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Mr. Bengford

Tech Theater Period 4

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On April 11, 2009 I saw the musical *Wicked* at the Orpheum Theatre in San Francisco. It was directed by Joe Mantello, based on Gregory Maguire's novel, Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West. The musical was about how the Wicked Witch of the West came to be, through her life in and after college, and also showed how there was more to her part of the story than just being evil to Dorothy. Elphaba, the witch, had feelings and longings too, and did not start out as an evil person.

Right as I sat in my seat, I was amazed at the set. It was beautiful! Eugene Lee did a wonderful job at creating the right atmosphere as soon as a person looked at the stage. The musical takes place in a different world, and the stage really showed that. There was a huge mechanical dragon at the top of the proscenium and along the side borders were towers. In the novel, Elphaba was born under a dragon clock tower, so the set was based off of the clock. The dragon moved and lit up by wires and strings connected to one of the side towers, where a tech maneuvered the control. The towers on the side borders were built like old wooden houses fused with clockwork gears, with ladders and different landings for actors to walk on. There were also two movable set pieces, as tall as the stage with clock gears that spun around. The drops were also beautiful. They each had their own feeling based on the scene, or had basic designs, like of a city background. The one drop I loved was one of the first drops shown. It looked like on big clock with three

little clocks on the bottom. However, the three little clocks were actually doors that the actors could move through. I had never seen anything like it before.

I also really enjoyed the lighting designed by Kenneth Posner. He did a wonderful job at setting the mood. They were dark toned at more serious moments and lighter with different gobos for lighter scenes. I loved his use of gobos! The ones he picked out were perfect for the scenes. My favorite lighting scene was after “Defying Gravity” when Elphaba is rising above the guards and about five gobos that were green, blue, pink, and purple were crossing over her so her face is where all five of them crossed. The lights looked like a mosaic that one would see in a church. It created the feeling of her triumph and it focused the attention on her face. One of his other gobos that he frequently used was projected on to the floor and it had a cage look to it. It was always used for the more serious scenes to show how the characters are “trapped” in the certain situation. I also like how the lights went all around the stage. There were Christmas lights that were on the bottom half of the border towers. I could not see them from where I was sitting when they were not lit, so when they did lit up, it was a great effect. They were used for the Ozdust ballroom and surprise engagement party to create a light-hearted and joyful feeling. The Christmas lights also turned green when it was the first scene of the Emerald City, which made it look like the whole feeling of everything being green was coming off the stage. I also was wondering how he created the “rain” because it was only projected onto some of the props on stage and it did not hit the actors or the background drop.

Many of my friends have seen *Wicked* several times and rave about how good it is. I now know why they love it so much. I could easily go see the musical again and

write a whole other critique on the sound and costumes, or go more in depth with the lighting and set design. All of the components made the show exciting to watch, and I liked the fact that I could see at least two techs working the spots in the border towers. That made me really happy to see because I normally do not see any of the techs doing what I have done in a production before, so it felt really special to me. I really loved the set design the most, I think, but *Wicked* is definitely a musical I would see again.