

## Mount Si High School Pippin

### **Direction:**

**A:** Good use of the space and a lot of nice pictures which took advantage of the set design with the raised platform at the back. I would encourage you to work with your students to infuse everything with a feeling of forward momentum. The storytelling and the importance of the points being made would be served well by an additional sense of urgency. This could be accomplished most immediately by picking up the cues in the scenes. The diction was strong and intentions were all nicely delineated by your actors, but there were often long beats between the lines which slowed down the pace of the overall. When we are listening in real time, we are already thinking ahead to our responses so that we can jump in to share our thoughts. This is something characters, living in the moment of the scene, can also do which will add life and zest to the performances. I feel you could have gone even further with the actors in exploring how they might behave when they are a part of the “troupe” and how the attitude and physicality might change as they take on the roles in the story which they and the Leading Player are presenting as the play within the play. Overall though, I want to congratulate you on the students’ connection to the material and the importance which it obviously had to them, as it showed in the commitment with which they played the piece. TECH/SOUND NOTE: The situation of having body mics on part of the cast is always a challenge. I wondered if you had considered experimenting with a lower sound level for the Leading Player on occasion, as I felt we could still have heard her and the volume difference between her and the other cast members (especially those who were not mic’d) would not have been so distinct.

**B:** I saw a well-paced show. Actors were well prepared and seemed to relish each of their parts. The stage picture for “Magic to Do” was wonderful. It set the tone for the presentational style of the show. I could tell instantly that each actor was engaged in reaching the audience. Most of the scene transitions were smooth. *Chapel of Isles* prayer scene seemed problematic, and as a result, I felt it took away from the dramatic momentum of the next scene. One solution may be to put more crew people on moving the dividing set piece; which worked very well for the entire play. I thought the blocking and action of the play used the very large playing space very effectively. Excellent pace of story telling throughout. Very nice work.

**C:** What an enjoyable production of this challenging musical! The commitment of the cast never failed to shine through the circus theatricality, and every character in every scene is fully present, telling his and her own story.

### **Music Direction:**

**A:** These singers were confident in the knowledge of their material and connected well to the lyrics. I would love to have had – in coordination with the conductor - some of the tempi move along a little more quickly to add energy to the show (i.e. *Magic to Do* and *No Time at All*). Working with some mic’d students while others are unmic’d is always a

challenge, so I would encourage those students who are without mics to really support with their breath and overdo diction which will help add vocal energy to help compensate. The ensemble as a whole had a nice choral sound – you might think about exploring the changes that can be layered on to that sound to move it from “choral” to “musical theater” sound, in which vowel sounds can be brighter and consonants more pronounced while keeping your already clean attacks and cut offs.

**B:** I heard strong vocal energy from the ensemble. At times I had difficulty understanding lyrics from the actors. I encourage this group to work closely with the music director to focus on clear articulation. It’s challenging in performance to keep in mind that most audiences are hearing these words for the very first time. Working on the beginnings and ends of words, will help master the score and further engage your audience. Overall this ensemble sounded great with their rhythm, pitch and tone. Congratulations.

**C:** Very fine work with this sophisticated music and the challenges presented by the space and equipment.

### **Choreography:**

**A:** Nice use of Fosse moves to pay homage to the original choreography. Your cast handled them well, so I felt you could have given them even more to help minimize the repetition. Also, continue to work to make the movement come out of the motivations dictated by the storytelling, with dancers moving organically from entrances to movement to exits all within character and the style of the piece. Good work incorporating the acrobatic skills of your cast members.

**B:** I saw a very presentational style of choreography and staging in this show. I thought this approach effectively told the story through grand, circus-style movements and gestures. The energy and animation of the staging was very entertaining and full of life. It kept the action of the play moving forward. Really excellent work.

**C:** This choreography is so much fun! The circus, hurdy-gurdy atmosphere of the "traveling troupe of actors" works so well. I enjoyed the lively interplay of the ensemble. Their connection and interaction help the audience sense that they are "in cahoots", and the dance numbers truly own the space and carry the story forward.

### **Orchestra:**

**A:** The sound of this orchestra was lovely, with parts played well and with balance both within the group and with the performers on stage. I felt some needed energy could have been fostered by quicker tempi (i.e. *Magic to Do* and the bulk of *No Time at All*), which would have made those tempo change moments within the numbers have more impact (i.e. when Berthe’s slower introduction moves into the *a tempo* verse and again when she goes from the *a tempo* section into the more thoughtful “Time to keep living” section). Overall, very nice – and what a great experience for the actors to get to work with a live orchestra and conductor!

**B:** This orchestra sounded great, with a rich sound. They were clearly well rehearsed and ready for this score. I heard appropriate tempi played throughout the show. I heard a very equal balance between the orchestra pieces. The orchestra's deportment, etiquette and dress were very professional; each in full black attire. This orchestra had a confident, lively and full sound. I felt at ease listening because I could hear this orchestra knowing and owning the material. Outstanding good work.

**C:** The orchestra does a fine job with this score, producing a big professional sound in numbers like "Magic to Do", "No Time at All" and "Finale" without overpowering the performers onstage and modulating beautifully to underscore the quieter, more intimate numbers like Catherine's "There He Was" and the Catherine and Pippin duet, "Love Song".

### **Scenic Design:**

**A:** The set design worked nicely, with big spaces to allow for full cast movement. The upstage platform with the stairs and curtained inner below center section, which were reminiscent of the most recent Broadway revival design, gave opportunities for a variety of pictures.

**B:** I saw effective use of scenic elements in this production. The main playing stairway with the inner below was very effective. It provided space for many of the numbers. The Chapel of Isle reverse side served the action of the play well. Very clever use of the same set piece painted differently. The bed for Catherine and Pippin's interior scenes was very effective; easily movable, well constructed and built to appropriate scale.

**C:** This fine set design uses the large space very well, giving the performers opportunity to use a variety of levels. The two grand staircases, the inner above and curtained inner below evoke a classical design and help with the Charlemagne -- young prince hook of the story. This continues when the troupe turns the large pieces around to create a cathedral. Good paint job.

### **Lighting Design:**

**A;** Lighting was appropriate and added warmth to the story as well letting us see everyone clearly.

**B:** I saw a very effective light plot for PIPPIN. Playing areas were well illuminated. The use of light level fade up at the top of the show was very well executed. It established the mood of the play that was about to unfold. The use of follow spots for the closing number enhanced the climax of the dramatic action. It did make me think that the use of a follow spot may have been helpful in the number "THE RIGHT TRACK" when the staging carried him to the top of the staircase which was dimly lit. Overall, an effective design. Good work.

**C:** Magnificent job of taking limited resources and making it all work! Actors on stage are easily seen at all times. Well Done.

### **Costume Design:**

**A:** Great variety of designs to create individual looks for each cast member. The Ringmaster look worked well for the Leading Player, and set her off as different and the master of what was happening. Nice attention to detail overall with creative touches for the "armor" and helmets for the military scene. Pippin's shirt look, although appropriate in its style, appeared to slide back on his shoulders causing him to have to pull it forward fairly frequently/noticeably. Securing it to a tighter sleeveless t-shirt lining might have alleviated this issue and still made for easy removal of the shirt when needed,

**B:** I saw very colorful costume design. The choice of color palette lent both a royal and working class/feudal backdrop for the action of the play. The use of purple and gold for the King and muted earth tones for Pippin, told me instantly who these characters were and where they were from. Good fit throughout the entire cast. There was nice attention paid to the details of the period, Good work.

**C:** The costumes are splendid, taking full advantage of the circus theatricality to dress each actor in his or her own distinctive look of piecemeal finery -- top hats, cirque du soleil body suits, explosions of colors and patterns with holy stockings. Fastrada and Leading Player are glamour itself in their Bob Fosse looks. I appreciated the use of what looked to be plastic laundry baskets split open and sprayed bronze to serve as armor. Because Leading Player has so much stage time, her character might benefit from a little more costume variety -- perhaps an added cape with a flash of red satin or trousers of a different fabric even if the black tuxedo look is maintained. The spangled vest is a nice touch in Act 2. Overall, the costume design with its inventive resourcefulness delights the eye and lifts this whole production.

### **Hair and Make-Up Design:**

**A:** Make up for the show was delightful, with each character creating a unique design, but with an overall cohesion of style and complimentary colors. It is a joy to see a concept created for and implemented on a high school stage. Hair was unique as well, and styled appropriately for the activities for the acrobats/dancers with nothing that got in the way of the faces of the performers.

**B:** The hair and make up design served the play well. Rosy cheeks for the female characters along with appropriately tussled hair for the men helped establish the medieval era of the story.

**C:** The hair and make-up design contributed to the overall circus troupe look with each actor sporting his or her individual look. I enjoyed the vividly painted faces and variety of hairstyles that could best be described as "festive".

### **Stage Crew:**

**A:** Smooth - It was obvious that the set changes had been well rehearsed. Sound cues were well executed for the most part, though there were a few which were a bit behind. Light cues were called well.

**B:** This crew worked well to make each transition seamless and keep the action moving forward. There were some very large set pieces in this scenic design to work with, This crew was neither seen nor heard. Every scene change seemed very well rehearsed and executed. Congratulations.

**C:** The stage crew works with precision. Large scene shifts are managed smoothly and swiftly.

### **Catalina Jarocki (Leading Player)**

**A:** The Leading Player was a striking presence on stage. She moved well and sang well. I especially love the hand work she did in the Fosse moves. I would encourage her to delve into the language a bit more and really use the text to move the dialogue forward. This can be accomplished, both in spoken and sung text, by giving energy to the consonants and connecting with breath support to infuse the delivery with energy.

**B:** I saw strong physical movement and dedication to the physical life of the character. I heard very confident vocal production with wonderful articulation. This role is demanding and I felt you brought everything you had to the part. It's not easy to drive the story forward, but I believe you helped keep the action moving forward; especially leading Pippin through the drama. I encourage this actor to continue reaching for lead roles and push your limitations. With additional stage time you will continue to build on the confidence you have on stage currently. Really well done.

**C:** Leading Player has wonderful command onstage, giving both her fellow cast members and the audience a sense of confidence. We are in good hands -- let's take this ride because we have "Magic to Do"! This performer is most successful in the big numbers like "Magic to Do" when her confidence and commitment give her a turbo charged boost to support her breath to the end of lines and keep her sound full and on pitch.

### **Alex Kilian (Pippin)**

**A:** This Pippin was very comfortable on the stage. He moved well and sang with confidence and musicality. I would encourage him to explore the journey of the character and make mental note about who Pippin is at the beginning of the story and who he is at the end of the story. There is a huge story arc to this character and so many ways to develop and share that journey with the audience. At the top, is he excited about the possibilities of life? Is he idealistic? Optimistic? Innocent? How does that opening of the show Pippin act and move? What sort of facial expressions does he have? When, specifically does he start to change and lose those initial attitudes? How does that change the way he moves and the face he shows to the world? I would love to have seen this actor use his face to reflect the places Pippin is as the story progresses. When does he start to fall in love with Catherine, instead of view her as simply a husband hunter? There was a tendency to be contemplative throughout. The posture of looking towards the floor effectively reflects that one process, but can limit the overall range of expression the audience got to see. Perhaps, if there is a starting

place of optimism and upward face – looking ahead to what life has to offer – then the lowered face can show the contrast as he moves towards the hardness of life’s reality.

**B:** I saw a very confident portrayal of Pippin. I noticed superb stage presence and great command of the stage. Animation and energy in movement and acting was exceptional. Vocally, I heard an exceptional performance. I noticed rich placement of tone and very sharp articulation. If anything, I encourage this actor to continue working on outwardly expressing the physical life of the character. Believability is one of your strong suits as an actor. Continued work in expressing with the body will compliment a very strong and rich vocal instrument. Congratulations on a very fine performance.

**C:** Pippin is well spoken with a warm voice. In "Corner of the Sky" he makes a dramatic connection with his fellow cast members and with the audience. From these early moments we are engaged with this young Prince Pippin and very willing to follow him on his journey. He has a remarkable technical command -- a rich warm voice, a focused energy, and a fine sense of comic timing. We believe Pippin's desire to be a good son to Charles in Act 1, and his scenes with Catherine in Act 2 are simple and lovely. This is a wonderfully talented young actor, fully invested in his role and sharing his story with his audience.

**Jessica Conlon (Catherine):**

**C:** This actress does a wonderful job of playing an actress playing a role, discovering her true feelings, then defiantly dropping the mask to cast her lot with Pippin. It's quite a needle to thread, and she does it effortlessly. This is a fully realized performance. Her numbers, "The He Was" and "Kind of Woman" and her duet with Pippin, "Love Song", are sung with warmth and honesty. Catherine's role in the show is to present clear choice for Pippin -- plain truth vs. razzle dazzle. This key job is in good hands.

**Chorus:**

**A:** This chorus took on their many roles in a fun and effective way. Good characterizations of the courtiers/peasants, etc., with good diction in line delivery. I would urge them to analyze the role which the ensemble in this story is called upon to play. Is there a difference between when they are a part of the theatrical company staging this show and when they are playing the characters within that show? If so, how does an actor show that difference with their attitude and physicality? Nice choral sound. As the ensemble in this piece was not mic'd, I would encourage the chorus to really energize their singing, connecting to breath and using clear consonants to really get their text out to the audience in musical theater style!

**B:** I thought this chorus was appropriately animated throughout the show; energetic and easy to watch. Vocally, the score sounded very clear and the entire chorus seemed very well prepared. All actors were appropriately engaged in the main plot while remaining in character. I noticed appropriate levels of animation and attention to individual characterizations. This chorus seemed to understand the important job of supporting the action of the play and providing the believable world of the drama. This was all accomplished without taking away focus from the main action. Really Great work.

**C:** This chorus is fun and fascinating from the moment we see that row of hands all across the stage waving under the curtain. We can imagine the entire chorus crouching behind the curtain in anticipation. Suddenly there they are -- the circus troupe! Each character is a specialty act performing tricks (a unicyclist, a couple of tumblers, a juggler). Vocally, the chorus is most successful when they are all singing together. Individual singing parts are sometimes lost when we can't tell who is singing. The scene work is first rate -- full of energy and clearly focused. They are a force!

**Overall:**

**A:** In addition to the things mentioned above, I would like to give a congratulations to the royal family (Charles, Fastrada and Lewis) who all have a strong sense of presence on stage and made good acting choices for their characters.

**B:** This show was a very bright and warm on a chilly, snowy winter afternoon. I was very impressed that each actor, orchestra member and stage crew person brought everything they had to this matinee. I also found the lobby area, ticket takers and ushers very friendly and helpful. I appreciate the hard work you exhibited on stage and the care you exercised in providing a welcoming theatre experience. Congratulations.

**C:** Congratulations on presenting a deceptively difficult musical like Pippin with its stylized sophistication and dark themes with such success. The heartfelt commitment of cast and crew are very apparent.