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'Sweeney Todd' Brings Razor-Edged Excitement

SAN LUIS OBISPO – The tale of the Demon Barber of Fleet Street is served up as cutting-edge entertainment in a new minimalist interpretation of Stephen Sondheim's Tony Award-winning Broadway musical, "Sweeney Todd."

Cal Poly Arts presents director John Doyle's total re-invention of Sondheim's now classic tale of justice as a special Center Stage event at the Cohan Center on Thursday, Dec. 4, 2008 at 7 p.m.

The Wall Street Journal called the revolutionary revival, "The greatest musical of the past half-century has returned in a staging of the utmost force and originality" and Time Out New York called Doyle's concept "the most addictively delicious dish on Broadway in years!"

This innovative new production features a multi-talented ensemble of ten actor/musicians, including Merritt David Janes in the title role. Local audiences who saw Janes star last season as The Wedding Singer's affable Jersey boy Robbie Hart can look forward to the versatile actor's dark and dramatic delivery as the diabolical Sweeney.

Sweeney Todd is based on the 19th century legend of a London barber driven to a life of crime after a malevolent judge takes his wife and child from him. Sweeney's plan for revenge includes a cut-throat partnership with Mrs. Lovett – an enterprising businesswoman – who is soon producing "the tastiest meat pies in London."

Sweeney Todd first premiered on Broadway in 1979 with a 27-piece symphonic orchestra and 30-member cast. Tim Burton's 2007 movie starring Johnny Depp closely followed the epic scale of the original stage production.

The John Doyle interpretation is vastly unique in comparison. The actors on stage are the show's musicians, playing a variety of instruments to perform the entire score. All are on stage throughout the show; even if they are not the focus of the scene, each artist is part of the piece.

The starkly modern set is stripped to the bare necessities and the actors utilize a few essential props to set the different locations as the audience is invited to envision a bleak 19th century London.

"To see Doyle's intensely powerful revival again...is to be reminded of its singular blend of precision, simplicity, and humanity." (Chicago Tribune)

Following a highly-successful London engagement, Doyle's production of Sweeney Todd opened on Broadway in 2005 to universal critical acclaim where it won the Drama League, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Awards for "Best Revival of a Musical," and was awarded a Special Citation by the New York Drama Critics Circle.

The nationally-touring NETworks' Sweeney Todd production features Doyle's original direction, recreated by Adam Hunter. Accompanying Sondheim's music and lyrics is the book by Hugh Wheeler, created from an adaptation by Christopher Bond, with music supervision by David Loud. For more information, please visit the tour website, www.sweeneyontour.com.

A pre-concert lecture by Cal Poly Music Dept. professor Alyson McLamore will be held in the Performing Arts Center's Gallery Level Lobby at 6 p.m.

Due to content, this performance is recommended for adults and students aged 14+.

Student and adult tickets for the performance range from \$44 to \$68 and may be purchased at the Performing Arts Center Ticket Office, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays.

To order by phone, call 805/756-2787; to order by fax: 805/756-6088. Order online at www.calpolyarts.org.

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Cal Poly Public Affairs
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
805.756.7266
polynews@calpoly.edu