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Journalism

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2020 Artist of the Year statement

During the 2019-2020 school year I created cartoons and illustrations for *The Highlander*, McLean High School's newsmagazine. My focus this year was in creating an independent staff that would be able to use relevant Adobe programs such as Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign, all without my help, and to educate upcoming artists and designers on the intricacies of working on a publication staff. I created an outline of lesson plans and activities for the school year, making sure that by the end of the school year my classmates would learn to create anything they'd envisioned. I faced the challenge of giving everyone the attention they needed, as everyone was at different skill levels, but I did my best and was able to engage all of my classmates during our activities. As the 2019 NSPA/JEA convention was held close to our school this year, and I've been to the events before, I passionately advocated for my classmates to attend and absorb all of the information the convention had to offer. At one In-Design session a third of the room was full of my classmates, and I learned the most there - a lot about the intricacies of In Design's tools. After being inspired at the convention I introduced the InDesign template and the Paragraph Style function to the staff. My favorite moment was learning about the importance of CMYK/RGB values after misprinting the color black. As my goal this year was to make sure that the staff would have all of my knowledge, I created a personal, detailed database of presentations, projects, and resources that anyone can access and use in the future.

Hallmark Movie Crossfire

This two-page illustration supports the arguments used by their respective authors in a humorous way. The author on the left is claiming that the generic couples shown in hallmark movies are wholesome and comforting – the illustration emphasizing their point with such cheesy, generic movie scenes in each frame. The author on the left argues against the films, and the illustration emphasizes the saltiness felt by the existence of such a bland and unrealistically joyful genre by depicting the more grim reality of being a realist during the holiday season.

OK Boomer

The phrase “OK Boomer,” had grown to be the phrase accepting the existence of an elder person not seeing the world from the same lens of someone the younger generations. This cartoon demonstrates how while the elderly are denying the reality in front of them, someone suffering from that reality has to simply accept the disconnect through “OK Boomer.”

Normalizing the World Ending

This illustration summarizes many, many things that have gone wrong in 2020. Almost childish, the light illustrations purposefully decorate the margins as if the things going wrong this year are sparking doodles on the essay of a vengeful, fiery god. I created the appearance of the whole page.

COVID Steals The Spotlight

This illustration demonstrates how theater students have been angered to discover that the activities they’ve looked forward to have been taken away from them by the Coronavirus. Not only does this illustration show that the hard work of the theater department has been to waste

(as demonstrated by the angered discarding of their scripts), but that the Coronavirus has also become the center focus of the school publication - in a space where a preview of their upcoming play would generally have been featured instead.

The Coronavirus Issue

The title of this piece is a play on words, as it is the cover of the Issue 6 of the newsmagazine publication, which covers the consequences of the Coronavirus issue. It tries to capture the feeling and magnitude of the situation which encroached on – seemingly – the whole world. The composition for this illustration was made using 3D models, repainted with several digital brushes, and then color balanced in CMYK to make it optimal for printing.

CROSSFIRE:

Just go with the snow—the clichés can be cute

ERICA BASS
OPINIONS EDITOR



Don't lie, we've all wished at some point to be in a Hallmark movie.

To be a rich New York executive who visits home for the first time in a while, partakes in an incredibly intense cookie bake-off, falls in love with a hot small town-er, all while learning the "true meaning of Christmas?" That's the dream.

Holiday rom-coms get a bad rap for being predictable and cheesy, but while that may be true, that also doesn't make them *bad*. In fact, most of the time, their complete absurdity is what makes them brilliant.

"I love a happy ending, and I think that some movies nowadays don't do that," sophomore Maren Johnson said. "It's always fun to know exactly how it's going to end up so that you won't get your heart broken, because you're so emotionally attached to the characters."

Despite the guaranteed good endings, these movies still manage to be entertaining and captivating. You already know she's going to end up falling for the small town hunk who believes in the magic of love, but will she win the Super Buttercup Snow Dazzle Sugarplum Bake-Off Supreme? Or will her arch-nemesis beat her out and teach her that material objects don't matter in the end? Who knows? The cheesy suspense is a fun journey in itself.

No one can pretend that these movies are realistic. All the characters live in a world where snow never melts and always stays nice and fluffy, where true love can be discovered in a matter of days and, somehow, where no one ever seems to go to work.

But, this fantasy is exactly what draws people in. It's nice to pretend that a world like this exists, and the possibility of finding true love in the sparkling snow is irresistible for us all. Audiences relate to these characters, as cliché as they are, because that's exactly what all of us want to be.

"They make me giddy. They make me smile," Johnson said. "And, when [the characters] finally get together, I, like, run around the house—I'm so excited! Even though I know that it's going to happen, I still just love them."

The innocent hope and joy these movies radiate is pure entertainment, and in a world as crazy and chaotic as the one we live in, there's absolutely nothing wrong with enjoying a bit of escapism.

You know what, though? Maybe critics are right. Maybe movies like this aren't for everyone. Maybe only people with a sense of humor can truly appreciate the pure cinema that is a holiday rom-com.

Let's be real; there's nothing like a shared bad movie experience to bring people closer. All of the terribleness—the bad acting, cringy lines and plot holes—comes together in a cacophony of comedic gold.

Gather your best friends to poke fun at the movie together, and suddenly this beautiful atrocity of a film becomes an inside joke to forever be treasured.

"I think sometimes the bad ones are the best ones because they're more entertaining to watch. As long as it'll entertain me for an hour and a half, I don't care what it's about or how it was written," junior Chloe Lahr said.

The fact is, the holiday rom-com is an art form that excels in what it's meant to do. Every movie may not be particularly cutting-edge or revolutionary, but they do make you feel comforted and at home. They provide a blissful escape from the realities of the world, or, if nothing else, they give everyone something simple to laugh at.

HOLIDAY ROM-COMS: MERRY OR CLICHÉ?

Christmas movies aren't built for everyone

ISAAC LAMOREAUX
A&E EDITOR



The holiday season isn't complete without the way-too-early tacky decorations at Target, watery hot chocolate and, of course, non-stop, overly festive, holiday romantic comedy train wrecks—the kind of movies that are awful, but you can't look away.

Call me Scrooge, but these movies get too much praise for the clichés mixed with sloppy plot developments and the too-good-to-be-true distortion of reality that is often written off as "Christmas spirit." They seem to cater exclusively to white, heterosexual individuals who celebrate Christmas.

Most can agree these movies are not the best in the world of cinema.

"I'm an expert, right—I've seen every Christmas rom-com on Netflix, every single one," senior Rachel Kulp said. "I can solidly say that none of them are good. Not a single one. I love rom-coms, but if the entirety of your rom-com hinges on a holiday, then it's [trash]. It's so bad because they're like, 'We love each other and Christmas.' Like, no one [cares]. I want to watch a movie about Santa Claus, or about, like, Ryan Gosling, and I don't like that overlay."

Trust me. Literally anything would be a better use of your time than watching the same story play over and over like a festively hellish version of *Groundhog Day*.

"When it's so formulaic, I tend to roll my eyes," English teacher Anna Caponetti said. "A less conventionally successful man teaches her something about returning to her roots and provides the heart and soul that she was

missing in the sterile corporate environment in which she's excelled."

One of the cornerstones of holiday rom-coms are the overuse of Christmas clichés: snowball fights, kissing under the mistletoe, sleigh rides in the park, the works.

Unfortunately, these holiday clichés seem meant to be enjoyed by specific types of viewers. Many people can't relate to the experiences of the characters.

"Not growing up Christian, there's always kind of an outside-looking-in thing. For me it's not even like there's [any] basking in the reflected beauty of Christmases I've experienced because I haven't," Caponetti said. "To me these plot devices or products are more obviously artificial."

Even worse, these movies are direly lacking in diversity. Visit Hallmark's holiday rom-com page, and you will scroll through a sea of straight white couples, with the exception of *one* black couple.

"It gets to the point where they like beat you over the head with how white it is," Kulp said. "There was this one [movie] where there was this African American sidekick, and she said

something like, 'Oh my god, like, sometimes you're so dramatic, Britney, I feel like I'm a side character.' I think it's funny that they acknowledge it, but you would think that by acknowledging it they would move to fix it."

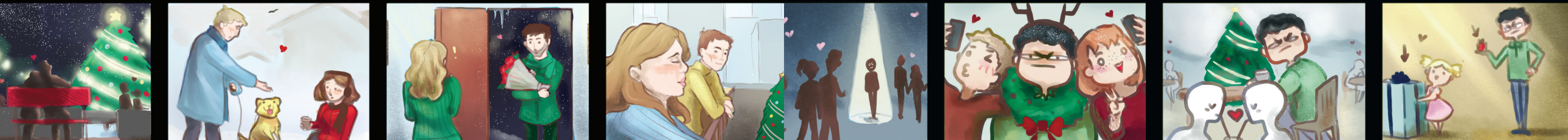
These movies fail to fix the problem of using almost the exact same kinds of casts over and over again. Sure, you use Mariah Carey as a side character, but using token minorities does not make these movies inclusive or diverse.

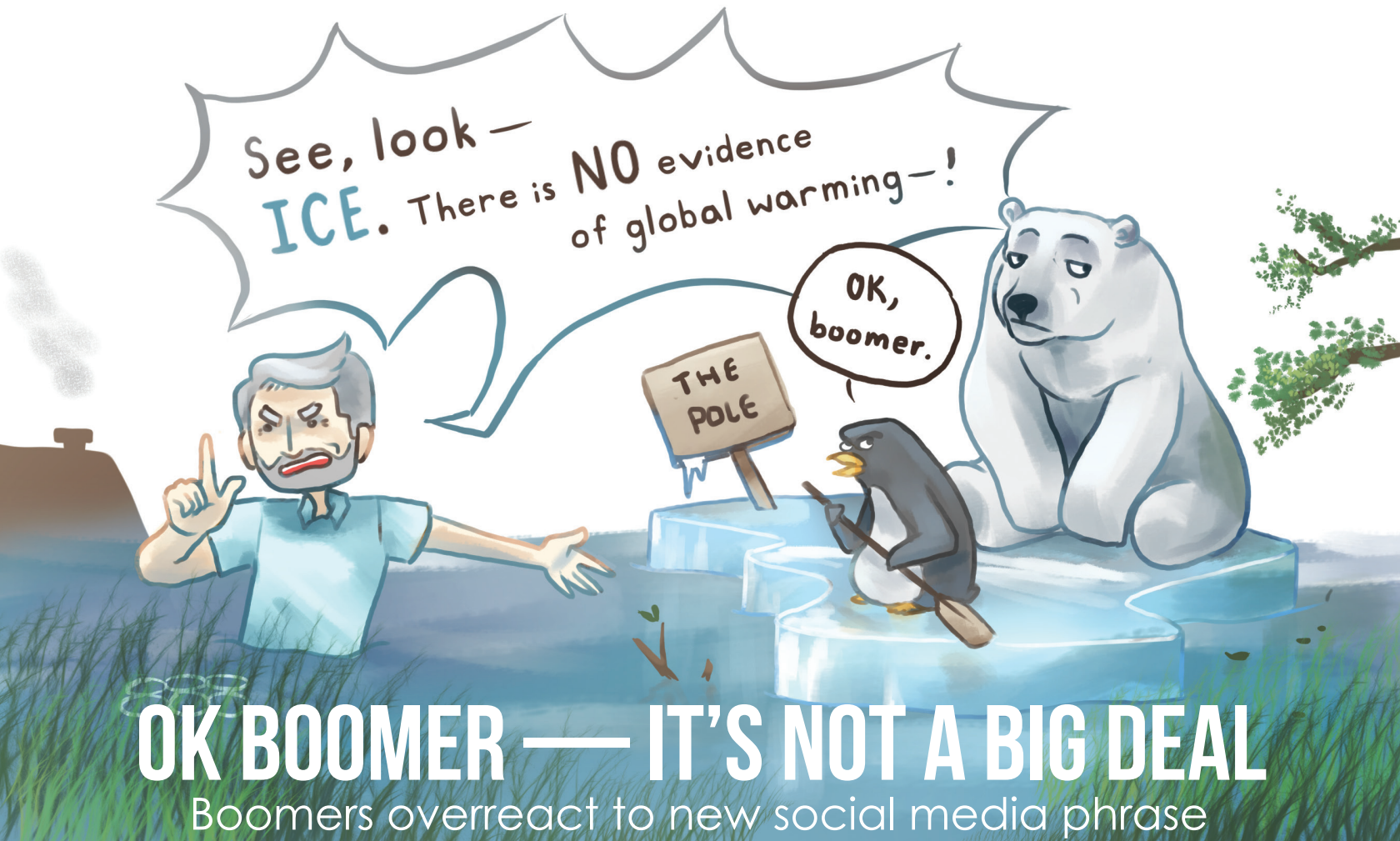
I will admit—I love me a good rom-com, even if they are cheesy. But their poor writing, littered with clichés, and an aggressively white cast make these movies fall flat.

As Kulp said, "If I see another movie about a female New York exec going home for the holidays and and getting stuck in a hotel in a blizzard..."



Illustrations & page design by Dasha Makarishcheva





OK BOOMER — IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL

Boomers overreact to new social media phrase



Climate change isn't real. Kids today are so sensitive. Boys shouldn't wear nail polish.

OK, boomer.

The emergence of this new phrase has deepened the divide between baby boomers and millennials. It is meant to discredit and shut down people from older generations, who hold what are considered non-progressive or outdated ideals.

"OK boomer" has received an unprecedented amount of backlash and claims of discrimination, even though it was originally just a silly meme. In fact, *The New York Times* said the phrase was the "end of friendly generational relations."

To claim that something meant to bring attention to a political issue is ageist is ignoring the meaning behind "OK boomer."

"I call people boomers all the time as a way of saying, 'shut up, old person,' because times are different, and they expect standards to stay the same," junior Brendan Lindsay said.

Young people use the term to express their dissatisfaction with older individuals and not to attack them.

"It stems from frustration with the older generation, who's been running this country for a really long time. A lot of people feel—and I think rightfully so—that they have been ignoring modern ideas and changes," senior Jacob Paikin said.

Twitter has become a platform for the constant bickering between the generations over politics.

Many older people have taken to social media, expressing their offense to "OK boomer." Some have even called it a slur.

Conservative radio host Bob Lonsberry tweeted his distaste of the term.

"'Boomer' is the n-word of ageism," Lonsberry said. "Being hip and flip does not make bigotry okay, nor is a derisive epithet acceptable because it is new."

It is ridiculous to go to such extremes and compare "OK boomer" to one of the most derogatory and damaging words in the English language.

This phrase is nowhere near bigotry, and those who address it as such fail to consider the meaning behind bigoted terms.

It's also quite hypocritical since common nicknames boomers have for millennials are "snowflakes" or "Peter Pans," terms used to criticize younger generations' sensitivity and unwillingness to face reality. Instead of getting upset over these phrases, young people have chosen to dismiss them.

Opposers of "OK boomer" cite it as an unfair shutdown to arguments. But the terms "snowflake" and "Peter Pan" have never been criticized for doing the exact same thing.

No matter the political or cultural climate, generational divides will always exist.

"I think that the difference in opinions from generation to generation is always going to be there," math teacher Michael Farmar said. "And that's healthy, because that's what brings about change. Awareness is always a positive thing."

Whether or not "OK boomer" offends or empowers people, it is crucial to keep in mind that it is just a phrase. It will come and go just like everything else the internet spits up.

The media shouldn't be making this term into something bigger than it really is. Boomers should take their own advice and be less sensitive, OK?

SIDE EFFECTS OF 2020 MAY INCLUDE...

Our 2020 vision didn't see this coming

ARIANA ELAHI FACT CHECKER | GRACE GOULD FACT CHECKER | CC PALUMBO REPORTER

Welcome to 2020, where each month brings a new tragedy. As the clock struck midnight on New Year's Eve, millions awaited the decade with hopes of an improved world. Needless to say, 2020 has not lived up to these expectations.

This January, we sure did start off with a bang. Less than three days into the year, President Trump pushed America to the brink of war with Iran after ordering an airstrike to assassinate Iranian general Qasem Soleimani. It reminded us of just how glad we are to have a president who has no concept of consequences. How can we blame him, though! Pulling triggers is so much fun.

Although the U.S. was on the verge of war with a near-nuclear power and our patriotic president was being tried by the Senate for treason, we aren't the only nation who's been having a rough 2020.

On the other side of the Pacific, Australia had burned for 210 days. No biggie, though, only a billion animals were killed in the bushfires and a mere 200 homes were destroyed. But who cares? Global warming is a myth. Anyway, that was just a little fiery bump in the road to what would be the best year yet, right?

Not exactly. On Jan. 26, basketball legend Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna died in a helicopter crash while traveling to her basketball game. As it turns out, this was just a taste of what was to come for the rest of the year.

In a fun twist of events, the world became the breeding grounds for an exciting pandemic, which wasn't surprising considering this whole year has felt like a fever dream. COVID-19 was first identified in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread to over 200 countries and territories worldwide. The disease has isolated billions of people, tanked thousands of businesses and left a powerful leader in the ICU. But at least Purell is having a good year.

And let's admit it, we all got what we wanted—a day off. Well, actually, we got an entire semester off, so maybe we wished a little too hard (RIP Senior Season).

With every passing month worse than the last, we're at the point where people are horrified of what April will bring. But you know what they say, April showers bring

May flowers. So hopefully, the summer months will return 2020 to what it once was...a disaster, but not a total disaster.

To the billions of people sitting back and watching the year unfold on their Reddit accounts, good for you! Watching cheap drama unfold on your phone screens is undoubtedly the best cure for boredom.

And maybe it's good that people are numb to tragedy, using the events in this awful year to create viral memes and TikToks. It seems like no matter what comes next, be it an alien invasion or a good old-fashioned sharknado, everyone is ready—at least the greatest meme creators of our generation seem to be. Come on, 2020, is that all you got?

10 WAYS 2020 COULD GET WORSE

1. Tiger King wins 2020 presidential election
2. Boomers take over TikTok.
3. Bob Ross comes back from the dead just to tell you how disappointed he is in you.
4. McLean High School decides to spend its Coronavirus Sanitization Fund on more hallway TVs.
5. The Office accidentally gets deleted from existence.
6. Three words: new Bieber album. Oh, wait, that already happened?
7. FCPS decides that fourth quarter DOES count.
8. The College Board gives 1s to every McLean student on their AP exams.
9. Our moms decide to cut our hair.
10. Netflix becomes free, but the only thing available is *Cats*.

A&E COVID-19 STEALS THE SPOTLIGHT

Theater community struggling during virus outbreak

SAISHA DANI, SWETHA MANIMARAN & KARA MURRI | REPORTERS

The curtains have dropped. The theaters are empty. Broadway is dark.

Perhaps no businesses have been harder hit by COVID-19 than those which rely on group gatherings and shared experiences. Local, national and international theater and arts organizations in particular have felt the devastating economic impacts of the recent pandemic. The immediate repercussions of the virus are evident at schools, where closures have abruptly canceled upcoming events. For TheatreMcLean, the highly-anticipated spring musical was forced to shut down thanks to the pandemic.

"The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee musical unfortunately will have to be postponed. There is no way we can put on [the show] we want to with the limitations that are provided," McLean theater teacher Phillip Reid said. "However, this does not mean the end of the show. There are possible avenues we may look into next year."

As the show's music director was only available for a limited amount of time, actors immediately began music rehearsals after auditions in February. They learned the music in about three weeks, and everything seemed to be moving along rapidly.

"We were pretty far into the show. We had almost blocked the whole thing, and press photos were coming up really soon. We had all of our music done and were starting to memorize our lines," said junior Avery Versaw, who was set to play a leading role in the production.

FCPS initially closed through mid-April due to coronavirus, so rehearsal arrangements were pushed back but still being made. Shortly after, Governor Ralph Northam closed Virginia schools through the end of the school year, halting all of those plans.

"When school was canceled for a limited amount of time we had plans to learn the rest of the show—the show must go on and all that—but then school was canceled for the rest of the year. We were all really upset, obviously, because we were starting to see that the show could have been amazing; it was starting to get up on its feet," said sophomore Kylee Majkowski, who was also

cast as a main character in the show.

Seniors were especially saddened by the closure of the musical since this was their last main stage and Cappies production of their high school career. Actors and crew members look forward to this final performance as a last hurrah.

THERE WERE ALL THE THINGS I HAD BEEN TOLD ABOUT SINCE I WAS A FRESHMAN IN THEATER THAT JUST LET YOU LEAVE WITH THE BEST POSITIVE CLOSURE — AND I KNEW I WASN'T GOING TO HAVE IT."

- SHERIDAN DALIER
SENIOR

"My dream of assistant directing next to Mr. Reid had been crushed," senior assistant director Sheridan Dalier said. "There were all the things I had been told about since I was a freshman in theater that just let you leave with the best positive closure, and I knew I wasn't going to have it."

Cancellations of so many activities both in and outside of school are more than mere disappointments for students who devote countless hours to various theater productions and ventures.

Senior Rebecca Blacksten, TheatreMcLean actor and member of the Unruly Theatre Project (UTP) improv theater troupe, watched some of her most exciting opportunities disappear in an instant.

"I was set to perform at the Kennedy Center in two weeks in a scholarship performance and in three UTP shows, and they were all canceled," Blacksten said. "It hurts my heart that I have to give up these opportunities and that I won't get to do Cappies."

Cappies is a theater awards program for which student critics review and vote on local student productions, and awards are given out to those critics, shows and individual cast and crew members. This year's Cappies Gala at the Kennedy Center, the grand finale to the Cappies season where awards are announced, will not take place.

"With schools closed and the hope that social distancing will slow the COVID-19 spread, we had to make a very difficult decision [to cancel the gala]. The health of our community is now our focus," said Janie Strauss, the National Capital Area (NCA) Cappies program director. "We must all do our part."

This was an unfortunate turn of events for the actors, critics and crew who were looking forward to celebrating their hard work and possibly receiving awards at the gala. All the work put into the event came to a standstill.

"The gala souvenir program and even the backstage passes were in production. The people to help the vocalists, dancers and orchestra rehearse, the nominee photo shoots, the rehearsal locations—everything was set," said Glenda Miesner, the program manager of the NCA Cappies. "The wheels were in motion, and we've had to stop the moving bus."

Beyond high school productions, local theaters have also been hurt due to the pandemic. Social distancing has caused

local theater organizations to lose audience members and profits. National and international theaters have felt these same effects.

"Broadway, the West End, the Kennedy Center, the Cappies and many local theater organizations, out of safety and concern for their staff and patrons, have found it necessary to cancel events, suspend operations and/or temporarily close. The loss of revenue and momentum for many of these organizations could be devastating," said Tara Taylor, the FCPS theater and dance educational specialist.

As of now, Broadway is closed through June 7, leaving the date for the Tony Awards up in the air.

"The Tony Awards were originally scheduled to take place on June 7, the new date of the closures, but had already been postponed indefinitely," *Broadway News* writer Caitlin Huston said.

Productions that were planning to open before the eligibility cutoff for the awards have been pushed back, and some may never reopen. These cancellations have left individual cast and crew members unemployed for an unknown period of time.

"While most theaters don't rely solely on ticket sales, missing shows hurts our organizations from a dollar perspective and from a mission perspective," said Chris Rushing, director of education at Synetic Theater in Arlington. "Nearly all theaters that I know about have to cancel or postpone at least one show. Now those artists are living in an uncertain gray area."

Even after social distancing requirements and stay-at-home orders have been lifted, a residual fear of group gatherings may continue to harm the theater community.

"Audiences might be anxious to be a part of a large group again for weeks and maybe even months after the virus is gone," said freshman Jack Abba, an actor in the spring musical and member of the UTP troupe.

Although theaters across the nation have been canceled, there are still ways to help these suffering organizations.

THEATER HAS BEEN AROUND FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. AS LONG AS THERE ARE HUMANS ON THIS EARTH, WE WILL BE GATHERING TOGETHER TO TELL STORIES."

- EVAN HOFFMAN
NEXTSTOP THEATRE
COMPANY PRODUCING
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

"Donating money, if possible, is important to various actors' funds, and when theaters have reopened, going to watch the productions is a way of supporting the arts," sophomore Clare A'Hearn said.

Miesner offers alternative ways to continue supporting the theater community to prevent future fiscal uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

"If you purchased a ticket to an upcoming performance that you can't use, and you can afford it, please don't ask for a refund," Miesner said. "Besides helping financially, we need to recognize the work and talent of the arts community."

Despite the tremendous burden the pandemic is placing on theaters worldwide, the "show must go on" mentality runs deep. Reid is encouraging his students to continue their artistic expression.

"We will get through this. Never lose your creative spark—find something to fulfill that need," Reid said.

Theater students are working to make the best of this crisis. Senior Marguerite Godwin, head of costume crew for the spring musical, has been making masks out of fabric originally intended for costumes to distribute to places in need, such as hospitals and nursing homes, during the outbreak.

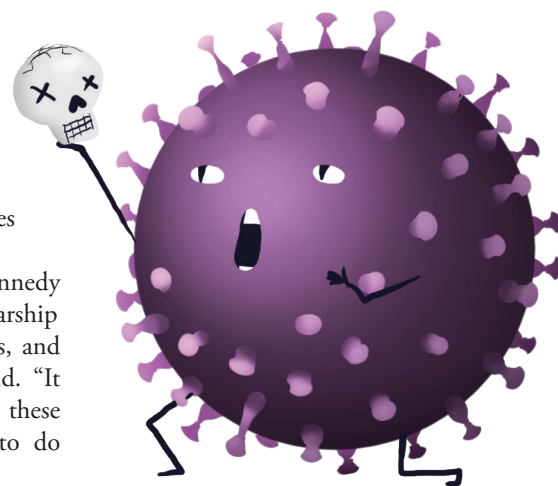
"I'm so grateful that I have so much material to use to help aid our health heroes who are risking their lives to help those in need. Definitely need to give another thanks to Reid who gave permission to use the show fabric so that I can donate more," Godwin said.

Amid this global crisis, the resiliency and irrepressible nature of the theater community is evident.

"Theater has been around for thousands of years. As long as there are humans on this earth, we will be gathering together to tell stories. So no matter how dark and scary things get, you can be certain that we will be back in some form," said Evan Hoffman, the producing artistic director of NextStop Theatre Company in Herndon.

During this time of crisis, the theater community has rallied together, even virtually, remaining optimistic and hopeful for the future.

"Just sit tight, be patient, try to stay positive and take care of yourself and those around you," Taylor said. "The curtain will rise again."





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The Coronavirus Issue