

# *The Renaissance*

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## **The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee at the Renaissance Theatre March 12, 2009 7:00 PM**

**The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee** is a one act musical comedy with music and lyrics by William Finn and a book by Rachel Sheinkin. The show centers around a fictional spelling bee set in a geographically ambiguous Putnam Valley Middle School in Putnam County, NY. Six quirky adolescents compete in the Bee, run by three equally-quirky grown-ups. The spellers learn that winning isn't everything.

The 2005 Broadway production, directed by James Lapine, has earned good reviews and box-office success and was nominated for six Tony Awards, winning two, including Best Book. The show has spawned various other productions in the U.S., a national tour with performances in Canada, and Australian productions.

An unusual aspect of the show is that three or four real audience members are invited on stage to compete in the spelling bee alongside the six young characters. During the 2005 Tony Awards, former Presidential candidate Al Sharpton competed. Another amusing aspect of the show is that the official pronouncer provides ridiculous usage examples when asked to use words in a sentence. For instance, for the word "palaestra," he says, "Euripides said, 'What happens at the palaestra stays at the palaestra.'"

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_25th\\_Annual\\_Putnam\\_County\\_Spelling\\_Bee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_25th_Annual_Putnam_County_Spelling_Bee)

## **The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee Background and Original Production**

*The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* was based upon C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E, an original play created by Rebecca Feldman and performed by The Farm, a New-York-based improvisational comedy troupe. Sarah Saltzberg, Wendy Wasserstein's weekend nanny, was in the original production, and Wasserstein recommended that Finn see the show. Finn brought Shenkin on board, and they worked together with Feldman to transform the improv show into a scripted full-length musical.

Spelling Bee was workshopped and developed at the Barrington Stage Company in the Massachusetts Berkshires in February 2004 and then given a fuller production in July 2004 directed by Feldman and Michael Unger. Dan Knechtges choreographed the workshop and summer productions and the Broadway production. Several cast members, including Dan Fogler, Feldman, Jay Reiss, and Sarah Saltzberg remained from C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E. Robb Sapp (later replaced by Jose Llana when Sapp moved on to *Wicked*), Dashiell Eaves (replaced by Derrick Baskin), Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Celia Keenan-Bolger (joined as Olive Ostrovsky in the summer), Lisa Howard, and Deborah Craig were added to the cast, and a full script was created. The musical moved Off-Broadway to the Second Stage Theatre on January 11, 2005, where it enjoyed critical and box-office success.

Spelling Bee moved to Broadway's Circle in the Square Theatre on April 15, 2005. It closed on January 20, 2008 after 1,136 performances.

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*The Original Broadway cast of *The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee**

### **The Creative Team For the Original Broadway Production:**

**William Finn (Composer/ Lyricist)**

**Rachel Sheinkin (Book writer)**

**James Lapine (Director)**

**Vadim Feichtner (Music Direction & Dance Arrangement)**

**Dan Knechtges (Choreographer)**

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