

Music theory students get a 'clue'

By: **ANDREA VARDARO** (Fri, Jun/06/2003)

One minute Pennsbury High School East senior Rachael Blasina was playing a jazzy tune on her alto saxophone, and the next minute she was snapping photographs of a "murder" scene. Not long after that, she filled in for an ill student, transforming into Honey Mustard with a new costume and a Southern accent.

Rachael's transformation is one example of the versatility she and her classmates in Suzanne Schmidt's Music Theory II class needed to deliver five performances of a 20-minute musical adaptation of the board game Clue on Wednesday.

"We put so much work into it. It was a great way to come together," said senior Jaclyn Kasrel, who noted that many of the students met for the first time in this course. She said that all of the students contributed their individual talents, while also expanding their horizons.

"[Working on 'Clue'] got me involved in something I don't usually do," said junior Allan Fortnum, who has performed in the orchestra pit for school musicals but had no prior experience singing and acting onstage.

He wasn't alone. Only five of the class's 18 students had previous acting experience. Singing for many of them had never taken place outside of the shower, but there they were, center stage, singing solos.

Students who aren't afraid to try something new impress Schmidt, who is "especially proud to see them doing things out of the box." That is why she originally came up with the idea to have Music Theory II students create and perform a musical.

There was more than just the bravery in tackling the unknown. There also was a lot of hard work. The students wrote the entire script and score. They blocked out the action, designed the costumes, sets and props and choreographed the dances and slapstick comedy routines.

"The role that I play is to keep [the students] on track and focused," said Schmidt, who describes herself as a facilitator.

For the past six or seven years, the musical has been an annual culminating project for Music Theory II. Some "Music Theory II musical vets" were in the audience Wednesday, and Schmidt acknowledged them for paving the way for "Clue." Past selections for musical adaptations included another board game, Candyland, "Gilligan's Island" and children's books.

Each year, Schmidt's students vote on whether to do the musical. They know that doing so means extra hard work during the first marking period. Most students choose to take on this task, which means using the second semester to plan their musical.

"It's been just such a great time writing our own musical," said senior Sarah Chaet, who had previous experience as a performer.

Allan agreed and called working on "Clue" a "great asset." He plans on going to college to study music education.

Though many of the other students also have plans for a career or serious hobby in music, right now they are still eight seniors and 10 juniors earning a final grade in a high school course.

After their brief brush with Broadway, the student performers welcomed back reality, singing, "Thank you for coming to 'Clue' the musical; it's been fun, but now it's time to all go back to school."

Schmidt said, "What's really special for me as a teacher is to see the growth in them musically and to know that I was able to be a part of their life and teaching them what they did today. I'm really proud of what they've accomplished."

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