

THE MAC WEEKLY

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"Our Town" moves audience's hearts, dancers' bodies

By: [Steve Sedlak](#), Arts Editor

I have no background in theater. When The Mac Weekly assigned me to cover this year's Theater and Dance department's production of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," I more than doubted my ability to give the play a fair preview. However, after glimpsing only a half an hour of the show, I can safely say that not only was I impressed by its professionalism, but that the play moved me both cognitively and emotionally. Fear not, dramatic neophytes! By all means, go see this play!

Macalester's production of "Our Town" is an extensive reworking of Wilder's original play, and yet it still seems to preserve the intensity of the original. The production is directed by Off-Leash Area, a Minneapolis based performance works company led by artistic directors Paul Herwig and Jennifer Ilse. The cast includes Macalester students Drew Callister, Alison Butler, Gwynn Shanks, Katherine Steiner, Brooke McAdam, Charlie Rudoy, Claire Bancroft, Rachel Diamond, Hannah Glaser, Morgen Chang, Katia Cardenas, Steph Stuart, and Hilary Schroeder. Andi Cheney, Natalie Khuen and James Mallek also worked on the production as stage manager, scenic artist, and props master, respectively.

As you can see by the sheer magnitude of the cast, "Our Town" is a large-scale production. But the size of the cast does not overshadow the delicate humanism that the production champions in its least likely of ways. "Our Town" is more than just a play - it's a new narrative philosophy. Incorporating both modern dance and drama, "Our Town" takes the emotional impact of the 1930s drama to a new height. On-stage narrators express the subjective thoughts of youthful lovers as they dance joyously/awkwardly about the stage in the rapture of first love. A town asleep lies on the naked stage in the puffy white undergarments of a century ago, occasionally engaging in mundane nighttime conversations that reveal themselves to be full of a certain magical innocence.

Perhaps it's the re-enchantment of everyday life that lies at the heart of the production. Suddenly hackneyed moments of melodrama - like a character coming upon and wording the romantic notion that the same moon that shines on Canada is the same one they see in South America and everywhere else on this half of the world - are fresh, new and touching again. The play undeniably bares traces of nostalgic longing for the place of its setting - a small town at the turn of the 20th century - and yet it seems far more complicated than that. It's a longing to return, but also a longing to re-philosophize what it means to be human again.

In any case, there's something intensely personal and human about the whole production that I can't really put a finger on. I guess that's what I always feel when I read a good book or see a good movie. There's something about narratives and the feeling that you've participated in someone else's life - albeit it be entirely fictional - that somehow uplifts a person and provides them with a new layer of empathetic understanding of their surroundings.

Tickets to the event are \$7 for general admission and \$5 for seniors and groups. "Our Town" will be performed at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday through Saturday, April 23-25 and at 2 p.m. on Sunday, April 26 on the main stage of the Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center. Student rush tickets will also be available.