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BEHIND THE SCENES: STEPVA STAGE CREW INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING MUSICAL TO LIFE

April 18, 2021 by Brigid O'Leary

FREDERICKSBURG, VA—The opening is in the books for “A Special Covid-19,” a musical based on the pandemic of 2020, reflecting the challenges of our current times as lived by someone with a disability. The two-act musical completely written, directed, and performed by a completely by a cast people with disabilities. It doesn’t end there, though. The tech crew is a diverse group, including teens with disabilities who, along with the cast, participate in STEP VA, a local 501c nonprofit that “empowers people with special needs through artistic expression and sensory exploration.”

The first run of the musical was held last night and was nigh on flawless. While the cast basked in well-earned applause, they also were quick to share it with their STEP VA friends on the tech crew: Aaron Schwenzer, Grayson Myers, and Emma, who requested her last name be withheld. While they all got involved for different reasons, they all also radiated excitement when speaking of the experience.

“I like working with and learning about different kinds of technology,” Emma explained. She worked most often with Bill Carroll, of The Bill Carroll Foundation, learning about music and lighting for the show.

“I learned a lot, especially about controlling the volume on microphones and things like that,” she said.



Aaron Schwenzer, left, and others on the tech crew paint the Zoom Screen backdrops for “A Special Covid-19.”

For Schwenzer, being on the tech crew allowed him to flex his creative muscle and put it to good use.

“I liked working on the sets,” he said. “And helping other people.

He did both, painting backdrops and wielding power tools to assemble said backdrops. The tech crew made three, rotating backdrop pieces as well as two, 3D representations of the coronavirus germ that were displayed on the front of the stage during the performances.

“It was cool working on sound, the sets, and with camera equipment,” Schwenzer said.

Myers got involved behind the scenes intentionally, and, like Schwenzer, ended up learning a lot about cameras and lighting.

“I wanted to help support the actors in the musical,” he said. “I am glad to have learned the skills with the camera and the lights.”



Grayson Myers, (seated) and Aaron Schwenger (center) worked with JL LaBarbera (right) of Carousel Pictures, learning camera and lighting work.

The experience they and Emma got behind the scenes aside, when asked about the best part of the production process, all spoke of the opportunity in terms other people.

“I’m glad to help STEPVA and help all of the actors show their abilities,” said Myers.

“I get to see friends again and have a fun time working with the actors,” Emma added.

“I learned how to make more friends,” Schwenger replied, adding that he also enjoyed working with others and helping when others needed it.

The crew agreed that seeing the work that went into making the musical was impressive.

“Watching the whole play come together, it was amazing,” Schwenzer said.

While Emma’s favorite scenes from the musical are the Prologue and the Name Game Rap, Schwenzer’s work behind the scenes left a lasting impression on him. Once set-building was done, he and Myers took to learning more about camera work from JL LaBarbera of Carousel Pictures, who handled all the photography and video aspects of the show, including the livestream of last night’s performance (available online for ticket holders through May 1).

Sponsored by STEP VA the musical finishes its run today, April 18, at 2:30 p.m. It’s being staged at Fredericksburg Christian School. Today’s performance is in-person only and all tickets must be purchased in advance, as none will be sold at the door. Tickets are available online at stepva.org.

For more information, to donate, or to purchase tickets, please, visit www.stepva.org.

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