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Style Publishing Group
P.O. Box 1676
Frisco, Texas 75034
Phone: 972.335.1181
Toll Free: 877.781.7067
Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com
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THIS FALL, FRISCO HIGH SCHOOL'S THEATER DEPARTMENT is challenging itself and adding a new element to its repertoire – a musical! *Once Upon a Mattress* will debut October 27th in the Frisco High School (FHS) auditorium.

This comedic production will take audiences back to the 15th century as a colorful cast of characters retells the fairytale classic, *The Princess and the Pea*. Yet, with characters such as a mute king under a curse, a dancing jester and a wizard who really wants to do stage magic, *Once Upon a Mattress* is not your typical fairytale.

In this eccentric castle, the lives of the people are changed when a young Princess Winifred, the Woebegone, swims the moat and arrives soaked to the skin, after hearing that the country had an “opening for a princess.” Queen Aggravain is convinced that she is unworthy to marry her son, Prince Dauntless the Drab, and puts the princess

to a test. Only the girl who passes this test may marry her son. In the meantime, no one else in the kingdom may marry, which has the couple, Lady Larken and Sir Harry extremely disturbed. This is only the beginning to this comedy-filled production.

With a rousing score of great songs, a rollicking spin on a familiar classic and a hilarious plot, it's no wonder FHS chose *Once Upon a Mattress* as its first musical production.

“It is a fun musical that we thought we could really handle as a first production,” said Brian Grunkowski, drama assistant director and publicity manager for *Once Upon a Mattress*. “We knew students would really go for it, and when we hear them strolling down the hallways humming or singing the songs, we know we made a correct

decision.”

Of course, putting on a musical production is entirely different than the typical high school play.

The students are faced with the challenge of learning musical and dance numbers as well as their lines. “The

that a musical was on the schedule for the fall season, they prepared the students by encouraging them to take other fine arts courses.

“We encouraged all of the core theater, choir and dance students to expand and, where their schedule allowed, to take one of the other courses,” adds Patrice Hesselbein, director of theater. “Many more theater students are in choir classes and choir students in theater classes which can only cause each program to become stronger.”

In the past, the theater department focused on three to five shows a year, mostly drama and comedy. Some past shows include *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *The Elephant Man*

(which made it to the State UIL, One-Act Play Competition), and *Dancing at Lughnasa*. After having done at least one play from every type of theater – Kabuki to Shakespeare – Grunkowski believed “it was only fitting that we attempt to do a musical next.”

The students got a taste of musical theater last year with the Broadway Junior project. “Broadway Junior is a company that takes Broadway shows and changes the keys of the music for the younger voices. Every year, we have graduating seniors direct shows for a culmination project. We choose a couple seniors, they cut the play, cast the show and take care of almost everything,” Grunkowski told. “We did a Broadway Junior version of *Into the Woods* last year... the turnout was incredible. It was very appropriate for



Rehearsal for *Once Upon a Mattress*.

photo by Andy Johnson

Gotta Dance...Sing...Act! FHS Debuts Its First Musical Production

By Amanda VanCura

core theater kids are not used to singing and most have not had any professional training, whether in class or otherwise,” Grunkowski explained. “We are all learning in this collaboration.”

Danny Lozano, choreographer for the show, adds, “One of the main challenges is taking a group of non-professionals and giving their work that polish and finish that a more technically-trained dance group would naturally have. I feel that this rather green group of actors has already proven to me that they are willing to make up for their possible lack of [dance] experience with their sheer drive and natural talent and willingness to do something innovative for Frisco High School. Musical theater takes the three separate art forms and melds them together.

Because the faculty knew last year

a beginner step into this forte.”

Putting on a musical production requires more than just the cooperation of the cast and crew; it is essential that the music and theater departments have a good relationship. At FHS, things couldn't be better.

“The camaraderie between departments has grown,” said Grunkowski. “The collaboration between all the fine arts are inspiring and amazing. The students can also attest to this. Theater students are learning from the choir students and vice versa. It is an exciting time.”

“Musical theater takes the three separate art forms, music, drama, and dance, and melds them together.”

“One big bonus we have discovered is how nice it is to work together on this project,” commented Hesselbein. “Although we as directors have cooperated on other small projects... it has become extra special for us to get the opportunity to work with the other artists. I think we are gaining even more respect for each other.”

Not only are students learning from those in other departments, they are receiving an education that goes beyond learning how to sing and act.

“Speaking generally, the fine arts help high school students think critically in everyday situations,”



Voice rehearsal for *Once Upon A Mattress*.

photo by Andy Johnson

informed Grunkowski. “Theater and the fine arts allow students to look inside themselves and discover who they really are. We feel that theater provides that growth necessary for this time of life. The students also have lots of fun doing it.”

Lozano adds that offering more opportunities in the area of fine arts is good for the community as well. “When I realized last year that we had never done a complete musical I, quite honestly, was surprised for a school of this size. I do believe that this is a sign of the area becoming more diverse and offering more options for success for a quickly evolving and adapting student population. We need to continue placing more emphasis on fine arts in Frisco.”

The FHS theater, choir and dance students have been rehearsing since

the first week of September to make this musical debut an unforgettable show. Lozano points out that there are a couple numbers that you'll want to watch for.

“‘Opening for a Princess,’ a full cast number and ‘The King, Jester and I,’ and ‘Shy’ will be very funny numbers. Unlike other musicals, there aren't just one or two memorable songs, they are all good and the story keeps the audience's attention. This is one that everyone should enjoy!”

Mark your calendars for October 27th, 28th and 29th at 7:30pm in Frisco High School's auditorium. Not only will you have a new take on fairytales, but you'll also never look at the FHS fine arts department the same way again.

Amanda VanCura is a freelance writer living in Frisco.