

return to the STAGE

THE FALL PRODUCTION OF "ARSENIC AND OLD LACE" MARKS CASTLE VIEW THEATRE COMPANY'S RETURN TO THE STAGE

"Well, isn't this nice?"
A sweet, old lady walks onstage to sit with her sister, serving tea to the local minister. Moments ago the audience watched as Martha Brewster – played by Devin Heppenstall '22 – hid three bodies in the basement cellar. Dark humor defined "Arsenic and Old Lace," the fall play that marked Castle View Theatre Company's return to the stage.

"From the very beginning, obviously our characters are down with murder," Averie Dow '23 said.
Dow played opposite Heppenstall as the other Brewster sister, Abby. The pair portrayed two old women who spent their time making wine, meddling in their nephew's love life, doing charity for the community and hiding the bodies of their murder victims in their cellar.

"You know how old people get cynical and they don't care what they do? They're like 'What do you mean you're laughing at me? I'm 70 years old, I don't care,'" Dow said.

"Our characters are like 'What do you mean murder is wrong? I'm old. You can't tell me anything,'" Heppenstall added.

The production marked the first scripted performance since CVTC performed "Chicago" in 2019. "Arsenic and Old Lace" was the first comedy the company had performed in recent history. Ashton Showers '24, who played lead character Mortimer Brewster, found the comedic tone of the show to be much needed as the company made its return.

"Most people wanted to laugh. That's why they came to the show. They wanted a reason to laugh and they needed to laugh," Showers said.

Despite the fact that the show first opened on Broadway in 1942, Heppenstall found that the show's humor carried well with a modern audience.

"We had to realize that we were going to say things like we wanted to say them and we just needed to be confident and know that we didn't have to over act it for it to be a laugh line," Heppenstall said.

The age of the show was one of the appealing pieces of the production for Dow, who found that doing a more traditional show represented a return to the storytelling that the company had been unable to do during their previous season.

"Seeing a super traditional show done after such a long time of not doing theatre was great," Dow said.

"It felt like a triumphant recovery."

The actors relied on the audience's energy during their performances and had to strike the right balance between storytelling and keeping the audience interested.

"I feel like as an actor I work better with the right energy and your energy comes from the audience. So, especially with the beginning of this show, where you're building up the story before you can start with the humor of it, the hardest part for me was keeping my energy up during the slow beginning," Showers said.

To keep the energy up backstage, the actors created an environment that reflected the chaotic comedy they were displaying to the audience.

"There's a video of me backstage in full costume skateboarding down the hallway. And that kind of sums up what we were doing," Heppenstall said. "That was our environment; just absolute, off-the-wall chaos. And that's what worked."

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Photo by Gavin Westcott

1. FAMILY MEETING: In the opening scene of the show, Devin Heppenstall '22, Averie Dow '23 and Ashton Showers '24 crowd onto the Brewsters' couch. Heppenstall enjoyed the show's dry humor and found that the overall tone of the humor made the rest of the show funnier. "There were jokes that were not written or intended for the way we delivered them. There were so many lines that were hilarious, even if they weren't necessarily intended to be. You'd look in our eyes and know that we were not kidding. There are some lines that there was no way it was intended to be funny but I thought it was hilarious. That was the

whole show, actually," Heppenstall said. **2. HOT**

SEAT: As he pleads with his captors, Ashton Showers '24 is tied to his chair by Andrew Johanson '23. Showers played many scenes with a heavy emphasis on physical comedy and even spent time with a professional clown to perfect the physical part of his role. "One thing that was really hard for me was how some people played the role differently physically. I feel like that was the biggest thing. It wasn't tone of voice, it wasn't facial expressions, it was the physicality that I used when I had these big reactions. I wanted to be over the top, like falling, tripping, stumbling, everything. So the issue for me was finding the difference between being childish and being funny," Showers said. **3. MURDEROUS**

REHEARSAL: During a dress rehearsal, Devin Heppenstall '22 and Averie Dow '23 look at Edy Lang '24 – their second victim of the show. Since the show was not only the first traditional show the theatre company had done in recent years, but also a comedy, actors like Dow felt pressured to make the most of their performances. "I feel like we had a lot of pressure on ourselves to make the audience laugh because the whole point of people coming to see the show is because it had been a terrible year and people needed jokes," Dow said.



Photo by Gavin Westcott



Photo by Maxwell Garcia



Photo by Gavin Westcott

4. DEVISSUED DUO: In an attempt to hide the tied up Ashton Showers '24 from the police inspector, Andrew Johanson '23 and Emma Jekelis '23 stand shoulder to shoulder. The two played a pair of murderers on the run from federal police. "It was a duo thing. It was a lot of work. There was the one scene where we're tying up [Showers], where I'm grabbing the rope and sort of sneaking behind his back to get the rope over him. [Jekelis] is trying get the chair down, I had to signal to her when to get it, but I also had to make sure that Ashton couldn't see me," Johanson said.

We didn't want the set to have a flat background. It was a blast to build. We tried to make it look like you had just taken a chunk of the house and put it on stage."

HALEY CASTEN '22

The set that came out of it for this show was one of the best sets we've had. There were all these intricate details. It added to the reality of the show."

ASHTON SHOWERS '24

It felt like we were coming home."

DEVIN HEPPENSTALL '22

