

Phantom Coaches Phantom Wannabes

Broadway performer teaches class at West



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TRAVERSE CITY — "The most powerful note in a musical or opera is silence."

Drawing on years of success, the Phantom coached potential Phantoms on the iconic mystery man: the Angel of Music in Andrew Lloyd Weber's classic "The Phantom of the Opera."

Captivating 75 choral students during Wednesday's master class at Traverse City West Senior High, Broadway star Franc D'Ambrosio worked intensely with four singers. The rest absorbed every word from a man hailed until 2009 as the world's longest-running Phantom. During his multiyear, multicity run, D'Ambrosio gave 2,600 performances before 5 million attendees.

As West Senior High gears up to present "Phantom" as its annual musical — call-backs for lead roles concluded just before the master class — D'Ambrosio's timely appearance was inspirational.

"That was a definitely once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said senior Jon Oakley, who with Maikel Ragel-Wilson was one of two males presenting a song from "Phantom" for critiquing.

"He got the most out of each person up there," added Oakley.

D'Ambrosio also worked with two female singers, coaching all four students on building a character's history, presentation, emotion and timing. The bottom line to success requires pushing beyond natural talent, he told them.

"It's not enough to sing pretty," said D'Ambrosio, who gave a concert Thursday evening at the City Opera House. "We have to find the words interesting, we have to take the audience along. You can't just sing what's predictable."

Choral director Russ Larimer and a production team including Pat Gallagher and Erin Peck also attended the master class, gleaning technical tips from D'Ambrosio. The trio will guide students through a production process culminating with a 10-show run in March.

Launching their "Phantom" season with D'Ambrosio's class hit the perfect note.

"It was real-life application of the craft, it was a direct hit," said Larimer.

D'Ambrosio talked about his background, training and experience, sharing with students the ups and down of a Broadway career.



Franc D'Ambrosio works with Traverse City West's Jon Oakley (cq) on a song from "Phantom," during a workshop with students. Record-Eagle/Jan Michael Stump

The classically trained singer started as another talented no-namer vying for musical theater roles. He crashed in a cramped studio with three other starving actors while fielding countless rejections. A movie role early in his career set a tone for a varied resume chocked with honors.

Discipline is the key to success, he told students, sharing his philosophy of extensive, almost fanatical, preparation.

"I am so overprepared they call me the Eagle Scout of Broadway," D'Ambrosio said.



Franc D'Ambrosio works with Traverse City West's Alyse Carbonell on a song from "Little Women," during a workshop with students. Record-Eagle/Jan-Michael Stump



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