Courtesy Photo

'House of Blue Leaves' hard work

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Heavy snow cancelled a showing of "The House of Blue Leaves" on Friday, March 7. The Saturday and Sunday showings went on as scheduled.

The cancelled show was moved to Friday, March 14, at 8 p.m. in the Ogle Center's Robinson Theater.

Director Jim Hesselman said he wasn't happy the performance was cancelled.

"One member of the cast won't be able to perform that day," he said. "We'll have to replace her role as one of the nuns for the Friday show."

Each show lasts about two hours with a 15-minute intermission between the two acts.

Hesselman said this hasn't been an easy show to set up. Since the play is set in an apartment, there are a lot of props to put on the stage.

He said the set is meant to be a mess.

"The writer explored how tragedies are small humiliations," Hesselman said. "It looks at how adding up the small things lead to huge events."

The 11 cast members and four crew members have worked on this show for about three months.

Ashley McMurtry, theatre senior, said she has been preparing for her role as one of the nuns since January. Auditions for the roles were held last December.

McMurtry said she worked for about 60 hours as a cast and crew member.

As a crew member she stained the floors for the production.

"I have the dirty, paint-stained clothes to prove it," McMurtry said. "Working on set has made me more handy now than ever before."

She said working nearly every day of the week with the cast hasn't been a big problem for her.

"I don't really mind doing it for so long. It's what we do," she said.

The rest of the crew has put in long hours as well.

Rebekkah Meixner, assistant professor of theatre and Theatre Department coordinator, said she easily put more than 1,000 hours into the show.

As coordinator, Meixner started setting up the show in meetings last September. She said she wanted to imagine what it would look like, so she had to draw blueprints of the set to see how it would shape up.

In order to know how to set the stage, she said she did research to see what items would be in a typical apartment during the 1960s. This included going out and buying different items.

"I had to do a lot of shopping for the show in antique stores," Meixner said. "We had to find a camera that someone would actually use back then."

The set started to take shape in February. Meixner said they would first put a scene together, paint it and then decorate it. While the paint was drying, she said she had to make sure the costumes fit the actors.

She also said they spent about $500 on props, which included a working television and refrigerator from the 1960s. The department didn't spend any money on furniture since they had it in storage.

The total budget for the show was about $3,000. Meixner said that was pretty typical for a college production.

Paying for the production wasn't a problem, but Ken Atkins, office services assistant senior, said the money didn't come from the university. He said the School of Arts and Letters only funds part of the IUS Theatre Department.

"They usually cover the first semester," he said. "The second semester productions are funded from first semester ticket sales. The university really funds half the year."

In fact, Atkins said it's expensive just to get permission to produce the show. It costs $350 to $400 just to pay the royalties to the play's writer, John Guare.

There are more productions coming soon. In April, the Theatre Department will host a student show called "The Good Doctor."

Atkins said this play is different because it will be produced entirely by students. They will direct, set the stage and handle all technical aspects.

Atkins said they haven't decided on what productions will be coming in the fall.

He also said the IUS Music and Theatre Departments will come together to produce a musical in the spring of 2009.

It won't be the first time those two departments have worked together. Erich Stem, assistant professor of music, played the opening and closing music for "The House of Blue Leaves."

This play includes two professional actors, J.R. Stuart and Georgett Kleier, in the cast.

Meixner said it's all a part of the process to change the actors' perspectives of theater.

"It's one thing for me to tell them what it's like when they do a professional play, but it's another thing to see that for themselves."

She also said the experience is open to everyone. Anyone, regardless of their major, is free to try out in auditions or to volunteer to help out on the set.

Courtesy Photo

'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.'

– T.S. Eliot

'Float' a milestone for Flogging Molly

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People are using the word "love" in regard to music a lot more freely than I think bodes well. Everyone has three dozen bands that are their "favorites".

Out of those three dozen bands, they probably know about three songs per band. Is this really what true fandom has come down to?

My main point with that little rant is that there's no enthusiasm in music anymore. It seems like no one cares about really being dedicated to a band they "love" anymore.

A slight change in style or credo, and these "fans" are off to find something different. Which is to say, a band that sounds exactly the same, but with a message they like better. Lame, cookie-cutter music with no heart.

In honor of Saint Patrick's Day, I am proud to announce that there is a group that is everything these bands are not. They have a unique sound many have tried to emulate, but none have really succeeded in doing so. They have a culture behind them. They have serious heart combined with a light-hearted attitude. They take themselves with pride, but not with too much solemnity. But most importantly, they have a dedicated and faithful fan base, spanning across all age groups and stratifications of attitude and society. That ever extraordinary band is the Celt-punk phenomenon Flogging Molly.

'As a Flogging Molly fan for nearly seven years now, I am extremely pleased with this album. It's a little change of scenery, without forfeiting what made them unique in the first place.'

To date, Flogging Molly has released two live-content and three original-content albums. The last original-content album that came out was "Within a Mile of Home" in 2004. The newest release, "Float," has been a long time coming.

The much-anticipated new disc has taken a slight style detour, settling into a new seriousness and maturity. Previous albums have had songs, fan favorites like "Devil's Dance Floor" and "Seven Deadly Sins" for example, which are just for fun.

"Float" is more emotionally dense, and packs more of a meaningful-content punch.

Alternative Press calls "Float" the most important album of the year, if not the decade.

I personally think this is a little ambitious. It's an important album, particularly for Flogging Molly as a band. I think it's a serious milestone in their creative evolution. But I'm not sure it carries as much social weight as AP is putting on its shoulders.

Appropriate to the more serious lyrical content of the album, "Float" has a mellower, more somber tone on the whole than Flogging Molly's usual fare.

The title track is a solid testament to the virtues of a little more sobriety of style, no Irish joke intended there. It's a placid, calm sound setting the tone for a man's continuing struggle to heal.

But what really perfects the song for me is the fiddle work by Bridget Regan. It gives an added depth and sensitivity.

My favorite song on the album is one of the few exceptions to the new stylistic changes.

"Requiem for a Dying Song" is political and emotionally appealing, with the energetic pace and quality that Flogging Molly has become known for. A similar sound, but slightly darker, is "Paddy's Lament."

The album is worth buying for those two tracks alone, no doubt. Think "Drunker Lullabies," but with a new twist.

A nod to evergreen fans turns up on "Float" as well. "Between a Man and A Woman" first showed up all the way back in 1997 on the live album "Alive Behind the Green Door."

This is the first time they've released a clean studio cut of the track, and I am personally thrilled with it. It's a little slower than I'd have expected, more emotional and polished. Definitely one of the highlights of the album.

As a Flogging Molly fan for nearly seven years now, I am extremely pleased with this album. It's a little change of scenery, without forfeiting what made them unique in the first place. The lyrics still have the same heart and spunk, with Dave King's intense, genuine vocal work to bring the words to life. As far as the rest goes, keep it fresh, keep it coming. "Float" isn't likely to come off my rotation any time soon.