

# MUSICAL!

DIRECTING

SCHOOL AND

COMMUNITY

THEATRE



fi - rate head and a fi - rate heart. A.  
well-bred man - arch ought to do! But

may to the cheat - ing world go you, Witte  
man - y a king on a first-class throne. If he

fi - rates all... are well - to - do, But I'll be true to the song I sing, And  
wants to call his crown his own, Must man - age some - how to get through More

rall *mf* *allegro*  
div - ly more than co - er - l do. For... I am a Pi - rate King!

rall *mp* *allegro*  
And it is, it is a glo - rious thing. To

ROBERT BOLAND AND PAUL ARGENTINI

# Musicals!

## Directing School and Community Theatre

Robert Boland and Paul Argentini



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Before the beginning of great brilliance, there must be chaos.

— Ancient Chinese Proverb



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RMB

To Vera, of course.

PMA



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# Foreword

*Musicals!* is a marvelously complete and detailed handbook that, in my opinion as a playwright, should be in every high school and college library in the country. It is almost impossible to think of a practical question arising in the course of a production that is not anticipated and answered in these pages with great clarity, goodwill, and humor. Although the book focuses on musicals, as the most complex and glamorous of theatre projects, much of the information is equally applicable to straight plays. A copy in every drama teacher's pocket would help them all to anxiety-free dreams and be a boon to casts and audiences as well.

WILLIAM GIBSON



# Preface

It is doubtful that any book can make you a great director. But this book can offer advice on organization, analysis, and decision-making that will help you become a better one. An understanding of the basic mechanics and theory behind productions is crucial for all directors.

Every production has some “art” in it. From curtain to curtain, if it is done to the best of the cast and crew’s ability and makes the most of the production’s resources, it can entertain, fascinate, and transport an audience for a few magic hours.

Great artists in every art—music, painting, architecture, literature—seem to have an amazing ability to communicate on a mystical, psychic level through their chosen medium. But what if your name has been pulled out of a hat to direct a show? Will you create art or stage an awkward, by-the-numbers production?

When “art” is called for, you must generate it within yourself. As a director you can train yourself to see the unseen, whether it is a vision of magnificent staging or simple insights about human behavior. The task at hand is to express what you see so that it is received with the same degree of enthusiasm by the audience. We see spectacle with our eyes; we see meaning with our hearts. Often only the smallest bit of action, a touch or a glance, or perhaps a prop, light, or sound effect heightens a moment on the stage. Watch the details then, for things you can do throughout the whole production.

Once a small-town country wedding was being hopelessly bogged down in formal ritual and endless choruses of “Ave Maria.” The congregation seemed uninterested until the bride and groom started back down the aisle and the organist, who knew the couple, grandly played “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling.” The bored observers burst into applause, cheers, and tears. This was a director’s touch that worked.

Be aware that even the best theatre artists can falter or stumble once in a while. You hope your production will win a positive reception from the audience. But what if it doesn’t work? Remember the experience, learn something from it, and move on.

First, urge yourself to constantly look beyond the obvious. Questioning is a path to

improvement. If you always remember “the play’s the thing,” you can lead yourself to a successful production every time.

Second, expect a great deal of yourself and everyone else involved in the production, and they will respond in kind. As any bridge player knows, you must do the very best with the hand you have been dealt—in this case, actors, crew, script, stage space, and more. Adopt a get-to-work, roll-up-your-sleeves attitude, and attack the task at hand. You must develop a knack for inspiring people to demand more of themselves than they thought possible.

Last, seek out theatre everywhere you can. See it all—the good, the bad, the indifferent—and learn to tell the difference in your own work. Often you learn as much from amateur productions as from multimillion dollar spectacles. Attend not as a critic, but as a student who asks why one scene works and another doesn’t. Or ask: Why does lighting affect one so deeply? What might have saved a particularly shallow, empty moment?

Theatre is contradiction. What an audience sees is an illusion. But it is based and anchored in something that is real, a “truth” that makes it greater than reality. When you seek out that truth, the audience suspends its natural disbelief and accepts your honesty.

With experience comes confidence, and confidence is what a director needs most. Project that confidence to your cast and crew and everyone will be glad to work with you. That’s when you hear the best compliment of all, “What’s our next show going to be?”

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