

Dead Man's Cell Phone rings true

by Auriana Cook



Photo by Nick Hadley

For some students, the idea of attending a school play might evoke memories of the stuffy period dramas or Shakespeare plays they slept through in high school. But this term's mainstage production is refreshingly different: "Dead Man's Cell Phone," by contemporary playwright Sarah Ruhl, is a modern manifesto on how technology has changed our lives. It combines aspects of comedy and fantasy, as well as themes of mortality.

Sam Levi, Artist in Residence in the theater department and male lead in the play, gave a summary of "Dead Man's Cell Phone."

"It's a trippy play," said Levi. "It begins with a woman in a café trying to do some work, and this guy's cell phone keeps ringing and ringing and ringing. And she finally says, 'Excuse me, I'm trying to work' and it turns out that the guy is dead. She steals his cell phone and he's getting all these text messages and all these calls and she feels like he keeps on living through his phone."

Levi plays Gordon, the dead man. He compared Gordon to a sleazy car salesman. "He's a horrible, horrible, self-centered, cheating-on-his-wife, sort-of-taking-advantage-of-people human being," Levi said.

In contrast to Gordon is Jean, the female lead, portrayed by Jennifer Whitten. Whitten said that Jean is described as "nondescript and mousy and like she doesn't want to take up a lot of space ... she wants to make everybody happy."

Clayton Hiatt, who plays Dwight – a nerdy loser and Jean's love interest – discussed how recognizable the characters are. "Almost every character we see in this play, we kind of have in our own lives and this really mirrors that," said Hiatt.



Photo by Andrew Koczan



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The play is sure to deliver some visually stunning moments, including the "cell phone ballet," which Levi described. "It's not really a dance, so much, as it's just like this movement piece in the afterlife, and it's worth seeing for that alone. It's just really pretty, really transports you," he said.

For those who thrive on action, there's also a fight scene involving Whitten's character. She picked this as her favorite scene, adding that it's "fun for the audience and really fun for us, without hopefully anybody getting hurt. I have split open my knee a couple times now (laughs)."

Jim Eikrem, artistic director and theater instructor, spoke about the lengthy process of putting together this production. Eikrem's acting vision had to meld with the visions of Chris Whitten (lighting and scenic director) and Alva Bradford (costume designer).

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"You have all of these minds working together to create this production, and it all comes together in a very, very satisfying and often moving and thought provoking way," said Eikrem.

The commentary on technology makes the play relevant to students.

"It will make you think about how even though we are connected now, today, in 2014, we're more connected with the world than we've ever been. In some ways, that makes you even less connected," Levi said.

"Dead Man's Cell Phone" runs from Nov. 13 - 21. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 2:30 p.m. \$8 student tickets can be purchased at www.clackamas.edu/theatre. There is a "pay what you can" matinee on Friday, Nov. 21 at 10 a.m. Contains adult language and themes.

Top from left: 1.) Jennifer Whitten as Jean, Beth Dodge as Hermia, Stacy Gianopoulos as Mrs. Gottlieb, and Clayton Hiatt as Dwight relish gifts from the dearly departed. 2.) Sam Levi as Gordon and Jennifer Whitten watch the "Cell Phone Ballet". 3.) Jennifer Whitten talking on the "Dead Man's Cell Phone". 4.) Allison Andresen as Other woman/Stranger threatening to shoot. 5.) Sam Levi practicing lines for his monologue in Act II.



Photo by Nick Hadley