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Introduction

Musicals have the advantage of providing a way to showcase a large number of performers. Musicals present opportunities for your entire group to perform using a range of skills — singing, movement, dance, and musical accompaniment, as well as acting.

If you don't yet have the experience or skills in directing all the aspects of a musical — that is, acting, singing, dance, movement, and technical production — this book will guide you in building your own skills or finding resources to help you.

Musicals have wide appeal to all ages. You will usually get a bigger crowd for a musical than you do for a straight play, and since your group works hard to prepare a show, don't they deserve the largest possible audience?

This book will help you in these situations:

- You are working with a group of kids at a school, church, or youth center, and they decide they want to put on a musical.
- You have decided you want to build a drama club that meets after school or on weekends, but aren't sure what to do and how to structure the sessions.
- You find yourself numbly saying, "I have just been told I have to do the school show. *What* am I going to do?"
- You have been directing musicals for some time, but are looking for some tips on rehearsal management and organizing the performers and parents.

This book aims to show you how you can stage almost any musical show on any budget, whether you are operating on a shoestring or producing a sponsored extravaganza. It provides

information and guidance about all the things you *must* think about (such as fire regulations and insurance for your group) as well as the things you *want* to think about (such as characterization and costumes). If you are a newly appointed, inexperienced director, don't be discouraged by how many elements need to be considered. Just take it a step at a time, and concentrate on the kids having a good time at each session you run.

This book focuses on working with musical scripts, not "straight plays" (non-musical plays). However, many of the ideas and much of the advice presented in this book will be useful to both novice and experienced directors of straight plays.

This book assumes you are working with a group of about twenty-five to thirty-five performers, ages six to fifteen who have a range of commitment and talent. This book also assumes you will be working with your group for about two hours per week, over a ten-month period. The two-hour weekly sessions are organized into blocks of about six weeks, which corresponds to how the school year is organized in many local school districts in the U.S.A. or educational authorities in the U.K.

Based on our experience, you should expect to add a few extra sessions for technical and dress rehearsals just before the performance. You may also need to add a few extra hours to work with a small number of principals and soloists. All in all, the total number of rehearsal hours is about eighty to ninety. If your production plans include building and painting sets, you need to plan some extra sessions that only your "building crew" will attend.

If your schedule is structured differently, (for example, you have a drama class for a total of four hours per week or you meet after school for a three-hour session each week) you can use the total number of hours to calculate how many weeks or months you will need to produce your show. During summer vacation or school holidays, you can do a show in three weeks of solid rehearsal, all day, every day. This total immersion approach can be extremely successful because the children see the results of their efforts after only a few weeks. When you meet weekly, you must by necessity spend some time each week reviewing because most of your cast will not be thinking about the show except when they are at a rehearsal!

We believe that young performers — and their performances — are not helped by too tight a directorial control or endless rehearsal. Spending hours of extra time choreographing every gesture or dictating every vocal inflection may indeed produce a more “professional” production, but it will lack the energy and vitality of a show in which the performers are permitted to make as many of their own decisions — and occasional mistakes — as possible. Also, if you try to rehearse at this level of detail, it will be difficult to cover the entire script, and it is doubtful the actors will remember your instructions.