



ON STAGE

with Van Wert Civic Theatre

Putting on a Show

by Mary Ann Falk

For over 30 years, VWCT has included at least one musical as part of our season. For the majority of those years, we have included two musicals. Our next show *The Great American Trailer Park Musical* is the second musical of the 2017-18 season and will be like no other musical you have ever seen...but a little more on that later.

The production of a musical is more different than similar to the production of, what we in theatrical circles call, a straight play. Yes, there are lines to memorize, sets to create, and costumes to make, but the skill set needed by the actors and production crew is very different. In addition, musicals are more expensive to bring to the stage--I mention this in case you have wondered why most theatres charge more for a ticket to a musical. The reason for the added skill and cost centers around the music. The publishers of the musical scripts charge more for royalties. A royalty is a payment that goes to the owner or creator of the work in exchange for the rights to perform it. Community theatres pay a royalty fee for every performance of every show we do. With a musical, we also must rent all the musical scores used for the production. This adds a significant cost to the production up front. Musical also tend to have larger casts, more costumes, and sets representing multiple locations. These features all increase the budget needed to purchase the materials to produce the show.

VWCT carefully selects musicals based on the talent pool from which we know we can draw. Not only do those on stage need to act, but they must be able to sing and dance. Most musical roles are written for a particular vocal range or style of singing. Personally, I find theatrical singers to be among the most versatile singers. I have belted out many low alto roles despite being a soprano. Each musical needs a director, music director, and choreographer who work in collaboration to manage all the moving parts of the show. At VWCT, we have been blessed to have excellent directors to tackle musicals, music directors who are also talented musicians, creative choreographers, and singing actors.

The actors for *The Great American Trailer Park Musical* have been working with Music Director Dee Fisher since mid-January. Most musical productions begin with this step where the actors learn the notes and rhythms. For this show, several songs use five-part harmonies. "Trailer Park"--as the cast affectionately calls the show--also has opportunities for each character to sing solo. This musical does not have a large cast (only 7 actors) or a lead character. Instead, every actor has to be



a strong, independent singer. In her role, Dee helps the singers understand not only their individual singing parts, but “talks through” the orchestration of each number. Seeing the big picture of the song and how it flows into the next scene helps as the cast moves into the next phase of production. Next week, Director and Choreographer Jerry Zimmerman will take the lead to block the show. To do this, Jerry tells each actor where they go on the stage during each part of each scene. These stage movements can get down to the detail of how to turn, when to stop, where to look, from where to enter, and which direction to exit the stage. Any songs that require dance numbers will also be rehearsed step-by-step. This is usually an actor’s least favorite part of the show-preparation process. It is a slow, unexciting process, but every show goes through this phase. However, it allows time for the cast to establish relationships that will strengthen the show.

Once all the details are worked out, the business of making it all come together begins. The director and music director create a schedule that allows the cast to run through scenes. I find an audience is often most impressed by the number of lines you learned for a show, but the work is much more complicated than that. Not only will a musical actor learn lines but also notes and words to a song, musical rhythms, and when and where to move on stage including dance steps all the while creating a character that will connect with the audience. And before the show opens, the skilled crew adds the set, costumes, lighting, props, and sound effects (I could write an entire article on each one of these areas). Then, on March 8 at 8 p.m. VWCT will raise the curtain on *The Great American Trailer Park Musical*. Check back next week for more information on the cast, the plot, and the fun you can expect to have when you get a ticket to this show that is as much fun as the title suggests.