

Mount Si School Once Upon A Mattress

Direction:

A: The “Normandy” scene had a slow pace and energy. Nice use of audience space and the arrangement of “Quiet”. I loved the ‘secret handshake’. I felt the reveal at the end wasn’t staged effectively as it might have been – the pea should have been at the very bottom and I couldn’t see well the tools coming out from the bed. I would have liked to have had a clean button at the end of the bed scene for full impact!

B: Congratulations on infusing the Lead actors and chorus with the fun and exuberance of a fractured musical fairy tale. Chorus and Lead Actors stayed engaged throughout the show exhibiting hard work on finding individual character, understanding of dialogue and excellent diction. Fine detail and subtle blocking (such as the Secret Handshake and the packing King during “Normandy”) provided depth to the scenes. Because of the multiple small scenes with only 2 or 3 actors, you might think about adding curious court members possibly doubling as servants throughout, as it would be in keeping with historical accounts of the cheek to jowl life in a castle. Some of the Chorus needed to develop a deeper understanding of the presentational style towards the audience as at times they glanced at the audience to see how people were reacting instead of staying in the scene. Keep up the fabulous work you are doing with these students.

C: This director had a very clear vision of the story this group was telling. Staging was balanced and interesting, including various groupings arranged in attractive pictures. There was excellent use of the downstage area, bringing the actors closer to the audience, as well as using the apron, the aisles, and the multi-leveled interior castle design with a myriad of transition capabilities. Spacing was creative, using all kinds of levels. Staging of the opening scene with Minstrel and dancers in masks was a beautiful storytelling device - the pantomime was striking. Following the pantomime, the curtain opened to a gorgeous view of gorgeously-costumed actors in the beautiful castle interior in an effective "freeze." It was a perfect segue into the following scene.

*Character development had been carefully studied and created, so that each actor was individualized by costume, animation, personality, and his/her place in the tale. Obviously, the Director had worked successfully with the actors on facial expressions, crowd reactions, and focus. Actors took time with their lines, and their enunciation was excellent.

*The humor! There was so much humor developed in every possible moment: Nothing was overlooked that could possibly be fun or funny, and the cast had great timing with their lines. They knew their script in detail. "Swamps of Home" was extremely funny; "Song of Love" also rocked with laughter all the way to the end, when Fred - exhausted - was dragged off the stage by two Ladies.

*The slower tempi of a number of musical numbers tended to also slow down the

pacing of the show, especially noticeable right after a musical number when there was a significant amount of time between lines of the dialogue. Work with the Music Director/Orchestra Director to ensure upbeat tempi when appropriate. It can make a big difference in the energy level of the actors.

*Many subtle tricks were used by the Director to focus the audience's attention: very clever!

*Overall, outstanding work!

Musical Direction:

A: Good work with the Minstrel and Jester handling male keys. "Opening for a Princess" felt slow, but was well sung. Good blend with the actors and with the chorus.

B: The singers were confident and filled with enthusiastic energy. Your wonderful direction sparkled in rhythm, and on pitch harmonies with ensemble and, in the duets with Sir Harry and Lady Larkin, and Dauntless and Winnifred. The balance and harmonies with the excellent Women's Chorus and Winnifred in "The Swamps of Home" were fabulous. Next steps in building your program would be working with your Choreographer on assisting all of these young dancer/actor/singers in strengthening their breath support to sustain their energy and, yet still sing with clear, concise diction while dancing, in particular, the energetic "The Minstrel, The Jester and I" and "Song of Love". If possible, scheduling more rehearsals with orchestra and singers will assist with this chronic challenge of increasing the tempi without sacrificing the other musical elements. Splendid work with these young and aspiring singers!

C: This Music Director knew the value of careful interpretation of every lyric. Obviously, much time and work had been put into building the story through song so that it embellished the story. Every musical number was well-prepared ... solos, small groups, and Company.

*Clarity and diction, excellent!

*Pitch - excellent!

*Good balance between chorus and principals, and also with the orchestra to the stage performers, usually a challenge to achieve. There were only a few times that the orchestra overpowered the singers on stage.

*You may want to consider adding more percussion to the Pit Orchestra in order to ensue strong rhythms to help drive the song and dance numbers effectively. A few tempi were a bit on the slow side, and it tended to slow down the pacing of the show.

*Overall, very nice work.

Choreography/Staging:

A: Loved the pointe shoes for the opening pantomime. The opening could have used a button to let the audience know to applaud. "Opening for a Princess" made good use of the space and the entire chorus. "Swamps of Home" was nicely done. Good job with the group numbers.

B: You did an admirable job on the choreography for this show with such a large, well rehearsed and confident cast. “Shy” was inventive with the “bend away” in unison from the sound of “Fred’s” loud voice, as well as the Jester’s “tap” dance created with ensemble clapping. You effectively used patterns within the available space. For future shows placed in medieval times, perhaps adding some traditional court dance styles would give the choreography a historical look. Consider adding more rehearsal time with the conductor and dancers, in really stepping up the tempi for the last 2 rounds of the “Panic” and using drummer brush sound for “The Soft Shoe” instead of taps on the Jester. As always, finding specific moments where the actor/dancer/singer can grab a good solid breath before launching into a song is a major musical theatre challenge.

C: Staging of the musical numbers was excellent: the staging supported the story with purposeful movement and with genuine mood setting. The dancers looked so happy to be performing their song and dance numbers which were all period appropriate.

*Energy seemed to vary from one dance to the next: the more upbeat numbers were executed with more zest and animation.

*“Very Soft Shoes” - very clever bit to have the Jester rhythmically ascending the stairs. The choreography was fetching and it was lovely to give the Jester her limelight, yet cutting part of the number would have been helpful in terms of moving the show right along.

*Dancers executed the steps well: aim for more precision and consistency.

*Work with the orchestra and music directors to ensure that the tempi for dances will be as upbeat as you need to drive the choreography well.

*Overall, very nice work.

Orchestra:

A: Nice sized band, well dressed and professional. Horns were good. I found the tempo of the overture a bit slow, but once the Minstrel entered, the tempo was fine. Is there a way for the orchestra to keep playing during set changes, maybe a repeat added. No scene change music between the bed scene and the last scene? There was a much brighter tempo for “Spanish Panic” & “Fred”. Good blend with the actors and with the chorus. The horns really stepped it up for “Happily Ever After” – good job.

B: What a treat to have a full orchestra accompanying this show!

Congratulations on the professionalism and deportment of the orchestra throughout the show. The tempi and rhythm moved the show along and created an enthusiastic momentum, although a bit sluggish in the Spanish Panic and The Minstrel, The Jester and I. The large orchestra balanced well with the stage and singers and instrumentalists watched the conductor for cut offs and dynamics. At times, the winds and strings were out of tune within their sections yet when the sound meshed between parts, the orchestra as a whole collaborated beautifully. Keep up the great work of bringing along these talented young musicians.

C: It is always great to see students in the Orchestra Pit. It is such a wonderful opportunity for them to be a part of putting together such a huge, wonderful show.

*The Orchestra was dressed in traditional black, and looked sharp.

*Rhythms were solid. Perhaps a bit more percussion would have helped to keep the dance numbers feeling strong and upbeat where appropriate. "Normandy" was a little on the slow side: it would have given the Minstrel, Larken & Jester an easier time carrying the number with a more upbeat tempo. That being said, the percussion was excellent under "Very Soft Shoes."

*Spanish Panic - super tempo - it got the chorus dancing like crazy!

*Loved the Entr'acte - it was almost dreamy and sounded lovely.

Scenic Design:

A: Beautiful set! Well painted castle set with some fun pieces to define scenes. The bed was excellent.

B: Congratulations on this excellent and well-painted set design with medieval style back flat with archways, windows and dais for the thrones. This provided enough room for the entire cast to be present yet gave a variety in levels. All of the stairs were stable for a multitude of dance numbers. The additions to SL in creating a bedroom with dressing tables, bed, etc. or SR for Wizard's Room immediately created a separate space and yet seemed simple enough for quick transitions. The bed worked very effectively as a sturdy structure for Winnifred to cavort as well as its movement capabilities on and off stage. Overall this set created a wonderful backdrop that enhanced and transported the audience's experience of this show. Well done!

C: What a great interior castle design, floor to ceiling gray stone with an elevated throne. It reflected the period well, and not only established a totally adequate staging location, but also placed the king and queen "above" others.

*The five different archways and doorways provided plenty of transition opportunities, and there was another exit under the stairs. Excellent planning.

*The scenic painting was very attractive, again finished in period design.

*Screening behind the doors of the castle provided lighting opportunities to further enhance the set pieces.

Overall, very nice work.

Lighting Design:

A: A wide stage with good light coverage. Some slow light cues. Good use of spotlight.

B: Lighting overall efficiently highlighted the main set area. This simple yet effective design had some great moments in the use of spotlights by helping to focus the attention of the audience while the overall lights were used to depict different scenes and moods. At times, this dimming of the lights to create background mood hindered the scene as in the Queen's songs, "Sensitivity" and "Quiet". Work closely with the director to make sure that the actors' playing areas are covered with enough light as needed, to clearly see the performers. Consider the use of gels for color changes for mood or time of day rather than lack of light.

C: The light design effectively focused the audience's attention in concert with the staging.

*Lovely color choices: a pink wash for "Yesterday I Loved You," and magentas, peach, blues, and violet throughout all read extremely well with the set, and also were mood-inspiring.

*Nice work lighting behind the doors of the castle.

*Technically, fades were nicely timed, and isolations were effective.

Costume Design:

A: Beautiful costumes with wonderful attention to detail. Loved all the hats for the ladies. Nice detail with Winnifred's first dress, I loved the lacing up the back. Nice detail on Dauntless' shoes. Good use of color. Everyone looked great!

B: Wow! An amazing amount of work went into costuming this large cast with such well-executed attention to detail in masks and medieval costumes. The costumes gave each character full range of motion and helped them establish and maintain their characters ranging from a Nightingale to a Wet Princess. The costumes fit each character's persona and actor's body with a richness of texture within the style and historical period. Brava!

C: This costume design was thoughtful, purposeful, and creative! A gorgeous color palette for the costumes was present on the stage from the first moment of the pantomime. The costumes were well-designed correlating with the time period. Different characters became easily recognized by their costumes which reflected their age, royalty, work. Details and accessorizing also served to give panache to each costume - turned up toes of Prince Dauntless's shoes; Fred's striped sox; diamond shapes for the Jester; many different hats (the Queen's especially regal), for examples. The Ladies in Waiting had beautiful gowns of differing colors. Every costume fit well and was neat and tidy. Overall, strikingly effective work!

Hair & Make-Up Design:

A: I appreciated the age make-up on the King and Wizard. If there was any age make-up on the Queen, I couldn't see it from where I sat. Since it is a fantasy piece, I would have liked to have seen you explore more fun, even wild, hairdos for the ladies.

B: What an accomplishment! You designed well-executed makeup and hair for the entire 38 members of the cast that complimented each of their characters, the time period and their costumes. Consider using some aging techniques for the King, Queen, and Wizard, a grey/white beard or mustache with brushing a bit of white to the hair for the men or adding a few wrinkles at the brow and mouth. For the rest of the ensemble, the makeup was exactly right for the lights and stage without being too modern.

C: Care was taken with hair styles to reflect age: youth (girls' ringlets), older-aged (the Wizard's grayed hair); all gals had their hair back away from their faces, it was good to note.

*Makeup was used to accent character (Jester's special makeup design). The

gals used bold lip colors.

*Foundations looked blended, and eyes were accented with eyeliner and the occasional use of fake eyelashes by the gals.

Overall, very good work.

Stage Crew:

A: Overall – good work. Details are important: Several times the actors were visibly on stage and ready to go and no one called a light cue to start the scene. Moving the many pieces kept the show moving. Good job!

B: The stage crew was well- rehearsed, quick, quiet, and did an outstanding job of prop preparation and calling the show, not to mention moving bedroom, tents, and giant bed efficiently in and out. This is a very difficult skill as light leakage reveals a lot. Spotlight operators and light cues seemed occasionally to be late as in the case of the Queen during Sensitivity but on the whole kept the cast fairly well lit throughout the show and were on the ball when an actor walked out of their light. Costume changers and makeup artists worked fast to keep the show moving forward through transitions. Know that your work is extremely important and was a contribution to the overall welfare of the show.

C: There was a lot of excellent work provided by the Set crew, lighting technicians, sound effects, Stage Manager, Assistant Stage Manager, and Production Manager. They worked together effectively in a timely fashion. Good job with sound effects, e.g., splashing noises from the moat. Pieces that were brought in, such as the bed, mirror, and vanity were transferred quietly and quickly. The light crew had nicely-timed fades throughout.

Lobby Display:

A: Not a large display. A bed and throne at one end of the 'eating' area and a photo display by the restrooms. Once in the theatre, the a slide show of the actors and their bios was lots of fun.

B: You created a simple yet effective lobby display with the throne and wonderful puffed quilt flat. The pillars with circling ivy plus "wooden" entrance doors really added to the audience's experience. Consider in the future of an additional board with pictures and bios of the cast and crew (as shown in the slide show) or the construction of costumes and sets. These boards are fairly easy to remove and store during school. Keep up the great work.

C: This lobby was a lot of fun. It started at the ticket table, which was draped in tapestry, continuing on to a bulletin board with cast photos, and led to concessions and an opportunity to purchase a souvenir Princess Wand. (Which I did.) Following the show, there was a meet and greet, during which time young kids could get their pictures taken with cast members, sitting on a throne or Princess Bed. Families really enjoyed this fun activity.

Performer Categories:

Allyson Conlon (Winnifred):

A: Ms. Conlon as Winnifred had wonderful energy. She has good belt she used to her advantage. Good job with "Swamps of Home". The performance grew as the performance progressed. "Happily Ever After" was well done. Congratulations for staying in character counting sheep since the end of the scene was lit by the orchestra.

B: What a powerhouse of energy you poured forth in portraying Princess Winnifred! You carried the energy throughout the show with consistent focus. You created empathetic relationships with each cast member with warm, genuine exuberance. Your character movements, attitude and voice contributed to the character without resorting to caricature. Your singing and speaking voice suited your character with clarity and diction, and breath support helped with your pausing/phrasing. "Happily Ever After" in particular created a contemplative and sympathetic response from the audience. Talk to your Musical Director about connecting your fluid high singing voice with your maturing belt with more breath support. This will balance and support your considerable range. Fabulous Work!

C: What an absolutely winning Winnifred! Great focus and energy the entire show!

*"Spanish Panic" is a taxing number, but she kept every bit of the elongated trial delightfully fun and funny, taking it to the limits of endurance. Even though the movement followed a pattern, Fred made the tiring out very physical and very hilarious - she was priceless! She created a laugh-out loud kind of scene.

*Great diction and expressive delivery of songs.

*Created a tomboyish character, yet still with a feminine appeal. Her physicality was super.

*Great timing and delivery of punch lines and mannerisms.

Terrific performance!

Alex Kilian (Sir Harry):

A: Mr. Kilian as Sir Harry created a good characterization with a huge ego. He has a very nice voice he used well during "In a Little While". I loved his moment weighing whether to keep Lady Larkin. Mr. Kilian got big laughs in his scene with the Wizard.

C: This Sir Harry did great work as a self-absorbed, very dramatic guy. His physicality of posing and being grandiose was still rather endearing. His energy was boundless, and his animation super.

*He still was a convincing suitor to Lady Larken, his song with her ... "Yesterday I Loved You" was lovely, ending harmonies beautifully blended. He has a full, strong voice with plenty of power. And every lyric of every song committed to the

telling of the story - excellent interpretation.
Super performance!

Autumn Moll (Jester):

A: You created a wonderful Jester with your consistent character choices. You obviously created a story and emotional arc for your character that evolved your character out of a caricature into a character with depth. This allows the audience to find rapport and retain interest in the welfare of the character. Well done!! Your singing and speaking voice suited your character with clarity and diction, and your breath support kept your songs in pitch even while dancing. Of note were your hilarious "Normandy" and solid musicianship in "Very Soft Shoes".

Dylan Johnson (King Sextimus):

C: Your amazing amount of preparation and work on this role gave the audience a grand time deciphering your comedic pantomimes and exaggerated choreography. You threw yourself wholeheartedly into the physical acting and created ripples of laughter in the audience in the song "Man to Man Talk". Your meaning was crystal clear which takes visualization and focus on your part. Consider slowing down and use strong, bold movements when striving to relate emotionally to your fellow actors. Great work on the comic timing and delivery, as well as superb understanding of pausing and phrasing through the body, that this role required. All asides, jokes, and rapport with the audience remained intimate while delivered in broad strokes. Job well done!!

Allison Caswell (Queen Aggravain):

C: This Queen Aggravain had great command: she controlled every scene she was in with pomp and sheer power. Even though her long speech went on and on, she kept it going in an amazing way, quite a trick to pull that one off!

*Her songs were all solid and in perfect character.

*Facial expressions were so good, and she had super physicality.

*This Queen really nailed it!

Ellie Schanbacher (Lady Larken):

C: Lady Larken was well cast. She has a pretty singing voice, excellent projection of songs and dialogue, and her diction is top-notch. "In a Little While" was a highly entertaining song: every lyric was delivered in a manner to support the story. "Yesterday I Loved You" with Sir Harry was lovely; they harmonized nicely at the end of the song. Loved her sweet facial expressions, too. Excellent work!

Cole Van Gerpen (Prince Dauntless):

C: This Prince was a kick! His excellent comedic timing served him well as he cavorted as a momma's boy. His little skips and little mannerisms were very very funny and fun. With Fred, he was totally smitten, his facial expressions so interpretive and beguiling. His character development was spot-on.

*He has a strong singing voice, rhythms, diction, and pitch all excellent. Wonderful performance!

Chorus:

A: Good participation by the chorus during the testing of the Princess. Good support by the ladies of the chorus during "Swamps of Home". "Quiet" was well done by the chorus, good rhythm. Highlight vocal with the finale.

B: The Chorus was exuberant and did an excellent job of ensemble singing and dancing. As each ensemble member exited or entered the stage, I noticed the relationships you created and the character choices each individual chose. Amazing harmonies in the Women's Ensemble (Swamps of Home)! The investment of all of the actors requires everyone to realize their importance, no matter how small their role seems to be. Once on stage, no one is unnoticed or a piece of scenery but a living, transmitting storyteller for the audience. Continue to build on this critical work by staying focused in the scene, even as you are preparing to sing or dance. There were times when some actors would glance at the audience to check on reactions or nervously dropped character when dancing directly in front. A good way to find your character is to design a name, history (both emotional and physical) and your relationship to each scene as well as to each other. This will help you to stay engaged in each scene as your character and not as yourself. Great Work!

C: This chorus did excellent work. All the song and dance numbers were performed extremely well: the voices were balanced, blended, and diction was crisp and clear; dance was energetic and animated, and all engaged totally in telling this story in the most fun, entertaining, and - at times - an over-the-top fun way. In crowd scenes, all were focused, had genuine reactions and interactions. "Spanish Panic" was a great, fun number: all became convincingly exhausted by the end. The guy dancers were not quite as strong as the ladies, but they gave it everything that had. That being said, this was a delightful chorus full of delightful performers.

Additional Comments:

Evaluator A: Really fun production to see just before the holidays! Dauntless did a great job with "Shy". The King did a good clean pantomime. The Minstrel and Jester did a good job as – especially handling the male keys. "Man to Man Talk" was nicely done. Queen Aggravain landed all her laughs, nicely done. She did nice job with "Sensitivity".

Evaluator B: This production was an excellent community builder and educational experience. The families enjoyed themselves from the opening Minstrel's Tale to the haunting and glorious lullaby of the Nightingale. Everyone was smiling and enjoying the hard work and effort by 48+ cast, crew and orchestra. At times the balance of the sound and levels were too hot for Winnifred and Queen Aggravain during their enthusiastic and agitated speeches.

A suggestion for the future would be to have a few more rehearsals with the actors on mikes and someone out in the audience checking levels.

Evaluator C: The selection of this show, "Once Upon a Mattress" seemed perfect for this group of student performers and student production crew. There was a lot of strength throughout: the actors, the song and dance numbers, the character development, and the great sense of fun. There were many many clever and creative moments, much less much humor and plain old fun, and your audience loved your show.

A few further shout-outs go to:

*The Ladies in Waiting - great focus and reactions; lovely backup harmonies in "The Swamps of Home."

*Minstrel, Jester, King - a fetching trio.

*The young girls for their amazing "squeaking" as they ran from King Sextimus.

*The involvement of the community - costumes, hair, etc.

*The graceful ballet dancers.

*The tech director and his students in technology construction, a special collaboration.

*The King, whose "squeak" turned into a mighty roar!

*A terrific program complete with bios and wonderful notes of thank you's and lots of interesting information.

*To the Junior Director - yes, there were many breaking legs!