



For immediate release — Monday, October 26, 2026

Faculty of Fine Arts Mainstage focuses on a future where pop culture endures

What happens to pop culture during an apocalypse? Pop culture's enduring legacy amidst environmental change and the influence of *The Simpsons* on what remains of humanity are explored in the University of Lethbridge's Fall Mainstage production, *Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play*, by Anne Washburn.

The play is a musical in three acts set in vastly different eras that explores how pop culture becomes a living archive of meaning that sustains communities in a post-apocalyptic world.

Director, choreographer and fight director Pat Chan says the play's power lies not only in its uncanny narrative, but also in its portrayal of pop culture as a legacy passed down through generations, all done through Chan's perspective and lived experiences.

"As an Asian director working with a distinctly Western pop-culture text, I found myself navigating the space between cultural familiarity and difference. *The Simpsons* is deeply rooted in American culture, yet its themes of family, community, survival and human vulnerability extend beyond geographical and cultural boundaries," says Chan.

"Directing this play invited me to examine how I could interpret a Western cultural reference through my own cultural perspective without losing its original identity. Rather than simply reproducing its American context, I sought to explore what happens when a familiar story is encountered, reimagined and passed on by people who come from different lived experience and backgrounds."

Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play is Chan's Mainstage directorial debut at ULethbridge. She says she was intentional in changing several aspects of Washburn's script, including adding original music, extending choreographed fight scenes and making music references more current.

"I wanted to push the story to the future and make it post-apocalyptic. I had a music student, Izzy Paige, compose a score that reflected the story's current and futuristic setting. Izzy's music is a unique way to tell the story about a post-apocalyptic situation," says Chan.

"Ultimately, directing *Mr. Burns* reminded me that theatre can bridge cultural differences. Even when civilization collapses, stories endure, reminding us of our shared capacity for hope, love and unity," adds Chan.

Music director Dr. Sandra Stringer is conducting the pit band and emphasizes the storytelling function of music in the production, as it grows in importance through the show's acts.

"I was really taken by the cleverness of the play's music and how it is deeply rooted in music from The Simpsons, and the significance of the music just keeps showing up over and over. It's been really a great time working on this score," says Stringer.

Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play will run in the University Theatre from October 28-30, and November 6-7 at 7:30 p.m. nightly. Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$15 for seniors and alumni, and \$10 for students. All ULeithbridge students receive one complimentary ticket with their student ID.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/faculty-fine-arts-mainstage-focuses-future-where-pop-culture-endures>

To view the promotional video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kHY_7Y9ncM

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