

'How to Succeed' Is A Birthday Show

Crews and Cast Average 17,280 Hours A Play

By SUE DIEHL
Collegian City Editor

The Penn State Thespians are celebrating their 69th anniversary today. And looking back on the work — and play — of the oldest continuing student activity on campus can turn up some rather astounding facts.

Ruth Yeaton, Thespian adviser and producer, calculated that an average of 17,280 manhours are put in on each production. That's 192 hours from each of 90 members of the cast and crews.

But the figure is light, considering that all shows now are produced on the stage of Schwab. There was a time — during the Second World War — when Thespians took their shows on the road. They visited army camps near Harrisburg and, according to printed itineraries in the Penn State Room of Pattee, many of the towns and villages in between.

Membership in the group is currently open to anyone who has participated in three Thespian productions. But until 1953, only men were eligible for membership. Ten years before, the women had formed their own organization, the Masquerettes. Mrs. Yeaton was one of those coeds who worked in Thespian shows, but received only the recognition of the females' counterpart.

The files of former Thespians activities are almost endless. But the biggest news on their 69th anniversary is the fall production.

"How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" will run Dec. 1-3 in Schwab. Rehearsals for the musical

comedy, which had one of the longest runs in Broadway history, are held nightly during the week. And the construction crew is currently building the sets in the loft above Schwab's stage.

Tons of Cold Cream

A girl first introduced as "Linda Loft" and later as Linda Taft (5th-grade-Devon), was working in the dressing room under the stage where the interview with Mrs. Yeaton was being held. She was experimenting with make-up application, and commented that the bulk of the finances for the show seemed to be going into cold cream and toilet paper — used instead of facial tissue to remove the cold cream.

But royalties, scripts, set materials and costumes also take their toll from the Thespians' budget.

All the crews for "How to Succeed" are as busy as the cast of singers, dancers and actors. Miss Taft was ordering leg make-up; Mrs. Yeaton was helping prepare the wardrobe as the construction crew pounded and painted in the loft.

J. Pierrepont Finch

The cast is headed by Michael Lemon (4th-liberal arts-Kennett Square) in the role of J. Pierrepont Finch, the ambitious young man who works his way up the business ladder to the top of J. B. Biggley's wicket corporation. Big-

gley is played by Andrew Weiner (10th-theatre arts-Bayside, N.Y.).

Finch (who asks the secretaries to call him Pooty) butters up the boss, gives flowers to influential secretaries, faithfully reads his success instruction manual and stabs everyone in the back who is in his way.

The most-frequently-stabbed award goes to Biggley's nephew Bud Frump, played by Larry Myers (5th-science-Lancaster). Frump evidently deserves Finch's undercutting. For he constantly complains to his mother, who relays the message to Mrs. Biggley, her sister, who, naturally, calls her husband to demand justice — in favor of Frump.

Frump claims that by not going directly to his uncle, he is using the "democratic" approach to the problem. But Biggley doesn't approve of his nephew or his nephew's tactics. Nepotism, the boss contends, is "when your nephew is a fool."

Amid the undercutting and backstabbing, Biggley finally succumbs to his incompetent but seductive girl friend Hedy La Rue, played by Patricia Christman (4th-liberal arts-Vanderberg Air Force Base, Calif.). But Finch remains practically oblivious to the advances of secretary Rosemary Pilkington, played by Marcia Josephs (4th-education-Pittsburgh).

The first production of Thespians' 70th year is directed by David Bigoney (10th-English-Huntingdon Valley), one of the younger veterans of the Thespians' stage.



—Photo Courtesy of the Penn State Room

The Earliest Production—"The Rivals"

1898's PRODUCTION of "The Rivals" is the beginning of The Thespians' long history here at the University. Men played the female roles with gusto. The players were J.V. Neubert, '99 (Bob Acre); A. N. Diehl, '98 (Faulkland); J. H. M. Andrews, '98 (Capt. Absolute); Clay Sprechner, '98 (manager); J. C. Reed, '99 (Sir Anthony); J. S. Albert, '98

(Thomas); L. E. Thomas, '98 (Sir Lucius); G. J. Yundt, '99 (Lydia Languish); Thomas Beaver, '98 (Mrs. Malaprop); N. W. McCallum, '99 (Julia); A. D. Carrier, '99 (Fag); R. T. Ströhm, '98 (Lucy); H. G. Huber, '98 (David) and J. L. Haehnlen, '99 (boy). From their stage in the College Chapel, this group of players began a long tradition.



—Collegian Photo by Dean Beason

The Latest Production—"How To Succeed . . ."

1966's PRODUCTION of "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" has just started. Here the stage crew works on the beginning of a set for the musical comedy. This show will be performed Nov. 1-3. It was a Broadway hit starring Robert Morse and Rudy Vallee.

"How to Succeed . . ." is the first of two productions this year. An original play will be presented in the spring term. The show is a birthday celebration for the University's oldest organization.



—Photo Courtesy of the Penn State Room

1924's "Magazine Cover Girl" production featured Auchenbach's Serenaders. The Serenaders were a big-band-sound

orchestra, complete double e-flat bass horn and marimba. Auchenbach's Serenaders were the highlight of the review.

Thespians Mark 69th Year Since Founding

By MORRIS MERTZ
Collegian Staff Writer

The Penn State Thespians, currently celebrating their 69th anniversary, have the noteworthy distinction of being not only the oldest continuing student activity on campus, but also one of the oldest university theatre groups in the country.

Although the Thespians were officially founded on Oct. 22, 1897, by the late Fred Lewis Pattee and the late John H. Lette, both faculty members, initiative for organizing the group came largely from two students, the late John C. Reed and the late J. H. M. Andrews, who later became a member of the University's Board of Trustees. The purpose of organizing the Thespians, as stated by Pattee, was to present "as distinctive a representation of some of the old classics as students possibly could be made to do."

In the campus chapel on Feb. 19, 1898, the Thespians made their debut in a production of "The Rivals." Two nights later they made their first round trip to Bellefonte, where they gave one performance. The road tour for "The School for Scandal," the Thespians' second production, was expanded to include Lock Haven.

Only Two Coeds

Since there were only two coeds in the upper classes at that time, the Thespians cast men in female roles and perpetuated the practice by barring women from both membership and appearing in their shows. Student actors soon discovered that undertaking female parts had definite disadvantages.

For example, the number of garments required to dress a lady in those days was about five times what it is today. But in later productions men found themselves wearing only tights or grass skirts and dancing the "hula hula," "bunny wiggle," "Japanese glide" and "gorilla hug."

In 1908 the Thespians began doing musical comedies. During World War I, however, they changed to farce comedies to cut expenses of elaborate productions.

Another innovation necessitated by the war was the casting of women in Thespian productions, since many male students were in the service. But after the war the Thespians resumed their all-male policy.

Original Musicals Started

Thespian shows were merely reproduced Broadway hits until an original musical comedy presented in 1921 proved to be an immediate success. The book was written by Byron Knapp, and the music was composed by Hummel Fishburn, professor emeritus and former head of the Department of Music and Music Education. Ever since then, students and faculty members have written many of the Thespian productions.

When a progressive movement swept the campus in 1930, coeds were finally permitted to appear consistently in Thespian shows. Masquerettes, the female counterpart of the Thespians, was organized in 1943 and was officially recognized as an affiliate of the Thespians. The Thespian membership ban against women remained in effect until the spring of 1953 when the Masquerettes merged with the Thespians.

During World War II, a troupe of Thespians once again hit the road and entertained servicemen in camps along the eastern coast. The troupe made about 20 trips throughout the war years. These tours brought recollections of past years when each spring the Thespians would take to the road and give two or three performances in various Pennsylvania communities, including Johnstown, Tyrone and Clearfield.

Today, while Thespians look back on 69 grand and glorious years, they recall it was not all smooth sailing, especially in the beginning. In the Thespians' first presentation, an actor portraying a lady

breezed through a stage entrance and lost her wig on the archway of the door.

The Thespians' 1902 production of "A Russian Honeymoon" went haywire when the curtain jammed at the end of a tragic scene. For 30 minutes the disillusioned hero stood frozen in his pose.

In 1919 scarlet fever forced the show to be postponed.

Another dilemma occurred in the early twenties when the Thespians wired a New York hotel to have three upright pianos available for the cast. After arriving and inquiring about the pianos, the members were led through a labyrinth of basement corridors and given three bottles of gin. In the code of prohibition days upright pianos had a meaning all their own.

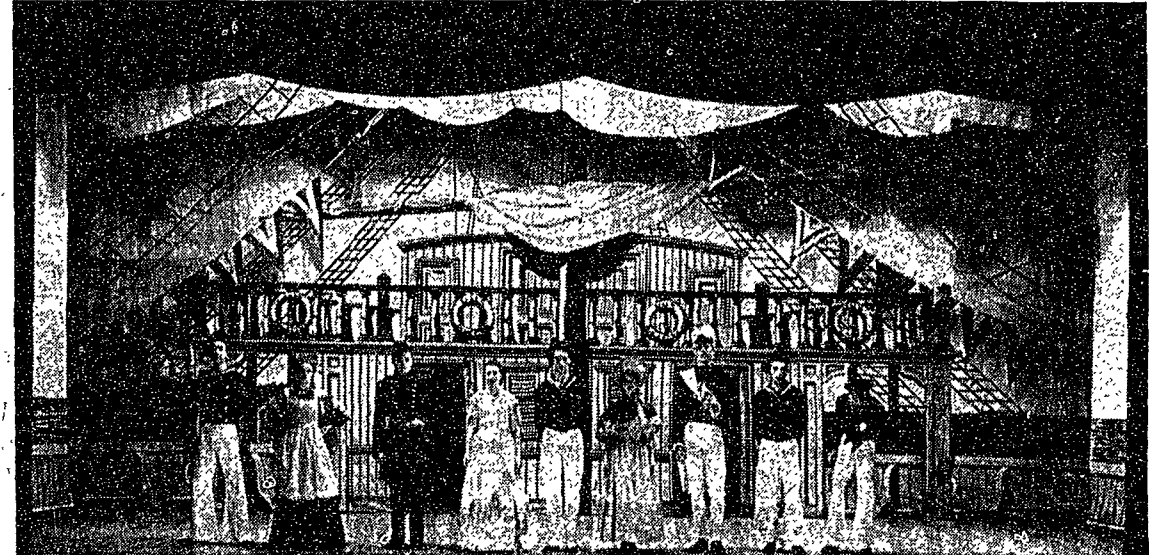
A Thespian Tradition

As a part of Thespian tradition, the group continues to present original musicals whenever possible in order to maintain an outlet for creative contemporary endeavors. Original works presented in the past few years include "Razzle McDazzle," "Fair Weather" and last spring's "Troubadour."

The Thespians annually produce two shows, including at least one Broadway musical. Broadway productions to the Thespians' credit include "Bells Are Ringing," "Guys and Dolls," "Oklahoma!" "South Pacific," "Kiss Me Kate" and "Li'l Abner."

In addition to producing shows, the Thespians sponsor meetings, trips and programs of interest for their members. Before the spring presentation it holds musical comedy workshop-programs in several areas of production. Each spring five outstanding senior members are selected to spend a weekend of theater-going in New York City.

Eligibility for membership in the Thespians is based on work with three or more Thespian productions.



—Photo Courtesy of the Penn State Room

1937's H.M.S. PINAFORE, an operetta by Gilbert and Sullivan was a classic production for the Thespians. On stage

are members of the King's Navy and their lovely co-stars. For this one, like it or not, the Thespians needed women.

Thespians Graduated Big Names in Entertainment and Business

By CLIFF ELLNER
Collegian Staff Writer

Abraham Schnitzer graduated from Penn State in 1916, which was barely twenty years after the Penn State Thespians performed their first show. He was active in Thespian work, and that might be a reason why he became one of Hollywood's biggest behind-the-scenes men.

Schnitzer, who ranks among Gene Kelly and Fred Waring in the Thespians' hall of fame, took a giant leap — "from turtlenecks to panties in one step" — and went on to head the Western Costume Company, one of the largest suppliers of its kind. He majored in chemistry.

But the Thespians have produced men and women who graduated into the spotlight as well as into the costume business. Their alumni, all famous in respective fields, became singers, theater critics, University administrators, and stars.

Gene Kelly, Class of 1933, got his

first taste of stardom on the stage of Schwab Auditorium, when he made up half of a dance team in the musical, "The Dutchess in Dutch." And Fred Waring, '22, appeared in Thespian productions long before he ever dreamed of launching the Pennsylvanians.

Waring, incidentally, never officially joined Thespians, but he was made an honorary member in 1942, some twenty years after his graduation.

Some, like Martin Brooks, who played the lead part in the 1946 Thespian show, went on to Broadway and television, and tried their hands in the "Real Thing." Brooks, for example, was featured in "I am a Camera" on the Great White Way.

Some, like Hummel Fishburn, who composed part of a musical in his undergraduate days at State, went on to University administration. Fishburn, now retired, headed the music department here and is a member of the Thespians Board of Control.



Ed Grove of State College . . . 1955's "Finian's Rainbow"

Some are Concert Singers

Some, like Alec Gray, made their names with their voices, on the concert stage. Gray became known as one of the great baritones of his day.

Don Taylor, an actor, had his name up in lights for the movie, "Winged Victory." Jimmy Leyden, Jr., composed the Naval Air Corps song, "Sky Anchors." Julius and Philip Epstein, a pair of Hollywood playwrights who graduated in 1931 and 1932, respectively, went on to write for Gene Kelly. Kenneth Holderman, a Thespian in undergraduate days, stayed — and is now the University's Director of Commonwealth Campuses.

The distaff showing, however, is slim — only Sue Browning managed to achieve a significant degree of fame.

That may be because there were no women in the cast until long after World War I.

No Women Policy

It may seem strange producing classics like "The Rivals" without

feminine people in feminine roles, but it was taken as a matter of course that women could not perform. That, plus a general scarcity of ladies at State, kept the coeds off the stage until 1919, when they were featured in "It Pays to Advertise." And, that was only because the men were away at war.

The anti-woman ban resumed after World War I, with men staging "The Fair Coed" in 1922, sans coeds. Critics reacted sharply and negatively, however, when the Thespians performed "The Kid Himself" in 1926.

"The cast 'girls' were fine," said The Daily Collegian reviewer, "but the chorus 'girls' were rotten as far as looking like the opposite sex is concerned."

Sweeping Reform Movement

But a sweeping reform movement overtook the campus when the progressives brought the women back on to the stage in 1930. The female addi-

tion became known as the Masquerettes, but that group has since merged with the Thespians.

The Thespians, however, are not the only group which has brought people to the spotlight. The Penn State Players, a brother organization, introduced actors Ed Bins and Don Taylor, in addition to Oliver Smith, '39, who designs scenery for award-winning Broadway shows. Harold Cohen, one-time Theatre critic for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, was also a Player.

Many people have exited from the Thespian stage to bigger things. Some are still taking their curtain calls. Raymond P. (Phil) Shafer, Jr., son of the Lieutenant Governor, was Mayor Shinn in the recent production of Meredith Wilson's "Music Man." Phil is now a graduate student in theater arts; he may make his name there, or in the field of politics, like his dad. Either way, he may be another feather in the Thespians' cap.