

'The Arabian Nights' combines comedy, drama

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NEWS EDITOR

Set against the backdrop of Baghdad in A.D. 700, Mary Zimmerman's play "The Arabian Nights" depicts the story of King Shahryar, who kills his wife after he finds out that she cheated on him. Betrayed and murderous, he decides to marry a virgin girl every

night, make love to her and then kill her. However, his newest bride, the clever and beautiful Scheherazade, tells him a different story every night

in order to keep him interested and avoid her death. Shahryar becomes so interested and invested in these tales that he decides not to kill her and allows her to continue her story telling.

For its annual fall production, the theater department has chosen to embark on the gripping journey of Shahryar and Scheherazade. This play is ensemble-based; all 18 cast members are on stage for the whole play. They each play three

to five characters and bring the stories Scheherazade narrates to life. According to student director junior Holly Wright, this year's play will call on the audience to use their own imaginations. "Gunn has never put on a production quite like 'The Arabian Nights,'" Wright said. "This play, unlike the previous ones Gunn has done, is up for much more interpretation. It's also very emotional."

A unique and challenging aspect of this play is the combination of many different smaller stories connected with the overall story of Shahryar and Scheherazade's relationship. "We're knitting together this progression of

stories so that [the play] is one production," Director Jim Shelby said. "It shouldn't feel disjointed like a bunch of little stories. It needs to flow from one story to another. By the end, the audience should have a cohesive feeling about it." The play will also feature music from drums and woodwind instruments, singing and dancing.

The inspiration for this year's play comes from Shelby's love for Zimmerman's works. After he saw

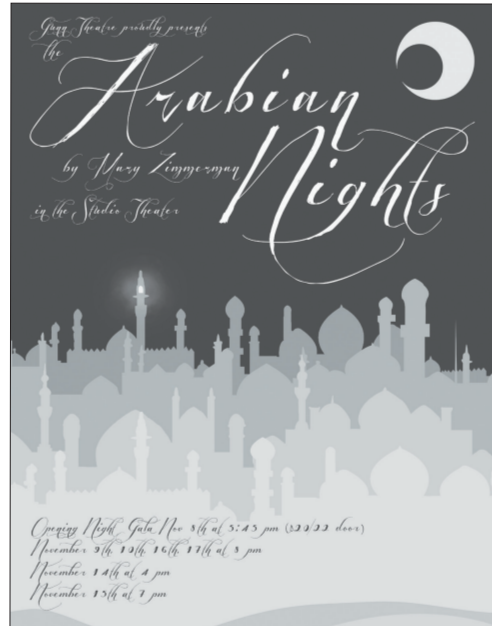
a performance of the play three years ago, he knew that one day he would direct a production of it.

According to both Shelby and Wright, the cast is making progress in unifying all the different aspects of the play. Since Shelby picked the cast based on character flexibility, cohesiveness with the other actors and the need to tell a story, the actors work hard to maximize these traits in the play and during the rehearsals. During their daily rehearsals, they participate in various technical exercises to build their characters and balance the activity of 18 people on stage. "Everyone comes to rehearsal everyday with something new and with great energy," senior Eugene Fry, who plays Shahryar, said. "We're able to feed off of each other. When it comes time for opening night, [the play is] going to be fantastic."

Shelby also hopes that the play will help the audience members reflect on the city of Baghdad in the play versus the present-day one one hears of in the news. "[The play's characters] keep saying that Baghdad is a city of dreams and poets, but now Baghdad, as we talk about the Iraq War, represents something so different," Shelby said. "Hopefully the audience gets a sense of historical perspective."

The compelling story line and rich setting of "The Arabian Nights" give the audience members a number of reasons to look forward to it. "There's so much people can take from it," senior

Andrea Allen, who plays Scheherazade, said. "You can go just to hear a bunch of great stories, or you can go to watch how complex it is. There's a lot of metaphor in it. It's funny and dramatic."



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