

# Theatre in the COVID School System

The aspects of a theatre education are varied, complex, and systematic as a core discipline. At its core, theatre has four essential components: the script, the process, the performance, the audience. When looking at theatre with the COVID pandemic, focusing on the core seems most logical when planning.

The first three aspects of theatre are the easiest to achieve:

- *The Script*: Select a play or musical that can be socially distanced. Emphasis on small cast shows ranging from 1-6 actors; gone are the large productions. Larger casts could be used, but with masks.
- *The Process*: Audition and rehearse socially distanced or virtually.
  - ◆ one audition for all shows; shows selected based on the turnout and quality of the audition
  - ◆ rehearsals held in H-125, music room, the stage, and/or virtually
  - ◆ practice established COVID guidelines for social distancing and cleaning when in-person
  - ◆ no bussing required
- *The Performance*: Perform socially distanced, filmed, or virtually. Performances could be done with a reduced capacity audience, no audience, or virtual audience.

The trickiest of the four components, *The Audience*:

1. Minimal audience: Audience socially distanced and wearing masks.
  - ◆ 350 seat auditorium at 20% capacity = 70 people allowed in the auditorium; 5% or maximum 17 people comprised of students, musicians, and directors with the show; auditorium at or below 25% capacity
  - ◆ prepay, tickets mailed, seating chart created for assigned seating
  - ◆ no concession sales, no raffle baskets, no 50/50 tickets, no money
2. No audience: Stream live performances to the audience; WDC pays for platform
  - ◆ Audiences pay admission to get an active link to watch the performance.
3. Drive-In: Perform outside with the audience in their vehicles.
4. Radio: perform a play in the school while the audience listens in their vehicles
  - ◆ Need to purchase a radio transmitter and research the legality of broadcasting via radio.

I recommend that no elementary production occur this year. Plays and musicals at the elementary levels have a high number of participants. Maintaining social distancing and safety would be challenging. In the past, the elementary play stipend has been used for a middle-high school production.

With a solid plan in place, the theatre program at Willsboro Central School will certainly continue into my 20th year. Regardless if COVID shuts the school down, rehearsals and performances may continue virtually. The rehearsal process would not change. However, the performances would need to be completed virtually.



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## Recommended 2020-2021 Theatre Season

### → Play #1:

- Rehearsals: October 2020 - December 2020
- Performances: early December

### → Play #2:

- Rehearsals: October 2020 - February 2021
- Performances: early February

### → Musical:

- Rehearsals: October 2020 - March 2021
- Performances: Late March

### → Notes on Rehearsals and Performances:

- The number of rehearsals will depend on the cast, their commitments, and their needs per show.
- The number of performances will depend on the route decided; traditionally 3-4.
- Rehearsals and Performances fluctuate from show to show. Some shows require more or less time depending on the experience of the students and the demands of the show. Traditionally, rehearsals vary between 15-30 with performances being 3-4.

The greatest difference this year will be timing. The theatre program traditionally works around each athletics season. It can be set up that way if there is a traditional athletics schedule (November, March, June). However, from what is being communicated to me, winter sports are unlikely to occur. This makes December to March ideal for theatre rehearsals and performances. Each cast will be small, making scheduling, social distancing, and COVID safety manageable for all.

In my research, I've come across a variety of plays and musicals that will work during this time. Again, the emphasis will be small, socially distanced shows. It is possible that many will audition for only a few parts. Technical roles might be available if we perform on a stage, which would increase participation. The musicals and plays listed reflect the most recent research within the COVID lens. Others will be considered with further research.



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## The Plays

### The Aliens by Annie Baker

- 3M, Two angry young men sit behind a Vermont coffee shop and discuss music and Bukowski. When a lonely high-school student arrives on the scene, they decide to teach him everything they know. A play with music about friendship, art, love and death.

### Driving Miss Daisy by Alfred Uhry

- 2M, 1W, The place is the Deep South, the time 1948, just prior to the civil rights movement. Having recently demolished another car, Daisy Werthan, a rich, sharp-tongued Jewish widow of seventy-two, is informed by her son, Boolie, that henceforth she must rely on the services of a chauffeur. The person he hires for the job is a thoughtful, unemployed black man, Hoke, whom Miss Daisy immediately regards with disdain and who, in turn, is not impressed with his employer's patronizing tone and, he believes, her latent prejudice. But, in a series of absorbing scenes spanning twenty-five years, the two, despite their mutual differences, grow ever closer to, and more dependent on, each other, until, eventually, they become almost a couple. Slowly and steadily the dignified, good-natured Hoke breaks down the stern defenses of the ornery old lady, as she teaches him to read and write and, in a gesture of good will and shared concern, invites him to join her at a banquet in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. As the play ends Hoke has a final visit with Miss Daisy, now ninety-seven and confined to a nursing home, and while it is evident that a vestige of her fierce independence and sense of position still remain, it is also movingly clear that they have both come to realize they have more in common than they ever believed possible—and that times and circumstances would ever allow them to publicly admit.

### Escaped Alone by Caryl Churchill

- 4W, "I'm walking down the street and there's a door in the fence open and inside there are three women I've seen before." Three old friends and a neighbour. A summer of afternoons in the backyard. Tea and catastrophe.

### Good People by David Lindsay-Abaire

- 2M, 4W, Welcome to Southie, a Boston neighborhood where a night on the town means a few rounds of bingo, where this month's paycheck covers last month's bills, and where Margie Walsh has just been let go from yet another job. Facing eviction and scrambling to catch a break, Margie thinks an old fling who's made it out of Southie might be her ticket to a fresh new start. But is this apparently self-made man secure enough to face his humble beginnings? Margie is about to risk what little she has left to find out. With his signature humorous glow, Lindsay-Abaire explores the struggles, shifting loyalties and unshakeable hopes that come with having next to nothing in America.



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## Love Letters by A. R. Gurney

- 1M, 1W, Andrew Makepeace Ladd III and Melissa Gardner, both born to wealth and position, are childhood friends whose lifelong correspondence begins with birthday party thank-you notes and summer camp postcards. Romantically attached, they continue to exchange letters through the boarding school and college years. While Andy is off at war Melissa marries, but her attachment to Andy remains strong and she continues to keep in touch as he marries, becomes a successful attorney, gets involved in politics and, eventually, is elected to the U.S. Senate. Eventually she and Andy do become involved in a brief affair, but it is really too late for both of them. However Andy's last letter makes it eloquently clear how much they really meant, and gave to, each other over the years—physically apart, perhaps, but spiritually as close as only true lovers can be.

## Love, Loss, and What I Wore by Nora Ephron and Delia Ephron

- 5W, A play of monologues and ensemble pieces about women, clothes and memory covering all the important subjects—mothers, prom dresses, mothers, buying bras, mothers, hating purses and why we only wear black. Based on the bestselling book by Ilene Beckerman.

## Tuesdays with Morrie by Jeffrey Hatcher and Mitch Albom

- 2M, *Tuesdays with Morrie* is the autobiographical story of Mitch Albom, an accomplished journalist driven solely by his career, and Morrie Schwartz, his former college professor. Sixteen years after graduation, Mitch happens to catch Morrie's appearance on a television news program and learns that his old professor is battling Lou Gehrig's Disease. Mitch is reunited with Morrie, and what starts as a simple visit turns into a weekly pilgrimage and a last class in the meaning of life.

## Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike by Christopher Durang

- 2M, 4W, Winner of the 2013 Tony Award for Best Play. Middle-aged siblings Vanya and Sonia share a home in Bucks County, PA, where they bicker and complain about the circumstances of their lives. Suddenly, their movie-star sister, Masha, swoops in with her new boy toy, Spike. Old resentments flare up, eventually leading to threats to sell the house. Also on the scene are sassy maid Cassandra, who can predict the future, and a lovely young aspiring actress named Nina, whose prettiness somewhat worries the imperious Masha.



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## The Musicals

### The Last Five Years by Jason Robert Brown

- 1M, 1W, An emotionally powerful and intimate musical about two New Yorkers in their twenties who fall in and out of love over the course of five years, the show's unconventional structure consists of Cathy, the woman, telling her story backwards while Jamie, the man, tells his story chronologically; the two characters only meet once, at their wedding in the middle of the show.

### Putting It Together by Stephen Sondheim

- 3M, 2W, Featuring nearly thirty Sondheim tunes, Putting It Together is performed by only five people who are thrown together at a party in a Manhattan penthouse. With a bit of imagination, the guests transform the apartment into the stage of an abandoned theatre, an estate in Sweden, an island outside of Paris, a street off the Roman Forum, the woods of a fairy tale and a mythical town in the Southwest.

### Some Enchanted Evening: The Songs of Rodgers and Hammerstein by Jeffry B. Moss

- 2M, 3W, More than those of any composer or lyricist writing for the stage, the songs of Rodgers & Hammerstein have become an integral part of our everyday lives. We sing them in the shower; we dance to them in ballrooms; we hear them on the radio and in clubs and, yes, in elevators and supermarkets, too. This stunning collection of Rodgers & Hammerstein compositions places five performers in a theatrical setting: first 'backstage,' where the songs are sung as personal interplay, and then 'onstage,' where the songs are presented to an audience. Offering its performers an opportunity to explore timeless songs within their own styles and sensibilities, *Some Enchanted Evening* delights its audience with a glorious parade of genuine hits.

### A Year with Frog and Toad by Willie and Robert Reale

- 3M, 2W, Waking from hibernation in the Spring, Frog and Toad plant gardens, swim, rake leaves, go sledding and learn life lessons along the way. The two best friends celebrate and rejoice in the differences that make them unique and special. Part vaudeville, part make believe... all charm, A Year with Frog and Toad tells the story of a friendship that endures throughout the seasons.