Man of La Mancha open in Geary Events Center

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The Tony-Award-winning musical “Man of La Mancha” closes Utah State University Eastern’s theatre season and “Year of the Arts” with productions from April 11-20 at 7:30 p.m. in the Geary Theatre. Best known for its principal song, “The Impossible Dream,” it features a 30-member student and community cast as well as an ensemble of musicians.

Adapted from Dale Wasserman’s non-musical 1959 teleplay, “I, Don Quixote,” tells the story of the mad knight (Quixote) as a play within a play, and performed by Miguel de Cervantes and his fellow prisoners as he awaits a hearing with the Spanish Inquisition.

Cervantes, aging and an utter failure as playwright, poet and tax collector, was thrown into a dungeon in Seville to await trial for an offense against the church. There he is dragged before a kangaroo court of his fellow prisoners, who plan to confiscate his few possessions—including the uncompleted manuscript of a novel, “Don Quixote.”

Seeking to save the manuscript, he proposes his defense in the form of a play. The court agrees, and Cervantes and his manservant don make-up and costumes, transforming themselves into Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

Quixote and Sancho take to the road in a quest to restore the age of chivalry, battle all evil and right all wrongs. The famous battle with the windmill follows, with Quixote blaming his defeat on his enemy, the Great Enchanter.

In a roadside inn—which Quixote insists is a castle—Aldonza, the inn’s serving girl and part-time prostitute, is propositioned by a gang of muleteers. Quixote sees her as the dream-ideal whom he will serve forever and insists her name is Dulcinea. Aldonza is confused and angered by Quixote’s refusal to see her as she is.

The padre and Dr. Carrasco arrive at the inn and are frustrated by Quixote’s lunatic logic. They are interrupted by the arrival of an itinerant barber and Quixote confiscates his shaving basin, believing it is the “Golden Helmet” of Mambrino.

Later Aldonza encounters Quixote in the courtyard where he is holding vigil, in preparation for being knighted by the innkeeper. She questions him on his seemingly irrational ways, and Quixote answers her with a statement of his credo, The Impossible Dream. Aldonza catches the fever of Quixote’s idealism but, attempting to put it into practice, is cruelly beaten and ravaged by the muleteers.

“There is magic in this show in that one of the main ideas is to Dream that Impossible Dream,” says Corey Ewan, who directs the cast.

“Don Quixote says that his work is to bring some grace into the world. I like this sentiment because too many bring hurt, contention and hate into the world.”

“This show has been on the back burner for Eastern theatre faculty for years. This was finally the time to present it to round out the end of the Year of the Arts.

“I am always pleasantly and gratefully pleased with the talent in our community and campus. As this was a big show we reached out to the community and they didn’t disappoint,” he added.

The play has been on associate professor Brent Innes’ bucket list for 25 years. Innes, who designed and built the set, agreed with Ewan, this is the right time to perform the play. “We have the actors and talent to present the show and want to end the academic year with a big show.

Innes has theatre connections from throughout the West and transformed the Geary Theatre stage into a stone-carved dungeon. “I borrowed large barrels from Tuacahn and the rest Eastern had in its storage,” he said. Innes welded a moveable drawbridge staircase that reaches from the top of the theatre to the stage.

Playing Don Quixote, Ben Jones admits, “Being a part of a large production always has its benefits and trials. Technically, as both a student at the university and an employee, there’s a wonderful opportunity to enjoy what Dr. Ewan, Brent, Mandolynn Browning [costume designer] bought together.
“I was fortunate to have this play be my first stage production in 1990 as senior in high school. David Hocanson, who plays Sancho, and Jennifer Lopez, who plays the housekeeper, were classmates. I enjoy the opportunity the department offers in allowing the community to participate in the productions and be a part of the wonderful students.

Having what is considered the lead role is an immense honor, opportunity and responsibility. Getting into a character becomes easier over time. I consider myself more of a musician than an actor. I feel the weight of the responsibility in portraying my character as flawless as possible and want to be sure that my contribution lives up to everyone else’s investment of time and energy.”

Emeritus music instructor Jay Andrus is music director with Taylor Pollock playing the captain of the Inquisition; James Thompson, the governor; Mike Hughes, the Duke; Patrick Paulk, Jose; Vincent Nelson, Tenorio; Stephen Ewan, Paco; Richard Tobey, Juan; Hayden Buss, Anselmo; Charles Turner, Pedro; Chris Vlamakis, Rodrigue; Brook Gailey, Aldonza; John Behn, innkeeper; Aubrey Jorgensen, Maria; Kelsey McCord, Fermina; Ali Huggard, Antonia; Landon Lee, Padre; Toby Unsworth, Dr. Sansun Carrasco; Grady Noyes, barber; four attendants to the knight: Terri Paulk, Scyler Smith, Kyaera Price & Morgan Innes.

The soldiers, prisoners and prison guards are Sean Tillman, Paulk, Smith, Price and Morgan Innes.

Ticket prices are $12 adults, $9 seniors, $7 USU faculty/staff, $7 non-USU Eastern students, $5 children 6-12.

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