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Gaieties lights up MemAud

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This year's production of Gaieties promises classic Cal-jabs and appearances by Dean Julie Lythcott-Haims, President John Hennessy, and Dean Richard Shaw. The show opens tonight at 8 p.m.

Gaieties, Stanford's annual Big Game Week theatrical tradition, will debut tonight at Memorial Auditorium. "Herbert Hoover and the Order of the Bearclaw," put on by the Ram's Head Theatrical Society, boasts song and dance, takes on world politics and discusses what it means to be a Stanford student, all with Gaieties' signature risque antics. While the show undoubtedly will not be everyone's cup of tea, Gaieties is for the most part a crowd-pleaser that shouldn't be missed.

"Order of the Bearclaw" takes a group of Stanford frosh through an adventure to save Stanford from the claws of a Machiavellian-yet-inane band of Cal students. Paul, a Cardinal who has lived on campus far longer than any grad student to date, leads the Stanford team. Accompanying him are Molly, a Type A premed, Tucker, a recently-out gay frosh, and Paul's wealthy and gorgeous ex-girlfriend, Kitty.

Yet again, Cal has a plan to bring forth Stanford's ruination. Paul and company must find a way to stop the Cal squad from bringing Stanford down.

With a cast of 28 actors — and dozens more students involved in production — "Order of the Bearclaw" delivers in a way that performances in years past have not. The final versions of the song and dance numbers are more polished than in previous years. Past Gaieties left many with the idea that the show's actors and dancers did not do either numbers particularly well.

Although the show has no Nathan Lanes or Sandra Bernhardt, this year's performers up the ante. They demonstrate that not only can they memorize lines and rudimentary dance routines, but they can also do it in a way that is convincing. Performers simply deliver a more natural performance than in years past.

"This year's cast is extremely talented," said Stefan Vraspir '09, the show's producer. "They can sing and dance, which allows for Gaieties to become more of a legitimate product. People dismissed Gaieties in the past because cast members were perhaps not particularly good at one or the other. But this year's cast is just very talented and can do away with that idea."

Earlier in the year, the submission of the Gaieties script to administration officials made headlines. Some students questioned whether the administration should meddle with a student-run production. If the

administrative revisions caused any changes to the script, it is indiscernible.

According to Olivia Harewood '09, veteran and show director, the affair was blown out of proportion.

“We met with other members of the Stanford community, not just with the administration,” she said. “By talking to members of the Stanford community, we were able to get points of view from outside the production. If anything, these meetings helped to better the show.”

The performance, still undergoing technical tweaks at the time of Monday’s preview, went by without major glitches. But attendees might want to grab a libretto, as the singing is sometimes overpowered by the show’s own orchestra. Some of the best jokes in the show lay within the songs.

Audience members should be careful to focus on specific parts of the stage during some of the show’s spoken portions. At times, multiple mini-stories take place in different parts of the stage. Some of the side action is connected to the main plot, while the rest pokes fun at other aspects of life as a college student in general. As entertaining as the mini-stories are, trying to focus on the entire stage may cause one to lose track of the main storyline. Expect cameos by Dean Julie Lythcott-Haims, President John Hennessy, and Dean Richard Shaw.

“Order of the Bearclaw” is definitely not as Harry Potter-ish as the title would suggest. However, though there might not be any flying brooms, the talented cast does conjure up a magical performance.

“Herbert Hoover and the Order of the Bearclaw” rolls into its three-day engagement at Memorial Auditorium beginning tonight at 8 p.m.



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