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Rome High's Grand Finale show choir prepares for its inaugural year

Spencer Lahr Jul 22, 2017 Updated Jul 22, 2017



Anna Lauren Smith (right), 14, and Indra Hernandez, 16, do a dance move as part of a number for Rome High's show choir, Grand Finale, which is in its inaugural year, at the East Central Elementary gym on Friday, July 21, 2017. (Spencer Lahr / RN-T.com)

In a show of their dedication to the newly formed show choir at **Rome High School**, over two dozen students sang and danced in the sweltering East Central Elementary gym Friday, as part of the initial practices of Grand Finale's inaugural year.

Though Rome Middle has had a show choir of its own — Grand Illusion — for 10 years, an opportunity for students to continue to indulge their interest in the performing art wasn't made available at the high school until this year, said Brian Sikes, the director of Grand Finale and a teacher at Rome Middle. And it wouldn't have been made possible without the persistent dedication of a group of parents set on seeing a show choir — which incorporates singing, dancing and acting, often under a performance theme — formed at Rome High, he added.

Toward the end of last school year, new Rome High Principal Eric Holland and Rome City Schools Superintendent Lou Byars gave the go-ahead and Grand Finale came to life.

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Auditions were held in May and 28 students have attended the camp that started earlier this week — the choir will practice once a week after school and once a month on a Saturday in the run-up to competition season in January, Sikes explained.

The number of current show choir members is small, he added, saying that most show choirs have at least 50 students. However, Sikes, who has previously directed the Rome Middle show choir, is hoping to boost the number of students by recruiting more, aiming to get up to the high 30s.

Sikes is assisted by Angela McRee, Grand Finale's vocal instructor and co-owner of MusikWorks Studio Inc., and Amie Sabourin, a professional dance instructor at The Dance Centre.

McRee said show choir is like trying to sing while doing jumping jacks, and amidst all the physical movement, trying to keep the music excellent. A regular choir will stand on risers in fancy attire and perform a song and then wait for the applause to end before starting again. A show choir performs for 18 minutes of constant movement and interwoven songs, to the accompaniment of a live band.

There is a frantic two-minute window for set-up before the show, McRee said, where all the props must be laid out and the bandstands moved into position. During the performance and similar to a musical, performers make costume changes while the show goes on.



"It's like a musical without dialogue," McRee said.

Show choir is a great artistic outlet that provides physical benefits as well, Sabourin said, and for some, it may be the only physical activity they get. The social element of show choir is another feature of its reach beyond artistic expression, as kids from all different kinds of backgrounds can come together as a family, she added.

For 17-year-old Bre Leiberman, who is the oldest in the group, show choir has been a love of hers ever since her friend encouraged her to try it in sixth-grade, after being a theater performer from early on in her life. After four years of pushing for one at Rome High, she got her wish for her senior year.

Lieberman has a medical condition where she can't do physically-intensive sports, but she can most certainly do show choir, which had blossomed into a host of friendships for her.

"I really just do it out of love," she said, adding that it has never been about making a career out of it.



Spencer Lahr

