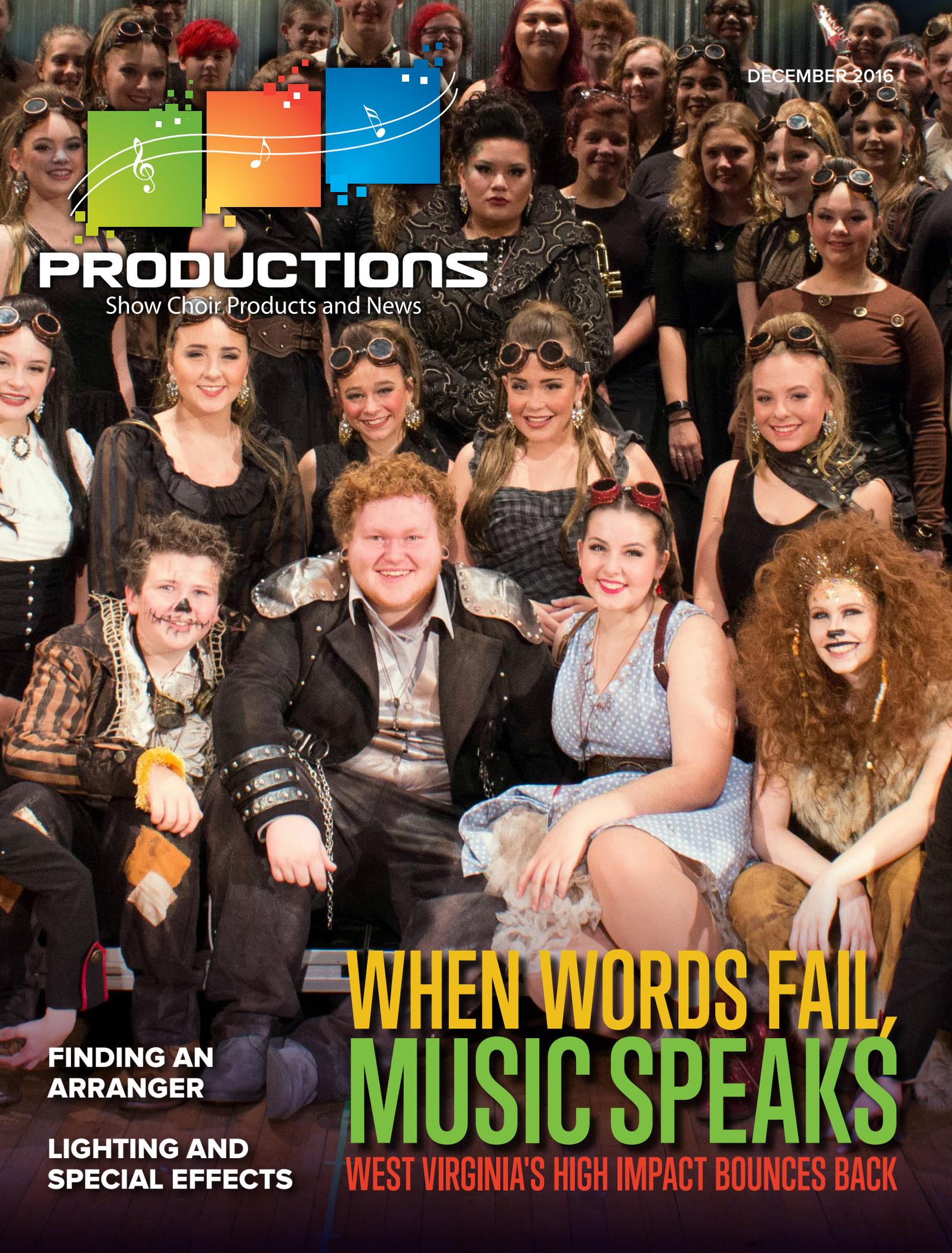


DECEMBER 2016



# PRODUCTIONS

Show Choir Products and News

**FINDING AN  
ARRANGER**

**LIGHTING AND  
SPECIAL EFFECTS**

# WHEN WORDS FAIL, MUSIC SPEAKS

**WEST VIRGINIA'S HIGH IMPACT BOUNCES BACK**

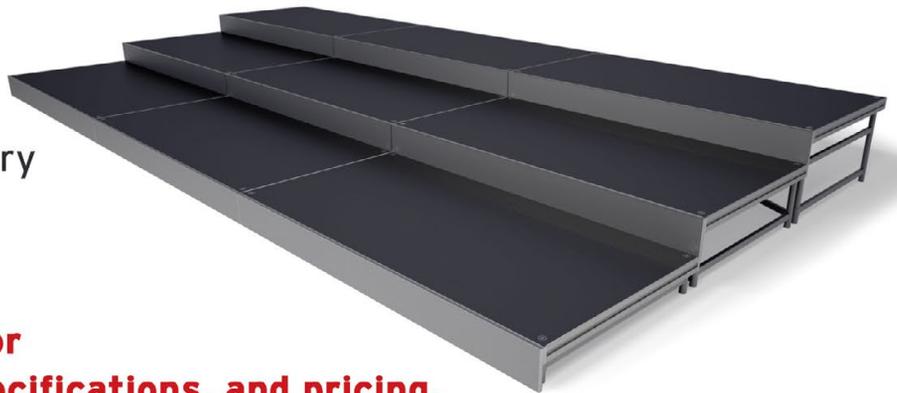


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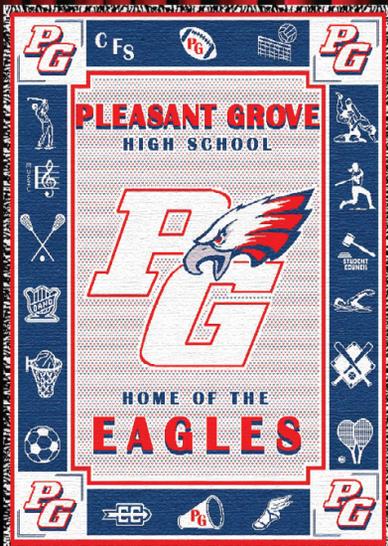
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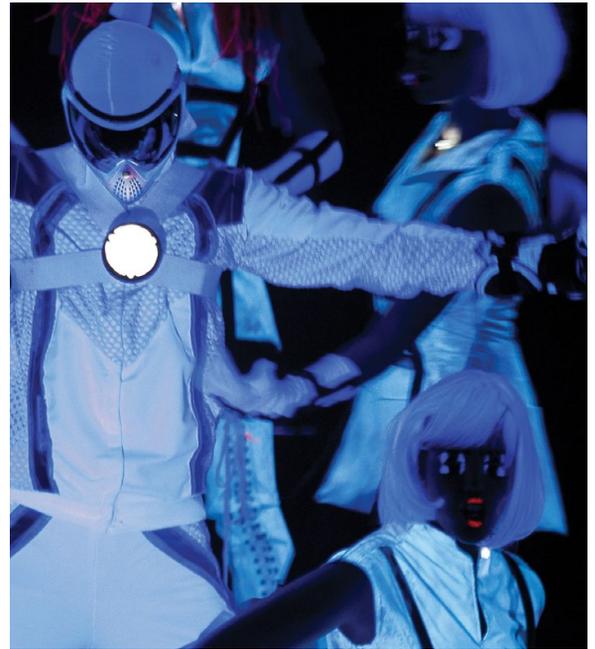
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## WHEN WORDS FAIL, MUSIC SPEAKS: WEST VIRGINIA'S HIGH IMPACT BOUNCES BACK

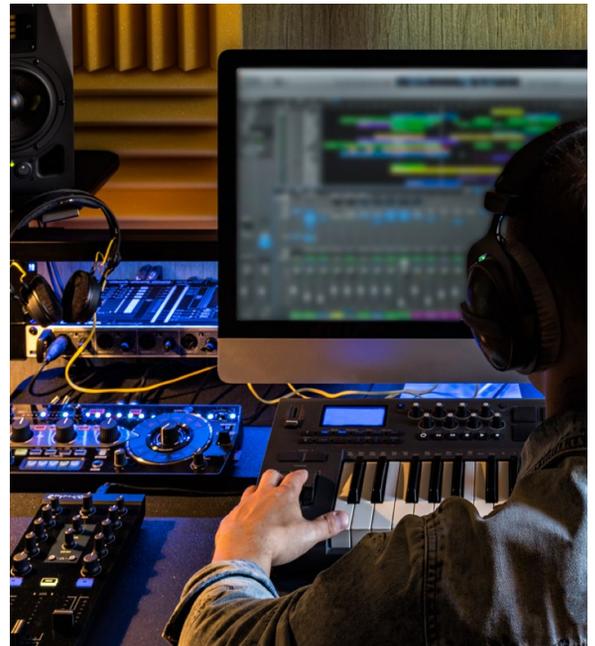
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## UPPING YOUR GAME: LIGHTING & SPECIAL EFFECTS

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## FINDING AN ARRANGER THAT'S THE RIGHT FIT

by Jon Burr

# EDITOR'S LETTER

Last year, I realized I had half-a-dozen unfinished screenplays and two discontinued novels that left characters awash in peril and frozen indefinitely. Those fictional people are all sitting uselessly in a digital folder. I would never have done this to characters created by authors I respect. I remember as a teen I skipped lunch with my family and stayed in the car to read, much to their annoyance, because I was in the closing pages of Stephen King's *The Stand*, and I just could not bring myself to put down that book, leaving Stu and Frannie in such dire straits.

So, back to last year. At that point, overcome with annoyance for my lack of follow-through and sifting through my dreams deferred, I resolved to write an entire screenplay from scratch in one 24-hour period. I set the time, started, and finished it. With nothing more than bathroom breaks and no sleep at all, I knocked out ninety-four pages just six minutes shy of the 24-hour mark. The thing produced, unlike all of its predecessors, did have a beginning, middle, and an end. It was a full story because I didn't have the time for my inner critic to step in and dismantle my forward progress or, rather, step in and make the process implode spectacularly. My inner critic is pretty dramatic.

However, I did not have the guts to return to those pages for nearly nine months. Finally, I decided I'd warm up with the oldest pieces, the unfinished ones, and see if there was some hidden genius lurking there that I'd failed to notice before, something exceedingly special that time and distance would illuminate.

Spoiler alert: There wasn't.

Then, over this last Thanksgiving weekend, I resolved to return to my 24-hour piece and see if I couldn't give it a charitable read-through, the way I would if a trusted friend had sent me something to review. Rather than cringing at all the mutated, partial clones of myself—think Ripley in *Alien: Resurrection*—I wanted to approach this work with a more forgiving mindset. After all, I had the built-in excuse used by all insecure students: It was "thrown together" in record time, so how could a fair judgment be meted out against such a rushed product? Surely, any failings are a result of time constraints, not an indicator of lack of talent. Instead, by the time my eyes finished scanning the second page, I'd determined even the characters' names were unforgivably stupid. It looks as though my charity doesn't extend to self-criticism.

Now, does that mean the screenplay (or any of my other stabs at creative tales) couldn't be turned into something? Is there anything at all in them that could ultimately be worth sharing? Who knows? Because I can't call up the gumption to share them with another soul in this world—even with the people who love me the most...in fact, especially with the people who love me the most. There is something existentially terrifying about sharing your creative efforts; it's a move that makes you strikingly vulnerable, and that's never been an easy emotion for me to lean into.

Recently, I've seen several friends posting about the NaNoWriMo challenge, a novel-writing project designed for professionals and amateurs that is designed for a writer to finish a complete novel in one month's time by committing to producing 50,000 words in 30 days. I thought, "I could do that." After all, I've proven I can take a deadline, commit, and make it work. What I haven't proven is that I have the fortitude to do the harder part: the all-important step of putting it out there to see what other people think of my efforts to create something.

This consuming reluctance and fear to share my personal creative work is why when I see young people create art through music, words, painting, dance, or any other medium—even if it's not particularly good (or even when it's empirically awful by most standards for any artistic community)—I'm still in awe of their courage. I also think we can set the example by sharing pieces of ourselves in our creative works, whatever those works may be. We need to act when we can act, sing when we can sing, paint when we can paint, and write when we can write. We need them to be unafraid of the slings and arrows of critiques, which follow any creative efforts, and we need to model that fearlessness for them.



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# WHEN WORDS FAIL, MUSIC SPEAKS:

West Virginia's  
High Impact  
Bounces Back

by Kathy Silber

The summer of 2016 had been a record-breaking hot summer. In the mountains and valleys of West Virginia, we are accustomed to steamy, hot, and humid summers. The week building up to June 23rd was rainy with daily thunderstorms moving through our state.

Our show choir High Impact from Herbert Hoover High School in Clendenin, WV, had practiced on every other Tuesday throughout the summer. We were excited about our show and had begun to work on vocals and choreography. We sweated throughout the evening because of lack of air conditioning in the school. Two days after our Tuesday practice, we had no idea it would be the last practice in our beloved classroom we called home.

### When the Rains Came

On Thursday, June 23rd, the rains began early around 9:00 A.M. The weather report called for heavy rain, and forecasters warned people to watch for rising streams and flooded streets. We had no idea that the communities of Clendenin and Elkview that feed into our school would be forever changed. The rain came fast and hard; by the end of the day, around 12 inches had fallen in our area. Reports of flooding began to come in, continuing throughout the night.

By morning the town of Clendenin, which lies on the banks of the Elk River, was under water, and Herbert Hoover High School was flooded with eight feet of water on the first floor.

The roads to the school were flooded, so there was no way to reach the school to try and recover anything. High Impact had lost everything they owned and had worked hard for. Nineteen years of fundraising and hard work lay under muddy water. All music, sound equipment, instruments, costumes, staging, risers, and our classroom with mirrored walls were gone in one day. Our equipment trailer was also parked behind the school, and we lost it with everything in it. Our school was deemed a total loss and was to be demolished. The only thing we were able to save were a few trophies and four show choir pictures that were located above the eight-foot water line.

### The Questions Followed

Members and parents called and texted me, asking if there would still be a show choir for the coming school year. Parents who had lost their homes and everything

in the flood sent me messages begging that we somehow continue as a show choir because it was all their children had left that resembled some normalcy.

I reassured them that we would continue and that I would do everything in my and the boosters' power to make it happen. I told the members that we had lost all of our equipment, but we still had the most important element of a show choir—our members. They could still sing and dance, and that was a great start.

Our summer show choir camp was scheduled for two weeks following the flood. We were so thankful to Elk Center Elementary school, which opened its doors for us to hold our camp there. We borrowed a keyboard and taped off the gym floor to resemble risers. We practiced hard for the week—not knowing where we would attend school, and we had lots of questions left unanswered.

### Reaching Out For Support

Knowing that we needed all the help we could get, I posted a notice on Facebook under the "Show Choir Directors and Choreographers" page. I asked for prayer,



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and I have been amazed at the outpouring of love, gifting and prayers that have been shown to us. I explained that we were not financially supported by our school district and that we were self-funded. Directors from across America started sending me messages and texts asking how they could help. Items such as music and costumes were offered to us.

A good friend of mine, who also happens to be the director of one of our biggest competitors, was the first to donate money to us. A music camp where I teach every summer took up an offering after the closing concert performance. Show choirs from West Virginia, Virginia, and Ohio had car washes, bake sales, spaghetti dinners, and concerts to raise money for us. Past students had Bluegrass concerts for us. The West Virginia Symphony had a concert to raise money for the music departments throughout West Virginia affected by the flood. The area schools in our district—including Capital High School, South Charleston High School, Sissionville High School, Winfield High School and Nitro High School—all sent what they could to help us.



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### An Outpouring of Love

Clover Hill in Virginia went beyond the call for help. Besides raising a lot of money for us, they collected four semi-truck loads of relief items for the flooded areas of West Virginia. The Show Choirs of America Camp out of Ohio sent us gift cards for JW Pepper and later a check to help us replace things that we lost. Through a GOFUNDME account, people sent in money; relatives of members from out of state sent donations.

We have been so grateful and blessed by the outpouring of love for us. Just a few weeks ago we received a donation from a wonderful lady in our community to purchase a new equipment trailer.

Currently, we are on a half-day schedule splitting our school day with the middle school. We have no permanent place to call our own. However, our students are positive and have shown strength beyond their young years. We have a long road ahead of us to recover the equipment that we need, but we will have enough to get back out there this year and perform and compete. I tell my members that people

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will not stand and clap for them this year because of what happened. I do not want our losses to define our performance. I want audiences to stand and applaud because the kids are outstanding.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the outpouring of love shown to us from show choirs across America. There is a saying that applies here: "When words fail, music speaks." But, actions speak even louder than words. We will take the stage once again this year because of the help we received from students who just wanted to see us make music again.

---

Kathy Silber is the director of Herbert Hoover's "High Impact" from Clendenin, West Virginia.

This year the group is comprised of 36 singers, 12 instrumentalists, and 12 crew members. High Impact repeatedly places in the top of their class and places in top six at competitions. Other awards include Best Band, Best Costumes, Best Choreography, and Best Show Design.



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# UPPING YOUR GAME: LIGHTING AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

by Rachel Clevenger

Brett Carroll, Director of Burbank High School's Vocal Music Program, is known throughout the show choir world for his outstanding shows, including their innovative special effects and lighting techniques. Carroll notes, "The most cutting-edge technologies on the market all pretty much involve LED low-power lighting instruments." He adds that it is important for directors or boosters purchasing

lighting equipment for any venue to recognize there are two very important sides of this decision: the lighting itself and whatever will be used to control the lighting. He shares, "That's always the difficult part. It isn't hard to go out and buy a bunch of affordable LED lighting instruments, but having the hardware (lighting board/computer) to control it is the most difficult part of the equation."

Because there are many ways to control lighting, Carroll stresses the importance of verifying that the equipment is all compatible and able to communicate electronically, and it's just as relevant that your program has someone who is knowledgeable about lighting device programming.

He adds, "The old days of a light just coming on/dimming, flashing etc. are gone." Today's lighting instruments, he explains, are incredibly flexible—which is excellent for planning and performance—but a lighting programmer is necessary to input those parameters of light, such as color and consistency, as well as movement. Not only is this time-consuming for the programmer, he notes, but this is a craft that requires skill.

Because of this, Carroll strongly suggests consulting with a professional lighting designer to ensure you do not obtain equipment that is too difficult to control or too complex—and to ensure you don't overbuy. He recommends speaking to at least three consultants about your choir's needs and how those needs can best be met.

Because he's learned over the years that many directors are overwhelmed by the choices and unsure of what they need, it is crucial to consult the right people.

### On the Cutting-Edge

Robert Mentele, Lighting Products Specialist for Full Compass Systems, holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Technical Theatre/Theatre Design and Technology from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Mentele suggests that some of the most exciting products on today's market aren't really new—but they are reemerging for a new type of user.

He notes that many groups are refreshing their moving mirrors/scanners to make room for fast-moving beams that can cover the stage, which offers an intense effect for audience members. He adds, "Similarly, laser generators were once too high-powered and expensive for anything other than nationally touring shows, and required special licensing and approval. Now, companies offer lower-powered lasers that can be completely controlled and programmed by an operator."

Rich Anders, National Sales Manager of Mega Systems, Inc., holds an A.S. in Sound Video and Lighting from the Art Institute of Houston. Anders believes that one of the cutting-edge tools in show choir right now is the integration of LED video panels, which are used for video, graphics, or just a backdrop of color.

Anders adds, "They are used as set pieces to convey mood, or background video for the performance. The panels are able to be spread out across a stage in sections and still show one image across all of them—creating some very dynamic effects. We are seeing the video or graphics element more and more as these products become tools for lighting designers today."

### Effects on a Tighter Budget

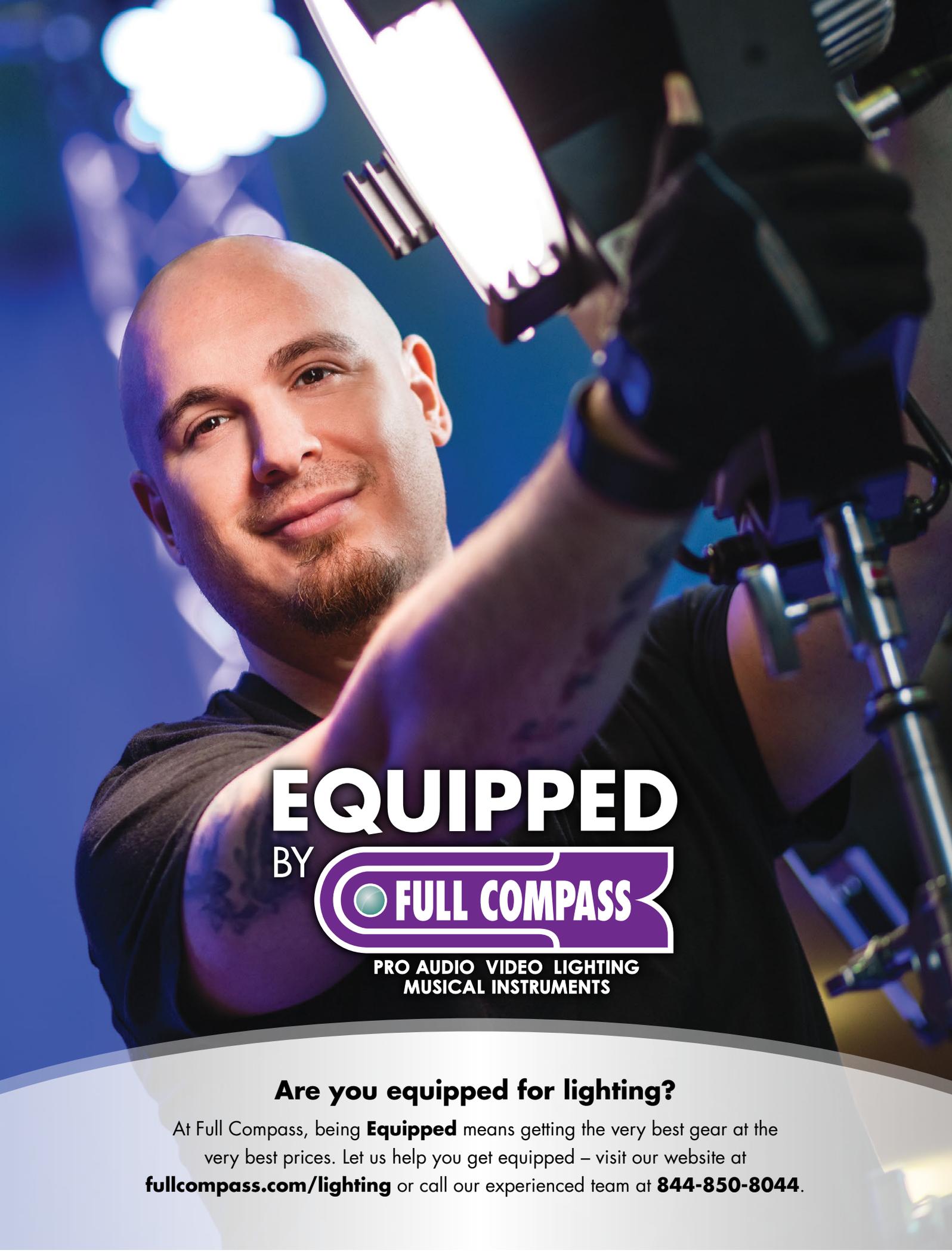
When it comes to lighting and special effects, there are the high-level competitors with tens of thousands of dollars in their annual production budgets, groups constantly looking to "up their game" with high-end tools. Then, there are choirs that also compete but may need more affordable methods for adding visually striking effects.

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When considering long-term auditorium upgrades for adding special effects to any type of production in your school's venue, Mentele suggests you keep in mind LED lighting fixtures, which are an excellent investment. Mentele adds, "They offer a lot of color flexibility, extensive cost savings in energy consumption, reduce labor of replacing lamps and help cooling systems because they generate less heat."

For choirs that may be on a tighter budget, Mentele shares that LED fixtures are beginning to drop in price fairly drastically. He praises the flexibility of color options that LEDs make possible, which can create opportunities for including "drastic visual elements" to your shows.

He mentions, as well, that if purchasing LED lights is too expensive for your choir, many times the same items are rentable from local companies, so you can have access to the best technology for a fraction of the cost.

Anders mentions that an affordable option for performers who want to augment their show with special effects is to incorporate moving heads into the production—with just one pair of units really adding to the overall effect. He adds, "These moving heads give you the ability to project gobos and do aerial type effects, as well as cover ceilings, crowds, etc."

Furthermore, Anders explains, these features have the benefit of not requiring installation in terms of being hung; instead,

they can just rest on the stage, which means the set-up is both easy and fast. These types of fixtures, he adds, need to be controlled with a lighting controller or software. For moving head fixtures, Natalie Wiesnet of Mega Systems Inc. recommends the MEGA-LITE Axis Grid and the PR XRLED Series.

### Updating Home Staging

Anders notes that any performance space can benefit from "a simple color changing fixture for set pieces, wall wash, stage wash, up lighting, or anything else." Luckily, for choirs on a tight budget, these small wash fixtures are not only brighter—but they have also become more affordable over time.

Just as importantly, they have a variety of uses, and these color-changing fixtures can often even be pre-set, rather than controlled, which means setup and subsequent use can be incredibly simple, even as the effect creates "space, mood, or even depth of field." For color-changing fixtures, Wiesnet recommends the MEGA-LITE Baby Color series or the MEGA-LITE Mass.



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When considering long-term auditorium upgrades for adding special effects to any type of production in your school's venue, Mentele—like Director Carol—suggests you keep in mind LED lighting fixtures, which are an excellent investment. Mentele adds, "They offer a lot of color flexibility, extensive cost savings in energy consumption, reduce labor of replacing lamps and help cooling systems because they generate less heat." He even notes that some local municipalities offer tax rebates to venues switching a percentage of their lighting system to LED.

Not every show choir is on the competition track, and many primarily perform for their schools and local communities. They share their stages with drama clubs and general choral events, but they too want the "cool factor" in their performances. In short, whatever your budget, there are lighting and special effects options that can add production value to your shows.

Dr. Rachel James Clevenger, editor of *Productions*, earned her B.A and M.Ed. degrees from Mississippi College. After finishing her PhD in Composition and Rhetoric, she taught and served as the University Writing Center Director for Birmingham Southern College and University of Alabama at Birmingham.



Photo by Irene Soule of Los Alamitos, SoundFX

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# FINDING AN ARRANGER

THAT'S THE RIGHT FIT

by Jon Burr

Finding a suitable arranger can be a challenge. If you've got a good one and things are going well, congratulations! You've got a valuable asset. Maybe you don't have one yet, or your arranger has become unavailable; arrangers can get busy, backed up, or ensconced in large projects with looming deadlines. In any case, for your project's immediate need or for a new ongoing creative partnership, you need to find an arranger that's the right fit for your group.

“Music is work to be done.” Knowing not only what the work is, but also having taste and fluency in making musical choices, comes from talent. Additionally, passion for the subject is very powerful; look for indications that the arranger loves what he or she does.

### Getting Started

In the realm of show choir competition, good arrangers are particularly valuable, given the importance of their work to the success of your competitive show. Some directors like to preserve their access and priority with their arrangers, consequently being reluctant to recommend them. Although word of mouth and reputation are traditional means of discovery, if you can't get a name or referral, that pathway won't get you anywhere.

Music faculty or staff at your institution is another possible resource, or source of recommendation. Composition students

and faculty might be able to step up to demands of the project, but it should be noted that experience, particularly professional experience (and trips around the sun!) are likely to generate stronger instincts, musical knowledge, and the “show sense” that comes only with time.

Talent is essential. Although, as Igor Stravinsky said, “Music is work to be done.” Knowing not only what the work is, but also having taste and fluency in making musical choices, comes from talent. Additionally, passion for the subject is very powerful; look for indications that the arranger loves what he or she does.

### Using the Internet to Find an Arranger

Google is a powerful tool, but it gets you only part of the way. You can come up with pages of results for search terms like “find a music arranger,” “show choir arrangers,” or other terms, but then it's up to you to evaluate your results. It takes some research. Given that anybody can put anything up on the internet, and that there is a really wide range of competence, experience, and price range represented, finding the mix that's right for you takes evaluation of several criteria.

### Things to Look for In An Arranger

#### Reviews and recommendations:

Given the bespoke nature of arranging work, one of the most important things to look for is reviews and customer feedback. How do the arranger's customers feel about her work? Is he accommodating, timely, conscientious, talented and skilled? Given that arranging is not a regulated or licensed

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profession, the perception of risk might be greater than, say, for a doctor or lawyer, who need to show evidence of professional credentials in order to work. Arrangers do have professional credentials, hopefully documented on their websites, but they are not regulated by any authority, and they are not rated by any criteria except your own judgment.

**Résumé:**

What about work experience? Has your prospect worked in shows, played in pits, done Broadway? Worked as a performer at high professional levels? Been arranging for any length of time? What about stylistic variety? Is your arranger a diehard rock-n-roller, or is there also orchestral work in his or her background?

Although it may seem desirable to find a winning competitive show in an arranger's résumé, that item alone will not necessarily speak to the breadth or stylistic flexibility required to write a diverse, exciting, stylistically broad show. Look for range of stylistic



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Jeffrey Bowen has 28 years of arranging and writing experience.

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familiarity to avoid hooking up with a musician of limited scope, unless your show is of a specific genre. If you're planning to perform to track, find an arranger experienced as a producer.

Methods and costs vary widely, depending on whether there are real players hired in the making of the track. Be clear in your mind what the form of your finished product will be, in order to evaluate your discoveries against your specific needs.

#### **Familiarity with Copyright Issues:**

Has your arranger ever obtained a license in the form of Permission to Arrange for any work? Does he or she understand the potential liability that can be incurred from a failure to properly license a work for a competitive show? Find an ally who understands how to keep your show protected from the ever-growing likelihood of copyright litigation or prosecution.

#### **Example Work:**

Most arrangers will be able to provide examples of their work, or a reel of some

kind. If they're cautious or scrupulous about copyright—or client confidentiality—you might not be able to find any examples on their website. Sending an inquiry will often get you the example you're looking for.

### **What Makes A Great Arrangement?**

#### **Instrumentation and Voicing:**

Assignment of instruments and voices is fundamental to arranging: "Who does what, and when?" Giving proper support to staging and dramatic sequence is the driver of these choices. The arranger needs to coordinate closely with a choreographer (if there is one) or work to marked-up lyrics or a storyboard to graph out the unfolding of events.

#### **Compositional Development:**

Proper introduction of melodic elements, giving new motifs room to breathe, and repeating motifs so they become familiar, together lay the groundwork for development, leading to the combination and

stacking of motifs during the progression of the arrangement. Building upon introduced elements is a fundamental compositional technique, and good arranging depends on it.

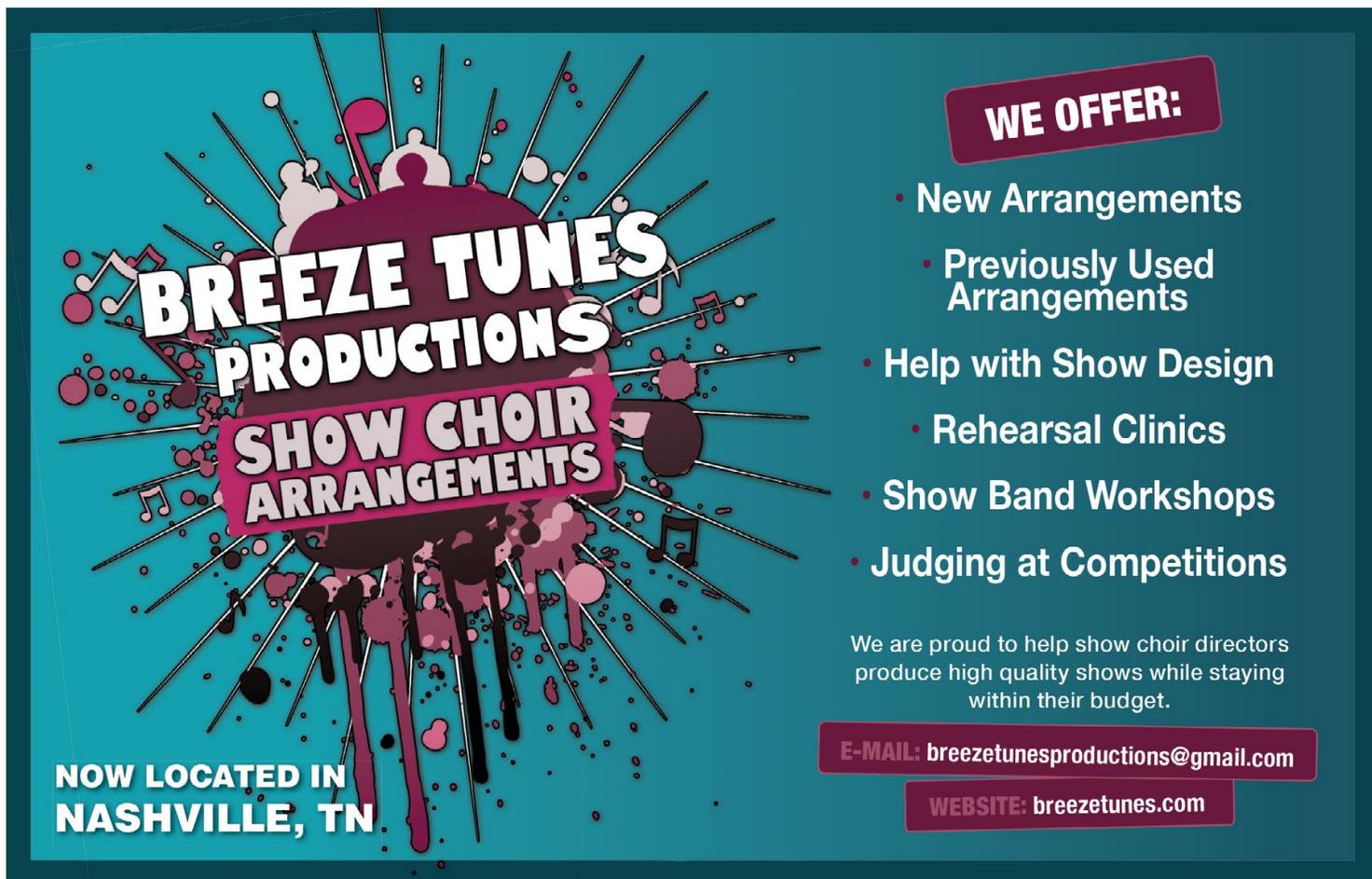
#### **Narrative Sense:**

Well-crafted compositional development has a narrative arc, building excitement, drama, joy, or any emotion you can think of. The fluent arranger controls the arrival of musical climax.

Happy hunting!

---

Jon Burr, proprietor and chief arranger at [www.arrangerforhire.com](http://www.arrangerforhire.com), is a professional musician with 45 years of experience. He's worked with such luminaries as Tony Bennett, Stan Getz, Chet Baker, Eartha Kitt, and Rita Moreno, played on Broadway in *Me & My Girl*, *Blood Brothers*, *Grand Hotel*, and *Gypsy*, and has produced numerous projects of vocal and instrumental music.



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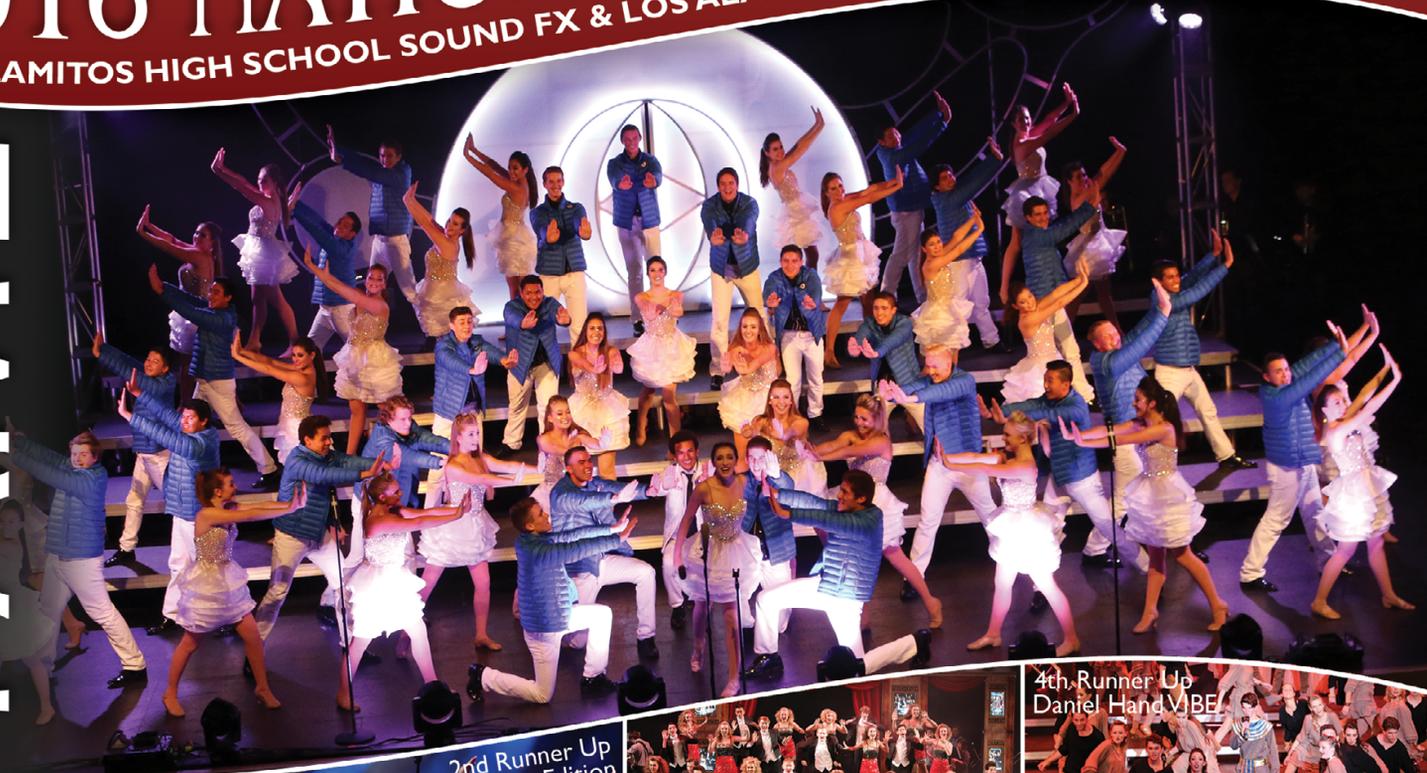


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## 2017 DATES & LOCATIONS

FAME New York	March 2-5
FAME Orlando	March 16-19
FAME Chicago	March 23-26
FAME Branson	March 30 - April 2
FAME Hollywood	April 6-9
Show Choir National Finals	April 21-22

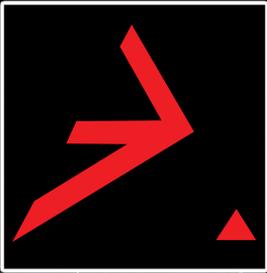
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Best Costumer	Gail McInnis Productions
Spirit of Service	Onalaska High School
Student Spirit of Service	Alex Wampler (Marysvill HS, OH)
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Best Regional Competition	Great River (Central & West HS, IA)





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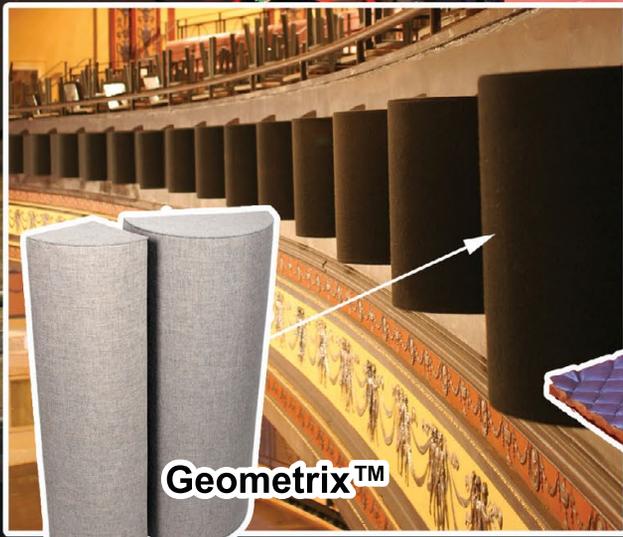
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