



The Sun Star

University of Alaska Fairbanks

Optimism, wonder, energy and tight asses: Speech and Debate pleases the masses

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“Speech and Debate” is a play written by Stephen Karem and performed by the UAF theater department, provoked both laughter and deep contemplation on Saturday night, Mar. 23 in the Salisbury Theater on campus.

The second of six shows over two weekends, this stage production chronicles life in a small town high school through the eyes of three students, and the many issues they experience while going through adolescence in a close minded society of adults who don’t listen to their needs or desires for expression.

The story follows the three main characters, Howie, played by theater student Thomas Petrie, Solomon played by fourth year theater and Biology student Sambit Misra, and Diwata played by sophomore Psychology and Theater student Nicole Cowans. The cast also includes UAF alumn, Rachel Blackwell, as a high school teacher and reporter for the Oregonian newspaper. Blackwell graduated in 2006 with a bachelor of arts degree and continued on to study for two years at the New School of Drama in New York City.

Solomon is an aspiring young journalist working to gather information for an article he’d like to write for the school paper, the Trojan, on the mayor’s alleged sexual relations with younger boys. Howie is young boy struggling to find friends and acceptance in a seemingly non existent gay community at his new high school, and Diwata is working to expand her hopeful career as an actress while also trying to overcome a recent abortion. All three students feel isolated and alone in their own ways. Through a series of events involving the new speech and debate club in their school, they eventually end up as close friends, united by their previous lives a social outcasts.

While the cast was small, the play was not lacking in any way and the size of the cast seemed to add even more to the play itself, making it seem more personal and allowing the audience to get to know each character better than if their were many more characters to keep track of.

“I absolutely loved working with Nicole, Rachel and Tom,” Misra said. “I’ve been in a lot of shows, but this has been by far one of my favorite to work on.”

The entire production was full of hilarious moments and touching realizations. The moment that elicited the loudest and most active response from the large audience was the scene where Howie, Diwata and Solomon are practicing their group interpretation after school. This scene included a sequined pilgrim costume, ribbons, pyrotechnics and equally creative and odd dance moves to George Michael’s “Freedom.” This had the audience in hysterical fits of laughter and applause.

What struck the deepest chord in many audience members was not necessarily the sensitive subject matter featured in the play, but the relationship the audience developed with the characters throughout the play. Not only did the audience feel the characters’ sadness as they experienced hurt and pain, but also their joy, exhilaration and hope. A strong connection was created between the characters and the audience that is rarely found in other stage productions.



UAF put on the show Speech and Debate last weekend. Photos courtesy of Todd Paris.