

“The Tempest” takes Moorpark College by storm

By Sarah Graue and Nia Robinson

The Moorpark College Theater Arts Department debuted their spring production, “The Tempest,” on March 16 in the college’s Performing Arts Center.

Student actors and production members powered through ten intense weeks of rehearsals to produce the department’s first Shakespearean play since “Romeo and Juliet,” which premiered only days before COVID-19 shutdowns in March of 2020.

Theater Arts faculty member John Loprieno directed the student performances of “The Tempest.” Loprieno said that his decision to implement Shakespearean curriculum into Moorpark College’s annual rotation of productions spans back to ten years ago.



Jam Averill shines as Stephano, the comical butler of Alonso, in “The Tempest” at the Performing Arts Center on March 14, 2023. Photo credit: Nia Robinson

“Shakespeare had a formula; he knew how to write a play and he knew how to play to the audience,” Loprieno said. “My goal is to have students walk out of the theater at the end and say, ‘Wow I think I’d go see another Shakespeare show,’ and a lot of that comes from the performance of the actors, their heart that they have and the way that they understand the material to bring it to life.”

Written in the early 1600s, “The Tempest” is a mystical blend of comedy and tragedy. The story follows Prospero, a magician who uses his supernatural powers to conjure a storm at sea against a royal ship carrying the King of Naples and his brother, Antonio. With the help of his servants, Prospero uses his remote island to try to reclaim his power against the shipwreck survivors.

The play has been in the spotlight in the last decade after being banned by school districts in Arizona for embodying themes such as enslavement and oppression.

First-year theatre student Lucia Salazar-Davidson plays Caliban, a character who is enslaved by Prospero. Salazar-Davidson commented on the presence of slavery in the play and how it contributed to the intricacy of the play’s characters and narrative.

“‘The Tempest’ is a really interesting play because it has these themes of oppression, colonization and power struggles, which is demonstrated not only between the struggles of Prospero and Antonio, but the servitude of Ariel and Caliban,” Salazar-Davidson said.

“I wanted to audition for Caliban because I was interested to see what I could do with him as a symbol of these things because as much as he is a flawed individual, a lot of his flaws come from the education he was given because of what Prospero told him.”





Casey O'Brien (Left), Colin Rinard (Center) and Lucia Salazar-Davidson (Right) perform "The Tempest" at their dress rehearsal in the PAC.

The production opened with an on-stage simulation of a ship lost in the rough waters of the Mediterranean Sea. With suspenseful music and immersive lighting design, the audience was quickly transported into the oceanic setting just before the Main Stage seamlessly transitioned into a new set reminiscent of the Globe Theatre.

Scenic Designer Brian Koehler, the mastermind behind the set design also coordinated the sets for "Electricidad" and "Monty Python's Spamalot." Koehler led his team of technical theatre students through months of construction for this semester's play.

Second-year technical theatre student Weston Ginoza explained the lengthy process of turning Koehler's 3-D renderings into blueprints and then assembling full-scale scenic models.

"This process usually takes a couple months, and we are usually working up all the way until opening night," Ginoza said. "It's a lot of work, we usually spend about 15 hours a week pretty easily. I've definitely logged around 20-25 hours a week just in pre-production work."

Ginoza also highlighted subgroups within the technical theatre department that were vital to the show's success.

"While we're upstairs in the scenic shop doing stuff, there's a whole group of people downstairs sewing, designing, pulling fabric and going to our sheds to pull costumes," Ginoza recalled. "It's a really long process, but what happens at the end is that you get a beautiful show."

In the PAC costume shop, students handcrafted and styled pieces for all members of the cast under the supervision of Haleh Risdana, head costume designer and make-up faculty member. Anna Bell Sanders, a second-year theatre student, described the process of creating the costume for Steffano, the butler of King Alonso.

"There's a lot of trial and error for all of the costumes that we made, I think we went through two pairs of pants before I finally finished," Sanders said. "Steffano's costume is really fun because we tried sticking to the period as much as possible so it's all historically accurate."





Wyatt Freihon plays Alonso's jester, Trinculo, and wears a specialty costume styled by Moorpark College costuming students in "The Tempest".

The theater department continued hosting performances of "The Tempest" until the weekend of March 25. Ariel McIntyre, a third-year theatre student, reflected on the wide appeal of this famous Shakespearean play.

"The Tempest' really has everything that's great about Shakespeare, including love, comedy, super villains and magic," McIntyre said.

The next big production from the Moorpark College theater department will be coming in April when students produce, direct and act in plays that they wrote. To see what other performances are taking place in the PAC this semester, [click here](#).