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**As You Like It: an eco-friendly production**

*Summary: Transformed “trash” has become the set, the costumes, and an artistic reflection of a campus committed to waste reduction, recycling, and energy self-sufficiency.*

(April 19, 2010)-The University of Minnesota, Morris’s Black Box Theatre echoes with the words of the great Bard of Avon as students perform William Shakespeare’s classic comedy *As You Like It*—with a contemporary “green” twist. The production crew’s goal was to be 100-percent eco-friendly. Transformed “trash” has become the set, the costumes, and an artistic reflection of a campus committed to waste reduction, recycling, and energy self-sufficiency.

*As You Like It* was chosen for the spring 2010 production because the play lends itself so well to the importance of interacting with and concern about the environment. “Its plot largely centers on city people being forced to return to Nature by living and surviving in the country,” says Ray Schultz, associate professor of theatre arts and director. “I definitely thought that particular theme resonated with UMM’s green initiatives. The eco-friendly production idea came as a way for me as a director and theatre as a discipline to consciously plug into and advance UMM’s interest and commitment to environmental issues.”

The production concretely demonstrates “a return to Nature” and environmental sensitivities by transforming ordinarily expendable “trash” into costumes and sets. Schultz was inspired to take this artistic route when he served as a faculty judge at last year’s “Fashion Trashion” Studio Art show.

“The students’ work was highly creative: dresses made from old CDs and juice container liners, vests made from pop can tops, a wedding dress created with Dasani water bottles and old shower curtains. The clothes were inventive, eco-friendly and, in many cases, really beautiful in design and construction,” says Schultz. “It got me thinking that it could be both highly creative and eco-friendly to costume a theatrical production in this way. I also thought that because of the theme I wanted to emphasize in *As You Like It*, this was a perfect opportunity to try it. So after a few talks with Jess Larson, associate professor of studio art, who agreed to collaborate by heading the costume design team comprised of theatre and studio art students, the concept was born.”

The biggest production challenge for the costume team was adhering to eco-friendly designs while maintaining a cohesive design process. “Stage costumes must not only say something about the characters in a play, they are also ‘clothes’ to be worn, and that implies a certain level of durability,” says Schultz. Costumes must last the run of the production and allow actors freedom of movement, too.

Ultimately, the unusual method of costuming lifted rags to riches, the ordinary to extraordinary. “We artfully, elevated everyday, discarded objects like old jeans, bottle tops, cassette tapes, and the like, and transformed them into something else,” says Schultz.

And, the set crew constructed a world made out of entirely recycled or reclaimed materials. Jason Rasinowich, technical director, serves as set designer for *As You Like It*. His work continues the comedic theme into the set landscape while

preserving the Elizabethan silhouette and thrust stage, staples of Shakespearean times.

As You Like It runs Thursday through Saturday, April 22–24, 2010, at 7:30 p.m. with a matinee performance on Saturday, April 24 at 2 p.m. in the Black Box Theatre, Humanities Fine Arts, on the Morris campus. Special high school matinees are scheduled for April 21 and 27 at 10:30 a.m. Ticket prices are \$8 for general admission and \$5 for students and seniors. Free, convenient parking is available in the North Lot. For more information, advance ticket sales, or to inquire about high school matinee performances, please call the Theatre Box Office at 320-589-6249.

Photo: A scene from As You Like It. Note the cassette tape “ruffle” on the nobleman’s shirt and the bottle top trim on his vest (right). The students specifically chose this location for publicity shots...in front of the dumpster behind Humanities Fine Arts.

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