

"The Man Who Came to Dinner"

The Oracle presents a sneak preview of the fall play, a comedic look at the pitfalls of cultures clashing.



Henry Liu

Sophomore Blake Vesey (left) and senior Daniel Wallach (right) rehearse their lines during an after school rehearsal.

Nicola Park

according to stage technology member "Man Who Came to Dinner" character-able elements and suspense

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COPY EDITOR

The theater cast and crew are performing a comedy in three acts called "The Man Who Came to Dinner" from Nov. 12 to Nov. 21. Written by playwrights Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman in 1939, the play is a slapstick comedy set in the World War II era in Mesalia, Ohio. Gunn's production celebrates the work's 70th anniversary.

Sheridan Whiteside, played by senior Daniel Wallach, is a big-living, pompous critic and lecturer from New York who comes to dine at the residence of the wealthy Mr. and Mrs. Stanley (played by seniors Austin Lewis and Michelle Lalonde) during the Christmas holidays. Whiteside injures himself by slipping on a patch of ice in front of their home and is cooped up in the Stanleys' house. "It's like small town meets Hollywood, and it's really fun to see the two clash," Lalonde said. The encounter of different cultures leads to,

according to stage technology member junior Karen Reitman, "the worst family Christmas ever," since the Stanleys and Whitesides must put up with each others' contrasting lifestyles.

According to drama teacher and play director James Shelby, the plot's twists keep the audience hooked. "At first there's a problem, and then everything gets fixed, then suddenly things start falling apart again, and so on," he said. Wallach agrees. "It's the perfect formula for a three act play," Wallach said. "It's a screwball comedy—everything goes perfectly wrong and everything becomes perfectly right."

A challenge for viewers may be understanding the culture of the 1940s, according to Shelby. "There are some cultural references we don't get now," Shelby said. "If the [performers] mentioned Zasu Pitts, then the audience back then would laugh and get the reference, just like how the audience would react if the play mentioned Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie."

The cast had to learn about the culture and life of the 1940s. "We had a two-hour long presentation of a lecture of the times," Lalonde said. Reitman spent a good amount of time researching the zeitgeist of the 1940s including fashion, food, sayings and customs.

The lighthearted nature of "The

Man Who Came to Dinner" sharply contrasts with last year's production of "The Visit," which according to Lalonde, "was very solemn and serious." Although "The Visit" was dark and expressed the faults of human nature, "The Man who Came to Dinner" was originally created to be a temporary relief from troubled times. "It let people forget how [hard life was] with the war building up and so on," Reitman said. "It's meant to be very uplifting."

Shelby and English teacher Jesse Hawkins chose the play, as they do every year. "It's a brilliant piece because it transports the audience to another time," Shelby said. "The takeaway message [is] to just relax." He chose the play in part because of its well-written structure. "It's a really well-crafted piece of dramatic literature," Shelby said. "There's lots of wit going on. I love the pacing and the writing of it."

A main aspect of the play that Shelby emphasizes is its distinctive flow. "The dialogue is crisp and funny and the structure is quite delightful," Shelby said. "If we hit the rhythm, the audience will just come along with it."

The play requires suspension of disbelief, a technique in which there are unrealistic aspects of a work but the audience overlooks the question-

able elements and suspends their reasoning for the sake of the story.

Another appeal of the work is the characters' connections to prominent figures of the 1940s. "Characters are so obviously based on famous people of the time," Reitman said. "The audience feels connected to the rich and famous." For example, Sheridan Whiteside is based upon Alexander Woollcott, a critic and commentator for *The New Yorker*. Part of the fun is the parody of well-known people of the time period, much along the lines of today's *Saturday Night Live*. "[Almost] everybody gets made fun of," Shelby said. The play pokes fun at Middle America.

Reitman read a quote in *Time* magazine about a 1930s actor on which one of the characters is based. "It described him as having 'cheek with chic and pose with poise,' and I thought that [the quote] described the play well," Reitman said.

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Left: Senior Daniel Wallach looks off into the distance while sitting in a wheelchair. Middle: Seniors Leilani Graham, Josh Kelly, Daniel Wallach and Matt Mallory from left to right) engage in conversation. Right: Josh Kelly waits patiently as his character relaxes during a scene in the play.