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Liberal High School Godspell Cast List:

Jesus: Cedric Mitchell

John/Judas: Dylan Wilson

The Community:

Christopher Volden

Adan Monarrez

Tra Clay

Makyla Johnson

Tania Sarabia

Brie King

Linnae Downs

Amira Coleman



By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

Out in the rough-and-tumble world of holiday shopping, people might debate about the true meaning of Christmas. But at Liberal High School's drama department, there's little chance anyone can forget the reason for the season. That's because the actors and musicians have already started rehearsal for the spring musical, and the production is "Godspell."

Drama teacher Cara Spencer said her selection of the musical was more practical than spiritual.

"I had to choose the musical before I had heard anyone in this town sing," she said. "I knew the show lends itself really well to being adapted to fit the cast. That was honestly my biggest selling point."

Now that the first-year teacher has been in town for most of a semester, she has a better sense of what her students can pull off. She's still glad she picked "Godspell."

"One of the things we've done, which is a lot of fun, is that we worked together to rewrite the script. With these kids, I'm sitting down and saying, 'All right, guys, how do you want to do this?' We're working on it together. They're very involved in the whole process."

That collaborative approach is fitting, given the material, which examines the idea of how a group of people can come together to find a sense of community and shared purpose.

"The musical as a whole is based on the gospel of Matthew in the Bible," Spencer said. "But the main point of the show is not, 'Hey, here's the Bible, you should believe in Jesus.' It's more about how the principles Jesus taught work to help people live together." In Spencer's view, this enhances the embedded story of Christ's ministry on earth by exploring practical applications of spiritual teachings.

"The show exposes us to these parables Jesus taught, and it makes the point that if you listen and pay attention to these teachings, you will be a better neighbor, you will turn the other cheek. You will live in a way that leads to more understanding between people," she said.

As is typical with "Godspell," staging is wide-open. The original show depicted events happening in a gritty urban alleyway. One of Spencer's friends staged the show in a treehouse setting. The Liberal High School production will feature people in a modern-day airport.

"I think this is one of the cool things about the show," she said. "It can be adjusted to reflect what people currently understand in their own lives. For instance, a couple of the parables, we're telling them in our own way. We make references to different movies, pop culture, while the basic message stays the same."

Spencer said one of her goals is to be respectful of the story of Christ while giving students

room to think creatively about how the parables would play out in today's world.

"What we want to do is not necessarily challenge people's beliefs, but say, 'hey look, there's different ways to look at this,'" Spencer said. "We can see the story from a different perspective, not just the way you always heard it and learned it in Sunday school. This gives the kids and the audience a chance, without pushing the boundaries too much, to recognize that there's more than one way to look at these things."

One controversial point in "Godspell" has been the way the musical originally ended — with the death of Christ, but no miraculous resurrection.

"It's not traditionally done with a resurrection, though some people do alter it to include that," Spencer said. "We're going to add that, because it's important to me, and I want to include the resurrection in our show."

For now, like the rest of the world that's focused on the holiday celebrating the birth of Christ, Spencer and her cast are far from that Easter-themed ending.

"We're rehearsing now, up till the end of the semester, and then we'll come back after the break to continue. It's an interesting schedule and it makes me a little nervous though I know we're going to be fine," she said. With students busy with finals and Christmas plans, Spencer is focusing on learning the music and getting a firm grasp on the show. In a nod to the musical's own theme and focus, she's also made community-building within the cast a priority.

"When we come back in January, we're going to have a choreography boot camp week, and we're going to build the set, and make costumes," Spencer said. "We'll get it all done."

The LHS musical is scheduled for Feb. 20 and 21, a Thursday and Friday.

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