



Loudoun County High School - The Lightning Thief

Yeah, the gods are real—the Greek gods—and they have kids with issues. Loudoun County High School had no issue pulling off their epic musical, *The Lightning Thief*.

Based on Rick Riordan's famous Percy Jackson book series, Rob Rokicki and Joe Tracz's *The Lightning Thief* premiered off-Broadway in 2014, with an extended version making it to Broadway in 2017. Percy Jackson used to believe he was a regular, troubled kid with a deadbeat dad. However, after his substitute teacher turns into some demon, he realizes that his dad is not just a deadbeat but also a Greek god.

Playing Percy Jackson, Zea Davis gave a complete and full-ranged theatrical performance. Zea had hilarious reactions and delivered their comedic lines with a flare that would send anyone into fits of laughter. At the same time, they conveyed the intense emotional strain Percy Jackson was under, getting to the brink of tears when thinking about their mother. Zea also impressed vocally, with a tone akin to a classic rock record, and effortlessly hitting fast-paced, complicated runs.

Zea's supporting cast did not disappoint, with Devin Carpenter playing Percy's loyal friend Grover and Emma Nicholson playing veteran half-blood Annabeth. Devin was an excellent comedic pairing with Zea, playing off them well during written lines and funny interactions in the background. Emma played off of Zea's acting choices very well. It was very satisfying to see Emma's character shift from being closed off to opening up in the second act. The most engaging part of the show was the romantic tension found after she had opened up; none of the glances or romantic close calls felt forced.

Other actors stood out for Loudoun County High School as well. Norah Lee played Charon, the Ferry to the Underworld. Norah's vocal performance in her standout number, "D.O.A.," was excellent and had just the suave a cool, laidback demon would possess. Speaking of suave, Eli Shabanowitz (playing Poseidon) heightened their calm demeanor, helping their deadbeat dad jokes land.

Loudoun County's light design emphasized these critical moments in the show. Created by Ella Molloy, Claire McMannus, and Nick Bahlman, the lighting in the show moved in a sharp, erratic fashion during exciting moments, like a bus blowing up, a monster landing a punch, or Medusa being slain. The lighting also underscored sad moments, the most prevalent being the recreation of a friend, Tatiana's, death. The stage became darker during this, and brighter tones (yellow to represent Zeus) were contrasted with a sickly green background. The set, designed by Eli Pepper, mainly utilized scaffolding. The scaffolding not only created most of the environments in the show but also allowed for

the lighting, let in the back wall of the theater, to remain relevant despite its positioning.

Loudon County's ability to synthesize different theatrical elements was excellent. Whether it was Percy, Annabeth or Grover bouncing off of each other during some witty dialogue, the hair and makeup matching the styles of the show's various costumes, or the set and the lighting working together to make moments pop and excite, *The Lightning Thief* was a show greater than the sum of its parts. This performance was a great example of the community and teamwork Loudon County High School has fostered. Whenever these kids unite creatively, nothing—not even the gods—can stop them from making something great.