

Shady Side graduate working on Off-Broadway production

By yourfoxchapel

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Paige Kilianny isn't an author by trade, but the 21-year-old spends her days telling stories.



The director/choreographer and Shady Side Academy alumna, now in her junior year at Carnegie Mellon University, is working this semester in New York City behind the scenes on an Off-Broadway production of "The Lady from Dubuque."

On weekends, she checks in with students at SSA, where she designed dance numbers for the spring presentation of "The Music Man," the much-loved Tony Award-winning show that includes well-known toe-tapping tunes such as "76 Trombones," "Till There Was You," and "Gary, Indiana."

Whether on stage or behind the scenes, Kilianny has learned early the secret to a standing ovation.

"You have to communicate to the audience so that they are affected," she said.

"Every person in the show tells a story, from the actors to the designers to the crew," said Kilianny, a native of Hampton. "If everyone cares about conveying their story, the audience is really going to care."

Kilianny graduated from SSA in 2009, the year she landed a starring role in the school's spring

production of "Barnum."

Her passion for theater, however, started much earlier; Kiliany was trained in dance from age 6.

As a member of the Pittsburgh CLO Academy, she performed as a youngster throughout city venues, including a run in "The Music Man," with screen actor Jeff Goldblum at the Benedum Center in Pittsburgh.

"Working on it now is very much an interesting déjà vu," she said.

As with old-time musicals, there are more than half a dozen major cast numbers and several smaller solos that Kiliany was responsible for choreographing.

She was charged with staging up to 45 student actors for each scene — which she compared to working as a traffic cop.

"You have to keep it moving, but it has to be pretty," she said.

Presented with the script and music, Kiliany quickly took notes and devised the numbers.

"It just makes sense to me. Dancing has always been a part of how I express myself and tell a story," she said.

Theater director Dana Hardy-Bingham said Kiliany's ability to juggle 45 students and have them present cohesive and appealing numbers was artful.

A professional Shakespearian actor, Hardy-Bingham said "musical theater was a foreign concept.

"I could never have done the show without her," she said. "She was an amazing resource."

As students prepare for opening night on Friday, Kiliany is busy working on the revival of Pulitzer Prize winner Edward Albee's short-lived original script about life and death.

The curtain is set to rise on that show in just five days and though in New York full time for her stint with the Signature Theater Company, Kiliany will travel home this week to watch SSA students tell their story, one that she helped write with detailed dance numbers.

"I'll be there," she said. "They worked so hard and picked everything up so quickly, I'm sure they'll be fantastic."