

High Stakes and Heartbreaks at Irvine High School's 'Almost, Maine'
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In *Almost, Maine*, the almost-but-not-really-town, shoes fall from the sky, hearts shatter into slate, and love flows as naturally as oxygen. Irvine High School's 'Almost Maine' follows nine different couples in nine different scenarios, each a unique and magical exploration of the human heart.

With darting eyes and gesturing hands, Glory (Genevieve Velarde) is filled with a magnetic liveliness that dissolves into frenetic nervousness. Tension lingers on her tight-lipped smile, and through apologies and outbursts between trembling breaths, Velarde conveys the character's frenzied nature with unparalleled authenticity. Her counterpart, East (Odisho Nihipali), contrasts with a steady tone and a subdued demeanor. Together, the two create a captivating on-stage dynamic, exemplifying the age-old saying that opposites attract.

Hopping onto the stage is Steve (Maddox Kreil), whose childlike innocence radiates through his vibrant smile and playful physicality. His furrowed brows and animated expressions add a whimsical, yet endearing touch to his character. Kreil's range truly shines in the scene as he gazes up at Marvalyn, eyes wide and lips parted with both vulnerability and disbelief.

From snow-clad porches to run-down laundry mats, the set design (Danika Outericky, Grace Gibson, Alyssa Brown, Zak Wilderotter) stuns. Three platforms are rotated and connected to construct each scene, perfectly suiting the quick-paced vignette-based nature of the play. White, snowy floors spill out from the apron onto the floor below, thrusting the snowy wonderland beyond its confines, and into the intimate space of the audience.

In a true display of innovation, a captivating constellation of recycled water bottles towers over the performance to create the recurring motif of the mystical Northern Lights. Vivid pinks, purples, and greens reflected by the bottles blend into an ethereal frenzy in tender moments of emotion as lighting (Arina Taghi Damavandi, Ryliegh Patton) works in harmony with stage pieces. Glimmers of red are visible at their pivotal points, providing a quiet but powerful whisper about love, both amongst ourselves and for our planet.

This theme of red also bleeds into costumes (Twig Keller, Zaida Harper) through Marci's red sock, various flowing scarfs, and peeks of Dave's scarlet undershirt. Pops of ruby emphasises the omnipresence of love, all while allowing technical aspects to blend together in perfect harmony.

With brilliant tech and acting, Irvine High School's rendition of 'Almost, Maine' is a truly magical 'Maine' attraction!