

Set Pieces

The Set for “Noises Off!” Takes Shape With Help From Theater Students

(By Allyson Brehm, The Ellsworth American August 1, 2002)

ELLSWORTH — Painting a set is messy work. Especially the elaborate set for “Noises Off!” the upcoming production by The Grand and The New Surry Theatre.

That fact did not dampen the enthusiasm of six area teens led by New York set designer Gerry Newman.

The teens spent about a week at the end of July covered in paint, tackling the massive job of making a 16-foot high, 30-foot wide structure look like an English country house.

The set has been taking shape on the stage at Ellsworth Middle School. The teens are all summer students at The Grand-New Surry Theatre Performing Arts School.

“I think it’s awesome,” said bespeckled seventh grader Sophy Miller of Penobscot. “It’s fun.”

“Noises Off!” is the second play to be produced out of the new partnership between The Grand Auditorium and The New Surry Theatre. Last year they produced “Lost in Yonkers” together.

Opening on Aug. 8 for only four shows, “Noises Off!” is a play that The New York Times called, “A journey to the outer limits of hilarity.”

Directed by NST founder and director Bill Raiten, “Noises Off!” is a farce. That means crazy antics and door slamming.



Six students in this summer’s Grand-New Surry Theatre Performing Arts School worked with New York designer Gerry Newman on a set for “Noises Off!” a farce to be onstage at The Grand Aug. 11 to 14. (From back: Amber McKay of Penobscot, Jenni Ahern of Penobscot, Brian Harding of Bar Harbor, Nina Pool of Brooksville, Sophy Miller of Penobscot and Rachel Freeman of Brooksville, with Newman in front.)



Cast members cavort on the set.

“Doors are a farce comedy tradition,” said Newman, a childhood friend of Raiten’s who came up from New York to superintend the set design. “The set is a lot of doors and they have to slam.”



Director Bill Raiten and stage manager Jane Clarke demonstrate how the set, mounted on a turntable, will revolve during the play.

Newman designed the two-sided set, which is on a turn table because the entire set must reverse for the second act of the show.

Newman was trained as a set designer in college, but now he does graphic design. His set designs are “just for fun,” he said.

He designs sets for friends such as Raiten as well as the Heights Players in New York, he said. Newman also designed the set for “Lost in Yonkers,” which Raiten also directed.

Newman’s design for the “Noises Off!” set “took awhile because it is complicated,” he said. Since the play is all about timing, everything must be in just the right location, he said.

Newman enjoyed working with his old friend. “He was wonderful,” he said of Raiten.

And everything has been going wonderfully during his days with the performing arts school, too, said Newman.

Things are going so well, in fact, that Newman was planning to teach the students some of his techniques for detail work—how to make wood look grainy, for instance—on only their second day on the job.

The three-week school is for ages 9 through 15. It began July 9 and ended July 26.

Every Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. the 30 students learned about acting, steel drums, singing, “STOMP” type percussion, art and dance.

“This is about lifelong learning,” said Raiten, who runs the school. “We want them to realize learning is fun.”

During their final week of school six teens volunteered to work on the set. Raiten hopes that some students will help backstage when the show is performed.

Raiten ran the school last summer as well.

All the set painters agreed that Raiten is a fun guy to work with.

“Bill’s great,” said Nina Pool of Brooksville.

“He’s really funny,” added Miller.

Ninth grader Brian Harding of Bar Harbor is attending the school for his second summer.

“It is a lot of fun,” he said. “We are always doing something new every year.”

Harding's favorite part is acting class and many of the other students nodded in agreement.

"Acting rocks," said the pigtailed Miller.

The Grand and The New Surry Theatre will continue to collaborate on productions. They are planning to produce plays by "two of America's great playwrights" in the fall.

Raiten would like to see the development of a troupe of The Grand/New Surry Theatre actors.

The casting of "Noises Off!" is heading in that direction: many of the actors have worked together, or with Raiten, before. They include Cindy Robbins, Dennis Harrington, Ben Layman, Jenny Bragdon, Monique Gibouleau, Dwayne Kent, Alec Aman, Bruce Reddy and Amy Spalding.

"Noises Off!" will be performed at The Grand in Ellsworth Thursday through Saturday, Aug. 8 through 10, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, Aug. 11, at 2 p.m. Ticket prices range from \$8 to \$18. Tickets/information: 667-9500.