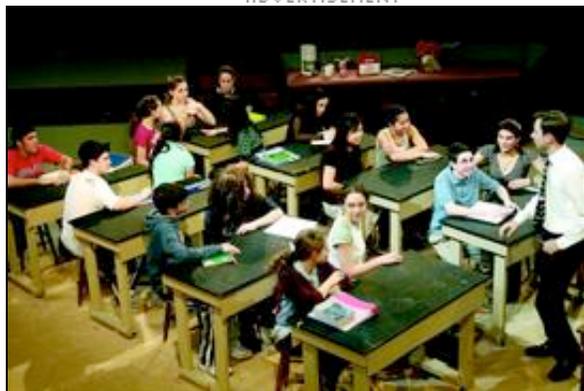


'Chalk' full of music

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By Matt Perkins/Daily News Tribune
GHS
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Newton -
At Newton North High School, grease isn't the word, it's chalk.

"Chalk: The Musical," the school's first-ever homegrown production, debuts this week.

"It focuses on a first-year biology teacher, and the trials and tribulations that he experiences over his first year teaching high school," said writer and director Zach Snow, who also teaches biology at Newton North. "Basically, the theme is balancing one's ideals with reality."

The only original high school musical around, "Chalk," which runs today through Saturday, was devised by Snow, who joined forces with musical director and Newton North physics teacher Todd Nocera.

The musical's cast includes both students and faculty, which Nocera said is unusual for high school musicals. In most cases, all the parts are played by students.

"That's been a really awesome part of this thing, too," Nocera said.

In fact, the lead character, Eric Stahl, will be played by Newton North math teacher Dennis Klem, and Stahl's mentor will be played by Matt Ford of the Guidance Department.

"It's been great," Nocera said. "All the teacher roles are played by teachers. It's definitely helped to get teachers working with kids."

Nocera, who holds a master's degree in music composition from Tufts University, said Snow came to him with the idea before they began writing.

"We wrote the first song, and he wrote an accompanying theme in which that song would take place," he said. "The collaboration has been remarkably easy — we sort of had similar personalities to start off with."

The two had previously worked together on a version of Arthur Kopit's "Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad," which Snow also directed, and for which Nocera composed all

the music.

Snow, who has years of experience in theater at Duke University and the New World School of the Arts in Miami, said his prior work with Nocera was motivation to collaborate.

“I thought it would be great and a lot of fun if it could be a musical and I could use his composition skills, and he was immediately excited about the prospect of that,” Snow said.

Eventually, the idea developed into an 11-song musical that they auditioned for and practiced in front of the high school’s drama classes. The music for the show will be performed by a small group of artists Nocera said he and Snow chose, and will be various in styles.

“It really spans in terms of types of music,” he said. “But we specifically chose the music around what was happening in the play.”

Students also helped to work on “Chalk: The Musical” with Nocera and Snow, who pulled in Elia Chesnoff, a colleague of Snow’s from the New World School of the Arts, as well as seniors Eleanor Kuhlman who choreographed the musical, and Jeff Lebovici, who helped to write and direct.

Snow said the show would not have been possible without the contribution of the students.

“They have been a phenomenal asset since the start of the production,” he said. “Very committed, very talented. I couldn’t have done it without them.”

“He’s been pretty instrumental,” Nocera said of Lebovici. “It was a really helpful process to have him involved.”

Wednesday night’s performance will be a live dress rehearsal, said Nocera, which was added to the week’s lineup after Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night’s shows sold out. Both Snow and Nocera said they feel the finished product will be rewarding.

“I have high expectations,” Snow said. “The rehearsal process has gone very well, very smoothly and pretty much on schedule. We should be all set for a great show on Wednesday.”

More information on “Chalk: The Musical,” including performance times, cast information and writer bios can be found at chalkthemusical.com.

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