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By: Student Blogger: Austin Watts Oct. 14, 2023



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I have officially arrived at the point in high school that every student anxiously awaits: I am an upperclassman. Doors are opening in the world of the arts, and new opportunities are aplenty.

I, along with most teenage theatre makers, exist in a delicate balance

between human, artist, and student. For most of my high school career, I have been able to survive doing show after show after show after show





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to my performance-based classes, I am also in the highest-level technical theatre class that my school offers. I am beyond grateful to be at a public school where excellence in the arts is a priority, but I have definitely had to adjust to spending three hours of my day working on theatre-related skills.



My school is fortunate enough to boast one of the few remaining dedicated technical theatre programs in the country. At most schools, technical theatre is only offered one hour out of the day and is usually taught by the drama teacher. However, our tech program features a teacher who solely teaches technical theatre, and classes available to all grades at our 7-12 school; and this system produces results. Our alumni and current tech students have studied with Oklahoma City University, OpenJar, Scottsdale Community College, and Northern Arizona University, to name a few institutions. Our school has also claimed the Thespy Award for Excellence in Stage Management 2 years in a row (Jamie Ko in 2022 and Brielle Norlie in





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organization and leadership, since my job is essentially to corral the costume designer's ideas into a feasible manifestation while also overseeing other organizational aspects. I am responsible for fittings, costume construction, cataloging, and communication with other creative departments among other miscellaneous tasks. When not actively working on the technical elements of *Suite Surrender*, my tech class spent the first quarter working on set design skills. We worked on perspective drawing, renderings, and in online softwares for blueprinting. Although I have much more experience with performing than working in technical theatre, I have found that a thorough education in the behind-the-scenes aspects of a show makes for more well-rounded performers and artists in general. Plus, my goal beyond high school is to be a director/playwright and work in theatre education, so a comprehensive understanding of technical theatre is absolutely vital for me.

My choir class, Chorale, is the highest-level concert choir on campus. I participated last year in the no-cut men's choir club, as well as the school musical (*Zombie Prom*), which got me involved in the choir program. I never intended to take choir as a class, since I did not know if I would have room in my schedule, but after seeing the level of talent within my school's choir program, opted to take some classes online in order to make room. As a contemporary musical theatre vocalist, I have found choral music to be challenging in a lot of exciting ways. From a technical standpoint, the styles are just so vastly different that it feels like I am re-learning how to sing, like a foreign language of sorts. I have also faced challenges in the range of the music we perform. I sing the Tenor I part, which is the highest male voice. I typically feel most comfortable in the Baritone range, so I have found myself having to work hard in training my head voice and upper vocal register as a whole. We perform a concert at the end of each quarter, as well as at a festival in the spring. This year, we will be performing in Anaheim at Knott's Berry Farm and Disneyland, so my friends and I are very excited. For our first concert, we performed a contemporary ballad, a



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In Company Performance Theatre (Company or CPT for short), I have the opportunity to perform in several one-act plays throughout the year, as well as participating in AZ Thespian Festival, a district-wide competition, and the regional festival that feeds into the Thespy Awards at International Thespian Festival (which I plan to attend over the summer). It is an audition-based program, with a typical prerequisite of two years of theatre classes, which can be begun as early as eighth grade, and a year of Junior Company. I was in Junior Company last year, which also required an audition and served to prepare me for my Company audition. In sporting terms, some would compare Company and Junior Company to varsity and JV teams: both require a tryout, and getting into either presents itself with opportunity and a sense of pride on campus. When we are not preparing for competitions or performances, we spend our time analyzing plays and doing scene work. Our class mission statement is as follows: "As a Company Performance Theatre class, we will prioritize a connected ensemble through compassion and inclusion. In our process of creating art, we will



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perform two monologues: a contemporary dramatic piece from *Bent* by [Martin Sherman](#) and a contemporary comedic piece from *Brighton Beach Memoirs* by [Neil Simon](#). I also performed a duo scene from *Shakespeare in Love* by [Lee Hall](#), the objective of which was to push each individual performer in the ten-person ensemble out of their comfort zone as an actor. For me, this came in the form of a romantic scene that required me to essentially shake off my pride and commit to a lusty and sensual character in front of my peers, which was scary but ultimately a massive learning experience. We wrapped up the quarter with a one-act called "Rules of Comedy," which we submitted to our state thespian festival one-act competition. "Rules of Comedy" is essentially a spoof of *Hamlet*, with two zany narrators taking the audience through the essentials of comedy and developing formula for what is and is not considered funny. I played Hamlet, which required some Elizabethan speech, but not to the degree where it necessarily challenged me to any great extreme. Next quarter, we jump right into preparing for our district-wide theatre competition, followed by a winter one-act, the identity of which remains to be determined.

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Throughout all of this, I also performed in two shows outside of my school's theatre program in the first quarter. In July, I was in the ensemble of *The SpongeBob Musical* at Mesa Community College. It was my first show at the collegiate level, and I had an amazing time. Being in a space with older performers who I had a lot to learn from gave me an entirely new set of tools to come back to my school's program with. Due to the ensemble-heavy nature of the show, I also gained a clearer perception of my stamina as a performer. In September, I played Damian in *Mean Girls: High School Version* at a local youth theatre. While I enjoyed the vocal challenges of the show and the chance to interpret a well-known character in a modern way, the rehearsal process was overwhelmingly disorganized and generally questionable in nature, and the performances proved to me exactly how burnt out I was at an artistic level. Burnout has been a huge consideration in my life since that show closed, and I look forward to diving further into that topic and my perspective/experience on it in later blogs.

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As I write this, I am halfway through my fall break. The next quarter is a little intense for me, but I already feel rejuvenated by some time away from commitments and thus more prepared to take on the challenges ahead. I am seriously looking forward to all the incredible experiences that await me before the end of the semester, and exceptionally grateful for all the first few weeks of junior year have brought to me.



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