

## **MUSICAL THEATRE DEPARTMENT**

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### **Philosophy**

Theatre is story-telling. To be a theatre artist – performer, producer, director, writer, composer - is to be a story-teller. Our stories are about people who are like us and unlike us, set in times and places that are familiar and also completely different. Our stories are as diverse and distinct as the people who tell them, encompassing a moment in one person's life and the totality of all human experience. We use words and movement, song and dance, music and silence, individual voices and ensemble in chorus to paint a picture; the stage is our canvas. It is a simple thing, to say, "we are story-tellers," and it is nothing to direct an actor to "tell the story," but in the moment, in front of an audience, to tell a story effectively... using words, movement, song, dance, music, silence, individual, and ensemble... *that* is a difficulty beyond words. *That* requires a lifetime of study and practice.

### **Curriculum**

We begin with fundamental techniques for dancing, acting, and music, laying the groundwork for the stories that the student-artists will tell. Advance technique is built on the foundation of the basics. Our goal is to develop and strengthen the technical skill of our students through a systematic and thoughtful approach; also, to nurture their intellect, dedication, curiosity, creativity, and passion – traits of a professional theatre artist.

Our curriculum is process-, rather than product-, driven, meaning that we emphasize practice and progress over an artificial end result. The goal, generally, is to prepare students for the rigors of a professional career and, specifically, for auditions to Musical Theatre programs in colleges and universities. However, we believe that creative problem-solving through process resonates in any path the student may choose to follow. The end of the training in the Musical Theatre Department is the beginning of a lifetime of creative conscientiousness.

The Musical Theatre faculty is proud of our curriculum, which has been refined over years of dedicated practice and scrutiny, and of our productions, which range from classic to contemporary musicals, faithful re-creations and immersive re-imaginings, as well as concerts, showcases, workshop productions, and classroom presentations. But the curriculum and productions could not exist without the dedication and passion of the many students who fill our classrooms each day. They come to NOCCA eager to immerse themselves in musical theatre; they leave ready to add their voice to this uniquely American art form.

In the almost-twenty years since the department was founded, our seniors consistently have been accepted to competitive colleges and conservatory musical theatre programs and have gone on to exciting and successful careers as performers, technicians, creators, and theatre administrators. NOCCA MT graduates have been seen on Broadway, in national tours, and in major regional productions. They are now driving the evolution of the form itself, and they are teaching the next generation of musical theatre artists.

## **Admission to the Musical Theatre Department**

- The Musical Theatre High School program is open to 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who have passion for Musical Theatre as an art form, matched by a strong desire to develop their skill. Plans beyond high school should include the possibility of continuing into an undergraduate theatre program and a career as a professional theatre artist.
- Admission is based upon:
  - completion of the application
  - an audition consisting of elements in dance, acting, and music
  - an interview, to gauge the student's appropriateness for the NOCCA Musical Theatre Department (i.e., passion, desire to develop skill, and future possibilities), and to gauge the Musical Theatre Department's appropriateness for the student (i.e., our ability to further the student's training, and is the curriculum the best fit for the applicant's personal goals).

## **Placement and Leveling**

All first-year students, regardless of their high school grade, begin in Level 1 and progress each year of their enrollment (second year = Level 2, third year = Level 3, etc.). Continued enrollment is contingent upon participation and progression in the classroom. We no longer offer an accelerated course of study for Level 1 students in their sophomore, junior, or senior year.

## **Equity and Fair Practice**

As our department philosophy says: stories are as diverse and distinct as the people who tell them. It follows that a diverse group of story-tellers is essential to the evolution of this art form and its continued cultural significance. Our goal during each audition season is to assemble individuals, each with their own unique experience and perspective, into a powerful ensemble whose collective vision elevates the musical theatre art form... the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

In short, we strive to create an ensemble that reflects the city, state and region we inhabit: distinct in character, unparalleled in culture, and exceptional in talent.

There is no financial requirement or obligation to apply or to be accepted into the Musical Theatre Department. Upon a successful audition and acceptance into the program, information is provided by The NOCCA Institute (NOCCA's non-profit partner) about Student Success Grants to meet the specific needs of the student and family.

A high level of proficiency and polish in singing, dancing, acting, or audition technique is not required to apply to the NOCCA Musical Theatre Department. Students come with a wide range of experience from their school programs, training classes, and community or church productions, or they may recently have discovered their love for musical theatre and are eager to grow their knowledge and skill. We are meeting students at the beginning of their journey into the musical theatre art form, and our program exists to provide them with the knowledge and skill to become a theatre professional.

When considering NOCCA, please bear in mind that the Musical Theatre Department is not an extra-curricular activity for the casual enthusiast to test their level of interest. Students receive grades and credit on their official transcript for their work in class. A college degree and a career in theatre should be on the table as a viable option. If this rings true... if this is an exciting opportunity... then we are here to help them on that journey.

## ***General Requirements and Guidelines***

### **Class Schedule and Grading:**

MT Level 1 classes take place Monday – Friday, 4:00 – 6:30.

MT Level 2, 3, and 4 classes take place Monday – Friday, 1:15 – 6:30, and require an academic schedule that allows them to arrive at NOCCA each day by 1:00.

The class plan for every level has a combination of acting, music, and dance classes throughout the week. In the fall of 2019, these classes were scheduled as a one-block day, distributed as a day of acting, a day of music, and two days of dance, plus a day for “MT Studies,” in which acting, music, dance, master classes, guest artists, and any other activity that supports the overall training and curriculum is given time and space. Rehearsals, extra classes, lessons, mentoring, and class projects may be scheduled to take place from 4:00 – 6:30.

Every student receives 3 honors-weighted arts credits per semester. These credits are vetted and certified by the State of Louisiana, and it is at the discretion of a student’s sending school as to how these credits are applied. The grade itself is a letter grade (A, B, C, etc.) that is the sum total of all their work in the classroom. In the Musical Theatre Department, this grade is made up of: Attendance = 50%. MT Studies, projects, and professionalism = 10%. Music class = 10%, Acting class = 10%, Dance classes = 20%, divided by the classes in each level’s schedule. Department productions that are by audition are not graded, however, the degree of professional conduct (a significant part of the preparation for college and career) that each student displays during the production is taken into consideration as part of the MT Studies grade,

### **Attendance and Participation**

All of the classes in the musical theatre department depend on consistent physical effort and mindfulness, therefore regular attendance is mandatory. The overall grade is weighted to reflect this: 50% of the final grade is based on attendance, as recorded on PowerSchool, the official attendance register. The attendance policy for NOCCA is detailed in the Student/Parent Guide.

Students with excessive absences may be given a growth plan with goals and targets to complete or they may be counseled out of the department. This is rare, but it reflects the importance of consistent effort in the classroom.

**Productions, concerts, showcases, workshops, and class presentations:** Throughout the year, the Musical Theatre Department presents a variety of productions to reinforce the daily classroom curriculum. These include fully staged productions where a student is cast based on an audition, as well as all-level or all-department showcases and concerts where every student participates. These productions vary from year to year, and are announced when appropriate. Though every student may not be cast in a production through the in-class audition, every student will, at some point during the school year, have the opportunity to perform for a public audience. In addition to public performances, there is a constant slate of workshops, class presentations, and masterclasses with guest artists that offer opportunities to perform. The class work is applied in productions; it is the classroom training itself where the student learns the skills necessary for future success.

**Dress Code:** Students dress in all black for their MT classes, a professional expectation. For music and acting classes, black t-shirts, shorts, leggings, etc. are appropriate. For dance classes, ballet, jazz, and tap each have a standard of professional expectation in attire and footwear. This list of requirements is updated regularly and provided to the students and parents before classes begin each fall.

**Participation in Community Productions:** Community and sending school performances are excellent venues to apply information from the classroom. Time-management and scheduling are important skills for the young artist, as well as developing an awareness of their capacity and limitations. To help them make well-informed decisions about how they should spend their time and energy, students are asked to complete a “Community Productions” form verifying that they have considered the ramifications of committing to a community production. This option is open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Freshmen are not allowed to participate in community productions, past experience taught us that incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders need time to adjust to the rigors of high school and NOCCA, academics and arts. Significant professional opportunities are given consideration; however, a constant slate of rehearsals and performances diminish the ninth-grade student’s ability to fully invest in their classes.

Sophomores and juniors in the Level 1 year are asked to consider the impact community productions will have on their training, as Level 1 classes do not end until 6:30 each night.

Seniors are asked to consider the impact of a community production on their ability to complete college applications and prepare for their auditions, particularly in the fall semester.

### **College Preparation**

The Musical Theatre curriculum is designed to build the skills and repertoire necessary for successful college auditions. The MT faculty is ready to mentor and assist the student who wishes to continue their training in an undergraduate program.

In the fall semester, Seniors focus on college preparation, including how to apply, audition preparation, and career counseling. All Seniors, regardless of whether they are continuing into a college Musical Theatre program or not, must prepare an audition binder of songs and monologues (developed over the entire course of student at NOCCA) and they must participate in Senior Juries, i.e. a presentation of that material.

In addition to classroom audition preparation, seniors are encouraged to seek individual voice, acting, and dance coaching from the faculty.

Seniors are offered the opportunity to attend the Unified College Auditions in Chicago, a convention where many of the theatre programs from across the country gather for a week to hold auditions for their next incoming class. The auditions always take place the first weekend of February, Saturday – Thursday. The three theatre disciplines (Musical Theatre, Drama, and Theatre Design) plan and travel together. To participate, students must meet the financial obligation (varies from year to year) and apply and schedule auditions for no less than three (3) colleges.

# ***Breakdown of the Musical Theatre Department Curriculum***

## **DANCE:**

- *Ballet:* Students are introduced to basic ballet concepts and terminology and focus on mastering the ballet barre (warm up), proper placement and alignment, and movement across the floor (center). As students progress, they dig deeper into ballet pedagogy, partnering in ballet, and choreography.
- *Jazz:* The jazz program covers specific techniques of classical jazz with additional exposure to elements and styles of commercial jazz, jazz funk, and hip hop.
- *Tap:* introduces the student to the basic fundamentals, including proper terminology, the use of counting, clarity of footwork, and weight shift. The students also develop a sense of musicality, and how to comprehend and perform various subdivisions and rhythms. By putting knowledge of musicality and tap vocabulary to the test, students begin to explore the art of improvisation, which is equally as important as learning technique.

## **ACTING:**

- *Fundamentals of Ensemble:* an overview and training in the Viewpoints Technique that will help build spatial awareness, presence on stage, and the creation of an ensemble
- *Scene Work:* in addition to in-studio presentations, there will be a focus on textual analysis in order to develop critical & analytical thinking while approaching text & material.
- *Monologue Preparation:* a major focus on the fundamentals of audition technique with an emphasis on reading plays, finding monologues within them, and learning how to find material appropriate to age, style, and content.

## **MUSIC:**

- *Vocal Technique:* a foundation in classical vocal technique with the goal of building healthy performance habits in all Musical Theatre styles (legit, classic Broadway, belting, rock/pop, etc.).
- *Music Theory:* reading sheet music, sight-signing, and ear training, as necessary for professional work and admittance to college music programs.
- *History and Repertoire:* The shows, songs, performers, creators, and trends in American Songbook, Classic Musical Theatre, and Contemporary Musical Theatre. Students focus on the appropriate vocal styles for each time period and discuss the evolution of the art form.

## **MT Access Workshops**

As part of the process of preparing for the next class of Musical Theatre students, the department holds audition workshops in the fall semester, designed to give an overview of the department and to give specific information regarding the audition itself. There are a couple of different options, from one-day Audition Information Sessions, to longer, multi-week workshops. These longer workshops change from year to year as we assess their effectiveness and try to find the best way for potential students to access the department and audition information before they apply. For Fall 2019, the multi-week workshops (traditionally offered to 8<sup>th</sup> graders) are open to students from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grades. For more information, sign up for the mailing list on the website ([www.nocca.com](http://www.nocca.com)) or contact NOCCA's Student Services. *Please note: participation in the audition workshops does not guarantee a successful audition or placement in the MT Department.*