

# Summer stock is a tradition here



Port Washington teen theater has been going strong since 1972

BY CLAUDIA GRYPVATZ COPQUIN  
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Even though it's summer and classes aren't in session, there is a lot of learning going on at Paul D. Schreiber High School in Port Washington.

The school auditorium has been abuzz with activity as local teenagers have rehearsed three to four nights a week for six weeks in preparation for an annual local tradition, The Port Summer Show.

This year's production of "Shrek the Musical" marks the 42nd consecutive year of the nonprofit teen theater program. The show will be performed Aug. 1-4 in the high school auditorium, which marketing materials emphasize is air-conditioned.

On a recent evening, a hallway served as a makeshift photography studio where, one after the other, cast headshots were snapped for the show. In one classroom about 30 orchestra musicians warmed up on their instruments, while in another room about 20 students worked on a dance routine. Onstage in the auditorium, a grumpy ogre named Shrek who has a Scottish brogue (Oren Barasch, 16) and a feisty, talking donkey named Donkey (Nate Krantz, 17) were going over their lines. Princess Fiona (Julia Bain, 17) and Lord Farquaad (Liam Marsigliano, 18) stood by, awaiting their cues.

Many of the cast members have been in previous summer shows, and once participants graduate from high school, they tend to return as stagehands and help out wherever there's a need. According to Elise May, a co-president of The Port Summer Show, many of the students "do it year after



Director Jason Summers leads students in rehearsing "Shrek the Musical," to be presented at Schreiber High School on Aug. 1-4. Working on the set at left is designer Nick Gardella.

year for seven years, so there's a real bond between the cast, the musicians and the crew. Everybody gets involved."

#### A family feeling

Some of the lead actors said that being part of the show is like being part of a family, and

that they're especially thrilled to be performing in "Shrek."

"I saw the show on Broadway twice," said Krantz, who will be a senior next year. "It's a weird coincidence; it's the only Broadway show I've seen twice."

Bain turned down a chance to

go away for the summer so she could perform in her last production. In the fall she will head to Ithaca College, where she plans to major in musical theater.

"This is my seventh show," Bain said. "Last year was 'My Favorite Year' and I played Alice Miller. At this point for me, I started when I was going into seventh grade. It's become a tradition every summer to be here, and I love it. I'm really sad that it's my last one, but it's nice to see the generations coming through."

Besides the stage crew and cast, who range in age from 12 to 18, the productions also require a good number of



The tale of everyone's favorite ogre is The Port Summer Show's 42nd production. ■ See more photos of the cast preparing for the show at news

adults. The orchestra includes some, and there are parents like May and Susan Hoffman, The Show's other co-president, who supervise and organize various aspects of the show, such as chaperoning, building sets, painting, fundraising, promotions, ticket sales and sponsorships. There is also a professional production staff that features director Jason Summers, a Brooklyn resident and co-owner of the Westchester Sandbox Theatre in Mamaroneck, which puts on shows year-round, including several designed for young thespians.

"This is my 10th year here," said Summers, 33, who added that this is by far the most complex show The Port Summer Show has undertaken.

"Shrek" is a huge production — huge in all aspects. We have the biggest cast we've ever had, over 60 people. Usually it's between 50 and 55. From a physical standpoint, the production demands a lot — there are puppets, there are special effects, there are costumes and makeup that are really out of the ordinary. It's really raising the bar."



About 30 musicians are playing in the musical. Many students return to perform year after year. A production staff of pros helps.

#### Program began in the '70s

The bar was initially set decades ago by Pamela Meadows and her late husband, Ronald. In the early 1970s, they were both active in the Port Washington Play Troupe, a community theater founded in 1927 and touted as New York State's oldest chartered amateur theater company.

As Meadows recalled, it was after they staged a children's production of "Peter Pan" that teenage cast member Kathe O'Connor "came up to me and

Ron and said, 'You know, if you don't like sailing or swimming or those type of summer activities, there's nothing to do here.' She called us the entire winter," Meadows said, urging them to start a children's summer theater company.

So in 1972 the Port Washington Summer Theater was born, with the staging of "Anything Goes." The Meadows ran the company for 15 years with the help of two to four other adults. "The kids had to do everything for themselves," she said.

## When|Where

Paul D. Schreiber High School auditorium, Port Washington

**Aug. 1-3, 7:30 p.m.**

**Aug. 4, 2 p.m.**

**Tickets:** \$10; \$5 for children under 12; no charge for seniors 65 and older for Aug. 1 performance

## Did you know?

Jeanine Tesori, who once roamed the halls of Schreiber High as a student, is artistic

director at New York City Center's Encores! Off-Center.

In addition to film scores, the Off-Broadway musical "Violet" (written with Brian Crawley) and other works, she has written four Tony-nominated scores for Broadway:

- "Twelfth Night at Lincoln Center";
- "Thoroughly Modern Millie";
- "Caroline, or Change";
- "Shrek the Musical."

— CLAUDIA GRIVATZ COPQUIN

In 1987 they turned the show — which was changed to its current name — over to a group of volunteer parents. Today, The Port Summer Show is part of The Port Washington Youth Council, a nonprofit coalition dedicated to providing a safe environment for local children in grades six through 12. At various times, close to 80 parent volunteers run the group, said Jeanne Brennan, an executive board member.

That communitywide involvement is part of what

makes The Port Summer Show special, its co-presidents said.

"This is a parent-run organization," noted May.

But local businesses also support the annual show.

"They donate, they buy tickets, they take ads in the program," said Hoffman. "And everybody is here for the same reason: to keep teenagers in Port Washington positively and actively involved during the summer in an environment that is educational and fun."

Not to mention entertaining.

