

Why Did Marat Cross the Road? To Get to the Other Side

- Alex Kerai

Theater is different from nearly every other art form: It is performed and then it is gone forever. Audiences will never see the same performance twice; that is impossible. If a performance is recorded it becomes film, and if a photograph is taken of it then it becomes a photograph and not theater. After rehearsing for three months, the cast and crew of Marat/Sade performed the show for two judges at the state-wide Drama Festival. Each year, the Massachusetts Education Theater Guild (METG) hosts a one-act play festival. To start, around 115 high schools across the state compete at 14 different host sites in a preliminary round with the hope of moving on to the semi-final round and from there, the final round in Boston.

This year, for the second year in a row, Marblehead was one of the host sites for the preliminary round at the Nelson Aldrich Performing Arts Center (PAC). This involved a lot of extra hours and planning for the Festival Staff, which included Emily Kauffman, Baie Rogers, Elizabeth Payne and me. The festival staff assisted the seven other schools who were going to perform at Drama Fest with their tech hour. During that hour, stage managers from the visiting schools would mark the stage, actors worked on projection and the tech crew worked on sound and lighting design. After months of preparation, the day of preliminaries came and everything went very smoothly. I was able to watch every show and was quite impressed with each school. They all put a considerable amount of time and effort into their productions and it showed. To be able to spend a day watching eight 40-minute plays performed by high schoolers is amazing. The talent and love for theater was apparent and is one of the many things that I love about Drama Fest.

Marblehead tackled Peter Weiss's complex *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (more commonly known as Marat/Sade), a show within a show, for this year's Drama Fest. Marat/Sade is set in the historical insane asylum of Charenton where the real Marquis de Sade was incarcerated for the last years of his life and where he staged plays with his fellow inmates as actors. Weiss's play is, for the most part, historically accurate, and thus an immense challenge for high school actors to perform. Not only are they playing historical or insane figures, tackling tough and disturbing subject matter, but some of them also have to speak in verse! These challenges are hard enough for a professional ensemble, and for high schoolers they would be nearly impossible – but under the masterful and brilliant direction of renowned director Henry Dembowski, everyone rose to the challenge. Senior Alec Glass said, "It was a very rewarding experience to work with Henry because he had such a clear vision of what he wanted out of us and yet his vision was also very adaptable to what we brought to the table." The cast included Andrew Dalton (Marquis de Sade), Tyler McDonough (Jean-Paul Marat), Olivia Gentes (Charlotte Corday), Fox Prouty (the Herald), Jacob Sundlie (Coulmier), Rachel Larson (Simone Evrard), Henry Power (Duperret), Julia Taliesin (Mad Animal), Jack Krivit (Jacques

Roux), and LJ Littler, Annie Krivit, Liv Foley and Alec Glass as the Four Singers (Curcurucu, Rossignol, Polpoch and Kokol respectively), with a large ensemble of students portraying inmates and nurses. The music was composed and performed by Paul Wilkens. Ms. Mary Franklin did costumes and also assisted Mr. Dembowski in directing. The show was technically directed by Mr. Greg Dana with his crew of students which included stage managers Elizabeth Payne and Emily Kauffman and myself, the lighting designer, along with a small stage crew. Senior Stage Manager Elizabeth Payne commended all, "The cast was amazingly talented and the crew was fantastic as always."

Marblehead advanced from the preliminary round onto semi-finals which were held two weeks later at Weston High School. MHS had two weeks to prepare for the semi-final round and adapt Marat/Sade to fit Weston's stage. Marblehead was the first school to perform at Weston during semifinals and after performing we watched every show. It was a fun, competitive day of theater and an experience that we were disappointed to see end so abruptly. Marblehead did not move on from semi-finals. Although the judges liked the "disturbing and vividly designed world" and complimented the cast on their "strong commitment to their physical and vocal work," they did not choose Marat/Sade as one of the productions to move on to finals. However, Marblehead did not go home empty handed either. Over the course of two rounds of Drama Fest, Marat/Sade won seven all-star acting and technical achievement awards. Tyler McDonough (two-time winner) won for his portrayal of Jean-Paul Marat, Andrew Dalton for his interpretation of the Marquis de Sade, Olivia Gentes for her role as Charlotte Corday, Fox Prouty for his performance as the Herald, Kyra Jones and Rachel Larson for their design of the set, Elizabeth Payne and Emily Kauffman for stage managing, and Alex Kerai for lighting design. The judges complimented everyone in the production saying how "at any point, a snapshot of the stage could be taken and the picture would be beautiful." Tech director Greg Dana I think put it best when he said: "Though we did not move on to the state finals this year, we gained at least two important things. The cast was one of the most talented and cohesive groups we have had in years-this can only help our future productions. Second, we started the show with a small, yet skilled crew that has now doubled in size and enthusiasm. It looks like good times ahead."