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Student-led Rocky Horror Picture Show Continues Tradition

Liam Lawless, Staff Reporter

Family Weekend is an exciting time to be on campus at Seattle University, as loved ones visit their Redhawks from various corners of the world to experience and celebrate the school's community firsthand. Among several activities and events planned this year was Inigo Student Theatrical Productions production of "Rocky Horror Picture Show," a blooming autumn tradition for students and guests alike.

This is the third year (on campus) that Inigo Student Theatrical Productions, an entirely student-run organization, has performed the "Rocky Horror Picture Show." Full of extravagant costumes and dance numbers, this production is no small feat.

Katherine Stambaugh, a fourth-year psychology major, is the president of Inigo and director of this year's production. Since the production is at the beginning of the school year, she noted a quick turnaround time.

"Every time we do Rocky Horror, it's a super rushed process," Stambaugh said. "We had a whole year where this club did not do anything, so we did not have a lot of guidance this year."

The theater group has had a five-week turnaround to put the show together since the first week of school. Abby Roberston, third-year criminal justice student and Inigo's movement director, is starring as 'Columbia' in this year's show. Robertson said the team has put over 60 hours into the show.

After a year online, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the difficulties with the production process. All returning members from Inigo are third- and fourth-year students, many of whom had to assume board positions within the group to keep it alive.

"I was a first-year when COVID-19 hit," Robertson said. "Suddenly there was a whole bunch more responsibility for everyone."

Maintaining everyone's safety continued to be a priority after returning to in-person production. Yet, doing so imposed precautions that endangered the show. Stambaugh pushed for the leads to have clear face shields, rather than masks.

"We have to wear masks, and since it is a shadow cast, the whole show relies on lip-syncing," Stambaugh said. "We wanted to be as safe as possible."

In addition to mask mandates, Inigo requested that all audience members provide proof of vaccination upon entry. If anything, "Rocky Horror" is raunchy and crass enough to be the perfect return to live production in the face of these precautions.



Jake Nelson

Brooke Friedel as the criminologists.

"[The emcee] is able to call people out," Robertson said, speaking about Abby Manicni's crucial role in the production. "[They] have an excuse to be rude, so there is no problem with them cussing people out when they don't have their mask on."

"Rocky Horror" demands more precaution from the crew when following COVID-19 guidelines: the film contains heavily sexual and violent themes, and overtly discusses many difficult topics along those lines. Creating a safe environment for Inigo's crew was essential to the production.

"There are multiple situations where someone is bearing a lot of skin and another cast member has to ask 'Is it okay if I touch you?'" Stambaugh said. "So we did some intimacy training specifically for parts of ['Rocky Horror']."

Inigo's entire crew put their hearts into this production, for the audience and themselves.

"One of the best things about doing the show was how comfortable it really made people with themselves and their body," said Robertson. "It's been great for everyone's confidence."

More than anything, preparing the show has solidified the relationships between cast members.

"People are there to catch you," Robertson said.

Grace Rosebrook, a fourth-year student who took center stage as 'Dr. Frank N. Furter,' is participating in Inigo's production for the first time. For many, leading the rest of the lingerie-clad crew through suggestive dances and explicit scenes may appear far too daunting and revealing. However, "Rocky Horror" provides an encouraging and affirming environment for everyone involved.

"[In the] community of people who do Rocky, there's this atmosphere of acceptance and excitement and fun," Rosebrook said. "It has always been a no-judgement zone."

The community behind "Rocky Horror" understands the significance underlying the production and wants to extend that embrace of openness, positivity and solidarity to all those who come and watch.

"['Rocky Horror'] is so important," Stambaugh said. "It's so much representation and it means so much to a lot of people, so I'm really happy we're doing it."

Representation matters for more than the performers. Masa Sawaf, a fourth-year sociology student, brought their younger brother to the show during his visit to Seattle.

"It was fun, especially seeing as he is cishet and Rocky is queer culture," they said. "Although he didn't understand it, he thought it was funny and enjoyed it, and that's all I care about. Getting to introduce people you love to other aspects of your identity is great."

Yasan, a second-year student at San Francisco State University, shared their sibling's excitement.

"It was fun seeing people get all excited and dressed up for the show," Yasan said.

Richie Merrell, another fourth-year student at Seattle U, also attended the show.

"It was good to be back in to see the show after COVID-19," Merrell said. "This production did a great job having all the best bits from years past with its own flare due to some pandemic precautions that honestly added to the whole experience."

The show left the audience and the crew buzzing with excitement and positivity.

No production of "Rocky Horror" is perfect—especially with numerous COVID-19 guidelines to follow—but Inigo certainly put on a memorable one.

"Things went wrong, things went really right. It was all just a blast," Rosebrook said after the midnight showing on Friday. "Covid didn't stop us; if anything [masks] made the show a little better."

COVID-19 guidelines permitting, Inigo will be bringing more livelihood into the theater with their spring musical.

