

SHOWSTOPPER

Jordan Smaka started student directing after facing a minor setback **By Emma Steury**



From preliminary rehearsals in his co-director's attic, to doing makeup for cast members and acting as a drunk god on stage, student director Jordan Smaka is immersed in the world of plays and musicals.

In the past 12 months, Smaka has gained an unusual amount of experience for a sophomore. Last year he student directed "Our Place," "Check, Please!" and "Clue." Over the summer he assistant directed "Seussical Jr." and co-directed "The Lightning Thief." This year he has student directed "All Together Now!" and "Fiddler on the Roof." Smaka hasn't always been a student director—he intended to pursue acting but a setback early in his career turned into an opportunity.

"I wanted to act in plays, but I didn't know anything about what we were doing," Smaka said. "So I decided that if I got cut, I was just going to student direct because we didn't have

FAST FACTS

FAVORITE SHOW DIRECTED

"The Lightning Thief"

ROLE MODELS

Dan Levy
Matthew Gray Gubler

DREAM ROLES

Marius from "Les Miserables"
Seymour from "Little Shop of Horrors"

ADVICE TO PAST SELF

"Stop stressing out," Smaka said. It is not as important as you think it is."

anyone. There were like five roles and a ton of people auditioning and I got cut. So I've been student directing since then."

This is no small feat. Student directors must watch the show objectively while also making small adjustments and changes to better the show and strengthen the story displayed on stage.

"Having a student director is everything," drama director Rita McLary said. "Because that director is your assistant. Jordan specifically is my memory bank a lot of the time. It's a lot of responsibility."

While it takes ample time, commitment and energy to fulfill this role, Smaka doesn't see it as simply a job.

"I get a lot of creative freedom and I get to help the actors make sure they're not looking terrible onstage which I think is really fun," Smaka said. "And I just get to hang out with the cast when I'm not directing."

For Smaka, directing means multiple things, especially during rehearsals. The run-throughs never fail to keep him on his toes.

"There's no such thing as a typical rehearsal for me," Smaka said. "Generally I'll be online or filling in for people who aren't there. Occasionally I can help

block or just run the rehearsal too."

Although Smaka enjoys acting more, he believes his skill set for student directing is stronger.

"Jordan has been the only student director I've taken on as a freshman," McLary said. "He's done an incredible job. Jordan has a knack for seeing something for more than what it is. He'll spot things and recognize that they are a benefit or potential problem way before the cast members would ever notice."

It takes a combination of strong leadership skills, creativity and a dash of natural talent to be a successful student director. Because of this, Smaka switched to part-time to keep up with his other responsibilities and commitments.

"This year has been hard because Jordan has only been part time," McLary said. "I think it's hard on both sides. It's hard for me and it's hard for Jordan because he misses so much. It's hard to keep all the balls in play."

Despite this challenge, cast, crew, directors, family and friends alike have nothing but positive affirmations for Smaka and his work.

"I love Jordan so much because he does so much for us," senior Cambelle Cleveland said.

Cleveland and Smaka have worked closely together on several plays and musicals in the past.

"We'll have our fun moments and all our jokes, but when it comes down to the wire, we know Jordan's going to take charge and get things done, and he really looks out for all of us too," Cleveland said.

Smaka plans to pursue a combination of acting and student directing for the remainder of his high school career and he encourages others to reach for their passions and goals as well.

"Just try it," Smaka said. "You're not going to get anything done if you only sit and think about it, it's really good to experience it. High school is a really good time to start experimenting and see what you like the most. Just go for it."

DEDICATED DIRECTOR: Student directing is a passion of sophomore Jordan Smaka, despite his love for acting. (photo by Grace Montgomery)