ARTS

"A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself."
ARTHUR MILLER AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT

'Halantir' and horror headline orchestra Halloween show

BY SIMRAN RANDHAWA
STAFF REPORTER

Woolsey Hall was packed on Saturday with the sounds of well-rehearsed instrumentals and the laughter of Yale students decked out in colorful costumes, as the Yale Symphony Orchestra presented its 2026 Halloween show to thousands of students.

Orchestra members made their entrances on stage in a procession of coordinated costumes. Beginning with an homage to the late Dolly Parton, instrumentalists' dress covered everything from "Pitch Perfect" and "The Odyssey" to "Alvin and the Chipmunks" and Tom Holland's iconic umbrella dance. The New York Knicks, the Norwegian national soccer team and Zara Larsson's 2016 pop era also made appearances in Woolsey Hall. This was also the second year that Flannel, a rock band founded at Yale, opened the show.

"It just felt like everything was aligning for that night," Evan Kessler '28, the show's conductor, said. "This is by far the best Halloween show and not just because I conducted it."

This year's silent film, which was accompanied by the orchestra, was chock-full of jumpscares and cinematic suspense. Titled "The Performance," the film centered on Bulldog Days, Yale's annual program that welcomes admitted students with festivities and mock lectures to encourage them to matriculate.

"The writing was phenomenal," Kessler said of the film. "The production team did such a great job putting this together: the directing, the cinematography, the music selections and just the vibe from everyone in the orchestra throughout the rehearsal process."

But between the film's poking fun at Yale's preppy fashion style — which replaces students' JanSport backpacks with Longchamp bags — and feature of the infamous Yale student-to-McKinsey consultant pipeline, something far more sinister was afoot.

As the film's plot unfolded, audience members learned that three students posing as Bulldog Days hosts were actually Harvard students who had taken over an abandoned Branford suite. They sought to implant chips into unsuspecting high school visitors to harvest their memories, creativity and experiences, which they hoped to use to develop a powerful artificial intelligence system for a company called "Halantir." The students were attempting to make artificially generated music more human.

That scheme began to unravel when a visiting student with coding experience discovered evidence of the hosts' Harvard affiliation on a laptop. The student found a video featuring actress Jennifer Garner, this year's celebrity guest star, that exposed the plot.

What followed was a collective effort by the Yale prefrosh and a CCE — Campus Community Educator, formerly known as Communication and Consent Educator — friend, Eric, to intervene. The film ultimately contrasted Harvard students' depicted ambitions with the relationships and community that shape student life at Yale.

"The AI evil plot thing was a very maximal way of depicting just, like, there is something that unites us all as students at Yale, and we should be proud of it," Mindy Zhao '29, a co-producer of the show, said.

According to Zhao, the film was meant to compare collaboration on Yale's campus to the team effort through which the protagonists in the film stood up against the Harvard students. This unity, she said, is reflective of the community within the orchestra, especially as it prepared for the show.

"The orchestra is just such a special family to us all," Zhao said. "It really takes a village, and I'm so happy with how it went."

The film was not all that brought audience members to the Halloween show. For Espen Fenstad '29, who dressed up as Jesse Pinkman from "Breaking Bad," the show was a way to support a friend performing with the orchestra.

"I was very excited to see my friend Grady perform," Fenstad said before the show. "I'm looking forward to the music and also the film. I think it'll be a great night."

Although Fenstad had not attended the previous year's Halloween show, he said videos circulating on Fizz had piqued his interest.

This year's show saw some shifts in its musical portion. The program featured three violin soloists and two vocal performances of the "Habanera" aria from Georges Bizet's "Carmen," including a falsetto rendition by the film's director Toby Huang '29.

For Kessler, the additional soloists made synchronizing the live orchestra with the film even more challenging.

"You're following both the movie and the soloist but also having to lead the orchestra at the same time," Kessler said.

Still, he welcomed the opportunity to showcase individual musicians within the larger production.



KALINA SABALA MONTES / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR



KALINA SABALA MONTES / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

Costumed students packed Woolsey Hall, Yale's largest performance venue, for the orchestra's annual Halloween show. This year's show brought changes to the orchestra's musical choices.

JayJay Refuge '27, who dressed as Coraline in a group costume alongside friends, said the Halloween show has always been an event that brings Yale students together.

"I feel like this is a culmination of my senior year at Yale," Refuge said.

According to Holly Lacey '29, a violinist and co-producer of the show, the production team had screened the film for orchestra members earlier in the week, which offered the team a rough approximation of what jokes would land. However, the experience of seeing the audience's reactions Saturday night was not something Lacey said she could prepare for.

"Just playing for our audience and getting to see all of their screams, all their reactions, all their laughs, I think that was the part I enjoyed the most," Lacey said.

Wolfgang Mannix '30 described watching the show as "an electric experience."

"I had no idea what I was getting into, and the show had me captivated from beginning to end," Mannix said. "I think the show was a true reality check for what college has to offer — that my own friends and classmates could create such an incredible work of art."

The first official YSO Halloween show was performed in 1977.

Contact
SIMRAN RANDHAWA *at*
simran.randhawa@yale.edu.

New Beinecke exhibit explores 18th-century artist's satire of London

BY RICHARD EICHHORST
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library has unveiled an exhibit celebrating William Hogarth, an 18th-century British artist who used prints to depict life in his country with a twist of social satire.

The exhibit, which opened on Oct. 6, is called "Satire, Sympathy, and Social Critique: William Hogarth's Progress Prints." It is the first Beinecke exhibition to feature works solely from the Walpole Library, Yale's decades-old research collection on British 18th-century studies, according to Rachel Herschman, the Beinecke's exhibitions and publications program director.

"The Walpole Library holds one of the most important collections of Hogarth's prints in the world, and I was excited by the opportunity to bring these works to Beinecke visitors," Herschman wrote in an email to the News. "Additionally, this exhibition offers important perspectives on Hogarth's legacy in the visual history of political satire."

Hogarth's prints cover a wide range of moral issues from idleness and arranged marriages to animal cruelty and exploitation. One set of prints, "Gin Lane" and "Beer Street," advocates for the weaker beverage, beer, over the spirit, gin.

In the imagined "Gin Lane," Hogarth depicts a mother letting her baby fall in order to reach for the snuff box, surrounded by feuds in a more desperate environment, while "Beer Street" consists of a more joyous atmosphere.

The exhibit's opening earlier this month coincided with a symposium on Hogarth, where several prominent critics analyzed his contributions to his field.

"He wants to look at the world around him, which for him is 18th-century London, and acknowledge the low and also think about elevating up, and he wants to bring everyone along with him," Holly Shaffer GRD '09 '11 '15, an art professor at Brown, said. "His works are meant to draw people in and to think about how they live in the world and that includes vice and virtue."

According to the exhibit, it is widely accepted that Hogarth's "modern moral subjects" were intended to criticize and reform the moral vices of London at the time. However, some prints still depict racist and antisemitic visuals.

His scenes mainly consist of white Londoners and typically depict Black and Jewish people as outcasts. At times, Hogarth uses race as a motif for vice and greed. According to the exhibit, recent scholarship on Hogarth has been more critical of his depiction of marginalized communities and how themes in Hogarth's works relate to colonial history.

Cynthia Roman, the exhibit's curator, recognized the difficulty of applying moral judgments to an 18th-century artist.

"Hogarth is engaged in philanthropy and, as Walpole says, his focus is always benevolence and reform, but racism and antisemitism are sadly still today, but they were then, part of society, and so it shows up in Hogarth's work," Roman said in a phone interview.

The end of the exhibit also includes works by modern satirists who took inspiration from Hogarth for their own social commentaries.

According to the exhibit, the symbol of the mother throwing the baby in "Beer Street" is still used to describe a wide range of issues across the globe.

Despite its anachronisms, Roman said, she believes that Hogarth's work is relevant today.

"I was especially intrigued to have this be part of the Beinecke's outreach community-facing agenda because I really think that Hogarth still engages audiences and speaks to so many kinds of social issues, as a way for us to have conversations about things that are still there for us to grapple with," she said.

The exhibit will be open until May 30, 2027.

Contact
RICHARD EICHHORST *at*
richard.eichhorst@yale.edu



RICHARD EICHHORST / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

The exhibit, which opened on Oct. 6 and is set to be open until next July, explores William Hogarth's prints as social commentary on issues from alcoholism to animal cruelty and grapples with racist and antisemitic tropes in his works.