

Classic Greek epic transformed into new, musical adventure

Drama department presents 'The Odyssey,' complete with a set of unique instruments

by **Christine Chang**

The enchanting tunes sung by the Sirens in Homer's *Odyssey* are up against some competition. It's safe to say that the drama department's winter production this week is infused with soulful music comparable to the very melody that supposedly left Odysseus dying to hear more. Starting March 12, the stage in MVHS's auditorium will come alive with a version of "The Odyssey," adapted for the stage by American playwright Mary Zimmerman. The play will be airing March 12, 13, 19, and 20 in the auditorium.

As an integral part of this year's spring play, the music is anticipated to be one of the most captivating aspects of the production. The different sounds of a rainstick, maracas and a didgeridoo, a long, pipe-like wind instrument indigenous to Australia, resounded several times throughout rehearsal.

Production manager junior Hema Kopalle noted that the sensory elements incorporated in this specific play uphold a crucial role in impressing the intended mood upon the audience. The spirit of the

music itself expresses an emotional aura reflected in the entirety of the play.

"There's an overall steam punk sense to it," Kopalle said. "Like, imagine being underground, where you have all these pipes and steam, kind of like that. It's not a conventional play. It has a very nitty gritty feel to it. Or think amber colors and music. Lots and lots of music."

The use of more primitive instruments generates music that is simplistic, but also very human. Commonly acknowledged as the universal language, music is crucial in making this Ancient Greek play resonate with audiences.

"I personally think the play gives an ancient kind of feel—a bit somber," senior Michelle Chow said. "There's also a sense of mysteriousness which you can hear in the low sounds of the music."

Drama teacher Holly Cornelison decided to make music such a major part of the play to overcome the impression that "The Odyssey" is archaic, and thus boring.

"It has old themes, but I wanted it to jump out at the audiences a little bit, be a little more tangible and feel less old fashioned," Cornelison said. "This adaptation takes an

epic story that is mostly narrated and turns it into more of a dramatic piece."

Another aspect of the play that sets the production apart from some of the previous ones is the role of teachers and administration in the play, including social studies teachers Bonnie Belshe and Viviana Montoya-Hernandez, English teachers Vanessa Otto and David Clarke, Dean of Students Denae Moore, and science teacher Katheryn McElwee.

One of the reasons Cornelison chose to include teachers as performers in the play was to heighten the realism of the characters' relationships. For example, Clarke's role as Laertes, Odysseus' father, would underscore the age difference between father and son.

"They are super excited but super scared about being on stage," Cornelison said. "But I thought it would be nice to give teachers on the staff an opportunity to learn about the rehearsal process and what it is like to be part of a production at Monta Vista."

Hence "The Odyssey" will be a production of breakthroughs, with teachers busy eliminating stage fright and new instruments coming into play.



Christine Chang | El Estoque

PLAY YOUR HEART OUT Sophomore Max Sorg displays his skill at the didgeridoo on Feb. 22, one of the few instruments used in the musical score of "The Odyssey."