

Inside opening night with the cast of “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street”

By Sarah Graue, Belle Aguirre, and Brianna Perez

Last week, Moorpark College Theatre Arts welcomed audiences to the premiere of their spring musical thriller, “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,” at the Performing Arts Center.

Directed by John Loprieno, the musical is a joint effort within all areas of the performing arts department. The cast and crew of over 100 members will embark on a three-week run with 12 performances in total.

Moorpark College student Trevor Alkazian plays Sweeney Todd, an unjustly exiled Victorian-era barber who returns home to London after 15 years to seek revenge against the judge who framed him and ravaged his wife.

Todd’s obsessive need to seek vengeance leads to a murderous rampage alongside his business partner, Mrs. Lovett, who turns the bodies into meat pieces.

On opening night, Alkazian shared his excitement for the audience to finally see his take on the widely-known character consumed by loss and revenge.

“I wanted to keep it as honest and original as possible,” Alkazian said. “One note that John Loprieno said was, especially during callbacks, was, ‘I want to see the vulnerability of the monster, I want to see the man behind the monster, I want the monster to be present and in front, but I want to see that journey in the eyes and in the intent.’”

Alkazian’s portrayal of Todd became more elaborate as he immersed himself in the production’s dynamic stage design. Alkazian explained how continuously rehearsing with props and cast members helped reinforce his character.

“Just so much of the technical aspect being a part of it, it feels like it’s a machine,” Alkazian explained. “It runs itself almost, and I’m just, I’m just very honored to be a part of the cast and be working with all these wonderful people and John again, of course.”



The lead actors of "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street," Trevor Alkazian and William Flannery, prepare for the opening night of their production at Moorpark College on March 14, 2024. Photo credit: Sarah Graue



Hair/Wig Designer J'enyce Johnson putting the finishing touches on Trevor Alkazian's appearance before the premiere of "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street." Photo credit: Sarah Graue

Due to the play's dark themes and acts of bloody violence, actors, set designers and costumers worked closely alongside a Blood FX team to incorporate fake stage blood for opening night.

Moorpark College costuming student Noa Walker shared her department's journey of trial and error throughout tech week. To test out complications, the cast alternated between using tempura-based stage blood and water for the gory scenes of the play.

"Last night, we had a decision like, okay, are we going to just do blood? Because if we do blood, it might stain, and it might take some extra effort to get out, but we can't do it without blood," Walker explained. "It adds so much to the story, the drama of it all, so like, it's gonna be tough to get out, but worth it."

Given the play's extensive ensemble, costumers also keep tabs on all apparel and assist with quick changes off-stage. Moorpark College student and dresser supervisor Kristen Fernandez commented on the organizational skills of her team coming into opening night.

"The first day... you're throwing stuff at the wall and learning it, and then it just gets better and better and faster," Fernandez said. "Everyone has their own little responsibility that they do, and so that's nice and we work well and it just gets very smooth by the end of it."

After being fitted into their costumes and mic'd by the technical crew, actors returned to the dressing room to put the final touches on their appearance by the makeup crew.



Costume construction and creation crew members Rhiann Olshane and Noa Walker staging a handcrafted dress on the opening night of "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street" on March 14, 2024. Photo credit: Sarah Graue

Alongside a team of artists, Moorpark College student Nola Cannon applied handcrafted makeup designs inspired by the original Broadway production of "Sweeney Todd." Cannon described the strategic prosthetic application process several actors will endure for the show.

"The Beggar Woman has three prosthetic boils, so it just takes a lot [of effort] because I have to hand make them, and then you have to hand paint them as well after they're applied," Cannon said.

While students learned the fundamentals of production makeup through technical theatre courses at Moorpark College, Cannon brought up the benefits of working with the cast.

"A lot of the crew that are on my team are in the class, so they already have the basic skills, so then they get to venture out and get to interact with the cast some more," Cannon said. "So it's been pretty easy because they're all very skilled."



Makeup designer Nola Cannon applying makeup to Luna Aguilar (Beggar Woman) on the opening night of "Sweeney Todd; The Demon Barber of Fleet Street" on March 14, 2024. Photo credit: Sarah Graue

Looking ready as ever, the cast gathered in the Performing Arts Center hallway to exchange good luck messages before taking the stage.

Brook Lebron, a Moorpark College student playing Todd's confined daughter Johanna, spoke about the unforgettable experience of playing her dream role within the production and noted her final worries going into opening night.

"All the effects in this show, and the huge set that we have to interact with, it can be challenging," Lebron said. "Making sure I can get downstairs fast enough, and I can fit through doors with my huge wig; just everything, but it's been really fun."

At 8 p.m., the Performing Arts Center crowd was bustling with excitement, ready for the cast to finally showcase their three months of hard work.

In the show's program, Loprieno provided final remarks on the cast's performance for attendees and highlighted his team's ability to find strength within the play's darkness.

"I take great comfort in the light our talented students provide. Embrace this light and enjoy the show," Loprieno wrote.

The cast of "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street" will perform on select dates until March 30, with both evening and matinee performances available for viewing. ASL interpreters will accompany shows on Friday, March 22, at 8 p.m. and Saturday, March 23, at 2 p.m.

Tickets for the show are \$20 for adults and \$15 for students and seniors. Tickets can be purchased online through the Moorpark College PAC Box Office to save 20%.

