



JaMalachi Willis films classmate Symone Crump performing her original monologue. PROVIDED

'A HAPPY PLACE'

Theater students find respite making 'Art of Healing' film

Amanda Karioth Thompson
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"This year was definitely an into the unknown situation. We weren't quite sure how we were going to do anything," admitted Randi Lundgren. As the Theatre Arts Director and Fine Arts Department Head at Godby High School, the idea of not offering her students an opportunity to participate in theatre was unthinkable. "We need the arts in times like this."

Despite the pandemic, she decided the show must go on and, to do that safely, she needed to think in new and innovative ways.

Lundgren applied for and received an Arts Education Grant from the Council on Culture & Arts. The grant was made possible this year through philanthropic support from the Duke Energy Foundation's Powerful Communities program.

With the grant and additional funds provided by the school district, Lundgren was able to purchase two cameras with tripods, two boom microphones, some lighting and a backdrop.

The new equipment has been used by students to record an original production called "The Art of Healing." This show features the entire fine arts department and will include band and choral performances, dances, as



Annaliese Trammel has enjoyed experimenting with video production at Godby. PROVIDED

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Theatre Arts Director and Fine Arts Department Head
Godby High School

well as dramatic monologues and skits. "Our plan is to film multiple students doing different things and then edit them together into a cohesive production. It's basically our big collaborative thing we do every year and this year we couldn't get together and do it so we're doing it this way instead," said Lundgren.

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Annaliese Trammel, Randi Lundgren, and JaMalachi review footage for "The Art of Healing" production. PROVIDED

Arts

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Students have already had practice using the new equipment and following safety protocols. The school successfully mounted a production of "Once On This Island," earlier in the year. "It was the first Leon County Schools musical to happen during this time. It was performed in our auditorium with a 20% capacity audience. We filmed and streamed it. It was hugely successful."

A lesson in digital delivery

That experience taught them a lot about the technical aspects of filming, editing and digital delivery and students like Annaliese Trammel and JaMalachi Willis continue to hone their video production skills. As Assistant Directors, the two eleventh graders have been stretched in unexpected ways. Though Annaliese has worked on video projects with her dad and her friends, she had some initial apprehension.

"I wasn't exactly sure how we were going to get it done but I had a lot of ideas I wanted to try. While it didn't all pan out, it was still fun to think about, like I can use two cameras and cut here and experiment with it. Now that we've tried some things and have the equipment, I feel like next year we can make it even better," she said.

JaMalachi was grateful to have a shared creative experience during a turbulent time. "I felt that theater was very helpful for me and lot of my friends. It made school a happy place to be in instead of being out in the world experiencing all the chaos going on. I'm in the theater classroom about five times a day," he laughed.

A safe space for stories

Lungren knows her students need a safe space to share their stories, now more than ever. She designed "The Art Healing" for students to use their own voices and create content that is personal and meaningful to their current experience.

"All of the performances my theater kids are doing are written by them. It's not just healing from COVID,

it's also healing from social unrest, being in quarantine and being alone, your mental health state. Some will be funny, some serious, but either way, they will be theirs. When you're going through pain and suffering and longing, the best way to express that and to work through it is through the arts in whatever art form you choose. The kids need that outlet and they don't always get that in any other way."

Because Lungren is teaching a mixture of in-person and digital students, filming for the production has been carefully orchestrated.

"Some of the digital kids come to school to be filmed and then go home. We've scheduled times after school when there's very few people and it's safe. If they can't come or don't feel safe, they're allowed to film on their own so they can still submit something from home. We talk about lighting and how to hold the camera properly. I've taught them how to film themselves."

Streaming 'The Art of Healing'

While recorded content and digital delivery of productions became a necessity during the pandemic, Lungren anticipates the world will hold on to this new way of experiencing the arts even after live performances return. She also plans to retain much of what she's developed this year, including the filming and editing curricular components which offer new ideas for creative career opportunities.

"I like having another venue that the theatre kids can venture into with video production. We may do even more of that next year, not out of necessity but out of exploration instead, which I like a lot better. It's always nice to do something because you want to, not because you're forced to."

Godby's "The Art of Healing" production will be streamed on June 1 at 6:30 p.m. Visit godbyplayers-bookstix.com for show details as they are finalized and to purchase tickets. Proceeds will benefit the school's fine arts programs.

This article is part of COCA's Creativity Persists collection and highlights how area arts educators are continuing to teach and inspire during the COVID-19 pandemic. Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).