

AUGUST 2016



PRODUCTIONS

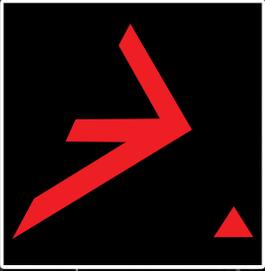
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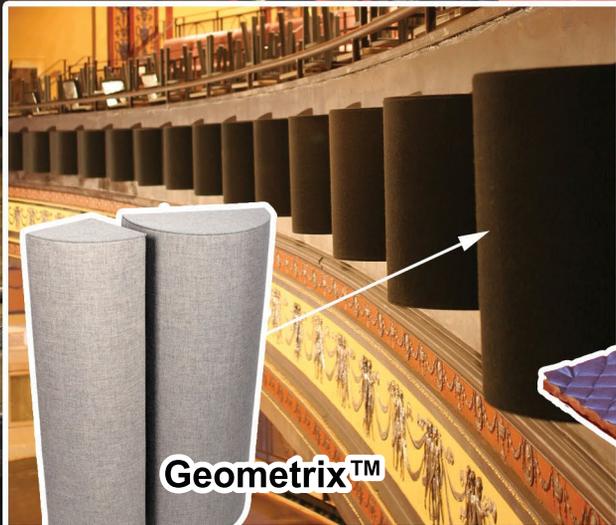
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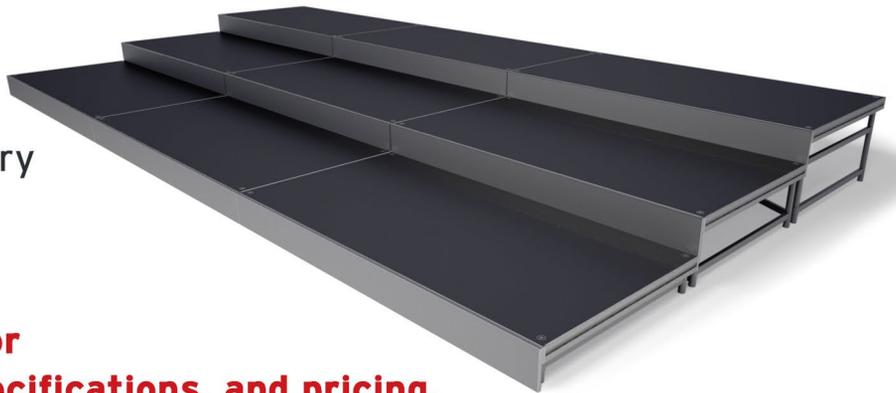


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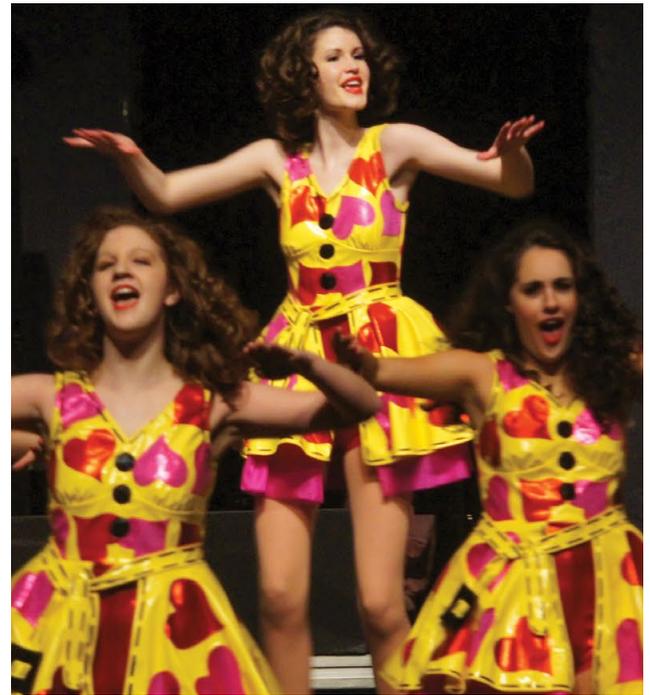
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LOS ALAMITOS SOUND FX: WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

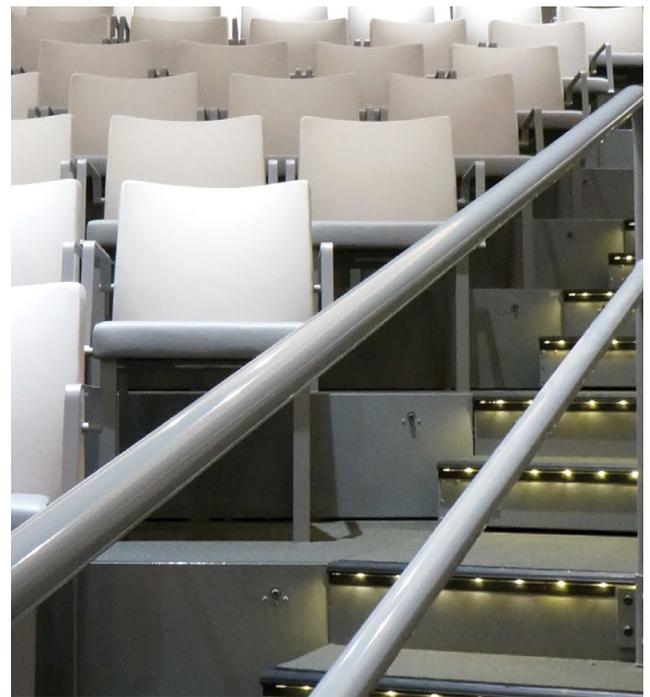
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EDITOR'S LETTER

No one is more optimistic as the year starts than a teacher, particularly a passionate and creative educator brimming with excitement for the season and ideas for the future. And, no one is more tired, emotionally and physically drained, than that same teacher as the end of a semester or end of term draws near. Students might be counting down the days to the next break, but teachers are sometimes counting the minutes! There's a reason for this—the more passionate and caring the educator, the more exhausting his or her job is likely to be.

In the January/February issue of *Harvard Business Review*, Adam Waytz's "The Limits of Empathy" suggests that while empathy is "all the rage pretty much everywhere" in most any talk of management—even judged to be a fundamental skill of effective leadership—it can also tax us both physically and emotionally, perhaps ultimately impairing ethical judgment. Waytz explains, "The more we spend on one person or group, the less we have left for others." He suggests one easy tool to remedy these cracks is to give people "empathy breaks" so they may begin to "replenish their reserves" by focusing solely on their personal needs and nothing else.

First of all, Waytz explains, empathy is exhausting—a constant drain on our mental resources. As such, any job that requires empathy throughout the average workday leads to "compassion fatigue." I was chatting with a new friend of mine recently, Dr. Jenny Mascaro at Emory College, who was working on a study that focused on the ways compassion fatigue resulted from professionals who were constantly sacrificing their own needs in order to tend to the needs of others. Now, does that sound familiar to you, as devoted educators and creative professionals? It probably also sounds familiar to boosters and organizers, the family members who are constantly putting their needs last so that they can give everything they have to the betterment of the group. As a culture, we typically honor self-sacrifice as a concept and praise people who tend to put others before their presumably self-centered needs, but Waytz notes that there are multiple dangers to ignoring this reality—one of which is impaired performance.

Secondly, Waytz notes that empathy is zero-sum; even while draining our cognitive resources and sapping our energy, it is depleting itself. An example, he notes, is that the more empathy he devotes to his spouse means the less he has left to give his mother; the more empathy he devotes to his mother, the less he has for his son. He stresses how important it is for us to recognize that both our desire to show empathy and the effort required to demonstrate that empathy come in limited supplies.

Finally, empathy run amok can erode ethics, Waytz believes, causing significant lapses in judgment. As empathy engenders loyalty to anyone in your group you consider "insiders" (whatever that group may be), it can also inspire anger and aggression to anyone viewed as an outsider. When we emphasize with these "insiders" to an unhealthy degree, it leaves us open to overlooking problems that we should be addressing. Additionally, people can use this "ostensible altruism to rationalize their dishonesty." He adds, "In short, empathy for those within one's immediate circle can conflict with justice for all."

Waytz notes two potential solutions to excessive empathy: (1) He suggests splitting the work on any task, asking those you lead to focus on certain groups rather than expecting them to "empathize with anyone and everyone." In this way, you are creating a task force to address various needs, and the work of maintaining relationships is less individually burdensome. This could be good advice when you are determining which creative directors in your program are in charge of which items—which parents are in charge of which responsibilities. (2) He also suggests looking for ways to make empathy feel like less of a sacrifice. Noting that our mindsets "can either intensify or lessen our susceptibility to empathy overload," he also recommends that we avoid the dreaded "burnout" by finding integrative solutions.

Most importantly, don't forget to take that time for yourself. If you are running on empty, you can't take anyone where they need to be—you can't even get there yourself. We need to ensure we can show compassion for our students and train them in empathy, but we also need to remember our own empathy reserves have to be regularly replenished, or we have nothing to give.



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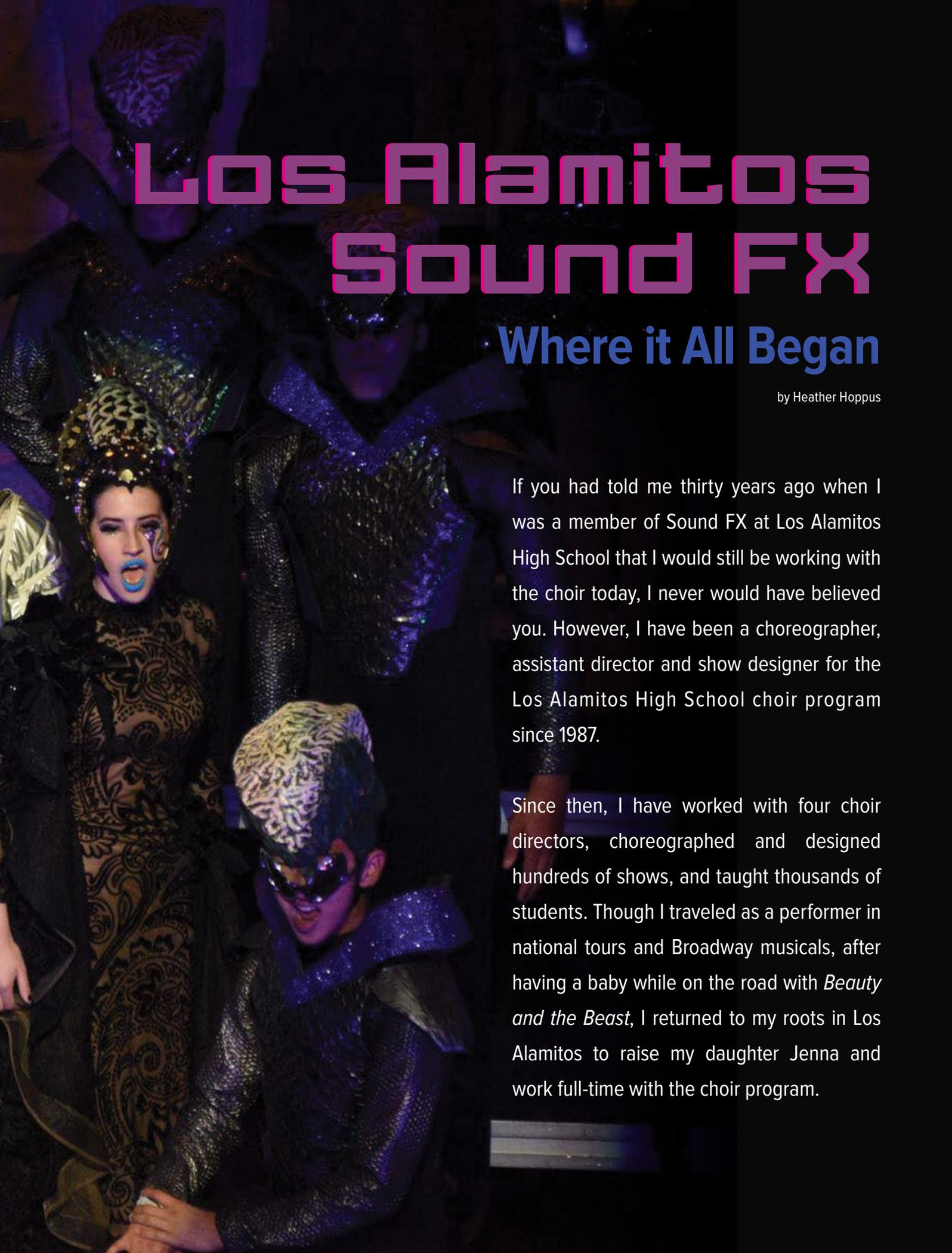
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Los Alamitos Sound FX

Where it All Began

by Heather Hoppus

If you had told me thirty years ago when I was a member of Sound FX at Los Alamitos High School that I would still be working with the choir today, I never would have believed you. However, I have been a choreographer, assistant director and show designer for the Los Alamitos High School choir program since 1987.

Since then, I have worked with four choir directors, choreographed and designed hundreds of shows, and taught thousands of students. Though I traveled as a performer in national tours and Broadway musicals, after having a baby while on the road with *Beauty and the Beast*, I returned to my roots in Los Alamitos to raise my daughter Jenna and work full-time with the choir program.



PHOTO BY IRENE SOULE

The Early Roots of a National Champion

In the 1980's there were very few choir programs in California where they sang and danced. Our director at the time, Ralph Opacic, wanted us to be like The Young Americans, so we took off the long chiffon dresses and brown tuxes, put on jeans and brightly colored t-shirts and started performing high energy medleys with athletic and complex dance elements.

In the beginning, Los Al was not a competitive choir. We focused mostly on four large-themed production shows each year on campus that started to attract a huge following. When Dr. Randi Carp took over as choral director in 1992, she wanted to get involved in the show choir competition circuit, so we started to compete locally and we soon figured out that although we had amazing talent, there were a lot of technical elements we needed to add to our shows in order to be competitive with the other groups in the area. In 2008, Dr. Carp left, so the district set out to find a replacement for her. The program had grown significantly, so we wanted someone that could take us to the next level.

Gail Hart from Hart High School suggested that we meet a successful director from Sullivan, Illinois, named David Moellenkamp; she thought he was a perfect match for our school. After interviewing several candidates, it was clear that he was the right man for the job. I could tell right away that our styles would complement each other well and that he would do amazing things for our program.

Taking over an established program from such a beloved director could have been a very challenging and difficult task for anyone. David stepped in with energy and contagious enthusiasm that won over the kids immediately. Thus began a new era of show choir at Los Alamitos High School.

A Director Unlike Any Other

David Moellenkamp is unlike any director I have ever encountered. His ability to motivate and engage a group of students is extraordinary in that he is able to get them to work at very high levels and accomplish things they never thought they could do. In addition to teaching his students to take ownership of their material and take personal responsibility for the success of

their group, he set high expectations for each student regardless of which group they are in or their level of experience. He makes every student feel important, like a vital part of the team.

From the beginning, he established a mentorship program to bridge the gap between existing members in the advanced groups with the incoming members. The older students teach the new kids the ways of the group and how to be successful in the program, not only as performers but in the social aspects of the choir as well. He has created a family atmosphere where each student has a place to call home in a school with over 3,200 students.

A Master Recruiter

Because David is constantly recruiting students to the program, you will often find him outside the classroom introducing himself to students and encouraging them to come see a show and participate in the program. Several times a year, he works with the elementary and junior high music programs, developing personal connections with the kids. Every student knows Mr. Moellenkamp; he is like a celebrity on campus.



PHOTO BY IRENE SOULE

Once a year, he has all of the boys in the district perform a combined number in our annual choral festival. This year, we had over 300 boys from ages 7 to 18 singing and dancing together, and the bonds these boys form inspire the younger kids to stay involved in the music program. They learn that choir isn't just for kids who don't play sports; they see that choir is the cool place to be.

Over the years, our artistic staff has expanded to fit the needs of our rapidly growing program. To accommodate our 600-plus students, we have a full-time accompanist, a full-time second director, an administrative assistant, an arranger and several choreographers. Additionally, it takes an army of parent volunteers to organize thousands of costumes, travel arrangements and all the tech elements involved in our shows. We are fortunate to have an amazing booster club that provides us with support and fundraising opportunities for the students and their families, so that everyone can participate in the program. Our biggest fundraiser of the year is Xtravaganza, which is one of the largest regional choir competitions in the country.

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Creative Genius

Much of our success is due to the creative genius of April James and her inventive and groundbreaking choreography. April is always open to new ideas and suggestions, and she brings positive energy and excitement to the rehearsal process. April takes the time to get to know each and every student, and she genuinely cares about them as people, they are not just X's and O's on a blocking chart. Her commitment and dedication to our program, along with her imaginative and original choreography, have helped us establish a reputation for unique and memorable award-winning performances. She also has an uncanny ability

to remember every single student's name.

Similarly, our arranger, Josh Greene, is a musical prodigy. He can take a song that you would never think a choir would sing and turn it into a choral masterpiece. Sometimes he will suggest a song like "Smells Like Teen Spirit," "Spaceman" or "Lazereto," and we will say to him, "There is no way you can make that work." Then, Josh shows up with a brilliant arrangement, and we are all grateful that we trusted him.

Even when surrounded by creative geniuses, passionate group members, and supportive parents, it is a difficult process coming up with new and cutting-edge ideas and concepts for six shows a year. We start



PHOTO BY IRENE SOULE

planning our competition sets in advance in the spring for our six competitive groups. As we spend countless hours over the summer researching themes, rearranging storylines and designing the sets and costumes for each show, it truly is a team effort involving an enormous amount of research, text messages and emails. We come up with some of our best ideas while driving in the car or sometimes in the middle of the night! Though it can be frustrating, we love this part of the process. This is what makes show choir exciting and alive—it is an ever-changing and always evolving art form.

Taking On Broadway

In October and December, we present Broadway and holiday concerts featuring all 600 students from seven periods of choir, performing medleys from different musicals and movies. Not only do I get to use my Broadway training to teach different styles of choreography and also incorporate acting, but our students also have an opportunity to directly interact with industry professionals that we invite to set.

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In late spring, we have started a tradition of producing a full-scale Broadway musical with our zero period concert choir and school orchestra. This past year we did *Les Miserables* with over 200 students. My close friends Sarah Uriarte-Berry and Michael Berry, who were both stars in the Broadway production, volunteered to help direct. We performed to a sold-out crowd of 2,500 people, and it was a spectacular evening. Even more impressive is that the students had learned the entire show in just three weeks after returning home from winning Fame Nationals in Chicago.

Coming Full Circle

Like most show choirs, once competition season begins we spend our weekends from February to May packing our truck and traveling around the country competing. In the warm-up room, David always says that he doesn't care what place they come in; he just wants them to do their best and leave everything on the stage. What matters most is that they do their job and that they are supportive and encouraging to other groups. Years from now, the



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audience won't remember who won; they will remember how the performance made them feel.

On a personal level, my life in show choir has now come full-circle. My daughter, Jenna Lea Rosen, has been a member and soloist in Sound FX for the past two years. It has been a surreal and wonderful experience watching her sing and dance on the same stage where I once performed. Proudly, I watched as she brought home six best soloist awards this year, including three at national championships.

While these last few years with Jenna have been particularly special, I have stayed at Los Alamitos High School for so long because it is part of the history of who I am. I can feel the memories of past students and friends around me when I am there, which gives me great comfort and peace. We get to make a positive difference in the world, one kid at a time.

Heather Hoppus has been a show choir choreographer and show designer at Los Alamitos High School for over 30 years. She has worked extensively on Broadway, in national tours and on film and television as a singer, dancer, actress and casting director.

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A DELICATE CONVERSATION:

COSTUMING SUPPORT FOR FEMALE SHOW CHOIR PERFORMERS

by Deborah Nelson

Recently, I have heard much discussion on whether female performers must wear a bra, a decision which can restrict some types of costuming choices. Support is needed for the bustline, so obviously a bra or bust cups/pads need to be incorporated into adult-sized costumes, unless the garment is cut so that the performer can wear her own undergarments without having the straps or any other part of her bra showing.

Some of the more scanty costumes literally use a bra or bustier and just stone the heck out of it, hoping no one in the audience will realize they are seeing underwear. Apparently, in this day and age, that can work—we have become fairly desensitized since 1980s Madonna, perhaps—but is it a wise or modest choice? Likely not. The better option is to cover the bra or bustier with fabric, and then decorate it. This will provide the best supportive costume and it will be, for lack of a better word, “proper.”

Maintaining Shape

The best starting point is to have the bust area of each of your female performer's costume to fit her properly, which means that it contours to her individual bustline shape, hugging her bosom. If this part of the costume is created in a non-stretch fabric, it must be supportive; for instance, a prom-style dress manufactured in taffeta or in a woven satin must come with an extra layer of support and/or some boning, in order to maintain the intended shape of the costume.

Sometimes the costumes you find perfect for your set simply don't correctly fit the bustline. When this happens, either the bodice can be altered with boning, which is fairly difficult, or the space can be filled with pre-made "cups" or pads. Adding what are known in the industry as "chicken cutlets," "pierogis" or "biscuits"—nicknames for those polyester fiber-filled bust pads that fill and shape the bustline area—can be used. Do not forget, however, that you absolutely must have these "cups" pinned in or sewn in so they don't make an escape during an especially rigorous dance move.

No One-Size-Fits-All Approach

With the varying shapes and sizes of bust pads, the only way to know what works best with any given garment is to have various styles on hand, and then experiment with what looks and feels best. Unfortunately, the one-size-fits-all approach definitely won't work in this case.

If the costuming is spandex or some other stretchy material, you'll likely need to create additional support, as the most minimal construction would offer only a thin layer of spandex. Of course, if that layer were tight enough, the support might be enough for a smaller bustline—but not for even an adult medium-sized bustline and most assuredly not for a larger bustline. At least a double layer of

spandex is preferable, and a costume with a bustline that has darts or seaming that is shaped to form a tightly fitting cup is even a better option. Of course, adding additional bust pads could also help.

Bras can be altered and adjusted to fit inside all types of open back, or nearly open backed garments. It is difficult to cut through under wires, but other than this, bras and corsets can be trimmed down to fit a neckline and the backs and/or straps can be cut away.

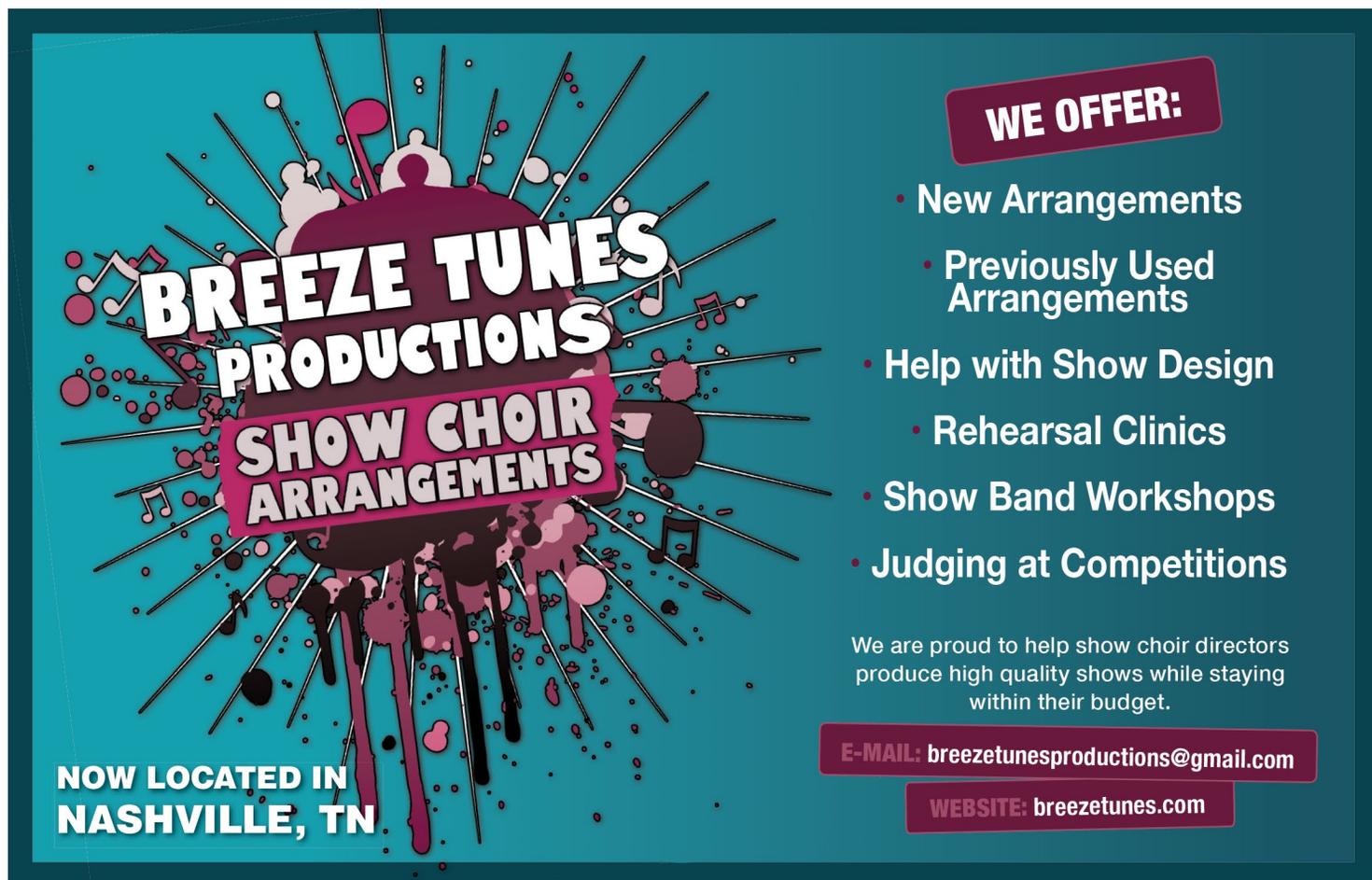
The Laws of Physics

The laws of physics will dictate what you can do, to substitute for cut away backs or straps. Generally areas can be filled in with stretch mesh or decorative (or my personal least favorite: utilitarian elastic straps) can be strategically placed, instead of the original bra straps. Plan to experiment with how to best create a bustline to support performers so they will feel comfortable with the result and look great as well.

While you are paging through numerous catalogs with front-only pictures and/or looking at samples of these costumes, think about better options for your dancers. Think about age appropriate costuming in regard to bust support. Can your female performers really concentrate on footwork, hand movements, and facial expressions if their breasts are not fully supported in their costumes?

For comfort, proper support is needed. Our regular day-to-day clothing generally includes a bra, both for support of the breasts, and to help restrict the movement of the breasts during physical exercise. The sport bra was invented for the more extreme movements of rigorous sports. Some clothing has built-in bust support, such as swim suits and exercise apparel.

Show choir costumes that are styled with modest backs that can accommodate a good bra is a good idea. Show choir costumes that



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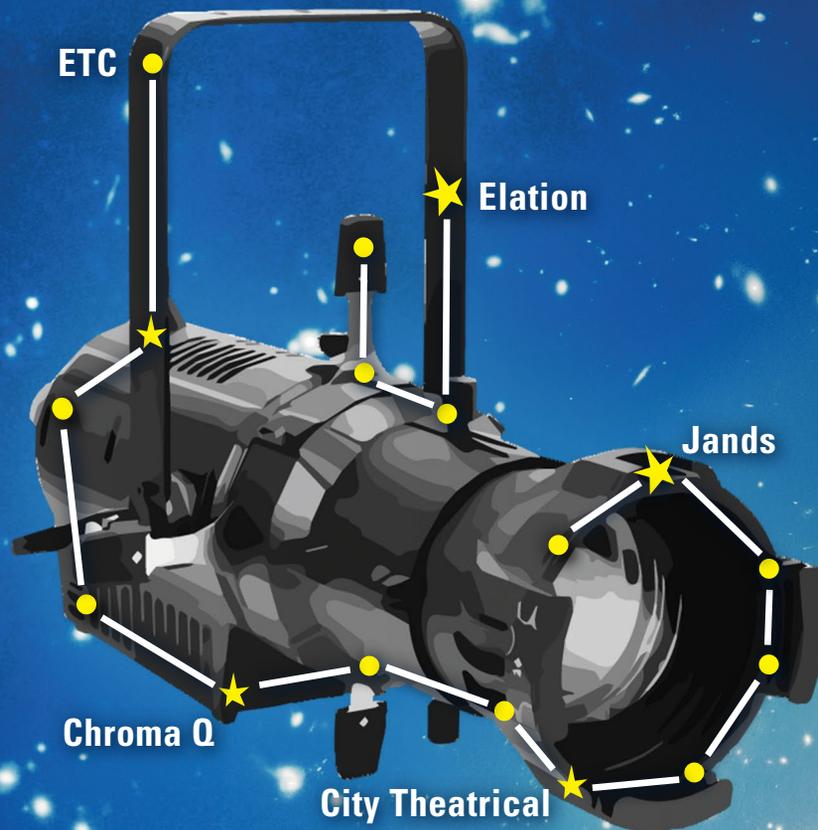
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As you pick costuming for your set and for your season, please consider all of the physical and emotional issues when considering dance costumes so that your female dancers feel supported in all the right ways.

are cut with less-modest backs can work when styled to cover certain types of bras. Show choir costumes that are styled to fit tightly around the chest and fit the performers properly are also good.

The current popular A-line halter cut dresses are an example of the worst possible design for supporting the bustline. If they aren't worn with a bra, the dresses are everywhere. They are loosely cut, so nothing at all is supporting the breasts—which is, quick frankly, distracting for an audience.

Bare Midriffs and Open-Back Styles

Bare midriffs are still very stylish. However, do all of your female performers have midriffs that are perfectly toned and will look good, when shown off? If not, cover them up. A compromise would be to have a costume

with a cut-out in the midriff area, or utilize nude-toned sheer spandex mesh for a bare look from a distance.

If you need the bare, open-back look, consider the same nude-toned, sheer spandex mesh fabric to help with the support issue by covering the neck and shoulder areas. The nude fabric can also be lined or non-see-through so that your dancers will look like they have lots of skin showing, but will be able to wear their favorite supportive bras. This fabric can be dyed to various skin tones, in addition to being available from different companies, in different skin tones.

A hideous look, in my opinion, is when some performers wear sport bras under a backless costume. Aside from the—again—likely inappropriate nature of undergarments being seen with a performance costume—there's an additional problem created when some in the group use different garments.

Groups should be striving to be uniform for their performance. Please avoid nude or clear straps as well; you still see them, so it's best to make them match the costume.

Most high school organizations have addressed both the open back, bare midriff, and visible bra strap issues with varying results. In fact, some states have banned any bare skin or bare skin-looking fabric at all from neck to thigh, while others allow nude fabric for use in the midriff or neckline and shoulder area. There are many options for bust support and keeping the open back look: duct tape, the throw-away stick on-bras, form-fitting costumes that have bust seaming, built-in shelf bras, bust pads or cups that are sewn into or safety pinned to the garment. All of these are better than nothing, but the best option is a good supportive bra.

On a side-note, one bad option is a strapless bra. They are uncomfortable to stand in, let alone dance in. It also shapes the body unnaturally, fitting especially poorly under form-fitting spandex. You can see where the bra starts and stops. Good back designs that help with bust support generally are more costly than backless, but are they not worth it?

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Considering All Figure Types

All figure types of a show choir performance group must be considered when ordering costumes for the group, as excellent performers come in all shapes and sizes. As such, directors must imagine each and every one of your female performers in any costume you are considering ordering. These girls pay lots of money for the opportunity to participate, and you don't want them paying for costuming they are embarrassed to perform in.

Obviously everyone has different tastes as to what is the perfect costume for a particular performance, and not everyone will be happy with the choice. But make it a wise choice. Adolescent girls can have negative self-images, so please do not contribute to this by forcing them to wear inappropriate costumes. There are many, many costume choices out there every season. Please choose wisely.

As you pick costuming for your set and for your season, please consider all of the physical and emotional issues when considering dance costumes so that your female dancers feel supported in all the right ways.



Deborah J. Nelson is the Founder/Head Designer for Satin Stitches Ltd., a custom performance costume manufacturer located in Minneapolis, MN since 1978. Ms. Nelson has a BFA degree in Fashion Design and worked in the garment manufacturing industry for 4+ years before starting Satin Stitches. Call 763-323-9507 or 1-800-48SATIN or email customerservice@satinstitches.com for more information.

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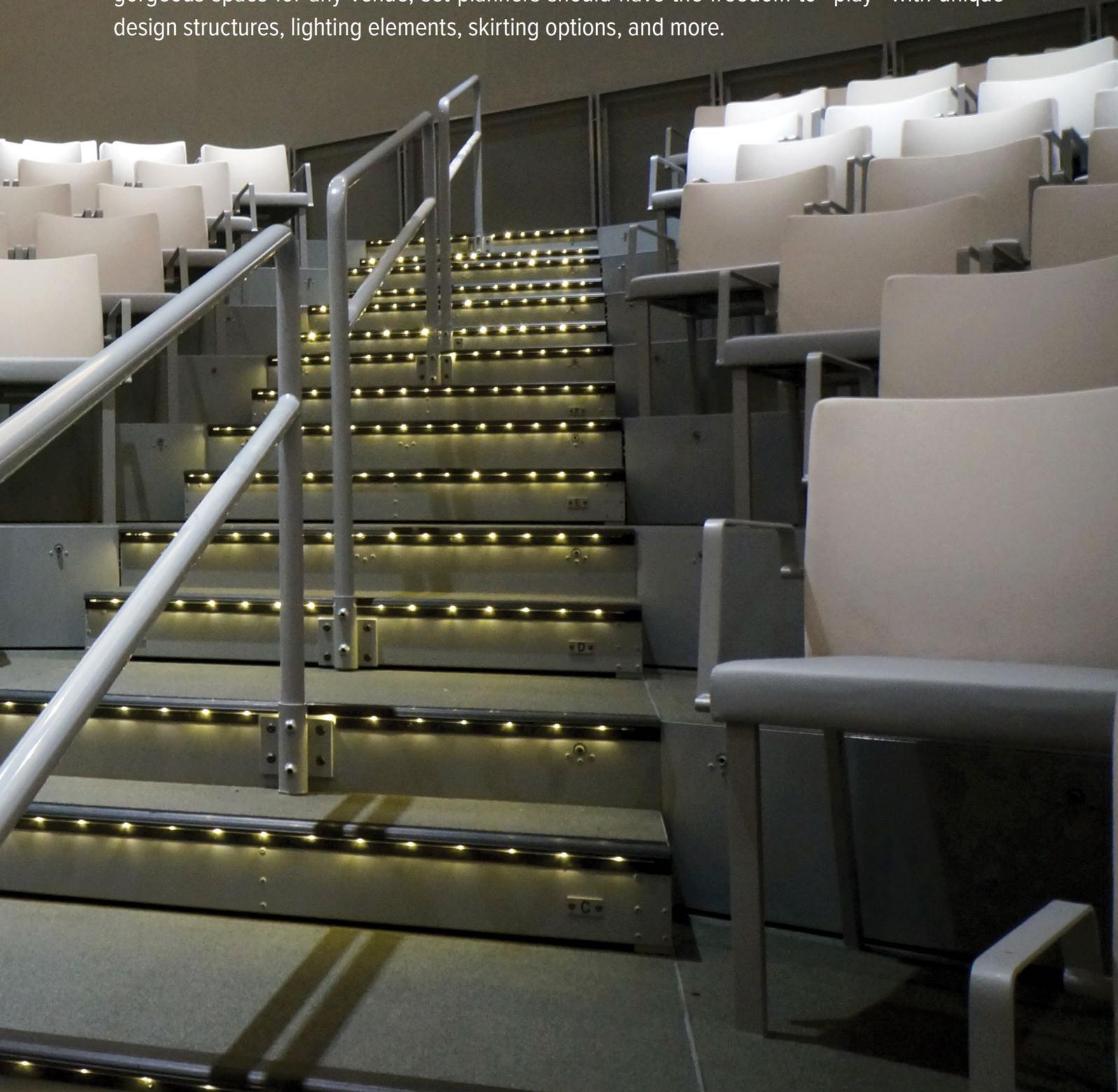
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Dressing Up the Stage

by Chelsea Johnson

When adjusting a venue or stage for a performance, some key factors to incorporate are the theater's acoustical, structural and functional aspects. Apart from the larger structural improvements or additions, there are many different ways to dress up a stage. To create a gorgeous space for any venue, set planners should have the freedom to “play” with unique design structures, lighting elements, skirting options, and more.



Skirting, which is typically the first choice for dressing up a performance stage, provides a classic appearance that serves a functional purpose (concealing the supports) and adding style. Skirting provides a nice finishing touch for any space.

Stage Skirting Clips or LED Lighting

For show choirs and traveling performers, stage skirting clips are a perfect solution. The skirting is easily removable and storable, making for a quick and easy set-up of a portable performance stage. Skirt clips can either be removed or simply left in place when platforms are stored. Usually, all skirting is custom-made and is fit specifically to each performance stage. Standard skirting is black wyndham material with 50% pleat fullness, but other options are also available from a variety of industry leaders. Skirting is a perfect solution to dress up a stage for any type of performance or venue.

If you decide not to include skirting, LED lighting can be a great tool to enhance the stage look. By arranging colored or strobe lights underneath the platforms, aluminum legs can serve as a reflector, adding flair and the illusion of motion under the stage to fantastic effect.

When a more intricate, flexible design is required, there are opportunities to mix things up a bit. Custom finishes, materials and a tight fitting stage system can really differentiate a space, as was the case with the San Francisco Opera.

Reviving a Historic Space

In February 2016, the San Francisco Opera opened the new Diane B. Wilsey Center for the Opera. The Center was part of a 40,000 square foot renovation to the 1930s-era Veterans Building, located just north of the 3,146 seat Opera House. The 299-seat Taube Atrium Theatre is located on the 4th Floor of the Wilsey Center, and was previously occupied by the Museum of Modern Art. The idea for the space was to be both intimate and flexible, yet somewhat informal. They wanted a space that would offer the ability to push performance boundaries, inspire a new generation of audiences, and be relevant for decades into the future.

The list of challenges was long. The Opera needed the equipment and technology to make the space flexible for the experimental performance styles and acoustical techniques that future performances might dream up. They also needed to modify the historic

fourth-floor space to handle the weight loads of an audience, and have the ability to control the lighting and acoustics for professional performances.

One of the most important elements considered was the ability to manipulate the audience configurations and sight lines. Based in Minnesota, Staging Concepts was selected to build flexible audience risers and stages that would meet two primary configurations, but would allow for many variations, with every design detail, material, and finish meticulously considered.

The understructure of the risers are powder-coated black to disappear in the darkness, and are also closed off with custom steel mesh closure panels. The panels transition seamlessly into custom raker guardrail engineered to meet the loading criteria of the International Building Code, but can also be installed quickly using a minimalist design by allowing the rail to lock directly into the platform frames.

The closure panels, guardrail, handrail, platform frames, and stairs are all powder-coated gray to blend into the gray walls of the performance space. The custom gray carpet was selected to match the room aesthetics as well as dampen performance reverberation

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Staging accessories like powder-coating, skirting, and unique surfaces can create a disappearing affect to the set, directing the audience's attention to the performance. Even in smaller venues such as high school auditoriums, college performance halls or public spaces, much can be done to dress up the stage in a functionally multipurpose space.

and footfall. The carpet is two-toned with black accents to ensure audience members can see stair edges at egress. LED lighting was integrated into step units to mark aisle-ways.

Although this project was an extreme example of customizing a space to create a beautiful layout, the smaller, made-to-order aspects of this space were what made the performances light up.

Staging accessories like powder-coating, skirting, and unique surfaces can create a disappearing affect to the set, directing the audience's attention to the performance. Even in smaller venues such as high school auditoriums, college performance halls or

public spaces, much can be done to dress up the stage in a functionally multipurpose space.

Options for Customization

For a semi-permanent stage or seating riser system, a closure panel is a great choice. Closure panels are made of rigid materials such as aluminum, solid hardwood or veneer, and can even be made to match the top surface decking material. Closure panels are much sturdier than skirting and provide a more permanent look; however they are also heavier to install, which means they are a better choice for a semi-permanent system.

Similar to attaching a stage skirt, closure panels are clipped to the side of the aluminum extrusion using the same built-in clip system. Closure panels can be easily removed with a simple T-handle tool for tear-down or for accessing space underneath a stage. Closure panels can be highly customized to match any area of a performance space. For example, if there is hardwood seating or ornamental trim in a performance space, you can source solid hardwood or hardwood veneer and match both stain and finish to yield a consistent look within a space.

On the Surface

Surfaces of platforms on stage are also extremely important both functionally for the performers and aesthetically for design reasons. The platform system chosen for this project consists of an aluminum extrusion frame with a top decking material and aluminum legs as standard. The top decking is mostly seen and used by performers, hence the top decking should suit their needs, however the sides of the platforms are typically seen head-on from an audience



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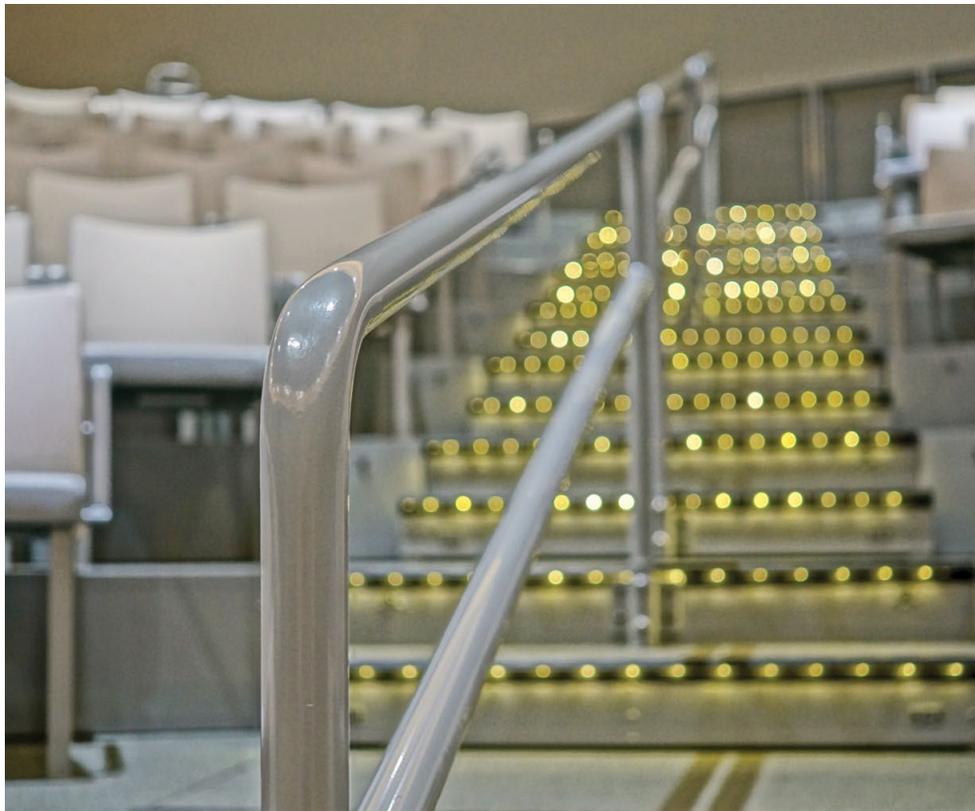
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perspective and it is important to account for the final dress up and finishing touches to a staging system.

Since a show choir's performances are highly customized, with variable choreography and blocking for each set, a modular system is the best option both on the road and at home. While it is relatively simple in design, the same type of platform used in this project would be perfect—as it is highly customizable and modular and features the ability to add skirting and clip-on closure panels to dress up a performance space in any way the designer sees fit.



Chelsea Johnson is the Marketing Specialist with Staging Concepts of Minneapolis, MN (www.stagingconcepts.com). Since 1990, Staging Concepts has provided the most advanced, modular, custom staging solutions for venues of all sizes in the Industry. To reach Chelsea, email marketing@stagingconcepts.com or call 800.337.5339.

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Satin Stitches was founded by Deborah Nelson, 38 years ago, after earning her BFA Fashion Design degree, and then working for 4+ years in the fashion industry as a designer/patternmaker, gaining extensive couture-quality manufacturing and fitting experience. Hand-crafting custom performance apparel has been in her blood, long before starting Satin Stitches! Currently, her design and production staff create both totally original and customizable show choir costuming for men, women and children of all sizes/ages. We do not resell or import. We create all of our very danceable, custom performance costumes in our Minnesota showroom/production facility.



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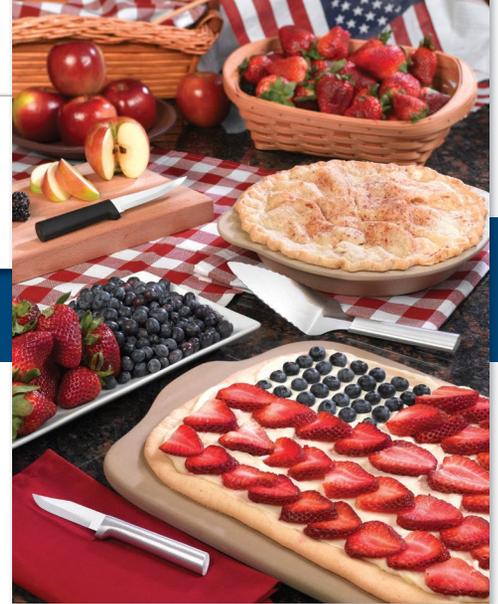
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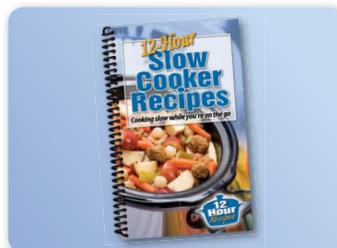
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