Rachel Surgent

Location: Benedum Center

Time: Gene Kelly Award 2014,2017

2014

“Did you ever think you’d find yourself up here?” Anna asks me, standing in her starting pose in my clump. “I honestly still don’t believe I’m standing up here, it doesn’t feel real ya know?” I meekly reply. “Well, you’re not there yet, but you’ll feel it tonight, it’s something else.” Charlotte said, crouching down. Even though we’re stuck in tableau, my eyes can’t help but glance out towards the empty house.

I always went to the Benedum Center as a child and wondered what it would be like to stand on the professional stage. What it was like to look out at thousands of seats graced in garnet, or to see the grand 5000-pound crystal chandelier that daintily hangs above the audience. Never in my young life would I have guessed at 15 I wouldn’t just be standing but performing up on that stage. I hear an echoing “Tableau! We’re only doing this once more so make it perfect!” from my director, Mr. Franklin. Suddenly the music begins, and my mind instantly focuses on only the “Transylvania Mania”.

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The music cuts out and there is a collective breath amongst the cast. The Producer joyfully says, “Hampton, that was excellent, I think you’ve all got this. Remember, your call time is for Act II tonight, be sure to be in the dressing rooms at intermission and when one of the Stage Managers comes up and calls for Hampton, make sure to line up quickly, we’re on a tight schedule.” “This is professional folks, take it seriously.” Franklin adds. Five-year-old me, never imagined fifteen-year-old me in a professional awards show on the stage she grew up watching.

“Do you need someone to do your French braid love?” Isabella, an upper classman asked me. Sitting in front of the mirror in the dressing room, which was a studio temporarily converted to a dressing room for the Gene Kelly Awards. I look back at her in the mirror and nod, handing her a hair tie. “You nervous?” she asks, calmly smiling at me through the mirror. I didn’t know how to answer the question, I was nervous, but I didn’t feel it. Everything seems eerily calm. “Have you ever done this before?” I ask. “Yes, I have! It’s amazing, seeing all the people out there, like 3000 or something, I don’t know, but yeah it’s such a cool experience especially when…”

“They’re announcing best all-student orchestra!” Claudia, our student choreographer shouts. Isabella ties up the end of my braid and we both rush over to the little 20 some inch television set at the other end of the room. Every girl is crowded around the tiny screen. “…and the winner is…” the whole room falls silent, “HAMPTON!” The moment of silence immediately erupts into pandemonium. Holding back tears of joy, we all quickly finish getting ready before being summoned to the stage.

We’re sent behind a black screen, on the stage. My nerves start to kick up as I keep adjusting the petticoat under my skirt and straightening my peasant top. We’re all shuffling across the stage hugging one another wishing each other a “break a leg” and sharing “I love you”. The announcer begins to speak again, “Here are your nominees for best ensemble…” We all freeze as we await the results. “… and the winner is…” Every finger, toe, leg, arm and eye were crossed on this stage, “… HAMPTON!” We unravel ourselves and begin to excitedly jump. The audience is going wild and so are we.

The announcer continues, “It’s our final school nominated for Best Musical, it’s Hampton, with Young Frankenstein.” The audience goes wild. We rush into our clumps for tableau. “Here we go!” Luke, a junior who stood behind me shrieked. The black screen rises before us and there we stand. A five-year-old’s dream coming true. There was a pause, the room fell hush.

The first note was plays. My mind drifts into the world of Transylvania. I’m a Romanian peasant girl whose town has been traumatized by the creations of Victor von Frankenstein.

Somehow four minutes of my life passes by me without even realizing. The world was in slow motion, yet time was flying by simultaneously. I come to realization as I close my mouth with that high B flat ringing in my mind. There’s 3000 people out there who just watched me, there’s 3000 people cheering, and clapping. The black screen closes before our eyes. We erupt in excitement, seniors crying, freshmen in shock and awe, upperclassmen cheering.

All I knew is that I wanted to do it again.

2017

“Pretty cool isn’t it?” I coolly say to the crowd of freshmen around me. Their eyes glaze over as they look up at how tall the wings are. “This will be your third performance here, you’re like a veteran!” freshman Rachel Simms notes. She reminds me so much of myself, she’s dedicated, excited, and amazed to be standing here.

I can’t help but think about my past performances. A freshman year Transylvanian peasant girl, a junior year glitzy showgirl from fabulous Camelot, and now a 1950s USO performer of a man’s impressive imagination, decked out in “Red, White and True”… blue.

“Hurry up folks we can only run this a few times with the orchestra!” I hear Mr. Franklin call.

I look to Joe, our leading man, and wisely say, “Enjoy this, today’s going to go by right before your eyes.” His cue music starts and off and out he goes.

“Let’s do this,” Caroline, a year below me looks to me excitedly. As ritual, I jokingly swat her behind and send her out for her cue.

I hear my cue and out of the wings I go. The world outside of this stage suddenly goes disappears and my mind only cares about “Be the Hero”. Minutes later we are given a five-person applause followed with a message from the Producer, “Be sure to be on time, you’re performing first in Act I.”

“Do you need me to curl your hair?” I say walking towards Heather, a freshman. Her anxious-but-trying-to-be-calm look mimicked the same impression I once had as I had sat where she is. “Actually yes! I don’t know how all the seniors got ready so fast!” she chuckles. I poke, “Are you nervous?” I look at her face in the mirror, she hesitates to answer but then looks back up at me via the mirror. “Yeah, I’m a little nervous. What’s it like out there?” I open my mouth about to explain, but nothing comes out. I smile and look down at the ringlet hair in my palm. “There’s no words to describe it I guess. You’re nervous and then suddenly a wave of calm washes over you. You’re performing but you don’t even realize it, you do, but it all seems surreal. I guess that’s what I’d say… It’s surreal.” I pop the bottle of hairspray and spray a Pantene scented cloud around her head.

“Five minutes girls!” I hear an assistant call. “Thank you, ‘five minutes’.” We robotically respond. Everyone begins to line up at the door to enter the stage.

Our cast migrates to the wings of the stage. I get butterflies, I’m not nervous per say, I’m excited and maybe under a little pressure. My freshman year we broke a Gene Kelly and Hampton school record for number of nominations and wins. I was once part of Hampton theatre history. Tonight, I hope we can make history again. Anxiously, I adjust the lapels on my halter top and run my hands along the sides of my skirt. Once again, we exchange our “break a leg’s” and “I love you’s”.

The announcer voice abruptly interrupts our moment, “Tonight, I present our first school nominated for Best Musical. Here’s Hampton with Big Fish.” The audience goes crazy and that eerie rush of calm.

The first music cue commences, then the second, now it’s my cue. I go out there, performing for the final time.

1.The place is the Stage at the Benedum Center.

2.The moments are 2014 and 2017, different years.

i.I think the description of the place is good. It doesn’t lose focus.

ii.Yes

iii.Single

iv.No

v.Yes, it is clear.

vi.That the reader understand what exactly is happening on the stage.

3.No random places

4.Consider explaining what exactly is happening (dancing, singing, etc.) and also what school you represent or what group.