Next Act: An Ambitious Tradition

Budget for this year’s Next Act: $6200. Flowers bought by parents for cast members: $20. Actors’ salaries: $0. Seeing the look on the director’s face on Hack Night: priceless.

For the 24th year in a row, Next House will feature a musical comedy during Campus Preview Weekend, April 10-13. This year, the show is *Once Upon a Mattress*, a comedic adaptation of the book, *A Princess and a Pea*.

What started off in 1985 as a simple show, has evolved into an elaborate production. “The whole thing is very ambitious,” said Ken Stone, Director of the MIT Hobby Shop and Next House Housefellow. “I went to the first one thinking, ‘oh boy,’ and I was totally enchanted. Everybody is having fun and you just get caught up in it.”

Next Act, which is completely student-run and produced, serves to merge community-building, residential life, and arts exploration into an experience that serves to benefit both Next House and the greater MIT community.

Auditions begin in January and everyone gets a part. Next House lounge is transformed into a theatre space, complete with a sophisticated, student-constructed stage. The scenery, props, costumes, programs, and T-shirts are all designed by the residents of Next House.

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Top Left: Joe Tennant as Prince Dauntless, Dayan Paez as Sir Harry, and Spencer Skates as the Wizard.

Bottom Left: Katie Silberstein as the Jester and Curtius Liu as King Septimus the Silent.

Right: Nora Mallory as Princess Winnifred.
The results from the DSL Events Survey are in and thank you to all of you who participated in the survey. Your responses have been incredibly helpful as we consider the future direction of DSL events. Of those who were emailed the survey to complete, 97 completed the survey in its entirety. Below are some of the highlighted statistics.

**For the Holiday Party:**
- The majority preferred the current afternoon time slot.
- >75% are satisfied having the party on campus.
- A solid majority stated that door prizes, charity contributions, invited families, decoration and entertainment are important.
- Give-aways and alcohol consumption are not important.
- Activities are not very important, but people prefer there to be options other than just eating and small talk, such as service projects and physical activity.
- >53% said they enjoyed the 2007 party and only 11% did not.

**For other DSL Events:** Significant majorities said they were very satisfied or satisfied with the food, music, decoration, give-away, student or staff speakers, and slide shows at past events.
- With regard to time for the Infinite Mile Banquet, 39% said either breakfast or lunch, 38% preferred lunch, and 21% preferred breakfast.

Now, without further ado, who won the gift card? It was Andy Barlow, Head Coach of MIT Baseball. Congratulations Andy and thank you to all who participated in the survey!

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**Infinite Mile Awards**

It’s officially Spring, which also means it’s awards season! The DSL Infinite Mile Awards Ceremony and staff appreciation breakfast will be held Thursday, June 19th from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Morss Hall. This year’s theme is the industrious beaver, known for its ingenuity and teamwork, just like the staff of DSL.

Nominations will be accepted through May 1, 2008 and a committee of DSL staff will meet later that month to select this year’s winners. To nominate either an individual or a team, go to http://www.surveyconsole.com/console/gateway/430942-0-0. If you would prefer to nominate by paper format, please fill out the individual or team form nomination and send it to Sonja Dagbjartsdottir at sonjad@mit.edu. If you have any difficulties with the nomination link, please contact Sharon Westerfeld at sharon7@mit.edu.
This spring semester, Sandra Harris was appointed Special Assistant to the Dean. In this position, Sandra is helping to provide sufficient support for underrepresented women students on campus, especially for African-American women, and to increase the numbers of underrepresented staff in DSL.

iHouse is also an area of attention for Sandra and the greater community. Working with DSL and DUE staff, a Faculty Advisory Committee, as well as members from across campus and student residents, Sandra and the group are developing and implementing a living-learning model and laying footprints for future projects.

Sandra has an extensive higher education background and brings a wealth of experience to this new position. She also serves as a housemaster at New House with her husband, Professor Wes Harris.

An Artist’s Opportunity
by Valerie Poitier, Office of the Dean for Student Life

There are two lenses I use to view life. One is art and the other is religion. My art works and story telling are a combination of both. I have a story for every quilt I have made and wish I had a quilt for every story I have written or told, alas I would need a warehouse.

When making a quilt, a weaving, crafting something from wood or painting, the issues facing us today work their way into my pieces. When reading or speaking the stories of women, I use the items as a vehicle to brave the tough topics. Using stories from my life and the stories older women have told me, I craft opportunities for the listener to see and hear their issues, our issues, from several points of view.

On March 4, 2008, The Artists Beyond the Desk presentation afforded me such an opportunity. The art work shown in the slide show along with the pieces exhibited during the performance were used to encourage the audience to watch the characters grow, come out of hiding, become aware of the riches and richness of their surroundings, to take a look at their own thinking, expectations, feelings about the topics and consider some of the possibilities to talk upon.

The poems and segments of the chapters read touched on transplant, birth, pregnancy, support, holding back and breaking through, courage, enterprise, self awareness, communication, happiness, wisdom and being planted solidly in ones own footsteps. There is more to life than meets the eye.

Fostering Dialogue on Religious Diversity

Dr. Robert Randolph, Chaplain to the Institute, participated in a panel on religious diversity at Milton Academy on March 5, 2008. The panel was a discussion of issues facing a religiously diverse community, answering two overarching questions: “How do we integrate beliefs and have honest dialogue in a religiously diverse community?”; and “How can we support families and staff whose beliefs differ?” Although this panel was at Milton, it is also a vital topic for the MIT community.

Dr. Randolph’s role at MIT is to foster dialogue across religious boundaries while at the same time supporting the communities of faith that exist here. “My role is not to advocate for one community or another, but to help create a wider community that has room for all shades of belief and unbelief, a community that nurtures and supports the healthy development of interior life during the university years.”
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“It is quaint,” said Priscilla Army, Next Act Director and sophomore in History. “We do everything ourselves and it is actually very technical for how little space we have.”

With a new tension-based back wall, spinning panels for seamless set changes and new curtains and lighting, it is technical indeed. Constructed by Next House participant Dayan Paez, a senior in Mechanical Engineering, with help from Ken Stone, Director of the Hobby Shop, the most challenging part of the set was the removable and functional lamppost, which withstood the weight of the lead actor swinging around it for Singing in the Rain in 2006.

Matt Cohen, a sophomore in Brain and Cognitive Sciences and Next Act Producer, said the show draws a lot of people who wouldn’t otherwise be doing shows on campus. “It is specifically a community-building project. Some have never done theater before and would never have been on stage if it weren’t for Next Act.”

Although no one in the show is paid with money, their compensation is in laughter and memories. “I don’t think anything is more rewarding than the Saturday performance when they get to do hack night,” said Priscilla. “They just put in their own little ad libs, insert MIT references, change the words around and make it really nerdy.”

The show starts at 8 p.m. and runs Thursday through Saturday night during Campus Preview Weekend. Tickets for the show are free and can be reserved by emailing nact-tix@mit.edu. Tickets are also available at the door.

Let Them Eat Cake!

On January 31st, Carmel Dudley and Skye Wanderman, along with other residents of East Campus 2nd West hall, created this gigantic cake in honor of Joe Graham, House Manager of East Campus. “I was incredibly surprised and unbelievably touched by everyone’s effort,” said Joe. “I’ve never seen anything like it.” The cake was made in appreciation of Joe and all he does for the students.