In a Heated Presidential Race, Students Find Passion in the Vote

By Dina Spanbock

The 2008 primary season has marked a drastic change from past elections because of more youth interest and participation in the upcoming presidential elections. Voter turnout of 18-to-29-year-olds has increased in almost every state primary or caucus. It began with the Iowa Caucus in January, with a 13% youth turnout rate, as compared to an average 3.5% in the previous two presidential primary seasons. This trend continued with an even bigger increase in the New Hampshire primaries; there was an impressive 43% turnout rate among youth voters, compared to 28% in 2000 and 18% in 2004. In New York, the youth turnout rate remained the same as in the past two elections, but the total percentage of voters decreased. Therefore, young voters made up a larger percentage of total voters in New York.

Why the increase in young voters? The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) conducted research last fall which found that college students have become more concerned about the issues facing America today. They have also been more involved personally as volunteers. They are looking for a positive candidate who addresses the problems and will motivate all Americans to be actively involved. According to CIRCLE director Peter Levine, “Young Americans have been turning out to vote at remarkable rates in these primaries. This reflects their deep concern about the critical issues at stake and the impact of this election on our country’s future.” Heather Smith, Executive Director of Rock the Vote, an organization aimed at motivating young Americans to become active and interested, explains why this is so: “Young people are tired of being characterized as apathetic and uninterested in politics.” She added, “They are casting ballots like never before, volunteering on campaigns, organizing at their schools, and have shown, since the first contest in January, they will pick the next President of the United States.”

Facebook Revolution: Not Just for Procrastination Anymore

By Arielle Darr

Facebook is blocked to students within the Heschel School because the administration believes it to be a distraction, yet this social networking site may one day be used within the classroom. Although Facebook is not generally regarded as a legitimate research tool, much can be learned from studying the site itself.

Facebook is not a tool that should be used for researching factual information, but rather as a way to gather opinions and analyze people’s thinking. The thousands of groups on Facebook, devoted to topics that range from political and social causes to hobbies, provide a new kind of forum for public discussion among people worldwide. Through these discussions, which are easily available to all Facebook members, researchers are able to study the way people interact and communicate. The various groups act as a permanent database of people’s feelings and thoughts as specific events are occurring in the world and over the course of time. People of all types and ages are drawn to Facebook globally. One group might include participants commenting from Kuwait, Lebanon, Israel, New York, London, Egypt, and Michigan all on a single page. People who would have never connected were in contact because of the interactive nature of Facebook. Their postings are often quite passionate. Facebook can spark political controversy itself. Members are allowed to create groups freely as long as they follow a set of loose guidelines. In recent months a controversy broke out when pro-Palestinians fought to list Palestine as a country option on Facebook. Facebook complied with their requests but after receiving many angry messages claiming Palestine is not a country, the listing was removed. Thousands signed petitions to relist Palestine as a country. Facebook now lists it; the tension still exists.

A project for Shmuel Afek’s Middle East Social Studies elective this fall serves as a case study showing the effectiveness of Facebook as a tool. In this course, students studied the modern history of Israel from two perspectives: Israeli and Palestinian. As a final project, three of the seniors in the course studied Facebook groups dedicated to discussions of Israel. One group, created around the start of the Second Lebanon War in 2006, was able to document the reactions of people on all sides of these events. Researchers can find someone’s thoughts recorded as a rocket flew by their home. Pictures displayed in Facebook groups generate some of the most remarkable conversations.

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And I will strike down with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my lunches. And you will know my name is the Lor...
What do you think?

 tens of thousands of dorm rooms and cell phones were called before Iowa’s caucus. Volunteers in Missouri gathered 800 signed pledges in support of Obama before the winter break began. At a meeting at Obama’s state headquarters in St. Louis, students proposed ideas for fundraising concerts, parties, and “dorm-storming,” a technique in which student volunteers are matched to their own dorms or friends’ dorms, capitalizing on the idea that students are more likely to respond to familiar faces campaigning.

Hillary Clinton, however, was a little slower on the uptake. It was not until after the Iowa caucus, in which Obama won 57% of the youth vote to her 11%, that she began making real strides to appeal to young voters. Since then, she has been using the Internet as her principle aid for getting the youth vote, both campaigning and addressing the potential uses of the Internet as a medium for information. She states that she would like to use the Internet to relay information about the goings on in the White House. She is special about Obama is that “he explains that one of the things that tend to win over young voters: his personality and his being young and fresh. Heschel Senior Adin Lenchner explains that one of the things that is special about Obama is that “he is the most well-spoken, articulate” candidate running. He continues, “A politician is supposed to be someone who represents the people. [Obama is] a real person.” His speeches are full of hope, and he radiates light and the belief that things can change for the better, and the sense that he can help make that happen. Rather than believing he can do it despite his lack of experience, young voters believe he can do it because of his inexperience. Tammy Balasz, Heschel senior, though not a definite supporter of Obama, agrees that his freshness could be an asset. “His new voice would be a nice change from Bush and might be exactly what we need. And the fact that he will be freer to act.”

The Democratic race continues to be very close, and young voters are making a huge difference in keeping it that way. Now, at least for us in New York, most of what we can do is wait and see what happens.
Over a hundred pictures were posted in one group, many of them from the second Lebanese War. One photo showing an Israeli child signing a missile being used against Lebanon sparked tremendous debate.

The Mock Trial Team - Left to Right: Ben Gottesman, Mikey Mizrahi, Adam Gitlin, Daniel Giovanelli, Dani Cole
Photograph Courtesy of Daniel Giovanelli

The site enables researchers to monitor changes in people’s stances on the issues as they converse with different people and become more educated about both sides of the conflict. In one case, an Israeli and a Palestinian exchanged words for weeks. A discussion that started with utter hatred and passion ended with the Palestinian stating that he really admired the Israeli and the soundness of his comments. The Palestinian questioned why there were not as many Israelis as thoughtfull and open.

Many postings expressed well-formulated responses, reflecting serious and mature thought. Encountering people’s feelings on different issues in this forum rather than through a book added depth and a sense of reality to what this Social Studies class had been studying all semester. As Adin Lench-
ner, one of the seniors who worked on this project concluded, “Working with Facebook as a primary source allowed us to tap into an unfiltered, entirely non-politically correct resource. We had previously only used official documents that sifted out the raw feel-
ings of the people; or in this case the younger generation. It was an incredible experience and truly refreshing, profound and moving.”

Joanna Kaufman and Alina Serkhovets accessing facebook
Photography Elisheva Epstein

“Facebook Revolution: Not Just for Procrastination Anymore” continued from page 1

FEATURES

“Gossip Girl”: Not Reality TV

By David Heller

Our society has a fascination with the wealthy and a never-ending quest for upward mobility. But even the wealthiest are not shielded from the ills of society, such as drug and alcohol abuse and insatiable materialism. The fact that the TV series “Gossip Girl” isn’t a fair repre-
sentative of the wealthy is beside the point. What strikes a chord among its viewers is perhaps their morbid satisfaction that even the wealthiest are plagued by the same vices that affect the rest of society.

“Gossip Girl”, loosely based on the Cecily Von Zieg-

pears to be just as much trouble
cracked up to be, since there ap-
pears to be just as much trouble

unquenchable appetites of those

the resulting vacuous minds and
unquenchable appetites of those
captured in it, cut across all so-
cioeconomic lines. The coveted
spots at the top of the economic
food chain are not all they’re

characters in the show live in pala-
tial apartments or town houses on
the Upper East Side, complete with
maids, chauffeurs, and cooks wait-
ing on their every material need.

As defined exclusively by economic
status. The series portrays a socially competitive culture in which there is rampant drug and alcohol abuse among grown-ups and teens, as well as unbridled materialism.

All of the wealthy

While this social leveling might be only a minor comfort to the rest of society, the fact that wealth does not provide a shield from the temptations and clutches of substance abuse is the more powerful message. Far from be-
ing glamorized or glorified in the
show, the wealthy are portrayed as being just as susceptible to misguidance as everyone else. The underlying message is that all parents – even the wealthiest - have a responsibility to their children. Merely showing up would be a good start. If parents spent more time with their chil-
dren, then their children might be less prone to seeking elusive satisfaction in drugs and shopping sprees. But, alas, happy and functional families do not make for very good TV shows.

CONGRATULATIONS TO MOCK TRIAL AND DEBATE FOR THEIR VICTORIES

The Mock Trial Team......

The Debate Team......
By Jessica Appelbaum

The television industry isn’t what it used to be. There is no longer a need to tune in to watch a show at its scheduled time. First came VHS tapes, which made it unnecessary to worry about missing a show because you could tape it. The next big innovation in television was the DVR, which not only allows viewers to save shows onto the cable box, but can record more than one show at a time, and does not have to be set to record every time you want to film an episode.

The newest improvement for the common viewer is television online, which makes shows available on the internet. This revolution began when many television stations became aware that their shows were being downloaded illegally online, and decided that it would be better to make them available on their websites. By doing this, they made money through the thirty second commercials that took the place of the normal three minute commercial break on TV.

Since Americans generally want to receive more in a quicker fashion, new websites have come out that eliminate commercials in online viewings, though these websites are illegal. All of the videos they offer were pirated and are posted without the consent of the networks. These illegal websites not only cause the networks to lose money, but the writers as well. This is one of the factors that may have spurred the writers strike. Networks are currently working on shutting down most of these sites.

By Jason Merrin

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The intellectually stimulating webcomics are circulating around the school. The intellectually stimulating XKCD, which does not stand for anything at all, already has many students and teachers checking back every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for new comics. Sprite comics, 8-Bit Theater and the now concluded series Bob and George, which involve manipulating still images of characters and objects from video games, have recently dropped in popularity. Video games are a major source of inspiration for many webcomic creators; three of the most popular online at the moment are VG Cats, Ctrl+Alt+Del, and Penny Arcade. Other popular titles involve “slice of life” storytelling, stories involving events from day to day life. Among these are Questionable Content, Templar Arizona, Girls with Slingshots and others. A few more comics popular at Heschel include Scary go Round which is a fantasy comic about life, and Wapsi Square, about names and technology. The television show Heroes, even in the absence of new episodes, publishes a full free online comic book every Tuesday.

Webcomics are an excellent source of a few moments of entertainment. A daily ritual for some, they can be read during breaks in work or first thing in the morning to add some laughter and fun into the regular routine.
Facing Transition

By Daniella Lipnick

Every morning as I enter the Heschel School -- located in a colorless neighborhood full of car dealerships, and construction -- I feel a sense of warmth and calm. Staff members often greet students. Sometimes it’s a loud cheerful “Hello Lipnick sisters!” from a teacher. My sister and I often jokingly argue over which of us has the better relationship with the many teachers we share, as here at Heschel, teachers and students become close.

My first destination is minyan where I find many of my friends. X is putting on his contact lenses with the aid of a compact mirror. Y is worrying that she hasn’t completed the math homework -- that I haven’t even started -- and we plan to help each other later. Then there’s Z who is always sure to ask me how I’m doing. Throughout the day, both in and outside of class, we debate a wide range of issues: whether Shakespeare’s characters should be considered sym- pathetic or comedic; if a velocity vs. time graph measures acceleration; if fluorescent lights shed a better glow than incandescent ones; or what the best meal is on the lunch menu.

I had taken this world for grant- ed until last year, but now that I realize my time here is running short, I tend to see the school almost as if I were an outsider, one who witnesses it for the first time. When one realizes that something is transient, that one may or may not see it again, its meaning is felt most strongly. It is now that I appreciate the uniqueness of this school, a place where I feel so entirely comfortable and accepted. I’m sure that I will sense variations of this beauty in different places and at different times of my life, but, of course, it will never be the same. The Heschel School building at 60th Street and West End Avenue is no tourist attraction, but, to me personally, it holds a kind of landmark status.

The voting lines during the election in Nairobi, Kenya.

By Zachary Levine

Public interest leading up to the elections in Kenya late last year was high, because it is known to be one of the most stable democracies in Africa. The two leading candidates were former president Mwai Kibaki from the tribe of the Kikuyus and Raila Odinga from the tribe of Luo. Prior to the election, Odinga was leading Kibaki by a wide margin in the polls. However, on December 27, 2007, what was expected to be a quiet and peaceful presidential election ended in chaos. Kibaki won the election, some claimed unfairly, and many people were upset. Many citizens speculated that the elec- tion was a fraud because Odinga had led in the run-up to it. Independent ob- servers from the European Union also claimed irregularities in the election procedures. Adding to the likelihood that there was fraud, the results showed that 97% of the Kikuyus voted for Ki- baki, while the majority of the other tribes voted for Odinga. The Kikuyus then were purported to have rigged the election. As a result the elections led to riots and disorder, particularly in the capital city of Nairobi. Several differ- ent tribal groups attacked the Kikuyus in Nairobi.

Since the election, almost 900 related deaths have occurred, and thou- sands of citizens have been displaced. If this conflict continues to escalate, the stability of the entire continent could be in danger. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, during a recent trip to Africa, warned of the tragic consequences that might result from ongoing conflict. He said, “I call on the Kenyan people: stop the killings and end the violence now before it’s too late.”

To get a firsthand account of the recent developments in Kenya, a Helios reporter spoke with Sam Kupferberg, a Heschel junior who was there for a family vacation during the December break.
By Ben Seidman

Heschel’s shift from Dell to HP was already eventful, but now the tech department feels strongly that Heschel has arrived at the right system for the school: Apple. For some this transition has been a blessing, but for others it has been a nuisance. Many students are curious as to what prompted this major change.

When asked what motivated these changes, John Hutzler, IT Director, responded, “We looked at IBM, Dell, and Apple. I didn’t think we would switch, but then two things happened: 1. The school announced the acquisition of the property behind the Honda dealership and the plan to move the other divisions down here and create one campus. The Lower and Middle Schools are all Apple already. 2. Windows Vista came out -- it posed a lot of problems and seemed like it would pose [more] problems.”

This transition has proved to be very beneficial for Heschel students. Oftentimes there are numerous students waiting by the technical department offices to receive assistance with their computers. Problems concerning

Heschel computers range from physical damages to computers, to computer crashes, to loss of internet availability, along with countless others. John Hutzler is positive that these problems will decrease in numbers as the school settles into this new system. He stated, “The Apple computers are very well designed and we’re seeing fewer physical problems with them so far, but they are new. It’s an unknown how they’ll be doing when they’re three or four years old. Apple has been easier to deal with than HP. The lack of Apple spyware and viruses has been a blessing for the IT department.”

A much easier road should lie ahead, and the tech department should be recognized for their efforts to create a cohesive technological environment.

By Rebecca Cooper

After a barrage of complaints from teachers about students playing computer games in class, the administration decided to fix the problem. When many websites were blocked, everyone thought that it would be the end of the endless game playing. However, the game block, which blocked many websites for both students and teachers, was supposed to solve the problem, did not completely do so. While blocking so many game sites did help improve students’ concentration, it was not completely effective.

“There are always ways to get around something blocked,” commented one freshman. “Students will find ways to get distracted regardless,” added another.

In some ways, the game block was more distracting then helpful. “People were constantly searching for ways to get around the game block and not concentrating on schoolwork instead of just playing the game and getting it out of their system,” noted one student. However, now that the game block has been in place for a while, the number of students playing games in class has decreased greatly. Miriam-Simma Walifish, an LQ teacher, noted, “Yes, more people have definitely been paying attention, and there has been a lot less distraction in the classroom.”

By Robyn Spector

Born in Buffalo, NY, and raised in Arad, Israel, Tamarah Touvian joined the high school faculty this year as one of the new Hebrew teachers. She is used to a multicultural environment. “My family has a little of everything:” Tamarah’s father had a Persian upbringing, her mother was born in Poland, and her entire family made aliyah in 1980 from the States. She received her Bachelors degree in Tanakh (a lasting passion of hers) from Ben Gurion University and her Masters in education and teacher’s certification from Haifa University. Tamarah finds that her favorite part of teaching at Heschel is “being in the classroom with [her] students.” She aims to create both a safe and comfortable learning environment and encourages students to “stay as true to [themselves] as [they] can.” Her hobbies include reading and cooking.

Illustration by Hannah Weintraub

Illustration by Ronit Zvi

Illustration by Robb Ed
HESCHEL LIFE

Heschel Leads the Way in the World of Non-profits
By Karene Schloss

Heschel provides an excellent education, but very few students know that Heschel is also one of the most efficient non-profit institutions in the nation. According to Charity Navigator (www.charitynavigator.org), America’s premier independent charity evaluator, Heschel has four-stars, the highest possible rating. Charity Navigator evaluates over 5,300 non-profit organizations based on the financial information provided by the non-profits on their annual tax returns (Form 990).

Charity Navigator rates non-profits by analyzing two areas of financial health – “Organizational Efficiency” and “Organizational Capacity.” Organizational Efficiency (OE) refers to the non-profit’s ability to deliver the majority of its spending to its programs. Organizational Capacity (OC) refers to the non-profit’s ability to sustain its programs over the long term. Organizations that exhibit growth in revenue and expenses will sustain themselves better in the future.

It is clear that Heschel’s administrators have done a superb financial job. Charity Navigator can also be used as a resource to make wise choices in giving charitable dollars, communally and individually. It allows philanthropists to pick charity not only based on its mission, but also on how well the charity does at what it sets out to do.

Organization Efficiency
- Program expenses 77.9%
- Administrative expenses 19.3%
- Fundraising expenses 2.6%
- Efficiency Rating 3 stars

Organization Capacity
- Primary revenue growth 14.5%
- Program expenses growth 21.1%
- Capacity Rating 4 stars
- Overall Rating 4 stars

Do You Have Your Spoon? Gotcha!
By Robyn Spector

It is no coincidence that spoons have been appearing all over the school recently. In fact, it is all part of the game plan of some of the Senior Planning Committee members. The Senior Planning Committee is a group of senior girls who volunteered during their remaining time in high school to plan and organize grade and school-wide events. The mission of the committee is to enhance school spirit and bring the school community closer together. Facilitated by both Rabbi Natan and Ahuva, they have already planned events such as “Pennypalooza,” “Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader: Heschel Style,” and “Teacher Spelling Bee,” and are currently in the midst of planning more activities for the coming months.

For the month of January, the committee orchestrated a 12th grade rendition of the classic game “Assassin,” which they renamed “Gotcha.” The game broke out at the grade meeting for 12th graders on Friday, February 1st, in “an extremely dramatic, totally unexpected manner,” according to one senior. Rabbi Natan began the meeting sitting on a table at the front of the Beit Midrash, calling the attention of little more than half the grade that showed up that Friday morning. He spoke about senior spirit and warned the grade against finishing their high school experience “with one foot out the door.” Daniel Giovannelli, red with passion for justice, blurted out, “Rabbi Natan, maybe if we weren’t feeling pressured to constantly do work as second semester seniors, more of us would not mind coming to school.” Daniel!!”, many people shouted back at him, unaware that the committee had asked Daniel to object. The exchange continued between Rabbi Natan and Daniel until the point at which Daniel became so enraged that Rabbi Natan told him to take a walk. But before Daniel left the Beit Midrash, Natan said, “Daniel, one more question. Do you have your spoon on you?” Although Daniel was told to object to Natan, he was befuddled by the question, unaware of the reason he was asked to do so. At that point, the senior planning committee members, Ilana, Rebecca, Elie, Noa, jumped to their feet and explained Natan’s spoon reference.

The rules of the game are simple; every senior (and Rabbi Natan) was given a spoon and an “assignment,” a person from the grade they have to catch. An assignment can be caught in two ways. The first is by catching the person in public without their spoon in clear sight. The second way is to catch the person alone, regardless of whether the person’s spoon is with them. Once a person is caught, the person who did the catching takes the spoon of their victim and also takes on the assignment their victim was supposed to catch. Although the game was played simply to have a good time and unite the grade,
Heschel Stars in Tutoring
By Aliza Rosenfeld

Over the past few years, many Heschel students have donated their time to tutor children at the Star Learning Center, located on West 84th Street. Weekly two-hour time slots are allotted for interactive tutoring sessions in which volunteers and students hone math, reading, and/or science skills. The education center’s purpose is to provide children from Pre-K through 12th grade with one-on-one assistance to help them with urgent learning problems. Star’s mission states that, “students absorb information to the best of their ability when the learning environment is upbeat and interactive with the emphasis on the application of the concepts, not just the memorization of fact.”

This method proves to work miraculously for the children who learn there after school. Children become more ambitious students, and learning becomes less of a burden. Maya Ude, a third-grader who is tutored at the center, expresses her joy at coming every week. “I like that it has a lot of books. It is a fun place to learn. I learn so much and it helps me when I get to school,” she says.

Many of the students need more attention than they receive from their school or family members. These children struggle at school and need the support of others willing to give them time. Abby Lipnick, a 10th grader at Heschel who volunteers at the center says, “While sometimes I feel as if I cannot give my student everything she needs, I always remember that without me she wouldn’t have anyone to turn to for help. Tutoring can often times be a difficult and daunting task, but the end result is always rewarding.”

Do you Have your Spoon? Gotcha!

A student paying for the School Dance which collected over $3,900 for charity
Photography by Amy Lewis

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Is the Music Business a Dying Art?

By Sabrina Kestenbaum

Remember the days when it seemed as though another music store was opening on every street corner? But, little by little, chain stores like HMV and Tower Records have been replaced by the ever-increasing drug store monopoly. What happened to them, and more importantly, what's happening to the record business? In two words: File Sharing.

On January 9th, 2001, iTunes, a digital media player application, was introduced to the world. With iTunes came the iTunes Music Store, a mega force that succeeded in taking over the music business through digital uploading. The new technology allowed people to buy a single song from an album for 99 cents. It was an exciting and fresh concept for people and a lot easier than shlepping to the nearest music store to pick up an album. With the launch of iTunes and the release of many other applications similar to it began the downfall of the music store chain.

In the beginning, iTunes did not wreak too much havoc in the music industry, because many people were still buying music through other means, but soon a new threat appeared: the world of illegal downloading. The Internet began to offer different applications that allowed people to download and file share music for free.

One illegal downloading sight, OiNK, had 180,000 members before it was shut down, but that number was believed to be only .001 percent of the file sharing community. However, OiNK was not only releasing albums and songs that had been already available to the world, but it also spread new music that hadn't been released by record companies yet. The industry is now realizing that these mysterious releases stem from people who are actually working in the business.

The rapid spread of file sharers is the number one concern for music industries. In the last year, the Nielsen SoundScan found a 45.8 percent increase in illegal downloading in the U.S. Not only this, but it also found that for every track that is paid for, twenty are downloaded illegally.

The music industry is now forced to confront these issues. While some legal action has been taken against the downloading sites, it is not nearly enough to account for even a small percentage of the file sharing community. The industry is at a loss and now must face a scary prospect: accept the future of technology or die.

REVIEW

357 Splendid Pages

By David Heller

Khaled Hosseini’s heart-wrenching novel, A Thousand Splendid Suns, traces the lives of two women in the oppressive and misogynistic Muslim society of war-torn Afghanistan in the 1990’s. Mariam, the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy businessman, was raised in virtual isolation by her socially outcast, epileptic mother whose suicide prompts Mariam’s sale at the age of fourteen to Rasheed, an uneducated cobbler thirty years her senior. Mariam gives birth to several stillborn children for which she is almost fatally beaten by her frustrated and abusive husband. Mariam and Rasheed agree to take in shellshocked, young Laila, a neighbor whose parents were killed in a bomb attack just outside their home. Through an insidious act of manipulation and deception, Rasheed persuades Laila to become his wife as well, thereby sealing the unlikely bond between the two women whose feelings toward each other morph from an initial sense of betrayal and jealousy into compassion and alliance against the oppressive cruelty of their husband and Muslim society. In response to the strict regime imposed by the Taliban under which, among other things, girls are forbidden to attend school or work and required to wear a full burqa outside their homes or face severe beatings, Rasheed remains characteristically neutral and unfazed by the profound threat to women. “Rasheed wasn’t bothered much by the Taliban. All he had to do was grow a beard, which he did, and visit the mosque, which he also did. Rasheed regarded the Taliban with a forgiving, affectionate kind of bemusement,…”. In the present dark age of terrorism, with the specter of Islamic extremism, this novel poignantly paints a grim picture of life in this unstable part of the world under Taliban rule.

Movie Review: Sweeney Todd

The Demon Barber of Fleet Street is back, and he’s better than ever. Tim Burton’s rendition of Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street throws a new spin onto the old British folk tale. The perfect life of Sweeney Todd, a barber, is torn apart by a jealous man named Judge Turpin. While he is on the road of vengeance, he decides to kill as many people as possible until he has murdered the man who ruined his life. Meanwhile, his neighbor, Mrs. Lovett, bakes the corpses of his victims into meat pies which soon become all the rage of London. While this plot might not sound particularly pleasant or interesting to the weak-stomached, it has been expanded upon many times into a plotline that is familiar to theater-lovers worldwide.

It is no secret that Stephen Sondheim, the composer of the original Broadway production of Sweeney Todd, is a musical genius. His talent is particularly evident in Sweeney Todd, with beautiful and witty musical numbers narrating the horrific plot. With the exception of one, none of the actors in the movie had been previously trained in the vocal arts. The fact that all of the music was sung off-key added an eerie twist to the movie. Perhaps, the movie’s biggest downfall was the elimination of The Ballad of Sweeney Todd, the musical number on which Sondheim based his original musical score.

Tim Burton is a director who is known for his strange movies, which is why it would have been hard to imagine the new Sweeney Todd being directed by anyone else (except for, perhaps, James Wan, the director of Saw, but the squeamish Sondheim fans might not have appreciated his interpretation). As any avid pop-culture follower knows, wherever there is Tim Burton, Johnny Depp is close to follow. Indeed, Depp’s portrayal of the Demon Barber of Fleet Street was delightfully creepy. When looking for odd women to play a role, none compare to Helena Bonham Carter, who plays Mrs. Lovett. The combination of two of Hollywood’s most bizarre actors left the door open for a lot of fantastic acting. With the ever-monotonous Alan Rickman, better known for his role as Severus Snape in the Harry Potter movies, playing Judge Turpin, the cast was impeccable.

Certainly, this was not the most creative interpretation of the story of Sweeney Todd. That title would have to go to the 2005 Broadway production in which every member of the cast played their instruments on stage. However, Tim Burton’s take on the classic story was perfectly eerie and very enjoyable. As Toby, Mrs. Lovett’s shop boy, sang, “Demons will charm you with a smile.” Indeed, this Demon Barber has charmed America and taken it by storm with his engrossing story and mad glee.