

Experimental opera coming to Eastern

WILLIMANTIC — The Performing Arts Department at Eastern Connecticut State University, in collaboration with the New York City-based theater/opera company Ridge Theater, will present “Lulu,” a multimedia, experimental opera based on Frank Wedekind’s original play “Earth Spirit.”

Performances are this Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. in the Proscenium Theater at Eastern’s Fine Arts Instructional Center.

“Lulu” is the first performance of Eastern’s new Artist-in-Residency initiative.

Ridge Theater actors and actresses have been on campus since Jan. 6 rehearsing for the production, which stars Dominican-American hip-hop artist and activist Natalie Ann Yepez, known by her stage name of “Maluca Mala.” Yepez, who is based in Bronx, N.Y., writes and performs in Spanish and English.

The opera tells the story of Lulu, a homeless child living in Vienna in the late 19th century who is raised by a predatory father figure. As a result of her childhood trauma, she grows up to become a seducer who rips through the lives of all who love her.

Director and Ridge Theater Artistic Director Bob McGrath said stories similar to Lulu’s — child sex abuse, human trafficking and the opioid epidemic — are too frequent in today’s news cycle.

“Lulu’s story is like a perfect storm of despair and death,” said McGrath. “In the wake of her childhood trauma, she learns to take back power in the only way that is available to her: to invert the very power system that entraps her and turn it on the abusers. This production illustrates the double-bind faced by women in the pervasive male authoritarian power structure of Wedekind’s time. We chose to do our adaptation because this same distorted power dynamic remains one of the most prevalent contemporary social issues of our time.”

Other “Lulu” artists include composer Joseph Budenholzer; Broadway star John Dosset, co-founder of Ridge Theater; and Jordan Golston, a new actor who has starred on stage and in film and television, including the TV series “Madam Secretary.”

Tickets for adults are \$20-\$30 for adults and are free for Windham Public Schools students.

The university will hold a public reception with the cast and crew Saturday at 6 p.m. in the Art Gallery of the FAIC.

For more information, call the box office at 860-465-5123 or email theatre-boxoffice@easternct.edu. To purchase tickets online, visit easternct.showare.com/lulu.