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Mount Madonna School Presents: The Sound of Music

Mount Madonna School (MMS) proudly presents the High School Winter Production of The Sound of Music, premiering at the Hawks' Nest Theater on January 24 and 25 at 2:00pm. This final collaboration between Rodgers & Hammerstein was destined to become the world's most beloved musical. Featuring a trove of cherished songs, including "Climb Ev'ry Mountain," "My Favorite Things," "Do-Re-Mi," "Sixteen Going on Seventeen," and the title number, The Sound of Music won the hearts of audiences worldwide, earning five Tony Awards and five Oscars.

Saturday tickets are available at: <https://mountmadonnaschool.ticketspice.com/the-sound-of-music-jan24>

Sunday tickets are available at: <https://mountmadonnaschool.ticketspice.com/the-sound-of-music-jan25>

The inspirational story, based on the memoir of Maria Augusta Trapp, follows an ebullient postulate who serves as governess to the seven children of the imperious Captain von Trapp, bringing music and joy to the household. But as the forces of Nazism take hold of Austria, Maria and the entire von Trapp family must make a moral decision.

The Sound of Music comes as a warm, nostalgic embrace for many, but for students at Mount Madonna School, this is likely their first encounter with the beloved musical. Re-introducing the vintage classic is part of what made it a compelling choice. "In an age of TikTok and endless media, classics from before 2000 aren't always seen," said Director, Chelsea Otterness. "But timeless works are that for a reason—they highlight the peace and bliss found in nature, in music and the arts, and in loyalty to family and one's values."

MMS performing arts students are stepping into 1940's Austria and the von Trapp saga with focus and enthusiasm. From enrichment projects and visualization techniques to personal reflection exercises, student performers are finding authentic ways to settle into character, bringing a range of depth and dimension to each performance. Cora Kayne, who plays Mother Abbess, along with Noa Zands, who plays Sister Berthe, visited the Villa Maria del Mar nunnery as part of their pre-production research. They were welcomed by Sister Michelle of the Sisters of the Holy Names religious community in Santa Cruz who talked about her personal experience as a nun, providing the students with levity and insight.

"When I think about nuns," reflected Cora, "my mind immediately goes to the black outfits, so it was kind of surprising to see Sister Michelle in a Santa Cruz sweatshirt." Cora explained that the visit with Sister Michelle helped shed light on some of the ways nuns have been portrayed in media and film over the

years, leading to the stereotype that they are often strict or rude. Cora says she learned to see her character from another angle after meeting with Sister Michelle. “It can be easy to jump to portraying Mother Abbess as firm, but now I think of her as grounded and sweet and kind. She chose this life of religious devotion, and she loves Maria.”



Noa Zands commented that her character, Sister Berthe, is meant to be critical of Maria. “Sister Michelle talked about how the nun stereotype came from a time when the whole world was more strict and rigid,” she said, “but it’s important for me to show that it’s not the only aspect of Sister Berthe’s character and that she does care deeply.” Noa said that what stuck with her after the visit were the nunnery’s sweeping views of the ocean framed by coastal flora. She learned that “a staple of religious life is being in touch with beauty.”

Helping students develop deep, personal connections to their characters will give the performance “an aliveness” that “is only possible because of who these students are,” said Chelsea. “They are committed to embodiment, letting their hearts lead them rather than following prescriptive directions from me.”

Nikowa D’Costa-Hemp, who plays Captain Georg von Trapp, strongly resonates with his character’s capacity for love. “His lovingness...when my character falls in love with Maria is what I’m connecting to right now,” said Nikowa, expressing an emotional openness that helps ground his interpretation of the role. Stepping into the captain’s world requires becoming “more stern and proper,” he said, “taking slower and more composed breaths, and having better posture because of [Georg’s] military background.” Even with that formality, he stays centered in the heart: “All the stuff that influences what [Captain von Trapp] does comes from the heart,” said Nikowa.

Nikowa feels the captain’s truth most clearly in the chest, anchoring him in “what the captain is feeling and what his background is.” During rehearsals, scenes involving the Germans trigger instinctive reactions: “He gets defensive and fearful,” said Nikowa. These responses help him understand Georg’s fear for his family and how it shapes his decision to leave his home country. “His duties are driven by his desires,” he said. “Once Georg decides that he wants to be with Maria and be a better father to his children, then his motivations stem from that.” The defining moment of the character’s journey, he says, is “falling in love again and finding music and embracing his duty as a father.”

Lucy Yen plays Maria, the free-spirited novice nun and governess to the von Trapp family. Lucy describes Maria’s inner life as “from the gut.” “Her gut impulses overpower her head,” said Lucy, “and sometimes even her heart,” noting that if Maria followed her heart alone, she might make different choices.





Lucy observes changes in Maria's breath depending on context. With the nuns, her breath is comfortable and familiar; with the children, she is excited and eager to share joy; and with the captain, she experiences a new kind of tension and breathlessness, reflecting her emotional vulnerability. On Maria's deeper calling, Lucy notes, "When she feels something bigger is happening...there is a stillness and an acknowledgement that there is something bigger."

For Maria, a key turning point is realizing she can lead and love beyond the Abbey. Lucy explains, "the moment she understands the impact she can have with the children, she knows she can no longer retreat from the world." Maria balances duty and desire by acting on joy and love for the children, even if it conflicts with

Abbey rules: "She defies the discipline of the Abbey...she is living on the loving impulse of joy."

Regarding Maria's return to the von Trapp villa, Lucy emphasizes personal growth through responsibility: "Her return is her real consequence; she left the children without saying goodbye. It was selfish and a mistake. It's the first hard choice she has to make with no reward. What she gained was making the choice to come back."

Lucy also highlights Maria's influence on Captain von Trapp and the ensemble: her empathetic leadership brings harmony through playfulness and intuition rather than authority. She notes Maria's courage in a historical context: navigating political strife requires resilience, moral conviction, and the willingness to act in the face of danger. Though it may be new to many young students, the relevance of the production resonates in today's climate. "In this story," Chelsea goes on to say, "characters face political upheaval, yet they choose to stay connected to each other and to their values rather than conform."



Maria's example encourages audiences to embrace uncertainty, act with empathy, and find strength through love and moral clarity. "It takes bravery to initiate change," Lucy says. "Every time [Maria] chooses to embrace something new and scary, that's where you see the story move forward."

"As we count down to the show, rehearsals are now anchored in the body. Students are focusing on moment-to-moment discovery," said Chelsea, "so that audiences will experience a performance that is alive, authentic, and full of heart."

Book by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse. Suggested by "The Story of the Trapp Family Singers" by Maria Augusta Trapp. Music by Richard Rodgers. Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II.

Nestled among the redwoods on 380 acres, Mount Madonna School (MMS) is a diverse learning community dedicated to creative, intellectual, and ethical growth. MMS supports its students in becoming caring, self-aware, discerning, and articulate individuals; and believes a fulfilling life includes personal accomplishments, meaningful relationships, and service to society. The program, accredited by the

California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) and Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), emphasizes academic excellence, creative self-expression, and positive character development. Located on Summit Road between Gilroy and Watsonville. Founded in 1979.