

Tie-dying not a lost art at CSU East Bay

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Students in the Department of Theatre and Dance prepare costumes and sets for "Hair" using the tie-dye method that leaves the psychedelic color patterns popular in the 1960s. Some of the more memorable cultural aspects of the late 1960s returned to Cal State East Bay's Hayward campus in August so that the Highlands Summer Theatre could stage the landmark musical of 40 years ago, "Hair," during two consecutive weekends in the campus' University Theatre.

"Hair" is the rock musical that, according to director A. Fajilan, "celebrates the spirit of the '60s by embracing the joys and compassion of communal living." To do that meant bringing back the memorable techniques that were used in designing the clothing that represents the era when the show was first staged and depicting what hippies were wearing on the streets of Berkeley and elsewhere.

That includes tie-dying, a technique that generally produces brightly colored clothing that was popular in the hippie culture. The process ties up cloth before applying dye in such a way that it only reaches part of the material to which it is applied.

Ulises Alcala, costume shop manager and lecturer for the Department of Theatre and Dance, had his students color white clothing with hot and cold dyes.

"Although I did look in the costume closet first, I ended up buying most of those pieces from a store in San Rafael," Alcala said.

Theatre arts students dyed clothing and material that ranged from white bikinis, pants, and shorts to the curtains to be used as a backdrop for the set. The costumes were mainly colored with yellow, pink and orange dyes that were either hot or cold.

The process involved the students tightly tying and knotting the material with string. Alcala encouraged them to sew a variety of designs to create certain patterns.

One of the tie-dying students, Kehinde Kujahagulia-Seltu-a dance major-sewed circles and triangles. The result Kehinde and everyone got revealed a myriad of psychedelic colors and patterns.

"There is no way the students could mess up any of the designs," said Alcala, who indicated that the process was not as complex as it would seem to others not familiar with the process. He said the students were able to have fun with it. And they gained some insight into a craft first used four decades earlier.

"I think the clothing was excellently designed by Ulises and the students in the class," said Cal State East Bay student Seth Thygesen, a member of the cast of "Hair" who is studying filmmaking.

And after all of the knotting, sewing, dipping, and brushing of the dye, the costumes looked much like the clothing one could have bought in Berkeley in 1967.