

# Let's Face It...



By Chris Casteel

*"The Face is the Window of the Soul..."* I don't know who originally said this, and try as I might, I can't seem to find a name to match to the quote. But I do know one thing; when I look at this small segment of the Mona Lisa's face, I can't help but be transfixed by her expression. It is not overt or over the top; however, it speaks volumes just the same. I believe that this is a good place to start an article that is all about facial expression in performance.

I realize it is early in our season, and most are focused on surviving the choreography at this point. However, our season is a bit shorter this year, so time is of the essence to push your performers into the next phase as soon as possible...conquering the face.

Each and every one of us has witnessed shows that were designed well, but lacked in the communication department. A show can have all the components of concept and design that can set it up for success, but it is the performer's responsibility to communicate the concept fully to the audience. Choreography is just that; counts and positions. However, it is the performer that breathes life into the choreographic piece. The only way to bring a piece of choreography to life is through true and genuine emotion, personality and expression. Given this, it is important for your performers to grasp that **the soul of their show is found in their faces**. Performers who do not express emotion or expression during a show become uninteresting for the audience. The mood of your show is what audiences and judges alike interact with.

So how do your performers learn to facially adapt to the show? This happens in much the same way that they learn the nuts and bolts of the show. They should work toward mastering consistent emotion and expression within sets of choreography. When working toward facial expression, perhaps these tips will help:

- Let the lyrics and music guide your response
- Make sure that the emotional response is a genuine one
- Always practice emotion and facial expression during practice. This is NOT something that shows up on the day of competition.
- Don't overdo it...again, be genuine. It is important that the performers don't come across as fake in any way.
- Performers need to truly believe in the persona or character that they are portraying. If they do not, it will come across as insincere to the audience.
- Work toward finding a connection with the piece of music. For the some performers, this may need to be taught/told to them as it is a bit of an abstract idea for younger performers.
- Find a place where they can view their facial responses to get comfortable with the character that they are becoming. This may be through the mirrors of a dance room or in the reflection from a window that they are rehearsing in front of.
- Facial expression is more than a smile or a straight face. It comes through the entire face. It must be alive.

An exercise for your performers may be to let them gaze at the small image of the Mona Lisa and write what they feel is being communicated in her expression. If your show is not calming such as the expressive qualities found in this image, find an image of art or media that represent the persona you would like your performers to emulate. Another idea would be to give them a bit of homework and have them bring in images that they believe the show represents. Discuss these;

decide which ones your team can emulate best. Then practice, practice and practice the expressive qualities within each set of the choreography.

And so I end this article with that unknown quote that started my mind on the tangent of performance.....

**The Face is the Window to the Soul...**