

What do two cowboys and existentialism have in common? In Herndon High School's production of *Cowboys #2*, the combination made for a rare experience of country western humor and real-life contemplation.

*Cowboys #2* was released at Theater Genesis in New York City in October 1964. This play, like many of its existential counterparts, was influenced by Waiting for Godot and Satre's No Exit. Chet and Stu are two self-proclaimed cowboys living in a fantasy world when the realities of the necessities of life set in.

Despite the confusing nature of Avant Garde performances, this production used physicality and sound to its advantage in keeping the energy up. The setup for the performance appeared basic enough, but in reality, its minimalist feel helped keep the focus on the actors and the metaphor at hand. As for the focus of the play, the production team was trying to show the audience a metaphor for the circle of life, which is a loaded concept they portrayed with ease.

Chet (Jake Swery), the cowboy who maintained a lively outlook on life almost the entire play, used consistent character choices throughout his performance. His vibrant expressions and passionate outburst made his character engaging to watch, especially when he had to carry the show while Stu was dead on the bench. Stu (Jefferson Escobar Rivera) maintained fantastic physicality and energy while he was alive onstage from jumping jacks to rolling on the floor. The juxtaposition of him on his feet and while he was dying showed how versatile Rivera was in this performance.

Even though Man #1 (Yaliek Miranda) and Man #2 (Kobe Rivas Galdamez) speak little during this show, they had an important role in the way the message was revealed. One thing that was most impressive about the two actors is how good they were at blending into the background of the action when needed and not stealing the show. Their purpose is subtle, even when they are making bird sounds and waving bandanas to help advance the storyline. At the end of the play, Man #1 and Man #2 switch places with Chet and Stu on the bench, helping complete the metaphor presented that history repeats itself. This transition was clean, and the energy stayed up until the last word rolled off their tongue.

The music at the beginning of the play started off the show on a somber note (foreshadowing the events of the play) in contrast to the cruelly ironic music at the end when sung by Man #1 & Man #2. The raw performance of the song added to meaning as well, making it more relatable to the average person. The versatility of the props in this show was impressive, to say the least. For instance, they used the guitars in the song at the beginning and later as a gun. They stored those guitars in barrels that also held the drinking water that filled Chet's hat. It again fed into the idea of simplicity to emphasize the message of the play.

It is an incredible achievement to produce a show about the human life cycle amid a pandemic, and Herndon High School's production of *Cowboys #2* could not have come at a better time. The cast and crew created a fantasy world doused with the harsh reality of living that only a skilled group of thespians could pull off, cowboy hats off to them!