

HOLYOKE

HCC theater production explores true stories of homeless youth

As the title suggests, “Polaroid Stories,” a play by Naomi Iizuka, presents a series of linked vignettes — snapshots, as it were — in this case about homeless youth living on the streets of some unnamed, presumably American, city.

Those snapshots capture their struggles, conflicts, hopes, and ambitions, but, like a Polaroid image, a full rendering only becomes clear over time.

But it’s even more complicated than that. The play, while based on interviews with real street kids, is also an adaptation of the ancient, epic poem “Metamorphoses,” written by the Roman poet Ovid in 8 A.D. By no coincidence, most of the characters have Greek names like Echo and Narcissus, Orpheus and Eurydice, Persephone, Dionysus, and Zeus.

“What they experience in ‘Polaroid Stories’ mirrors or somehow distorts the familiar tales we know from Greek mythology,” says Rose Schwietz Malla, guest-director of the Holyoke Community College Theater Department’s fall 2024 production of the play. “‘Metamorphoses’ is a collection of stories about people and mythical figures experiencing change, transforming in some way, as do the characters in ‘Polaroid Stories.’”



The HCC Theater Department will present “Polaroid Stories” by Naomi Iizuka today through Saturday. From left to right: Zachary Ciano, Brandon Rodriguez, Alison Smythe, Tatianna Green, Nicole Anderson, Arianna Davila, and Rae Roqué. (SUBMITTED)

HCC will present “Polaroid Stories” today through Saturday at 7:30 p.m. each night in the college’s Leslie Phillips Theater, with an additional matinee performance on Saturday at 2 p.m. (The Friday show will be ASL-interpreted.)

Schwietz Malla, a graduate student in the University of Massachusetts Amherst theater program, said she selected “Polaroid Stories” in part because of the way it elevates marginalized young people to the status of mythological figures.

“In society and in school, we often learn the stories from Greek mythology but not necessarily the stories of young people who are unhoused,” she said. “I think the play does a beautiful job

SEE HCC, PAGE C2

IF YOU GO

WHAT: “Polaroid Stories” by Naomi Iizuka, directed by Rose Schwietz Malla

WHEN: Today and Friday 7:30 p.m.; Saturday 2 and 7:30 p.m. (Friday show will be ASL-interpreted).

WHERE: Leslie Phillips Theater, Holyoke Community College.

TICKETS: \$5 (HCC students, staff, and faculty); \$10 (general admission); \$8 (seniors). Available one hour before each show at the Leslie Phillips box office or by calling 413-552-2528 to reserve.

* Show intended for audiences 13 years and older

HCC

CONTINUES FROM PAGE C1

of bringing you into their world. We sense their losses and longings and get a glimpse of what they care about and what carries them forward day to day through their challenges.”

While the play is not as plot driven as most theatrical productions, there is a loose narrative arc as the different characters lives overlap.

“It feels like being sunk into the world in which they live,” says Schweitz Malla. “Because it’s a play about young people in the voices of young people, it felt like something really fitting

for a college environment. There’s a lot of anger in the play, a lot of passion and angst, and that’s exciting for young actors to dig into.”

Even people who haven’t read “Metamorphoses” should be familiar with the myths adapted for the stage, such as that of Narcissus, the beautiful young man who wastes away after falling in love with his own reflection; and Orpheus, who follows his lover Eurydice to the underworld in an ill-fated attempt to rescue her from death.

Although they live rough lives on the mean streets, the addicts, prostitutes and runaways depicted in “Polaroid

Stories” still have a zest for life, says Schweitz Malla.

“They have such a drive to be alive and experience more, and keep moving forward, and I find that really inspiring,” she says. “I hope the audience gets a sense of that too.”

The cast: D (Dionysus): Manuel Morales, of Holyoke; Eurydice: Arianna Davila, of Springfield; Persephone/Semele: Rae Roqué; Orpheus: Zachary Ciano, of Springfield; Philomel: Tatianna Green, of Chicopee; SKINHEADgirl: Alison Smythe, of Wilbraham; Echo: Nicole Anderson, of Palmer; SKINHEADboy: Benjamin Richards, of Springfield; G (a.k.a. Zeus, Hades).