

# The Sagemont School's Drama Department Deserves Standing Ovation

BY STACEY BOMSER

The Sagemont School boasts a critically acclaimed drama department. Beginning in fourth grade, interested students are introduced to the magic of musical theatre. By high school, Sagemont's award-winning International Thespian Troupe performs to packed houses and takes top honors at arts awards programs such as the Cappies and Florida State Main Stage Festival.

Sagemont Theater Teacher Elizabeth Garrard believes the drama department's success is due to its progressive program. "At the elementary level, students begin to develop a working vocabulary of theatrical terms, as well as a respect for the art form and the technique that an actor must use on the stage."

A unique partnership with the Fort Lauderdale Children's Theater provides Sagemont Lower School students the opportunity to learn and train alongside industry professionals.

"The Fort Lauderdale Children's Theater runs our elementary school production and assists with sets and costumes for the middle school and high school productions," explains Garrard. "They also provide our students and teachers access to knowledgeable theater artists and community resources."

Once students enter middle school, they can expand their knowledge by taking theatre classes as arts electives. "By the time they enter high school, many students have already had five years of training and are prepared to excel on the stage," states Garrard. "They are able to incorporate more advanced techniques in acting, voice and movement. Many of our graduates go on to study theatre at some of the most prestigious programs in the world."

Senior Jessie Jordan will attend the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. It is one of the nation's only universities dedicated solely to educating students in the visual and performing arts. She believes her training at Sagemont has prepared her for this opportunity. "I have gained confidence as an artist and learned to collaborate with my peers on creative projects."

This year's high school drama students performed *Chicago, The Musical*. The production was nominated for seven Cappie Awards including Best Lead Actress in a Musical (Jessie Jordan); Best Female Dancer (Susana Obando); Best Featured Actress in a Musical (Erica Merlino); Best Set Design and Construction

(Dan Entenberg, Victor Paes-Leme, Santiago Reyes-Retana and Crew); Best Costumes (Taylor Briesemeister, Andres Hernandez and Crew); Best Lighting Design (Arturo Fernandez, Skylar Scorca and Crew); and Senior Critic (Claudia Moncaliano).

Garrard says she takes the potential to win awards into account when selecting which plays to perform. "A great production begins with selecting the right material. First I assess the skill level of the current student body. The script should challenge them, while at the same time being accessible to our audience base. I try to choose material that has some level of literary merit and three dimensional characters. I want the audience to be entertained, but the material should also be thought provoking."

She says she also likes to look for pieces with historical significance. "I encourage the students to do extensive background research, not only on the characters and time period, but also on the significance of the script and playwright," explains Garrard. "For *Chicago*, students researched the significance of Bob Fosse's choreography, the rise and fall of Vaudeville, sensationalist crime reporting, and the 1930's in America."

Sagemont's Black Box Theatre was the perfect intimate setting to reflect the cabaret feel needed for this production, decorated with red draperies and twinkle lights. This is the second year the school has had its Black Box Theatre on campus, and Garrard is grate-



The Sagemont Upper School's production of *Chicago, The Musical* received seven Cappie nominations.



The Sagemont drama department closed out the year with the Middle School production of Walt Disney's *The Little Mermaid*.



The fourth and fifth grade production of *Seussical, Jr.* featured elaborate costumes and set design.



Mariah Pumphrey-Solomon as the Cat in the Hat in *Seussical, Jr.*

ful to have access to a working theatre laboratory.

"Students are able to experiment with different styles, forms and techniques that go beyond the traditional 'proscenium' staging. For *Chicago*, I introduced students to the three-quarters thrust staging devices, and incorporated a Brechtian distancing effect into my direction of the piece," explains Garrard. "The student lighting designers had the opportunity to put together a three direction lighting plot, and students learned many new acting techniques that they would otherwise not have had access to."

The younger students also have the opportunity perform in Sagemont's Black Box Theatre. Middle school students were able to use their time in the "actor's studio" to work on performance, song, set design, lighting and stage direction for their production of *The Little Mermaid*. These talented young thespians performed a spectacular production of the beloved story of a mermaid's wish to become human.

Fourth and fifth graders also brought a popular children's story to life with *Seussical, Jr.*, which brings the Cat in the Hat, Horton the Elephant, and all of the favorite Dr. Seuss characters to life onstage.

All three productions were performed to packed houses and received rousing standing ovations – a true testament to Sagemont's successful drama season.