RETURNING TO THE STAGE

Three years. That’s how long it’s been since Santa Ana College’s music, theater and dance students performed on the Phillips Hall stage to a full audience. That all changes this May.

A flurry of guitars and violins reverberates off the walls of the small rehearsal room. Cutting through the loud instruments, Adjunct Professor of Music Ernesto Viramontes lets out a soulful grito, a joyous shout that comes from deep within the body.

The students of Don Mariachi spent every Wednesday night this semester preparing for their first performance at home venue Phillips Hall in three years, a night of classic mariachi songs on May 27 called “México de Noche.” They are practicing “El Son del Caballito” repeatedly until they get it right. “Let’s try it one more time, but this time at a faster tempo,” Viramontes says.

Don Mariachi is more than just a class. It’s a way for the students to express their love and passion for the music of their country while serenading their audience with mournful yet beautiful music.

“México de Noche” will present different styles of traditional Mexican music such as son jalisciense, ranchera, bolero, and huapango. The set list includes songs by famous mariachi artists like Jose Alfredo Jimenez, Juan Gabriel, Mariachi Vargas and Tomas Mendez.

“MARIACHI IS PLAYED FROM THE HEART. YOU CAN NOT GET THE STYLE FROM READING IT OFF A CHART.”

-ERNESTO VIRAMONTES
ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF MUSIC

Santa Ana College’s guitar ensemble is getting ready for their upcoming in-person concert. This will be their first time performing in front of an audience since the pandemic forced the group to rehearse and perform solely online.

Pieces by Beethoven, Bach, Houghton, and a few others will be performed at the concert. SAC’s guitar ensemble will also be featuring a special guest, the Mount San Antonio College guitar ensemble.

A soothing breath of Ireland wafted through the halls of the music building where the guitar ensemble rehearses. The sweet sound of “Londonderry Air,” a popular Irish tune, floated from the guitars and filled the room with a warm and welcoming presence.

Returning to the Stage

A story and photo by Jonathan Espinoza
MARIACHI (continued from page 7)

heard before,” said Viramontes. “People like to hear old songs. For some people, they will remember when they were kids and for some, it will bring back memories of their grandparents. It is a family tradition.”

Mariachi music is direct and driving, and it is designed to instill emotion, but all that was lost with pandemic-era concerts, all held over Zoom or at the Johnson Center. Until they returned for in-person learning this semester, students enrolled in the music classes that comprise practices via Zoom while occasionally meeting in person in open spaces. Rather than practicing the music as a group, the students would sit and listen to their prerecorded parts in hopes of improving.

“It was very difficult dealing with Zoom issues because it is such an in-person type of class,” said violinist Edwin Martinez. “But when you start practicing in person, you can feel the energy for you guys, I know you will follow,” said Director Adam Gerling to them during the practice.

“For singer and guitarist Paul Rodriguez, who has been in the ensemble for about seven years, there is no better feeling than performing in person. It reminds him of the first time he sang “Cielo” to a live crowd. “When I first sang, I could feel the audience everywhere I turned, and I could feel that they were enjoying it,” Rodriguez said. “There is no better feeling than to make people happy.”

After months of many late night practice sessions, the Don Mariachi is ready to put down their sheet music and take it to the stage for a night of whistles and claps. “It feels good to be back,” said Viramontes.

THE BEAT GOES ON

The metronome is set. click. click. click.

The tuba makes a bombastic entrance from the back of the room, and the clarinets playfully follow, like Little Red Riding Hood skipping merrily through the woods. It’s a quiet evening as another night of practice begins. Adjunct Professor Adam Gerling holds the magic wand as director of Santa Ana College’s Concert Band. “The ensemble of music majors is gearing up to perform “Myths, Legends, and Fantasy.”

They will be playing a composite of fantastical songs like “Pegasus,” which is about the legend of a mythological flying horse, and songs from into the Woods which was inspired by the Brothers Grimm fairy tales. Other songs include “The Washington Post,” written by famous conductor John Philip Sousa who composed this piece as a marching tune for the U.S. Marine Band in the 1880s, making way for the golden age of Band. Before going into lockdown and rehearsals were held remotely, the ensemble could be as large as thirty players, but this semester the group size is just under ten people. One of those players is Evan Bathe, who first picked up a clarinet when she was 9-years-old and fell in love with music. She has a bachelor’s degree in music education from Cal State Long Beach and she teaches instrumental and general music to middle school and elementary students at Lydia Romero Cruz Academy in Santa Ana.

Another player said, “This is my therapy. It’s like the fun thing I do, plus a lot of us have been doing this for so long. It’s like you’re with a group of friends, plus you get to meet so many people from the community.”

Director Adam Gerling, is leading the Concert Band ensemble for the first time. “If being the energy for you guys, I know you will follow,” said Gerling to them during the practice.
GOING BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Alumni and faculty join together to keep theatre performances alive.

Story and Photos by Emma Mcmillen and Sergio Gutierrez

When *Anna in the Tropics* premiered on April 22, the audience witnessed a concoction of murder, adultery and Russian literature. What they didn’t see, behind the scenes, was all of the preparation that went into this production.

“There’s almost a fear to share your show with the audience,” said Adjunct Professor of Theatre William Mittler. “We’re enjoying rehearsal, we’re committed, we’re discovering our characters.”

The first step in putting on a show, however, is casting. Due to a decrease in enrollment since the pandemic, casting options were scarce.

Theatre Department Chair Amberly Chamberlain, described the effects on the department as tragic. “We had, like, three people show up for auditions. It was very sad and we did not want to have to cancel the show, so we reached out to alumni and then even some friends,” Chamberlain said. After the cast was assembled, they participated in intimacy training to ensure everyone felt comfortable with each other.

“It’s hard to just allow someone to grab you,” says actress and alumni Cristina Villagomez. “You have to build those connections first before you’re comfortable doing things like that.”

As rehearsals began, performers followed safety precautions like getting tested regularly. Mittler, the director, often uttered “masks on off-stage, masks off on-stage” during practice runs.

When it was finally opening night, everyone was excited to get back under the lights.

One of the lead actors, Sergio Camez says, “there is nothing like being in a room and being on stage.” Villagomez finishes this thought, adding, “and feeling the people inside of there reacting to what you’re putting out.”

PERFORMING Child Development Professor Chantal Lamoureille performs in spring production *Anna in the Tropics.*