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NW Theatre Link

A publication of the NW Section of USITT

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The Survey

From the Editor:

Thank you all for the positive response to a NW section newsletter and for participating in the survey. To get the ball rolling the content of this issue will be generated by yours truly. It is intended only to get this thing off the ground and hopefully generate some ideas. Page 2 has some suggestions for future content which I will rely on you to help generate.

If any of you out there are into layout and/or graphics and want to help please let me know! It is definitely not my forte.

This newsletter is – and will probably always be – a work in progress, so feel free to provide feedback.

– Mark Langley

In This Issue

- The results of my decidedly non-scientific survey results which will hopefully help direct the future of this publication.
- A facility profile of the Olympia High School Performing Arts Center
- “Reader Recommended Product(s)”.

First, an apology and mea culpa to you costumers out there for not having a more inclusive survey. I can only plead a major mental lapse on my part. Ditto for not including “production manager” in the job choices. Having learned something from my mistakes on this one, I may try to refine some of the data in the future, or include a short survey as part of a newsletter feature (a la ESPN’s “Question of the Night” or similar surveys proliferating across the media spectrum).

With 51 people participating in the survey, here is what the results had to say about the section:

- You are primarily involved with educational theatre (57.4%), with professional theatre running a distant second (23.7%).
- Most of you identify yourselves as designers, but you are a multi-faceted group, with 157 selections from 48 people.
- You are a very experienced bunch, with 62.5% of you having over 15 years of experience.
- As far as the newsletter is concerned, workshop announcements, facility profiles, reader recommended products, and skills topped the list of useful topics and will hopefully be regular features, though there is obviously interest in other areas. We will try to cover all of them to some degree.
- In an interesting statistical side-note, “education program profiles” was evenly spread between 21.4% and 28.6% in all four ratings from most useful to not useful.
- The newsletter name: We are creative people, but coming up with a title that says something about what the newsletter represents – geographical region, professional interest, organizational affiliation – is a challenge (which is why I tried to get *you* to do it and probably why most of you skipped the question). I chose NW Theatre Link because I like the association of the word “link” with cues as well as in a social networking context. Thanks for all the submissions.

“Of most interest to me would be a listing of all the schools in the region that offer theater training. One of the big problems is we are so spread out we don't know about each other.”
– Survey response

Anyone care to take this on?

HELP WANTED! (for future issues)

Announcements – training opportunities, demonstrations, seminars, events, etc.

Tips and Techniques

- Safety – what methods do you use to teach and encourage safe practices?
- Design – any special tools and/or techniques you use to solve design problems, teach design concepts, or inspire young designers?
- Construction – problem-solving, discoveries, cautions, shortcuts

Reader Recommendations – Books, tools, software, materials, anything else you would like to share with the Pacific Northwest section.

Facility Profiles – what is your place like?

Personality Profiles – is there someone in the region you feel deserves special recognition?

Technical Tales – we all love a good story.

Send your submissions to:
mlangle7019@gmail.com

Thank you!

QUICK TIP

Communication is a critical part of safe rigging. As we all know, during load-in and strike the theatre environment can be very noisy, but some high school students are self-conscious about yelling in class. Often when I teach a group how to communicate between the rail and load floor I use this exercise to practice:

Split the group into 3 small groups. One group stands at the rail and one group stands on the far side of the stage. I put the third group in the middle and make them pound on the floor with hammers and 2x4s. Then I make the other 2 groups yell instructions back and forth.

It's fun because the students enjoy the opportunity to get really noisy in class! You can also keep an eye on the class and you don't waste time sending a group to the load floor.

Reader Recommendations

Book: *Heads! and Tales: Uncle Bill's Musings on the Theatrical Experience*
by Bill Sapsis

This is a quick, humorous, informative, enjoyable read. I have attended three "Stump the Rigger" sessions hosted by Mr. Sapsis at USITT conferences. His expertise and sense of humor coupled with trademark blunt honesty translates well to the written page. The usual topics such as tools, hardware, materials, and techniques utilized in theatre and touring rigging are included. This information, of course, can be found elsewhere and in greater depth. But here the style is conversational, not overly technical, and is therefore not intimidating even for the novice or those with "mathophobia." This would be a good background read for introduc-

tory-level students prior to reading Mr. Glerum's *Stage Rigging Handbook*.

The real strength of the book can be found in Sapsis' refreshing attitude toward safety and fall protection. Sapsis writes, "My goal in writing this book is to help keep you safe on the job." He attacks the notion that "the show must go on" with common sense advice and perspective. This message is particularly important for novice riggers who, whether through ignorance, intimidation, or machismo, often take unnecessary risks. He makes it OK to follow Nancy Reagan's advice and "just say no."

Software: Google Documents

<http://www.google.com/google-d-s/intl/en/tour1.html>

I manage a stage crew of high school students at the Olympia High School Performing Arts Center in Olympia, WA. Communication with them as a group can be a challenge. E-mail works OK, but when I ask who is available for a particular event it means plowing through each response for the answer.

Enter Google Docs. This is a free, on-line hosted document creation and storage service that includes spreadsheets, documents, presentations, etc. You can import or export with a variety of programs or create documents and save them. You can share them with specific people or with the world. You can also collaborate and control editing permissions. You can also create pdf documents without Acrobat.

I use the spreadsheet with dates and call times across the top and names down the side. They can access it from anywhere at any time and enter their availability for each

event. I highlight those that are scheduled. When a student needs a replacement I have a record of who else is available on that date. I calculate hours for billing on the same page. I also have the work rules on a document on-line so I can point new staff to them. It puts the responsibility on the crew for making themselves available for work.

On the minus side, functionality on these programs is much more limited and clunky than regular application software, and when importing and exporting the formatting can get funky, especially for editing. But for basic documents that you want to share, it works fine. I still use E-mail for general announcements and to send reminders (these are teenagers, after all), but it has dramatically simplified my crew communications and scheduling. The best part is the kids no longer have an excuse for missing work.

FACILITY PROFILE

Olympia High School Performing Arts Center, Olympia, WA.

Web site: http://olympia.osd.wednet.edu/information/performing_arts_center/

AT A GLANCE

Year Opened: 2000

Architect: BLRB Architects

Capacity: 438 in main seating area with up to 704 when 2 rotating seating sections are added.

Proscenium: 48 ft. wide and 22 ft. tall

Stage: Maximum depth at centerline is 46 ft. Offstage of the legs there is about 8' stage left and 12' stage right.

Ammenities:

- 3/4 fly house with 45' 9" trim height on counterweight system.
- Motorized electrics
- Center cluster speaker arrangement
- Strand 550i lighting console and Mackie SR24-4 mixer
- Large orchestra pit with space for 30+ musicians
- Dressing rooms for men and women with a common make-up
- Small shop area stage right
- StageRight Opus II acoustical clouds and Alla Breve towers
- Rotating seating sections provide 2 additional spaces when they are not facing the auditorium; a presentation classroom with a movie screen and projector, and a drama class room with a small acting area and lighting grid.
- Catering for events can be coordinated with our Food Service department

ABOUT THE SPACE: The Olympia School District, and Olympia High School (OHS) in particular, have very strong music programs. OHS has four orchestras, 4 choirs, and 4 bands, sending far more music students to state competitions than any other school in the state. The PAC was built primarily as a concert hall to handle large performing groups and musicals. The most recent production of *The Music Man* had a cast of about 90.

Biggest Challenge(s): Speaking as the manager, managing its use between multiple groups with variable needs is the biggest chal-

lenge. We host over 30 music concerts and festivals, 2 musicals, 3 plays, and assorted class activities, assemblies and presentations for the school district. Community rentals, which help offset the operating costs, are difficult to squeeze in. Community events include a church with a truss-and-motor set-up every week, an annual senior citizens' variety show, celebrations, ceremonies, conferences, and presentations. We have also hosted several large government events. The lack of separate storage, rehearsal, and construction space creates challenges with overlapping users.



The auditorium showing the seating turntables open and closed. It appears narrower and deeper than it actually is due to the lens. *Photos provided by BLRB Architects*



Other comments:

The technical staff is made up of current and former high school students from the Olympia School District who are trained to operate the systems in the auditorium. Keeping this crew is getting more challenging since the technical theatre class that originally served as the training and recruiting ground was cut last year due to budget and staffing restrictions. The students on the crew are great to work with and do a tremendous job.