

Les Misérables

Tony award-winning musical based on Hugo novel brings 19th-century France to Rudder Theater

BY BETH FOCHT
The Battalion

The wigs have been powdered, the sound check is complete and, after two full days of preparations, one of the biggest productions in the world has come to Bryan-College Station. The Opera and Performing Arts Society presents "Les Misérables," a musical about pre-revolutionary France, in eight performances March 23 through 28 at Rudder Auditorium.

A Story of Epic Proportions

"Les Misérables" is based on Victor Hugo's epic novel of 19th century France. The story begins in 1815, as the audience is introduced to the main character, Jean Valjean. Valjean has been released on parole after 19 years in prison, but is being persuaded by Javert, a police officer, after violating parole.

The plot then jumps eight years — Valjean has become a changed man. He has not only become a successful factory owner but is also mayor of the town where the factory is located:

The plot continues to thicken with

the introductions of Fantine, a worker in Valjean's factory and her daughter, Cosette. Valjean promises Fantine on her death bed to take care of her daughter, and the plot takes a nine-year leap to Paris in 1832.

Hints of a brewing revolution and unrest in the streets accompany the underlying plot of a student revolution, one of the many uprisings leading up to the French Revolution. The main plot weaves itself around this idea as the fates of Valjean and Cosette are determined, along with the students leading the uprising.

"Les Misérables" and Victor Hugo

Alfred Hitchcock once said, "That book [Les Misérables] would make a wonderful musical." Coincidentally enough, years later Les Misérables was made into the world's most popular musical.

Numerous movies have been based on Hugo's epic of France before the revolution, and each movie illustrates the horrors Hugo speaks about.

Dr. Cynthia Bouton, a history professor at Texas A&M with a background in French history, said Hugo wrote the novel, in some ways, as the

history of 19th century France.

"You can locate the story of Les Miz in a 19th century context," Bouton said. "It is almost as if Hugo was writing about the history and legends of this time period through his novel."

For those who do not have the time to read Hugo's Les Misérables or brush up on their French history, Bouton will be giving a lecture presented by OPAS and MSC Literary Arts that will explore a brief look at French history and Victor Hugo's novel. The lecture will be today at 5:30 p.m. in Rudder 301.

Bouton said she hopes to provide people with these historical contexts to help explain what the musical is about.

"The lyrics make references to important points of history and audiences can get a sense of how turbulent these times were without the historical background," she said. "The story will of course make more sense if you know this information, but it is not necessary. The musical is very historical, but it is also a great story."

The story in the novel formally

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Top: French soldiers man the barricades during a war scene. Right: Marius played by Brian Herriott, bottom: Jean Valjean played by Robert Evan performs one of the songs written by Claude-Michel Schonberg

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