

ABCDE FOCUS



Your drama newsletter

SPRING / 2024

President's Message:

The ABCDE is always working hard for BC Drama teachers, and our Fall conference plans are already underway. By the time you read this, the Goodwill Shakespeare festival and NTS/BC Drama festival will have just finished up. Spring has sprung in most places in BC, along with many Spring musicals. My thoughts recently have been on our jobs as Drama teachers in a post-covid classroom. At the time of this writing I have just closed "The Spongebob Musical" at Carihi Secondary in Campbell River and in my 31 years of teaching have never directed a more challenging show. I've spent some time reflecting on why it was so hard and what I learned in the process (because I'm still learning so much, even after teaching for so long.) It was hard because there is no such thing as an easy musical, but with hundreds of props and costumes, challenging music, tons of sound cues and a bunch of new things for me (like UV lighting) this one was harder than all the others I've done. I always say that shows somehow magically come together close to show time, but I have changed my thinking on that. Shows come together once everyone on the cast and crew decides to step up and do the hard work. Sometimes that happens early in the rehearsal process, when we have that dream group that just clicks, but sometimes it takes longer. Maybe it isn't until tech weekend the "magic" finally happens. For me, it started to click just before tech, and we continued to have blips throughout the run, but closing night was as good as it could have been, and I hope my cast and crew finally realized what hard work can accomplish.

What I have been hearing from colleagues across the province, and experiencing myself is that teaching drama is getting harder. More kids than ever before don't want to put in the effort to learn lines or participate in classes. They are skipping class more often or staying home sick more often. They are quitting shows and crews more often, even a few weeks away from show time. That kind of disengagement can be disheartening. Our colleagues are feeling frustrated and tired, and wondering how long they can stay in the profession when teaching the classes that used to be a joy are now just filled with challenge after challenge. That is concerning, especially in a subject area that is already low on teachers. Our post-secondary education programs produce considerably fewer Drama specialists than other subjects, and we want to make sure new teachers stay in the profession.

One thing that I encourage all of you to do is find help. I have found solace and support in the people I work with. We can't do what we do alone, so find your people...the person to run your sound, the person to teach your music, the person who will find you sponsors, or run your concession, or help with costumes or do your choreography. Also, ask your colleagues across the province for support. (I couldn't have done Spongebob without the amazing costumes and props I was able to rent from Colin Plant at Claremont.) The ABCDE Facebook group is a great place to get or share costumes and props. Drama teachers are talented folk. We can do anything and everything, but that doesn't mean we should. Find your team. That is one way to circumvent the burnout that comes with our profession. Our jobs are important, and those unruly, disengaged kids need us more than they know, so take care of yourselves.

Christine Knight
ABCDE President

SPOTLIGHT ON COMOX VALLEY SCHOOLS



Photos from Something Rotten! This is a Comox Valley Schools full district musical. Directed by Lisa Williams at Highland Secondary School featuring students from Highland, Vanier, and Isfeld. They had A LOT of FUN!

ABCDE EXECUTIVE 2023-2024

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SPOTLIGHT ON NEW WESTMINSTER SECONDARY SCHOOL



Photos from NWSS production of Shrek The Musical



CYTA - Outstanding School Production - Shrek the Musical - NWSS
Congratulations to Traci Cave, Steve Clements, Frances Monteleone, Kelly Proznick, Lindsay Waldner, and over 50 students and their parents who helped make this happen!



CYTA - Outstanding Creative Team - Peter and the Starcatcher - St. George's School
Congratulations to Jamie Donnici and the cast and crew of this fantastic production!



Goodwill Shakespeare Festival took place in Vernon B.C April 25th - 27th

The Good Will Shakespeare Festival is a multi-discipline theatre arts festival that brings together like-minded students, and their teachers, to create, learn, and share their passions in the theatre arts.



Let's here it for our fabulous workshop leaders at this year's fest!

Roark Critchlow, Marc Anthony Massiah, Brian Tate, Amelia Sirian-ni, Tanya Laing Gahr, Cara Nunn, Gordon Hamilton, Rusty Gahr, Amber Lewis, Nathania Bernabe, Jackie T. Hanlin, Mike Stack, and Ann Dorval



The NTS/BC Drama Festival was a huge success! Big thanks to Gordon Hamilton, Katie Everson, Sharon Conrad, Jake Guy and Mitch Deeming for organizing! The festival took place at Douglas College in New Westminister May 2nd-5th. Thank you for fostering respect, excitement, artistic development, teamwork, problem solving, and a true sense of community! See you next year!

Do you have something to say? Something to share with your fellow members of the ABCDE? Or just a burning desire to be published? Please send your articles, letters, photos, lesson plans, ideas, etc. to zwolfman@sd38.bc.ca and I'll put them in the newsletter!



Colquitz Middle School "Beauty and the Beast Junior"



Carihi Secondary School "Spongebob the Musical"

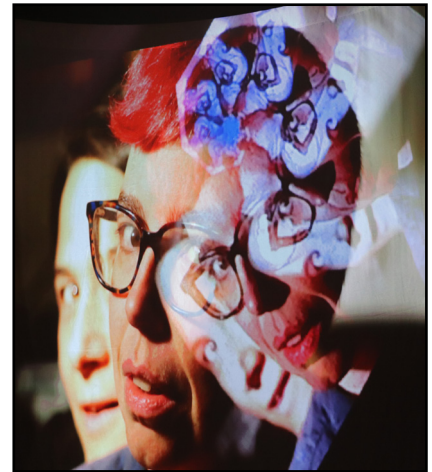


North Delta Secondary School "The Great All-American Musical Disaster"

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT ON MIND OF A SNAIL

Overhead projectors are not obsolete! One might even say that they are slowly making a comeback... Mind of a Snail Puppet Co. is a shadow puppetry duo currently based in Vancouver BC, on the unceded, stolen and occupied territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Since 2003, Chloe Ziner and Jessica Gabriel have been developing a multilayered style of visual storytelling using overhead projectors as their main light source, and have been recently integrating live video and interactive live-streaming into their tool kit. Their performances play at the intersection of puppetry, visual arts, clowning & music. As artistic collaborators, they are excited about exploring beyond the boundaries of traditional theatre, and creating magical immersive experiences for their audiences. This duo both grew up on the West Coast of BC, Chloe grew up in the Comox Valley and Jessica on the Sunshine Coast. Over the years, they have accumulated a fleet of 10+ overhead projectors! None of which are gathering dust. Mind of a Snail's work has been presented across Canada, and internationally to the USA, Taiwan and Brazil.

Some highlights include Taiwan International Festival of the Arts, The Puppeteers of America National Festival in Minneapolis, Summerworks in Toronto, Casteliers International Puppetry Festival in Montreal and more. Mind of a Snail shows "Caws & Effect", "Curious Contagious" & "Against Gravity" have won dozens of awards at Fringe Theatre festivals across Canada. Their show "Multiple Organism" won Critic's Choice Innovation Award at the 2018 Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards. As an independent theatre company, Jessica and Chloé devise theatre in a non-hierarchical way and approach each project as creative equals. "Everything in our shows are made by just the two of us. We are like a DIY punk band, we do it all ourselves, from the tech, to the live music, to the performing, to making our own puppets and handmade merch." Jessica and Chloe also both have diplomas in Permaculture Design, which is how they met and continues to be one of the foundations of their work together. Permaculture is a set of design principles centered on whole systems thinking and that uses patterns found in nature.



These principles are normally applied to ecology, sustainable agriculture and community resilience, but Mind of a Snail has taken many of the principles and applied them to their arts practice. "At the beginning of every workshop process or design commission, we start with curiosity and observation. Each person in the room has different skills and experiences that they bring to the table. What is the wider context we are currently in? What objects are physically around us? What shapes, textures and sounds are in the room that we can help to illuminate? We work with what's already here and strive to meet each other in a place of co-creation, discovery, and play."

Stay connected:
www.mindofasnail.org

www.instagram.com/mindofasnail

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT ON AFFAIR OF HONOR

Affair of Honor is a fight and movement based theater and performance company, founded by Nathania Bernabe and Jackie T. Hanlin. This company is focused on the exploration and continuous training in the art of performance combat, ensemble building and multiple mediums of physical theatre. Affair of Honor is committed to creating visually stunning fight and movement based productions as well as providing a platform for emerging artists, showcasing diversity and cultivating stories with women at the forefront. Affair of Honor also specialises in educational workshops in stage combat. Our program is a comprehensive look at stage combat, we teach through the lens of safety first and guide students in how to become good communicators and scene partners. Stage combat is an engaging opportunity for students to learn active discipline because it is inspired by the histories and traditions of martial arts from all over the world. The biggest tips for explosive, hard hitting stage combat is to mask lessons in consent and good partnering, as combat techniques. Once they learn how to build trust with partners and know that they are safe and in control, this artform is limitless and sustainable. As we work in a physical theatre medium, we operate all of our work through the lens of consent. We ensure students feel empowered to ask for what they need from us, their teachers and their fellow classmates in a clear and respectful way. Practicing how to advocate for their needs is essential in building trust, communication and strong partnerships. If you have stage combat in a show, start planning early! Give your students enough time to get the movements in their bones.

Bring a fight director as early as possible or, if you are doing the choreography, work the scenes with violence closer to the beginning, block them first and then build the choreography around it. This ensures students get enough reps after everything is built (ideally during daily warmups) before the show opens. We have been in many situations where we come a week before tech and it's very hard on the students. Even if the budget is tight, block the scenes with action first, and get a Fight Director in as early as possible. The wide eyes we see on students and professional actors as they balance memorization, choreo retention, blocking, etc is mitigated when it is frontloaded in the production schedule. How do we build choreography? We always look for context within the script. What are the character's motivations, are the characters trained fighters or is this a scrappy pedestrian fight, has the playwright given us stage directions on how the violence will go and lastly what is the vision and time that the director and production team have based on budget. We begin to create a base of choreography whilst being cognisant of the time given to teach. If we do not have a long session we go for simple movements that are executed well and if we have more time we build to more complex skills. All create different wow factors and our end goal is to make the actors feel confident within these actions. We achieve this by suggesting the teachers schedule and budget for at least one day (more will always lead to a better end product because the pedagogy is so rich) for the students to learn the techniques before they even begin the choreography.



This ensures that the students know why they will be safe at all times on stage. Safety is never a fluke, it is deliberate and ensures that they can sustain the choreography for each show. At that point diving into choreography becomes seamless. A successful model for a play like *She Kills Monsters* or *Percy Jackson* has been holding stage combat workshops in the first semester and the second semester is all about building the fight choreography for the show. Last but not least, we love stage combat as a way to access movement and empower how people feel within their bodies. We have found a high success rate in getting students to explore physicality with their bodies in this non traditional way. Feedback we have received from students in the past has expressed that stage combat was far more complicated than they anticipated but feel excited for the new skills they have learned. They have a lot to keep track of head to toe while also moving with their partners in the room, it's not just throwing fists around. We challenge their spatial awareness and opening their focus to the world around them. Stage combat creates a gateway for students to lunge and squat, duck and dodge, punch and kick all while improving their agility, coordination, balance and mind body connection on top of playing a character.

Find out more at:
www.affairofhonor.ca

ANCHOR HERE!
FRIDAY OCT. 25
ARTS UMBRELLA, GRANVILLE ISLAND



Conference 2024
ASSOCIATION OF BC DRAMA EDUCATORS

SAVE THE DATE!

Our Fall PSA is scheduled to be held Friday Oct. 25. We look forward to welcoming you to the Association of BC Drama Educators Conference 2024. The conference will be held at Arts Umbrella on Granville Island. One day filled with community and capacity building. You don't want to miss this!