

Arts & Entertainment

Tapping Into Our Hearts: Dance at Meredith

By Olivia Slack, Staff Writer

From Nov. 16 to 18, Meredith Dance Theatre (MDT) and the Meredith Jazz and Tap Company (MJTC) held their fall shows. These four performances culminated in the Sunday night gala, which featured select pieces from each company that were chosen throughout the weekend.

I attended the Sunday night gala show on Nov. 18 and thoroughly enjoyed it. I found the choreography to be innovative and often emotional. From all

of the choreographers and dancers, there was nuance in both the structure and individual movement of the dances. In most if not all the dances, there were complex and clearly thought-out intricacies in terms of shape and pattern. Rarely were there matching lines of dancers with completely synced movements; choreographers instead opted to add interest through the use of facing and direction changes. Solos and differentiation between dancers were also frequently used,

and made for choreography that was visually complex and interesting.

Although there was no overarching story consistent with all the pieces, I found each individual dance to have enough emotional material that I felt impacted as a viewer. Many of the dances I interpreted to have themes of strength, sisterhood and friendship, which is fitting for students at Meredith. The finale pieces especially, for both MDT and MJTC, were focused strongly on our strength as women

and on drawing on each other's strength to find our own. Additionally, while emotional, the dances left some room for interpretation for the audience members, allowing us to mirror our own experiences and emotions onto the performances and find our own personal deeper meaning.

Overall, the fall performances for MDT and MJTC were filled with impressive choreography and loads of dance talent, and I left feeling thoroughly impressed with the talent at Meredith.

She Kills Monsters Review

By Caroline Garrett, A & E Editor

During the weekend of Nov. 8-11, the Meredith Ensemble Theater performed *She Kills Monsters*, a Dungeons and Dragons-themed production written by playwright Qui Nguyen. The play tells the story of Agnes Evans and her younger sister Tilly who died in a tragic car accident at the beginning of the play. Tilly, an accomplished teenage "nerd," created her own world by writing a complex D & D game. Agnes, upon finding the game's rules amongst Tilly's things, recruits her sister's Dungeons and Dragons friends to help her complete the quest. The play weaves together comedic relief as Agnes progresses through the game, all the while learning more about her sister and processing her grief. The play's themes grapple with the complexities of identity and tackle issues such as homophobia; however, sexuality and disability are portrayed without coming across as tropes or replacing the story's central focus. Playwright Nguyen's message is one

of not being afraid to be yourself and the importance of having a place to fit in. According to Anna Phillips, '22, the production's assistant director, "the play's all about family...the story in its entirety is about the bond between two sisters as Agnes tries so desperately to discover who her sister truly was."

Leslie Castro '19, who played Tilly, describes *She Kills Monsters* as the "pièce de résistance" of her career as a theatre major at Meredith College. As someone who identifies with the character, she felt like she could finally act in the way that her theatre classes had encouraged: by "liv[ing] truthfully in a set of imaginary circumstances." "Acting Tilly's story... was painting a truth that I and so many others have lived." For many, theater becomes a second home and acting a way of self-expression that allows for the creation and further exploration of one's own narrative in real life, and in *She Kills Monsters*.

She Kills Monsters was performed in the Studio Theater of Jones Auditorium, a small, intimate space which solidifies and enhances the theme of family by allowing the audience to feel closer to the actors than with a traditional auditorium setup. The cohesiveness of the cast and crew with one another was also evident. Phillips and Castro discussed the long hours spent navigating the logistics of the show beyond the usual blocking and rehearsing of lines. The play included dance choreography, fight scenes, and life-sized puppets; and many students dedicated their free time to costume sewing and set design. The collaborative efforts paid off in spectacular performances that allowed everyone involved to showcase their talents.

I attended the final performance and was able to see just how hard everyone had worked, how proud the cast and crew were of their successes,

and how sad everyone was to leave the show behind as they took their final bows. While initially skeptical of how I could relate, having little knowledge of the inner workings of D & D, I felt quickly drawn into New Landia, the world of Tilly's creation, and spent my afternoon laughing, crying, and finding pieces of myself in the characters' stories. "That's the funny thing about *She Kills Monsters*," Castro said. "You don't expect a play about the fantasy game Dungeons & Dragons to so closely resemble life." She went on to explain, "In the weeks since the show I've received so much support from my fellow Angels...it was a pleasant surprise to have a classmate...tell me they loved the play and unexpectedly connected with it." Through several well-executed performances, Meredith Ensemble Theater spread a message of love, acceptance, belonging, and the encouragement to live your truth.

Fantastic Beasts: A Fantastic Sequel?

By Olivia Slack, Staff Writer

Harry Potter fans worldwide have been waiting for two years in anticipation of the second movie in the *Fantastic Beasts* franchise, *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*. A self-proclaimed Harry Potter nerd myself, I went to see *Crimes of Grindelwald* the night it came out in theaters. As someone who absolutely loved *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, the first film in the series which came out in 2016, I had high expectations for *Crimes of Grindelwald*. I'd like to say it measured up, but the reality is that it just did not. This movie felt far too close to a remake of the original Harry Potter films in my opinion, with the main villain, Grindelwald, becoming increasingly similar to Voldemort as the storyline moved forward. That was the main issue I had with the movie itself: it just didn't feel original. Although J.K. Rowling wrote the screenplay and it is based on her own world, in many ways the movie resembled a well-done fanfiction, with a plotline tweaked just slightly enough to be passed off as original, and characters haphazardly thrown into the mix just for fans who wanted to see well-loved characters prior

to the original series. However, the characters' actual inclusion in this movie often felt forced.

A prime example of this was in the case of Newt Scamander, the supposed main character of *Crimes of Grindelwald* and undoubtedly the star of the first movie. Newt in the first *Fantastic Beasts* movie was an excellently written, well-rounded character who had an important and justifiable role in the storyline. However, in this second movie, the necessity of his presence was far less obvious. I questioned the need for his involvement in the defeat of Grindelwald for more than a few reasons, and those excuses that were given seemed contrived. Additionally, the inclusion of Newt's love for the titular "fantastic beasts" seemed included only for the enjoyment of the fans and offered no real importance to the plotline, with the creatures that were included having far less importance than they did in the first movie.

On the positive side, some of the new characters included in the movie, despite their actual presence feeling a bit forced, had intriguing backstories and personalities. I'll

avoid naming any specific names in case of spoilers, but one character in particular who is also present in the main Harry Potter series has me excited for the future *Fantastic Beasts* films especially. I hope that future

films in the series are able to explore these characters' personalities and motives a bit better than *Crimes of Grindelwald* did, and if that happens, they will be truly enjoyable movies that will be great additions to the Harry Potter universe.



Comic by Micah Clark, Cartoonist