

Fullerton Union's "A Monster Calls" is an Authentic Tale of Acceptance written by Noah Reynen, a senior at Capistrano Valley High School

When Conor O'Malley finds himself troubled with reoccurring nightmares of losing his mother he begins to get strange visits from monsters linked to the yew tree outside his house. Each night at 12:07 these monsters plague Conor with tales and stories that may help him with the pain of his mother's battle with cancer if he can only learn what these stories mean.

With subtlety and nuance, Connor Udhus portrays Conor O'Malley, the panicky, troubled young boy at the center of the narrative. Udhus illustrates his turmoil throughout the show, fidgeting with his hands as he stumbles about the stage in a flighty panic, screaming and squirming during his cryptic nightmares, fighting to hold back tears as he struggles to grasp the harshness of his mother's condition.

Conor's mother (Sydney Parker) speaks to her son with a gentle, playful tone in her voice and a loving hand on his shoulder. Parker takes soft slow steps as she crosses the stage, strained coughs breaking her speech as she finds a way to smile, even if only for a moment, in the most despairing of times.

The Yew Tree Monsters (Molly Cooper, Maddie Engelhardt, and Katherine Timmerman) work with an unsettling synchronization. Their voices line up like a haunting chorus, frightening Conor with booming, harmonized threats and uncanny twitches, yet also show tenderness as they sit beside the crying boy and comfort him at his lowest point, their voices softening and hands resting upon his shoulders sweetly.

Costumes, headed by Isa Calvo and Reanna Trejo, tells a complete story without a single word, foreshadowing the tales and trials Conor will go through on the patch of the school uniforms, or conveying the growth of Conor and his Grandmother's relationship through changing shades of red, purple, and ultimately blue throughout the show. Costumes work in tandem with SFX (Katherine Hudson) to create the ethereal look of the yew tree monsters. Using foam latex over lifecast molds, the SFX team creates living, breathing monsters from scratch.

Jojo Fares' choreography creates a dreamscape on stage, incorporating recurring motifs of movement to create the illusion of Conor's nightmares. The show opens and ends with an otherworldly dance sequence that, like poetry, cohesively rhymes the beginning and ending of Conor's story.

With care and sincerity, Fullerton Union's "A Monster Calls" delivers a heartfelt production.