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Muse project gives student director opportunity to lead

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Ouachita's Department of Theatre Arts will present "The Old Man and the Old Moon" as its annual Muse Project on Feb. 25-March 1.

The department produces a full-length, student-directed production each spring. Junior theatre majors who are interested in directing the Muse Project during their senior year submit their production ideas a year in advance, along with a detailed report about it. The theatre faculty deliberate and then select the director from the pool of applicants.

Molly Kennedy, a senior musical theatre major from Melissa, Texas, is the director of "The Old Man and the Old Moon." The production marks her directorial debut.

Kennedy's passion for educational theatre influenced her decision to apply to direct this year's Muse Project. After graduation, she plans to teach theatre. Having never directed before, Kennedy thought that the Muse Project would be a great jumping off point before getting out into the real world.

"The Old Man and the Old Moon" by Pignen Theatre Co. is a musical tale about an old man whose duty is to fill the moon with liquid light. The moon serves as a lantern, and if it is not kept filled, bad things will happen to the world. When the old man's wife disappears, he is forced to abandon his job and search for her, all while dealing with the consequences of living in a moonless world.

"It's not just his story, but it's also kind of a parable about how the moon got its phases," Kennedy said.

Kennedy saw a 40-minute adaptation of the show performed at a One Act Festival in 2019, and she fell in love with it. She chose the show for Muse due to her love of whimsical theatre and the low budget. For Kennedy, the musical represents the magic of storytelling.

"The illusion is never hidden. We have shadow puppetry and all kinds of things, and the puppeteers are always seen," Kennedy said. "There is something so magical about that. I think it ties us back to things like playing pretend as a kid."

At first, Kennedy was intimidated by directing a full-length production. Several aspects of the show are so outlandish that she had to be innovative to figure out how to depict things like a ship catching on fire and a volcanic eruption onstage.

"That's really what the show is about: communicating the power of love and adventure."

- Molly Kennedy

Despite her apprehension, Kennedy faced the challenge head-on with her cast and crew by her side. Hearing the music and seeing the cast bring the show to life in the first few weeks of rehearsals provided Kennedy with the reassurance she needed, and she overcame her initial fear. As for masks and social distancing, the cast rose to the challenge and has not been hindered by these adjustments.

Due to the collaborative nature of the show, it all came together and made Kennedy proud of their work.

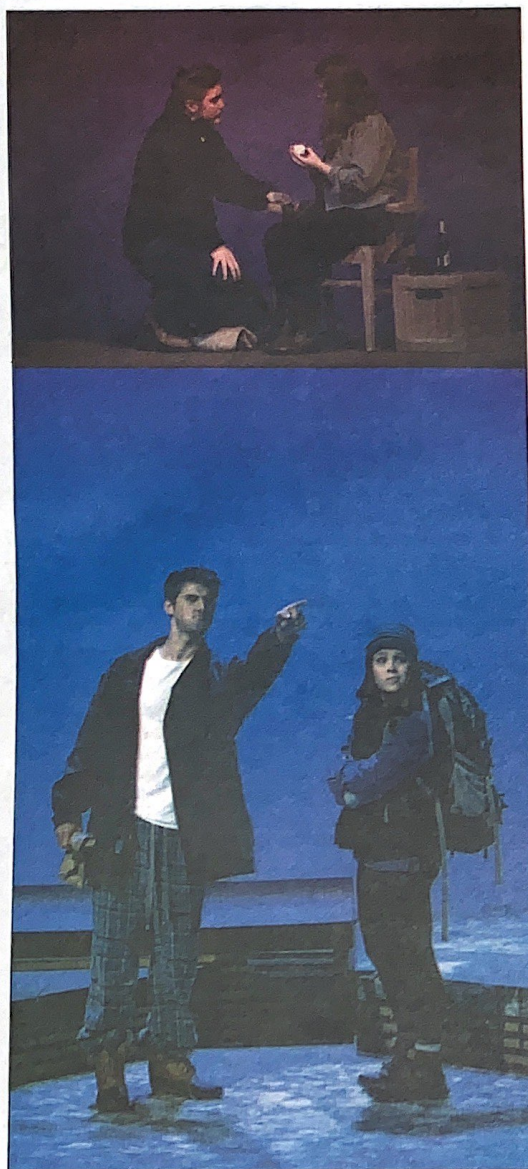
Overall, the Muse Project serves an important educational purpose in the theatre department. Muse is unique because it provides an opportunity for theatre students to apply what they are learning and step up to the responsibility of producing a show without professors and faculty telling them what to do every step of the way. The costume, lighting and set designers are all students learning how to perfect their crafts while expressing their creativity.

"I would say that having the Muse Project is, I think, the most beneficial thing that Ouachita can provide for the theatre students," Kennedy said. "The faculty is there to help us when we get stuck, but for the most part, the responsibility falls on the students, and it's the most practical application of the things that we're learning in class."

"The Old Man and The Old Moon" has something for every audience member. Audiences can expect an hour and a half adventure. It is a heartwarming story with music, puppetry, cool effects and lighting, and Kennedy believes the show will inspire viewers to follow the call of adventure in their own lives.

"That's really what the show is about: communicating the power of love and adventure," Kennedy said. "Expect 90 minutes of the most fun you could have onstage."

All in-person tickets are sold out, but livestream tickets can still be purchased online at www.obu.edu/boxoffice. As always, current Ouachita students are eligible for one free ticket to the performance by presenting their student ID.



Top photo: Students Cross Brandon and Molly Kennedy perform a scene from "Al-most, Maine" during last year's Muse project. Bottom photo: Students Carlin Campbell and Kennedy rehearse. This production was composed of nine vignettes and the performance ran during Valentine's Day weekend. (photos by Justin Trostle)