

“No Summer Vacation for Theatre People” by Marya Danihel

(Peterborough, NH) It’s a lovely New England afternoon—smudges of cloud soften a porcelain sky, bobolinks swoop over wildflower meadows, and little breezes relieve the stillness. This is what our tourists come for, and droves of them are savoring this beautiful day on bikes, in canoes, in old barns crammed with antiques. Summer people.

In an old barn in Peterborough, New Hampshire, there is another kind of summer visitor. Several of them are clustered on a platform, wearing odd ensembles: a billowing eighteenth-century skirt and a T-shirt; running shorts and a powdered wig; sweatpants and a cutaway coat. One or two more run up and down ladders, adjusting banks of bright-colored lights, and three or four, though normally dressed, bristle with headsets and antennae.

This is the Peterborough Players’ technical rehearsal for *Amadeus*, on the day before opening, and these summer visitors are here to work—intensely. For apprentices that means taking classes, building sets, sewing costumes, hanging lights, raking the grounds, parking cars, ushering patrons, and occasionally playing a small role. Members of the professional company—Equity actors from both coasts—may play a large role in one production while rehearsing another; somehow they must find the time to do the “homework” of learning lines and studying their character, frequently while at the laundromat.

With so much to do, production staff members must constantly think about how to use their time wisely: how long before that paint dries? should I push this actor in today’s rehearsal or wait and see? if I write this tomorrow, will the newspaper have it in time?

So while the rest of the world is packing picnic hampers, relaxing on their decks with gin and tonics, and generally loosening up and slowing down, theatre people are experiencing their most demanding season. For most, it’s a relief to work so hard, every day, on someone else’s schedule—no making rounds, no time to worry about the next job—and the little leisure they have is especially sweet.

The other reward almost every Player will cite when questioned is the group experience. They learn to appreciate and to live up to each other’s work, trust each other’s commitment to the production, and take pressure-cooker behavior in stride. Leslie E. Daniels, an apprentice from New York City who has a small part in *Amadeus*, puts it like this:

“When I walk out on stage as Katherina, I’m walking on a floor I built. That’s my space. With all this special company of people, I belong there.” And as she talks, on her ten-minute break, she works with pliers and wire on a costume necklace: another bit of work done, another little step closer to the first night when she can say, “We did it!” and be proud.

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