

Educational Experiences MENU

Abound in Stage Door Production

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The educational experience students receive as part of the cast and crew of an MSU Department of Theatre production often reaches beyond the stage and can involve many other departments, as was the case in the department's recent production of *Stage Door*.



Utilizing 1930s-style wardrobe and makeup techniques, Stage Door's actresses had glamour photos, reminiscent of the era, taken by Professor of Photography Peter Glendinning.

"If you have ever wondered what makes academic theatre different than any other form of theatre, this was a great example of the academic side," said Associate Professor of Acting Rob Roznowski, the play's director. "It was an educational experience for all involved, including me."

Roznowski, an award-winning actor, author, director, educator, and playwright, said the cooperative collaboration that went into the production of the play between the College of Arts & Letters departments and other MSU colleges and centers was incredible.

Set in New York City in the late 1930s, *Stage Door* tells the story of several would-be actresses who live together in a boarding house.

To set the situation of the female characters within a larger context, Lisa Fine, then Co-Director of the MSU Center for Gender in Global Context (GenCen) and Professor of History, held a class for the cast that was devoted to discussing the historical background related to women and women's issues during the 1930s. Fine also participated in a talk-back at the end of one of the performances.

Cast members were assigned actors from the 1930s to research for inspiration. Roznowski said it was exciting to see contemporary college students present on the work of top character actors such as Beulah Bondi, Percy Kilbride, and others.

Professor of Photography Peter Glendinning, whose mother lived in the Rehearsal Club, the inspirational locale for the play, worked with the student female actors to recreate glamour photos reminiscent of the time. Using Glendinning's photos, students in College of Communication Arts and Sciences Assistant Professor Henry Brimmer's Advertising class created mock Broadway and Hollywood posters of the 1930s.

Karen Kangas-Preston, Senior Academic Specialist and Instructor of Costume Design and Technology in the Department of Theatre, trained the actresses on makeup and lined up gorgeous evening gowns to wear.

Other collaborators included Alison Dobbins, Associate Professor of Integrated Performance Media Design, Department of Theatre, who created and projected neon images of women onto the stage, adding striking elements to the set design, and Eric Boerman, Sound Designer and MSU senior Theatre major, who carefully selected music from the time period and matched a song to each of the play's characters. The songs were recorded to play during the show.

"Each of these elements expanded our understanding," Roznowski said, "so that for all involved, *Stage Door* proved to be an exceptional educational experience."

Banner photo by Karen Kangas-Preston.

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