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## “Cal-fused” rails on Stanford, but all in the name of love

### [Molly Thomas](#)

 November 21st, 2008 by Molly Thomas

As predicted, Ram’s Head’s production of *Gaieties* is a two-hour theatrical extravaganza of Cal-bashing, gratuitous nudity, sex jokes, student group mockery, pelvic thrusts and jazz hands. Improbably and unexpectedly, however, this year’s show has actual theatrical merit. Due to a solid and talented cast, excellent direction and a nugget of sincerity hiding beneath the lovable and traditional sleaze, “Dazed and Calfused” transcends its role as a Big Game week rally event to present an ultimately touching picture of why we love our school.

This is not to imply that the usual nasties of *Gaieties* are missing. The show indiscriminately bashes on Cal, Harvard Law, France and women. When challenged by his female friend, one male character zings, “At least I didn’t need a constitutional amendment to vote!” The writers admirably fulfill their traditional duty of mocking student groups, and I was personally amused by the murder of a nosy Stanford Daily reporter within the first three minutes of the show. During a group LSD trip, no fewer than four fully nude actors, one of whom is wearing a dinosaur mask, runs through the scene. Every scene is rife with sexual misconduct of every possible gender combination and fetish preference, including some bizarre carrot/vegetable peeler role-play. *Gaieties* is not high art; the script is always willing to abandon logic to fit in a well-played sexual pun.

This year’s *Gaieties*, however, has a few stellar components that pull the show out of its typical morass of sexual confusion. Largely due to the script and junior Nick DeWilde’s direction, this show has greater focus and clarity than previous years. Rather than filling up the stage with distracting gags, pulling focus from the actors and the plot, DeWilde keeps the action centralized around the main characters — ensemble members enter and exit for their momentary roles, but each scene advances the plot and the relationships between the characters.

Although the show has significant flaws, these are largely technical. Wednesday night there were several obvious glitches such as miscalled lighting cues and major set failures. The sound was inconsistent, and I could rarely hear the lyrics of the songs. Although their cameo appearances were charming and popular with the crowd, both Dean Julie and President Hennessy forgot to hold for the laughter of the crowd, so much of their amusing dialogue was lost. A notable exception to the lackluster technical elements was the excellent lighting design, a key element in any spectacle musical.

The general fun and good feeling of *Gaieties* easily smooths over these shortcomings, especially in the show’s rare moments of sincerity. In one moment, the male protagonist Josh steps forward into a cheesy spotlight to simply and earnestly argue that he has to save Stanford because it is the first place he’s ever wanted to call home. The moment of honesty departs as quickly as the confidence of a freshman in Chem. 35, but those seconds encapsulate “Dazed and Calfused” and DeWilde’s intent: Stanford is our home, not

just an institution that gives out degrees.

Our suggestions to maximize your Gaieties experience: Read the lyrics printed in the program before the show in order to understand what they’re saying, come dressed in full rally gear or at least in a Stanford logo or three and sit with your student group of choice so that you can all cheer when the show ruthlessly attacks you. Enjoy, and beat Cal!



[Big Game](#), [Dazed and Cal-fused](#), [Gaieties](#)



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## Behind the scenes of Gaieties

### [E. Blair Laing](#)

 November 14th, 2008 by E. Blair Laing

If you were to accidentally wander into a Gaieties rehearsal in Manzanita dining, you might not even realize that it was anything unusual.

Dressed in street clothes and hanging around tables in groups, laughing, the cast of this year's Gaieties looks like any other group of students. But as soon as they start warming up, it's pretty clear that the cast of Gaieties is anything but normal.

They begin by singing "Seasons of Love" around the piano, and then it quickly devolves. Their warm-ups involve singing phrases such as "I love Obama," "fondle me" and "I can't sing, but I'll fuck your mom." And they wrap it up with a version of "Doe a Deer" that is about beer and starts something like "Dough, the stuff I buy beer with. Ray, the guy I buy beer from. Me, the one I buy beer for. Far, a long way to the store."

And the debauchery just continues. While the rehearsal by its nature is entertaining and inappropriate, the cast keeps this up during off moments, constantly cracking inappropriate jokes in relation to lines from the script.

### **A longstanding tradition**

Gaieties, a Stanford tradition going back to 1911, is here again in full hilarity with this year's show, "Dazed and Calfused." One of the biggest productions put on by Ram's Head, Gaieties is a comedic musical celebrating the Stanford-Cal rivalry every year during Big Game Week.

While this student-written, student-directed play has earned its reputation as being over-the-top, sexually inappropriate and politically incorrect, it is also a genuine dramatic production, and requires months of work to produce — and not just from the cast members, but also from the dozens of backstage technical staff.

"I think this show is the first time, to me, that Gaieties has felt like a legitimate show," said Director Nick DeWilde '10. "My big thing this year is that there is something at stake. I think Gaieties is about more than just pumping you up for Big Game. It's about reminding you what a phenomenal school you go to."

DeWilde, who is directing this year after two years on cast, has been working hard to promote his vision of what Gaieties should be.

"What art is, is being able to take a community and show it to itself," he said. "You take Stanford and you show it to itself. And you show it farcically, but if you don't have truth in there, then you're not doing it justice. And this year there is a lot of truth."

In general, all of the cast and staff involved feel that this year's show is particularly special, and that the production has evolved over the past few years.

Taylor Ray '10, a three-year veteran cast member, and a member of this year's writing team, feels that the plot and cast for 2008 are truly phenomenal.

"I think that this is probably the best script that I've seen Gaieties have," Ray said. "And it is by far one of the most talented casts. Plus, the people are just really crazy and fun, which makes it better."

Jason Richman '09, the current head of Ram's Head and the producer of Gaieties in 2006, feels that show has evolved over the years.

"I think you've really seen a progression in the show quality as a whole," Richman said. "The talent is better. I think Gaieties was written off a lot as being just about sex. It's become a lot more about the music, the comedy, the comedic timing of the actors."

### **Production begins**

This year in particular, Gaieties has even more to offer. But it hasn't been easy.

"I think the script is fantastic," Richman said. "I think it's irreverent, I think it's very witty and I think the plot is fantastic, which adds to the overall appeal."

Of course, the script didn't happen overnight. Head writer Brett Hammond '08 began writing the script last spring, along with a team of writing staff. Often meeting in the Casa Italiana lounge, the writers began by simply throwing out funny ideas, and then sifting through the material to craft the show.

"Brett was our head writer," Ray said. "But everyone sort of shared the task of writing the scenes and stuff."

With a draft in hand, the writers enlisted Charlton Gholson '08, Hammond's roommate, to compose the music for the play.

"They do the script first, without the songs," Gholson said. "Then they come to me and they say we want this kind of song, or we want this to happen in a song, things like that, general guidelines. I give them my initial thoughts and write up the lyrics first. If they don't like them, they send it back, and we keep working."

This process of revising the script and score takes months, and isn't actually finished until right before the show is cast.

"The composing went on for most of the summer, and I've been finishing it all the last couple months," Gholson said.

"It's been about six months that we've been working on this play," Ray said. "There was a lot of revision going on this summer, we had to make it tighter, shorter. It wasn't finalized and printed until right before we had our read-through with the cast."

### **Making it their own**

But the script is never completely set in stone. Cast members are encouraged to play with the characters and their lines. And one of the famous Gaieties traditions, the crosses, are not scripted at all.

“The crosses are a Gaieties tradition where people who aren’t in the scene just randomly cross and do something distracting,” explained sophomore cast member Phillip Bowen.

Cast members are given free reign to make up crosses in the appropriate scenes, and the best are run. Crosses are known for being notoriously ridiculous and witty.

“I think that a lot of the things going on in the background are the funniest things,” Richman said.

Because the cast is able to participate in reworking parts of the script, every night’s show tends to be a little different, and the closing night is usually wilder, with more nudity, than the earlier nights.

“The cast is always collaborating,” Ray said. “There is so much going on that isn’t even in the script, so the show isn’t really finalized until it gets on stage in MemAud. Every night is different from the last one.”

Cast members are also given some free reign when it comes to costumes. The costumes staff determines what type of costume should be worn in each scene, and the cast members are responsible for finding the outfits themselves.

### **Behind the scenes**

Not everyone who is involved with the show chooses to prance across the stage or strip down for the audience. And the behind-the-scenes crew is just as crucial a part of the production as the cast.

As stage manager, Monica Miklas ‘09, who also writes for The Daily, is involved in all the backstage aspects of the show.

“My job is basically to coordinate any interactions between the cast and the staff and technical team,” Miklas said. “I go to rehearsals to ensure that things are progressing at the right pace and getting done, so that the creative staff can advance their vision of the show.”

Miklas was hired on as stage manager in the spring, and was involved in the fall with casting. During the show, she will be sitting with the light board operator, giving him lighting queues as the play progresses.

“In musicals especially there is so much that goes on behind the scenes,” Miklas said. “There are so many people giving input behind the scenes that make things run that you kind of forget it, and focus on the actors. A creative staff is able to work well because they have a technical staff backing them up — and vice-versa. Without a creative staff, you’d have nothing.”

In addition to the stage managers and costumes staff, there is also a technical staff and props staff. The props staff is responsible for determining what props will be necessary in each scene and scrounging up everything they can. What they can’t find, they buy or build.

“We went through the script,” said Fontaine Foxworth ‘11, props co-chair, “and made a list of all the props for each scene. Since then we’ve been spending time gathering stuff from our friends, and we went shopping to get some stuff. For other things, there is an actual tech staff that does the actual building.”

### **Well worth the effort**

While developing Gaieties from script to complete musical may take a lot of time and effort, from both the creative and technical aspects, it also creates a unique atmosphere and experience that few involved would be willing to give up.

“Gaieties takes up a lot of time, but you have so much fun with the people you’re with that you become a really tight-knit family,” said three-year cast member Kit Garton ‘10. “It doesn’t feel like work. Without Gaieties, I don’t know what I’d do with all of my time.”

Garton’s sentiments were echoed by the rest of the cast, and not just the veterans. Freshman Rachel Lindee feels that her Gaieties experience has absolutely transformed her first quarter here at Stanford.

“Gaieties has been absolutely amazing,” Lindee said. “I just feel so lucky to be in the show and to have met all these amazing people. My quarter has been revolutionized into seven weeks of crazy fun, crazy people and just general craziness. I can’t put to words, basically, how amazing and incredible this experience has been.”

Another freshman, Harry Spitzer, who plays one of the leads, feels similarly about his experience.

“Being in Gaieties is an honor,” Spitzer said. “It’s a lot of fun. It took a little adjusting to get used to the crowd; it was kind of a shock at first. A little bit insane.”

Spitzer is living in Okada this year, which he described as being really quiet, so Gaieties has given him something a little wilder to look forward to.

“To have this as an alternative has been really awesome,” Spitzer said. “It’s awesome to have this community starting out my freshman year. Being part of such a huge Stanford tradition is awesome. I feel like I’ve been reborn. And I’m a little nervous, but I’m really excited, especially for freshman show night.”

DeWilde may spend more time stressing about the show than anyone else, but he feels it’s worth it because he’s been able to leave his own mark on the Gaieties tradition.

“It’s funny because [as director] you don’t spend as much time at rehearsal, but the time you’re out of rehearsal, you’re in meetings, or you’re worrying about the show,” he said. “The time that I do spend there is a little more stressful, but it’s hugely rewarding. It’s sort of an act of love. You do it because you want to leave your mark on the show; you do it because you have a vision about it.”

Ultimately, DeWilde hopes that the production this year will live up to his vision.

“It’s sometimes hard for people to understand why we spend so much time on this show because it’s so ridiculous,” DeWilde said. “But I’ve always held that it really matters. It matters that we do it, because it shows Stanford that we care enough to do it for this school. There’s a certain kind of people that go to Stanford, and they’re awesome. We should celebrate that.”

Gaieties will be playing at Memorial Auditorium, Nov. 19 through Nov. 21. Tickets are \$10 and available in White Plaza or on the Gaieties website, [www.DazedandCalfused.com](http://www.DazedandCalfused.com).