Coffee talk brings together artists, audience

Actress Ingrid Trovao that played the role of Shui Ta and Shen Te speaks during the Coffee Talk in the Black Box Theater following the evening performance, "The Good Person of Setzuan" in a "Coffee Talk" discussion of theories.
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and ideas hidden within the play on Oct. 8, 2015, Brandy Sebastian/the Telescope

Just past 7 p.m., and people are standing in clusters in the intimate black box theater, throughout the lobby and outside at Palomar College.

Most of the performers and audience members were in this theater together for more than three hours. Now it’s a break for free coffee and cookies. In just a few minutes, some audience members are going to return to interact with the cast one more time.

This was a coffee talk on Oct. 8, following the performance of “The Good Person of Setzuan.” Palomar students, both as performers and audience members, faculty from several disciplines, friends, family and community members came together in an open discussion to share their thoughts on social issues brought up in the play.

“The Good Person of Setzuan” shows the extent people will go while under economic duress. The morality of each character becomes less distinguished as their situations are exposed.

This semester, the questions were “What does it mean to be a good person? And is it possible to be good and stay good in our society?” The coffee talk was brought together to promote campus engagement in the arts.

The coffee talk is led by Michael Mufson, the director of the play. Mufson said he found inspiration for these talks while in graduate school. He read about a liberal arts colleges holding open discussion after plays in order to engage the community in discussion.

Mufson said he believes this idea is perfect for a college environment.

This tradition of open discussion on relevant social topics has occurred in some form for more than 15 years since Mufson began directing at Palomar.

“The questions are out there for people to engage in,” Mufson said.

The discussion features four respondents, each an expert in a different field. The respondents include William Leslie, Mary Ellen Brooks, Bill Jahnel, and Cynthia Bond.

Baruch Guerrero, a Theatre Arts and Radio Communications major, is the stage manager of this show. Guerrero spoke at the coffee talk, and discussed ideas concerning society brought up in the play.

“Being able to talk to everyone after is fun,” Guerrero said.

Guerrero said that working with a large cast was stressful, but the community established from the experience was worth it.

“If you didn’t have a childlike energy, it wouldn’t be fun at all,” Guerrero said.

The issues discussed at this coffee talk span from socioeconomic status, gender roles, and ethics in natural law. Brooks brought up the concept of conflict theory, which states that capitalism is fundamentally unequal due to it’s nature, and social conflict is unavoidable in such a society.

Karen Mcleod, 30, said that the biggest challenge in this play is playing two different characters that are very different. When asked about the coffee talks, she explained that everyone is different, and every gets something different from each experience.

“We did the best to communicate with them,” Mcleod said.

More information on upcoming coffee talks and other Palomar Performing Arts events can be found on their website: www.palomar.edu/performingarts.

Michael Mufson, director, leads the “Coffee Talk”

http://www2.palomar.edu/telescope/2015/10/25/coffee-talk-brings-together-artists-audience/
discussion following the performance of "The Good Person of Setzuan" at the Black Box Theater Palomar College, Thursday, Oct. 8, 2015. Mufson opens the doors to scholars, students and the actors to converse about what the play means and what the writer, Bertolt Brecht, is trying to say.

Brandy Sebastian/the Telescope