

AUGUST 2015



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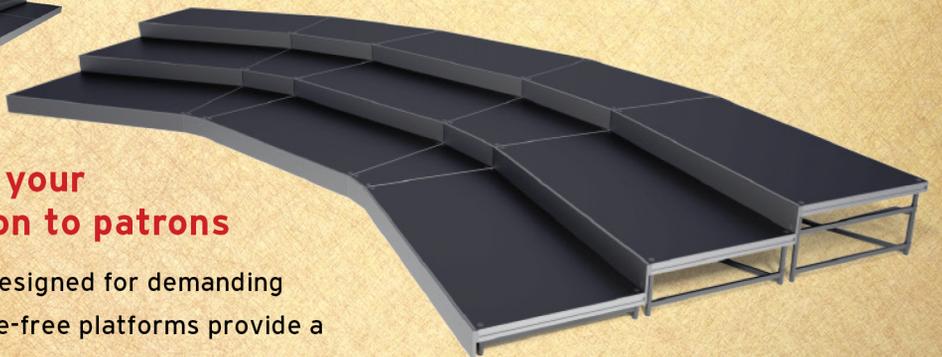
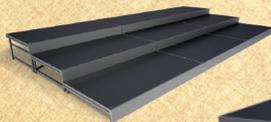
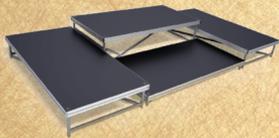
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Photo cover by Tracey Harrison, featuring Clinton High School's Attaché

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# EDITOR'S LETTER

Probably because I'm now hard-wired to approach every August with renewed vigor and optimism for the new semester, I always find myself doing a little more deep-thinking as fall approaches. This has always been the time for an educator to breathe a little, dream a little, and plan a lot.

One of the things I've found myself thinking about these last few weeks is the question of integrity and leading by example. Recognizing integrity is about more than how we define ourselves in relation to the rest of the world; it also informs what we look for in others and even how we model that character trait for our children, whether biological or borrowed for the semester.

Do we keep our word to our kids? Do they see us keeping our word with other adults? Are we adhering to high principles and standards in our professional lives? Are we espousing values that we aren't necessarily demonstrating in our words and actions? Are we influencing (positively) by example?

Integrity and leadership are also about more than keeping your word with others or staying true to our values. Leadership, in particular, goes beyond just setting a good example. Do we speak up when we see an injustice, or do we leave it for another person to handle? Do we work to be honest and fair? Do we share recognition for group accomplishments? In the ways that we lead, are we training our students to become successful leaders one day?

While we know our students are raised by their parents, we are also fully aware of our influence in their lives. As such, many educators are working to add structure and visibility for training student leaders. For instance, this November the Indiana Music Education Association is hosting a Student Leadership Experience for music students in 8th to 12th grade to hone their skills in leadership.

Participants will meet with Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser, who has authored a leadership program based on life skills and focused on self-development. Unlike workshops that offer tips for the control of a leader over his or her followers, Lautzenheiser's curriculum focuses on nurturing the organizational values of the group.

Participants in the Student Leadership Experience will also meet with the creators of the Social Excellence Project, where they will learn more about the social function of leadership in order to leverage their skills in music education to be more connected to their place in the world. Finally, students will work with Fran Kick about taking initiative, leading by example, problem solving, and increasing awareness both individually and as a group.

There are dozens of wonderful programs out there doing similar work. My hope is that administrators will make the time and find the place for students to practice these skills, so while the exceptional educators are leading by example, students are also provided ample opportunity to practice their own budding leadership skills in real-world dynamics.

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Show Choir Products and News

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# Orchestra Pit Fillers & Stage Extensions

By Bill Gareiss

You have developed a great show choir program, member numbers are growing, and you are now challenged with finding enough space to allow everyone to participate. You must find a way to increase the square footage on stage—in order to accommodate the additional performers—and to bring them closer to the audience to make each performance more intimate. The easiest option is to extend the stage with either a stage extension, or if you have an orchestra pit, to fill it with platforms. If the decision is made to move forward with the project, it is important that you stop and consider some of the following points.



## Getting Started

Most performing arts facilities are occupied by multiple users. Meeting with the other users of the space to determine and agree on what the primary needs are is a great first step. You may share the space with the band, orchestra, dance, drama, or other choir groups. Working as a team to collaborate and come to agreement on what the top priority needs of the group are is a very important first step prior to contacting a manufacturer of staging. A few questions will immediately come up and will need to be addressed before starting the project. They can include the following concerns:

- Should the stage extension/pit filler be just at the existing stage height or should it also set up at audience level and orchestra level?
- When set at stage height will you need a spanning or bridging design which offers clear space under the decking for the orchestra or for storage of equipment, pianos or instruments?
- How will the conductor view the orchestra and the performers on stage during a musical performance?
- If you also want the decking set at audience level, will you be wanting chairs mounted in that space in order to increase seating capacity up close to the stage?



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■ What other configurations or uses for the equipment do you have? Some systems will allow you to make risers from the same decking but using different height supplemental supports.

■ Who will set up and take down the equipment, where will it be stored, and what weight capacity will it need to support?

■ Are you anticipating the need for grand pianos, lifts, heavy scenery elements or large numbers of moving performers?

■ Who is paying, what is your budget and what is your ideal timeline for completion of the project?

Expect it to take some time with multiple meetings before consensus regarding all these important considerations is reached. Once you have discerned the needs of the facility, then you should contact some professional staging manufacturers to help guide you. This is an important step to insure that you will get an engineered system that is developed for the application and fits the constraints of your facility. This is not an area that you want to try and build on your own as many risks are involved in doing so.



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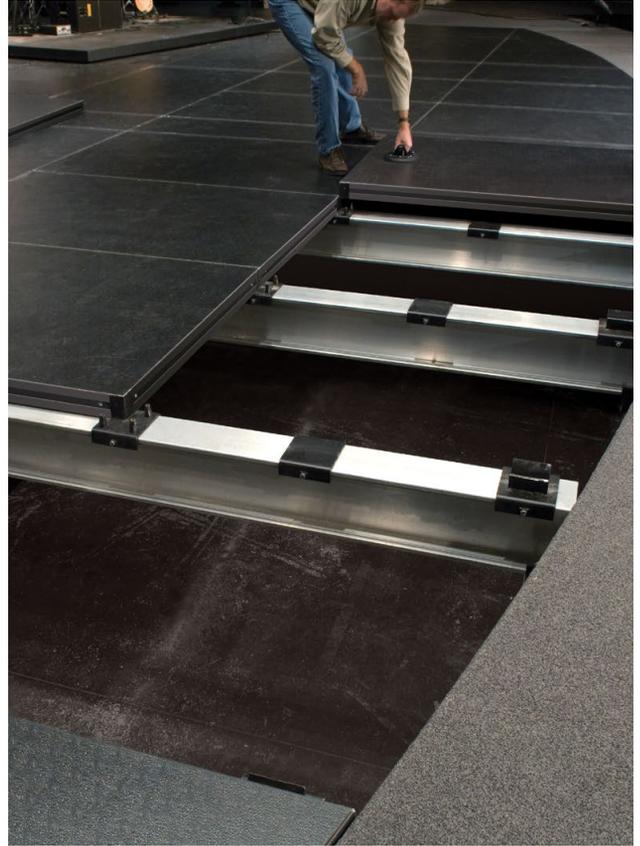


Price should not be the only consideration, especially when taking into account that you will live with this system for many years; you want to get the best match for your needs.

### Design Process and Construction Considerations

The design priority is that these modular units be extremely strong and safe in order to withstand the live loads and action performed on them by a large quantity of enthusiastic performers. Safety, meeting code, ease of use, versatility, quietness, and stability of the platforms, as well as how they store, are all important considerations to weigh out. Be prepared to share a lot of information with the staging company including the ideal scope of the project and all of the needs you outlined as a user group. You will need to share dimensions such as width, depth, and height needed. It is good to have as many details, drawings, and photos to send to the staging company as you can get your hands on. The more detail the better!

Once you are ready to move forward, you should contact several staging companies. A minimum of three different bids should be sought to make sure all aspects from budget to the design you developed are met. Most staging companies can typically generate a professional design layout, equipment list, and quote within a few days. Ask for lots of photos, specs, and support materials. It's also great to get references and testimonials from other customers to help make your decision. Price should not be the only consideration, especially when taking into account that you will live with this system for many years; you want to get the best match for your needs.





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## Equipment Options

There are many options for equipment type and materials that can be used to build the system. The staging company will be able to help build a system that will function safely at the needed height and required configurations. The performance surface can be made to fit your event needs or to match your main stage to give it a permanent look.

Another consideration should be that the platform is quiet for the performers and will not be distracting when they transition from the main stage to the extension. The system should be designed in a way that all of the components work together to provide a stable area for your dancers, actors or the orchestra. Having a stage that has platforms that bridge together and supports that have cross bracing is not only an option but a must-have if your stages are higher than sixteen inches.

Certainly, the staging manufacturer should provide a stage that will meet the building and fire code standards as an integral part of the design and construction. Installation and training by the manufacturer is important to ensure all the components fit and function perfectly and your set up crew is trained in the proper safe use of the equipment.

Once you have selected a professional staging company and communicated all of your needs, you can go back and focus on your upcoming show knowing that they will deliver a worry free system for your performances for years to come.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Bill Gareiss works for Stage-Right Corporation in the Theatre and Performing Arts Sales Division. Bill has been helping performing arts groups and facilities with their staging, riser and acoustic enclosure projects for 27 years and is passionate about StageRight's role in supporting the Arts with safe, reliable and easy to use equipment.

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# Forever Young

By Josh Sassanella

The funny thing about growing up is you gain the ability to look back and see the decisions that defined you. For me, almost every decision was surrounded by music and each song was special.

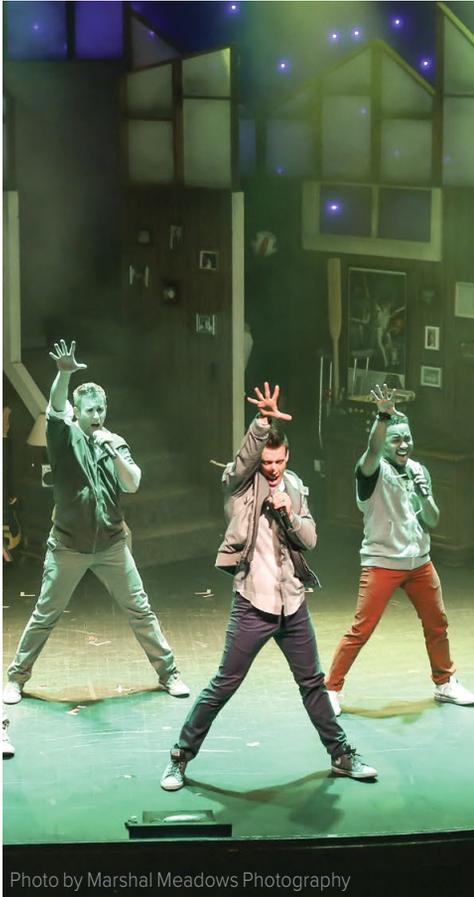


Photo by Marshal Meadows Photography

There was the hair-band music my cousin played in his car that was loud enough to blow out the eardrums on any ten-year-old boy. There were the songs that rolled me around the local skating rink, as I held hands with the girl of my twelve-year-old dreams. There were the songs that played as I walked up to bat at my local little league field and helped the team win the big game. Or at least I think we won. With each memorable tune I somehow magically remember those people, those friends, and those moments just like they were yesterday.

All these years later, I seem to remember one more than the others. It was the fall and Auburn, Indiana, was in full swing with the sounds and the smells, most of them good, of our annual county fair. I'd partnered up with my lady and my friends and headed out to see something I'd never seen before. My older brother, Jeremy, who started on the varsity football team his freshman year of high school was to take the stage in what I thought to be a strange performance. Tonight was the night I would be introduced to what is commonly known as show choir.

Why was this whole thing strange? My brother was a big jock. I mean one of the biggest. So to hear that he had been hijacked to sing and dance was something I was not going to miss. Maybe all those years singing at our church had finally caught up to him and

he was ready to show us what this thing was all about. Needless to say we were there for a train wreck of epic proportions, and there was no way we were going to miss it.

The announcer came out and introduced with a booming thunderous voice, "Ladies and Gentleman, Dekalb Classic Connection." And there he was—my big brother tucked up in the back row. I saw him as the show began and I never stopped watching him. One eleven-year-old boy was to be changed that day. His name was Josh Sassanella.

I remember it all. Each moment was being tattooed on my heart like the birth of a child or a wedding day. This was what I was meant to do. Surprisingly, I looked at my little brother Justin and my best friend Evan and they were right there with me. They were completely focused and as enthralled with it

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Music tells you where you were, who you were with, the good times, the bad times—the times you never want to forget—and even some you wish you could.

as I was. Auditions for our middle school show choir became a necessity, and nearly twenty five years later I have a family, a show choir, and a career that is made of music, full of music, and surrounded by nothing but music.

Now, here I sit in my brother's home in Branson, Missouri, and the dreams keep coming true. Two years ago we began to write a show for this little entertainment town in the middle of the beautiful Ozark hills and after more work than I could possibly put into one article, Evan, Justin, and I have something special. We know that when we look back we are remembering the music and the memories that we all have. It may not be my cousin's car or an Indiana roller rink. It may not be a little league park, but the music is the same.

It's the one thing we have in common.

Music tells you where you were, who you were with, the good times, the bad times—the times you never want to forget—and even some you wish you could.

We call the show "Forever Young," and without that one chance show choir performance on a pop-up stage in a small town in Indiana I would have never known that music has the power to not only change our amazing audiences' lives but to change my life for the better but keep me "Forever Young." Every time I hear the iconic Bob Dylan song, I remember that stage. I remember that music. I go back to where it all began.

I know a lot of young people may flip past this article in this magazine and miss out on what

is written here, but let me say this to the parents and the students out there. Look around you at that next show choir show.

Watch the eyes of the youth as they suddenly pull away from those screens. Look at them as their phones lower and they push that button that makes it sleep. Watch their feet tap to the beat of this year's hottest young people learning the lessons that only music can teach.

Show choir parents: pat yourselves on the back. You made the right choice. Directors: be proud of what you have accomplished; you got them there. Students: follow the music. Let the music do the rest. Remember and realize how it's the soundtrack of your lives.

Maybe after it's all said and done, we will all look back on that one show choir show that made our newest world leader rule with a compassionate heart. Maybe we'll look back at the show choir show that played in the headphones of the scientist that finally cures cancer. Maybe we'll hear the music of a world that lays down its arms and realizes that we are all in this together—just like fifty kids on any given Saturday during show choir season.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** After graduating from Dekalb High School in Waterloo IN, and being a proud member of Dekalb's award-winning show choir *Classic Connection*, Josh has spent the last 8 years living and performing in New York City. Josh has been seen swinging from the rafters of The Foxwoods Theatre in *Spiderman-Turn Off The Dark*, and more recently, Josh has been rocking socks off as a cast member of the smash hit musical *Rock of Ages*. His other credits include productions of *Mamma Mia!*, *Rent*, *Xanadu*, and *Smokey Joe's Café* among others. Between productions Josh travels the country working with numerous Show Choirs, choreographing, and cleaning more dance steps than he can possibly count.

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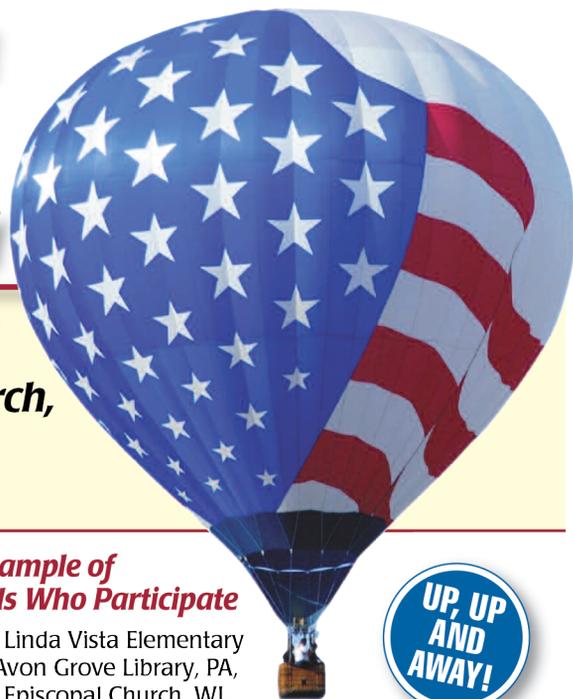
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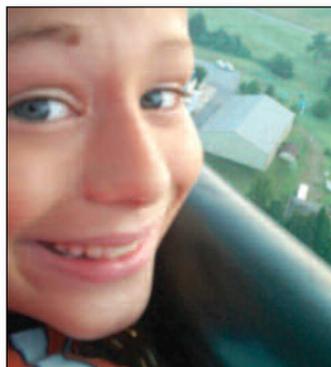
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RECIPE FOR

# Show Choir Success

By Stacy Hanson

In the spring of 2015, the FOX series “Glee” aired its final show, concluding six seasons and 121 episodes that together contained more than 700 musical numbers. While credited with raising the visibility of show choirs, this popular series did not capture all the factors critical to a successful show choir program. From the directors we talked to, three key ingredients—all downplayed on “Glee”—are setting expectations, building support and choosing the right foundation.



The limits of a 43-minute episode meant that “Glee” could never represent the countless hours of singing and dancing rehearsals required. Only show choir insiders understand the tremendous work involved.

### Setting Expectations

The limits of a 43-minute episode meant that “Glee” could never represent the countless hours of singing and dancing rehearsals required. Only show choir insiders could understand the tremendous work involved.

This point was brought home to Jeff Kelly several years ago; he directs the Jefferson Connection show choir at Bloomington Jefferson High School in Bloomington, Minnesota. The local FOX affiliate invited his group to give a mini concert. “On short notice, they wanted us to perform two brand-new songs at their studio, along with the “Glee” theme,” he recalls. Although initially intrigued, Kelly eventually was unwilling to disrupt his group’s regular rehearsals to accommodate a brief TV appearance.

“I turned them down, as did other area show choirs,” he explains. “I think it was a learning experience for this station; they later simplified the request by asking local show choirs to perform a song already in their repertoire.”

Amy Fambrough agrees that “Glee” fostered unrealistic expectations, even among some students new to show choir. “They didn’t realize that what they saw on one episode might represent six months of rehearsals in the real world,” she says.

Fambrough is choir director at Timber Creek High School in Keller, Texas, where her show choir learns from 20 to 25 musical numbers each school year. She has found that parents often share these unrealistic expectations, particularly about the commitment their child is undertaking.

Fambrough first required parents and students to simply sign a participation contract, but later decided more was needed. “Several years ago I had to remove a student for poor attendance,” she recalls. “When the parents complained, it was obvious they hadn’t read the contract they signed.”

The past three years she’s held a mandatory parent meeting before student auditions, to educate parents and encourage buy-in. At this meeting, she details expectations, benefits of participating and costs. (Last year’s show choir fee was \$275, not including uniform and shoes.) The team aspect of show choir is also emphasized because the group’s development is hampered when even one student is absent.

Instilling the values of personal responsibility and accountability teaches life lessons that directors believe will resonate far into the future. “With contests, sometimes you win, sometimes you don’t,” explains Kelly. “But the season is truly successful if the students learn, enjoy and grow from the process of working together as a team.”

### Building Support

The team aspect of show choir extends beyond the performers to the numerous volunteers who help pull everything together.

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Yet these vital behind-the-scenes roles received scant attention on the TV show.

"Today you need an army of assistants, including costume designers, set designers and builders, music arrangers, choreographers, vocal instructors and instrumental instructors," says Dan Neece, who recently retired after directing show choirs for 40 years, including the last 30 with the Starship show choir at Enterprise High School in Redding, California. When canvassing for volunteers, Neece solicited both current and past parents. "There's always somebody out there – everyone wants to help kids."

Kelly encourages directors to nurture this network. "Some directors feel like they have to do everything themselves—I'm not sure why," he explains. "It takes a number of quality people around you to make it work." Beyond the performance-focused volunteers is usually a broader network involved with fundraising and advocacy.

Remember the numerous "Glee" episodes highlighting the required door-to-door selling, car washes and raffles? Actually, those episodes never happened. Reality is more challenging. Neece explains that his choir began holding a week of fundraising concerts in late February, just before contest season.



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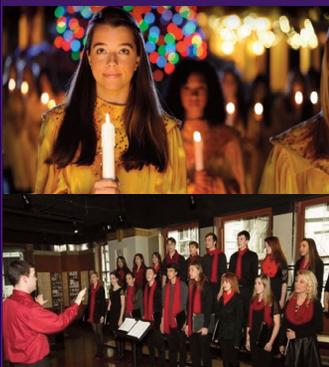
All the parents, volunteers and advocates help maintain and build successful programs. To ensure performances will fully showcase the students' hard work, one final key support cannot be forgotten: staging.

For four consecutive school days, elementary and junior high students were bussed to Enterprise High School for an abridged, one-hour show in the 1,100-seat auditorium. Students were charged several dollars per ticket, with scholarships available. Senior citizens received free admission. For five nights that week, Starship performed their full two-hour show, with tickets priced at \$8. "People will spend money to see kids perform," Neece states, noting this week of concerts typically raised more than \$40,000, a figure supplemented by program advertising and raffle tickets. Along with the potential for high revenue, such performances offer another important advantage: cookie-dough sales cannot improve choreography and car washes do not help intonation. By the end of that busy performance week, Neece says Starship was ready to compete.

Public concerts like this also serve to build awareness for your program, creating valuable goodwill. Fambrough consciously limits the size of her show choir—32 students next year—so they can accommodate performances in the community, including grand openings, open houses and other civic events. "Fitting 50 students in many of these sites would be impossible," she states.

Her own personal advocacy efforts included three years of lobbying that recently culminated in show choir students earning physical education credit in her district; this is uncommon in Texas. "Many of

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Show Choir National Finals	April 29-30

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Visual Vanguard	April James
Best New Director	Adam Miller
Best New Choreographer	Ellie Jordan
Best Arranger	Jeremy Alfera
Best Costumer	Gail McInnis Productions
Spirit of Service	Damon Brown
Most Promising New Program	American Leadership Academy
Best Regional Competition	Great River (Central & West HS Davenport, IA)

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my students are in multiple activities and found it difficult to fit in all their requirements," states Fambrough, who expects to complete her PE certification training soon. "Marching band already had this for years."

Bert Johnson, vice president with FAME Events in Mesa, Arizona, is not surprised to hear about the efforts of Fambrough and her peers. "I think show choir directors put in double the time of regular choir directors," he states.

All the parents, volunteers and advocates help maintain and build successful programs. To ensure performances will fully showcase the students' hard work, one final key support cannot be forgotten: staging.

### Choosing Foundation

For many beginning choirs or show choirs in certain parts of the country, staging is foreign equipment. Johnson says performing on a flat floor is common outside the main "Show Choir Corridor"—an area centered in the Midwest, with smaller pockets into

California, the South and Northeast.

This year FAME celebrates 20 years of hosting show choirs competitions across the country. Most FAME contests take place on sixteen 4' x 8' staging platforms of various heights (8", 16", 24" and 32"). "Groups that come to our events with no intention of using staging quickly see the benefits," explains Johnson. These include better visibility for all performers, improved sound projection and increased choreography options.

"If choirs cannot afford their own full set, even a smaller number of platforms will make a big difference," notes Johnson. When directors ask him for staging recommendations, he stresses these key factors: lightweight portability, rock-solid stability and creative flexibility. He says probably 30 percent of the choirs he sees go far beyond the traditional 4x4 platform arrangement, employing many imaginative configurations.

Imagination also inspires creative ways to either disguise or accentuate the platforms. For some shows, Enterprise Starship uses fog machines to create a hazy effect;

for other shows, custom-made plastic inserts illuminated the gaps between platforms with colorful, battery-powered lights. Some choirs create a staircase look with solid wood facing.

Behind the platforms, competition sets commonly feature painted scenery or backdrops. Other elements include large video screens or onstage curtains for dramatic impact and costume changes. While money certainly helps show choirs pay for staging, equipment, travel and costumes, Johnson believes the necessity of money is a misconception. "Good direction, committed volunteers and simplified sets can go a long way," he concludes.

The Hollywood version of show choirs depicted on "Glee" can certainly be enjoyed as entertainment, but insiders know that the FOX series wasn't reality TV. By properly setting expectations, nurturing support and selecting the right foundation, show choir directors are creating strong programs that achieve renewed success season after season.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Stacy Hanson is Marketing Communications Manager with the Wenger Corporation of Owatonna, MN, ([www.wengercorp.com](http://www.wengercorp.com)), which makes a variety of music education and performance equipment. She can be reached at [stacy.hanson@wengercorp.com](mailto:stacy.hanson@wengercorp.com). Wenger is an official partner of the FAME's National Show Choir Championship Series, supplying staging and risers to FAME events nationwide.

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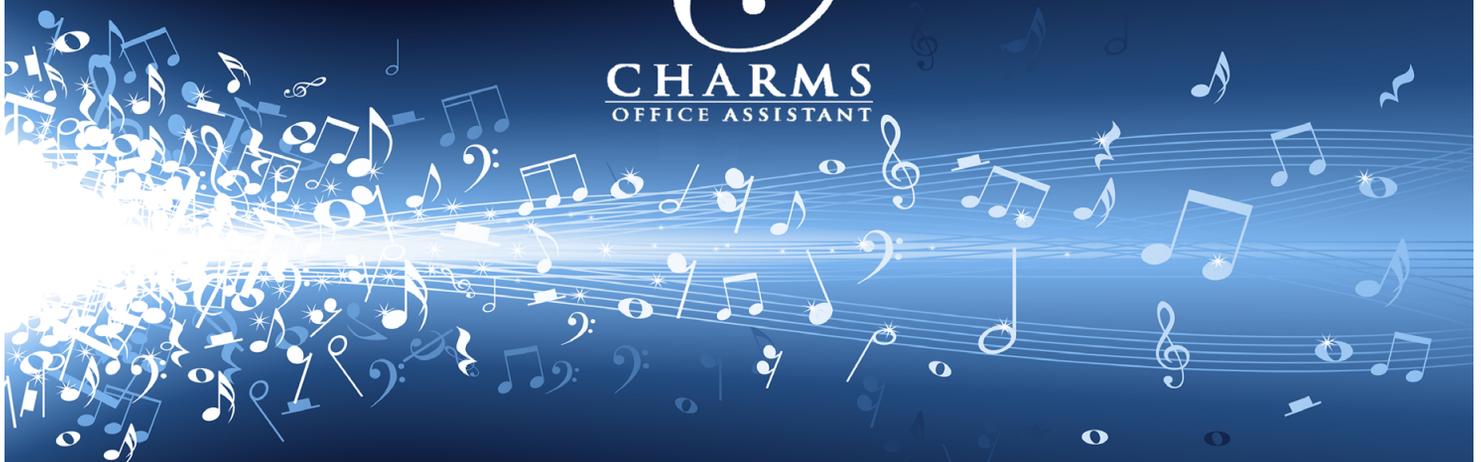
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# *Transforming*

## OFF-THE-RACK GARMENTS FOR DANCING

By Deborah J. Nelson





## Let's face it -

Custom gowns and costumes can get expensive. Whether you enjoy ballroom dancing as a social activity, or relish it in competitions, you may want to purchase an off-the-rack dress, top or bottom and transform it into something that is danceable. You may see a dress with that “wow” factor on the clearance rack, and wonder, “Can I make it work?”

Generally, smart alterations to a ready-made garment can be much less expensive than creating a costume “from scratch.” The key to making smart alterations is that you are adding to a garment, rather than taking away from a garment. If you have sewing skills or work with a seasoned costume maker or alterations specialist, you will be able to decide what will work, and what won't. Ripping apart is costly and often counterproductive.



This is a very contemporary style with the sheer lower skirt. There is a full back detail that would need to have supporting straps of the decorative variety to secure the bodice for rigorous dancing. (The dress won't stay in place when dancing without adding straps to secure it to the body).



With short dresses, attaching a leotard under it at the waistline will help turn this dress into a dance costume. More secure straps will also give more danceability to this style.

**What you may find on the rack might include some of the following possibilities:**

### Tops

When you see a beautifully bedazzled top, try it on and raise your arms into dance position. Does this top have enough underarm "give" (if it has sleeves) so that the top stays down in place, or does the entire top raise up and create an unattractive look? If the top still looks great (from front, back and the sides) with your arms raised, you have just found a great addition to your ballroom wardrobe. Maybe you have a skirt or pant that will coordinate beautifully, creating an elegant dance ensemble. If not, finding or creating a coordinating piece will be less expensive than an entire outfit.

If you have or find a danceable top and can picture it as one part of an ensemble, consider if finding or creating that accompanying pant or skirt makes sense. It's always difficult to find a matching fabric, so consider a coordinating colored piece (such as pairing a burgundy skirt with a pink top, or black with nearly any colored top). Coordinating textures is also important. Perhaps you simply need to accessorize or add some glitz to this top.

If you find a beautiful top and you can picture it as part of an ensemble, will you need any alterations to make this a reality? You may need a gusset (an extra section of fabric, most likely shaped like a football) to be seamed in between the sleeve and the bodice area of the top. You will need to find matching fabric to do this, and then you need to determine if this addition will not detract from the beauty of the top. Another option would be to separate the sleeve from the bodice, in this underarm area – binding off both sections, so you see your bare armpit instead of fabric. You will need to consider if you can be happy with this look.

### Pants or Skirts

Palazzo pants are popular, once again, and can be the perfect accompaniment to a fabulous top. As mentioned, always view yourself in a mirror to be able to see ALL sides of yourself. (The rear view is very important with Palazzo pants!)

If a found skirt isn't full enough to dance, consider adding in several "gores" (triangular or pie-piece shaped sections of fabric) that can add lots of volume to the hemline of a skirt without increasing the width through the waist or hips.



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Gores are easily inserted into seams, but if there are none, you can cut slits where you wish to add fullness. These slits need to be carefully marked and cut in order to achieve a professional look. These gores don't need to match, so that you could add solid red gores, for example, to a red striped or floral printed skirt.

### Dresses

For dresses, as with tops, you need to do the "sleeve check" to determine if the dress is workable as a dance garment or costume. The additional determination will be if there is enough "skirt" for the style of dancing that you plan to perform. Maxi-dresses are very popular, and if you find a beautiful long dress, perhaps it has enough swing to it to dance beautifully.

Most special occasion dresses have very skimpy skirts—prom, bridesmaid and mother's dress manufacturers keep their costs down by minimizing the skirt fullness. Many times, there may be enough fullness in the top layer of the skirt, but there



Any purchased off-the-rack garment may be perfect, or perfectly altered for you, BUT you just might need to add a little glitz.



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A critical eye can help you determine if an off-the-rack garment can be turned into a show choir costume.

is a slim-cut lining, which is fine when you're standing still, but you can't dance in it! If there is enough fullness in the outer skirt, you can simply replace the skirt-lining layer with a lining with fullness that matches the outer skirt.

If the outer skirt—or only skirt, if it's unlined—doesn't have enough fullness, determine if you would be able to find matching (or suitably contrasting) fabric to gusset in the gores as discussed with skirts. One option would be to split the side seams and incorporate a full skirt or pant under the skirt panels of the dress, creating a tunic look.

Something else to contemplate when figuring out if you can use an altered,

off-the-rack dress is if it stays in place when you dance. Many dance costumes (and gowns) incorporate an attached leotard or panty in the costume, so that the costume stays smoothly and sleekly attached to the body when dancing, and doesn't shift up or twist with movement. Of course, no special occasion dress comes with a built-in leotard though you can add purchased dance briefs for modesty when dancing, but generally these can't be anchored to the costume to keep the costume in place; however, a talented designer or dressmaker just might be able to make it happen.

Finally, there is the "Glitz Factor." Any purchased off-the-rack garment may be

perfect, or perfectly altered for you, BUT you just might need to add a little glitz. Rhinestoning takes practice, so if you are a practiced rhinestoner, create a plan and go for it. You can refer to my previous blogs and articles with many tips on how to determine a design, and then determine the best ways to achieve your design plan.

The main thing to keep in mind is to go minimal first, all over your garment, to see if you like it or if you need more. Gradually add more, again, all over your garment, until you are happy with the outcome. NEVER start an intricate design on your garment (especially on the front), as you may change your mind, or run out of time or rhinestones, resulting in an unwearable garment. If you start minimal, you will be able to wear your garment, add more, and then wear your garment again.

A critical eye can help you determine if an off-the-rack garment can be turned into a show choir costume. Keep these tips in mind when you are shopping those clearance racks!

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Deborah J. Nelson is the Founder/Head Designer for Satin Stitches Ltd., a custom performance costume manufacturer located in Minneapolis, MN, since 1978. Ms. Nelson has a BFA degree in Fashion Design and worked in the garment manufacturing industry for 4+ years before starting Satin Stitches. Call 763-323-9507 or 1-800-48SATIN or email [customerservice@satinstitches.com](mailto:customerservice@satinstitches.com) for more information.

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