Haley Kluge Grand Ledge High School

When the curtain opens at the beginning of act 2, the cast of *The Phantom of the Opera* will greet the audience with an array of colorful and elaborate costumes on top of a 25-foot-tall staircase. The scene *Masquerade* contains some of the most extravagant choreography and costumes in the entire show, and demands a set piece just as spectacular. “The staircase was one of those things that we had to get right,” director Steve Delp said. “That scene-Masquerade-it’s the show stopping number.”  
 In preparation for the show, Delp and his fellow directors saw several other high school productions of *Phantom* in order to see how they tackled the large scale production. Specifically, he looked at other schools’ staircases.  
 “Their staircases just weren’t grand enough,” Delp said. “They looked too small or just didn’t have ‘the look.’ It looked like a set piece where things would just be glued on wood or balusters painted on- things like that. We did it ourselves because we couldn’t find one that I thought was at the caliber I wanted for our show.”  
 With such high expectations, Delp approached Carroll Shults, the drafting and architecture teacher at GLHS. In collaboration with four of his advanced architect students, they created the design plan for the *Masquerade* set piece. Seniors Calvin Hamilton, Sam Konkoly, Josh Smith, and Bobby Blackshaw spent four weeks creating the staircase start to finish. They were responsible for designing the staircase itself, the platform behind it, the balusters and the curved railing. But not only were they concerned with the design aspect of the project, but also the realistic restrictions of the stage.  
 “There’s a structural component to this too; it’s not just how it looks,” Shults said.   
 The stairs had to be large enough to fit 40 to 50 cast members, the steps had to be wide enough to comfortably turn and dance on, the entire set piece had to be able to break apart to move on and off the stage easily, it had to appear to continue on to a second story, and the design as a whole had to copy that of Broadway’s.   
 “We sketched it out on paper first in a couple different styles to decide which one would work the best,” Hamilton said. “And once we decided, we got a prototype on the computer started.”   
 Once the original design was set, Delp and the students collaborated to create the ideal staircase that merged all of their ideas together.   
 “We’d show Delp the progress we had made, and any comments or questions or alterations he wanted to make to it, he would suggest and we would change it accordingly,” Hamilton said.  
 After four weeks of creating and adjusting the design, the planning was done, and construction began.  
 “They came up with this design and gave me a thick packet of plans on how to do it,” Delp said. “I got a bunch of people together who were willing to build the staircase and we all got together and built it on a Saturday.”

Built from scratch, the staircase was almost entirely constructed at GLHS. Delp’s team of seven workers built the treds from lumber purchased at Menards that they cut and constructed themselves. The spindles were contracted out in Fowler and the bent railing was created in Parma Westfalia, but both pieces were connected back to the actual staircase in the auditorium after they were created. Once all assembled, the art club came in and painted added texture to the entire set to match the time period to finish the steps. Although most of the work for the staircase was done inside the building, some portions were contracted out. However, even those parts were based of the designs of the architect student team.

In its entirety, the staircase took four weeks to design, 11 hours to construct, and $2,500 to build. But after its completion, the students were excited to see their design come to life.  
 “It was so cool,” Konkoly said. “It’s a lot different on the computer screen than seeing it in real life.”  
 Shults agrees that the audience will be just as impressed.  
 “I’m waiting for the curtain open,” Shults said. I’ll be listening to the crowd, because I think there will be a lot of ‘oohs’ and ‘ahhs’ and a lot of dropped jaws.”