

**From:** LMHenderson@fcps.edu,  
**To:** tallieuman3@gmail.com, sweinhardt@verizon.net,  
**Subject:** FW: [External] Cappies Reviews for James Madison High School, Waiting on Trains  
**Date:** Wed, May 19, 2021 10:46 am

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-----Original Message-----

**From:** [AdminNCA@cappies.org](mailto:AdminNCA@cappies.org) <[AdminNCA@cappies.org](mailto:AdminNCA@cappies.org)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, May 16, 2021 7:22 PM  
**To:** Henderson, Len M. <[LMHenderson@fcps.edu](mailto:LMHenderson@fcps.edu)>  
**Subject:** [External] Cappies Reviews for James Madison High School, Waiting on Trains

**TO:** Advisor and Show Director of Waiting on Trains at James Madison High School  
**FROM:** Jane Strauss

Here are the Cappies reviews for Waiting on Trains. There were 18 critics at your show, and up to now we have received 16 reviews. If we receive late reviews, we will forward them to you.

Please share these reviews with your cast and crew.

Thank you.

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3, 2, 1½ Happy New Year! At the turn of the millennium, it was as if time had stopped. For the assembly of misfits confined within a small-town train station, all they could do was wait: wait for hope, wait for change, wait for trains. James Madison High School's dynamic production of Waiting on Trains will certainly leave you eagerly waiting for more.

Waiting on Trains is a one-act play written by D.M. Larson. Illustrated through the integration of dialogue, movement, and technical enhancements, the piece tells the story of how five walks of life converge in the "magnet of the lowest life forms": a train station. From an arrogant businesswoman chasing her father's approval to a homeless man simply searching for a quiet place to sleep, the characters learn to reassess what constitutes life's most impactful moments.

Thoughtfully selected, cast, and directed by student director Talissa Uman, the cast and crew opted to film an in-person, onstage performance adhering to all COVID-19 and VHSL guidelines. Under Uman's leadership, the students of James Madison effortlessly overcame the limitations of transparent masks and social distancing, even without the use of microphones or editing. The entire cast's commitment to conveying their characters was apparent, and the dialogue was always audible and supported by a combination of verbal and non-verbal storytelling techniques.

Frantically racing onto the stage, Elenora Fiel immediately established her character's conceited nature through her invigorated portrayal of Sue, the pompous businesswoman. From her moments of sheer pessimism to revealing the motives behind her determined facade, Fiel maintained Sue's quick-tempered persona throughout the show. Kirk, played by Ashton Rauch, exhibited an energy that matched his female business counterpart; amid their frustrations, Kirk and Sue became bound by their shared realities, and together the pair commanded the stage (or, more fittingly, the train station). In contrast, the three small-town natives were equally important figures. Stella Monner embraced Verna with an unwavering presence as the train ticket saleswoman who fell victim to Sue's arrogance; William Bush exhibited his wits through his charismatic portrayal of Jean the janitor; and Benjamin Eggleston fully embodied Rut, the hysterically delusional drifter whose banter with Sue provided comic r

elief.

Throughout the show, various technical elements supported the actors; to ensure that attention was not diverted away from the plot, the crew took a minimalistic yet comprehensive approach. Since the performance was unedited, stage manager Susan Weinhardt played an integral role in creating a seamless flow. Paired with the thoughtfully constructed prop and set designs of Denali Greer and Nic Crews, every technical choice reflected and reinforced the setting and various characterizations. Additionally, clever stage choreography and blocking displayed an authenticity that brought the story to life. In one climactic moment towards the end of the production, rather than simply running off stage, Kirk and Sue race down the stairs into the auditorium; this seemingly small detail allowed the train station to transcend the stage limits as the pair began their journey back to Seattle.

Just as all hope of leaving the cavernous abyss seemed lost, Kirk and Sue discovered light at the end of the tunnel. The midnight train to Seattle arrived, and the couple were whisked away from their inconvenient plight. While the troublesome pair managed to escape their predicament, some were not as fortunate. For those left waiting endlessly for their trains to arrive, James Madison High School's intriguing performance of *Waiting on Trains* suggests "maybe you've been looking for the wrong thing."

by Justin Pokrant of Westfield High School

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Two business execs wait as fast as they can, a bored ticket woman toys with them, and the shrill tones of God are heard briefly at Madison High School's revelatory train station. What significance does a computer really hold in relation to a self-awakening? The cast of *"Waiting on Trains"* experienced the shuffling progress of the new millennium as they simultaneously turned a page within themselves in a sweet and truthful piece of theatre.

The play was written by D.M. Larson, an active playwright. The play takes place in a train station on New Year's Eve 1999 as five people are waiting for a train: two businesspeople, a ticket-taker, a janitor, and a homeless man. The businesspeople are anxious for the train to come and the employees are anxious to leave, but as the night goes on all of them learn what parts of life really matter.

As high-strung businesswoman Sue, was Elenora Fiel. With her slightly crazed and indefatigable zeal, Fiel charged on set and her energy never faltered. Fiel showed her character's harried demeanor through her snappy encounter with the ticketer Verna. Her mounting annoyance at Verna's unhelpfulness was shown through more agitated physicality and line delivery, which set the tone for the rest of Sue's indomitable character. Working as a foil to Sue's impatient fierceness was the ticket taker Verna, played with the right combination of boredom and flirtation by Stella Monner. Monner showed Verna's dissatisfaction with her job through her complete indifference to whether the prophesied train ever showed up or not. She also rounded her character out by adding more energy when Verna was flirting with businessman Kirk. Monner's physicality was very relaxed and casual, which emphasized Verna's very different approach to waiting for the train from Sue, whose rigid, proper physicality showed tension and impatience.

The tipsy homeless man, Rut, was played by Benjamin Eggleston. With his lolling movements and intermittent cries, Eggleston's Rut provided comedic relief and a funny addition to many scenarios, for example, when he mistook Sue's angry exhortations for the words of God. The interchange between a frustrated, pants-suited woman and a drink-addled disciple calling out in confusion was a moment Eggleston hammed up to the max, utilizing his full body to bring the humor home. In the role of the hyper-focused businessman Kirk was Ashton Rauch. Whether sharing his fears, asking for a power cord, or typing furiously, Rauch retained Kirk's frenetic air. His laser-focus on his computer and his quick movements helped Rauch create a distinct aura for Kirk.

The whole production had to be (and was) physically distanced, but the blocking was cleverly created, by student-director Talissa Uman, to make the distancing seem normal and unnoticeable. The props, by Denali

Greer and Nic Crews, also played a key role in the production. Since everything was minimalist, what props there were, were strategic and effortful, with the suitcases looking period appropriate and the broom adding to the janitor's (William Bush) physical comedy.

It's time to leave the station and catch the train, wherever it goes. Madison High School's production showed that it's not where you go but what you value that matters in life.

by Beverly D'Andrea of Westfield High School

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"Train stations are the magnets of the lowest life forms." That may be true, but it was also the magnet that led to some of the greatest realizations about life, as shown in James Madison High School's inspiring production of *Waiting on Trains*. Completely student created, from the directing to the tech, this show was a heartwarming blend of philosophy, self-realization, and sly humor.

Written by D.M. Larson, *Waiting on Trains* followed five strangers from varying social and monetary statuses at a train station on December 31st, 1999. Through various conversations during the 30-minute wait to take a train to Seattle, the people there ponder over what is truly necessary to live a good life, and what gets in the way.

Despite strict guidelines imposed on the execution of this production by FCPS and VHSL, the cast and crew created a cohesive piece. The actors utilized projection that transcended the uncomfortable barrier of a mask, the distance of the camera from the stage, and the no-microphone rule of VHSL. They also displayed skillful physicality that reflected the mannerisms and descriptions of each actor's respective character. The creative blocking made all the movement in the show feel natural, even though the cast was actively social distancing the whole time.

Ashton Rauch, who played Kirk, made his character's intentions and words clear through his expressive movement while interacting with others, especially during his eccentric banter with Elenora Fiel's character, Sue. Fiel's expert articulation helped the audience better understand the storyline.

Stella Monner (who played Verna) established the theme of the show through her snarky delivery of lines, and was complimented by the choices of William Bush, the actor who played Jean. Both provided an ambiance that reinforced the setting and tone of the play. This was supplemented by the staccato bursts of humor that Benjamin Eggleston provided in his animated movement while portraying Rut.

This show featured a simple, yet thoughtful set design. The props, scenery, and lighting all worked in harmony to establish the mood, time, and location of the piece (all elements created by Denali Greer and Nic Crews).

"Come on, everyone has dreams. Where would the human race be without dreams?" To be honest, life without dreams would suck. Missing a train and having to wait 30 minutes for the next one also sucks. However, this particular missed train is what prompted the storyline that James Madison High School's comforting rendition of *Waiting on Trains* brought to life. Witty, yet touching, this production presented the audience with impactful messages about what it means to live, and how expectations can determine everything.

by Spoorthi Nadkarni of Westfield High School

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December 31, 1999: The world is about to enter a new age. As grand as that event was, the interaction between five people waiting for their train to arrive provides an insight into life's many wonders. An intellectually comedic play written by D.M. Larson and performed by James Madison High School, *Waiting on Trains* is a triumph of unconventional and minimalistic theatre.

Two businesspeople, a ticket receptionist, the janitor, and a homeless man, speak with each other to uncover the most meaningful moments of life and what it truly means to be successful. In a beautiful analogy of what matters in life and what doesn't, the files on the computer that were so crucial to what one of the businessmen interpreted as success were deleted after being left behind at the train station.

The play was student-directed by Talissa Uman, who is going on to study theatre education in college. This added a refreshed sense of staging, interpretation, and characterization to the play. Talissa was also responsible for casting the production. Her decisions were reflected in the strong characterization and obvious understanding the actors had for their roles. This production was entered into VHSL, so there were requirements for its submission. Actors had to wear clear plastic masks that made speaking clearly difficult and actors could not wear mics. This is a daunting task for anyone, but with careful enunciation and projection, the actors were heard easily.

Elenora Fiel, who portrayed Sue, a businesswoman, had an energetic performance. In her first interaction with Verna, the ticket receptionist, played by Stella Monner, she established herself as proper and superior to the others. She developed into a more relatable character, reflected in Elenora's mannerisms. Stella was also quick to establish Verna as carefree and slightly rude. This first scene set the stage for more interactions between this unique set of characters. Interactions between Elenora and Ashton Rauch, who played Kirk, the businessman, were also strong. This was supported by the fact that their characters' personalities seemed to be paired similarly to those of Verna and the janitors.

William Bush, who played Jean, the janitor, and Benjamin Eggleston, who played Rut, the homeless man who periodically entered their conversations, would be considered the comic relief of the play. Rut often stumbled into the scene to mess with those waiting for the train. Benjamin had to speak as though he was a drunken man, with a mask on, and no microphone; not the easiest circumstances! He did it all with impeccable comedic timing. Jean could be found wandering the set and talking with Verna. He was often seen with a push-broom or spray bottle listening in on the conversation. It was as though he lived in his own little bubble which made his subtle physicality even better.

Another requirement for VHSL submissions is that the filming must be done at only one angle. Director Talissa Uman and stage manager Susan Weinhardt chose an angle that optimized the audience's view of the stage. The set and props, done by Denali Greer and Nic Crews, were spaced well without sacrificing the natural interactions of the actors. The props were also period accurate.

The important moments in life are to be savored while the ones that are just taking up storage need to be deleted to make room for new experiences.

by Maryn Brown of Westfield High School

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New Year's Eve, 1999. Everyone on the verge of a new millennium running to escape their past lives in boring towns for a chance of reinvention all lead to one place, a train station. D. M. Larson's *Waiting on Trains*, performed by James Madison High School, was a humorous one-act filled with irony about what the important things really are in life and unexpected interactions.

Relationships between strangers are arguably one of the most fascinating occurrences to be observed in everyday life. *Waiting on Trains* extensively explores the many results of relationships that can occur when a group of five assorted strangers are thrown together by fate while some are waiting for a train to escape the boring reality of a small town.



Within the total comedy of the show, the main source of bickering came from the polar opposite duo of Verna (Stella Monner) and Sue (Elenora Fiel). Sue, a businesswoman hungry to fulfill her biggest aspirations, and Verna, a ticketing woman whose boredom with her place in life has caused her to develop a carefree attitude, clashed with their differing perspectives. Fiel portrayed Sue in a posh and highly expressive manner where she always got her opinion out, which tag teamed well with Monner's portrayal of Verna's easygoing and sarcastic persona.

Throughout the entire production, several characters remained continuously on stage while others travelled on and off stage. Those in the eye of the camera for almost its entirety, including Ashton Rauch as Kirk and Stella Monner as Verna, never faltered from their character, creating deep identities. William Bush as Jean, a janitor, and Benjamin Eggleston as Rut, a homeless man, paired well in their roles that appeared at the most comedic moments. Even with less stage time than others, they created lasting impressions as onlookers who were connected to the train customers through Verna's interactions.

With requirements that had to be met from the VHSL one-act competition, the tech elements were simplistic and consistent. Although these requirements presented challenges, the cast and crew dealt with them gracefully. Soft lighting and the choice of a wide angle encompassing the entire stage made sure all actors were visible and facial expressions were able to be clearly read. Actors projected and articulated their lines without strain and with an abundance of energy that was infectious. However, those were not the only challenges overcome in this production due to pandemic regulations. An impressive triumph, the cast's distancing in the show's blocking never hindered their ability to tell the story, and only enhanced the environment of tension that comes with being strangers at a train station.

Talissa Uman, a senior at James Madison High School, took the lead in this production as the director. She was innovative in her direction of the actors and crew to create a cohesive and laugh pulling production. Uman will be studying Theatre Education in college, and this show certainly showcased her qualifications and dedication to the craft. Her work alongside stage manager Susan Weinhardt contributed to the final product of a smooth and engaging show.

Finally getting on that train they came for, the cast of James Madison High School's *Waiting on Trains* concluded their production with a memorable exit into the audience, signifying the characters finally being able to move towards their new lives.

by Katie Wood of Centreville High School

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Thought-provoking and comical, James Madison High School's production of *"Waiting on Trains"* helped shed some light on what is important to keep with us in life, and of what is okay to let go.

The play, written by D. M. Larson, followed five strangers at a train station on New Year's Eve, 1999. Two of these strangers, business people, are trying to catch a train to escape the vapid atmosphere of their town. At the station, they meet a janitor, a ticketing woman, and a homeless man, all of them helping the two businesspeople understand the importance of the smaller aspects of our lives.

Despite social distancing guidelines, the actors of this production were able to create strong chemistry with each other, utilizing their physicality to characterize themselves. Elenora Fiel brought immense stage presence and energy to her role of Sue, one of the business people. Fiel also displayed a range of expressions with her face and body. Benjamin Eggleston (Rut; homeless man) was comedic and nicely juxtaposed the seriousness of the other characters. Both he and Fiel showed anti-chemistry that was crucial in characterizing each other. Finally, although unable to move around as freely as other characters, Stella Monner (Verna; ticketing woman) kept her character alive throughout the production. She was continuously engaged and demonstrated exceptional enunciation and projection, especially with the lack of microphones in the show.

The technical aspects were all appropriate and relevant, adding to the production's value. The set design (Nic Crews and Denali Greer) allowed the actors to explore their physicality on the stage. The props corresponded well to the period of the late 90s, such as a bulky laptop and a magazine.

Although one might not need to take a midnight train going anywhere to learn about the value of the small things, "Waiting on Trains" by James Madison High showed that doing so could end up being a great start.

by Kenneth Anderson of Annandale High School

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Finally viewing a classic on stage, in person, production reminds of the good ol' days when that was the regular. James Madison High School brought that reminiscence into reality with their production of Waiting on Trains. The play focused on a small group of strangers, some waiting to board a train out of a boring town, and some working at the station. The characters discuss with each other about their dreams of the new year, and what they want to do outside of the small town.

Waiting on Trains was picked for production by the student director, Talissa Uman. Talissa will be studying theatre education in college next school year, and got her shot this year at directing her own show. Also sent for submission with VHSL, the play faced multiple challenges such as prohibited use of mics, visible tech, and being limited to only one camera shot and angle.

The actors of the play took on their characters completely and did so while having to wear clear masks and maintain distance on the stage. The actors playing the characters of Sue and Kirk (played by Elenora Fiel and Ashton Rauch) matched each other's energy of being professional and business-like, while contrasting the pair of workers, Verna and Jean (played by Stella Monner and William Bush). The two groups couldn't have been more different, and the actors portrayed that well. Meanwhile, the scrappy homeless character of Rut, played by the actor Benjamin Eggleston, starkly contrasted all of the other characters by his use of body language, speech, and dialogue.

Displaying one of the more intricate sets seen recently, James Madison's technical aspects complimented the dialogue and story with simplicity. The set was clear in what it was trying to convey and show. The challenge of physical distance requirements surely did not stop the James Madison team. While managing to maintain the distance requirements, they still had engaging and uninterrupted blocking and staging during the show.

Waiting on Trains beautifully commented on the desires for something new and eagerness to leave certain things behind. The on stage show was a breath of familiar fresh air. A show to be seen, James Madison High School went above and beyond in their efforts to create an in-person experience from the comfort of home.

by Morgan Milman of Annandale High School

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On New Years Eve of 1999, five strangers find themselves stuck together in a train station. James Madison High School's production of "Waiting on Trains" by D.M. Larson is the tale of two ambitious business strangers, accompanied by a blunt ticketress, an uninterested janitor, and the local homeless man; as they wait for their train away from a 'hick' town. As they interact with each other, these characters argue about and struggle to learn the value of what really matters in life and what is, truly, insignificant.

"Waiting on Trains" by D.M. Larson is a one-act stage play. James Madison's idea to produce the show came from Talissa Uman, the student director, as she will be studying theatre education in college in order to become a theatre teacher. Len Henderson, theatre department director at James Madison, gifted her with the opportunity to

have a live stage production to produce and direct. Uman picked the script, cast the show, and directed the piece with the intention of entering it into VHSL and Cappies. Since the recording reviewed was also submitted to VHSL, VHSL restrictions were applied - the start of the show was audibly announced, technical setup was shown, there was one fixed camera shot, and no microphones were allowed.

Actors were enthusiastic and immersed in their characters. The absence of microphones highlighted the importance of good projection, and the actors delivered their lines clearly and thoughtfully. The acting choices they made and their physicality helped develop their characters. Businesswoman Sue, played by Elenora Fiel, was prim and proper standing up, sitting down, and in her clipped tone of voice opposed homeless Rut, played by Benjamin Eggleston, who walked with a staggering, drunken gait and whose loud, brash voice cut through the silence and was always clearly audible. The actors also did an excellent job acting without dialogue - from businessman Kirk, played by Ashton Rauch, who typed away on his laptop in the background for the first half of the show and janitor Jean, played by William Bush whose quietly cleaned the benches, while clearly eavesdropping on Sue and Kirk's conversation. Though actively socially distancing, this play had very engaging blocking, the characters interacting seamlessly with each other.

Denali Greer and Nic Crews were in charge of set design, construction, props, and setup. The benches were built personally by themselves, adding to the setting of a train station. The fixed camera shot showed both ends of the stage from left to right clearly, as well as the characters, at all times they were on stage. The lighting helped illuminate the characters, without glaring down upon and whitewashing them. The costuming reflected their characters: Sue and Kirk's suits in contrast to Jean's janitorial outfit. When Sue and Kirk finally depart for their train to Seattle, they run down the steps at the front of the stage, towards the audience. This helped add depth to the stage and represented the concept of going out into the world.

This play was a fascinating look at how theatre might look like as we emerge from quarantine. Looking at this production alone, it is clear there is much potential for socially-distanced, live stage productions. The underlying message is subtle, but clear. The characters argue about their priorities in life - whether it be love and life, or money and ambition. Though Kirk constantly talks about his work and the importance of the contents of his laptop, they were easily deleted at the click of a button by Jean and Co. Such begs the question: "How much importance do the substantial things in life ultimately have?"

by Nhi Nguyen of Annandale High School

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Remember Y2K? Most current high schoolers do not as average seniors are born in 2002 or 2003. Madison High School presented "Waiting on Trains" by D. M. Larson, a one act play with a few people waiting for a train the night of December 31st, 1999.

This student directed performance was filmed for a Virginia High School one act play competition where they had to follow distancing and mask guidelines as well as only use one camera angle. As the actors sat on benches at the train station, they complained about work and the late train. Their conversations allowed for great societal comedy and commentary on what is really important in life.

The show opens with Verna, played by Stella Monner, working at the ticket desk. She stayed on stage the whole show and held a distinct character throughout. Her fed up attitude paired with her relaxed posture and casual flip through of her magazine created a character who is still present even when not involved in the conversation. Sue, played by Elenora Fiel, was on stage for much of the time as well, and she embodied an annoyed early 2000s businesswoman perfectly. Her outfit along with her posture and movement as she crossed her legs when she sat and slowly walked in her high heels as she paced created a character that everyone could recognize immediately and laugh at when she shouted about how her "music" helps her relax. Also, every character had

great physicality, but Rut, played by Benjamin Eggleston, stood out when he jumped and shouted as the stations staple homeless man.

The 2000s era show was emphasized by the props and sound cues. The old laptop and loud ringing of Sue's cell phone brought viewers back to their blackberry days. The simple set design looked like a train station and allowed for easy distancing that seemed completely natural. There were simple details such as a board of flyers that added to the environment. These elements were thanks to Susan Weinhardt, Denali Greer, and Nic Crews. And huge kudos to Talissa Uman, the show's student director. She made thoughtful choices in blocking to keep the movement feeling natural and still dynamic. She even added depth to the recording as she had two characters walk off the front of the stage to get on the train.

Talissa Uman brought viewers of the show back to the 2000s. Masks and distancing was forgotten as the viewer felt like they were watching a show at Madison High School from the third row in audience left. The cast and crew clearly thought through every choice and created a great show.

by Caroline Jareb of Centreville High School

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It's December 31st, 1999. A new millennium is on the horizon. As the tech crew sets the stage, the audience can't help but anticipate greatness. Indeed, James Madison High School's production of "Waiting on Trains" delivered. Much like the title implies, the story focuses on two business associates waiting for a late train. The ensuing conversation is both incredibly perceptive and impactful, as it centers on the most important things in everyone's lives. It's a testament to the cast and crew how much insight a group of teenagers can bring to a lesson it sometimes takes lifetimes for people to learn, all while working around COVID-19 guidelines.

Because the show was submitted to VHSL for critique, the cast and crew had to follow specific guidelines about social distancing and mask-wearing and adapted particularly well. Even though the clear masks are unfathomably uncomfortable, the cast managed to work around them with ease. Their projection could be heard from two blocks down, and one of the cast members even managed to "drink" from a bottle while wearing a mask. Needless to say, it was very impressive.

On that note, one of the most impressive qualities of the show was the acting. Elenora Fiel's characterization fit Sue's character perfectly. Her physicality and energy were almost like a caricature of a businesswoman, constantly in motion and ready to go. The energy she radiated helped her castmates thrive and brought the show together. Of course, this review would be remiss if I didn't mention Ashton Rauch. His proper physicality and posture made his whole character believable, and his prop-work was extremely natural.

Verna, played by Stella Monner, had a more relaxed physicality, fitting her character to a tee. Monner's ability to act bored left the audience wondering how often she finds real-life dull; it was so accurately depicted. She had great chemistry with Jean, played by William Bush. They're easily identified as coworkers who have grown quite fond of each other after many years of working late night shifts together. Jean, like many others in the cast, depicted his blue-collar worker most effectively through his physicality. He handled his broom with ease; one of the best moments being when he pushed Rut around with it. Rut, played by Benjamin Eggleston, by far had the greatest challenge with physicality and effortlessly prevailed. He was able to talk to "God"/Sue with just the right amount of eccentricity, and his sluggishness made his character stand out.

And last but definitely not least, the tech crew: Much like an actual train station, the lighting was minimal and consistent. And much like the 1990s, the computers were clunky, and the props fit the time period. Special kudos deserves to go to the director (Talissa Uman) and set designers (Denali Greer and Nic Crews). Despite the limitations of social distancing, the blocking still managed to look natural. This, of course, wouldn't be possible without the thought put into the set design. Everything was placed far enough apart so that the show could be socially distant but still feel like a train station.

To be candid, the limitations of the pandemic have really taken a toll, and this is one of the best shows produced this year. It's easy to see that everyone involved put a tremendous amount of thought and effort into this show. It is definitely worth the watch. And as two people sit and ponder about the future of the new millennium, it is difficult to not feel like there's something more in store.

by Makayla Parker of Centreville High School

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This show was all in all very good. They followed all the rules for a VHSL submission, and it was nice to see something being performed onstage again. For VHSL you must film the show in one take, and it felt refreshing to be able to watch that sort of show again. Even though everything is still virtual, watching students perform a show on their stage was amazing.

The show was about a man and a woman waiting for a train (hence the title). The setting was around the new year that was bringing these characters into the new century. The characters onstage had moments of opening up to each other and some funny one-liners that made the show easy to watch and enjoy.

One thing that stood out was the characterization of Rut, portrayed by Benjamin Eggleston. Rut was seen as the tall, dark haired, homeless man who came in and out of scenes as a sort of comic relief. Benjamin did a wonderful job portraying this character through the physicality and just the overall tone of the character. Even though the requirements of a VHSL piece make it harder to hear the character's lines, it was very easy to understand Benjamin and all of the comedic lines that he had were loud and clear.

Talissa Uman was the student director of this piece, and she did a wonderful job with the production of the play. The decisions she made to make the final product of the piece made the show feel more alive. Each choice a director must make is crucial to what a show will end up being. Talissa did a wonderful job with this show.

Another thing worth mentioning was the staging and the set. The set made the stage look like this was a real train station in 1999/2000. Each little detail was part of making the set look and feel real to viewers. The blocking went hand in hand with the set, as it made the scenes look and feel like it was just a normal day in history. The ending portion where Kirk (Ashton Rauch) and Sue (Elenora Fiel) run offstage and into the house made the set feel 3D and it added so much depth to the setting.

This show was very impressive and each person did a wonderful job with their roles in tech and onstage.

by Lily Kilduff of Heritage High School

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In *Waiting on Trains*, presented by James Madison High School, two people on their way to work, Kirk (Ashton Rauch) and Sue (Eleanora Fiel), conversed among themselves and station employees Verna (Stella Monner) and Jean (William Bush). Through their conversation they discussed work and dreams for their future and hopes moving forward. James Madison High School made the short play mimic the feeling of watching a film as they uniquely executed this piece. While navigating through difficult masks and social distance guidelines regarding Covid, the flow was smooth throughout the whole scene as if it were under regular circumstances. Dialogue and projection was the perfect amount to aid listeners with what was going on on stage, even when the actors and actresses faces were shielded from the masks.

A character that caught the eye was Rut, played by Benjamin Eggleston. Benjamin provided comedic relief as a very spaced out homeless man, embodying the role completely with a significantly accurate interpretation of an older person. Benjamin had amazing physicality and constantly left a humorous print on the stage in between entrances. Another character that stood out was Verna, played by Stella Monner. Even when being in the same

place throughout the whole piece, Stella was able to draw attention to herself when it was time for her lines and, simultaneously, allow the other actors and actresses have their time to shine. With her very loud singing and careless attitude, Stella played part in setting up the atmosphere for the piece and made conversation fluid among the dialogue with her castmates.

Directed by a student, Talissa Uman outstandingly casted and blocked this production. Characters walked safely but comfortably across the stage, never appearing stagnant or stiff. Everyone acted and moved as if they were their characters. Talissa picked a perfect fit piece to follow VHSL guidelines, and send into Cappies. A second key tech element was the set and props, run by Denali Greer and Nic Crews. There weren't many pieces of furniture on set, and by just positioning them the right way, the two created a train station. Props, such as the computer and briefcases, were successfully set for the time period of the piece and provided more visuals to follow along with. Both aspects were strong attributes for the play and the feel of the presentation.

Waiting on Trains was an intriguing short play that represented the importance of life itself and possibilities that come with. This show also reflected a reminder of the purpose of drawing focus away from work and following goals. The cast and crew from James Madison High School did a great job highlighting these areas and showed how they worked hand in hand to make their strong efforts reflect within this masterpiece.

by Malani Fenner-Smith of Heritage High School

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James Madison High School shared the delightful show of Waiting on Trains. The show Takes place December 31, 1999, as the characters wait to leave a small town, what was initially a cold meeting turns warm. The lighthearted show brought joy in many ways. Additionally there is a lot of charm wit the setting being in 1999

This show was a recording of their VHSL piece meaning there were some limits required for the competition. The set they used had to be carried on for the performance was minimalistic but realy effective. They really only used what needed to be seen in their set rather than trying to get as much stuff on the stage as possible. The distance between characters that the set provided with the help of the directing also created the correct requirements for social distancing and on top of that felt extremely natural. I found myself frequently forgetting that they were required to stay apart.

This show was student directed and cast. Talissa Uman did nothing short of an incredible job. The show felt alive in a way that not many shows can. It felt sincere and grounded while also of course being lighthearted and fun. Many shows have more experienced directors and still end up with worse results. The future for Talissa in theatre education is looking bright and hopefully there are many more shows directed by her.

The actors Stella Monner, Ashton Rauch, William Bush, Eleria Fiel, and Benjamin Eggleston work together wonderfully. Although this shows is not quite an ensemble show in many ways it benefited from a similar dynamic. Each character and their respective actor played off of each other so well that it really brought the show to a much higher level.

This show was a pleasure to watch and was done so incredibly well. I can only imagine what kind of amazing show we would have been able to see had there been that opportunity this year.

by Paolo Mancini of Heritage High School

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Turn back the clocks to December 31st, 1999, as the time inches closer to the new century. Set in a wintery train station, James Madison's High School presents the riveting show, Waiting on Trains. This captivating production explores the struggles and successes in searching for the true meaning of life.

D. M. Larson, a renowned playwright, wrote *Waiting on Trains*. This play begins with several strangers arriving at a train station on New Year's Eve, with classy businessmen impatiently waiting for the train. Throughout the show, the strangers soon realize what is truly important in life and letting go of their personal past.

This production followed VHSL guidelines which consisted of simple lighting, no microphones and only one camera angle. The actors also followed Covid-19 protocols such as social distancing and wearing clear masks. These guidelines and protocols tested the actor's determination and forced the actors to adapt to their new environment.

Elenora Fiel starred as Sue, the classical and high-strung businesswoman. Fiel's clear vocal expression and articulation made it easy to understand her captivating lines. Fiel's determined and formal movements--such as her proper posture--helped distinguish her character. Her posture reflected her character's own lifestyle and created subtle choices that differed from the rest of the cast. Ashton Rauch starred alongside Sue as Kirk, a professional businessman who lives life on his computer. Rauch's vibrant physicality highlighted the importance of his lines; additionally, Rauch maintained a clear focus throughout the entire show. Rauch and Fiel's connection during the show created an exciting focal point for the audience to follow.

Benjamin Eggleston played the featured role of Rut, a sluggish homeless man who lives at the train station. Eggleston's comedic timing and engaging energy made the production fascinating to watch. His in-depth characterization clarified his character's motives. Jean (played by William Bush) and Verna's (played by Stella Monner) ability to create a strong connection truly helped to introduce the beginning of the show. Bush's use of his props helped convey his own character's purpose and motives throughout the show. Bush's detailed and focused movements starkly contrasted Monner's relaxed and concise movements. This added to both characters and matched the character's personalities nicely.

The technical aspects of this show added to the production immensely. Talissa Uman directed this production and took on many of the important responsibilities. Uman crafted engaging blocking and implemented the use of props, both of which helped the actors maintain their distance--and encouraged social distancing guidelines. The props (designed by Denali Greer and Nic Crews) supported the story and enhanced the character's purpose in the performance. Their ability to create time-appropriate props alongside the 1990s style costumes brought the audience back in time.

From the incredible acting and direction to the detailed props and scenery, James Madison High School's production of *Waiting on Trains* was truly a delightful performance to watch.

by Ellie Vlattas of Westfield High School

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It's New Year's Eve, and 5 strangers find themselves at the train station, unaware of the life changing interactions that will soon take place. James Madison High School explores the vastly different outlooks and values of individuals from different economic classes. As the new millennia looms overhead, businessmen and janitors alike reevaluate their priorities. *Waiting On Trains* offers insight into life's most important moments, with a memorable character dynamic.

Written by playwright D. M. Larson, *Waiting On Trains* follows the fateful night of 5 individuals at a small town train station. Two business strangers, a ticketing woman, a janitor, and a local homeless man strike up a compelling dynamic. It's December 31st, 1999, and all are awaiting better days and larger purpose. Eventually, the unexpected quintet begins to converse, and from there, arguments, anguish, compassion, and realization ensue.

Ashton Rauch's portrayal of hyper focused businessman, Kirk, was remarkable. Rauch captured the obsessive tendencies of Kirk with ease, and provided a visible foundation for his character's priorities in life. Rauch's mannerisms, from feverishly typing on his laptop, to his rigid persona, visible in his facials and hunched back, enhanced the division between characters. Elenora Fiel embodied the fiery presence of businesswoman Sue with expertise. Fiel used the stage to her advantage, from her powerful struts to her strong, clear voice. Fiel was very detailed in her approach with the role, from her perfect, poised posture, to her tightly clasped hands.

Stella Monner opened the show with investment, beginning the relations between characters. Her role as Verna, the ticketing woman unafraid to loosen up, was played with passion. Monner captured the spirit of Verna through the singsong performance she attacked in the first moments of the show, to the blatant remarks she made time and time again. William Bush provided much needed comedic effect with his prop, a push broom. Bush used the prop to enhance his character, Jean, the janitor of the train station. Bush's characterization allowed insight into his thoughts and narrative, from his slow but steady cleaning efforts, to his laid back interactions with the other characters. Jean was not often phased, and Bush made sure this trait was evident through his impeccable performance.

Benjamin Eggleston brilliantly portrayed Rut, a local homeless man waiting for a train to take him away from stifling boredom. Eggleston was a hilarious presence, a nice contrast to the serious personas of the business people. Eggleston was sluggish in his movements, even careless, and was loud and talkative, mannerisms which reflected the lifestyle of his character, Rut.

Waiting On Trains was almost entirely student produced, led by student director Talissa Uman. Uman selected the show, cast the show, and directed the entire production. Uman's vision was spectacular, from the natural looking blocking despite the social distance restrictions, to the show selection itself. Susan Weinhardt should be applauded for her job of stage manager, as the production ran with ease. The set, designed and constructed by Denali Greer and Nic Crews, was simple but effective in conveying the location. It was just what the performance needed, detailed but not overbearing. The set was easily assembled at the beginning of the show, which allowed for a seamless opening to the production.

James Madison High School's Production of Waiting On Trains is a comedic, sometimes chaotic, story of growth and realization. What will become of these 5 strangers when the clock strikes 12?

by Kylee Weimeister of Westfield High School

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From Washington, D.C.'s elusive metro, to the subterranean subway rails of New York City, the human race shares a common experience when using public transit: train stations feel like you've entered a whole other dimension. From janitors on the job to a quirky ticketing lady, James Madison High School's "Waiting On Trains," ventures into the complex personalities of those eagerly waiting for the new year within a train station.

Waiting On Trains, a play written for small-cast ensembles, revolves around a group of drastically different characters who are brought together through either their occupations within a train station, or their wait for their ride into an undisclosed destination. First produced in 2018, Waiting On Trains relies on the diverse and intimate relationships between the unique characters.

James Madison's cast faced a number of challenges within their performance, but nonetheless preserved with unmatched efforts and resilience. In order to align themselves with VHSL competition rules, this cast was required to drop the use of microphones--but proved that microphones played no barrier in their production as they trekked through the show with immaculate enunciation and projection.



Portrayed by William Bush, Jean, despite being a janitor on the job, had stand-out performances and truly added to the atmosphere of the train station. Whether it was brooming the stage or polishing the set, Bush made sure to utilize his surroundings to the best of his ability, and certainly caught the eyes of many while performing his tasks. Verna, played by Stella Monner, played the ticketer. Usually seen sitting at her desk throughout the performance, she excellently played the roles of a typical ticketer and injected a comedic factor at the beginning when seen lip syncing to music. Monner, although playing the role of a job that may seem dull, breathed life into her role and had well-rounded interactions with the patrons of the train station.

Rut, depicted by Benjamin Eggleston, portrayed a homeless, drunk man at the station--providing a view into what you typically see at train stations, allowing for audiences to relate to the show. hilariously galloping through the stage and providing comedic bits throughout his drunken performance, Eggleston did not hold back in making sure to provide an "authentic" train station experience by carrying himself in a sluggish manner.

Denali Greer and Nic Crews both took on multiple tasks in order to make this production a success. Together, they managed set design, props, as well as working stage crew prior to the show's performance. Seen at the beginning assembling the set, the duo was swift in piecing it all together. In addition, prop design accurately fit the time period the show was set in, accomplishing the 1990s feel. Student directed by Talissa Uman, Uman used the entire space of the stage by blocking actors in accordance with social distancing but made sure that their relationships were still visible despite the distancing. In addition, Uman utilized the house (or where the audience would be seated) in her blocking in order to amplify the atmosphere of the show.

ALL ABOARD! James Madison's "Waiting On Trains" is set to take us through more than just a railroad into cities, but the stories of those who are waiting for their passage on the midnight train. "Waiting On Trains" will manifest a new perspective onto audiences, and have us rethinking how we look at others waiting at stations with us--who knows what challenges they face as they wait for their ride?

by Oscar Lazo of Westfield High School

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