

## **Why We Tell the Story of Mater Dei's Once on this Island**

written by Jessie Nero, a senior at Tesoro High School. March 12,2022

Undertones of independence and community fill Mater Dei High School's production of Once on This Island, following the story of young Ti Moune as she receives supernatural aid to realize her purpose in life and to fall in love.

Jilliana Le, Ti Moune, does a phenomenal job capturing her character's hopeful, positive personality. With dancing feet and energetic squeals, Le always conveys her excitement for life and her passion for a purpose. Her wide eyes and dotting facial expressions clearly show her complete entrancement when in love. When she is abandoned by her love, she collapses to the floor, her desperation for happiness remaining evident through her pleading with Papa Ge or heart-wrenching sobs at the hotel gates.

Mama Euralie, Erin Lustado, delivers a striking performance, providing a warm presence for Ti Moune. Lustado maintains a reserved front, keeping her hands to herself with a calm expression plastered on her face. With comforting hands on shoulders or tender strokes of Ti Moune's hair, Lustado emphasizes her role as the maternal figure and her familiarity with those around her.

As Erzulie, Katherine Cruz successfully conveys her angelic aura with her melodic tone and warm smile. Cruz gracefully floats across the stage maintaining perfect posture to replicate her elevated status and ethereal nature. Contrarily, Ben Thai as Papa Ge slithers across the stage deceptively. His snake-like motions and evil smirk reveal his manipulative and cunning character.

The lighting design, done by Dagny Canzoneri, serves to impress, warm tones representing Ti Moune's home, her safe place, and colder blue light representing her hopelessness and desolation at the loss of her love. Pink light floods the stage when Ti Moune speaks of her romantic aspirations and hopes. Additionally, when Ti Moune dances at the ball, darkness surrounds her, signifying her isolation and lack of acceptance, but light grows as others join in and she is welcomed.

Emma Buchanan, the costume designer, accurately depicts the differences between classes through color. With the rich folk in pure white lace and the peasants dressed in vibrant colors, the class divide becomes apparent. Moreover, the use of specific colors associated with specific gods allows for a clear distinction between each being and their specialty.

Mater Dei's extraordinary cast and crew celebrate the beauty of culture and importance of home in their production of Once on This Island.