

Village Theatre

KIDSTAGE

Director	Matt Wolfe
Choreographer	Katy Tabb
Musical Direction	Julia Thornton
Scene Design	Karla Davenport
Lighting Design	Marc King
Costume Design	Cassandra Leon
Sound Design	Lisa Finkral



Overview

Young Frankenstein was produced by Village Theatre's Kidstage program in the fall of 2014 with a full production team backing a cast of 25 actors.

The venue, a black box theatre with negligible wing space and no fly system, caused me to find a way to adapt the show from its intended format.

I developed a concept to support the show's rapid and frequent location shifts. The show was set as if it were a Zeigfeld Follies show in Transylvania. The bulk of the show took place in front of a "grand drape" and a large staircase, and the scene transitions were managed by a Greek chorus of Zeigfeld girls, who became more than set movers. They became advocates for the main characters and found their own unique personality and role in the show.

Behind the "grand drape" was the one set that we couldn't compromise, the one which needed a dramatic reveal – the laboratory.

Not long into my research phase I identified a challenge unique to this script. The original movie of *Young Frankenstein* is a parody of the movies Gene Wilder loved when he was young. Then, the Broadway version functions in many ways like a parody of the parody. The Broadway version, though retaining most of the classic gags and moments from the film, feels far removed from the source material of both the Universal movies and the Mel Brooks classic in spirit and tone.

To try and bridge these sources together visually, I chose a grayscale concept for the show. The scenes would play in grayscale to create the proper mood and help the audience enjoy their nostalgic connection to the films. The musical numbers, however, would play in deep, saturate colors covering the grayscale to help heighten those moments appropriately.

Most importantly, though, I saw in the story a group of misfits, led by the chief misfit, Dr. Frankenstein, all on a journey to find a home and sense of family. We did all we could to support that.



The “Zeigfeld Girls”



The theatre space lacked any kind of automation, but using the concept of the “Zeigfeld Girls” allowed us to play out moments like this classic bit from the movie featuring a secret, revolving door. The girls moved the scenery as a seamless part of the storytelling.



1930’s style travel posters helped to establish location in lieu of elaborate scenery, and other signs printed to look like early 20th century theatre posters helped to mark transitions. All of these were moved through the space by the elegant Zeigfeld ensemble.



Here the girls help establish the classroom of Dr. Frankenstein with a vintage diagram of the brain.



Having the girls available allowed us to heighten some of the production numbers to feel like old Zeigfeld numbers, seen here in “The Brain” and “Listen to Your Heart”



Beyond moving sets, we found several ways for the girls to support the action of the show. Above, in the scenes with Inspector Kemp, this Zeigfeld girl's function on the left was to provide the sound of his wooden arm and leg creaking with a noisemaker. Her track through the show paid off well enough that a bit was made of her “reunion” with the other Zeigfeld girls after being released by Kemp during the show’s happy ending.



The blind lead the blind as Zeigfeld girls escort the Hermit into his big scene down the “grand staircase”.

Color and Light

Finding the right style for the grayscale concept was difficult, but we settled on the following. Rather than trying to do full body makeup to complete the image, we would allow flesh tones on set and balance them with a vertical row of old-fashioned, incandescent chaser lights on an implied proscenium downstage left and right. That “proscenium” also helped to convey the look of an old-fashioned theatre. The one other pop of color allowed was green for the monster’s skin and Dr. Frankenstein’s shirt, pulling the two of them together. Other than that, all color on the set came from LED instruments in the house during the production numbers.



Seen above and to the left are “before and after” shots of the opening number “Happiest Town”, beginning with the dour, funeral procession and moving into the celebration that follows.

Below, “Together Again” in its familiar opening scene and then with vaudeville follow spots that arrived once Frederick chose willingly to dance with Igor.





“Join the Family Business”

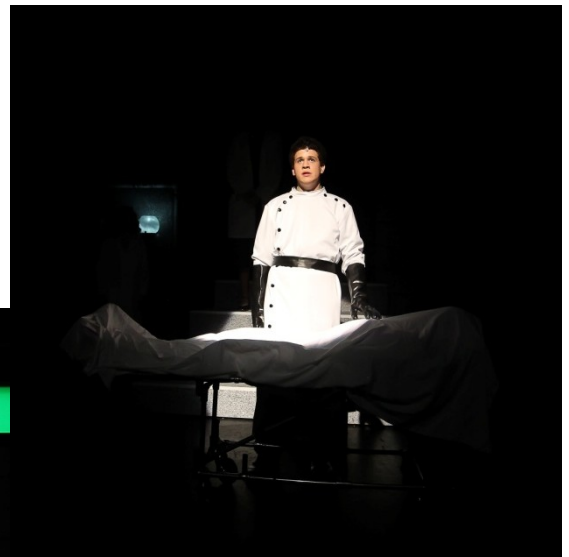


“He’s Loose!”



Frau Blucher tells the tale of her romance with Victor Von Frankenstein through shadow play, merging with the image at the end of the number.

The cyclorama only made its appearance once in the show in order to augment the moment that the monster was brought to life. Similar to the use of the Zeigfeld girls, the ghosts from Frankenstein's dream in "Join the Family Business" returned to solve our problem of having no way to hoist the monster into the air towards the lightning. The actors lifted the gurney high with the monster atop.



Costumes

The period for costumes was set around 1934. Below is the look of our 1930's New Yorkers, Romanian peasants, and our attempts to call back to the classic looks of the principals from the film.



