

The Show Must Go On

Jeanne Hardie shares her enthusiasm for the stage

You could call her the Mother Superior of the Saint George's stage. Not only is Jeanne Hardie the busy teaching/directing presence for each Middle and Upper School student performance, but that authoritative clerical role from the comedy *Nunsense* was what finally brought her to the school to stay.

First, as with any play, it helps to know some background on the main character. Raised by a dancer and saxophone player who met on a Big Band tour, Jeanne has performing in her blood. She was on the stage in Helena, Montana in 1981 when a visitor named Bob Farley learned she planned to move to Spokane and immediately hired her to choreograph plays for him at Saint George's. After Bob retired in the early 90's, Jeanne directed *The Diary of Anne Frank* at the school, but her primary focus was the Box'n'Hat Players, a community musical theater troupe for students that she formed and ran for two decades.

"I've also appeared on every stage in town," says Jeanne, whose favorite roles – Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolff?* – tend to be forceful, active characters with a lot of energy. "Off stage I'm not as extroverted," she admits, "but I can be wild and crazy and confident on stage."

It was in another of her favorite roles, as Mother Superior in the Spokane Civic

Theatre's production of *Nunsense* in the mid-1990s, that she worked with music director David Demand just before he was hired by Saint George's. "He called and asked if I would come out and help him do *Nunsense*

at the school, and that led to a half-time job teaching drama and directing shows."

Half-time became more time and a dozen years later Jeanne is still collaborating with David on musicals, including the upcoming production of *Footloose* this spring. It is one of three Upper School shows she choreographs and directs each year, plus Middle School productions and the annual 8th grade version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

"I favor a simple, fluid style that takes advantage of scenery that moves around and does two or three things," says Jeanne, who praises Founders Theater for its great fly system and wonderful lighting positions that allow her to "use colors and do things in silhouette, matching the color to the tone of a particular scene."

"I feel so fortunate to be working here in a performance-based program," she says. "My strength is getting kids to do a good show, to bring out the talent they have. In the classes I try to instill a love for theater as well as basic performing skills."

Some of her Middle School kids already love drama, but others are more self-conscious. "We play animals to get them out of their comfort zone and working together, and learn where to go and what to do." By Upper School, her students are involved in serious improvisation games and analyzing their characters' intentions, as well as taking direction and learning how to put on a show.

"I want to create theater-goers who have a critical eye," she says. "I think it increases the appreciation, since the work and time that goes into a show is like a sports team getting ready for the big game. Except that in the theater you get only a few chances, and you have to 'win the game' every time."

– John Carter

On the Web

View songs from recent Saint George's musicals *Seussical* and *Kiss Me Kate* that Jeanne choreographed at www.sgs.org/discover



Jeanne Hardie rehearses Middle School students for a play in Founders Theater

