

Laguna Hills' Les Miserables tells a story of Hardship and Hope

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Laguna Hills' High School's production of Les Miserables, School Edition explores the power of redefining yourself through the heart-wrenching plight of desperate criminal turned bourgeois mayor Jean Valjean throughout the turbulent years of early 19th century France. Haunted by the man he used to be, Jean Valjean seeks a better future for himself, his adopted daughter, and the oppressed people of France.

Jacob Tapia's mesmerizing performance as Jean Valjean is a driving emotional force throughout the show. Tapia's ability to express guilt, conflict, and hope in his face and demeanor gives the show a relatable, deeply affecting quality. His noteworthy and astoundingly dynamic vocals, ranging from his hearty, pitch-perfect belts in "One Day More" to his soft, touching falsetto in "Bring Him Home," allow him to expertly convey the complex character of Jean Valjean.

Lauren Cole shines as Eponine, embodying the creeping disappointment of feeling unnoticed by the world around you. In her performance of "On My Own," Cole's piercing vocals poignantly express the all-encompassing pain of unrequited love and the relief of escaping through fantasy. Ethan Hall's Javert serves as the embodiment of Jean Valjean's ghosts from the past, portraying through his strained mannerisms and contorted facial expressions the anger and confusion that comes from trying to understand a world full of gray areas with a black-and-white mindset.

The Revolutionaries, headed by Rene Kairouz's Enjolras and Liam Fellows' Marius, infuse great hope into the show, expressing their vision of a new world with quietly electric energy in "Do You Hear the People Sing?" The innocent magnetism between Fellows' Marius and Grace Warner's Cosette acts as a ray of light into the dark world of France in turmoil. Kevin Gramling as Thenardier and Elena Sierzchula as Madame Thenardier bring much-needed comic relief to the show through their wacky accents and exaggerated, bouncing physicality.

Lighting design by Annie Gelfer is a technical highlight of the show, utilizing flashes of red, orange, white, and black during the battle scene to represent the terrifying and mind-dizzying violence of the conflict. Julia Cornell's choreography, specifically her creation of the "Dream Dances" during "I Dreamed a Dream" and "Castle on a Cloud," is commendable.

Laguna Hills High School's Les Miserables tells with beautiful detail and notable talent a tale of redemption and redefinition.