

# Oh, “My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy,” where do I even begin?

ELIJAH TEMPLETON  
LIFE EDITOR

Ye, the artist formerly known as Kanye West, once stormed the stage at the MTV Video Music Award’s, interrupting Taylor Swift who was receiving an award for Best Female Video. “Taylor, ima let you finish, but Beyonce had one of the best videos of all time,” he said, much to the shock and horror of those in attendance and those watching on television around the world. What followed was a media fire storm that saw him receive wide spread condemnation and eventually enter into a self-imposed exile. West retreated to Hawaii, flew out dozens of collaborators and set to work on what would become the magnum opus of his already legendary discography. That album was “My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy,” and the rest, as they say, was history. Recorded primarily at Avex Studios in Honolulu, Def Jam effectively gave West a blank check to finance the production, which he ran with and spent around three million dollars to record the record, making it one of the most

expensive albums ever made. In a 2013 interview with the New York Times, West said this record was something of an attempted apology. “[“My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy”] was my long, backhanded apology. You know how people give a backhanded compliment? It was a backhanded apology. It was like, all these raps, all these sonic acrobatics. I was like: “Let me show you guys what I can do, and please accept me back. You want to have me on your shelves.” The recording process itself has earned almost equal renown as the record itself, with millions of fans being acutely aware of the intricate schedule and creative process that all collaborators were required to abide by. West booked the three recording rooms at Avex simultaneously for 24 hours a day and every day, the production crew and collaborators would eat breakfast together at West’s rental home and then head straight to the studio, often working deep into the night. West is said to have never slept a full night while

recording, instead opting for short power naps in the chairs and couches of the studio to remain immersed in his creative process. Everyone involved also was required to wear a black suit and black knit tie while recording in an attempt by West to maintain focus and elevate their collective artistic vision. This painstaking attention to detail and discipline was effective in creating the maximalist and grandiose sound of “MBDTF” that would yield some of West’s most popular and enduring tracks. From “Power” to “Runaway” to “All of The Lights,” West is in top form on this record and he is not the only one who came to play. Rick Ross delivers a career best verse on “Devil in a New Dress” that was so iconic it warranted it’s own music video. Nicki Minaj, a relative newcomer to the hip hop world at time of the album’s recording, stole the spotlight on “Monster” and catapulted herself to the top of the totem pole of female MC’s with a single verse, despite warranting “50k for a verse, no album out,” in her own words.

Justin Vernon, of Bon Iver fame, brings a transcendent vocal performance to the eclectic and energetic sonic storm that is “Lost in the World.” I could wax poetic about each feature on every track of this record and none of it would be overstating the quality of production, mixing and songwriting on display from all involved. “My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy” is the ultimate distillation of Kanye West as both an artist and public figure. It is grandiose, opulent, provocative, life affirming and stuffed to the brim with musical talent that can’t be emulated by any one artist alone. This record stands alone as the absolute pinnacle of West’s particularly braggadocious brand of hip hop. You may think what you like of the man he has become, but great art is eternal and when people have long since forgotten his misdeeds, his work will remain as a testament to the power of unwavering self-belief and the power in creating something uniquely your own. In my view, this album is his legacy. And what a legacy it will be.



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PHOTO COURTESY OF IMDB  
Ye on set of the “Runaway” music video.

## “Now You See Me: Now You Don’t” is fun, but forgettable

ELIJAH TEMPLETON  
LIFE EDITOR

After almost a decade away, everyone’s favorite kleptomaniacal magicians returned to the big screen for the newest installment in the ever-expanding “Now You See Me” franchise. The third film, upsettingly titled “Now You See Me: Now You Don’t,” a title that many fans, myself included, have long lamented not being the title for the sequel, which would have opened up a new title for this one, think “Now You Three Me” or “Now You See Three,” just to name a few. Missed chances at catchy titles aside, “Now You See Me: Now You Don’t” sees the franchise take a more “Ocean’s 11” approach than previous installments, with elaborate set pieces and tightly choreographed action sequences to put their sizable ensemble cast on full display. The film opens with the introduction of three new

characters, Bosco (Dominic Sessa), June (Ariana Greenblatt) and Charlie (Justice Smith). Our young trio are magicians in their own right, who grew up idolizing the exploits of The Horsemen and modeling their own Robin Hood-esque wealth redistribution stunts on The Horsemen’s tricks in previous films. One by one, the core cast is brought back into the fold until finally the old guard meets the new and they all decide to work together to take on their most daring heist yet: the heart diamond. The only thing standing between the Horsemen and their target is the sizable resources and manpower at the hands of the Vanderburg family and their evil princess, Veronika, played by the always delightful Rosamund Pike. Like all the franchise installments before it, the film relies heavily on the chemistry between the characters and the charm of our criminal

but lovable magic-makers. The plot is a bit formulaic, and intended twists in the film’s climax seem all too predictable if one pays even the smallest bit of attention. Despite its narrative shortcomings, the film is a fun ride that coasts by on its cast’s charisma and ever-evolving character dynamics. The kids try to impress the veterans while the vets work to keep the young guns humble and remind them of their place in the magic hierarchy. There is plenty of fun banter, and the film’s heart lies in the bonds the characters share, making friendship and found family the real magic of these stories. It is likely a film you watch once and then never again, but for those two hours, you’re sure to be entertained and this one is worth the price of admission to see.

Official Score: 7/10



COURTESY OF IMDB

## “Dancing with the Stars” season 34 semi-finals set stage for explosive finale

ALLIE CARSON  
NEWS EDITOR

The semi-finals of “Dancing with the Stars” (DWTS) season 34 was themed around Prince and one high performing couple was sent home. With there only being six couples left on the show, Robert Irwin, Alix Earle, Dylan Efron, Jordan Chiles, Whitney Leavitt and Elaine Hendrix, all of the couples had to dance to two Prince songs. Elaine, who’s now the

oldest on the show and has been injured for the past few weeks, went first and danced a Foxtrot to “I Wanna Be Your Lover.” Once in the skybox, the scores were released and the couple, Elaine and Alan, got 27/30, straight nines from the three judges. Alix, who has a background in competitive dance, went next and danced the Argentine Tango to “Little Red Corvette.” While she got a perfect score last week, the judges weren’t nearly as impressed this week,

getting a 28/30, Derek being the only judge to give her a 10. The villainous mormon from “The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives,” (SLOMW) Whitney, was third. This was the first episode of DWTS since season three of SLOMW came out where it was revealed she only came back to the show for the opportunity to dance on DWTS.

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## Colter Wall makes cowboy music and that’s alright with me

WILL LIVINGSTON  
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Full time Canadian rancher and part time country singer Colter Wall must have finally gotten time away from his ranch work, because he finally released another album. Wall has really made a niche in country music as the “cowboy song” guy. There’s always one guy in country music for every generation that just really digs western music and only does that sort of sound. Marty Robbins did that in the 50s and 60s. The Highwaymen all dabbled pretty heavily in the genre, Willie Nelson especially so. Chris LeDoux did it in the 90s. Wall is that guy for this generation, and his new album

“Memories & Empties” is just a continuation of that style. I’ll admit I’m a bit biased. I’ve been listening to Wall’s music since I got put onto it in 2020, and I’ve liked it ever since. I really like this album, but this one is not his best. Colter Wall’s strength in all his music is his lyrics. A lot of these songs in this album are about being sad about a woman, and these ones kind of all sound the same. I might personally like them, but I’ll admit it gets a bit monotonous after a little while. The strength of this album lies in its second half. Once “Living by the Hour” blessed my cardrums I knew we were so back. People who don’t listen to Colter Wall also need to know that sometimes he does



a song with a spiritual theme to them. They always slap. “4/4 Time” is one of those songs, this time about the narrator mourning that he’ll never make music as good as the music God put in the birds, but he hopes that God will settle for his “4/4 time.” “The Longer You Hold On” is a pretty catchy song, and “Summer Wages” ends the album on an upbeat note. If the album was just the last five songs, I’d give this a 10. But the first five songs are also on this album, and they’re really just ok compared to other Wall songs I’ve heard. This is a good album overall, but I would not suggest starting with this one if you’re getting into Colter Wall’s music.

Official Score: 6/10



# A-State Theatre’s “The Thanksgiving Play” blends commentary and comedy

AMELIA YOUNG

STAFF WRITER

A-State’s theatre program returned to the stage this past weekend with “The Thanksgiving Play.” “The Thanksgiving Play” is a satirical comedy that focuses on a group of well-intentioned educators trying to write Thanksgiving pageants without any Native American representation, but they get trapped in a loop of political correctness, being socially aware and trying to do what they believe is ‘the right thing.’ After reading the play three or four times, Dallas Martinez, the show’s director, began developing a directorial concept to guide him and the designers

toward what they wanted to achieve with this show. “This one is just like ‘escape room of good intentions.’ They’re just trying to find a way out, but they can’t, all based on one another and their political correctness, and trying to be socially aware, and it just seems to be a never-ending trap,” Martinez said. “So, let’s play into that. They’re literally confined, entrapped if you will, in this classroom that we’ve created, and it’ll be a neat experience for the audience, because I’m not sure the last time we’ve done it in the round.” Joanna Crites plays Logan, a drama teacher and director who wants to put on a Thanksgiving play at her school. This production will be

Crites’ first time playing a lead role in an A-State production. She has played an ensemble-focused role in a previous A-State production. “I think every show is very different; there’s really no comparing one show to another in my mind. I think that every cast and every crew, every director is different, and there’s just so much to love about each experience that I get to have,” Crites, a junior general studies major from Alma, Arkansas, said. With the help of her boyfriend, Jaxton, played by Zane Brewer, and history teacher Caden, played by Nico Stark, who is helping maintain historical accuracy, all they need is someone

to play a Native American. Alicia, played by Kamyron Lefebvre, is hired as their Native American representative, but it later turns out she is not Native at all and portrays many different ethnicities to book roles. Now the four have to come up with a way to tell the Thanksgiving story as four white people. The production takes place in the Black Box Simpson Theater, where the audience is very close to all sides of the stage. While the Simpson Theater is used once almost every season, it has not been set up in this style in the past four seasons. Brewer has been in four A-State productions in the past, but this will be his first in the Simpson Theater.

“The audience is always going to see you. So it’s thinking about all sides at all times. Making sure you’re sharing the love with everybody. So I think getting to do such an intimate show in this immersive setting has been my favorite,” Brewer, a senior theater major from Conway, Arkansas, said. Martinez and the actors really play on the idea of how far to the left you can be before it starts getting ridiculous. The show is full of humorous lines generated from how politically correct the characters try to be. Logan delivers most of these lines, whether it’s referring to Thanksgiving as ‘the holiday of death,’ or showing her exasperation by saying ‘oh my goddess.’

But she’s not the only one. Jaxton also has more than a few moments that had the audience laughing. The four realize they cannot play Native Americans, resulting in chaos as they scramble to tell the story of the first Thanksgiving with zero Native American representation. Nothing can prepare the audience for what they come up with in the end. “We need an audience, because I’ve seen it. I’ve laughed. I know the jokes. I know the lines, you know what I mean? So we need people to be in there,” Martinez said. There will be three more performances, 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2:30 p.m. Sunday, in the Simpson Theater.



Photo by Amelia Young | Staff Writer

Members of the cast rehearse before opening night of “The Thanksgiving Play.”



Photo by Amelia Young | Staff Writer

(Left) Joanna Crites and Zane Brewer as Logan and Jaxton in “The Thanksgiving Play.”

## Professor Speaks: “What’s your craziest story from your teaching career?”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASTATE.EDU  
Lavonda Ann Evans is an instructor of sociology in the sociology and criminology department.

“A student emailed me that they couldn’t come to class because they had food poisoning. They ate expired chicken, but they didn’t think it would make them sick, and so they couldn’t come to class. . . I mean, what are the chances? That is the most outlandish thing that I have heard of as a way to not come to class.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASTATE.EDU  
Megan Weaver is an adjunct instructor of fine arts in the arts and design department.

“I had a student once who, technically, through excuses, killed her grandma like five times, so they repetitively missed class claiming that their grandma had died throughout the entire semester. So that was one of the worst excuses.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASTATE.EDU  
Danny Vivar Guerra is an assistant director of student leadership in the student development and leadership department.

“For one of our SGA Senate meetings, it was Halloween themed, and one of the senators dressed up as myself. So she went and bought a wig, some glasses, put on a beard and a name tag, and it was pretty funny.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASTATE.EDU  
Natasha Neal is an instructor of political science in the government, law and policy department.

“When I was an advisor, I got a phone call from a parent asking if I could help her contact her son. So I looked him up on the computer, but I wasn’t going to provide her with any information. I asked, ‘Is he presently a student here?’ She was like, ‘Yes, I just gave him a \$5,000 check for his tuition.’ And I told her, ‘I can tell you that the last semester he was here was last spring.’ He had dropped out of school, not told his parents, and he was using the tuition money that they were giving him for his apartment rent, because he was actually on academic suspension.”