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Do the youth hate the arts?

By Anya Farwell The Daily
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Meany Hall, located in Red Square across from Odegaard Library, is not only home to the dance department but to theaters and large performance venues as well.

Case Tanaka

“Who lives, who dies, who tells our story?”

This quote is from one of my favorite musicals “Hamilton” that I had the treat of seeing for the short time the production was in Seattle this past month. When Hamilton hit the stage, it captured the hearts of the youth with its original score, and catchy rap songs. When seeing the production I was in awe of the talent of the cast and the sheer stunning force of live theater; I thought to myself, “Why don’t I do this more often?” The answer to this question seems to be rather simple... or not.

Musicals and theatre have had a significant grounding in the art world for generations, with knock-out productions such as “The Phantom of the Opera,” “Rent,” “The Prom,” and “Wicked,” in more recent years. With the soundtracks, costumes, and live vocals, you would think seeing these shows in person would be a bucket list item for many. Or at least it used to be a bucket list item. In recent years, it seems live theater has seen a significant decline in the attendance of youth, bringing up the question, do youth hate the arts?

“I think a lot of people right now are being very careful with what they spend their time and money on,” said a UW student, preferring to stay anonymous. “When they are thinking about the calculus of what they can spend their money on, theater is coming up short.”

It’s not a shocking revelation that the lack of attendance can be partly attributed to the soaring ticket prices of many of the shows. When looking for cheap theatre tickets, you’ve hit gold if you find anything under \$100.

“We want to make art as accessible as possible, but also so we can pay people making the art, we still have the charge for tickets,” he said.

Although theater is expensive, sometimes this price theory of “make it or break it” falls flat.

This is shown with the production “Romeo and Juliet” starring Rachel Zegler and Kit Connor. In an article by The Hollywood Reporter, “Romeo and Juliet” received the “youngest ticket-buying audience” in Broadway history. Most of the audience was between 18 and 24 years of age.

With the young star-studded casts like “Romeo and Juliet” and the reaction from the youth, we have to question whether the lack of appropriate advertising to the younger generations is connected to the lack of turnout at shows. Although Zegler and Connor are lead figures in the whirlwind of rising stars from their roles in “Heartstopper,” and Zegler in “The Hunger Games,” it can’t fully atone for the drastic changes in theater.

It seems this issue isn't just reserved for theater. At the Oscars on March 2, multiple people shined a light on this subject, most notably Sean Baker, the four-time Oscar winner, whose speech brought attention to the lack of attendance in movie theaters in the United States.

"It's a communal experience you simply don't get at home," said Baker. "During the pandemic, we nearly lost 1,000 screens in the U.S."

With people streaming at home, many smaller theaters have been forced to shut down due to the lack of attendance. But, I know what you're thinking, "Why would I go to a movie theater when I can watch it at home in my sweats?" It seems many people have the same idea. With the new renaissance of streaming platforms and the loss of cable television, people are able to watch musicals, concerts, and live shows from the comfort of their couch, giving all in-person arts an automatic disadvantage.

Although there is a plague of high prices on tickets, organizations such as Seattle Rep offer affordable ticket prices to high school and college students, making theater and other performances more accessible to the youth in the Seattle area.

With this in mind, and following the wise words of Baker, I encourage everyone to go to the theater "one last time," so you don't miss "your shot" to see an influential, and maybe once-in-a-lifetime performance that can't be matched from your couch.

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