

FROM THE PAGE TO THE STAGE

Art Form: Musical Theatre
Style: Modern
Culture: American

MEET THE ARTIST:

From the Page to the Stage is produced and presented by members of the **Musical Theatre Guild**. Drawing from the book, music, and lyrics of five different musicals, writer *Kevin McMahon*, director *Lee Martino*, and musical director *Tom Grieb* have collaborated to create this brightly entertaining revue. The Musical Theatre Guild is a non-profit company with a large membership of professionals who are committed to keeping this American art form alive by performing staged, concert versions of wonderful, but almost-forgotten musicals with live accompaniment. Since its inception in 1995, the Guild has produced over fifty such concerts. The artists in this production are professionals who have been trained in many performing arts skills. Physical and vocal characterization, singing, dancing, projection, diction, improvisation, and script analysis are just a few of them. Collectively, they become a singing quartet representing four major singing ranges: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Baritone. Individually, they have appeared in many other plays and musicals.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

From the Page to the Stage is a celebration of the magic that occurs when an inspired work of literature is taken down from the shelf, receives a make-over from playwrights, lyricists, and composers, then emerges onstage in a live performance, totally reinvented as a new work of Musical Theatre. The five uniquely engaging shows featured in this revue are *Man of La Mancha* based on Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, *Big River* from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* based on the iconic "Peanuts" comic strips by Charles M. Schultz, *Seussical*, based on various books by Dr. Seuss, and the satirical "prequel" to Frank Baum's *Oz* books, *Wicked* based on Gregory Maguire's book of the same name. A wonderfully versatile company of four singing actors magically inhabit multiple roles, performing songs in many musical styles. A feast for the imagination, *From the Page to the Stage* will surely inspire both young and old to take another look at great literature in the library, and great musical theatre wherever it can be found.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

If you have ever enjoyed a football player dancing wildly after scoring a touchdown, felt proud when Olympic champions sing along to their national anthem, felt moved while overhearing a parent singing a soft lullaby to his or her child, or are having so much fun with your friends, that you start wailing along to a song you're hearing, then you understand something about musical theatre. Like the rest of humanity, the characters in a musical experience moments when their feelings are too full and rich to express in words alone, so they sing. Sometimes, if singing isn't enough, they dance -- just like the football player.

The difference, of course, is that theatre is an art form which tells stories. In musicals, the plots of these stories are written by playwrights as a script, or the "Book". Then the composers and lyricists add the rhythmic and emotional power of melodies and words, or the "Score." This brings new dimension to what we see and hear. But for those not familiar with musicals, it may all seem very odd.

Picture the pictures: An honorable but crazy Spanish knight passionately peaks of his search for truth -- then sings an anthem! A rebellious fellow and a runaway slave are about to be caught, but escape -- harmonizing to a bouncy bluegrass tune! A teenage girl with magical powers is furious with people who have been lying about her, and plans to "get even" -- right after she "gets down" with a threatening pop-rock power-ballad! But hidden in each song lyric are secrets and clues for the audience. "Pay attention," they all say. "This quest may cost me my life." "We're on a big river adventure!" "Wait and see how I'll get my revenge!"

These moments, and many more like them, are featured in *From the Page to the Stage*. As you enjoy it, remember that Musical Theatre, like every art form, is inspired by "real life" and then takes it to a selective level of reality. The creators and performers want to share their visions, and bring us into them so we can respond with our own. Choose to believe.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What did you discover about seeing a story presented as a musical that is different from reading it? Which do you prefer, and why?
- In lyric writing, feelings come first, story comes second. Which song lyrics made you feel something, and respond with: laughter, sadness, anger, concern, surprise, happiness, or boredom?
- The composers wrote in many musical styles. What differences did you hear between the songs in the five shows? Which song was your favorite, and for what reasons?
- While changing from character to character, how did the cast transform their bodies and voices? What did these skills add to the magic of the show?
- Which of these musicals would make you want to read the original book? Will you?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LITERATURE:

The delightful musical *Into the Woods* features familiar fairy-story characters thrown together into an original cautionary tale. “Be careful what you wish for” is the Universal Theme. Using Act One of the original Broadway production (on VHS and DVD) as an inspiration, the goal is to have student groups create their own literary work in prose or dramatic form. To begin, lead the class in a discussion of sound *Literary Structure* including character, goals, actions to succeed, antagonistic characters, decisions to overcome obstacles, conflict, crisis, sacrifice, and resolution. Create groups of six or seven students, and begin screening Act One over a period of days, in ten-to-fifteen minute increments. After each screening, have the groups discuss what they’ve observed based on *Literary Structure* concepts as well as all the entertaining similarities to, and differences from, the original tales. After finishing the act, the writing begins with a “twist”. Each group member must choose and “become” ONE character from a book, comic strip, poem, or fairy tale. Using the twice-discussed elements of *Literary Structure*, those characters will devise the plot, and an original (though adapted) story or playlet will be born!

- Legend:
- ⊗ Artistic perception
 - ❖ Creative expression
 - ▶ Historical & cultural context
 - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
 - * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ⊗ Listen to songs from other musicals with literary beginnings, or watch musical numbers from filmed versions of them. Discuss how the music and lyrics define situation and heighten feelings. Consider rhythms, melodies, rhymes, phrases, and performance elements.
- ❖ Have students imagine their own stage settings for one of the musicals, using photos of other scenic designer’s work as inspiration. Paint backdrops on large paper. Or, tip over a mid-sized cardboard box, creating a stage. Using cans, juice boxes, fabric, paper, etc, build a set, using the mathematic ratio of 3/4” equals one foot.
- ▶ In days gone by, popular music came from Musical Theatre. Select names of important American songwriters of yore, such as George Gershwin or Irving Berlin, and create an “Artist Collection” for each. Using texts, songbooks, CDs, the internet, etc., gather photos, biographical tidbits, printed and recorded music. Share these together, and then consider how the lives of these artists (many of whom were of immigrant or former-slave stock) and events in their eras -- WWI, the Jazz age, Great Depression, WWII -- are woven into the fabric of their work and is reflected in our cultural history. Pay special attention to how many of their songs are considered classics.
- * Musical Theatre productions exist because of many different people. **Producers** raise money and make overall decisions. **Writers** create the book. **Directors** stage the show, with the **Actors**, who interpret and portray the roles. **Designers** establish the “look”, while a Stage **Crew** is behind the scenes, working the technical components. The **Staff** of the theatre administrates the business-end. They all collaborate. So must people in “real life.” Consider how these “theatre folk” have familiar and necessary counterparts in clubs, sport teams, religious groups, the classroom, school, community and family. Have students share their experiences in such “real” collaborations.



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