

# Downstage Center

Go behind the scenes with Kevin Selwyn



Roll call. Two musicals, two children's shows, one play, one opera, one laboratory musical and one laboratory play. That's it?

Yep, that's it for theatrical productions exclusively endorsed, produced and administered by Shenandoah Conservatory. These opportunities also offer credit for performance majors in acting, theatre for youth, musical theatre, opera and vocal performance.

But is that all there is?

Follow some theatre students off-campus or tread the hallways of Ruebush after designated school-show rehearsal time, and you'll find a lot more.

At any given time, there is sure to be two or three student-run productions either in rehearsal or performance. Outside productions, as they are colloquially known in the conservatory, are productions exclusively endorsed, produced and administered by students "outside" of designated school production rehearsal times and performances.

Let's go underground into the world of student-run productions to learn about two upcoming performances.

Junior acting major Dave Stishan has been involved — directing, producing or acting — in four student-run productions since his freshman year.

"Outside productions are good exposure," Stishan said. "You get to see your peers outside of an educational setting." Stishan even has his own production company that was set up specifically to mount student productions.

Cofounded by Stishan in spring 2008, MidCity Productions was established to give fellow actors more opportunity to perform theatre that is often not chosen in an educational setting.

"This means we can have smaller casts and better experiences altogether," said Stishan.

Since its inception, Stishan, in conjunction with MidCity Productions, has mounted two shows: "Steel Magnolias" in spring 2009 and "The Odd Couple" in fall 2009.

He is currently in rehearsals for "The Crucible," which will have its debut on Saturday, April 10, at 7:30 p.m. at the Winchester Meeting House in downtown Winchester.

But his production company hardly ever breaks even.

"Everything is funded from our own pockets. We have no backers," he said. "We pay for show rights, books and costumes — some of which are borrowed. But that amounts to about 95 percent of what we need coming from our pockets," he said.

While MidCity Productions is a relatively new addition to student life at the conservatory, another group has been around even longer.

Shut Up! It's Shakespeare!

Sorry for the outburst, but that is the in-your-face name of a student-run Shakespeare group that has been regularly performing the shows of the immortal Bard for years.

"We don't boast technical prowess," said current director of the ensemble, senior acting major Lindsey Mitchell. "It's a group for students who love Shakespeare and want to play with it."

Mitchell continued, "I'm all for student productions. But, I find the hardest part is having authority with my peers. I've only ever worked with freshman, but it's exciting to work with students closer to my age."

Mitchell is currently in rehearsals with the ensemble preparing a performance of "Othello: The Moor of Venice."

Leadership of SU!IS! is amorphous and a new director steps forward from the ensemble to direct each new show.

For example, sophomore musical theatre major Brianna Galligan directed SU!IS!'s production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" last semester.

Stay tuned to *The SUN* for more information about Othello and keep your eyes on this ensemble in the future to meet all your auxiliary Shakespeare needs.

Both MidCity Productions and Shut Up! It's Shakespeare! must take up a lot of students' time with rehearsals and performances. Well they do. And, all the extra late-night hours students put into the shows don't exactly thrill conservatory faculty.

But, who's to stop students from doing what they love? Students participate in outside productions if the understanding they must not let their school work fall by the wayside.

"I make it a point to never step on anyone's toes. Rehearsals always happen after department rehearsals, so it takes a lot of flexibility and dedication," said Stishan.

"I'm glad 'Othello' is receiving full faculty support," said Mitchell, who is directing the ensemble in conjunction with her advanced directing class.

"Too often schools have cookie-cutter acting programs, and all they do is shove out robots," Mitchell continued. "What's great about Shenandoah is we have the opportunity and freedom to do outside programs. It's nice to have faculty support."

Although the school productions such as the mainstage musicals or plays can be wildly entertaining, there is something fascinating about seeing a production in which the students are left completely to their own devices.

Keep your eyes peeled for more information about "The Crucible" and "Othello," and please support your fellow students as they fit a little more theatre into their already packed schedules.