Xanadu Review

UNH's Mask and Dagger put on an entertaining production of "Xanadu" earlier this month
On February 18, the University of New Hampshire’s only student-run theater organization, Mask and Dagger, performed their final show of the musical “Xanadu.”

Originally premiering on Broadway in 2007, the stage production of “Xanadu” is based on a 1980 film of the same name, which is famous (or infamous) for being laughably awful. The movie was originally envisioned as a low-budget roller-disco picture, but once prominent performers like actress Olivia Newton-John and actor Gene Kelly joined the production, the film became much more expensive than originally intended.

The film premiered at the end of the summer of 1980 and absolutely bombed at the box office, making a mere $23 million against a reported budget of $20 million. It was panned by critics at the time, with one calling it, “a stupendously bad film.” Fortunately, the soundtrack album, which featured music from English rock band Electric Light Orchestra, was received very well and sold over 2 million copies.

The stage production retained much of the film’s original plot: struggling freelance artist Sonny Malone is dissatisfied with his recent mural of the Greek Muses (daughters of Zeus) and decides to kill himself. On Mount Olympus, Clio, the youngest and perkies Muse, convinces her six sisters to travel to Venice Beach to reignite the flame inside Sonny. Clio changes her name to “Kira,” and is able to quickly inspire Sonny, who decides that he can combine all the arts and “something athletic” into one amazing venue: a roller disco.

However, unlike the movie, the stage version is far less serious and is constantly poking fun at the utter stupidity of the plot throughout the show’s 90-minute runtime.

The show featured just nine cast members and was held in the Paul Creative Arts Center in the Hennessey Theatre.

The clear standout performer of the show was second-year student Jackson Rogers, who played Danny, the hard-hearted real estate mogul. His expressive acting and comedic timing accentuated the comedic moments that would have otherwise fallen flat.

The two lead performers, third-year students Olivia Kettler and Morgan Eldredge, who played Kira and Sonny respectively, also did well; Kettler’s performance was even more impressive, given that she was on roller skates for much of the show’s runtime.

The theater is configured as a black box theater, black box meaning it’s a very sparse performance space, typically a square room with black walls and a flat floor.

Like most other black box theaters, Hennessey can only seat around 130 audience members, who are seated around three of the four walls, which made the performance all the more intimate and special. The small space necessitates limited set pieces, which leaves it up to the performers to make the space come alive, but also requires the audience to interact visually with the production more than usual.

The one aspect of the show that fell short doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with this production, but rather the plot itself. Several comedic moments in the show are meant to poke fun at the objective stupidity of the original film. That being said, audience members may have found themselves groaning and rolling their eyes at the corniness of the story.

Overall, while the structural elements of the story left something to be desired, the acting and singing performances were impressive enough for the show to be entertaining throughout.