

## MUSICALS - HOW TO BEGIN

You start by meeting with your assistant director, choreographer, vocal director, a pianist, costumer and set designer, (if you are not designing yourself) for a few hours to make sure you are all on the same page about where you want to take this show in terms of style-- Have vocal auditions for the music first; then have the choreographer teach a short 16-count dance to everyone, and see who executes it the best---there are a few scenes in Fame where you need really strong dancers--but go with your strongest voices for the leads in a musical, always---the rehearsals go in phases--the first two, everyone just sings, and learns all the songs---a pianist, even though you may have a vocal/performance track for this, is essential----then comes the choreography of all production numbers---then you block the dialogue, plug in the music and dancing and begin to run thru the whole show, scene by scene---at least that's the way I do it---you'll need three afternoons a week---Mon/Tue/Thur work best, after school for two hours---anyone who needs extra coaching can meet with the assistant director during practice, if they're not in a scene, or during spring break---then you'll want to gather your techies for days after school that you do not have practice, to build/paint the set, and 2 to 3 weeks before opening night, running sound and lights during practices---and always be prepared to be flexible for bad weather and other disasters, which is why I give myself ten weeks for a musical---musicals are fun and great money-makers, but exhausting---I am very driven when directing one, and when it's over, I tell myself I'll never direct another one, then the next week, I find myself looking in the MTI catalogue for the next year.

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I take just one day's rehearsal for the read-thru-- we don't do the songs then, as it would take too long. We sit in a giant circle and read through the script Round-Robin style, which means each person reads a line in turn going clockwise around the circle (lines, not sentences). This creates a better ensemble feeling, IMHO, and gives everyone more of an investment in the show-- otherwise, if just the principals are reading lines, then a whole lot of people don't have much to do.

Then I take 5-6 more rehearsals for music, usually sticking a blocking rehearsal in the middle to break things up a bit. Then Choreography, which takes the longest of everything-- you can usually choreo ONE number in a two-hour rehearsal. And you'll have to set aside rehearsal time for small numbers, too, but often you can do that while other stuff is rehearsing. Each time they're learning choreo, they're also reinforcing the music they learned-- but I still do a day of music review each week until we get to run-thrus.

So, depending on how many numbers you have to choreo, it'll take that many rehearsals-- and then you'll want the choreographer back at least once a week for fine-tuning, clean-up, review.

After laying down all the music, blocking, and choreo, (which usually takes me three weeks, but I rehearse Mon thru Friday) my last three weeks look like this:

Act 1, Act 2, Dress parade/music & dance review, Act 1, Act 2

Run-thru, run-thru, music/dance clean-up, run-thru, run-thru

Then into Tech Week-- load-in on a Saturday, first Tech/Run Sunday, Monday & Tuesday dress rehearsals, Wed. final dress/curtain call/ production photos--then we open Thursday...

I have two tech Saturday work days prior to tech week, for all the building/painting.

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Yes, I would start with a full read but I think it's best to have your musical director or accompanist play the songs. If the kids hear the CD or see the film they tend to try to mimic it. Instead, they need to have their own chance to interpret the text. Also, most of the films of well-known musicals are not identical to the play, there are sometimes different songs or scenes. Sometimes it's fun to show the film at the cast party.

My personal opinion is that if you can, you ought to try to divide and conquer those first two weeks and have music going on in one location and choreography in another. I like to teach all the big musical numbers that involve the most people first and then choreograph them. While the chorus is learning choreography your musical director can teach some of the leads their music. Once the kids know the songs, putting the choreography with it helps them remember the words. By the end of the first two weeks, the kids should know all the music and all of the dance numbers. (It won't be perfect but they should have the basics.) At this point, doing things out of show order is perfectly okay, start with the hard stuff, the stuff with the most people in it.

Then the next two weeks are spent blocking, and connecting the blocking to the musical numbers they already know. (If possible, the musical director recording the music, even in a rough form, or having the performance tracks for these rehearsals helps. It also helps to make cd's available to the kids if possible, not the cast recording, something without voices, then they can practice on their own.) I like to block a scene they already know the music to, run the blocking once or twice and then run the scene WITH the musical number. It helps them get the flow.

Then that third block of two weeks is spent polishing everything a piece at a time so that the last two weeks are runs (first a week of running each act on alternating days, then a week of the full show) to tighten the show up to running time and level.