

THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

THE MUSICAL THEATRE & ACTORS STUDIO



Director's Notes

It is always around this time of the year – as we welcome in the holidays – when things seem to move at a frighteningly rapid pace. I hope you and yours will find the time to take some deep breaths, live in the moment, and enjoy the spirit this season can offer. [I'm doing my very best to take my own advice, too!]

This fourth issue highlights the many advantages we have because of our strong partnership with the Signature Theatre, to include our first field trip and second masterclass of the year. And, as usual, you'll have the opportunity to hear directly from both students and our friends from the industry.

Second quarter has started off strong, with each class taking a deep dive into the Golden Age of Musical Theatre, a time period [1943-1964] when Broadway hit its stride, producing the showstoppers that have become part of the canon of musical theatre. Outside of traditional research and discussion, students have also performed and workshopped 32-bar song cuts, participated in a Book Club [with our classroom text: "Nothing Like a Damn by Eddie Shapiro], and learned choreography from Ashleigh King...our second invited guest artist.

It has been incredibly exciting to officially start the rehearsal process for our upcoming production of *Cry-Baby: the Musical*. With just three days under our belts, students have exhibited a focus and professionalism that – if continues – will result in a show not to be missed! Ticket information will be shared soon!

With Gratitude,

Erich DiCenzo

DIRECTOR OF THE MUSICAL THEATRE & ACTORS STUDIO

♪ "The people called it *Ragtime!*" ♪



MTAS students pose with Mr. DiCenzo in the lobby of Signature Theatre before the student matinee of *Ragtime*

On Wednesday, November 8th, forty-six of our students joined Mr. DiCenzo and our Academy's Career Experience Specialist, Ms. Amy Hard, to see Signature Theatre's student matinee performance of *Ragtime*...an incredibly moving piece of musical theatre that left students reflecting on its message and power.

"Ragtime was a whirl of emotions. The show was incredible, and I was crying for most of the second act. Ragtime is a complicated story to tell but the actors at Signature Theatre really put it all together and I could understand it all."

Kathryn Whitis [Fairfax HS]

"I don't think I've ever been moved so much by a performance as I was during Ragtime. The raw emotion that the cast displayed was incredible to witness, and certainly left a lot of us, including myself, more than just teary-eyed by the time the lights came up. It really was a great experience."

Madelyn Regan [Centreville HS]

"When I went into the theatre I was not expecting everything that happened in that room. This show honestly blew me away, so I went home after that and listened to the entire soundtrack."

Scarlett Anthony [Westfield HS]

Set in the early 20th century, *Ragtime* tells the story of three groups in the United States: African Americans, represented by Coalhouse Walker Jr., a Harlem musician; upper-class suburbanites, represented by Mother, the matriarch of a white upper-class family in New Rochelle, New York; and Eastern European immigrants, represented by Tateh, a Jewish immigrant from Latvia. The show also incorporates historical figures such as Harry Houdini, Evelyn Nesbit, Booker T. Washington, J. P. Morgan, Henry Ford, Stanford White, Harry Kendall Thaw, Admiral Peary, Matthew Henson, and Emma Goldman.

“When Can We Come Back!?”

The energy in the lobby of Signature Theatre was palpable after the student matinee of *Ragtime*. Our students connected with peers from other schools in attendance and offered their feedback for Signature’s Marketing & Social Media Managers. The room was already a buzz with students asking: “When can we come back?” In an effort to answer that question, I reached out to David Zobell, Signature’s Education Director:

Q: Can you offer a little history lesson of your student matinees?
A: Our first student matinees were in 2015 with West Side Story. We've done at least one student matinee every year since then with the exception of the 2021/22 season. We just weren't ready. During our virtual 2020/21 season, we offered school streaming options for our virtual productions.

Q: What motivated their return?
A: I feel very, very strongly about our need to do these matinees and, over time, I think everyone on staff has come to see their necessity too. The casts of the shows always rank the student matinees as their best audiences, they bring such a vibrant and vocal response to the shows. And I think it's important that kids not only see professional theater but that they see that high-quality professional musicals exist outside of New York City.

Q: Do you hope to continue your student matinee series in the future?
A: We will definitely continue to do them every season. My personal long-term goal is to reach a point where we offer at least one student matinee on every high school appropriate show we do. We're not there yet but I think we will be within the next few seasons.

INDUSTRY-LEVEL INSPIRATION

First semester’s Signature Workshop series focused on choreography. Earlier last month, students met Maurice Johnson and they’re wrapping up this month with Ashleigh King, who just so happens to have served as the Choreographer for *Ragtime*. Exposing students to relevant industry professionals is an invaluable resource to their growth and development as artists. And – again – it seems the inspiration shared works both ways!

The students at Fairfax Academy continue to amaze me with their talent, focus and love for what they do! As an educator and artist, I’ve been afforded the opportunity to work with many high school programs locally and abroad. However, few have compared to my experience with Fairfax Academy. I must applaud Erich Dicenzo and the faculty for instilling a drive in the students that I haven’t witnessed in quite some time. They inspire me to do better and to be better. The talent and skill set of these students show no boundaries. I will be surprised if Broadway doesn’t come knocking!

Maurice Johnson
Signature Theatre Guest Teaching Artist

“We haven’t gotten to tackle contemporary choreography in class yet, but Maurice brought a style and flare that was new and so much fun! Working with Maurice was so refreshing, and I loved dancing to artists we hear on the radio...like Lizzo!”

Nina Wilborn [Hayfield HS]

“It was so inspiring to learn choreography that collegiate performers were working on at their schools and getting a taste of that here in MTAS!”
M Ulses [Madison HS]

We Crushed Our Goal!



With thirty-three contributions, averaging \$185 each, we have officially reached [and passed] our goal! The funds raised through our MTAS Sponsorship will support our continued efforts of providing students enrolled in the Academy with industry-level exposure and experiences.

Even with our goal reached, please consider [still] contributing and becoming an official sponsor today. Each sponsorship level comes with great incentives!

[CLICK HERE](#)
...to see the incentives available and make your contribution TODAY!

ALUMNI CHECK-IN

It is always around this time of year when our past MTAS students find themselves on Fall and Winter breaks, and when some of them stop by to say hello. When they do, we not only have a chance to check-in, but also get the most relevant – firsthand – experience of what life is like in their respective college programs. This month we heard from students at Roosevelt College, Syracuse University, and the Hartt School.

A LOOK AHEAD

Friday, November 30th & December 1st
Signature Theatre Workshop
with Ashleigh King
Choreographer of *Ragtime*

Friday, December 15th
Last Day Before Winter Break