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High Schools Prep for Stellar Spring Productions

By Clare Varellas



Photo Ohlen Alexander

March 6-8 in the Acalanes Performing Arts Center. But though the production - a story of a romance between a missionary and a gambler in a town notorious for its casinos - has been performed many times before in forms ranging from youth dramatic productions to Broadway shows, Acalanes is working to incorporate a slightly new "look" to its set and costumes with the help of Acalanes' Stagecraft class, a newly added elective that allows students to craft onstage sets for school productions.

"Mr. Meehan and his Stagecraft class have created a set that's not really like anything we've done before," said director Cathy Challacombe. "It's a much more modern use of sets. The costumes are predominantly black and white, so visually it will be very different."

In addition to an artistically crafted set, Acalanes boasts an outstanding group of singers and actors participating in the production, some of whom already have plans to pursue music at prestigious colleges next year. Briana Grether, Andrew Cope, Caroline Whelehan, and Danny Igoe will carry out the roles of their outlandish characters with gusto, all the while wowing audiences with their vocal talents.

The musicians and actors of Miramonte High School opted for a more contemporary show when they selected "Shrek the Musical," to be performed March 13-16. Based on the 2001 DreamWorks animated movie, this brand new Broadway musical, which depicts an ugly ogre who falls in love with an equally 'beautiful' princess, appealed to Miramonte students who had fond childhood memories of the movie.

"When it first appeared on Broadway, I was skeptical," said director Heather Cousins. "However, it was the perfect choice for this particular generation of students because as they say, 'Shrek' is their childhood. They grew up with the movie."

But most people would not expect such a quirky production to include such catchy, captivating music - songs that will give cast members Daniel Cook, Tosca Maltzman, Maritza Grillo, and Andy Tobin perfect opportunities to showcase their supreme vocal skills.

"As soon as I heard the music, I was fully on board," said Cousins. "Both the movie and the musical appeal to the entire family with clever jokes which will fly right over small kids' heads. What the movie doesn't have is the original Broadway score, music by Jeanine Tesori and lyrics by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright David Lindsey-Abaire."

But Miramonte's cast members are not the only ones daring enough to take on a more cutting-edge production this spring. Campolindo High School's actors and singers will perform the satirical musical "Urinetown" on the weekends of March 13-16 and March 20-23. Originally written by playwright Greg Kotis, the dystopian production depicts a world in which water is so scarce that using the restroom costs money. Albeit centered around an obscure topic, Campo students embraced the challenge of putting the show together.

"We're always looking for shows that explore genres and themes that we haven't previously tried, and modern, 'in your face' social satire is something we've not done before," said director David Pinkham. "'Urinetown' itself is an important example of the evolution of musical theater, having opened the doors in 2003 for shows like 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson' and 'The Book of Mormon' on Broadway. We think it's brilliantly funny and a romping good time."

But as strange as the musical's theme sounds, the production is thought-provoking, triggering philosophical, environmental, and political questions about society, without explicitly presenting answers at the end of the show.

"While it doesn't 'preach,' it does make one think," said Pinkham. "We particularly like the fact that 'Urinetown' points out some of our foibles (including how easy it is for us to shy away from something just because of its name), and deals with important issues like corporate greed, governmental oppression, the folly of idealism and the scarcity of environmental resources."

Combine with these deeper meanings plenty of opportunities for talented Campolindo vocalists to break out into song, and the result is a show that not only entertains, but inspires. Guy Clearwater,

For many of us, the word "musical" conjures up images from the most classic Broadway productions: Curly beaming while belting out "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" in "Oklahoma" or Fantine executing a tear-jerking rendition of "I Dreamed a Dream" in "Les Mis." So when you venture into the auditoriums of Acalanes, Miramonte, or Campolindo high schools during one of their March musical performances, you might be surprised to find onstage an ogre singing in his swamp, or a man loudly expressing his opinion that people have the right to use the restroom without taxation.

Armed with deep talent pools and hard-working directors and musicians, Lamorinda high school musical casts have chosen to perform some relatively new and groundbreaking productions this year, or to take new, interesting spins on old ones.

Acalanes High School cast members will be performing the well-known musical "Guys and Dolls"

Nathan Correll, Maddie Browning, Alyssa Murray, Will Martin, Ricky Lomas, Nani Senderowicz, and Marissa Monopoli will all shine in this double-casted musical.

For tickets and showtimes visit: www.showtix4u.com ("Urinetown"); www.showtix4u.com ("Shrek the Musical"); and www.ahsperformingarts.org ("Guys and Dolls").



Photo Ohlen Alexander



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Acalanes Stagecraft students work on creating modern sets for "Guys and Dolls" show.



Miramonte student fine-tunes dance moves at recent rehearsal.

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