

Jewish holiday of Purim comes to close Thursday

By Taylor Siskind

► Sunset Thursday marks the end of Purim, the Jewish holiday that focuses on the defeat of Haman's plot to persecute the Jewish people in the Biblical book of Esther.

Following the Texas A&M Hillel celebration of this holiday Wednesday night, Rahr Chabad Jewish Center will host the Jewish community Thursday night.

Manya Lazaroff, wife of the Rabbi Yossi Lazaroff at the Chabad Center, said the main message of Purim is that God is in everyday life.

"There's times in our life when we see the hand of a higher being," Yossi Lazaroff said. "And there are times that it's less obvious."

Associated with Purim are four "mitzvot," or commandments — the reading of the "megillah," or the Book of Esther, the giving gifts of food, the giving of money to those in need and a feast. Jews use "graggers," or noisemakers, to drown out any mention of Haman's

name during the first mitzvah, when the megillah is read.

"We try to enable Aggies to participate... So they could be able to accomplish all four of our events if they haven't been able to do it prior," Yossi Lazaroff said.

With Reveille in attendance, Hillel celebrated by making "hamentaschen," a triangular-shaped cookie meant to resemble Haman, holding a costume party and megillah reading Wednesday night.

The Hillel student board also conducted a "Purim Spiel," or play, to tell the Purim story. Veronica Beskin, Jewish student life coordinator at Hillel, said costumes are a large part of the holiday and in some ways resemble the American festival of Halloween.

At Chabad, a megillah reading took place Wednesday night and will occur again at noon Thursday in MSC 2403. A stadium-themed costume party and additional reading at Chabad is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. Thursday.



Shelby Knowles — THE BATTALION

(From left to right) communication junior **Dan Rosenfield**, English freshman **Celeste Swanson**, psychology junior **Rebecca Waronoff** and health senior **Alex Powell** enact a "megillah" reading Wednesday night.



Tim Lai — THE BATTALION

Students act out a scene from "Cold Soles" Wednesday night.

Festival displays student-run plays

By Mary Anna Reyes

► A Marilyn Monroe musical, a comedy, a murder drama and an absurdist play about two guys and a refrigerator — the Student New Works Festival is in full swing.

The festival, which began Feb. 27, continues Thursday through Saturday in the Blackbox Theatre and showcases student actors and directors from the Department of Performance Studies.

The main event in for the 2015 festival will feature performances of "Dear Norma Jeane," "Viola Sees a Ghost," "Cold Sole" and "Black Widows."

Kristina Miller, instructional assistant professor of theatre arts, said the multitude of talented students at A&M deserve to have a platform like the festival through which students can share their ideas and passions.

"It's important to give them the opportunity to share their ideas and take pride in their work," Miller said. "It's also a huge learning experience — there is so much that goes into producing any kind of live performance. Many of the aspects of producing go unseen or seem minuscule."

The festival is open to everyone, not just performance studies students. This year, just over 40 students are involved in the festival, including Stephen Steele, theatre freshman, an actor in three of the four showcased plays in

the festival.

"The students, the department, or just anybody, is allowed to submit a proposal to write their own show and have a budget and direct it through the university," Steele said.

The semester-long process to prepare for the festival can be daunting for writers looking to have their work performed for the first time, Miller said.

"Start early. Plan ahead. Get your script or proposal finalized and have several people proofread them," Miller said. "Try to put together a production team who is as passionate about the project as you are. Find a faculty mentor who has experience producing the kind of work that you are attempting to produce and meet with them regularly."

After returning from winter break, the actors and directors had less than a month of preparation until show time. The festival functions as a workshop, meaning the performances will not be as perfected as professional plays. Still, in those three weeks, the performance studies department students worked to settle every detail they may have overlooked.

Chris Haley, writer and director for "Cold Sole" and theatre arts junior, said the amount of work in the production process has been a learning experience.

"Lighting aspects didn't even cross

my mind," Haley said. "I was like, 'Oh, I'm just going to turn the lights off and on.'"

Haley said his play was inspired by a true and common event. Haley said he didn't want to spoil the play by revealing too many details, but he did hint at the lighting design is something the audience should watch out for.

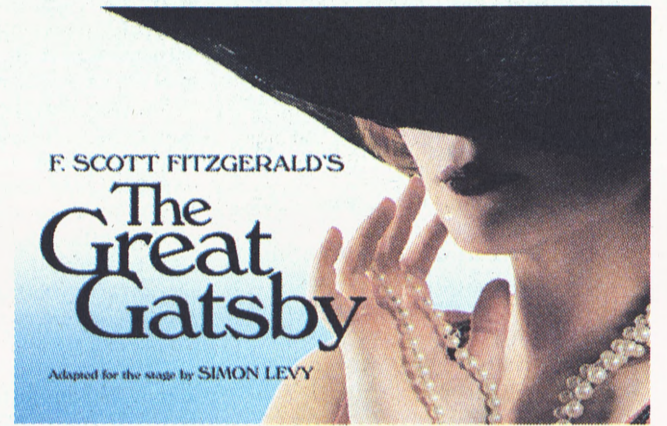
"It's about two roommates fighting over their fridge," Haley said. "When you get down to it, that's about the gist of it."

"Cold Sole" is Haley's first written and directed play. Haley said he got a confidence boost from the experience through the process of experimenting and seeing his work performed.

Those involved in the Student New Works Festival usually exit center stage feeling more confident about their work, said Miller.

"I hope that all of the students involved walk away and feel pride in their achievements but also I want for them to have desire," Miller said. "A desire to do it again and to use what they have learned to do it even better. They all have the potential to create. After this I hope that they are confident in their abilities."

Performances are free and begin at 8 p.m. Thursday in the Blackbox Theatre in the Liberal Arts Building, however seating is limited.



PROVIDED

The Montana Repertory Theatre group will bring the Roaring Twenties to Rudder Theatre Thursday evening. The performance is expected to ring with the novel's motifs.

Theatre group to bring 'Great Gatsby' to life

By Keely Wirries

► Bringing the glitz and glamour of the Roaring Twenties, the Montana Repertory Theatre will showcase their live adaptation of the American classic, "The Great Gatsby" Thursday evening.

The play will incorporate the same motifs and thematic concepts of the movies and novel, but it will provide a different vantage point for the audience, said OPAS student chair and urban and regional planning senior Rachel Fisher.

"That's the great thing about the theater — you have this whole different medium," Fisher said. "It's not just reading words on a page or seeing things on a screen — there are live actors in front of you playing out these roles and bringing [Fitzgerald's] words to life, so I really hope that it resonates with people and makes them think twice about the way they look at things."

Jordan Scoville, OPAS member and civil engineering senior, said with the name recognition and star quality of the Montana Repertory Theatre, the audience should be able to take away as much from the

play as they would from the novel.

"[Everyone] should come see the show because it is going to be great, obviously," Scoville said. "If you've ever read 'The Great Gatsby' or seen the movies, everyone knows it a great story and it's going to be a great performance with the Montana Repertory Theater." While the flamboyant style of the Roaring Twenties is featured in "The Great Gatsby," Fisher said she hopes people will understand the message about American capitalism that Fitzgerald and the Montana Theater Company express.

"It definitely has this side that money doesn't buy happiness and you have to be true to your character and you can't waver in your values because you can lose sight of who you are, but I definitely hope that people will walk away with the image Fitzgerald was trying to convey," Fisher said. The show begins at 7:30 p.m. Thursday evening in Rudder Theatre. Tickets can be purchased online, at the MSC Box Office, by phone or at the door.

SANGAM CONTINUED

styles of dance.

"The teams performing are acapella groups, Bollywood fusion dance and traditional raas and bhangra styles," Chikhliya said. "It's cool to see people our age still holding onto their culture."

A participating A&M dance team, Wreckin' Raas, will showcase the Dandiya Raas dance style of Gujarat, India. Pratik Mandaliya, team co-captain and kinesiology junior, said the team has been preparing for Sangam as they would a national competition.

"We started choreographing a routine in September and have been practicing since," Mandaliya said. "This time around, we're making the routine more crowd-oriented and involving dancing to a blend of Indian and American music."

Achukola said the talent show is for all students — not just Indian students.

"We're trying to promote diversity within the university," Achukola said. "We want to show what our culture is like and raise awareness."

The Sangam talent show takes place at 5 p.m. Friday in Rudder Auditorium.

SBP CONTINUED

"As time went on in the campaign, I did have a conversation with [Tsau] and some of his campaign team members that the best thing to do may be to work together to make sure that all diverse students of all different backgrounds receive the same voice they deserve," Murtha said.

It was during this conversation Tsau said he was offered a cabinet position in Murtha's administration.

"[Murtha] came to speak to my team and he promised — explicitly stated — if we backed out of the race, endorsed him as our candidate and got my entire committee behind him during the debate, he would have given me the executive vice president position," Tsau said. "He told us it was the second-most powerful student position here at Texas A&M and I would have three cabinet positions for my choosing, so that would be a total of four positions."

Murtha said this was a friendly conversation, telling Tsau a position would always be available for him, whether he withdrew his candidacy or not. Murtha said such offers are commonplace and occur almost annually.

"I have talked to [Tsau] about EVP, and I have no issue with that," Murtha said. "There's nothing ever stated that I can't do that."

Tsau went on to decline the offer, and brought the situation to Benigno, who was announced as student body president-elect after the Feb. 19-20 election.

On Feb. 23, Benigno then met with Murtha at a restaurant. Benigno said he met with Murtha to give him a chance to address the issue.

"I told him I knew exactly what he had done

and that Isaiah and I were both willing to talk about it," Benigno said. "I said if he continued to pursue the office of student body president, that the both of us would find that information relevant to the student body."

Murtha said he felt the conversation was threatening, and saw it as blackmail.

"He proceeded to talk about how this was going to hurt my career in SGA, my career going into law school, my character — just all kinds of things, and tried to threaten me not to take [the J-court case]," Murtha said.

Murtha said the meeting is proof Benigno committed campaign violations.

"It proves to me that he knows they did wrong things and they wanted to prevent the J-Court case from happening," Murtha said.

Murtha recorded the Feb. 23 meeting and provided the audio file to *The Battalion*. In the exchange, Benigno said he would only bring the cabinet offer to light if Murtha continued his SBP pursuit through J-Court.

"I'm not going to drag you through the mud unnecessarily and I don't think it's relevant unless you hold office," Benigno said in the recording.

Benigno said he has since reviewed the recording and could find nothing that could be construed as a threat.

"I think it's comical and ludicrous that he feels or felt threatened by that conversation," Benigno said. "I maintain my innocence and I urge anyone who might feel that I acted in the wrong to read the transcript or listen to the audio because I don't think anyone that reads those things could reasonably find me at fault."

Benigno said he originally intended not to pursue the matter.

"But when I read that [Murtha's offer] was an honor violation that skipped the Election Commission, J-Court and SGA internal regulations and goes to honor council, I realized it was a bigger issue than just an election violation," Benigno said.

Benigno cited section six of election regulations, which states: "The Election Commission shall make every attempt to conduct voting in a way free from coercion or pressure. Those obstructing the free and fair nature of the voting process, by which voters may cast a ballot by free choice, are in violation of these regulations and the Aggie Honor Code and they shall be reported to the Aggie Honor System Office for possible reprimand."

If any party decides to submit a Student Conduct Code violation against another, potential penalties vary based on severity and range from correctional workshops to expulsion.

Associate director in the Department of Student Life Kristen Harrell said cases involving the Student Conduct Code are typically assigned to a student conduct code officer, who then determines whether there is significant evidence of policy violation. From there, cases are split into two categories based on whether they could end in expulsion.

Major cases are brought before a three-person panel. Opposing parties could be heard together or separately, depending on the nature and similarity of the claims.

The pending J-Court ruling, for an appeal in which Murtha argues Benigno should have been fined for rule violations in a campaign video, is expected within 72 hours of Monday's hearing.