



Liz Shrier

In rehearsal: As the principal, Glenn Rosen, husband of science teacher Ann Dannenberg, gives math teacher Dennis Klem, playing a first-year teacher, advice. Klem is writing the advice down in his character's "advice notebook."

Students, faculty to perform in début of 'CHALK: The Musical'

BY JUSTINE BUNIS

Students will be able to relate to the characters, conflicts and themes in "CHALK: The Musical," said science teacher Todd Nocera, the musical director.

"The story has immediate relevance," Nocera said. "It's about life at a typical public high school. I think any student at Newton North can relate to most of what happens."

"It's a great story with great music, produced entirely by Newton North faculty and students."

Nocera, science teacher Zach Snow, the director; Snow's friend, Elia Chesnoff; and senior Jeff Lebovici collaborated to create the musical, with Snow as the primary writer.

It débuts Thursday, Feb. 8 through Saturday, Feb. 10 with a cast of 26 in the little theatre.

Concept

"CHALK" is about balancing one's expectations with reality, Nocera said.

"Sometimes it's hard not to feel that high school is all a big game, that we spend too much time jumping through hoops that we know deep down aren't all that productive or valuable," Nocera said.

"For teachers there are the constant pressures of local, state and federal mandates, standardized tests, etc., and students have the absurdly complex and stressful college process."

"The key is to not let them get in the way of what is really important, what makes us happy and what is ultimately the most rewarding."

"We all struggle to balance our hopes, dreams and ideals with the reality of our every day lives. So while the immediate context of high school allows us to forge a direct connection with students, the message is quite a bit deeper."

Snow said he was looking for a play to direct with students

and faculty last January when he began thinking of the idea for "CHALK."

He said that he thought about the kind of play he had in mind, he decided that writing it himself would be a creative solution.

Teamwork

After creating the concept for "CHALK," Snow said, he wanted to get as many people on board as possible.

"I had worked with Todd Nocera in the past," Snow said. "When he agreed, it just started building momentum from there."

Snow said he asked Lebovici to get involved in the writing after he saw his ability in AP Biology.

"I asked Jeff about writing, and he was fully committed from there," Snow said. "He has been instrumental in the whole process."

In the story, a first-year biology teacher goes into his job with all sorts of expectations and ideals, Lebovici said.

But the job is not exactly what he expects, and he is left questioning which ideals he should hang onto.

Writing and directing a completely original show is difficult but rewarding, Snow said.

"The writing team has taken this very seriously," he said. "We are working so 'CHALK' has a life after and beyond this premiere production."

"Hopefully there will be more productions in other schools, in the community or beyond."

"We intend on publishing it, and we will see where it goes from there."

Snow said knowing exactly what he had in mind in writing a scene makes directing and rehearsing the play more interesting and more fun.

Working on an original performance has allowed the actors to have some input during rehearsals as well, he said.

"There have been some minor

line tweakings during rehearsal," Snow said.

"It is a unique experience for the actors."

Music

Nocera said he composed most of the 11 songs in "CHALK," with Snow assisting.

"We decided early on that we wouldn't limit ourselves to a particular style or genre," Nocera said.

"Rather, if I let the music speak freely, each song could give what was most needed at that particular point in the show."

As a result, the music varies, with styles ranging from country to jazz and Broadway to rap, Nocera said.

"We hope the audience will feel a musical cohesiveness throughout the play while also enjoying the variety that the music offers," he said.

Nocera, who is a freelance composer when he is not a physics teacher here, said he drew from many influences when composing the score for "CHALK."

"We thought about other musicals that we liked and what made that music work so well, but we also spent a lot of time thinking more fundamentally about what makes a good song," he said.

"We paid a lot of attention to the story line and the message that each musical number needed to communicate."

Nocera will play the piano and lead an eight-piece band.

Playing in the band are seniors Alex Hartshorn on drums, Alex Mijailovic on guitar, Ari Miller on trombone and Dave Sumberg on bass.

Also playing are juniors Nate Berla-Schulock on saxophone, Mia Friedman on fiddle, Sarah Harney on cello and Josie Sedgwick on violin.

Directing and acting

Working on a student-faculty production has been a fantastic

experience, Nocera said.

"To invest a collective energy, passion and honesty into creating something truly special is wholly invigorating and makes me proud to be a member of this community," he said.

Math teacher Dennis Klem, who plays Eric Stahl, the main character, said that he can connect to Eric's struggles.

As a first-year teacher, Klem said, he had to face the realities of teaching math to people who didn't necessarily want to learn.

"I guess you go into teaching assuming that students will be really interested in your subject, and especially with math," he said. "I loved math as a student."

"You also learn that people aren't one-dimensional. There may be many reasons why a person is successful in a class beyond whether they like it or don't like it. I had to figure out how to work with many outside factors."

Working with students is an added bonus, he said.

"I have the most interactions with students because of my role," Klem said.

"It's different for me because I'm their peer now. With students I rarely have that opportunity to get to know people on a peer level."

According to sophomore Casey Knotts, who plays Courtney, an "airhead type girl," a special aspect of this show is that it is a faculty and student production.

"You get to learn about teachers as people," she said.

"It is really great with the faculty, and I am going to enjoy this while it lasts because I am probably never going to do it again."

Set

Junior Steff Sobieraj designed the set. It has three parts: a classroom with lab tables, a teacher's lounge, and a hallway.

Tickets cost \$5. Performances start at 7:30.

Jubilee Singers to give concert

Program to feature spirituals, gospel

BY DANNY KESSLER

Spirituals and traditional and contemporary gospel are on the program for the Jubilee Singers' concert next Saturday, said music teacher Sheldon Reid, the group's conductor.

"There will be a lot of interactions between the audience and the choir," Reid said. "So the audience should be prepared to participate and have a good time."

With 63 members, this year is Jubilee's eighth as a Newton North group. The singers specialize in music of the African Diaspora, meaning any songs loosely associated with black culture from its origin to modern day, Reid said.

The concert will be called Harambee, Reid said, which in Swahili means "Let's pull together."

Spirituals include "I'm Gonna Sing 'Til the Spirit Moves in my Heart" arranged by Moses Hogan, and "Ain'-a That Good News" arranged by William L. Dawson.

Traditional gospel arrangements will be "One More Time" and "I'll Fly Away." Reid's own arrangements will be "Voices of Freedom" and "Amazing Grace."

Jubilee will also present contemporary works including "Where the Spirit is" by Kirk Franklin, "When You Praise" by Fred Hammond and "Just a Few More Days" by the Miami Mass Choir.

Making its début in the concert will be the Harambee Gospel Choir, a first-year group from South.

Jubilee will perform some numbers with Harambee but most alone, Reid said.

Some songs will be a cappella, and Jubilee's band will accompany others, Reid said.

Playing in the band are seniors Benjamin Brown on keyboard, Alex Hartshorn and Alex Kurland on drums, Ari Miller on trombone, Eric Schindler on saxophone, David Sumberg on the bass and Ariel Yelen on the piano.

Other band members are juniors Nathan Berla-Shulock on saxophone, Matt Parad on guitar and sophomore Luis Brown as secondary percussionist.

At intermission, senior Julie Mhlaba will run a bake sale to raise funds for The Shelter of Hope in Zimbabwe.

The concert starts at 7 in Lasker Auditorium. Tickets cost \$5 for students and \$10 for non-students. They are available from Jubilee students and during lunch.

