

Pacifica Tribune



Photo by Mark & Tracy Photography

From l to r, the three Heathers, Heather McNamara (Melissa Momboisse), Heather Chandler (Brigitte Losey) and Heather Duke (Lauren Arnold) – Westerberg High's reigning mean queens – never walk into a room when they can grind.

Happy little horror musical

By Jean Bartlett
Tribune Writer

Serial killing at a high school to get a seat at the top of the social hierarchy may not be your typical song and dance storyline, but if you're the musical version of the 1989 R-rated cult classic "Heathers," then you've got to be true to your school and sing out! (1989 is the US release.)

Not familiar with "Heathers" the movie? The dark comedy – dark being perhaps best explained as the shadow within a black hole – made stars out of Winona Ryder and Christian Slater. It presents a high school under the reign of three toxic teen queens all named Heather. It also presents: the trio's clueless followers; the representative bullied "every person;" a

cornucopia of empty-headed adults; a brainy, beautiful misfit walking the high-school-thin line of good versus desperate-to-be-cool behavior; and the mysterious, sexy newbie who smells like teen spirit but walks like American psycho.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the cult film classic, and "Heathers" is rated number 5 on Entertainment Weekly's "50 Best High School Movies" list. "Heathers: The Musical" with music, lyrics and book by Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy, hit the stage on the film's 25th anniversary and like its namesake already has a cult following among high schoolers, twenty-somethings and fans of the original on-screen "Heathers."

"Heathers: The Musical" is currently playing the mainstage of the Pacifica Spindrift Players. It is directed by Doug Greer, Louis Lagalante is the music director and it is choreographed by Marc Gonzalez. The rock musical comes with a content warning in the program, repeated here: "This production of 'Heathers: The Musical' contains adult language as well as discussions of and depictions of suicide, bullying, harassment, eating disorders, gun violence, murder, sexual assault, and homophobia. Parental discretion is strongly advised."

This warning is not to be taken lightly and one scene definitely has the audience squirming. However, for those who get the horror-and-comedy-go-hand-in-hand genre, they will find that not only are they laughing, but they are also tapping their toes, hanging on to the notes of talented singers, sometimes whistling over boy meets girl, and occasionally even bouncing their head to the music.

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While the musical's themes are "difficult and triggering," as one cast member so aptly put it at final bows, it leaves people talking and discussing. In addition, choreographer Marc Gonzalez worked brilliantly within the space of the small stage to create a real hoofers' dazzler, and Louis Lagalante's music direction is superb.

It is important to note that while on review night – Dress Rehearsal – the theater was packed with many folks in their twenties, it also had a quite a number of people who: stayed from beginning to end, were happy to do so, and age "50" was in their rearview mirror. One of them is quoted here.

"This is what life is," she said. "This is what high school is. We've all had the bullies and the bitches."



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Struggling-to-remain-nice Veronica Sawyer (Catherine Rieflin) falls for damaged anti-hero J.D. (Scott Scholes).

Delivering spunk and charm, with an inner ground swell of vixen and a sweet vocal, Catherine Rieflin is perfectly cast as the brainy, naïve heroine Veronica Sawyer. Scott Scholes is sexy, smart as killer good guy J.D. and what a pretty tenor. Brigitte Losey as Heather Chandler – the power behind the Heathers clique – has fantastic vocal chops and acting skills to match. Brava. Lauren Arnold as the second most rotten Heather, Heather Duke, is deliciously horrible with top of the line musical skills. Melissa Momboisse as the third Heather, Heather McNamara, does the impossible – makes you cheer for her in the end. Wow! Jamie Gussman's performance of the constantly picked-on Martha is spot-on and when she sang "Kindergarten Boyfriend," she held her audiences hearts in the palm of her beautiful vocal.

"Heather" movie fans be aware that the musical is less violent and even happily suggests/sings that there is hope after high school.

"Heathers: The Musical" plays weekends at PSP Theater, 1050 Crespi Drive, Pacifica, through April 28. Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. Sunday at 2 p.m. Box Office: 650-359-8002 or online at www.pacificaspindriftplayers.org. Tickets: \$30/adults, \$25 seniors and students. Contains very adult language and themes.

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