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CSU theater asks: Please turn your cellphone on

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CSU theatre program students rehearse 'Orestes 2.0' in preparation for Thursday's opening. The show, featuring guest director Sanaz Ghajarrahimi, kicks off many changes for the program, including 'Tweet Seat' sections where attendees are encouraged to use their cellphones (on mute) to post their experience on social media. / Dawn Madura/The Coloradoan



Written by Stacy Nick

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Right before the lights go down and the curtain comes up on CSU Theater's production of "Orestes 2.0," the audience will hear a little reminder about their cellphones: Please leave your cellphones on.

That's right: *on*.

With its season opener, the program is not only revamping a classic Greek myth, it's also revamping how the public sees it, making productions social-media friendly. So starting this season, CSU's theater productions will have "Tweet Seat" sections — seats where cellphones are welcome, as long as they are muted.

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'Orestes 2.0'

When: opens Thursday with shows at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays through Oct. 20
Where: University Center for the Arts, 1400 Remington St., Fort Collins
Cost: \$18 general admission; \$8 for CSU students; free for all patrons on Sundays
Information: (970) 491-2787 or www.csuartsickets.com
(Note: This show is not appropriate for youths under 18 due to strong adult content and themes.)

"We want to change the landscape of the arts and make it more necessary, to make coming to see theater a habit," said Walt Jones, CSU director of Theatre & Dance and department co-chair.

"If students can't see it on this," Jones said holding up his cellphone. "They won't see it. ... So we want them to tweet and Tumblr and post."

It's a revolutionary move in a field that has long battled the annoying mid-performance cellphone ring and the distracting light of a text, and it's just one of many recent changes to the program to reignite the fire of live theater for both the audience and the actors.

Live streaming previews of all shows, big name guest artists and free tickets on Sundays all are aimed at getting more people, particularly the harder to capture younger audiences, into the arts.

Thanks to a Fort Fund grant, CSU's theater program expanded its free show offer to include Sunday matinees for all attendees, said Jennifer Clary, marketing director for the department. Last year, it launched free tickets for CSU students for all Thursday shows.

Free ticket Thursdays was a way to give back to the students, whose fees paid for the main section of the University Center for the Arts renovation, Clary said. Thanks to Fort Fund, now people who might not otherwise have come to the theater will give it a chance.

The funds also have allowed the program to bring in nationally recognized guest artists and directors to work with students both onstage and in the classroom, as well as offering public lectures.

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