It is regularly fed back that CS is expensive, in fact it is comparable with many other places. However, it is important to remind everyone at this point that all our performing arts teachers are trained professionals, often international and that doesn't come cheap. In addition, extended rehearsal sessions and standby sessions that we offer on this course are for gratis, which amounts to something in the region of approx 6 -12 + hours per academic year (Equivalent of approx 12 weeks - almost a term - for gratis). We do this in order to work around everyone's time tables – in order to make sure the children are as prepared as possible – providing they carry out all their responsibilities, learning lines etc - additional time for gratis - something many other schools don't offer.

What we manage to provide is quality learning and performance experiences – not big school productions with students as third tree from the left – *(even though we also consider the learning from this is also hugely valid we hasten to add)* – but productions where your children have an important role, where they are working all the time, often double cast with multiple roles. This may not always be as theatrically aesthetic as a big show - but the process, the work, the experience, the skills gained are of great value to both the performer and in life!

We understand the challenge this 'deceptively' simple show demands, especially for the young performer. However what we saw with each cast was energy, enthusiasm, gusto and importantly commitment, both individually and collectively in all their numbers and in the show.

For your children to learn and grow it is important for you to be a supportive warm audience, that these young actors can 'feed off' in order for them to build confidence and skills – to take on with them. Please remember Musical Theatre 'Triple Threat' performance – singing, dancing and acting all at the same time, is extremely difficult to achieve well and look good! It appears 'deceptively' simple when you look at professionals doing it, who make it look so easy. Please remember when your child is up there trying to achieve this.

Both Students and Teachers should be congratulated on all their hard work and commitment for this show.

Enjoy your break and we are looking forward to seeing everyone back next term for further 'skills' and repertoire work in class!

Best wishes,

Ali & Pete