

ARTS

“Remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.”
EPICURUS GREEK PHILOSOPHER

Advanced campus screening of new ‘Wicked’ movie draws mixed reviews

BY ANGEL HU & KELLY KONG
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Community members packed in a Humanities Quadrangle auditorium on Tuesday night for an advanced screening of “Wicked: For Good.”

Directed by Jon M. Chu, the movie is the latter half of the “Wicked” saga and adapts the second act of the 2003 stage musical. The film, which will be released in theaters on Nov. 21, continues the story of Elphaba, now the Wicked Witch of the West, played by Cynthia Erivo, and Glinda, played by Ariana Grande. The two witches navigate the consequences of their past decisions and see their friendship put to the ultimate test by a series of events destined to shape the future of the Land of Oz.

The screening was co-hosted by the Yale LGBTQ Employee Resource Group and the Yale Cinemat, which worked with Manager of Film Programming Marc Francis and NBCUniversal to present the screening to the Yale community.

“The excitement about ‘Wicked: For Good’ is incredible – tickets sold out in seconds! – and it is so special that we all get to experience this film together on the big screen,” Elora Sparnicht ’27, the president of the Cinemat, wrote in an email.

“Movies have such power when it comes to bringing people together, and as student filmmakers and creatives, it’s so important to remember that,” Sparnicht wrote.

Christine Gentry, director of the Yale Teaching Fellowship and co-chair of the Yale LGBTQ Employee Resource group, highlighted the significance of “Wicked” in LGBTQ culture and community.

“‘Wicked’ and musical theater just hold a very special place for our members in their hearts,” Gentry said. “It just seems so exciting to give them some sort of VIP exclusive preview.”

Yale students expressed gratitude for the opportunity to view such an anticipated movie before its release.

“There’s so much interest in this sort of thing, and the fact that we have this is honestly an incredible opportunity,” Ryan Chao ’28 said.

The hosts welcomed a full house into the theater. Throughout the movie, the audience responded to various scenes and moments with rapturous laughter, gasps and applause.

“Seeing ‘For Good’ was just a much anticipated, amazing cinema moment. And I know we’re all super excited,” Chao said.

However, some attendants preferred “Wicked” over its sequel.

“It was a little underwhelming for me,” Nicole Vilorio ’25 said. “I like the first one way more. I think the songs made more sense to me.”

“Wicked: For Good” also featured original music not in the canonical Broadway soundtrack, which drew mixed reactions from the attendees.

“I really like the new songs,” Sebastian Martinez ’29 said. “They

made this movie more cohesive with the new songs, with the added transition to dialogues and scene choices.”

Chao, on the other hand, said that the new songs diluted the emotions and charged energy of the original musical’s second act.

“It’s hard when you need to make such a long film and you’re taking not as much content,” Chao said. “I think I was mostly disappointed with how stretched out things were and with the filler plots.”

However, Chao expressed admiration for Erivo and Grande’s performances.

“They’re able to showcase a lot of their personal acting style in the songs,” Chao said. “For example, Cynthia Erivo is an incredible dramatic actor, and we saw even more of that side of her that’s just really shown through in an incredibly powerful way.”

Other students praised the continuity between the first and second movies and liked its light humor.

“I think it did well to build upon the story. It had a sort of self-awareness of the silliness of itself,” Liam Hannigan ’26, an attendee of the screening, said.

The first part of “Wicked” was released in theaters on Nov. 22, 2024.

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Dramat goes number one with ‘Urinetown’

Wednesday night proved it truly is a “privilege to pee” in a glistening performance of “Urinetown.” Leaking with wit and overflowing with potty humor, the Yale Dramatic Association’s fall mainstage proves that good satire, just like a full bladder, refuses to be ignored.

The musical, originally by Greg Kotis and Mark Hallman, premiered in 2001 and has been a regional theater staple since. Last performed by the Dramat in 2006, it was only a matter of time before the show reared its urinous head again at the University Theatre. The production opened on Wednesday night and will close Saturday night.

The show is overseen by the professional director Ashley Rodbro ’09, who returned to her alma mater for the peeing parable after previously serving as the stage manager for the 2006 Dramat production. With the assistance of producer Dhruv Bhalla ’27 and stage manager Elizabeth Simmons ’28, “Urinetown” is a production you do not want to piss away your chances of seeing.

“Urinetown” is a thinly veiled commentary on environmental decay and rampant capitalism masked by facetious tinkling. In a dystopia desolated by droughts, public toilets have been commodified by the exploitative “Urine Good Company.” Public urination is strictly prohibited, and offenders are sent to the mysterious “Urinetown,” never to be seen again.

The show is a riot. Farcical, yes, but also strangely precise, the kind of satire that feels both hilariously unhinged and eerily controlled. Its clownish extremes never obscure the sharper truths underneath. Instead, the silliness becomes a conduit for something bitter, necessary and unexpectedly resonant.

Much of this energy is brought from the cast. The ensemble is wacky, eccentric and lively, often stealing the show with their own wild antics or show stopping backflips.

The main cast is a spring of talent. Abram Knott’s ’27 velvety baritone is perfectly suited to Officer Lockstock, the omnipresent narrator who shepherds the audience through the show’s manufactured chaos with a voice as smooth as it is sly. His pairing with Alyssa Marvin ’29 as Little Sally – the precocious, chaos-sniffing kid

who’s always two steps ahead of the plot – proves consistently delightful. Their back-and-forth lands with a kind of wry, conspiratorial charm.

Ben Heller ’27 twinkles as Caldwell B. Cladwell, the tyrannical CEO whose corporate greed forces citizens to pay to tinkle. Meanwhile, Jaden Nicita ’28 and Sally Zheng ’28 make for a warm, endearing duo as Bobby Strong and Hope Cladwell, the starry-eyed leaders of the resistance whose earnestness gives the satire its emotional center.

My favorite performance of the night was that of Sabrina Strapp ’28 as Penelope Pennywise, the maniacal warden overseeing the town’s filthiest urinal. Strapp’s powerhouse vocals, over-the-top facial expressions and unrelenting commitment steal every scene she storms into. She’s unhinged in the best ways possible.

Much of what makes these performances sing is the cast’s razor-sharp physical comedy. The smallest details – an eyebrow flick, a precisely timed pause, a barely perceptible hand gesture – stack into big, sustained laughs. Their timing is impeccable, made all the sharper by an unusually eager Wednesday-night audience.

One of the most surprising stars of the night was Sadie Pohl’s ’28 captivating choreography. With airborne splits, rousing kicks and synchronized jabs, Pohl ensured there never was a dull moment on stage. In a very rare occurrence for this critic, I looked forward to each dance break because I was so intrigued by what jiving combination the cast would bring next.

Additionally – and this feels like a small miracle – for the first time in my experience with the Dramat I was able to hear every performer. Typically in University Theatre, the cavernous acoustics swallow up any line that is not yelled. In a joyous reprieve, every actor in “Urinetown” could be heard loud and clear.

Audiences still have three more days to catch this comedic romp. “Urinetown” glows with a chaotic brilliance that is nothing if not a golden shower of theatrical joy.

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LUCIANA VARKEVISSE / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

The Yale LGBTQ Employee Resource Group and the Yale Cinemat co-hosted an advanced screening of “Wicked: For Good.”

‘Siddhartha, She’ oratorio swaps gender of titular character

BY KIVA BANK & KAMALA GURURAJA
STAFF REPORTER & CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Faculty artists from the Yale School of Music on Saturday performed “Siddhartha, She,” a seven-scene oratorio alongside the Yale Philharmonia, guest artists, Yale Choral Artists, Yale Glee Club, Yale Opera and Yale Voxtet.

An oratorio is a large-scale musical work, typically a narrative on a religious theme, performed without the use of costumes, scenery, or action. The semi-staged performance took place at Woolsey Hall and was conducted by Glee Club director Jeffrey Douma, who led the singers through the score composed by Christopher Theofanidis MUS ’94 ’97, the chair of composition at the Yale School of Music.

A reimaging of Hermann Hesse’s 1922 novel “Siddhartha,” the work originally premiered in August at the Aspen Music Festival, where Theofanidis is a composer-in-residence and has been teaching since 2021. The libretto of the two-act show, which was written by poet Melissa Studdard, reimaged the protagonist Siddhartha and Siddhartha’s best friend Govinda as women.

“What I wanted to do was present it as a mythical past with an Indian flavor,” Studdard said. “It’s more precise than that. It’s definitely an Indian setting, it’s definitely contemporaneous with the life of the Buddha, but I also didn’t want to risk moving

into the realm of any kind of appropriation, so I tried to keep it somewhat mythical as well, and with that being the case, I leaned into other things that were important to me.”

Janna Baty MUS ’93, who plays Kamala, said she recognizes that the identity of the protagonist in the German author’s novel is Indian but said the message of the story extends beyond culture.

“Irrespective of the ethnicity and nationality of the author, or the ethnicity or nationality of the subject being described, there are many universal truths that are fleshed out in the story,” Baty said, later adding that “There was no attempt to pretend that any of the actors were Indian.”

Baty explained that the performers wore plain black clothing and accessorized with colorful scarves, which were symbolic of the river that flowed through both the story and across the stage on Saturday night. A long blue cloth was draped from one side of the balcony to the other, extending into the hall, a “metaphor for life” according to Baty.

For Krisha Ramani ’27, the problem with the reimaging is not the Buddhist themes it borrows but the disregard for that source material. She said she thinks the spread of Eastern ideas to the West can be valuable and noted that ideas of transcendence exist in both traditions.

“Self-discovery is universal and should be discussed,” Ramani said in a phone interview. “But to tell the story using the vehicle of Hindu and Buddhist philosophies and then do away with explicit South Asian influence is a disservice to the origin of these stories.”

Adriana Zabala, an associate professor of music and assistant dean of collaborative arts at the Yale School of Music, said she had hesitations about playing the role of Siddhartha, including whether she was the right choice as a woman of European descent. She said Theofanidis originally reached out to her in the spring of 2024 to ask if she was interested in playing the role.

Zabala said she has played male roles with romantic connections to both men and women in her professional career as a singing actor for over 30 years. She explains that she carefully navigates the role of these characters that she does not necessarily identify with.

“I am always looking for some truth that I can put into action,” Zabala explained. “It’s something that I can latch on to that’s true for my character.”

Zabala said the truth she found in Siddhartha’s character for this performance was the tension between the sense of belonging among a family or place and having the stronger pull to “see beyond.”

Theofanidis said he “handpicked” the cast based on vocal ability for the work’s premiere at Aspen Music Festival, like original cast

member Key’mon Murrah, whose voice he described as “completely otherworldly.”

“The voice type is super important to the kind of character,” Theofanidis said. “The voice has got to be the right kind of voice, and the actor has got to be the right kind of actor for that role.”

Murrah also performed the role of the Buddha, Gautama, in the second staging on Saturday. Tamara Mumford and Scott La Marca also returned to their roles as Dharuna and Aman, respectively.

Zabala added that the choice to change the gender of Siddhartha “modernized” the retelling.

Baty and Zabala portrayed the same-sex relationship between the characters, something they were able to do with ease, according to Zabala, who said they have been coworkers at the School of Music for years.

Baty explained that the portrayal of the female protagonist was a “refreshing” one because often female characters in opera have tragic fates and do not experience personal growth in the manner Siddhartha does in the reimagination.

“To imagine Siddhartha as being female, and imagine what her loves and experiences as a disciple, as a seeker, as a daughter, as a lover, as a partner, I think that gives a great deal of depth and interest to an already very beautiful tale,” Baty said.

Shreenandini Mukhopadhyay LAW ’26, who attended the oratorio, said she found the performance “immersive” and “theatrical” because of the projected visuals of figures like the snake and bird, saying these elements made the acts easier to follow. She said that the themes “felt very personal to a certain level” because she is from India and has been to Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

“I was very delighted that the genders were switched, but that didn’t necessarily mean it was a ‘woman’s perspective’ retelling,” Mukhopadhyay said. “It kind of felt like the switch was just made.”

“Siddhartha, She” was co-commissioned by the Aspen Music Festival and the Yale Glee Club.

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