

'Zucchini' is a poignant, real family film

By Sophie Braccini



This month the International Film Showcase offers a Swiss-French film, "My Life as a Zucchini," directed by Claude Barras. It's a beautiful animated movie that engaged the work of over 100 artists. This movie is a delicate and charming tale of resilience, hope and love appropriate for children from 6 years of age and for the adults who have been able to preserve their child's heart.

Zucchini is his name. He really clings to this nickname that was given to him by a mother who was not always kind, because she liked beer a bit too much. But now she's gone, "to heaven," and the little boy with eyes so immense that they take up most of his face, is so desperately alone. The father is long gone, "he liked 'hens' too much" (hen or poule means loose woman in French). A policeman takes him to a small orphanage. This is not a place where kids are abused in any-

way. Quite the opposite. There he will recover, he will reinvent himself, he will learn to trust, to love again, and discover that the people whom you chose and that chose you can share stronger bonds than some families.

Zucchini's reality and that of his friends is grim. They have all ended in the children's home because of personal dramas that the movie does not hide. But it is an animation, so it says sad things with a light poetic touch and never falls into the grim or the frightening. The relationships between the children are shown with humor and tenderness. It shows that life has been tough for them, but they are resilient and they find strength in being a group. It is very rare to see a movie that is so touching and so real, without sugarcoating, yet completely adequate for young viewers.

"My Life as a Zucchini" was

nominated for Best Animated Feature Film at the 2017 Oscars, but lost to "Zootopia." The Swiss-French film is definitely not Disney. It takes children much closer to reality than most American directors would dare. One could argue though that for that reason it also touches more authentic and real emotions. Parents can be reassured that the movie ends well. The movie is now rated a very rare 100 percent positive critic consensus on Rotten Tomatoes.

The film was presented at the Cannes Film Festival last May and Barras gave an interview to the French magazine Telerama about the making of the movie. He explained that it all started 10 years ago for him when he read Gilles Paris' novel "Autobiography of a zucchini." He started drawing the characters, created many different versions, cutting them out and creating groups until he found the winning team of visual characters.

The entire film was made using the technique of "stop motion" where clay puppets are animated one image at a time. The puppets were created with a metal frame, clay for the face and bodies and a multitude of "accessories" such as mouths and limbs that are changed in a darkroom by puppeteers one frame at a time. Barras explained that the puppets are 35 centimeters high (13.8 inches) and are now in museums.

Barras casted the children's voices using non-actor children and had them play the scenario as if for a live performance. From these filmed interactions Barras constructed the final story played by the puppets. The result is stunning and aesthetically very pleasing.

"My Life as a Zucchini" opens on March 24 at the Orinda Theater for a week. More information is available at www.lamorindatheatres.com.

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Campolindo High School Presents 'Beauty and the Beast'

Submitted by Sachi Enochy



The cast of Campolindo's "Beauty and the Beast."

Photo Sachi Enochy

"Be Our Guest!" and step into the magical world of the modern classic, Disney's "Beauty and the Beast," presented by Campolindo High School. Follow the "tale as old as time" as the Beast encounters Belle and races to break the spell and return to his former self with the help of his enchanted

household members.

The show runs through March 26 at the high school, 300 Moraga Road, Moraga. Tickets are on sale up to four hours before each show. Price is \$25. For information on show times and more, visit <http://www.campochoir.com/ticketing/>.

Teen Advisory Board offers students the chance to make a difference

By Namratha Kasalanati

The Lafayette Library and Learning Center has a program for teens called the Teen Advisory Board, or TAB for short. In TAB, students decide on programs that can be put on for the enjoyment of the teenage community. These are relatively small scale programs, and are usually held in the library.

Being part of TAB is very fun, and it is not a huge commitment. We usually discuss books, movies, newspaper articles, music, and other types of media we have read or heard. Some books recommended by the group were "Eragon," by Christopher Paolini, "Special Topics in Calamity Physics," by Marisha Pessl, and "Shoe Dog," by Phil Knight, the creator of Nike.

After making our suggestions, we talk about our next programs. We like to brainstorm in groups and then vote on the best and most possible ideas. Usually we choose two programs per month and an alternate, in case one program does not

seem to be possible.

This school year, we have put on a movie, "Mean Girls," had a Teen Social day, where we played games and met new people, and had a Book Swap. We are planning other programs such as a nature drawing lesson, or an Earth Day program. For the end of the year, we are planning a cosplay contest at ComicFest 2017. Be sure to look out for more TAB programs. They are posted in the Lafayette Library, Stanley Middle School Library, and in other schools and stores around Lafayette. They could even be posted in your classroom.

If you wish to join TAB next school year, you should pick up an application in August or September in the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. Our adult supervisor and meeting facilitator is Patrick Brogan, Teen Services Library Assistant. He looks through the applications for qualities like being proactive, leadership, depend-

ability and others. Students in sixth through 12th grades can apply. It is always great to have new minds join our program. It builds leadership and involvement in the community. Plus, it is fun.

Lastly, this is a thought provoking quote by Elie Wiesel: "Mankind must remember that peace is not God's gift to his creatures; peace is our gift to each other." We should remember to be peaceful and kind to each other and consider the consequences of our actions as we are growing up so we can make the world a kinder and more peaceful place.



Namratha Kasalanati is in seventh grade at Stanley Middle School. She likes to write, read, learn about new ideas and participate in cross country and track.

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