

How HST Casts Shows

The goal of this document is to give parents some understanding of how HST casts so they are able to help their child process disappointment when casting comes out. First, you need to understand the standard factors that all directors take into consideration when casting a show.

- **Physical Size.** Example: If the lead role is supposed to be a little child - with older siblings and parents – the tallest person cannot play that part and be believable.
- **Vocal Range.** Example: The best singer may not have the vocal range needed for a particular song/solo that the lead character needs to sing. (An alto can't sing soprano part)
- **Vocal Ability.** Example: Sometimes the hardest song may not be the leading role's song. Secondary characters often have more technically demanding songs. Additionally, some shows are extremely dependent on a strong vocal chorus/ensemble. These actors may be singing more than the leads and thus strong voices are needed in the chorus.
- **Compatibility.** Example: Certain characters need to 'play off' each other. The actors need to have a believable rapport or chemistry. This is essential in comedy/romance.
- **Character Demands.** Example: A particular character may need to cry, get angry, be evil, speak in an accent, be athletic, be a strong dancer, or be funny. The person cast must be able to meet that demand. Some skills can be taught/coached, others need to be already mastered. Part of the skill of casting is for a director to know what they can pull out of a performer in time allotted.
- **Past Performance.** Directors remember if an actor they have worked with wasn't prepared, wasn't off-book by deadline, was disruptive, questioned directions, etc.
- **Experience.** Directors usually prefer to work with known quantities for lead parts. A new actor may have a fabulous audition but that doesn't tell a director about their work ethic, reliability, ability to take direction, willingness to be a team player, etc.

In HST this means that a 1st year troupe member is RARELY cast in a leading role. While this may seem extreme, particularly if your child knows their audition was better than the person who got the part, there are several reasons for this:

*There is always a "pay your dues" aspect to breaking into theater. *Socially, your child will have a much harder time becoming part of the community if they have to "prove" why they got a lead. *Natural acting talent does not mean your student is a natural at handling the pressure that goes with a lead. *A new student has not had the opportunity to adjust to the pace/challenges of HST(rehearsing without set pieces, only 2 rehearsals on stage, sharing backstage with a 2nd show)

In addition to the standard considerations for casting, HST directors have these additional challenges:

- **HST works with a 'troupe' structure which means that students audition to be in the troupe first. The director does not know the show when these auditions happen.** They may have a couple ideas in mind, but they select the show after seeing who they have (the list of who is auditioning has always had last minute changes so the director doesn't really know numbers until the day of auditions). Although they select a show after auditions, it doesn't mean the show has the perfect number of parts for that troupe. Things like plot line, songs, and special skills required in the show all weigh more heavily than matching numbers. To accommodate numbers we may split a part into two, take lines from leads and give to chorus members, and occasionally we write in additional lines/scenes/characters. There are also years where chorus/ensemble students do not have any lines. We try to give these students as much face time (time on stage) as possible, but some shows have limited ways to accommodate this. There is no 'perfect show' that meets every desire. Picking a show has as many factors as casting a show.
- JR & GB Troupe directors are asked to find a 'moment in the sun' for graduating students who have been with the troupe for awhile and have not yet had that 'moment' (this does not mean a lead role, but a role that lets them to have their moment to shine).
- SR & SH Troupe directors are asked to spread the wealth (meaning that someone is not eligible for a major lead once they've had one) but with so few big parts in Shakespeare and Broadway shows, we tell students that they need to go into troupe willing to be chorus or ensemble all 4

years. The performance level is higher in these troupes and the singing/dancing/acting demands are greater. In public/private highschool drama programs, many students never get into their school plays because so many try out. Students are quiet happy to get chorus/ensemble roles.

- **HST's philosophy of "not hanging someone out to dry" means that we won't assign more than we're confident a student can handle.** This expression comes from the days when clothes were hung out on the line & the embarrassment that used to result if someone stopped by when your unmentionables were hanging out there. If a performer is on the stage and goes sour while singing a song or 'blanks' when giving their lines, they are stuck hanging out there like those unmentionables. It will be the longest most painfully remembered minutes of their lives.
- **HST believes in "spreading the wealth" among the lead roles.** This means that a student who gets a primary lead one year is not likely to get another primary lead. Directors may choose to 'save' a younger student for future years, knowing that most students stay with HST until they graduate out. However, there are times they may need to use them early in their troupe career, resulting in that student having chorus/ensemble roles in their last years in troupe.
 - It is possible for a student to have a 2nd substantial part. This happens when the casting puzzle has a problem that can be solved by using that student again.
 - When a highschool student has a substantial role early on in their troupe career, the student is welcome to switch between SR & SH troupes (as is any student). However, they need to take the audition class & get director approval to know if they will have "returning status" if they switch or if they will be auditioning as a newbie.
 - It is possible that a highschool student will never get a substantial part. However, HST greatly values our ensemble players because their skills create the world that the other actors use to tell the story. We encourage every HST student to look at the big picture and decide if being part of all that HST has to offer is enough, regardless of the parts they get.
- In HST, casting a musical is not always done by vocal ability. Sometimes the acting skills or the character's look may weigh more heavily than the singing. A director can choose to change a vocal key or speak-sing a song when the other needed characteristics are well-matched for a particular role by a student with weaker vocal skills.
- HST highschool troupe directors usually ask students to list what else they are involved in and what their desires/goals are for that year. Parents should be proud of the fact that we have students who tell the director they do not want a major part because they will not have the time to juggle that responsibility/time commitment with their academic demands. **Our directors honor this** although it may directly impact how they have to cast the show.

It is important to realize that with a limited number of students in the troupe (vs. the 100+ students that audition for a show in a regular school), HST does not always have the perfect fit for every role. Final casting is a massive puzzle. **Directors often end up casting the show two or three ways before settling on the one that brings them peace.** In every case there are compromises and at least one student the director will say, "I wish I had something more for this student." Also, the director is aware of future yrs.

- Sometimes a director casts a non-graduating student in a role because it would be a good moment in the sun for them & they aren't sure they'll have a 'moment' for them in later. This means that a student who had a bigger part before their graduating year, may not get a big part their last year.
- Sometimes a director wishes they could cast a student in a part but they realize that would limit them from casting them in a big part later on, so they "save" them for a future show.

Please assure your student that their value in HST has nothing to do with the size of their

part. There is a saying in theater, "There are no small parts, only small actors." This statement is true because it is the ensemble's reactions and interactions that bring a scene to life. They are responsible for transporting the audience to another place and time. Good ensemble work is the best evidence of being a seasoned actor and HST takes great pride in our ensemble work being top notch. Please show your child that you value ensemble work by talking to them about the creativity/skills you see in ensemble players.

Remember, **the parent's reaction/attitude toward casting has the greatest impact on a student's outlook.**