

DAILY TROJAN

Theatre students prepare to perform repertory

Starting Thursday evening, Masters in Fine Arts in Acting, students showcase their talent in three works

Kelsey Borresen

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Seasoned actor or not; the thought of playing six different characters in the span of just three days is truly daunting. To go from playing Judas Iscariot's mother to a fairy queen to an 18th century French aristocrat seems an unthinkably difficult task for most. For third-year Masters in Fine Arts in Acting student Gina Manziello, this will soon be a reality. Luckily, it is one she has been preparing for all along.

I came to [the] program because I wanted to be acting all the time and that's what I got, Manziello said.

This week, all of those 12-hour school days of rehearsal and class time will pay off. Beginning Feb.19, the 10 members of the MFA Acting program's first graduating class will embark on their last great task as graduate students: the three-play & rotating repertoire. The actors will be performing one play one night and a different one the next. Some days pose even more of a challenge, forcing the actors to do one matinee performance, then another that same evening.

Other nights will require the actors to perform two plays back-to-back, allowing them only one 10-minute intermission to transition between characters. Over the course of a long weekend, they will be performing Stephen Adly Guirgis' "The Last Days of Judas Iscariot", Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream", and two one-act plays by the 18th century French playwright Marivaux: "The Dispute" and "The Constant Players".

"Judas Iscariot" is a contemporary dramatic comedy featuring Christ's betrayer by the same name and is set in a courtroom in limbo between heaven and hell. The language is fresh and explicit, shedding an MTV-era light on a Biblical tale with lines such as "signed, sealed, delivered, motherfucker, peace!" and "puppets are bullshit".;

Shakespeare's "Midsummer" is probably the most well-known of the four plays and one of the great playwright's more lighthearted works. It chronicles three markedly different worlds: upper-class Athens, working-class Athens and a fantasy fairy realm, all of which eventually converge in the play's finale.

Marivaux's 18th century comedy "The Dispute" explores the question of which of the two sexes is the more inclined to be unfaithful. A wealthy prince commissions two caretakers to raise four children; two girls and two boys in isolation. After years of living only with the people that raised them, the children are finally exposed to the ever-alluring opposite sex as an experiment in infidelity.

“The Constant Players” is another Marivauxian comedy. It involves a vindictive French aristocrat, Madame Amelin, who plays a prank on an uptight friend, Madame Argante. The prankster elite successfully convinces Madame Argante that the preordained marriage between her fair daughter and Madame Amelin’s own nephew is off. Instead, Madame Amelin pretends that she has now giving her blessing to an old maid played by actor, not actress, Reynaldo Pacheco, to teach her friend a lesson in lightening up.

Performing such different plays in the rotating repertory style demands a lot of the cast. Some actors will play two characters in one show, some men will play women, some women will play men. Some actors will play children and others will play the elderly.

While the task seems insurmountable at first, the actors are ready to show what they have been investing so much time, energy and emotion into for the past two and half years.

“From day one, from the moment we started working on this program, we were given a million tasks”, cast member Christopher Fernandez said. “And so from the get-go, we were forced to start working our imaginative muscle, and our creativity was really pushed. And so because of that, now when it’s time to produce, there’s no pressure because we had time to fail and we had time to find what our strengths and weaknesses were”.

Though the actors have fine-tuned their craft, they have also learned invaluable lessons they will be able to take with them both on and off the stage.

“If there’s one thing about the entire course that is important to me, it’s that they learned this ensemble ethos”, Andy Robinson, director of the MFA Acting program, said. “Regardless of what they do in the world after they leave USC that gives them the resource and the ability to live in the world in a productive way. They really do learn how to work with other people. We can get along with people and be polite, but when we are required to work intensely with other people and in an honest way, this is when you have to learn tolerance.”

So after three years of rigorous rehearsals and challenging classes and an overall demanding daily schedule that sometimes included working Saturdays, are the soon-to-be graduates ready for the real, and often harsh, world of acting.

“We’re all ready to get paid. It’s just time. And everybody knows it’s time”, Fernandez said. There’s nothing like going out and really doing it. We have all the tools we’re ever going to possibly need and any other tools that we may need along the road, we’re just going to have to find for ourselves”.

The Dispute & The Constant Players

By Pierre Marivaux

Directed by David Bridel

Thursday, Feb. 19, 7:00pm

Saturday, Feb. 21, 8:00pm

A Midsummer Night's Dream

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Andrew J. Robinson

Friday, Feb. 20, 7:00pm

Sunday, Feb. 22, 2:30pm

The Last Days of Judas Iscariot

By Stephen Adly Guirgis

Directed by André Belgrader

Saturday, Feb. 21, 2:30pm

Sunday, Feb. 22, 7:00pm