

Bard Musical Theater Podcast

00:00 Josh: Hi everybody! Welcome to our next edition of our podcast series, focusing on musical theater today. I'm Josh Tyler, I'm here as always with the Director of Admission, Mackie Siebens. Hey Mackie!

00:14 Mackie: Hi everyone! Hi Josh. So, as Josh said, I'm Mackie Siebens, I'm an alum of the college, and we're joined by three students who are interested and involved in musical theater, and we're going to do a quick round of introductions. We're going to start with Max!

00:28 Max: Hi everyone! My name is Max, I'm a sophomore, I study American Studies and French, but I do theater as an extracurricular, and I love it! I'm originally from Connecticut.

00:42 Adrian: Hi, my name's Adrian, you probably heard me before on one of these, but again I'm a junior, I'm a double major in Political Studies and Theater and I'm originally from New York City, which is great.

00:57 Thai: Hi, I'm Thai, I'm a senior Theater major, I'm also from New York City. I am a club head and founder of Bard Musical Theater Company.

1:08 Mackie: Great!

1:09 Josh: Great, well can you tell us a bit about how the Bard Musical Theater Company came to be?

1:16 Thai: Yeah! So, throwback to my freshman year, 2016, I was trying to find my place at Bard, find my people and the things that I enjoyed. And I was constantly surround by people who were like, "oh my god, we really love musical theater, we love combining movement and text and vocals and music, and people who had all these backgrounds and were really passionate about musical theater as a hobby, or career, but didn't know where to place that, and how to get that done on campus, and there had been a previous Bard Musical Theater Company, or club, that existed, but all of the founders of it had already graduated. So, I sought out the people who had graduated, and asked "hey, what have you guys done in the past? Because there're all these people that want to do this, but we just don't know how to go about it." And so, after that, I just signed the club up, which is amazingly easy to do at Bard, which is something I appreciate about this school, is you can have a vision for a club and just make it happen. And so, I signed us up and we got funding to put on our first production, in 2017? I think spring of 18, which was *Little Shop of Horrors*. (What is time?) And yeah, then it just kind of grew from there!

02:52 Mackie: Very cool. And can you tell us a little bit about how people now can join the club, or join the company itself, and what sort of process that is, what it looks like?

03:05 Adrian: Yeah, it's kind of interesting because Thai, at the beginning of my freshman year, hosted meetings for this club that was happening, and I kind of had the similar experience of having this need or desire to create work that was musically oriented, or musical theater in that range, and I saw this meeting, and was like, "I have to go," and I was involved in the original production that happened, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and then I eventually started taking up more and more administrative roles, I remember the summer between my freshman and sophomore year, I texted Thai every three days, "Hey, how can I help? I want to organize this, I want to do this, for the next production maybe we can have playbills, maybe we can organize more people, maybe we can do these things," and eventually I am glad to now be alongside Thai running the club, and building this together. But I do want to refer back to Max, because Max was just recently a part of our last production, which was *The Putnam County Spelling Bee* and I'm curious about your experience with that, Max.

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04:17 Max: Well, I loved being involved in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, it was my first musical theater production at Bard. I did musical theater all throughout high school, and I really liked what Thai said about trying to find my niche when I came to Bard. The Musical Theater Company offered a really good haven for me, and this extracurricular that I so enjoy. It was wonderful being in the Old Gym, and just the whole black box vibe is really lovely. For our upcoming musical this semester, I'm going to be the stage manager, so that's going to be a really fun, behind the scenes part, which just really emphasizes that a lot of the productions here at Bard are so multi-faceted, and there's ways for everyone to get involved. But yeah, my experience with the Musical Theater Company and the Old Gym has been nothing but positive.

05:10 Josh: That's great. And you mentioned the Old Gym, which is the space in which you guys rehearse and perform, and certainly putting on musicals of any kind requires a lot of different aspects of the production, and space. So, can you tell us a little bit about that space? How it came to be used for that particular purpose?

5:32 Adrian: Sure, I mean, we can work together on this. The Old Gym is a student-run performance venue. I think it's the only student-run performance venue on campus, so it's always in high demand, it's always being used. It's a black box space, and the myth goes that it used to be a gymnasium –

05:52 Mackie: It's not a myth, it's true!

05:56 Everyone: It's true!

05:57 Thai: There's a photo of it in the basement, of the first floor of the library –

06:01 Adrian: Oh!

06:03 Thai: - in 20's garb, everyone in the gym.

06:04 Mackie: I hate to put you on the spot, but were you here when it was –

06:06 Josh: I was here when the transition was made –

06:07 *everyone exclaims*, that's so cool, *laughter*

06:13 Josh: It was kind of a miscellaneous space, kind of trying to find its purpose, for a while. It was actually not used for about a year, during the time that I was here at Bard, and then it transformed into this black box space. But from everything that I hear from students, it's greatly evolved since that time.

06:39 Mackie: It's kind of like SMOG, I guess that is a student-run performance space, and that was a student mechanics operation garage, and now it's a performance space. But anyway, back to the Old Gym.

06:48 Thai: I never knew that...

06:51 Adrian: Yeah that's what it stands for! SMOG. So, for me it's kind of amazing that they took this gymnasium, they painted it black, they blacked all the windows, they put a lighting rig up, and it was suddenly a space for theater, a space for art. The Old Gym is such a special place for so many people here, because so many people do their SPROJs (senior projects) there, so many people ignite their careers at that place, and you know a lot of what we do in the Theater Department, with Theater majors, is a lot of theoretical theater making, which is really helpful and valuable to us, and we use the Old Gym as a space to kind of vent our artistic frustrations and create work for us, by us. So, the Old Gym is very special to us.

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07:41 Thai: I mean yeah, I agree with all of that! I think it's really a space where people have been able to practice arts, the technical arts in a way that they don't get to do that anywhere else on campus, which is so special –

07:55 Adrian: Or any other college!

07:58 Thai: Yeah, well I can't speak for other colleges, *laughter* but as far as what I know about theater programs at small liberal arts schools, I don't know how much teaching of technical arts there is, so yes, I think that that's something that's really special. I know a lot of people learned how to do lighting design at the Old Gym, just by doing certain productions, both of us learned how to manage a Tech Week, we'd never done anything like that before, together, and that's such an amazing experience to have because how else would you know how to do that, when you're kind of in classes, working on theater theory during the day, so it's just a hands on experience, and it also looks really good on a resume.

08:44 Mackie: Speaking of sort of beyond Bard, there are productions that have gone on and become, people that have either created theater companies or in the case of *Oklahoma*, have taken a production here, and made it to Broadway.

08:58: Which is the plan! *laughter*

09:01 Mackie: That is the dream, right.

09:03 Josh: Really speaking of those productions, something like *Oklahoma* that was reworked by a Bard student, or you mentioned *Little Shop of Horrors*, but you also mentioned having your own creative outlet. Are there student created productions that happen at the Old Gym?

09:19 Thai: Yes, there're many, yes, I would say there are many projects, people that can write their own material, and produce it which is really exciting. FEST is one of those spaces where – it's an annual theater festival that takes place where a lot of people write their original pieces and bring that into the Old Gym every year. I'm right now working on a SPROJ that is a musical, so that's really exciting. So, that's I guess a good example of being able to kind of imagine a world that encompasses all these different arts in it, and to be able to see it come true hopefully, that will hopefully go up in the Old Gym, and I also do have plans to bring it outside of Bard when I graduate. So people certainly make their own stuff.

10:17 Mackie: And speaking a little bit about all your academic interests too, especially for those interested in theater, I think because we don't have a musical theater major specifically, sometimes the optics of that are a concern for a student who really, really wants to come here and essentially do what you're doing, which is nice because you can now share the fact that just being within theater, you have a lot of space to kind of do what you want to do. So maybe for those listening, it's something to keep in mind, that Theater & Performance is one department, but you can really take it lots of different directions if you want to, including musical theater.

10:54 Josh: One of the great things about being at a place like Bard, too, and having that liberal arts approach, is that you can be actively engaged in the vocal music program, the theater and performing arts program, and then do something like a musical theater company, and utilize both of those skills, but get training in your classes, and then work on that skill through your club which is really fantastic.

11:23 Adrian: I just want to speak on just the theater at large is so diverse, and it offers a lot of space for people to grow in so many different ways. Max is an example of that, Max is not a theatre major but he's very much engrossed in the theater community here, and it's about people who are dedicated to that work and dedicated to that effort of art-making. So, we might not have a musical theater major, but that freedom that it enables us to create our own work, that is ours, alone, is really special. And I don't think that's an experience that other people would get anywhere else.

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12:05 Thai: Just to add on to that, I think that being at a school like Bard, where we often are asked to think, well, Bard is “A Place to Think” right? *laughter* We do a lot of thinking here, and I think what’s special about the company and the community we’ve built is that everyone can bring in their other interests into the musical space. So, for example, Adrian, you do a lot of Political Studies, and we love to have conversations within our community about the intersection of politics and theater. I have an Africana Studies background, so I try to bring that up as much as possible, so that community acts as a way to discuss larger issues of musical theater or theater and how that can reach out and touch other subjects that are happening within our liberal arts.

13:01 Mackie: So, can you talk a little bit about how many productions there might be? We’ve talked a lot about sort of the variety, but how many productions there might be on the scale of *Putnam County*, that you could speak to? So that students can kind of conceptualize just how many things there are going on.

13:22 Adrian: Well, okay great! Well currently, we’ve been doing about one main-stage, full production a semester, which can include a plethora of students, at the very least 50, when it comes to cast, crew, and everyone involved in this production. It’s so hands on. That’s what we’ve been doing for the past couple semesters, but we’ve actually started to grow and expand. So last semester we hosted *Putnam County Spelling Bee*, but we also hosted a cabaret-style show, where people came up and sang, you know, songs and music, and we catered it, it was a really nice event, we had over 60 people show up and it was during finals week, which is crazy.

14:10 Mackie: Wow!

14:12 Adrian: Yeah, I know! So, now, we’re actually hosting two musicals. We’re hosting *The Last Five Years*, which will go up in late February, and then we are also hosting *Fun Home*, which is going to go up hopefully in May, right before the end of the semester. We’re just going to keep trying to expand. We’re also planning on having two to three cabaret-style shows. So even if you’re not involved in these main, big productions, we’re constantly hosting opportunities for people to get involved, either in the production team, like Max, or involved in the cabaret shows, there’s always something to do in this club.

14:46 Mackie: Well, if any of those were like the 25th *Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, then I will be there!

laughter

14:56 Max: If I may just say, I think Adrian makes a really good point, because my first show at Bard wasn’t even a musical theater show. It was *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, but it was put on in the Old Gym, and there’s a submission process for if students want to put up their work there, whether that be stuff that they write on their own, or performances that they adapt, anything, there’s always a chance to get that in. And like I said, my first production was not musical theater related, but it was in the Old Gym, and it was a really great experience. That was sort of like my (introduction) to the Bard Musical Theater Company.

15:32 Adrian: And now you’re in!

laughter

15:33 Max: Now I’m in!

15:34 Thai: I also wanted to highlight, Max, to go back to the question about how you really get involved in the community, and I’m pretty sure that you, during your first year, during L&T, you knew that I was involved in musical theater and that I was a Peer Counselor, and you just texted me, and came up to me, and were like, “I want to be involved!” And that’s quite literally how easy it is.

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15:58 Mackie: Shocking from you Max!

laughter

15:59 Max: I know, I'm so introverted!

16:00 Thai: I just took note of your name! And then we put you on the email list, and then you heard about everything, so it's literally that easy to just be like, "Oh, I know who's running this, I know who's making this happen, how can I be involved?" And we want to include as many people as possible.

16:14 Max: I remember that quite vividly, because it was move-in day, and I was walking around with my hankie, which had, you know, my tears and my sweat, from the whole day. And I was walking around with my friends, and I found Thai and Payton Smith, Class of 19, and I just said, "I really want to be involved in theater!" Because you know, I was already verklempt from the day's proceedings. We exchanged contact info, and look at us now, Thai!
laughter It is quite that easy.

16:49 Mackie: That's awesome. I mean I think that answers all of our questions. Is there anything else, any other tidbits that you want to squeeze in?

16:59 Josh: Anything exciting on the horizon?

17:03 Adrian: I mean I'm a Virgo, so I'm always planning for new and exciting updates. We're going to keep looking for new opportunities out there to explore musical theater on this campus, and strengthen it and find new ways of telling different types of stories, and including as many people as possible. You know, there's a couple of projects out there, so stay tuned. You can follow us on Instagram @bard_musical_theater_company and we also have a Facebook page and we're very active. And once you get on campus, I am just as active as you guys are, so I will be constantly berating you with posters, with audition notices, so if you do decide to go here, you will be seeing me the second day of L&T, telling you about the auditions about the upcoming shows. Shows! So yeah, please, please, please!

18:00 Mackie: Well on that note, I want to thank all of you for joining us. This has been great and a lot of fun, and for everyone listening, if you have any questions, please let us know. You can reach us at admission@bard.edu, and stay tuned for our upcoming following podcasts!

18:20: We look forward to next time! Thanks!