

Mr. John Whapham, Sycamore High School

Josh Goldman

Excellence in Theatre Education: John Whapham

Mr. John Whapham, theatre director of Sycamore High School's Aves Theatre program, is extraordinarily deserving of recognition. He's really good at his job. Indeed, there are few program directors in the Greater Cincinnati area with his combination of artistic vision, business savvy, and concentration on a goal—providing excellent arts education his students.

The 2008-2009 Main-Stage Season at Aves Theatre included *Metamorphoses* by Mary Zimmerman, a show that takes place in and around a 10,000 gallon pool. A startling (and wet) pick for any theatre, let alone a high school. But for Mr. Whapham, this is actually a predictable choice. He consistently delights in pushing the boundaries of the possible. *Metamorphoses* exemplified his usual desire to emphasize both strong acting and striking technical support and expression. Actors were required to learn how to perform waist-deep in water, just as physics students were asked to design a pool structure, while musicians were challenged to compose and perform an original score, all highlighted by a student-designed, intricate, and evocative lighting plot. This was not (please, excuse the expression) a "walk on the beach," but it was a typical event in "Whapham-Land." John Whapham sets the bar high by choosing material which stretches his actors and techies, all the while inspiring them to excel by never imagining a different result.

Mr. Whapham has directed productions over the last three years that were honored with scores of Cappies nominations and fifteen wins. This educator led a production that was named "Best High School Musical" in the state of Ohio by the national magazine USA WEEKEND. During his tenure, numerous students have been accepted to the most prestigious theatre and music colleges in the country. But, these metrics are not adequate measures of the successes of Mr. Whapham during his four years at Aves Theatre. A director is outstanding when it is common to find him spending whole afternoons coaching a pupil in the finer points of stage presence, then sitting down to listen as that student shares details about daily events or career dreams. In the challenging economic world of the arts, it is outstanding for a program administrator to coordinate a department that continues to be financially self-sustaining. An educator is outstanding when he selects a show such as *Parade* and initiates a broad-ranging dialogue on anti-Semitism and racism with its cast, crew, and audience members.

Mr. Whapham created an atmosphere of excellence that has allowed me to feel comfortable pushing my own artistic boundaries. To explore the arts. And to explore myself as a person. After three years and over a dozen productions, I owe him a great deal. He is an excellent theatre educator.