

Acalanes Choir Puts on a Hilarious Musical The Mystery of Edwin Drood

By Andrea A. Firth



Acalanes students perform The Mystery of Edwin Drood

Photo Chris Wickman

Over the past weekend, the Acalanes High School Concert Choir had sold-out audiences laughing, shouting, clapping, and voting during their performance of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Audiences voting?—Well that does not seem to make sense. However, in this wacky musical almost anything goes (or maybe that was last year's show). Based on an unfinished novel by Charles Dickens, this musical (created for Broadway by Rupert Holmes) has the ending determined by audience vote. Allowing this level of spectator participation required the actors to be spontaneous versus rehearsed and to often improvise more than memorize.

Bruce Lengacher, the Director of Choral Activities at Acalanes and the show's Producer, led a cast of 70 with musical support provided by members of the Acalanes Orchestra and Symphonic Band in a show that employs the British pantomime and music hall traditions popular in the late 19th century. "One of the great things about this show is that there is no fourth wall," explained Lengacher. "From the moment that you walk into the lobby,

the actors are interacting with you. It's kind of a circus atmosphere. It's really fun."

The story of *Edwin Drood* is written as a play within a play—that is the actors are playing actors—which has each lead playing dual or triple roles. The music is drawn from multiple styles and includes big full-cast numbers alongside poignant solo and duet pieces. The student-designed and constructed set for the Acalanes production was comprised of several plywood periactoids. That's theater speak for multi-sided, painted props that are easily moved to create different backdrops.

In addition to an ensemble that could act, dance, and sing, the depth of talent among the Acalanes lead performers for *Drood* was remarkable. Vinnie Urdea gave standout performances as The Chairman (a sort of Master of Ceremonies) and the ditsy Mayor Sapsea entertaining the crowd with his comical delivery of written and impromptu jokes. Emily Radosevich, who spent much of the evening mustachioed or bearded as the cross-dressing Edwin Drood, belted out her songs and in character hammed it up for the audience. With his

swarthy complexion, long sideburns, and sinister grin Cameron Gordon looked and played believably evil John Jasper. And the sweet ingénue Rosa Bud (who was voted the murderess in the show I saw) played by Yvette Dickson probably had the best vocals of the evening.

Alex Frankel was so realistic as the Reverend Chisparkle that he could lead a congregation tomorrow, but a real Anglican minister probably is not that funny. Janette Wallen combined her terrific comedic sensibility and tremendous vocal talent to deliver scenes both funny and moving in her part as Princess Puffer. Tyson Moore was a crowd favorite in his hilarious portrayal of the thespian-wannabe Bazzard. While Sara Garewal and Maxwell Cazanov as the Landless siblings used their best Indian accents to a humorous end. Jason Long who played Durdles and Andrew Bontemps as his sidekick added more laughs as did the high-kicking Jessica Bruns who played Flo. Student Producer Gina Connolly pulled the show together with the assistance of Student Directors Bruns and Bontemps.