

Connecting Classroom Reading with Live Performance

About 80 students filled the seats in Callan Theatre one evening earlier this month for a special showing of the play *King Oedipus* presented by Catholic University's Department of Drama.

The performance was only one part of the evening planned exclusively for students in Humanities 101: Classics in Conversation. Earlier in the week, members of the production staff of *King Oedipus* visited the humanities classrooms to discuss the play, which the students had already read. Before the performance, students toured Hartke Theatre and afterward they talked with the director, actors, and staff.

Mark Wujcik, technical director, gave the tour of the newly renovated Hartke Theatre. Students learned what goes on

behind the scenes of a production while walking through one of the dressing rooms, the costume closet, and the green room.

"Can we see the trap doors?" one student asked while backstage. Wujcik smiled and led the group into a small props room that holds hundreds of benches and suitcases. He pulled a rope and an elevator came through the ceiling of the room. The elevator is used to transport props from downstairs to the stage, he explained.

The evening was part of an initiative to encourage first-year students to learn outside of the classroom, said Todd Lidh, director of the First-Year Experience (FYE) program. The program is designed to show freshmen that learning is interdisciplinary — students should be making connections between their courses. Seeing *King Oedipus* after reading the play by Sophocles in class is an obvious link, Lidh said.

"If you are going to read a play, you should experience what it means to go to a play and see what a performance tells you about a text that you've read that's different than just talking about it in the classroom," he said.

"Drama by its very nature is always interdisciplinary because you come across topics, issues, really bodies of knowledge that come from other disciplines," said Patrick Tuite, chair of the drama department.



Students wait for *King Oedipus* to begin.



Cast and crew answer questions from students.

As the show began, the lights in Callan Theatre dimmed. The stage is triangular and its corners reach out into the audience. Students were startled as actors walked right by them.

“You really couldn’t sit back and relax because the actors were so close to you. You had to be involved in the show,” one audience member said during the post-performance talk.

Students whistled as Graham Pilato, a master’s student who played Oedipus, bowed and the show came to a close.

“I’m so glad the drama department is able to contextualize the play that is being taught in other disciplines. It’s really a community event and I’m so

proud to be leading the production,” said Orion Jones, third year master’s student in the Department of Drama and director of *King Oedipus*.

Jones and the actors, along with Alberto Segatta, lighting designer; Klyph Stanford, scenic designer; and Phil Carluzzo, composer and sound designer, answered questions from the students.

Students learned of Jones’ plan to incorporate classic themes with modern ones. The cast wore handmade masks just as all ancient Greek performers did and the set references the shape of a medieval cathedral.

“Another thing we can do in this department is teach people about making theater. That education will hopefully inspire students to want to see theater in other places,” said Tuite. “Perhaps students, if they go to shows in D.C., will see alumni who are working professionally.”

“College is about giving you opportunities that you may not have later on in life. While you are here, make the most of it,” Lidh said.

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