

Do you know what how much it costs to produce a musical? Some of the veterans and officers might, but most people haven't the faintest idea what it costs to produce a musical. I will start with just the basic costs. The performance rights to the musicals are owned by three main "theater libraries". They are Music Theater International (MTI – they own the rights to Seussical), Tams-Witmark, and the Rodgers and Hammerstein Theatre Library. Each one of these will charge a royalty (a fee) for the right to produce the show. This fee is based upon the size of the theater and the number of seats, the ticket prices, and the number of performances. They also take into account whether it is a school, community, or professional production. This fee varies according to the popularity and release date of the musical. For our production of Seussical we are paying \$355 for each performance, for a total of \$1420 before we ever crack a script. Speaking of scripts, those have to be rented too. The rehearsal set consists of 25 scripts, plus the director's books and the orchestra parts. The rental fee is \$400. We always have way more than 25 people in the show, so I order an additional 15 scripts at a cost of \$93.75. These materials are only rented for two months, so I have to order an additional month, which costs another \$400. If a RehearScore is available, I rent that at a cost of \$250. Finally, there is a \$400 security deposit that is required. So before a single piece of the set is put up, the grand total to get legal right to produce the show and get scripts in our hands is \$2963.75.

Now we have to build a set. Sure, we could save money by building cardboard cutout sets and only performing on a single level of stage, but who wants to come see that kind of production? I believe going to see a musical needs to be a total immersion experience. People want to be transported away from their current reality and caught up in the magic of the story. That's hard to do if the set isn't believable, and that takes two things: money and skill. Construction skill can be free if you get the right volunteers and have the right personnel. However, lumber, screws, and paint all cost big bucks. Depending upon the complexity of the set and what materials we can re-use from previous productions, we usually spend between \$1000 and \$1500 for set materials. Costumes and props also are a financial drain. We are fortunate in that we have talented volunteer parents who can create our costumes. If we had to rent our costumes from a costume company, it would cost over \$5000 just for the costumes! And that's for only one to two weeks! As it is, the costs for costume materials, props and material to build them, and other miscellaneous expenses are usually over \$1000 per show. Now to this we need to add the expense of hiring professional musicians to fill out the pit orchestra. We use as many high school students as possible, but we always need to hire some professionals to cover the missing or extremely difficult parts. That expense often runs close to \$1000 or more.

So let's do the math. Royalties and rental is \$2963.75. Sets, costumes, props, and pit come to approximately \$3500. This adds up to nearly \$6500 to produce Seussical at JCB High School. On Broadway, you can probably add at least one more zero, maybe more. That's why Broadway Show tickets cost \$100 a seat. Our shows cost \$8 for adults. How many adult tickets do we need to sell to break even? Let's do the math: 6500 divided by 8 comes to 813 adult tickets, just to break even. However, over half of our audience is comprised of students and senior citizens, who only pay \$5. We would need to sell 1300 of those tickets to break even. On a good night, we get 300 people at a performance. It is often less. Many schools have to charge \$10 - \$15 per ticket, just to break even. I feel that if we charged that kind of money, our audiences would be even smaller than they currently are. This is the reason we have to sell advertising in our programs. This is the reason it is so important for YOU to talk up the show to your friends, family, and neighbors. There are about 45 cast members. If each one invited ten people who actually showed up and bought a ticket, that would be only 450 people. If we want to be able to continue doing high quality shows, we need to do more than break even. We need to make a profit. That way we can buy equipment and tools, as well as pay for future shows.

I hope this little discussion has opened your eyes to some of the inner workings of the show production process and the importance of self-promotion. If people don't know about what we're doing, they will either stay home or do something else. Let's fill this auditorium for each performance. You deserve a packed house!