

Critic Manual

2025-2026



Mission:

To celebrate and amplify the voices of students from all backgrounds, ensuring that our community is a welcoming space for everyone. Our focus is:

- ✓ To be 100% student driven review process
- ✓ To be 100% student driven award recognition
- ✓ To provide exposure to diverse plays/musicals
- ✓ To promote student confidence
- ✓ To promote local community awareness
- ✓ To promote development of tomorrow's readers

Critic Name _____



Cappies of Greater Cincinnati 2025-2026 Show Calendar

Show	School	Date/Time
Six: Teen Edition	Milford High School	10/18/2025 2:00pm
The Play That Goes Wrong: High School Edition	William Mason High School	10/18/2025 7:00pm
Girls in the Boat	West Clermont High School	10/25/2025 7:00pm
Peter & the Starcatcher	Highlands High School	11/02/2025 2:00pm
John Lennon and Me	The Summit Country Day School	11/08/2025 1:30pm
The Great Gatsby	Larry A. Ryle High School	11/14/2025 7:30pm
The Curious Savage	Colerain High School	11/15/2025 7:00pm
TBA	Loveland High School	11/20/2025 7:00pm
Eurydice	Clark Montessori High School	12/05/2025 7:00pm
Indecent	Walnut Hills High School	02/14/2026 2:00pm
Newsies	Mariemont High School	03/14/2026 7:30pm
Grease: School Version	Scott High School	03/21/2026 12:00pm
Wizard of Oz	Conner High School	03/28/2026 12:00pm
Anything Goes	Mercy McAuley High School	03/28/2026 7:30pm
Les Miserables	Lakota West High School	04/12/2026 2:00pm
Into the Woods	Harrison High School	04/18/2026 2:00pm

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Welcome Cappies Critics!

You are in for a wonderful experience! We are the only high-school theatre, peer-evaluated organization in North America - perhaps even in the world. Bill Strauss, Cappies co-founder, always stressed that the Critics were/are the heart of the program.

Our program is driven by students and monitored by adult volunteers. Our voting system, and indeed our entire Cappies Information System, is student-designed.

We are immensely proud of what everyone has accomplished since we began in 1999 – from the excitement of Cappies shows, to the student-critic bylines in major newspapers, to the drama and glamour of Cappies galas.

The materials in this binder reflect our on-going commitment to provide a learning program that encourages excellence in theatre and in writing.

Thank you, in advance, for helping make this our best year yet.
Judy Bowns, Cappies Co-Founder

Alecia Lewkowich Cappies President

Jeffrey Flood-Orion, Cappies Vice-President

Registering

Turning in Your Parental Authorization Form

The first thing to do to be a Cappies Critic is to sign your electronic Parental Authorization Form. This form needs to also be signed by your parent or guardian.

PARENTAL AUTHORIZATION IS MANDATORY.

No student may attend a Cappies show as a Critic unless the Program Director has received a signed Parental Authorization Form. No exceptions.

Connecting with Cappies Information Services (CIS)

Receiving e-mails. Throughout the year, you will receive e-mails about your upcoming shows or other Cappies news. To make sure you receive these, please see that your spam filter allows e-mail from cappies.com. Then, check for Cappies e-mail at least every other day so you know what's going on. (If you don't have an online computer at home, talk to your Cappies Advisor to see what can be worked out.)

Activating Your Account. When you become a Critic, you'll be registered on Cappies Information Services (CIS) – the part of the Cappies web site where, among other things, you can see your show schedule and submit your reviews. You will receive an e-mail from cappies.com telling you your username and password. To be officially added to the roster of Cappies Critics, you must activate your CIS account by logging in. To log in, go to cappies.com/cis and enter your username and password. Then select the region code for your Cappies chapter from the scroll down menu, and click "Log in". (Ask your Lead Critic or Cappies Advisor if you need help.) CIS can also be reached by clicking on "CIS Login", located at the top of the www.cappies.com home page.

You will need your username and password every time you log in to CIS, so, after you log in, you may wish to change your password to something that's easier for you to remember. To do so, click on the "Change your password" page and fill in the form. Your password must be at least eight letters or numbers, in any combination, including capital letters. CIS will not allow you to choose common or easy-to-guess passwords (such as "password"). If CIS doesn't accept your new password, it will tell you. Try something else until CIS accepts your password.

Checking Your Contact Information. To use CIS, and for program officials to reach you (or your family, in an emergency), the Cappies must have accurate contact information for you, including your home phone and cell phone (if you have one) numbers. This information is kept confidential and is accessible only to program officials. Please check to be sure this information is correct on the "View your personal information" page at www.cappies.com/cis. If corrections are necessary or if you change your e-mail address or phone number during the year, go to the "Correct your personal information" page at CIS.

A note about Critic teams: Teams must have a minimum of 3 critics and a maximum of 9. All critics must be in grades 9 to 12 and must attend the school of the registered team. The only exception includes team members who do not attend the registering school and who do not have a team at their own school of record.

Your Show Schedule

The Shows You Will Review

Your Team's Show Assignments. You and your Critics' Team will see and submit reviews for a minimum of five shows over the course of the year. The shows assigned to your team will be based on the availability and conflicts your lead critic submits to the steering committee. To see a list of your assigned shows go to the "View your schedule" page at www.cappies.com/cis.

Volunteering For Additional Shows. You may also volunteer to review additional shows beyond those assigned to your team. (In some Cappies chapters there is a limit to the number you can review in a year).

Limitations as to which shows you may review include:

- You may not review the same play or musical at another school that your school has selected to perform for this year's Cappies show.
- You may not review a show that is at your own school
- You may not review the same play or musical performed more than once in a season.
- You may not see more than half of the shows in a season.
- You must at least see 2 plays and 2 musicals, the other is your choice.
- You may not review/vote for a show in which a cast or crew member is from your own school.

To volunteer to review one or more shows, go to the "Volunteer for a non-assigned show" page at www.cappies.com/cis, check the "Volunteer?" box next to the show(s) you wish to review, and then click "Save changes" at the bottom of the page.

Only Seeing Shows With The Cappies. If you want to review a show, you have to attend the Cappies performance with the other Critics. You can not see the show at another time and review it. Also, you can only see a show once, so that your end-of-year score is based only on the Cappies performance and not mixed up with a second performance that may have been better or worse.

Handling Schedule Changes

Coordinating With Your Lead Critic. If you can't make an assigned show, let your Lead Critic know right away (and adjust your schedule on CIS as directed below), as this may affect your team's schedule. At least half of your team must attend an assigned show to make it count as fulfilling one of your team's minimum requirement. If not, an additional show will be assigned to your whole team to make up for it. In some programs if your team fails to send the minimum number of critics a second time, your show could be ineligible for nominations and awards. So make sure you let your Lead Critic know right away if one of your team's assigned shows conflicts with something already on your calendar. If a show assignment turns out to be a conflict for most of the Critics on your team – for instance, if your prom gets scheduled on one of your assigned dates – your Lead Critic can ask the program director if a switch is possible.

To contact (or send files to) your Lead Critic through e-mail via CIS, go to the "Send an e-mail to lead critic" page at www.cappies.com/cis and follow the directions. Your e-mail will be sent to your Lead Critic and a copy will be e-mailed to you as well. Keep in mind that all e-mails sent through CIS can be seen by Cappies officials. Please keep your e-mails respectable and Cappies related.

Adjusting Your Schedule On CIS. If you can't make it to one of your team's assigned shows, in addition to letting your Lead Critic know, you must decline the show on CIS and volunteer to review a different show to make up for it and reach your individual minimum to be able to vote for awards at the end of the year.

To decline a show, go to the "View your schedule" page at www.cappies.com/cis and check the "Decline?" box opposite the pertinent show, and then click "Save changes" at the bottom of the page. To volunteer for another show, click the go to "the volunteering page" link at the bottom of the page. Then check the "Volunteer?" box opposite the show you want to review, and click "Save changes" at the bottom of the page.

If you must decline a show, do so as soon as possible so you have time to volunteer for a make-up show, if necessary – while there are still shows left in the year to see that have enough room for you to attend. If you must decline a show close to its date, do it at least 48 hours before the show's start so the final attendance list won't have your name on it.

Emergency Cancellations. If, due to illness or personal emergency, you must decline a show closer to its start time than 48 hours ahead, still decline through CIS and notify your Lead Critic. If, due to illness, personal emergency, or transportation problems, you are unable to attend a Cappies show and cannot decline through CIS before the show's scheduled start time, then e-mail (or ask a family member to do so) your chapter's Program Director or Web Coordinator.

Preparing to Attend a Show

Equipping Yourself

Be Familiar with the Theatre Evaluation Guide. To know what to "Keep in mind" and what to "Look and listen for" in a Cappies show, see the [Theatre Evaluation Guide](#). You may find it helpful to review it before each show, especially when you're starting out. The better you know and understand what's in the Theatre Evaluation Guide, the more you'll enjoy watching shows, the better you'll be as a Critic, and the more you'll learn from the whole experience. The cast and crew of the show you're scoring may have looked through these guidelines, too, so they'll know what they need to do to excel.

Learn About the Show. A day or two before you see a show, do a little background research on the play/musical to help you appreciate what you are going to see. For instance, what's the history of the show? When was the play written? How long was it on Broadway? Has it won any notable awards? Was it controversial or trend setting?

Print Forms as Needed. You'll need a Notes page, an Award Category Eligibility form, and a Critics' Choices page for each play or musical you attend. Schools will provide these forms for you, but it is always good to have a few extra on hand. To get the forms, go to <https://www.cincicap.com/> and print what you need.

Bring Your Binder and a Pen. Bring this Critic binder with you to each show so you can refer to the Theatre Evaluation Guide, as needed, during discussions and scoring. You can also use it as a hard surface to write on while you're taking notes during the show. Be sure to have something to write with as well. (No pen-lights or other light sources, please, as it can be very distracting for the cast during a show.)

Dress the Part. When you attend a Cappies show remember that you are representing both your school and the Cappies Program. Please take this into consideration when deciding what to wear.

Arranging Transportation

Getting Directions to the Show. To see where a show is being held (It's not always at the host school.) and to find directions to it, go to the "View your schedule" page at www.cappies.com/cis and click on the name of the play or musical. A small window will then pop up with the address and a link to a map so you can get directions.

Planning to Arrive Before, and Stay After, the Show. There are pre-show and post-show Critic discussions, so, when scheduling your transportation, plan to arrive 45 minutes before the opening curtain and stay about 45 minutes after the show. Depending on where you are going and the time of day, you may want to allow some extra time in case you get temporarily lost or stuck in traffic.

When you get to the show's Cappies room on time, you'll have a chance, before the discussion begins, to look at the tech displays and to chat with the other Critics. In some Cappies chapters, a critic who arrives after the pre-show discussion is not permitted to see the show. A Critic who gets there less than ten minutes before curtain may not get to see the show, as the school may take back their ticket. A Critic who gets there after curtain, even if the school lets them in, would have missed too much to review the show. Check with your local chapter for specific rules.

Determining How You'll Get There. Work out with your parents how you're going to get to and from shows. Nearly always you'll have to get there by car.

If your plan is to have somebody drop you off at, and pick you up from, the show, make sure they will be there about half an hour after the show is over and that they know they may have to wait for you. Call them on your way back to the Cappies room to let them know about when you'll be ready. (Bring your cell phone or arrange to use somebody else's to call them.) If for any reason your ride is late, make sure you find and tell a Mentor. At least one Mentor must stay until the last Critic has been picked up. This way no one is left standing alone, late at night, at a place they don't know. Be considerate of the Mentor's time and be sure your ride is on time.

If your parents are going to drive you, they may want to stay for the show. If so, make sure they know they can't go in the Cappies room at any time (even before the show), and they can't sit with you. They'll need to come as early as you do (45 minutes before the show) and stay as late as you do (45 minutes after the show, or maybe later, if it takes longer). Also, they'll have to buy their own tickets – preferably in advance, so they're sure to get a seat. Call the school's theatre department to make reservations.

If you want to carpool with other Critics, first make sure you have your parents' permission and that your plans comply with the laws about teenagers driving teenagers. The reminder e-mails you will receive before each show will include an attendance list which may be used to arrange carpooling. If there is a driving curfew for teenagers, you might need to plan

around that. Evening Cappies shows are to end by 10:30 p.m., and there's the discussion after that, so there will be times when you won't be leaving for home until well after 11:00 p.m. Add in the time it will take to get home to make sure you have plenty of time to make it before any curfew.

Your Critic Integrity

Displaying Objectivity

For the Cappies awards and your feedback on shows to be meaningful, people must know that your evaluation is objective – that it is based solely on your knowledge of theatre and what you observed in the show – without any outside influence. Therefore, when working as a Critic at a show, it's best to socialize only with fellow Critics. Even waving at a friend you have at the host school may be interpreted by others as bias toward the school's show. This also includes texting and social media. So, to preserve your integrity as a Critic, keep with your fellow Critics. Your friend(s) will understand. For the same reason (and the sake of your relationship), if you have a really close friend on the cast or crew, it's best not to even review their show. That's what professional theatre critics do in the same situation.

Saving Your Opinions for Your Review

While the cast and crew of the show are eager to hear what you thought of their work, your opinions must be presented carefully to give a balanced evaluation of the whole production and prevent hurting their feelings. After all, these students are students like you, just learning their craft. The Review Writing Guide will show you how to appropriately present your evaluation of these student's work.

Here are some tips to help you at a show to save your opinions for your review:

- While watching the show, go ahead and laugh and clap as you see fit, but don't discuss your opinions – even in a whisper. You never know whose mom is sitting right behind you, reading your lips for her theatre-booster phone tree.
- During bows, do pretty much what the rest of the audience is doing. Don't start a standing ovation – let the parents of the performers do that – but if you liked the show, it's fine to stand, too. If nearly everybody in the audience is standing, and you thought a show was only so-so, go ahead and stand anyway so as to not give your thoughts away. (If it's closing night, and the school is giving special acknowledgements at the end of the show, the school is to let you leave the theatre before that. There's supposed to be an announcement excusing the Critics, but, if there isn't, the Mentor will gesture to you all to stand and exit the theatre as quietly as you can.)
- When you walk between the theatre and the Cappies room – during intermission or after the show – don't say anything about the show, even to another Critic. You never know who may be a few feet away overhearing. If someone from the host school asks what you thought of the show, it's best to say that you're a Critic and not permitted to talk about the show.

Keeping Critics' Confidentiality

Because Cappies is a learning program, there is one exception to saving your opinions just for your review. That is, talking with your fellow Critics in the Cappies room at the show. In the Cappies room, you and your fellow Critics may freely discuss the show to compare observations and information and to make Critics' Choices. However, everything that is said in the Cappies room is to be kept in confidence – forever. What goes on in the Cappies room must stay in the Cappies room. Just as you save your own opinions for print, let your fellow Critics save their opinions for print – or not – as they see fit, and let your Program Director announce the Critics' Choices when the time is right. All of this protects the integrity of each individual critic and of the Cappies program now and in the future – and makes it possible for everyone to speak candidly in the Cappies room.

Scoring Privately

Your Critics' Choice scores and award votes are even more private than the opinions you save to put in your review. They are not even to be shared with other Critics, not even the ones on your team. The results (names of award winners) will be divulged at the Cappies gala, but the scores are not revealed at any time so peoples' feelings are not hurt and you are not put in the awkward position of having to defend your score.

Confidentiality Consequences

Divulging information about the Cappies Show, discussion in the critics' room, critics' choices or voting whether in person, via social media (i.e. Twitter, Snap Chat, Instagram, Facebook, etc), or in writing could result in removal from the Cappies Program per your local Steering Committee.

Writing Carefully

While the cast and crew of the show are eager to hear what you thought of their work, your opinions must be presented carefully to give a balanced evaluation of the whole production – and to prevent hurting their feelings. After all, these students are amateurs like you, just learning their craft. The Review Writing Guide will show you how to appropriately present your evaluation of these students' work.

Critic Discussions and Scoring

The Opening Discussion

Checking in with the Editor Mentor. When you get to a Cappies show, go right to the Cappies room. When you get to the Cappies room, check in with the Board Member, who will mark you present on the attendance list, indicating that you are eligible to review the show. After you're signed in, you can spend some time having refreshments, looking at the show program, tech evidence, and other show materials.

Finding Out What's Particular about This Show. Twenty minutes before show time, the Discussion Mentor (typically a teacher) will start a discussion about the show and particular things to watch for in this production of it – in addition to what's in the Theatre Evaluation Guide to "Keep in mind" and "Look and listen for". A few minutes before curtain, the usher will come get everybody from the Cappies room. Take your binder with you so you can note your observations during the show.

Post-Show Discussions

Sharing Opinions and Learning about Theatre. At intermission and again at the end of the show, you'll return to the Cappies room to discuss what you thought about the show per the four evaluation factors for each category in the Theatre Evaluation Guide. This sharing of opinions brings out observations and information that help everyone learn more about theatre, and, thus, write thoughtful reviews and give knowledgeable scores.

Keeping the Discussion Moving. The discussion after the show is supposed to take about 45 minutes. To keep it moving along so everyone can go home in a timely manner, please raise your hand to speak, state your opinion briefly when you're called on, and then listen quietly while other Critics give theirs.

Making Critics' Choices

During the post-show discussion, you and your fellow Critics, as a group (by majority rule), will select a Critics' Choice in each category for which the show is eligible.

Choosing the Best. You're picking the best-in-show for each category. If the lead actor is also the best vocalist, comic actor, and dancer, then that's who your Critics' Choice will be for each of those categories. (That doesn't happen much, but it's often true that you'll want to pick one person in two categories.) Remember, you are picking the best compared only with the others (if there is more than one) in that category in *this* show. (How well they did in comparison with how well it can be done will be reflected in your scoring.)

Determining Eligibility. The Theatre Evaluation Guide defines what's eligible for each category. In addition, the Show Director provides an Award Category Eligibility form listing particulars for this show.

Resolving Disagreements. If disagreements arise about how to apply an eligibility rule, the following steps will be taken. First, the category definition will be read aloud. Then, the board member present at the show will make the decision they feel best aligns with the rules. (If you think that decision doesn't follow the rules, when you get home send an e-mail to the chapter Program Director.) If you don't think a show qualifies for a non-performing category (like Sets or Costumes) but the Show Director says it does, go ahead and make it a Critics' Choice, and score it. Then, make sure a Mentor and at least one Lead Critic notify the Program Director about the difference of opinion.

Scoring

After you and your fellow Critics make Critics' Choices, you will choose your own score for each one and the play/musical as a whole. *These preliminary scores are to help you remember, at the end-of-year voting, what you thought about each of the shows you saw.* The 10-point scale you'll use is explained at the bottom of the Critics' Choices form, and tips for scoring are given for each category in the Theatre Evaluation Guide. If your school has done this show, take extra care to base your scores only on the production you are reviewing. Do not base them on a comparison with any other performances. Review the theater guide for scoring and consider the degree of difficulty of a role.

Fair Scoring

Across all the shows you see, and all of the Critics' Choices you score, try to keep your overall *average* score somewhere between a 4 and a 7 – especially if this is your first year as a critic. If your mean evaluation score is below 4, maybe you're too "critical." If your average score is above 7, maybe you're a little too nice. Your overall score for a show category should be in a similar range as the individual scores. If you scored a majority of the performers and technical categories with a 6 and 7 you should not score the show category a 3 or a 9.

Apply the same scoring standards to shows in the fall, winter, and spring. If, over the course of the year, you feel that your scoring scale has changed, you can fix that when you vote for awards at the end of the school year.

Nomination and Award Notes

The Critics' Choices are the names that will appear on the ballot at the end of the year, that is, those that could be selected to receive Cappies nominations or awards. So, you may also wish to mark a few N's and A's next to the score of people you think might deserve nominations (N) or awards (A) – to help you remember what you thought when it comes time to vote at the end of the year. For example: If you scored the orchestra a 3 it should not receive a nomination or award.

Turning in Your Scoring Sheet

When you are done scoring and making whatever notes you want, sign your sheet and turn it into the Board Member before you leave. It will be kept safe so you can see it on voting day. You may also wish to save your show programs to refresh your memory before you vote for awards. (If you forget to hand in your form, bring it to the next show, and give it to a Mentor when other forms are turned in for that show. Clip on a note as a reminder that it's for an earlier show. If this happens at your last show, just bring the form with you when you vote.)

Submitting Your Review

Meeting Your Deadline

After the show, write your review, letting the cast and crew, their family and friends, and the general public know how well you think it went. The Review Writing Guide will show you what to put in your review and how to present it. To see the deadline for your review, go to the "Submit a Review" page at www.cappies.com/cis and look for the deadline listed next to the show. For the Cincinnati Chapter, all Cappies review deadlines are Monday at 9pm.

Reviews are submitted through Cappies Information Services (CIS), which keeps precise time. Once you submit your review, you will receive an e-mail notifying you that your review was received – and that it was on time (or late). If you miss the deadline by even one second, your review will be marked late and it will not be eligible for publication.

If your review is not in 24 hours after the deadline, e-mail reminders will be sent to you, your Lead Critic, and your Cappies Advisor. If your review is still not in 72 hours after the deadline: (1) you can no longer submit your review; (2) your Lead Critic and Advisor will be notified; and (3) you will not be allowed to evaluate that show in the award voting. If this happens a second time, you will be removed from the roster. (However, if you did not submit a review because of illness or personal emergency, your Advisor can e-mail your chapter Program Director to request a three-day extension, but your Advisor must do so within seven days after the review deadline.)

Formatting Your Review

You'll be sending in your review electronically, so write it on your computer's word-processing program, where you can use spell-check or grammar-check and save your work. Just write the text of your review (no title or byline), use block paragraphing (no indenting), and skip a line between paragraphs. (Your review will remain anonymous during the Mentors' selection process. If it is selected for publication, the media will receive your and your school's names as they appear on your "View your personal information" page.)

Counting Your Words

The best reviews are usually about 400 to 500 words long. (Your word-processing program most likely has a word-counting tool that can quickly count the words for you.) Reviews that are close to 600 words may not be accepted in some chapters. Reviews that are close to 300 words are unlikely to be selected and reviews of fewer than **200** words WILL NOT count as a submitted review.

Sending It in Via CIS

To submit a review, first copy it from your word-processing program. Then, go to the "Submit a review" page at www.cappies.com/cis, and click on the name of the show for which you wish to submit a review. Paste your review in the text box, and click "Preview Review." Here, make sure you have completed all tasks and check them off on the checklist. If you wish to make any changes, click on "Edit Review," make your changes, and click again on "Preview Review." (The word count is listed at the top of the "Preview Review" page, so you can track it as you edit your review.) You may want to copy your revised review back to your computer program to save it. Once you are completely satisfied with what you are submitting, click "Submit Review."

Fixing Submission Errors

Suppose you discover, after you've submitted your review, that you've made a major error. For example, suppose you reviewed two shows over a weekend and submitted the wrong one for a particular show. If this (or something comparable) happens, please send an e-mail to your chapter's Program Director and/or Web Coordinator, requesting that your review be deleted. When they have done this – which may or may not be prior to the review deadline – you can submit the correct review instead.

If CIS Is Down

The "Current CIS Status" is listed on the Cappies home page at www.cappies.com. If it says "Online", your review must be submitted through CIS as directed above in order to count. However, if CIS is "Offline", submit your review via e-mail to AdminCIN@cappies.com. From here, it will be forwarded to the Mentors. Please keep a digital copy on your computer as you may be requested to resubmit your review on CIS.

Getting Read at The Host School Or in The Media

After you click "Submit Review", your review will be forwarded, along with all the others, to the Discussion and Editor Mentors who will look them over before they are sent to your readers at the host school or the media. The Mentors will edit out any unfair criticism and spot check for plagiarism before the cast and crew read them. (A review found to have substantially violated the rules of criticism may be withheld from the host school and a notice sent to the Critic and/or their Advisor. A Critic found, in any part of their review, to have plagiarized – that is, used someone else's words as their own – will be removed from the roster.)

Cincinnati Cappies AI Policy

Students MUST disclose use of any AI program or app in CIS after the last line of their review before they submit. Students must identify what program they used and for what purpose (i.e. "Grammarly was used to check spelling and grammar in this review"). **(Note- the program director will remove these lines before publication- Editor mentors should leave them alone.)**

Any review that comes back as more than 55% likely to be AI generated through multiple checkers (no less than 3) will be flagged for AI use, for which the critic and advisor will be notified.

Critics will have a 24-hour rebuttal period before their review is struck and discipline is enforced for plagiarism. If a word doc, google doc, or other word processing program with version history capability satisfactorily proves the review was human generated, discipline will be dropped and the review and its ranking will stand. Handwritten reviews are not accepted as evidence. As the writer of the review, the burden of proof is on the critic. Beginning in the 25-26 season, on a first offense, failure to disclose or rebut to the satisfaction of the board will result in the review being deemed ineligible and an additional show and review will be assigned to the critic. On a second offense, the critic is removed from the Cappies program.

The Mentors will also select the very best reviews for publication. All of the Critics who attended the show will receive an e-mail letting them know whose reviews have been selected and for which publications. . However, these reviews are posted under "Reviews" at your chapter's home page on www.cincicap.com for everyone to see.

Voting for Awards

Preparing For Voting Day

At the end of the year, you and your fellow Critics will vote to determine who is nominated for and wins Cappies awards. You'll be presented with the Critic's Choices (by actor name, versus character name) in each category and asked to score them in three ways, as shown below. Keep in mind that if you are the Critics' Choice in any category for your school's show, you won't get to vote for anyone in that category.

Before voting day, you may want to refresh your memory about the shows you saw by looking over the programs, your notes, and your reviews. (To see your reviews as kept by CIS, go to the "View your submitted reviews" page at www.cappies.com/cis and click on the name of a show.) You may bring notes with you to the voting place. When you get there, you will also be able to see your Critics' Choices sheets with the notes you made at each show.

The Voting Process

On voting day, you'll check in, pick up your Critics' Choices sheets, receive voting instructions, and be directed to the in-house computers/use your own laptop (directions will be provided in advance as to technology needs), where you will vote in all three of the following ways.

Evaluation Scores

Give each Critics' Choice (from the shows you saw) a score from 1 (poor) to 10 (professional quality). You may use the same score you wrote on your Critics' Choices sheet at the show or you may adjust it up or down. Remember to keep your scoring *average* somewhere between a 4 and a 7.

Tie-Breakers

Rank the candidates within each category. If you gave the same score to more than one candidate, still rank one above the other. For instance, if you gave three candidates a score of 6, designate them as 6A, 6B, and 6C, with "A" being higher than "B", and "B" higher than "C".

Nomination and Award Points

Give points to those candidates you think deserve nominations or awards. You will have five nomination points and one award point to distribute for every show you reviewed. (For instance, if you reviewed five shows, you'll have 25 nomination points and 5 award points to distribute.) You must give out all the points you earn, and one-fifth are to go to tech categories. You may give these points to candidates in several shows or in one show, but you may only give one of each kind of point to any one candidate.

How Results Are Calculated

When voting is over, the following scores are calculated for each candidate:

- a mean evaluation score (the mean of the evaluation scores received from Critics),
- a nomination point score (the number of nomination points received by a candidate, divided by the number of Critics who saw their show), and
- an award point score (the number of award points received by a candidate, divided by the number of Critics who saw their show).
- Nominations and awards are based on a combination of these scores – with tie-breaker rankings used as needed. The nominations will be announced a day or two after voting.

The auditor(s) used at the end of voting must be independent from Cappies, Inc. and every chapter's votes MUST be audited and communicated to Cappies Inc. before release to the chapter directors.

Multiple nominations

A candidate may receive only one performing-category nomination or award and one non-performing-category nomination or award per show. If a candidate earns enough votes to merit more than one nomination or award, the candidate will be nominated or awarded in the more prestigious category (for performing categories) or the category in which they are listed alone (for non-performing categories).

Voting Irregularities

Any possible outcome-swaying "gaming" or "strategic voting" by critics is observable in the results, with program officials retaining the authority to disqualify any votes that they, the auditor, and an international Cappies official conclude were not cast objectively. Students participating in such behavior will be removed from Cappies. At the discretion of the steering committee, the critics' school may be put on probation or removed from the program.

Critic Awards

Awards for Critic' teams and individual Critics are based half on how many reviews you do and half on how many of them get picked for publication (with extra credit given for selection for the major newspaper).

Special Awards

Your chapter's Steering Committee may give one Special Award for Service per year. This is for extraordinary service on behalf of the Cappies or high-school theatre in general. There will be no nominees, only a winner will be named in this category.

The Awards Gala

At the end of the year, the nominees will be applauded and the Cappie awards will be given – in a style reminiscent of the Tonys – at the Cappies gala. This is the night where the talents of actors, dancers, singers, costumers, set-builders, sound people, Critics, and so forth are acknowledged. It's everybody's turn to shine.

The gala is a formal event, so everybody's dressed up – which adds to the electric atmosphere. Schools cheer for their classmates and for the talents from other schools. Excerpts from some of the shows are presented, and the winners make short, excited, acceptance speeches. As a Critic, you helped make it all possible. Enjoy!

Aspects of Theatre / Award Category Guide

Here, presented in the same order as listed on the Critics' Choices - Post Show Evaluation form, are the aspects of each show that you are evaluating and writing about in your review (excluding Marketing and Publicity). These are also the Cappies award categories that you make Critics' Choices for and score. Mentors also use this Guide to determine eligibility for awards. Show Directors use it as well – to understand what information Critics need to have prior to a show, to establish eligibility in some categories, and, if they wish, to let the cast and crew members of their Cappies shows know what you (as a Critic) will be looking for.

The Four Evaluation Factors

The following four factors are the basis for evaluating each aspect of a show/award category. For a high overall rating, several of these factors should leave a favorable impression. Was the work of high quality? Was it creative? Did it offer a range of expression? Was it difficult? If you can say "yes" to all four, or an emphatic "yes" to at least two of these factors, then a high score can be warranted. Conversely, if you feel the answer is "no" for all four, then a low score is warranted.

Presentation

Whatever the category – sound, orchestra, ensemble, dancer, lead, song – simply ask: How good was it? How effective? How entertaining? In technical categories, you need to score the candidate only, so you may need to differentiate carefully between the work of the student(s) and the work of other people. Your own view is key here, but audience response and other-Critic opinion can help inform your own judgment.

Originality

How original and creative was it? Did the candidate make the work distinctly his or her own? Did the performer's character strongly resemble that in a well-known film? Were the sets or costumes exactly what you would have expected, for that show (or time period)? Was there any aspect of the performance or crew work that was inventive, unusual, or surprising? When the show was over, were you still thinking about the intelligence of the craftsmanship (of a character, humor, vocal styling, props, costumes, sets, lighting design, etc.)?

Range

What was the range of expression? Did the candidate attempt – and achieve – different elements of theatrical work? Did a performer present more than one aspect of a character? Did a lead set more than one kind of mood in different scenes? Did a vocalist sing numerous kinds of songs – for example, a touching ballad and an up-tempo number? Did a set designer produce two very different looks on stage? Were the costumes well-selected in more than one period? Were there several kinds of special effects, or just one? Was the ensemble work funny in one scene, heartfelt in another?

Difficulty

What was the degree of difficulty? Whatever the candidate did, was it hard to do? Were the songs easy or hard to sing? Were the characters easy or hard to find? Given the script, did the performer get laughs the easy way, or the hard way? Was the set very basic, or did it involve careful engineering and delicate finishing work? Were the costumes rented or hand-made? Was the sound crew dealing merely with a few cues, or with the swapping of a dozen body microphones whose volume had to be balanced against a full orchestra? On the whole, was this a tough show to do, or a relatively simple one?

MARKETING AND PUBLICITY

Marketing and publicity refers to the publicity campaign for the produced play or musical. The materials or description of campaigns must be available to the Critics prior to the show and must be the original work of a student or group of students in grades 9 through 12. This may include, but is not limited to:

- graphic design,
- poster,
- program,
- web site or social media,
- press release,
- trailer or other media, or
- lobby display.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

The caliber of the marketing and publicity should show a cohesive theme, a high level of artwork, an understanding of 'what sells', and should be attractively displayed.

Look and listen for:

Appeal. What was the quality of the presentation? Did it have eye-appeal (ear-appeal, if applicable)?

Originality. Was it original and creative?

Variety. Were there a variety of examples and types of publicity?

Difficulty. What was the overall degree of collective difficulty?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: A full scale marketing and publicity campaign showing numerous (five or more) examples of media at the highest design level.

7 or 8: A marketing and publicity campaign showing at least four types of media from the seven suggestions above and/or something not listed, all at a very high level of design.

5 or 6: A marketing and publicity campaign showing at least three types of media from the seven suggestions above and/or something not listed, all at an average or slightly average high-school level of design.

3 or 4: A marketing and publicity campaign showing at least three types of media from the seven suggestions above and/or something not listed, all at an average or slightly below average high-school level of design.

1 or 2: A marketing and publicity campaign that clearly does not display the understanding of the concepts of marketing or publicity.

SOUND

Sound refers to the technical aspects of sound, including amplified sound, sound effects, and music not performed by live musicians. The extent of sound amplification, the frequency and timing of sound cues, the visual aspects of the placement of sound equipment, and the use of sound equipment by performers are factors. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students, in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible.

Keep in mind:

The question is not purely whether the performers can be heard, and you should evaluate amplified sound only. The nature and extent of the challenge faced by a sound crew can be very different, from show to show, and some theatres can pose special sound challenges. Nearly always, sound is more difficult in a musical than in a play, and scoring should reflect this. A play that uses no microphones, has a few sound effects, and has no sound errors should not be scored as high as a large musical with a dozen shared wireless microphones and a few sound errors. For a play, a high score should only be awarded if it poses technical sound challenges that are handled well. If the cast projects well with unamplified voices, which can be reflected in performer, ensemble, or overall play scores, but not here. In large musicals, small mistakes should be forgiven, especially if good adjustments are made. If mistakes recur, or are not quickly corrected when they happen, that should be reflected in the scoring.

What you are evaluating is the sound design and the work of the sound crew, not necessarily the overall quality of sound. Almost anything can affect sound quality – the size of the cast, the size of the theatre, the number of people in the audience, the speaker placement, the number of microphones the school could afford, even the costumes and prop. Squeaks and bumps can be a performer's fault. If a voice cannot be heard well, that can be as much the result of a performer's lack of projection and articulation as it is of the work of the sound crew. You are evaluating the work of the sound crew *only*.

Look and listen for:

Amplification. Is the sound amplified just about right – or is it too loud, too soft, or uneven?

Clarity. How well can you hear performers' lyrics or words in amplified songs or dialogue?

Errors. What missed sound cues, static, whistles, bumps, or other errors can be reasonably concluded to have been partly or fully the result of the sound crew?

Microphone placement. Are the microphones located well? Do they look good on performers? Are they situated cleverly to minimize errors?

Adjustment to space. How well did the sound crew adjust to the special needs or challenges of the theatre?

Sound cues. Do sound cues add to the atmosphere of the story? Are there any unusual or hard-to-execute sound cues?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: There is substantial amplification with nearly no sound problems, which are hardly noticeable and never detract from the show, along with creative sound effects and/or design which enhance the show.

7 or 8: There is substantial amplification with occasional sound problems, which are noticeable but seldom detract from the show with appropriate sound effects or design which enhance the show.

5 or 6: There is substantial amplification with some sound problems, which are noticeable but at times detract from the show – or little or no amplification and creative sound effects or design which enhance the show.

3 or 4: There is substantial amplification with numerous significant sound problems, which are noticeable and occasionally detract from the show – or little or no amplification and sound effects which neither enhance nor detract from the show.

1 or 2: A show with substantial amplification has constant sound problems, often detracting from the show – or little or no amplification, with occasional sound flaws.

LIGHTING

Lighting incorporates the design and execution of stage lighting, including lights that are part of any sets, costumes, props, or still-projection (gobo) special effects. Factors to consider are the timing and coordination of light cues, and the use of lit areas by the cast on stage. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible.

Keep in mind:

Basically, if it lights up, then it's lighting. Lights do not need to command attention to be done well. They just need to work with the show. Some shows require flashy lighting, and others must be done more subtly. The key issue, always, is whether scenes are well lit. Try to distinguish between performer and crew error. If a performer is out of place, there usually is nothing a lighting crew can do about that. You may need to discern the difference between the light cue being incorrect and the performer going to a wrong location. (One skill of a good performer is one who moves fluidly into his light even when a cue is wrong.) All factors are important here – and keep "degree of difficulty" in mind.

Try to take into account what the performing school has in the way of lighting fixtures. Usually, you can see them from the audience, if you look around from your seat (or, better, look briefly from the front of the house during intermission or after the show). The more fixtures a school has available, the more options it has for using lighting creatively. Some schools have "intelligent" lighting fixtures that can move, change color, and have cutout patterns (gobos) that can be controlled remotely, through cues written before the show.

Look for:

Execution. Are the light cues well timed? Is the lighting well synchronized with the performance? Do spotlights hit their targets? Are any blackouts intentional?

Tint and Color. Is color used appropriately and well? Does the color reflect the time of day or mood of the moment?

Effect. Does the lighting create or enhance a scene? Does it help establish a mood? Do the lights correctly reflect the situation, emotion, and time period of a scene?

Complexity. Do the lights change frequently? Are there multiple effects?

Functionality. Can you see the performers well (especially their faces)? Are performer faces lit to look good? If their faces are in shadows, or have a flat or washed-out quality, might that reflect an artistic decision?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The lighting is complex and fits the show perfectly, with well-timed cues, well-lit performers, and very creative effects, significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The lighting is complex and fits the show nicely, with errors that are hardly noticeable, and interesting effects, nicely fitting the performance

5 or 6: The lighting is appropriate and fits the show, with errors that are hardly noticeable, fitting the performance... or, if simple, is very well done.

3 or 4: The lighting fits the show fairly well, with some noticeable errors in cues or lighting of performers, and workable effects, neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The lighting does not fit the show well, with several noticeable errors and no helpful effects, detracting from the show.

SETS

Sets refers to the design, construction and finishing work on all scenes, including back walls, stage trim, furniture, and every physical item other than lights, costumes, and hand-held props. All design work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. A majority of the construction and finishing work must be done by students, but some adult participation is permissible, especially as required to ensure performer safety. Furniture need not be made by students. Crew work (in set changes) is not a factor.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

(In the past if the *set design* was done by an adult then no set award was possible even if the students did all the building.)

Keep in mind:

The set must fit the show's theme and mood. Sets can be elaborate or minimalist, realistic or cartoonish. Any style can work, and the most complicated set isn't always the best kind. The set should first fit the show and then impress. Many shows will have unit sets that require no scene changes, and others will have multiple or moveable set pieces. That involves an artistic decision, but the more complex the choices, the greater the challenge for set designers and builders. Some shows may be enhanced by creative and original set pieces, while others may call for a highly traditional look. A well-designed set will allow for nimble stage crew work. If the crew work is slow or awkward to watch, that may be, in part, a reflection on the quality of the set design and construction.

The size of a stage, and a school's budget, can influence set choices. A small stage, or lack of wing space, can preclude a large set or multiple complex shifts. A set designer who works brilliantly with a difficult space or small budget should be scored accordingly. In shows (for example, in black boxes) with no more than a very basic set design, even if the set pieces work perfectly, the lack of difficulty, originality and creativity, and range of expression will preclude a high score.

Look for:

Aesthetics. Is the set enjoyable when the stage is empty? Does it make the show more enjoyable to watch? Does it help make the show unique? Are there any unconventional set pieces that add to the flavor of the show?

Theatricality. Are the set pieces consistent within an artistic concept? Do they correctly suggest a time period, location, and situation?

Usefulness. Does the set work in the show? Are there multiple entrances? Are there levels and divisions? Are they cleverly positioned? Does the set provide varying looks, for different scenes? Does the set add to the flow of the show?

Construction. Is the set well-crafted and nicely decorated? Are the details well-tended and interesting? If the goal is realism, does the set achieve that? If the goal is something else, does the set achieve that other goal?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The set has a quite complex design, was very challenging to build, is aesthetically superb, fits the show perfectly, allows creative staging options, is well crafted and decorated down to the smallest detail, and significantly enhances the show.

7 or 8: The set was somewhat challenging to design and build, is aesthetically pleasing, enhances the show, allows varied staging options, and is well crafted and decorated.

5 or 6: The set was somewhat simple to design and build, fits the show nicely, allows some staging options, and is fairly well crafted and decorated... or, if simple to design and build, supports the show.

3 or 4: The set fits the show fairly well, neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The set does not fit the show well, detracting from the show.

COSTUMES

Costumes refer to the design, assembly and making of costumes, and the speed of costume changes. Costumes are defined as anything worn by performers, including hats and footwear. All design and assembly must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. *A significant proportion of the costumes must be designed and acquired or made by students specifically for the show.* Some non-student-made costumes (for example, costumes that are rented, made by parents, drawn from a school's costume collection, and/or borrowed from elsewhere) are permissible, but only if a list of rented or adult-constructed costumes is provided to Critics prior to the show.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

Differentiate carefully between student and adult work, and between rented or borrowed costumes and hand-made costumes – which can be more creative and difficult.

Look for:

Theme and period. Do the costumes demonstrate continuity in theme? If costumes are intended to be realistic, do they succeed at that? If the intent is cartoonish, do costumes succeed at that? Are costumes correct to the period, season, and location of each scene?

Character. Do costumes effectively single out lead characters? Do costumes help differentiate various groups of characters or ensembles? Do costumes help define the characters' personalities? Do costumes help distinguish age, gender, income class, or other character differences?

Aesthetics. Are the costumes eye-catching? Are there any beautiful costume moments?

Quality, functionality, and speed. Are the hand-made costumes well-made? Do costumes help conceal microphones? Do they fit well with the set and lighting? Are costume changes quick, especially for ensembles?

Quantity, variety, and creativity. How many costumes are there? How many of those are hand-made? How original are the costume concepts?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The costumes – many of them made by students specially for this show – are superbly designed, beautiful to watch, fit the show perfectly, and significantly enhance the show.

7 or 8: The costumes – some of them made by students specially for this show – are well designed, pleasant to watch, and enhances the show.

5 or 6: The costumes are well-designed, nice to watch, fit the show, and complement the show.

3 or 4: Some costumes are well-designed, nice to watch, and a good fit for the show, while others are not.

1 or 2: The costumes do not fit the show well, detracting from the show.

MAKE-UP

Make-Up refers to the design and execution of all facial (and other) cosmetics, hair, nails, and props (for example, fake noses, ears, hands, or feet) attached to performers' bodies. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. The extent of make-up done by specialist (as opposed to performers doing their own) must be identified to the Critics before the show.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

In many shows, performers do their own make-up, requiring less pre-show preparation. The purpose of this category is to recognize make-up specialists. The basic purpose of stage make-up is for facial definition, to keep performers from looking

too washed-out under the lights, and to make them look the age of their character. Some of the best make-up can be the least noticeable. Other times, make-up can help a performer create and shape a character. Special touches can be used for unusual looks (wigs, noses, scars, feet), unusual characters (animals, aliens, fairies, monsters), or unusual situations (blood, dirt, wounds, scars, tears). Those touches can be hard to do well. When evaluating make-up, look closely in scenes with strong lighting, where differences in quality are especially noticeable. All four of the evaluation factors should be considered equally here.

Look for:

Definition. Does the make-up show faces well in normal stage lighting?

Believability. Does the make-up help define characters? Does it reflect their ages?

Special or unusual touches. Is there any special make-up for unusual characters or conditions? If so, is it believable? Or, if the artistic choice is to be cartoonish, is that well done?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The make-up is exceptionally well done, fits the characters perfectly, includes some difficult and well-executed special touches, and significantly enhances the show.

7 or 8: The make-up is well done, fits the characters reasonably well, includes special touches that are well executed, and nicely complements the show.

5 or 6: The make-up is generally well done, fits the characters reasonably well, includes some special touches that are well executed, and nicely complements the show.

3 or 4: The make-up fits the characters fairly well, neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The make-up does not look good and does not fit the characters well, detracting from the show.

PROPS

This aspect of theatre refers to the design, construction or collection, and use of student-designed props that are neither sets nor costumes (that is, handled by performers but not attached to their bodies). Examples include, but are not limited to, weapons, food, beverage containers, and live animals. This work must be specifically identified to Critics prior to a show. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. The quality of performer-use of props is a factor, but a performer who uses props and effects (for instance, a puppeteer or magician) may be considered only if she/he assisted in the design and/or construction of the props.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

Some scripts pose challenges that can be daunting for any show, especially one on a budget. Creative props can provide solutions to those challenges, making a show more fun and interesting. Usually, the prop crew can only provide what's in the script or what little can be added without deviating from the script. Depending on the show, props can be workable, extensive or few, realistic or fanciful, overlarge or miniaturized, serious or comical, appealing to the eyes or appealing to other senses. They can range from the startling and amazing to the predictable and merely workmanlike. Note that the selecting and handling of live animals are included here. All four evaluation factors should be equally considered.

Look for:

Theme and period. Do the props work well within the script? Do they demonstrate continuity in theme? If props are intended to be realistic, do they succeed at that? If the intent is cartoonish, do they succeed at that? Are they correct to the period, season, and location of each scene?

Aesthetics and illusions. Are the props eye-catching, or aesthetically pleasing in other ways? Do they create interesting illusions?

Quality and functionality. Are the props handled well? Are they sturdy?

Quantity, variety, and creativity. How many props are there? How many are hand-made? How original and imaginative are they in design and execution?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The props are extensive, creatively designed and superbly executed, convey the script perfectly, and significantly enhance the show.

7 or 8: The props are well-designed, suit the script well, and complement the performance... or, if minimal, are creative and superb and significantly enhance the show.

5 or 6: The props suit the script well and, whether extensive or minimal, neither add to nor detract from the show.

3 or 4: The props suit the script fairly well and may at times detract from the show.

1 or 2: The props do not fit the show well, detracting from the show.

SPECIAL EFFECTS AND/OR TECHNOLOGIES

This aspect of theatre refers to the design, construction, or collection of special effects and/or technologies that are neither sound nor lighting. Examples include, but are not limited to, video, magic, fog, aromas, projections, and digital effects. This work must be specifically identified to Critics prior to a show. All work must be done by or under the direction of one student or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. The quality of performer-use of effects is a factor, but a performer who uses effects (for instance, a magician) may be considered only if she/he assisted in the design and/or construction of the effects.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

Keep in mind:

Some scripts pose challenges that can be daunting for any show, especially one on a budget. Creative special effects can provide solutions to those challenges, making a show more fun and interesting. Special effects are sometimes required by a script, and other times added as stagecraft. In some schools, their use can be limited by building codes and smoke detectors. Depending on the show, effects can be workable, extensive or few, realistic or fanciful, overlarge or miniaturized, serious or comical, appealing to the eyes or appealing to other senses. They can range from the startling and amazing to the predictable and merely workmanlike. Note that video light projections are included here. All four evaluation factors should be equally considered.

Look for:

Theme and period. Do the effects work well within the script? Do they demonstrate continuity in theme? If effects are intended to be realistic, do they succeed at that? If the intent is cartoonish, do they succeed at that? Are they correct to the period, season, and location of each scene?

Aesthetics and illusions. Are the effects eye-catching, or aesthetically pleasing in other ways? Do they create interesting illusions?

Quantity, variety, and creativity. How many special effects are there? How original and imaginative are they in design and execution?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The effects are extensive, creatively designed and superbly executed, convey the script perfectly, and significantly enhance the show.

7 or 8: The effects are well-designed, suit the script well, and complement the performance... or, if minimal, are creative and superb and significantly enhance the show.

5 or 6: The effects suit the script well and, whether extensive or minimal, neither add to nor detract from the show.

3 or 4: The effects suit the script fairly well but may at times detract from the show.

1 or 2: The effects do not fit the show well, detracting from the show.

STAGE MANAGEMENT AND CREW

This category incorporates the effectiveness and timing of all cues. In addition to the performance, the stage management should be evaluated on the evidence provided in the Cappies Room. e.g. prompt book, rehearsal reports, pre/post show checklists.

All work must be done by or under the direction of a student stage manager or a student management team, but adult guidance is permissible.

Keep in mind: Regardless of type of show stage management is responsible for being the head of communication during the rehearsal process, creating rehearsal reports, recording blocking, managing the schedule & keeping things running smoothly. When looking at the stage management in a show it is important to remember that the management of these components during the rehearsal will lead to a smooth run of the show. During the production, Stage Managers call every light cue and sound cue during and work closely with the head of the stage crew backstage to keep the production running smoothly in and out of scene changes.

Look and listen for:

Execution/Cues. Do the light cues change on beat with music? As soon as set pieces are finished moving on or off stage the lights come up and the scene begins? Are there pauses waiting for sound or light changes?

Organization. Is it clear from the tech board that the stage manager had a clear organization system for communication with the cast? Had a clear way of organizing the rehearsal information (blocking, choreography, etc.)?

Rehearsal materials provided. Do the rehearsal reports contain detailed reports? Did the scene change plots have clear and detailed information on them? Did the prompt book have easy to follow and complete cues in it?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The stage management is difficult, creative, and very well-executed, swift and silent, hitting all cues, causing no distractions, and significantly enhancing the show. Rehearsal documentation is provided to show clear, detailed & complete organization and communication from the Stage Management team.

7 or 8: The stage management is challenging and uniformly efficient and enhances the show. Rehearsal documentation provided and thorough.

5 or 6: The stage management is uniformly efficient and complements the show. Rehearsal documentation provided neatly compiled but perhaps few in number or lacking in detail or not clear or detailed.

3 or 4: The stage management is efficient, with a few noticeable flaws, neither enhancing nor detracting from the show. Rehearsal material provided is loosely organized but perhaps lacking in detail or not clear or detailed.

1 or 2: The stage management is not well done, with numerous noticeable problems, detracting from the show and no documentation is provided that the stage management completed organized or clear assistance during rehearsal.

ORCHESTRA

Orchestra refers to a group of musical accompanists that performs not less than six full songs, as accompaniment to vocalists in a play or musical, and will be evaluated for tone, pitch, authority, balance, pace, performer support, and other factors of musicianship that may contribute to a successful show. An orchestra may be a combo, band, orchestra, or any other group of not less than 3 musicians, of whom not less than 80 percent are students in grades 9 through 12. (A four-member orchestra must be all students, a 5- to 9-member orchestra may have one adult, a 10- to 14-member orchestra may have two adults, etc.) A conductor who is an adult and does not play an instrument will not be included in this percentage. Whether the score is performed as written for professional orchestras, or as simplified for student orchestras (by the publisher or by the school's own music director) is a factor. If not otherwise specified, Critics will assume that the score has been simplified for student use.

Keep in mind:

Different scores have different degrees of difficulty. Scores that have been simplified for use by school orchestras are less difficult than those that have not. The mere fact that a school's music director may have altered some parts does not necessarily mean that they have been simplified. There are two ways to evaluate orchestras: to listen to them carefully – and not to try to listen to them at all, and see if what they do stands out, in either a positive or negative sense. At various points in a show, you should try to do both.

Listen for:

Command, intonation and technique. Does the orchestra play with confidence, in tune, flawlessly? Do all the notes sound right – or, if not, was that the composer's intent?

Phrasing. Does the orchestra interpret the music nicely? Does the music flow naturally? Are solo lines well articulated? Do they sound smooth? Does the music make sense?

Dynamics. Does the orchestra support the singers and not overpower them? Is the sound well- modulated, loud when it should be loud, and soft when it should be soft?

Style. Does the orchestra play in the style of the score, and period of the story?

Blend. Do all sections of the orchestra play complement each other, and blend well with each other? Does no section dominate too much? Are any instruments (over-amplified guitars and electric basses, drums, horns) often too loud?

Entrances and cut-offs. Does the orchestra start songs well, and have strong, solid finishes?

Support. Does the orchestra adjust to early or late entrances, vocal errors, or sound problems?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The students play a challenging score with superior execution.

7 or 8: The students play a difficult score with excellent execution or a less challenging score with superior execution.

5 or 6: The orchestra complements the show with few errors.

3 or 4: The orchestra sometimes distracts/overwhelms the show and/or makes several errors.

1 or 2: The orchestra frequently distracts/overwhelms the show and/or makes numerous errors.

CHOREOGRAPHY

Choreography refers to the design and teaching of dance choreography, stage combat, and/or other synchronized on-stage movements. To be eligible, a show must have a majority of its musical numbers, stage combat, and/or synchronized scenes designed and taught to performers by a student, separate students, or a small group of students in grades 9 through 12, but adult guidance is permissible. Performer execution of the choreography is a factor. The entire set of student-designed choreography will be evaluated as a whole. Some adult choreography is permissible, as long as its location in the show is clearly identified to Critics in advance.

Keep in mind:

This category pertains to synchronized stage movement, not to the simple blocking of performer locations or the creation of stage pictures. It encompasses the design and teaching of choreography, and you cannot separate what was designed from what was taught, so you can only evaluate what you see. The success of the ensemble, or individual dancers, in carrying out the movement is what you should evaluate. The four required factors are equally important. Creative touches are important, but there may be times when the best choreography will bring to mind the original Broadway production. The larger the number of dancers, the more challenging it is to do difficult choreography.

Look for:

Dance technique. Are the dancers following the proper technique for that style of dance? Are toes pointed? Are legs straight? Is the dance done crisply? Are everyone's gestures tightly coordinated, so the entire ensemble looks like one dancer doing the move?

Rhythm, timing, and showmanship. Does the movement stand out? Does it grab your attention? Is the dance tight to the rhythm, with a good start and finish?

Complexity and extent. How complex are the movements? How lengthy are the segments with movement? How many performers are involved?

Use of stage and props. Are the dancers using all the stage, and using sets and props creatively?

Suitability. Does the movement suit the ability of the dancers? Do the performers make it natural and easy? Does the movement suit the show, and reflect the time period of the story? How well does the movement help tell the story? Does it make sense, where it occurs?

Size of ensemble. How many dancers are doing any choreography? Difficult choreography?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The movement is of superior design, complex, executed energetically, cleanly, and significantly enhances the show.

7 or 8: The movement is very well designed, challenging, executed energetically, cleanly, and enhances the show.

5 or 6: The movement is well designed, interesting, and presented well, nicely complementing the show.

3 or 4: The movement is presented fairly well but with some noticeable problems, sometimes detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The movement is either not well done or very simple (or both), and presented with frequent noticeable problems, detracting from the quality of the show.

CREATIVITY

Creativity refers to creative achievement – by a student or group of students in grades 9 through 12 – not encompassed in another category. Only one creative achievement may be identified as the Critics' Choice in each Cappies show. Areas of creative achievement include, but are not limited to:

(A) Musicianship; (B) Composing; (C) Lyric Writing; (D) Play Writing; and (E) Directing.
Guidelines for evaluating these areas of creative achievement are given below and on the following pages.

Significant documentation that clarifies the student versus adult contributions for each aspect of the work is strongly recommended. If either component (design and/or execution) is primarily student done, then the production is eligible for an award in that technical category, assuming that there is substantial documentation to prove that element was student done.

This applies to each of the Creativity categories: Musicianship, Composing, Lyric Writing, Play Writing, and Directing.

A. Musicianship

This creative achievement refers to an individual or group playing on stage during a production, in at least two songs, totaling not less than 60 seconds. The songs including solo segments by the student musician must be identified to the Critics before the show.

Keep in mind:

Nearly always, this category will apply to a musician who performs as an on-stage soloist, rather than as part of an orchestra pit. If so, listen more carefully than you watch. Very slight and subtle variations in performance can separate an excellent from a good musician. You do not need to be a skilled musician yourself to detect this, but you do need to pay very close attention. If a musician is also a vocalist, with two or more solos, he or she may also be considered in that category.

Look and listen for:

Command. Does the musician command attention as a soloist?

Intonation and technique. Does the musician play in tune? Does the musician play flawlessly?

Phrasing. Does the musician interpret musical lines nicely? Do the musical lines fit naturally? Are they well articulated? Do they sound smooth? Does the music make musical sense?

Style. Does the musician's style fit the show?

Theatre. Is the musician enjoyable to watch, as a performer? (This will not apply, if the musician is not on stage.)

B. Composing

This creative achievement refers to student composition of at least 3 songs for a Play or Musical. The songs written, or orchestrations made, by a student composer must be identified to the Critics before the show.

Keep in mind:

In a musical, the music is central to the show. In a play, any music should add to the show. Composition is a difficult task that requires a special skill set. Orchestration is an even more advanced skill. The simple fact that a student is composing and, perhaps, orchestrating songs, is itself an achievement. Composing songs suitable for vocalists (and lyrics) is a somewhat different task than composing pure music. If a candidate qualifies as a Composer, Playwright, Lyricist, and/or Musician, under the above definitions, the candidate can be evaluated in only one of these aspects, in which case the quality of the other aspects will not be a factor.

Look and listen for:

Instrumentation and orchestration. Are the songs written for several instruments, and do those instruments complement each other well, and blend together well?

Melodies and harmonies. Is the composing interesting melodically? Are the melodies memorable? Do the set the proper tone for the moment? Is the music interesting harmonically (the kinds of chords used, and progression from one chord to another)?

Context. Is the music appropriate to the moment? To the character? To the time and place of the setting of the show?

Range and structure. Does the music have variety, from song to song? Within individual songs? Does the music have a logical musical progression?

Originality. Does the music sound original, or too derivative? Does it sound too much like anything you recognize?

Fit to lyrics. If there are lyrics, how are they set, rhythmically and melodically? Do the musical lines require any distortions of natural speech patterns?

Vocal range and support. If there are vocalists, are some sounds set too high or too low? Does the composer give the vocalist proper places to breathe?

C. Lyric Writing

This creative achievement refers to student lyric writing of at least 3 songs for a Play or Musical. The songs written by a student lyricist must be identified to the Critics before the show.

Keep in mind:

It is not hard to write song lyrics. Nearly anyone can do this, to some degree. The challenge lies in separating good or excellent lyrics from everyday ones. A lyricist needs a real feel for the language, and for music. The best lyrics combine poetic rhythms and rhymes with clever word play, an effective use of emotions, and a solid craftsmanship, with words fitting very comfortably to music. The very best lyrics join with a well-designed composition to produce a song that sticks in your head as you leave the theatre.

Look and listen for:

Subject. Are the songs interesting? Do they speak broadly? Are they original ideas?

Context. Are the songs and lyrics well-placed? Do they fit the moment? Do any of the songs advance the story? Are the lyrics appropriate to whatever time period is required? Do the lyrics convey what the story needs to convey?

Emotion. Do the songs convey emotions effectively? Do characters start singing at points in the story where it feels natural and even necessary?

Balance and range. Is there a good variety of types of songs – ballads, comedy songs, rhythm songs, charm songs, aggressive songs, dance songs, other types? Is there a good mix of solos, duets or trios, and ensembles? Are songs spread well among the characters?

Fit to the characters. Are the lyrics appropriate to the characters? Do they convey emotions, and use words, that are believable for the characters?

Fit to the music. Do the lyrics fit naturally and comfortably with the musical lines? Do they bring to mind the natural flow of speech, set to music?

Rhymes. Is there an interesting use of rhymes – end rhymes and inner rhymes? And is there an interesting occasional use of unrhymed lyrics?

Vocabulary. Are the words smart and interesting? Are the lyrics poetic, or heightened speech? Do the lyrics follow the natural rhythms in the language?

D. Play Writing

This creative achievement refers to student playwriting of not less than one full act of a Play or Musical, totaling at least 40 minutes.

Keep in mind:

Writing a play takes perseverance, but not necessarily great skill. What is hard to do, and what takes great skill, is to write a play that makes you truly look forward to act two, to see what will happen – and then, when it's over, you keep thinking about the story and characters on the way home. The challenge is to separate the quality of the writing from the quality of the performances (and directing).

Look and listen for:

Story. Is it a good one, told concisely? Does it offer an interesting perspective on questions larger than the story itself? Is there a logical dramatic arc to the story? Is any conflict plausibly constructed, and just as plausibly resolved in the end? Is every member of the audience allowed to reach his or her own conclusions (or is the story "preachy")?

Lead characters. Are the lead characters believable and interesting? Are the lead characters draw your interest, either because they are likeable or for other reasons? Are they who and what they seem to be? Are their social and psychological aspects well developed? Are they consistent within themselves and within the story? Do they develop (have a "character arc") over the course of the story?

Secondary and ensemble characters. Are the secondary characters helpful in advancing the story? Is there a good mix of characters? Do their subplots provide a useful contrast, whether comic relief or something else? Are their varying aspects – young or old, male or female, people of different wealth, ethnicity, nationality, or religion – effectively portrayed?

Scenes. Are the scenes well structured – comic scenes, tragic scenes, combat scenes, highly emotional themes? Do the scenes flow well, one to the other?

Stagecraft. Do interesting things happen onstage? Does the story break at the right spot, between act one and act two?

Musical aspects. In a musical, is there a good balance between dialogue and musical sections? Do some of the songs advance the story? Are the songs sincerely presented by the characters?

E. Directing

This creative achievement refers to student-directing of all aspects of an entire show, including casting, tech work, sets and costumes, blocking, and scene and character direction, with minimal guidance from a theatre teacher or other adult.

Keep in mind:

Occasionally, a student is given the title of "director," but still is, in effect, an assistant to an adult show director. For a student to be eligible for this award, the show must be directed almost completely by that student. In fact, as well as in name, the student must lead a group of their peers, create among them a cohesive team of actors and technicians, and make and execute decisions about creative concepts, casting, tech, costumes, blocking, rehearsals, scene and character development, and all other elements that go into a production. This is a very large challenge for a student.

All four factors apply here, in roughly equal measure. Consider many of the same aspects as for the Play or Musical categories, except (apart from casting choices) you cannot hold the director accountable for every individual performance. Ask yourself, through the show, whether you are noticing director issues more than you usually do at shows. If not, then the student director may be doing good work. If you find yourself thinking "this is a great show," and not "this is a decent show, considering it's student run," then the student director may be doing very good work.

Look and listen for:

Show choice and casting. If the director chose the production, is it one within the capability of the cast and crew to do well? Has the show been appropriately cast? Do the actors suit their characters?

Staging. Was the show well staged? Did the director use the space of the theatre and the set to enhance to production? Did the staging help tell the story? Does the staging look planned and rehearsed?

Character work. Do the performers look like they were given direction? Do they look sure about where to be and what to do? Are the characters sharply defined, and developed well? Do lesser characters (and less talented performers) have fully developed characters? Do performers exhibit good on-stage chemistry and appear to work well together?

Pace. Does the show move briskly? Are cues well-timed? Is crew work quick and efficient?

Musical aspects. If the show is a musical, how well are the songs integrated in the story?

Technical aspects. Are sound, lighting, sets, costumes, and other tech aspects used to enhance the story line? Are these items used to an appropriate degree? (Or could the show have made do with more of them – or less?)

Originality. Is this production unique in significant ways? (Or does it look like other productions of the same show – or a movie – that you may have seen?)

For all creativity categories consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The creative element is of superior quality and significantly enhances the show, and nearly all of the above questions can be answered with a clear "yes."

7 or 8: The creative element is of excellent quality and enhances the show, and nearly all of the above questions can be answered with a clear "yes."

5 or 6: The creative element is of good quality and enhances the show, and many of the above questions can be answered "yes."

3 or 4: The creative element is basic and answers some of the above questions can be answered "yes."

1 or 2: The creative element is not well executed, and only a few of the above questions can be answered "yes."

A NOTE ABOUT PROJECTIONS: Projections will be categorized by who DESIGNS and/or RUNS the projections. Example: if projections are run by a lighting crew member - they will be considered in the lighting category. This would be the same if run by a member of sets, running crew, or stage management. If projections are designed and/or run by a separate, independent crew, it could fall under Creativity.

ENSEMBLE (PLAY / MUSICAL)

Ensemble refers to a distinct and recognizable group of performers who frequently (at a minimum, in more than one scene) appear on stage together as an intended/named unit, but it may not include the entire cast, or an adult in a prominent role. A

majority of the ensemble performers must be students in grades 9 through 12. In a Musical, the Ensemble must be supporting in at least one song. In a Musical, this award is intended to recognize a chorus, although other ensemble groups are eligible. As long as they appear together, they may represent different character groups. For example, the Winkies/Ozians in "The Wiz", the secretaries in "Thoroughly Modern Millie," or the villagers/utensils OR the Silly Girls in "Beauty and the Beast." Though the ensemble may include a performer eligible for a lead category, the ensemble may not solely consist of leading actors e.g. The Jets (yes, All of them) are OK. The Delta Nu's can be an ensemble even though Elle is among them.

Keep in mind:

Ensembles can be large or small. They can include performers (in supporting or lead roles) who may have a key identity wholly apart from the ensemble. An ensemble usually provides some counterpart to the story – humor, intrigue, or jolts of energy. It works best when it functions as a team, with good dynamics and chemistry among its members – but can include well-defined individual characters. Of the four factors, quality of presentation matters most. An ensemble can be distinctly un-original, while lending a useful flavor specific to the period of the story. Usually, an ensemble need to have less range of expression, or character arc, than individual performers. What it is at the start may be what it remains at the end of the story. Achieving good dynamics with a two- or three-person ensemble may be less difficult to with a larger group. In a musical, an ensemble should have a significant musical role, with at least one song in which it is defined and supporting. It might also participate in several other songs, lending strong harmonies – and aggressive (perhaps humorous) dance sequences.

Look and listen for:

Character and story. Does the ensemble have its own distinct identity? Does that identity serve the purposes of the story?

Style and period. Does the ensemble convey a particular style or period? Is it eye-catching?

Comedy. If humor is part of the ensemble's purpose, is it funny – vocally, facially, and physically?

Energy and measure. Does the ensemble bring useful energy to its scenes – and give a measured performance, not going "over the top" and providing too much of a good thing?

Vocals and dance. If the show is a musical, does the ensemble sing well, with strong voices and good harmonies? Does it dance well, with coordinated movements?

Cohesion and focus. Does the ensemble work well as a team, with good group dynamics? Do ensemble performers give proper focus to individual performers, when required?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The ensemble is distinct, and engaging, with high energy and outstanding dynamics – and, in a musical, has superior vocal and dance skills – significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The ensemble is distinct with high energy and solid dynamics – and, in a musical, has excellent vocal and dance skills – nicely complementing the show.

5 or 6: The ensemble is distinct with good energy and solid dynamics – and, in a musical, has good vocal and dance skills – nicely complementing the show.

3 or 4: The ensemble is distinct – and, in a musical, has inconsistent vocal and dance skills – neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The ensemble is distinct but uneven – and, in a musical, has weak vocal and dance skills – detracting from the show.

FEATURED (ACTOR IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE – PLAY/MUSICAL)

A Featured performer creates and defines a memorable character, in a role that may OR may not have significant stage time, character presentation, and involvement in the story line. A role that is too small to qualify as Supporting will qualify as Featured. Examples in a musical are: Grandmother Berthe in "Pippin", Freddy in "My Fair Lady", and Marcellus in "The Music Man".

Keep in mind:

A role cannot be too small – but can be too large – to qualify as Featured. A Featured performer can dominate one long scene or two short ones, and can have a minor role in several other scenes. More than that is too much to be considered Featured – and qualifies the performer as supporting. When two performers comprise an ensemble, with roughly equivalent stage time, they must either be both deemed Featured performers, or both deemed supporting (or comic) performers. In a musical, a Featured performer may have some solo lines, and may be part of a duet if the other vocalist is supporting more, but not as an equal part of the duet. Originality and creativity in the crafting of a role can often be the key factor here.

If the same performer creates more than one different Featured role in the same performance, select the most memorable of those roles, and score only that, disregarding other roles by the same performer. If no Featured role is in fact "memorable,"

none should be selected and scored.

Look and listen for:

Character. Does the Featured performer create an interesting character, with a distinct identity, that serves the purposes of a scene – or the story?

Impact. Does the Featured performer make a quick, vivid, and lasting impression?

Voice, physicality, and comedy. Does the Featured performer have a distinctive voice and physical gestures? If humor is part of the character's purpose, is the Featured performer funny – vocally, facially, and physically?

Energy and measure. Does the Featured performer bring useful energy to a scene – and give a measured performance, not going "over the top" and providing too much of a good thing?

Focus. Does the Featured performer give proper focus to other performers, when required?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The Featured performer creates an engaging character with distinct qualities and superior execution while making a very vivid impression – and significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The Featured performer creates a dynamic character with distinct qualities and excellent execution, bringing energy, making a solid impression – and nicely complementing the show.

5 or 6: The Featured performer creates an interesting character, making an impression – and slightly enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The Featured performer creates a somewhat interesting character – and neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The Featured performer creates a flat, uninteresting character that detracts from the show.

DANCER IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE

A Dancer is a performer in any role, whether lead, supporting, or featured, who dances, either solo or as part of an ensemble, but who must be supporting, at least briefly, in one or more one dance numbers, but not necessarily as a solo. The dance will be evaluated for movement, expression, timing, technique (for instance, leaps, turns, jumps, or pirouettes), and the effectiveness of their integration. Non-dance movements (including gymnastics) may be considered, if part of a dance sequence. A performer's singing and acting, in dance scenes or elsewhere, are not factors. To be eligible, dancers must be in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

To be considered for this category, a dancer should be supporting, preferably downstage, either solo or as part of a small ensemble, for roughly 32 beat counts (four 8-counts), about 15 to 20 seconds. A dancer can be, but need not be, a lead or supporting performer in the show. The dance can be in any style. Stage combat does not make a performer eligible as a dancer, but can be considered in the performer categories. Most dance segments will be of one style, which may not be original. The major issue should be the excellence and difficulty of the dance.

In any musical with substantial dance segments, an effort should be made to rate a dancer of at least one gender, and if appropriate, both.

Look for:

Technical excellence. Does the dancer have technique? If so, is it done well? Are toes pointed? Are legs straight? Are gestures strong? Does the dancer make a hard technique look easy?

Showmanship. Is the dancer drawing you in, entertaining to watch, with strong overall appeal? Does the dancer show confidence, high energy, and good facial expressions throughout?

Style. Does the dancer effectively convey any particular style? If so, is it appropriate to the number and to the show?

Complexity and extent. How complex are the dancer's movements? How lengthy are the segments with movement? How many performers are involved?

Rhythm and timing. Is the dancer tight to the rhythm, with a good start and finish?

Ensemble work. When in an ensemble, are the dancer's movements coordinated with others? Does the dancer appear to provide leadership for other members of the ensemble?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The dancer shows superior technique and performance with challenging choreography, significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The dancer shows excellent technique and performance with challenging choreography, enhancing the show.

5 or 6: The dancer shows good technique and/or performance with less challenging choreography, enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The dancer shows some good technique and/or performance.

1 or 2: The dancer shows a lack of technique and/or performance skill, detracting from the show.

VOCALIST IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE

A Vocalist is a performer in a lead or supporting role who is a principal soloist in at least two songs. A vocalist will be evaluated for tone, pitch, authority, phrasing, characterization, and presentation. The quality of the performer's acting (other than in songs), dancing, and the qualities of the song composition, accompaniment, and sound or other tech work during the performer's vocals, are not required factors. To be eligible, vocalists must be in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

If a vocalist presents a range of musical genres, and has an effective vocal styling, those should be considered positive aspects, as well. First and foremost, ask: Is the vocalist's voice strong, is it on pitch, and does it have good tone? Then ask about articulation, projection, range, character, breath control, vibrato, difficulty of the music, and other factors. As with orchestra, this may be a good category to evaluate by (briefly) closing your eyes and concentrating on listening to the voice. In any show, for either gender, if any vocalist has a principal solo in at least two songs, then rate at least one vocalist of that gender.

Look and listen for:

Tone and intonation. Does the vocalist have a voice that sounds good, and holds pitch, throughout the vocal range?

Articulation and projection. Can the lyrics be understood easily? Does the vocalist have a strong voice that projects well? If a microphone is used, does the performer handle it well, or cause the sound to be uneven or unwanted sounds to come from the microphone?

Phrasing. Does the vocalist communicating the intent of the lyrics, and the believability of the character, within a song?

Range. Does the vocalist not strain their voice at the top of the vocal range, or lack breath support at the bottom of the vocal range?

Breath control and vibrato. Does the vocalist sing full phrases and not break them up at odd places? Does the vocalist have good control of vibrato – smooth, consistent, not too much (especially in the higher range), and not overpowering the sound of the voice itself.

Character. Does the vocalist sing in character, and change no aspect of that character when singing? Does the vocalist convey that the character believes what is being sung?

Theatre. Is the vocalist enjoyable to watch when singing?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The vocalist shows superior technique and performance with challenging score, significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The vocalist shows excellent technique and performance with challenging score, enhancing the show.

5 or 6: The vocalist shows good technique and/or performance with less challenging score, enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The vocalist shows some good technique and/or performance.

1 or 2: The vocalist shows a lack of technique and/or performance skill, detracting from the show.

COMIC (ACTOR IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE — PLAY / MUSICAL)

A Comic actor encompasses a role "reasonably" intended by the playwright to be comedic and will be evaluated for character, movement, expression, and timing. The comic performer should hold a significant presence in at least one scene.

Any smaller presence, such as, but not limited to a "one-liner" walk-on role should not be considered adequate for qualification. A role that qualifies for lead or supporting is automatically considered large enough to qualify for comic.

Critics should keep in mind that it is more difficult to maintain comedy for multiple acts than for a few moments. Examples would include Leaf Coneybear in "Putnam County Spelling Bee", Agatha in "The Children's Hour", Eulalie Shinn in "The Music Man", and Eugene in "Grease". Examples of characters that would not qualify include Giles Cory in "The Crucible", Bum in "Hairspray", and Grocery Boy in "The Children's Hour". In a Musical, the performer may have, but need not have, vocal lines in any songs. Some plays may not have a significantly comic character. To be eligible comic performers must be in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

A comic performer must hold a significant presence in at least one scene. In a musical, a comic actor need not be a vocalist in any song. If a comic performer sings or dances, only the comedic aspects of that song or dance should be considered.

Comedy can be verbal or physical, wry or slapstick, solo or group. Tech work (sound, costume, make-up, props) can

contribute significantly to a comic sequence – in which case, the credit should go there, and comic performers should be credited only with their own humorous persona and antics. Also, do not score on the humor in the script, but rather on the performer's own comedic touches. Originality and creativity deserve extra weight, since those are very important underpinnings for good humor. Don't measure the difficulty. Just measure the laugh.

The bottom line, for comedy, is whether it's funny and makes people laugh. If it makes others laugh, but not you, remember that what you're evaluating is comedic performance as theatre, not as a good fit with your own sense of humor. Be alert to when a comic performer distracts from a story line, draws too much focus from others, or goes "over the top" with humor that seems forced and awkward. Also note, if a role is not intended to be humorous, as written or as interpreted by the director, then a performer should not be selected for this category.

Look and listen for:

Character and story. Does the comic performer create a vivid and amusing character with a distinct identity? Does that identity serve the purposes of any scenes, or of the story?

Style and period. Does the comic performer's humor fit within the style and period of the story?

Delivery and timing. Does the comic performer get maximum impact from humorous lines or scenes?

Voice, face, and body. Does the comic actor use voice, face, and body in humorous ways?

Energy and measure. Does the comic performer bring useful energy to scenes – and give a measured performance, not going "over the top" and providing too much of a good thing?

Focus. Does the comic performer lend comedic focus to other performers (making them funny too)? When humor is not appropriate for a scene, does the comic performer give proper focus to other performers?

Audience response. Does the comic performer make the audience laugh?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The comic performer creates an engaging humorous character with distinct qualities and superior execution while making a very vivid impression – and significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The comic performer creates a dynamic humorous character with distinct qualities and excellent execution, bringing energy, making a solid impression – and nicely complementing the show.

5 or 6: The comic performer creates an interesting humorous character, making an impression – and slightly enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The comic performer creates a somewhat interesting character – neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The comic performer creates a flat, uninteresting character that detracts from the show.

SUPPORTING (ACTOR IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE — PLAY / MUSICAL)

A Supporting Actor performs in a supporting, but not lead, role with significant stage time, character presentation, and involvement in the story line. A role that is too large to qualify as Featured will qualify as supporting. In a Musical, a Supporting performer may or may not be a principal soloist in at least one song - or not sing at all. To be eligible Supporting performers must be in grades 9 through 12." Examples would be the King in "Once Upon a Mattress" and the Wicked Witch of the West in "The Wizard of Oz".

Keep in mind:

A supporting performer does not carry the story, but lends vital support to the story—hence the term "supporting" – and can carry an interesting sub-plot. A supporting performer usually (but not always) has less stage time and character development, and (in a Musical) fewer songs than the leads. The standard should be high. A supporting performance should be persuasive and compelling. All four factors are important. A supporting role may or may not have character arc and require a range of expression. In some shows, a supporting role may be the most creative or difficult role.

Look and listen for:

Character. Does the supporting performer create and hold a believable character? Does that character support plausibly develop, or change, over the course of the story?

Story. Does the supporting performer support the story, and help propel it to a resolution?

Style, period, and age. Does the supporting performer embody the style and period of the story—and the age, ethnicity, nationality, social status, and other elements of the role?

Intensity and nuance. Does the supporting performer have sufficient intensity—and, where required, subtlety and nuance?

Monologue and dialogue. Does the supporting performer deliver lines crisply, audibly, and persuasively—when alone, and when with other performers?

Emotion and physicality. Does the supporting performer use face, gesture, and body, along with the spoken line, to convey emotions effectively?

Comedy, vocals, and dance. When appropriate, is the supporting performer funny? If this is a Musical, does the supporting performer sing and dance at the level required for the role?

Technical aspects. Does the supporting performer use technical aspects well—handling microphones adeptly, standing in the light, wearing costumes comfortably, making full use of the sets, using props effectively, making well-timed entrances and exits?

Focus. Does the supporting performer lend focus to other performers, as required?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The supporting performer creates an engaging character with distinct qualities and superior execution while making a very vivid impression – and (if a Musical) sings and dances with superior technique – significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The supporting performer creates a dynamic character with distinct qualities and excellent execution, bringing energy, making a solid impression – and (if a Musical) sings and dances with excellent technique – enhancing the show.

5 or 6: The supporting performer creates a believable character that supports the story, and (if a Musical) sings and dances well, slightly enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The supporting performer creates a fairly believable character that supports the story somewhat, and (if a Musical) sings and dances fairly well – neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The supporting performer does not create a believable character that supports the story, and (if a Musical) does not sing and dance as well as the role requires – detracting from the show.

LEAD (ACTOR IN A MALE/FEMALE ROLE — PLAY / MUSICAL)

A Lead Actor performs in a leading role, with substantial stage time, character development, and centrality to the story line. In a Musical, the performer must be a principal vocalist in at least two songs. To be eligible, Lead performers must be in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

A lead performer stands at the center of the story, and show, with the most stage time, character development, and songs (in a Musical). The standard should be very high. A Lead performance should be provocative and powerful. All four factors are important. In most shows, a Lead role usually shows the arc of the character, reveals the greatest range of expression. In many (but not all) shows, a Lead role is the most creative and difficult role.

In a show consisting of a series of vignettes, with no clear Lead character of a particular gender, the dominant performer of that gender may qualify. Every show should have at least one Lead performer.

Look and listen for:

Character. Does the lead performer create and hold a believable character? Does that character plausibly develop, or change, over the course of the story?

Story. Does the lead performer draw you into the story, and then propel the story to a resolution?

Style, period, and age. Does the lead performer embody the style and period of the story – and the age, ethnicity, nationality, social status, and other elements of the role?

Authority, intensity, and nuance. Does the lead performer command the stage with authority, intensity – and, where required, subtlety and nuance?

Monologue and dialogue. Does the lead performer deliver lines crisply, audibly, and persuasively – when alone, and when with other performers?

Emotion and physicality. Does the lead performer use face, gesture, and body, along with the spoken line, to convey emotions effectively?

Comedy, vocals, and dance. When appropriate, is the lead performer funny? If this is a Musical, does the lead performer sing and dance at the level required for the role?

Technical aspects. Does the lead performer use technical aspects well – handling microphones adeptly, standing in the light, wearing costumes comfortably, making full use of the sets, using props effectively, making well-timed entrances and exits?

Focus. Does the lead performer lend focus to other performers, as required?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The lead performer creates and holds a very provocative and powerful character with distinct qualities and superior execution that propels the story, has strong command of the stage all the time, with real intensity and strong emotional content, and (if a Musical) sings and dances with superior technique – significantly enhancing the show.

7 or 8: The lead performer creates a dynamic character with distinct qualities and excellent execution that carries the story, has solid command of the stage nearly all the time, with intensity and emotional content, and (if a Musical) sings and dances with excellent technique – nicely complementing the show.

5 or 6: The lead performer creates a believable character with distinct qualities and excellent execution that carries the story, has solid command of the stage nearly all the time, with intensity and emotional content, and (if a Musical) sings and dances with good technique – slightly enhancing the show.

3 or 4: The lead performer creates a fairly believable character that carries the story somewhat, and (if a Musical) sings and dances fairly well – neither enhancing nor detracting from the show.

1 or 2: The lead performer does not create a believable character, has weak command of the stage, and (if a Musical) does not sing and dance as well as the role requires – detracting from the show.

SONG

The Song is the best-performed song in a Musical. A song will be evaluated purely on the basis of its presentation by a cast, crew, and orchestra, including voice, dance, acting, staging, sound and other tech work, accompaniment, and any other elements of the song's presentation. The quality of the composition, lyrics, and adaptation (even if student-done), the extent of student participation in the orchestra, and the quality of any other presentation of the same song (earlier or later in the Musical), are not factors. To be eligible, a song must be in a Musical, and must not include any solo lines by an adult. A majority of the performers with solo lines in the song, and a majority of all performers in the song, must be students in grades 9 through 12.

Keep in mind:

The task here is to select and evaluate the best-performed song in the Musical. That may or may not be the best song, nor the largest, showiest, most amusing, or most famous song. It must be the best-executed song, considering all aspects of performance – including tech and orchestra work. In many Cappies programs, the Song nominees (or Critics' Choice Songs for Musical nominees) will be invited to perform at the Gala. This fact can be a source of inspiration for making a selection, but it should not alter the basic choice among songs, nor how any song is evaluated.

Listen carefully to vocal qualities (tone, pitch, phrasing, vibrato), and watch dance elements just as closely. Listen and look for a song done very well – and, when scoring it, give major consideration to the difficulty in the vocals, dance, orchestration, or technical aspects. Many songs will have little range of expression, and if that appears intended by the composer and lyricist, that is fine. A difficult song that is extremely well presented, but not original in concept, may be selected and scored high. Do not be swayed by audience response. A very amusing ensemble song may be a literal "show stopper," even if it's very easy and done in a sloppy manner, while a brilliantly performed, very difficult dramatic solo or duet may receive far less audience response. Faced with that choice; select the latter.

Look and listen for:

Vocals. Is the song performed well by the soloists? Is it performed well by the ensemble chorus? Can you understand the lyrics well?

Characterizations. Do the soloists and ensemble members sing in character?

Orchestration. Is the song performed well by the orchestra? (See the Orchestra category.)

Dance. If dance is part of the song, is that performed well? Is it sung in character?

Energy. Is the energy level of performers appropriate for the song?

Sound. Is the quality of sound uniformly good through the song?

Other technical aspects. Does lighting, sets, costumes, or other tech work enhance the song?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The song is challenging and performed with superior vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography and technical elements that enhance the song.

7 or 8: The song is challenging and performed with excellent vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography and technical elements that enhance the song or is less challenging and performed with superior vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography and technical elements that enhance the song.

5 or 6: The song is less challenging, but performed with good vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography and technical elements that enhance the song.

3 or 4: The song is performed with some good vocals, characterization, orchestration (if applicable), choreography or technical elements.

1 or 2: The song is uneven with weak vocal, characterization, orchestration and/or technical elements that detract from the show.

PLAY

Play refers to the performance as an entirety. It will be evaluated as a production, and the quality of the published work (that is, the work of the playwright) is not a factor. It will be evaluated as a whole, including all on- and off-stage elements. It may not have an adult in any supporting or lead role, and the extent of adult participation in off-stage roles is a factor.

Keep in mind:

You are not in any way judging the playwright's work, nor are you recognizing the success of a well-known play. You are simply judging the quality of this production, measured against the standard of what you might expect of a first-rate high-school production of that play. You may consider any special interpretation of a well-known play – whether the creative choices enhanced or detracted from its overall impact of a show. The four evaluation factors are all important here. Plays vary somewhat in degree of difficulty, but not as much as musicals. Some involve more difficult character, ensemble, or tech work. Plays that are new or not well-known can be more difficult to do than those that are very well-known, but this is not as important a difference as with musicals. If a play has been made into a rentable movie, it's reasonable to assume that many in the cast and crew have seen that movie and have had a chance to gain pointers from it. In such a case, look for original, creative touches. Judge the play as a whole: lead and supporting performers, minor characters, ensembles, and all aspects of tech work. Dialogue and character development are more substantial aspects in a play than in a musical, because more time is spent on them, and they are usually more central to the story (and quality of the production). Anything that happens on stage can and should be considered, whether or not student done – but the greater the student work, the more credit should be given. Be careful not to pay too much attention to ovations or other audience response. Good audience energy can reflect a strong show, but not necessarily – and Critics need to look beyond that.

Look and listen for:

Impact. How well does the play work?

Lead performers. How strong and believable are they? Do they command the stage?

Supporting and minor performers. How good are they? Do they support the story well?

Ensembles. How good are they? Do they provide energy and definition to the story?

Drama and humor. How well is the story presented? How persuasive are emotional scenes? If the show has humor, how well does it succeed?

Technical work. How good are all the technical aspects – sound, lighting, sets, costumes, make-up, props, effects, and crew work?

Direction. How effective are the creative choices, casting, blocking, character work, musical direction, dance choreography, integration of tech work, and overall pace of the show?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The play is challenging with superior performances, direction and technical elements

7 or 8: The play is challenging with excellent performances, direction and technical elements or less challenging with superior performances, direction and technical elements.

5 or 6: The play is less challenging with good performances, direction and technical elements.

3 or 4: The play is presented with some good performances, direction and technical elements.

1 or 2: The play is uneven with weak performances, direction and/or technical elements

MUSICAL

Musical refers to the performance as an entirety. Live accompaniment is not required. It will be evaluated as a production, and the quality of the published work (that is, the work of the playwright) is not a factor. It will be evaluated as a whole, including all on- and off-stage elements. It may not have an adult in any supporting or lead role, and the extent of adult participation in off-stage roles is a factor.

Keep in mind:

You are not in any way judging the book, lyrics, or compositions, nor are you recognizing the success of a well-known show. You are simply judging the quality of this production, measured against the standard of what you might expect of a first-rate high-school production of that show. You may consider any special interpretation of a well-known musical – whether the creative choices enhanced or detracted from its overall impact. All four evaluation factors are important here.

Musicals vary in degree of difficulty. Some involve more difficult music than others – or character, ensemble, or tech work. Usually, musicals that are new or not well-known are more difficult to do than those that are very well-known, in part because the cast and crew will not be working off pre-existing models. If a musical has been made into a rentable movie, or has an easily acquired CD, it's reasonable to assume that many in the cast and crew have seen that movie and heard that CD, and have had a chance to gain pointers from them. In such a case, look for original, creative touches.

Judge the Musical as a whole: lead and supporting performers, minor characters, vocalists, dancers, ensembles, orchestra, and all aspects of tech work. Anything that happens on stage can and should be considered, whether or not student led – but the greater the student work, the more credit should be given. Be careful not to pay too much attention to ovations or other audience response. Good audience energy can reflect a strong show, but not necessarily – and Critics need to look beyond that.

Look and listen for:

Impact. How well does the musical work?

Lead performers. How strong and believable are they? Do they command the stage?

Supporting and minor performers. How good are they? Do they support the story well?

Ensembles. How good are they? Do they provide energy and definition to the story?

Music, vocals, and dance. How consistently good are all these core components of a musical?

Drama. How well is the story presented? How persuasive are emotional scenes?

Humor. If the show has humor, how well does it succeed?

Technical work. How good are all the technical aspects – sound, lighting, sets, costumes, make-up, props, effects, and crew work?

Direction. How effective are the creative choices, casting, blocking, character work, musical direction, dance choreography, integration of tech work, and overall pace of the show?

Consider the following examples to score this for presentation, originality, range, and difficulty.

9 or 10: The musical is challenging with superior performances, direction and technical elements

7 or 8: The musical is challenging with excellent performances, direction and technical elements or less challenging with superior performances, direction and technical elements.

5 or 6: The musical is less challenging with good performances, direction and technical elements.

3 or 4: The musical is presented with some good performances, direction and technical elements.

1 or 2: The musical is uneven with weak performances, direction and technical elements

Cappies of Greater Cincinnati determines whether a show is a play or a musical based on how it is billed by its licensing company. If a show is billed as "a play with music," it is treated as a play for all Cappies purposes and category eligibility.

Writing Your Review

What To Include in Your Review

The purpose of your review is to let the public know what high-schoolers are accomplishing in theatre and to let the cast and crew know how well they did.

It needs to include:

- the name of the play or musical,
- the name of school producing it,
- some background on the play/musical,
- a brief set-up of the plot, and
- an evaluative description of the performances and non-performing elements you saw in the show, including examples of what went well and mentions of what did not.

Your own theatre experience, the information in the Theatre Evaluation Guide, and what you learn in Critic discussions will help you show your readers how the several aspects of the production contributed to its level of success.

Presenting It to Your Readers

How you present the above information will affect whether your readers continue to read past your opening line and how much respect they have for your opinions. It will also determine whether the Mentors select your review for publication. Specifically, the Mentors will look for how well you:

- **Criticize Appropriately.** Give honest descriptions of what happened on stage, proportionate praise and criticism within the range of fair comment, and solid analysis of theatre.
- **Give Accurate Praise.** Reflect the overall Critic opinion of a Cappies show, and various aspects of that show, as expressed during discussions.
- **Engage Your Readers.** Write with an engaging and creative style, and make your review of interest to readers who did, and those who did not, see the Cappies show.
- **Spell Names Correctly, Etc.** Correctly spell all cast, crew, character, and other names, and use correct grammar and punctuation.

Samples and Instruction

Here are two sample reviews (by Critics who accomplished the above so well that they were published) and instructions to guide you in writing your own reviews.

Sample Review of a Play: *A Piece of My Heart*

The horrors of Vietnam are quickly fading into history. Young people today have no vivid memories of lost loved ones, and it is difficult to imagine America at a time of such crisis. But the atrocity of war came to chilling life on the stage at St. Ursula Academy's recent production of *A Piece of My Heart* by Shirley Lauro.

The play chronicled the experiences of six women who each went into the war zone for different reasons and came out with memories that haunted them long after coming home. Dealing with the pain, confusion and even the love that was part of "the Nam" could be very difficult to handle, but the performers created characters that pulled the audience into their lives.

Sissy (Rebecca Whatley) is a sweet girl, innocent of the horrors she will face when she stepped off the plane and signs up for field hospital duty. With a simple, traumatized glance, Whatley revealed the agony Sissy felt as she nursed mutilated soldiers. Whatley's performance contained the power and raw emotion of a woman who discovers what war is really like.

Whitney (Allison Aiken) is a highly educated boarding school teacher who goes into Vietnam to work for the Red Cross and to find a little adventure. Aiken's portrayal of the sarcastic, bitter Whitney was brilliantly executed. With a simple toss of the head or sip of liquor, there was no doubt of the true feelings of the character.

The show was comprised of monologues that flowed into dialogue with other characters and into the action during the war. The characters that entered the lives of the featured woman were portrayed by an ensemble which found specific actions and tones to differentiate between the numerous roles they conveyed. The energy of the entire cast charged the tension of the flashbacks and the frantic confusion of a hospital overwhelmed with victims of war.

The set was simple and was used to illustrate the simple power of the stories being told by the characters. All props (accumulated by Claudia Feldhaus) and costumes (designed by Maria Reupert) were accurate to the time period and provided the perfect accompaniment to the stories being told.

The experiences of the women in Vietnam may be far removed from the lives of the performers in this play, but each actor created characters that seemed to speak from these traumatic experiences. As the lights faded, the ensemble stared up at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, a powerful testament to the courage and strength of the women who gave everything for their country.

This review was published in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*.

Written by Matt Borths, St. Xavier High School, Cappies of Greater Cincinnati

Sample Review of a Musical: *The Music Man*

Smiling faces, colorful costumes, beautiful voices singing in perfect harmony, a vibrant orchestra and marching band. ... Does this sound like a great Fourth of July celebration? Well, not quite! It's Northwood High School's production of Meredith Wilson's *The Music Man*.

This classic American musical is the story of the small and "stubborn" town of River City, Iowa in 1912 and its extraordinary visitor, Harold Hill, a man of many identities. Harold comes to the town to con the townspeople out of their money with his phony "boy's band." In the process, Harold finds himself falling in love with the town's uptight librarian, Marian Paroo, and River City itself.

Some very talented students brought this show's variety of lovable characters to life. Memorable performances included Tyler Alessi, who brought an endearing charm to Harold Hill's tricky character, and the comedic duo of Grant Scavello and Natalie Larriva as Mayor and Mrs. Eulalie Mackecknie Shinn. Erika Nafius as Mrs. Paroo showed a consistently impressive Irish accent, while Kiersten Regele's dance skills and smiling face added to the innocence of the Zaneeta Shinn character.

Another bright spot was the Barbershop Quartet, including Northwood students Robert Webb, Christopher

Figuroa, Charley Cullen, and Eric Weigan (guest artist). Last but not least, Andrea Borden brought energy and charisma to Hill's love interest, librarian Marian Paroo.

The cast as a whole was focused and lively, while The River City Teens tackled amusing choreography with an air of excitement. The Residents of River City humorously captured the small town's "chip on the shoulder" attitude. The energy of the cast started low but built to the climactic closing number, "Seventy-Six Trombones" in which the entire Northwood Marching Band and Drill Team consumed the auditorium, almost overtaking the cast.

Northwood's student orchestra did a praiseworthy job with the show's difficult numbers, while the school's student-run sound and stage crew provided impressive support. Fun and creative crossovers ably covered lengthy scene changes. Cast members who did not wear body microphones were occasionally difficult to hear during solos, but the majority of the cast did a great job of projecting the lapses. A few backstage set changes disrupted quiet moments, but most of the scene shifts went quickly and without error.

Northwood High School's production of *The Music Man* was a fun, feel-good experience that captured the heart of small town America.

This review was published in the *Orange County Register*.

Written by Nicole Weber
Huntington Beach Academy of Performing Arts
Orange County (California) Cappies

Criticizing Appropriately

While a core purpose of the Cappies is to promote and celebrate high-school theatre, the critical reviews must have integrity, fairness, and accuracy. Most shows have aspects that could have been better – and, therefore, most reviews should include some criticisms. However, when making criticisms, remember that you are not evaluating experienced professionals, but students who are learning about theatre arts. This may be the first time they have ever been in a reviewed show. The following methods will help you give an honest description of what happened on stage while protecting the feelings of the students involved with the show.

Critique the Work Of High-School Students Only

Cappies is a program for high-school students, so only work by high-school students may be criticized (or praised). If the show includes performers younger than high-school age, they are to be praised or not mentioned. Adult participants are not to be praised or criticized. Neither is the script (unless student-written) up for evaluation, just the production of it.

Only Mention Names for Praise

When giving praise, you may refer to students by their name or their character name. However, when making a criticism, no individual student may be referred to by their name, character name, or role. Instead, if a singer was off-key, for instance, you may say, "Some singers were off-key." Or, if you criticize the sound in the review, don't mention the name of the sound person anywhere in the review. This is so the cast and crew can benefit from your honest and informed opinion without being embarrassed.

Include Observations On A Variety of Elements

Share your observations about both the performing and the tech elements of the show, and about the leads and the supporting cast. Also, remember all four of the evaluation factors – difficulty, range, originality, and presentation – and describe events for your readers using this perspective. For instance, it's a lot harder to do sound for a full-scale musical than for a black-box play, and your words of praise or criticism should reflect this.

Describe the Behavior

Avoid words that declare themselves to be praise (commendable, praiseworthy) or criticism (unfortunate, detracted, marred, and plagued). Instead, just describe what you saw. For instance, "The production was unfortunately marred by several microphone problems," grinds in a valid criticism too much. It's enough to say, "At times, the microphones didn't work". In addition, don't guess at what caused the problem; just remark on what you actually saw. For instance, saying, "A few characters could have used more time to learn their dances correctly," addresses the rehearsal process as opposed to what happened on stage. Instead, the observation could be made that "A few characters did not execute their dances properly."

Balance It with Praise

Whenever possible, combine your criticism with a favorable remark such as,
"Although there were lines lost from actors speaking too quickly or the orchestra overpowering them, the performers kept their energy constant and strong."

Criticize By Omission

At times, the most appropriate way to state a criticism is to say nothing at all. For instance, if you say nothing about the lead performers but broadly praise supporting characters or ensemble members, that will make your point. Or it could be that all you say about the lead actor is that she/he showed tremendous poise, and then, later in the review, you say that some performers in the show fell out of character.

Position Criticisms near the End

Place criticism near the end of your review, after many positive observations – but not in the last paragraph where it would be emphasized. It also helps to put it near the end of a paragraph, but not in the last clause.

Giving Accurate Praise

Differentiate Levels of Success

Only write rave reviews for rave-worthy shows (as determined by Critic consensus in the Cappies room). Reviews for shows of different calibers should reflect those differences. Between an outstanding show and a disappointing one, the gradations may seem difficult to express. Below are some examples to help you.

Corresponding paragraphs are given from reviews for four fictitious productions of *South Pacific*: a weak show that would score a 2 or 3, a so-so show that would score a 4 or 5, a pretty good show that would score a 6 or 7, and an outstanding show that would score an 8 or 9. Compare the slightly varying treatment of the same show elements to get an idea of how to reflect the varying levels of success of shows you review.

Lead In

The following lead-in paragraph is for the production that earned a score of 2 or 3.

"Use a paradise location to describe the most un-paradisiacal of situations, and you've got *South Pacific*, an epic tale of love, prejudice, and palm trees performed last weekend by Little Valley High School. This Rodgers & Hammerstein musical won nine Tonys in 1950, and ran for over 2000 performances on Broadway before hitting the screen in 1958."

For the better shows, the word "performed" was followed by "solidly" (4 or 5), "with aplomb" (6 or 7), or "brilliantly" (8 or 9).

Remark on Individual Actors

The excerpts in this section are in order from describing the weakest performance (2 or 3) to the strongest (8 or 9).

"As Bloody Mary, Jane Thomas brought an eye-opening, tongue-in-cheek charm to the production. On songs like "Happy Talk," where she playfully mocked the lovers Cable and Liat, Thomas displayed enthusiasm and energy for the role."

"With both cheekiness and tongue-in-cheek, Jane Thomas brought charm to the role of Bloody Mary. On songs like "Happy Talk," Thomas playfully mocked the lovers Cable and Liat without losing the grace or humor of her character."

"With a mix of playful mock and big-boned jolliness, Jane Thomas crafted a full-fledged comic foil as Bloody Mary, evident in songs like the anthem-like 'Bloody Mary' and the ticklish 'Happy Talk.'"

"With a mix of playful mock and big-boned jolliness, Jane Thomas provided a full-fledged comic foil as Bloody Mary, with entrances that made the audience roar."

Describe the Acting in General

In the following paragraphs, you can see how praise and criticism are combined for each of the different levels of performance.

2 or 3: "The big-boned Seabee Luther Billis was nicely played by the comically-adroit Matt Baker. Though other ensemble numbers lacked crispness and energy, Baker, along with his ruffian crew of sailors, used a grab-bag of swaggering, womanizing antics to make "There's Nothing Like a Dame" an audience favorite. In his amusing solo performance on the cross-dressing "Honey Bun," Baker demonstrated his jiggling coconut bra. Articulation was a problem in many scenes, and a number of songs had pitch errors, but the performers did nicely to stay in character."

4 or 5: "The big-boned Seabee Luther Billis was enjoyably played by the comically-adroit Matt Baker. Though other numbers seemed to lack impact, Baker, along with his ruffian crew of sailors, used a grab-bag of swaggering, womanizing antics to make "There's Nothing Like a Dame" an audience favorite. Baker's solo performance on the cross-dressing "Honey Bun" was very amusing, as he demonstrated his mastery of a jiggling coconut bra. Articulation was a problem from time to time, and some vocalists strained to hit notes, but the performers always kept their characters clearly in focus."

6 or 7: "The commitment and energy of the entire 41-person ensemble carried this production. The energy on big dance numbers like "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair" more than make up for any other injustice. Swaggering sailor tunes like "There's Nothing Like a Dame" had a chipper air that seemed to come at least as much from the chumminess of the cast members as from Rodgers' libretto. While a few lines were hard to hear, the vocalists did fine work with some difficult music, and did very well in keeping their songs tightly in character."

8 or 9: "Matt Baker's Luther Billis and his ruffian crew of Seabees added their own puckish twist to the script's comic relief. "There's Nothing Like a Dame" has a bombastic chipper to it seemingly unwritten in the script; while Baker's solo performance on "Honey Bun" drew huge laughs with his stunning mastery of a jiggling coconut bra. Throughout the cast, line articulation was outstanding, and vocalists showed superb range and styling with very difficult music. Every song conveyed exactly the attitude required for the character and story."

Reflect on the Technical Elements

Here, the technical elements of the different productions are explored.

2 or 3: "Jill Benning's sets reflected the story's tropical atmosphere, with basic backdrops and suggestions of green flora around the stage frame. Martha Cunningham's costumes were simple but effective, using a mix of sailor suits, military uniforms, and traditional Asian frocks. Many scene changes were heavily drawn out, even when little amelioration was made to the set. Muffled and faulty microphones challenged the production throughout, but the cast and crew admirably trekked on through every difficulty."

4 or 5: "Jill Benning's sets, with cool blue backdrops and luscious green flora, nicely captured the show's tropical atmosphere – as did Martha Cunningham's costumes, a mix of sailor suits, military uniforms, and traditional Asian frocks. At times, major scene changes were heavily drawn out. Microphones were occasionally muffled, but the cast and crew never lost focus and adjusted well."

6 or 7: "Jill Benning's sets, with their use of cool blue backdrops and luscious green flora, effectively captured the show's tropical atmosphere – as did Martha Cunningham's inventive costumes, a simple but effective mix of sailor suits, military uniforms, and traditional Asian frocks. Most scene changes were swiftly made. For a show with this many vocalists using mics, the sound was quite good. Even when small microphone problems arose, the cast and crew adjusted very skillfully and could be heard clearly."

8 or 9: "Justin Bonner's stage crew kept the show running smoothly at all times. The sound was nearly flawless – no small feat for a show with this many vocalists using microphones. Among the many other superb technical aspects were Jill Benning's sets, with their use of cool blue backdrops and luscious green flora to capture the show's tropical atmosphere, and Martha Cunningham's costumes, a simple but effective mix of sailor suits, military uniforms, and traditional Asian frocks."

Sum It Up

Following are the closing paragraphs from the four reviews.

2 or 3: "Clocking in at three hours, *South Pacific* is truly a difficult production for a high school to tackle, but Little Valley took to the task admirably."

4 or 5: "Clocking in at three hours, *South Pacific* is a challenging production for a high school to tackle, but Little Valley gave it a good effort, in a show well-received by the audience."

6 or 7: "Clocking in at three hours, *South Pacific* is truly a difficult production for a high school to tackle, but Little Valley turned in a very fine show."

8 or 9: "For an exciting production with near-professional polish, Little Valley deserves many rounds of applause, as this "enchanted evening" proved nothing short of spectacular."

Engaging Your Readers

Before you begin writing, have in mind what you want to say. Take notes during the show to help you remember elements which stood out as you watched. Write a catchy phrase or two right after the show to sum up your impression of the production while it's fresh in your mind. Use these to help you decide what to put in your review. For instance, which performances or performers do you want to mention? Which technical elements do you want to highlight? Then, think about your readers. How will they best be able to understand and enjoy what you have to say? The following practices will help you create a well-written and interesting review that will grab your readers' attention and keep them absorbed in what you have to say all the way to the end.

Arrange Your Thoughts

Arrange your thoughts so your readers can easily follow along as you move from discussing one element of the show to another. Here's one way to do this; it's called the seven-paragraph plan. Each of seven paragraphs is dedicated, as follows, to one purpose, and together they offer a logical flow of information.

Paragraph 1: The Lead-In. Grab your readers' attention. A good hook should not start with a direct quote from the show, or a question to the reader in the very first sentence. Reviews that start this way will not be ranked in the top ten. Rhetorical questions are permissible in the first paragraph, but should not be the very first sentence of your review.

Paragraph 2: The Story. Help your readers relate to the play or musical you are reviewing. If you haven't already, tell them the name of the play/musical (and the name of the performing school). Keep in mind that some of your readers will be familiar with this show and others will not. Interest both types of readers with a brief plot set-up and some interesting background on the show. For instance:

When was it written and by whom?

Where and when does the story take place?

Is the story well-known or lesser so?

Is there something noteworthy in its performance history?

Does its theme address important issues today?

Note: When using information you have found on the plot or background of a show, remember to put it in your own words for your review (so as not to commit plagiarism).

Paragraph 3: The Production Overall. Make some broad observations about the show as a whole. What production element anchored the show? An inventive or unusual concept? The cast's energy? The choreography? Technical elements or effects? A specific actor or ensemble? Write two or three sentences about this, but only if you considered the show to be a success. For instance,

"Quentin Tarantino High school's production was anchored by the exceptional talent and versatility of the ensemble. Every member of the 38-person cast helped convey the riveting truth behind the intricate script, making each of the characters clear-cut, complex, and captivating."

If the show fell short in key areas, describe it without praising it much. If there were major problems, don't put them here. Instead, include them further down, or merge them with another paragraph.

Paragraph 4: The Lead Actors. Describe highlights of what the lead actors did well. Put any criticisms of their work later in the review, where you can state it in an indirect manner. If you think their work was particularly weak, don't mention them at all – and talk about other actors here instead.

Paragraph 5: The Supporting Cast. Describe highlights from featured actors, stand-out vocalists or dancers, ensembles, etc. In addition, criticisms about all aspects of performance – including the leads – are appropriate here. Do not hesitate to criticize performers, when warranted, but justify all criticisms with specific and persuasive examples.

Paragraph 6: The Technical Aspects. Sets. Costumes. Lights. Sound. Props. Effects. Stage Crew. Makeup. Pick two or three technical elements which were most integral to the level of success of the production. Describe their major facets (for example, what costumes were most notable), and explain how they were successful (or problematic).

Paragraph 7: The Closer. Sum it all up.

Follow A Theme

Start by writing an up-beat, one-sentence description of the show overall. Think of it as the last sentence of your review (your closer). It may, for instance, commend the performing school on successfully tackling a particularly emotional script, or use references from the show to create a pun. Try to create a punchy ending, or tagline, your readers will remember. Have fun with it – and your readers are likely to also.

Next, write a strong, interesting opening sentence (your lead-in) that will command your readers' attention and set them up for a review that will culminate in that last sentence you just wrote. Two ways to go about this are with a zinger or a dramatic description.

The zinger is a catchy, one-sentence grabber that plays off the production or content of the script. This type of lead has lots of room for creativity; however, it must be extremely clear and

extremely concise; keep it to one sentence. Here's an example:

"Nikki's parents ran away, Luis's hooked on cocaine, Jackie's a child prostitute – and you thought your neighborhood had issues! Last weekend, Pauly Shore High School paid tribute to the abandoned children of America's ghettos in their production of *Runaways*."

If a show has a captivating opening moment, or one that is perhaps definitive of the play/musical (for instance, the ballet fight-dancing which opens *West Side Story*), the dramatic description works well, particularly for shows with a serious theme. An example follows. Before moving on, fill out the first and last paragraphs. (See the above examples.). Try to make these paragraphs no longer than three long sentences or four short ones.

"A procession of silhouetted actors filed listlessly through the auditorium, as projectors and television screens displayed slide after slide of familiar images – protesters, candlelight vigils, men in orange jumpsuits, and the voices of newscasters repeating the name "Matthew Shepard." So began Harold & Kumar High School's recent production of *The Laramie Project* ..."

Writing the beginning and the end first, and then filling in the middle, helps focus your thinking so you end up with a cohesive review.

Give Examples

Show, don't tell, your readers how the production reached its level of success. Give examples of what you saw and heard to make your point. For instance, instead of saying, "He gave an energetic performance," describe his specific movements – perhaps like this:

"He bounced about the stage as if he had springs under his feet."

If you use the audience to reflect how well the performers did, don't say how the audience felt; just say what they did. For instance, "The audience roared with laughter." In addition, don't put yourself in the review (I, we, this critic). Only describe what happened on stage.

Create Mental Images

Make your review interesting for readers who saw – or didn't see – the show. Describe in rich detail the colors and textures on stage. Put images in their mind's eye – again or for the first time. Consider the different pictures created in your mind between reading, "The costumes were whimsical," and reading,

"Some of the characters wore khaki shorts with brightly striped suspenders, accompanied by orange, argyle knee-highs and propeller beanies."

Help your readers see what you saw. Make them feel like they were at the show (or bring a special moment back to mind) by using vivid nouns and strong verbs (ahead of adjectives and adverbs) as you describe what happened.

Use Flavorful Words

Keep It Fresh. Use a variety of words in your review to keep each sentence fresh, and therefore interesting, for your reader. For instance, instead of repeatedly using the word "walked" to describe how each actor moved, use a variety of synonyms such as

sauntered, strolled, traipsed, trooped, stepped, or hoofed it.

Use a thesaurus to find words other than those that first come to mind, but make sure they mean exactly what you intend to say – and that you understand how to use them correctly.

Say What You Do Mean. Choose the words that most fully say what you mean. For instance, instead of using the tentative, double-negative phrase, "it did not disappoint," say that "it delighted".

Make It Lively. Keep to a minimum your use of linking verbs (is, are, was, were), especially when used with flavorless

nouns (there, that, this, it). Instead, restructure the sentence to describe an action using a lively verb. For instance, instead of "There were balloons everywhere," say "Balloons hung everywhere."

Be Clear and Concise

Keep your sentences clear (versus convoluted) by putting subjects close enough to the main verbs that your readers don't get lost mid-sentence. Use punctuation smartly, to help make your prose more readable. For instance, limit your use of colons and semi-colons. They slow readers down. In addition, limit each of your paragraphs to about four sentences. Alternate between short and long sentences, and use varying sentence structures, to create flow.

"Boil down" your writing to eliminate redundancy, "throat clearing," and other fluff. Look at each sentence, and see if you can cut it by a third or a half and still say the same thing, in more concentrated prose. Do that through a whole piece that you've written, and you'll be surprised how much sharper it will read.

Spelling Names Correctly, Etc.

Proofreading Your Work

After you've written your review, proofread it. Proofread for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. (Your word-processing program may have a tool to help you. Remember, however, that the computer can't do it all; for instance, it won't flag "there" where you mean "their".) Also, re-check the show program to make sure you have the right name and spelling for the play or musical, the performing school, the characters, and the cast and crew. People like to have their names spelled correctly.

Doing so shows your attentiveness to detail, which adds to your credibility as a Critic.

Lastly, proofread to make sure that *you* are happy with the review you are sending in. It's your work and you should feel proud of it. It's all right to have a friend or family member look over your review and give you feedback on, for instance, your spelling or how well you have made your points. Just remember, though, it's your review, and all of the opinions and words are to be yours alone. Following is a checklist to help you edit your own review, making sure you have engaged your readers, criticized appropriately, and given fair and accurate praise.

The best reviews are usually about 400-500 words long. (Your word-processing program most likely has a word-counting tool that can quickly count the words for you.) Reviews that are close to 600 may be accepted, but are unlikely to be selected for publication. Reviews that are close to 300 words are unlikely to be selected and reviews of fewer than 300 words may not count as a submitted review.

What To Always Include In Your Review:

1. Catchy opening sentence/Good "Hook"
2. Name of the performing school
3. Title of the show
4. History of the show
5. Short synopsis of the plot
6. Evaluative description of performance and non-performing elements
7. Mention at least 3 Actors by name
8. Mention at least 2 Techs by name

Self-Editing Checklist

1. Does the entire review sound good when you read it aloud? Are all points clearly and simply made (vs. awkward or long-winded)? Is it as concise and sharp as it could be?
2. Is there an attention-grabbing first sentence that is not a quote or a question to the reader?
3. Are the basic plot and some background of the play/musical given?
4. Does the review include comments on: the notable acting (leads and others); the technical aspects (accounting especially for difficulty level); and, perhaps, an overall element that anchored the show?
5. Is each opinion illustrated with a representative behavior (an example; nouns and verbs)?
6. Are all criticisms general (no names), brief, and followed by something positive?
7. Could someone who didn't see the show picture what you saw as you describe (with nouns and verbs) what happened on stage by the actors and technical crew?
8. Are a variety of words used (vs. redundancies)? Are any double-negatives that crept in changed instead to what *did* happen (vs. what did not not-happen)?
9. Does the review end with a sound-bite or tag-line type, catchy closing? Does the body of the review lead, logically, to the

closing remark?

10. Does it sound like the production was as successful as (and not more than) the Critics as a whole said in the Cappies room?

Critics Choices – Post Show Evaluation

Show: _____ Performing School: _____

Critic: _____ Critic's School: _____

Score	Points	Category
		Play or Musical
		Song ¹ Title of Song:

Score	Points	Category	Name	Role
		Lead Actor in a Male Role		
		Lead Actor in a Female Role		
		Supporting Actor in a Male Role		
		Supporting Actor in a Female Role		
		Comic Actor in a Male Role		
		Comic Actor in a Female Role		
		Vocalist in Male Role ²		
		Vocalist in Female Role ²		
		Dancer in Male Role ²		
		Dancer in Female Role ²		
		Featured Actor in a Male Role		
		Featured Actor in a Female Role		

Score	Points	Category	Names
		Ensemble (Group Name)	
		Stage Manager/Crew	
		Creativity (Name & specify type)	
		Choreography	
		Orchestra ¹	
		Sets	
		Costumes	
		Lighting	
		Props	
		Sound	
		Hair and Makeup	
		Special Effects/Technology	
		Marketing/Publicity	

¹ Song eligible for musicals only. ² Vocalists, Dancers, and Orchestra optional in Plays (see the rules).

Scoring Key:

9-10: Superior execution, fully engaging and professional quality for high school theatre.

7-8: Excellent execution, engaging and the best quality for high school theatre.

5-6: Good execution, mostly engaging, and the expected quality for high school theatre.

3-4: Uneven execution, sometimes engaging. And lesser quality for high school theatre.

1-2: Poor execution, inconsistently engaging, and insufficient quality for high school theatre.

A: Award point

For each show you review, you acquire one award point and five nomination points.

N: Nomination point

When you vote, you will allocate those points across all shows you have reviewed.

OATH: I understand that my role as a Cappies Critic requires me to hold myself to the highest ethical standards. I have not, and will not, collaborate(d) with my fellow critics in order to perform my Cappies critic duties. I will evaluate critics' choices and ultimately cast my votes for awards with utmost integrity.

Critic Name (print) _____

Critic Signature _____