

Cappies Reviews for Westfield High School, Flowers For Algernon

If you were offered a chance to become the human guinea pig of a revolutionary experiment that eliminates your mental handicap and turns you into a super genius, would you take it? Naive to the potential side effects, Charlie Gordon does, and stumbles blindly into a confusing maze of lab coats, vast knowledge, foreign emotions and more--all revealed in Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon.

Faced with a daunting script, thick with emotionally mature themes, this cast took on the challenge with great ambition and executed it in an aesthetically appealing way. Charlie is poked and prodded into the world of science due to his mental retardation. He undergoes an operation to improve his IQ, previously performed only once before on a white lab mouse named Algernon. Charlie rapidly surpasses societies' definition of normal intelligence. He begins to feel as if he himself is the one in a cage, questioning the commonly held belief that ignorance is truly bliss.

Flowers for Algernon was originally a science fiction themed short story by Daniel Keyes. It then developed into a well known novel. Due to controversial material in the book, it was removed from many school libraries. Eventually it was adapted for the stage in 1969 by David Rogers and later became a musical, making its debut on the West End.

In Westfield High's production, Mitchell Buckley takes the spotlight with taste and accuracy in the leading role of Charlie Gordon. There are obvious difficulties that face any actor attempting to portray a character with a disability. Buckley handled these with grace and effective comedic timing. The extreme dynamics of his character's variable mental capacities were no challenge for this actor. He expressed the mental and emotional growth and decline with specific characterizations and attention to detail. Buckley made Charlie so real, he captivated the audience. The stage chemistry with female lead Alice Kinnian, played by Madeleine Bloxman, consistently delivered the desired authenticity.

Typically, teenage actors in high school find it extremely difficult to realistically portray the full mannerisms of a complex middle aged character, but Alex Mann as Professor Nemur did just this. Lab coat and all, Mann was the convincingly graying, middle aged Professor. His characterizations refused to let scenes lag and brought energy to the script. In addition, Mann composed original piano music, effectively integrated into various scenes, influencing mood and transitions.

This show also had a talented technical team. The stage crew was quick and quiet. The lighting crew used creative washes and shadows to further the intensity of the story. Set design by Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt was appropriately simple yet visually striking and included a life size mouse's maze that was perfectly symbolic.

Westfield High School took on an extremely ambitious show and should be proud of their hard work and all-together impressive production. It left the audience standing in ovation at curtain call.

by Sophy Meudt of Heritage High School

"We may not have long, but maybe we'll have more than others do in a lifetime," says Charlie Gordon, a mentally-disabled man who knows that there's more to life than just living it, and it's important not to take for granted the goodness of what's inside of you. Charlie Gordon went on a journey that changed his view of people: good, and bad. Westfield High School captures this riveting journey in its production of "Flowers for Algernon."

"Flowers for Algernon," the renowned book by Daniel Keyes, was adapted into play by David Rogers in 1969. The play is set in New York and Chicago in 1965, where a young man, Charlie Gordon, aspires to have intelligence. He is mentally-disabled, with an IQ of 68, but wears a genuine smile that isn't found on the faces of ordinary men. He is offered the opportunity to be part of experiment where his intelligence could reach genius level, just as the test mouse, Algernon, was showing signs of. However, "if they put Algernon in the big cage with the other mice, what would happen to him?"

The play was poignant and inspirational. The bittersweet story of innocence being swept away and the fear of "not trying hard enough" are heart-wrenching, but wonderful. The cast of "Flowers for Algernon" is fully committed to the miracle developing in front of them. Whether it be the ghastly stare of Charlie's mother, or the goofy, guiltless laugh of Charlie, they grasped their emotion just as Charlie grasped his rabbit's foot.

Charlie Gordon, portrayed by Mitchell Buckley, ultimately captured the innocence of the disabled Charlie, and the importance of harnessing it as reality slowly wipes the innocence away. His subtle progression and regression were especially notable, as Buckley changes his voice and mannerisms to distinguish the two kinds of Charlies inside. Charlie's love interest and teacher, Alice Kinnian, portrayed by Madeleine Bloxam, embodied an understandable grasp for what was occurring inside Charlie and the difficulty of letting it happen.

Julian Sanchez successfully depicted Burt Seldon, the scientist that noticed the pros and cons of Charlie's change. His struggle of watching his creation degrade at his fingertips was tragically beautiful.

Another character notable for evoking emotion was Stephen Cox as Teenage Charlie. His representation of Charlie in flashbacks and his haunting appearance in Charlie's mind supplemented Gordon's struggle to let his old-self loose. As Charlie manages this struggle, he revisits his sister, Norma, portrayed by Maggie Mitchell. Mitchell expressed the unforgivable regret and the inability to change what's already been done. Her emotion was honest, revealing a valuable part of her character that is agonized by the teasing she performed as a child.

The set reflected the time period, with prominent artistic pieces. In the most dramatic scenes, the set split revealing a white maze that allowed for a sensational effect. The red lights of Charlie's flashbacks became brighter as his memory became clearer, and the colors were powerful. The makeup, hair, and costumes commendably reflected the 1960s and there were exceptional details such as Charlie's costume displaying his maturity and his hat becoming a faded red as he aged. Scene transitions were quick and offered soft, student-composed music that melodically filled the air and allowed time for audience reflection.

Westfield High School's rendition of "Flowers for Algernon" widened eyes towards the aspects of life we overlook. As the modest Charlie Gordon puts it, "The path that I choose through the maze makes me what I am."

by Kristen Popham of Chantilly High School

Through the darkness of splattered ink blots come the images of a man and a mouse. Tying them together is the confusion of life and the power simple gifts like flowers can bring. Westfield High School's powerful production of Flowers for Algernon was performed with strength this past Saturday.

Based on the 1966 novel by Daniel Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon* was adapted into an award winning movie in 1968 and came to the stage in 1969 as a play written by David Rogers. The show follows the story of Charlie Gordon; a mentally handicapped man who believes there is kindness in everyone and looks for opportunities to learn more. When Charlie finds his way into a research study centered on increasing intelligence he is excited about the prospect of becoming smarter, but as his intelligence increases Charlie begins to open the wounds of childhood memories and realizes that more intelligence does not bring about the security and happiness that he thought it would. When Charlie faces the possibility that the results of his operation may not be permanent he finds solace in a lab mouse named Algernon and searches for answers in his small companion.

Mitchell Buckley gave a riveting performance as Charlie Gordon. With an excellent sense of timing and stage presence, Buckley brought the complex character to life onstage delivering powerful monologues with great intensity. Buckley also created strong relationships with his scene partners to display Charlie's thoughts and feelings about each character he was interacting with. As Charlie's teacher and eventual love interest Alice Kinnian, Madeleine Bloxam showed a true understanding of her character and served as a good foil to the characters who were more interested in Charlie's brain than in his feelings.

Brandon Sanchez, Alex Mann, and Julian Sanchez gave outstanding performances as the team of doctors who are in charge of the experiment Charlie participates in. Mann was able to portray the older character Dr. Strauss with ease. Brandon Sanchez had excellent stage presence and both he and Mann were able to display their character's frustration over the failings of their experiment. Julian Sanchez stood opposite Mann and Sanchez in that his character felt more remorse for Charlie and displayed superb character development as the show progressed. Both Sarah Schweit and Maggie Mitchell gave strong performances as Charlie's Mother and sister Norma respectively. Schweit and Mitchell played the incredibly complex characters with fantastic dynamics and understanding.

Despite some technical hiccups the show's technical elements were fitting and progressed throughout the show wonderfully. Lighting set the mood of each scene and the props were all time appropriate for the 1960s where the show was set. Costumes and make-up were also time appropriate and had excellent color schemes for each character. The show had many set transitions and Westfield's stage crew handled all of them quickly and efficiently. The entire show was underscored with music composed by Alex Mann and Joe Dremiecki and often set the tone for the scenes.

While there are often more questions than answers when it comes to the human mind, Westfield's show made a powerful statement on the importance of humanity, and through excellent performances the message of acceptance was clearly stated.

by Emily Kelly of Robert E. Lee High School

There is nothing left for Charlie Gordon. He traps himself into his own mind, hiding behind the panic and apprehension of his regression. The value of power and intelligence has rendered his professors obsessed with the experiment that would expectantly bring them fame and distinction. No one cares for Charlie. Neither his mother or father, nor alleged friends at the bakery. No one cares except maybe Alice Kinnian, but Charlie's delirium won't sanction him to love anyone. There is nothing but a mouse; a single mouse to race him in the mazes, to solace his racing thoughts and quiet his unhinged reflections. On the Westfield High School stage, the audience follows Charlie Gordon's experimentation and contemplates the validity of the treatment of the mentally disabled.

Daniel Keyes initially wrote *Flowers for Algernon* as a science fiction short story, taking the Hugo Award for Best Short Story in 1960. Subsequently, Keyes expanded the short story into a novel, winning the Nebula Award for Best Novel. Notwithstanding that the book has been challenged for removal from libraries in North America, the novel is regularly

taught in schools and has been altered numerous times for television and theatre, including David Roger's adaptation of a stage play. The story line follows the progress reports of a Charlie Gordon, the first human test subject for a surgery meant to increase intelligence by artificial means. The eponymous Algernon, a laboratory mouse, undergoes the first surgery, whose success spurs the same trial on Charlie. The overall themes focus heavily on the treatment of the mentally disabled, conflicts between intellect and emotion, and how past events may have future influence in life.

Altering from a bakery janitor with an IQ of 68 to the most astute man alive, Mitchell Buckley performs Charlie Gordon's demanding role with expert grasp and prowess. Complete with a captivating smile, Buckley proficiently intertwines subdued mannerisms into his advancement and regression, creating a jarringly believable individual. Sharing Charlie's torment and heartache, Madeleine Bloxam as Alice Kinnian effectively characterizes the teacher figure suffering from unrequited love at the hands of fear and mistrust. Bloxam capably handles the maturity and significance of her role.

As the three professors altering Charlie's life for the sake of their stardom in the scientific world, Brandon Sanchez (Dr. Strauss), Alex Mann (Professor Nemur), and Julian Sanchez (Burt Seldon) successfully represent the erroneous nature of the human mind. All three actors fittingly distinguish certain traits and features into their roles, creating a convincing conversion from elation at their success to complete tension and fatigue at their failure. Following the cast's overall aptitude Bayleigh Aschenbrenner (Mrs. Donner), Sarah Schweit (Mother), Stephen Cox (Teen-age Charlie), and Paolah Urista (Mrs. Mooney) admirably capture the momentousness of their roles, tying the loose odds and ends and developing a formidable, impacting performance.

Additionally, Westfield commendably handles the technological aspects of the production. The ornate attention to detail the cast puts into the set and costumes make for an aesthetic display and believable locales; each and every costume piece serves purpose, and the hard work doesn't go unnoticed. The lighting designs potentially contribute to the atmosphere of each scene, and the stage crew smoothly and rapidly supplies scene and set transitions, in tandem with the beautifully haunting student composed piano melodies written by Alex Mann and performed by Joe Drzemiecki.

The entire cast handles the contentious content with notably excellent maturity, all the while attending to all technological details with tactful discretion. Westfield High School admirably puts on a praiseworthy production of Flowers for Algernon, noted for their laudable contributions of time and talent.

by Isabel Zapata of McLean High School

"I am not afraid of life or death or nothingness, but of wasting it like I had never been..." These are the words of a brilliant individual, Charlie Gordon. However, Charlie's story isn't a usual one. He started off labeled as "mentally retarded" and was mocked by his co-workers for being stupid, but after a highly experimental operation based off of the same operation performed on a mouse, Algernon, Charlie Gordon's intelligence skyrockets over several months. However, Algernon slowly loses his own intelligence, and everyone fears the same will happen to Charlie as well.

Originally written as a short story, then a novel by Daniel Keyes, Flowers for Algernon is a touching play presented by the cast and crew of Westfield High School. The novel and short story were written in the 1960's, which provides the setting for the play. The play is a difficult one, for it deals with issues like the treatment of the mentally disabled, the significance of the individual, and the effects of child abuse.

As the heart and soul of the production, Mitchell Buckley masterfully portrayed Charlie Gordon. Only meticulous research on Buckley's part could have led to such a stellar performance. With his happy grin and childlike mannerisms, the audience fell in love with Charlie. Buckley fully captured the character of Charlie and his intellectual and emotional arc

throughout the show. He brought the audience to tears when depicting Charlie trying to counter his falling intelligence and give as much as he possibly could to the world before losing his ability to do so.

The doctors who performed the operation on Charlie – Professor Nemur, Doctor Strauss, and Burt Seldon – were played with great thought and care by Alex Mann, Brandon Sanchez, and Julian Sanchez. Charlie’s teacher and love interest, Miss Kinnian, was taken on by Madeleine Bloxam, who provided an exceptional performance of a concerned, but emotionally torn lover.

The set brought you back to the 1960s, in an understated way. It was simple, but with great attention to details, and maneuverable, making the many scene changes quick and noiseless. The many costumes fit with the time period and helped relate Charlie’s inner struggle with his appearance. The student-composed music for the show drew the audience into the performance was very effective in setting the mood for the show.

With ease and grace, the students at Westfield High School were able to turn one man’s emotional struggle into a sensational story on stage. May Charlie Gordon’s smile live on in our hearts as a reminder of the value of a human life.

by Emilie Knudsen of Oakcrest School

How long would someone let a tragic past haunt them until they finally decide to change their life? The dramatic and heart wrenching story of a moron tired of always “pulling a real Charlie Gordon” goes through a breakthrough surgery in the hopes of gaining intelligence. Bonding along the way with Algernon and a mouse maze, the cast of Westfield High School performed *Flowers for Algernon* written by David Rogers in 1971, shows two willing victims discovering that there are more important things than a high IQ.

With such a powerful story there were multiple instances of low energy, but smart characterization and intricate details pulled the show together.

The lovable and complicated character of Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley) captured the audience’s hearts and took the stage through every stutter, bewilderment of words, and innocent ways. From that moment every eye was captivated by the extreme emotional state the character went through in flashbacks, frustrations of the unknown, and then later on the realization the surgery was only temporary. The unbelievable factor of how knowledge can affect one person and those all around him was flawlessly executed by this actor.

Adding another emotional struggle to Charlie’s character was his mother (Sarah Schweit) and Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam) who portrayed the only two female teachers. Though in the script there was a slow revealing of the females connection, it created the tragic story of why Teenage Charlie refused to let him love Alice. All that he could remember was the woman who he loved that taught him from a young age tried to kill him and was living in constant fear that Alice would do the same. Both actresses made accurate character decisions that played well off Charlie’s emotional states. Due to the seriousness of the show some characterizations were overplayed and very generalized while others seemed to be lost in the moment and simply delivering their lines with flawless diction and pronunciation.

While some scenes had low energy, one thing that did not fall flat was the outstanding attention to details from the sets, props, and lighting which helped paint the emotional and realism of the story. The amount of details in the set was noteworthy from wall ventilation to the power outlets that had the ability to plug in the TV used to increase Charlie’s

intellect. The main focal point and awe moment in the set was the backdrop of the mouse maze and cleverly enough there was no exit or entrance to the maze showing how once you have entered there is no escape and no end, just like the surgery he endured. Lights helped contribute to the emotional state of the show. Every flashback Charlie remembered had a red wash unable to recognize his parents' faces until his character finally gains back his memory, the pasty white hue in the hospital scene, and bluish tint when night came was flawlessly executed.

This charming yet saddening tale, performed by Westfield High School, of one man's strong connection to a mouse and his past innocents and youth haunting his "new" intelligence level, provokes the question of if ignorance really is bliss?

by Sarah Reed of Stone Bridge High School

In recent years, the word "retarded" quite rightly has become taboo because of its derogatory implications towards mentally challenged people. But how does a phrase that originates as a clinical term evolve to be so offensive? The answer is not black and white, but the history of mankind's insensitivity towards mental disabled people certainly has contributed to the severe connotations of this word. This insensitivity is explored in "Flowers for Algernon", an artfully woven story about Charlie Gordon, a thirty-two-year-old man with high hopes for accomplishment but a low IQ. Westfield High School's production of "Flowers for Algernon" gracefully conveys the struggle of a simple-minded man living in a small-minded world.

The play, written by David Rogers, is a theatrical translation of the Daniel Keyes' book of the same name. The story takes place in the 1960s, and revolves around Charlie Gordon's experiences as the first human subject in an experimental operation to improve mental capacity. Though scientists have had brilliant success in completing the experiment on a mouse named Algernon, the human test has considerable risk. At first, the procedure goes beyond all expectations and Charlie's intellect begins to rapidly increase, not just to that of a normal person, but to that of a genius. However, as the play goes on, the mouse Algernon starts to exhibit erratic behavior and dies soon after, foreshadowing Charlie's own impending regression of ultimate death.

In the lead role of Charlie, Mitchell Buckley displayed phenomenal talent and developed the nuanced complexities of his character. He completely immersed himself in the role, astoundingly capturing Charlie's evolution from a sweet, ignorant buffoon to a genius that understands the harsh realities of life. Buckley's regression to his original mentality was equally impressive. His attention to minute details of physicality through slight changes in posture and nervous behaviors as well as his use of variance in tone and speed supported the believability of his transformations. Buckley displayed wonderful chemistry with the entire cast, making the interactions on stage seem natural, most notably with his teacher and the object of his affection, Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam).

The supporting cast also featured many distinguished performances, though at times some minor characters seemed to lack energy and complete devotion to their roles. Charlie's mother (Sara Schweit) demonstrated tremendous maturity and successfully conveyed the conflicting emotions of her character. Her acting was most compelling in the climactic scene when Charlie confronts her after he has gained intelligence. Here, she sang "Three Blind Mice" in a sorrowful, eerie voice as she slowly scrubbed the floor, causing an unsettling feeling to resonate powerfully with the audience. Charlie's sister, Norma (Maggie Mitchell) was equally strong, especially in her terrific emotional crescendo of guilt and anger towards her brother's new mental acuteness.

The technical elements were a perfect compliment to the themes in the show, giving the production a cohesive conceptual feel. The set was visually striking: two stark white walls framed a laboratory setting across the main stage, highlighting the artificial and scientific topics of the show. When the play showed Charlie's dreams, the white laboratory walls opened to reveal a large maze, again relating to the theme of experimentation and also metaphorically representing the Charlie's trapped situation. The maze was lit by an electrifying red light, which created stunning accents on the actor's faces and

transported the audience into a dream world. Additionally, the original music between scene changes was beautifully melodic and set the tone for the show.

With an honest, heart-wrenching story of humanity, Westfield High School created an emotionally poignant production that brought the audience to their feet.

by Marielle Burt of McLean High School

Whenever one goes to see a piece of high school theater, they come in with a certain amount of pre-conceived expectations that a show will have some obvious technical shortcomings, and that the production won't be able to fully transport you to the time and the world of the show. Westfield High let you forget that the preconceptions of a high school show, allowing the audience to immerse themselves in the powerful and thought provoking script.

Flowers for Algernon is a play based upon the novel by Daniel Keyes. It centers on the life of the mentally challenged Charlie Gordon. In the play, Charlie becomes the subject of an experiment testing a new operation designed to increase human intelligence. The treatment works, and Charlie quickly rises to a genius level. However, his intellectual growth is faster than his emotional growth, and his childhood traumas begin to resurface with his returning memory, along with doubts about the morality of the experiment.

The cast, as an ensemble, did a great job of bringing the story to life. I really enjoyed the musical interludes between scene changes. Usually, when a blackout occurs to cover a scene change, the audience gets taken away from the world of the show, and dragged back into the real world. In Algernon, the interludes fit the mood of whatever was going on in the story at the time, maintaining the play's continuity.

It would be impossible to even mention this production without talking about Mitchell Buckley, who played Charlie Gordon. The role is very demanding, requiring stamina, versatility, and insane amount of dedication to make this role believable, and Buckley did this and more. Charlie doesn't have any lines when we first see him, but I was immediately drawn to him when he first entered. Little things about Buckley's acting brought out his character, like the tugging on his shirt, or his open, innocent smile. All of these quirks went away with his increased intelligence, and then they came back with his flashbacks and his regression. Buckley had such attention to detail in his portrayal that I could truly be moved by his character, instead of simply analyzing the performance of a high school student. His was one of the best high school dramatic performances I've ever seen.

The supporting cast was also made up of some immensely talented actors. The three doctors involved in the experiment; Dr. Strauss, Professor Nemur, and Burt Seldon, were all played almost flawlessly by Brandon Sanchez, Alex Mann, and Julian Sanchez. The standout performance was done by the character with arguably the smallest part of the three; Burt Seldon, played by Julian Sanchez. His interactions with Charlie were very humanizing, and he conveyed his emotions and doubts about the experiment in a way that made him very memorable. Another standout supporting performance was done by Sara Schweit, who played Charlie's mother. One of the most memorable moments in the show was when Charlie saw her for the first time in seventeen years. The image of her mechanically scrubbing the floors while ominously singing Three Blind Mice was sad and terrifying.

Technically, the production was above average for a high school show, with the sound being the standout. There were two boom mikes on either side of the stage that picked up every line in the show with excellent clarity, and not once was any feedback or invasive noise heard, as is often the case.

Overall, Westfield's production was well above average for a high school play, and this wonderfully written story was done absolute justice.

by Carlos Castillo of Albert Einstein High School

Walk into Westfield High School, and one is immediately greeted by ushers dressed in white lab coats and goggles, ready to sweep you into their world of experiments, surgeries, hypotheses, and failure. Westfield's production of *Flowers for Algernon* was a heartbreaking roller coaster ride that captivated the audience as they followed Charlie Gordon's struggles to become what he had always wanted to be: smart.

Flowers for Algernon is based on the 1966 novel of Daniel Keyes, which follows the story of kind, charming, and mentally-challenged Charlie Gordon who becomes the first human being to undergo a radical operation that will "make him smart". Soon enough, Charlie's brain capacity starts to outstrip that of his peers, startling memories of his abusive family rise to the surface, and Charlie is forced to deal with the perpetual fear of regression, with which his intelligence level would eventually slip back down to even worse than before.

Mitchell Buckley led the cast as Charlie, and traveled one of the most difficult and wrenching journeys thus depicted in theatre. Buckley's emotional depth was incredible; his ability to create two almost entirely different personas, pre-operation Charlie and post-operation Charlie, while still maintaining the same character was effective and entrancing. Buckley's excellent development of Charlie carried the show and made almost every scene great.

Monitoring Charlie throughout the entire process was the team of scientists leading the experiment. Julian Sanchez shone as Burt Seldon, arguably the kindest of the team, who worked with Charlie through tests and puzzles to evaluate his intelligence level. Sanchez created his own journey, as he watched Charlie succeed and then struggle, while growing steadily more attached to him. Also attempting to help Charlie was his old night school teacher and developing love interest, Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam). Bloxam channeled raw emotion into her character, as Alice faced her continuing confusion over her feelings towards Charlie.

Charlie's nightmarish and haunting memories of his family were produced by the excellent team of Sarah Schweit as his mother, TJ Vinsavich as his father, and Stephen Cox as the teenage version of Charlie. The dynamic of the flashback scenes was tense and terrifying; in addition to seeing Charlie's awful predicament, the audience experienced the pain of the parents and their struggle to figure out what was right while trying to keep everything as normal as possible. Cox, with only one line, used good physicality to express his emotions. Schweit and Vinsavich worked well together to create a relationship that was strained and desperate.

The tech elements of the show were executed soundly and added deeper meaning to the story. As the pacing of the show was somewhat slow, with blackouts almost every two minutes, the stage crew was essential and excellent. They made quick, soundless changes, so the show never dragged too much. The set was minimal, yet effective, and the sound was almost perfect in allowing each actor to be heard clearly.

Flowers for Algernon explored mature and complicated themes exceptionally, and delved deep into the significance of love, failure, innocence, and ever-important hope.

by Lily Habenstreit of Albert Einstein High School

A short story turned novel turned stage play, musical, film, and radio play, Daniel Keyes's Flower's for Algernon is a challenging, wrenching and timeless story that refuses to look away from pain, but rather defies confinement to a single medium; forcing the audience to watch as the ever-jubilant Charlie Gordon's operation artificially increases his intelligence from that of someone barely able to function in society to that of a distressed, pessimistic genius, and then observe his tortured regression. It's a story Westfield tackled with a rawness and respect that made for a heartbreaking and engrossing production.

The nuance to Mitchell Buckley's portrayal of Charlie's gradual evolution from cheerful, well meaning and slow to embittered genius was phenomenal, with a gradual stiffening of his physicality, crispness of speech and loss of his contagious, naive smile. Maggie Mitchell also displayed incredible nuance and skill when playing Charlie's sister Norma's emotional breakdown, all while Sarah Shweidt hummed and sang eerily as Charlie's mentally unhinged mother. Some rare comic relief in the play was brought by Paolah Urista as Mrs. Mooney, the reactionary and occasionally oblivious landlady, and some of the most touching intimacy in the show was between Charlie and Julian Sanchez as Burt, a lab assistant who was frequently put in awkward, emotionally difficult situations. In spite of occasional awkward physicality from some of the cast, they all projected well and built up into believable, appropriate and engaging shouting matches when called for.

The costumes, hair and make-up in this show were period to the 60s and subtle changes in costumes over the course of the show, most notably with Charlie, understatedly marked change in the characters. The props were wonderful, from the PhD in the Professor's office to the cakes in the bakery's front counter, they drew enough attention to make the scenes real without pulling focus. The composing of the show was deliberately simple and the sound effects were loud enough to hear without rendering the actors unintelligible. The lights of the show, particularly in the flashback scenes when the audience was not supposed to see the parent's face were very well done.

A thought and sob provoking show, Westfeld's Flower for Algernon did justice to the complexity of the themes tackled by this timeless story.

by Mary Holmcrans of Albert Einstein High School

Bring your tissues, because Westfield High School's emotionally effective production of "Flowers for Algernon" may bring you to tears.

Westfield High School tastefully carried out the adaptation of the 1966 novel by Daniel Keyes, "Flowers for Algernon" which follows the inner struggle of the mentally challenged young man, Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley), through his involvement in the experimental operation raising his intelligence and leading up to his eventual intellectual downfall. With the development of his IQ, he begins to lose his genuine cheerfulness. He begins to gain understanding of the malicious and lonely reality of his life and love, such as his newly found adoration for his teacher Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam). This conflicts with his emotional past. His affiliation with Algernon, the mouse for which the same experiment has been carried out, ominously predict their combined fate.

Mitchell Buckley as Charlie Gordon was charming and lovable. His costume representing his stages in his intellectual development was commendable. His genuine portrayal of Charlie through the subtle progression and regression was natural and commendable. His inner struggle was captured in his punctuated bursts of dialogue and mannerisms. His

chemistry with Madeleine Bloxam who played Alice Kinnian was authentic, never diverting eye contact and always maintaining purpose throughout the scenes.

Sarah Schweit's portrayal of Charlie's mother had the perfect amount of deliriousness making the scene with Charlie and Norma very powerful and unsettling. Sarah Schweit maintained perfect pitch when humming "Three Blind Mice" and her presence throughout Charlie's flashbacks along with Little Charlie(Andrew Sharpe) were creepily and wonderfully executed.

There was clear attention to detail which proved to further enhance the powerful and though provoking messages of the show. This meticulous success was especially prevalent in the tech aspects. The lighting was spot on in everything from the blinding laboratory lights to the changing of light in conjunction to the clarity of Charlie's memories were fitting. The set comprising of a large wall the opens up to reveal a maze was excellent and appropriate. The white light as Charlie walks towards the maze in the end was overwhelmingly fitting for such a powerful moment. Costumes were not only time appropriate, but also symbolic. The piano playing dramatic chords that enhanced every scene providing that extra push over the edge was more than effective.

Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon successfully delivered the powerful messages, making the experience both enjoyable and heartbreaking.

by Michiko Feehan of Albert Einstein High School

After 3 hours of raw, heart wrenching performance, the audience emphatically presented the cast of Flowers for Algernon at Westfield High School with a standing ovation. While it was earned by the entire cast and crew, there was certainly no actor more deserving than Mitchell Buckley, who succeeded in portraying one of the most difficult roles in modern theatre with astounding aptitude.

The stage version of Flowers for Algernon was written in 1969 by David Rogers, adapted from the novel of the same name by Daniel Keyes. The play follows Charlie Gordon, a mentally disabled adult, as he undergoes a surgical procedure that raises his IQ to genius level. After becoming a mastermind in mere months, Charlie realizes that he is bound to lose his intelligence and return to his pre-operational state. The emotional range the role of Charlie requires, along with the difficulty of smoothly representing his fluctuating intellect, tested Buckley's skills as an actor.

He passed with flying colors. Buckley was consistent and natural in his portrayal of pre-operational Charlie, but it was his subtle and effortless transition from mentally ill to mentally magnificent that showed his remarkable range as an actor. Small elements of his performance, such as the fact that his smile was never quite as gleeful in his genius state, made Buckley so intriguing to watch. The audience was fascinated by him for the entire show, and while the rest of the cast was fairly strong, it was Buckley who carried the production and made it worthy of high praise.

That being said, Westfield's performance would not have been nearly as enjoyable if not for the excellent technical elements. The set was well-designed and executed by Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt; one of the most interesting pieces was a large maze upstage of the performers that had no solution. This clever and poignant element fit the themes of the play and added to the motif of mazes seen throughout the performance. The lighting, despite a few missteps, added to the mood of each scene, and all actors could be heard clearly, indicating strong sound crew work.

Although Buckley gave the best performance in the hardest role, other actors contributed to the success of the production. The three men working on Charlie's project, played by Brandon Sanchez, Julian Sanchez and Alex Mann, were all believable in their struggle to balance their work and their feelings for Charlie as a human being. In minor roles, Paolah Urista and Maggie Mitchell showed confidence and presence in their interactions with Charlie.

Overall, Westfield's production was thought-provoking and realistic. The audience was instantly connected to Charlie and maintained that connection through his upsetting ordeal. Strong technical elements across the board and of course Mitchell Buckley's moving performance made *Flowers for Algernon* a triumph.

by Noah Habenstreit of Albert Einstein High School

With a tremendous eye for detail, Westfield High School has brought us a compelling and powerful performance, like no other, in their rendition of *Flowers for Algernon*.

Flowers for Algernon, based on the novel by Daniel Keyes, is a stirring tale of society and of a man who just wishes to be smart. A provocative story set in 1960's, when mental illness was beginning to be understood and was arbitrarily treated, opens our eyes to the social injustices in our society through the lens of Charlie Gordon, an individual with low intelligence who volunteers to participate in an experimental intelligence-enhancing experiment.

Charlie Gordon, skillfully played by senior Mitchell Buckley, was absolutely sensational. This young actor was a rather creative and thoughtful young man. He carried much of the weight emotionally throughout the entire performance of the play and boldly took every opportunity that the brilliant script had to offer during his gradual transformation of intelligence and during his regression back to mental illness. With such a complex character as Charlie Gordon, Mitchell Buckley does a marvelous job of storytelling and is a sight for sore eyes when it comes to high school theatre.

There was great talent amongst the rest of the cast. Charlie's mother, played by Sarah Schweit, played the role of a crazy woman very well. Sarah Schweit's ominous singing and creepy antics were very effective and very spooky. Teenage Charlie, played by Stephen Cox, made some very interesting choices that made certain scenes about Charlie's past very uncanny. Mrs. Mooney, played by Paolah Urista, added a nice element to the story. Her spunky and odd personality and her peculiar interactions with the mouse Algernon made her a splendid character to watch. And last but not least, psychologist Burt Sheldon, played by Julian Sanchez, played the role of a middle-aged man very well.

During the show, very clever decisions were made in regards to music. Very simple, but effective music was played throughout the performance, creating the perfect mood for each scene and highlighting important parts of the plot. The beautiful score, composed by Alex Mann, continued the emotional "feeling" very well between scenes and made the atmosphere so overwhelmingly stark that the audience could not help but to shed tears.

The costume staff did an excellent job of finding clothing that was in the style of the period. In the 1960's, men wore suits with thin lapels, flat-front pants, and skinny ties. Women wore "wiggle" dresses, pencil skirts, and skirt dresses. These clothing styles were very apparent in all of the characters throughout all of the scenes. In addition, the costume department paid very close attention to details in regards to Charlie's costume. In the beginning of the story, he starts off wearing very child-like clothing and as he develops intellectually we begin to see him to wear more sophisticated suits and dress clothes.

The construction and lighting crew were both so effective too. Throughout the show, symbolic red lighting and the quick blackouts was very fitting and made scenes very compelling. The creative set included a very detailed and colorful bakery, a psychoanalysis laboratory, an office, and Charlie's apartment. Not to mention, the huge walls of the center stage that occasionally moved to reveal an elaborate maze. The hard work of the construction and lighting crew really paid off as the stunning and detailed set made it incredibly fantastic to watch the show. The entire audience sprang to their feet and gave a standing ovation as Charlie Gordon headed off toward the maze in the dim, gloomy, spell-binding red sunset of the final scene.

by Tomonari Feehan of Albert Einstein High School

All Charlie Gordon wants in life is to be smart. However, after playing lab rat for the first operation done on humans to raise intelligence, he finds the world of higher thinking is a maze of its own.

"Flowers for Algernon" is a short story written in 1958, turned novel in 1966 by Daniel Keyes. After winning a slew of science fiction awards, the journey of Charlie raising his IQ from 68 to 185 before it starts slipping away from him has been turned into films, contemporary dance works, and radio plays. This emotionally charged tale addresses the mistreatment of the mentally disabled, the tension between intellect and emotion, and how the past impacts the present. The version performed by Westfield High School debuted in 1969, and was done by David Rogers.

The performance by Westfield was expertly done. The entire cast handled the material with maturity and grace, working as a cohesive unit to effectively breathe life into the work and allow the heart-wrenching story to affect the audience without overdramatizing it. Likewise, the technical aspects of the show were implemented effectively, adding an additional well-crafted level to the production.

As Charlie Gordon, Mitchell Buckley effectively carried the show. As his character's brainpower rose, Buckley's commitment to his role was evident. Characteristics of the low intelligence Charlie, such as playing with his sweater and slow, stumbling speech disappeared gradually, evolving into crisp diction and an air of confidence. Buckley particularly shone in highly dramatic moments such as when confronting his past, inviting the audience into Charlie's inner torment. Although Charlie's intellect collapsed, Buckley's excellent characterization remained; managing the descent until the Charlie of the beginning of the play reappeared, using a goofy smile to come full circle.

Madeleine Bloxam, portraying Charlie's teacher turned love interest Alice Kinnian, handled her role with charm and poise. Her chemistry with Buckley, as well as her character's care for Charlie, was evident. Also aiding Charlie was Burt Sheldon, a lab technician played by Julian Sanchez. Sanchez's compassion for Charlie and desire to help shone through his gentle speech and emotional tone. Another noteworthy performer was Maggie Mitchell as Charlie's sister Norma. The emotional complexity of Norma's situation, in a confrontation with the brother she believed was dead, was well done by Mitchell. Although there were moments of unmotivated blocking and slow pacing throughout the play, moments like Mitchell's reunion with Charlie were captivating due to her well-displayed facial expressions and full understanding of speech.

With an excellent attention to detail and aptitude for visual appeal, the technical aspects of the show stood out. Alex Mann's piano compositions were elegant in their simplicity, keeping the attention of the audience between scenes and setting the mood effectively. The lighting design of Robert Palack was superb, as well-casted shadows and red mood lighting aided the story, as were effective spotlights and the allusion of sunlight through a window. Perhaps most spectacular was the costume design by Zoe Hawryluk. Hawryluk's costuming was all period and clearly well researched; with the color schemes were pleasing to the eye. Her integration of symbolism such as Alice wearing more flowers as her affection for Charlie grew bumped Hawryluk's work to the next level.

With technical and onstage elements combining to create a delightful show, Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon was a well-executed operation with excellent results.

by Emily Sakowitz of Chantilly High School

In the maze of life, some routes lead to an exit, others turn into corridors, and some are dead ends. In Charlie Gordon's maze, he takes a certain path that leads him right back to where he started in Westfield High School's production of "Flowers for Algernon."

"Flowers for Algernon" is a gripping science fiction novel written by Daniel Keyes, and adapted to the stage by David Rogers. The play concerns Charlie Gordon, a mentally retarded man who is chosen for a scientific experiment designed to increase intelligence. The operation is a success and Charlie's IQ increases more than one hundred points to genius level in a matter of months, but soon, Charlie's intelligence regresses backwards to where he began, leaving him with barely a memory of what he was.

A well done show was characterized by a certain attention to detail. From electrical sockets on the walls, to sharp lighting, to subtle acting choices, the show had an aura of realism about it. The intricately designed set complemented most every actor's characters well, and made it seem as though the events of the show were actually taking place.

One actor who stood out with particular attention to detail was Mitchell Buckley playing the complex Charlie Gordon. Buckley's performance displayed his talent as an actor, showing a gradual and well measured change from a disabled man to a genius, then back through his regression to impairment. Buckley should be lauded for his presentation of a mentally challenged character by acting in such a way that he came across as not insulting and crude, but as innocent and inoffensive. A deeper understanding of Charlie Gordon's character was evident in Buckley's performance on a deeply moving, emotional level.

This emotional level was also reached by Sarah Schweit and Maggie Mitchell as Charlie's mother and sister, respectfully. In a standout scene, Charlie goes to his parent's house to prove his worth to them, but discovers his mother has dementia and is being taken care of by his sister. In the dynamic scene, both Schweit and Mitchell displayed their own acting prowess. Schweit showed an outstanding commitment to character, having severe outbursts followed by calm periods; while Mitchell connected on an intensely passionate level, an outstanding accomplishment, this being her only scene. While the show seemed to drag on with many scene changes, the scene with Schweit and Mitchell was well paced and flowed beautifully.

On the technical level, the show also did not fail to astound. The simple set (designed by Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt) served its purpose well, and created a heightened sense of realism with supreme attention to detail. Costumes (designed by Zoe Hawryluk) were period appropriate and well coordinated onstage. Lighting wise, the design by Robert Palack was skillfully aimed and featured deep reds along with eerie shadows and well-lit rooms.

Putting on a show of such magnitude at a high school level requires a certain degree of maturity and talent, and the entire cast and crew displayed it with ease. Westfield High School's production of "Flowers for Algernon" was an emotionally breathtaking piece of theater that was as mysterious and complex as a card with ink spilled all over it.

by Greg Baker of Chantilly High School

Flowers for Algernon is a famously heart wrenching and thought provoking play. A young man, Charlie Gordan, with a sweet disposition and mental retardation, desperately wishes to become smart, and so enters an experimental scientific procedure involving brain surgery to increase his intelligence. Audiences watch in sadness as his learning abilities increase tenfold until he is smarter than the scientists performing his experiment, then as he regresses into the original Charlie, devastated at losing his newfound understandings and abilities.

The show brings up some very big questions, concerning the treatment of mentally disabled people and whether or not intelligence really makes a person happier. Westfield brought all of these thoughts and emotions to the table, and more, in their wonderful showing of Flowers for Algernon.

Charlie Gordan, played by Mitchell Buckley, was fantastic. It is difficult to portray a character such as Charlie, who changes so much throughout the show, going from a man who is operating on a third grade level to a fully grown adult to a man who is once again operating on a third grade level. However, Buckley did it powerfully, with attention to old mannerisms and such detail during his regression that his character had full believability. Buckley made the show fantastic, bringing passion and realistic feelings and actions to the play.

Burt Seldon, played by Julian Sanchez, was another great actor, bringing a deep sadness to his role as the nurse technician caring for, then collaborating with, and then working under, Charlie. Sanchez conveyed his grave feeling of responsibility for what has happened to Charlie and made the audience connect with him.

The technical aspects of the show were equally strong. The set was well designed, simple yet elegant, and particularly the minimalism of the laboratory scene conveyed the bleakness of Charlie's condition. The attention to detail, namely in the office scenes, were also well done. The set changes were quick and well performed, keeping pace with the show. The transition music was also fantastic, bringing wonderful emotion and power to the show with the simple chords that were deeply moving.

The lighting was just as powerful, with light changes conveying emotional changes in Charlie's character. The monologue lighting and the hospital lights were moving and added to the emotional depth of the show.

Overall, the actors, actresses, and crew really brought out the emotion and ideas of the show for the audience to feel. Westfield's production of Flowers for Algernon was wonderful in that it wasn't overdone and was handled with the proper maturity and emotional depth for a performance. This show was fantastic.

by Hannah Grudi of Chantilly High School

"Sometimes a man's life seems a lot more delicate than a mouse's." This conflicted attitude is not always taken when dealing with Charlie Gordon. To his parents, he's a problem. To his doctors, he's specimen. To his coworkers, he's a joke. Westfield High School's performance of "Flowers for Algernon" effectively conveyed the powerlessness and isolation of a man struggling to overcome his low IQ.

Based on the book by Daniel Keyes, "Flowers for Algernon" was adapted into a play by David Rogers. Charlie Gordon, a

mentally-challenged young man with a menial job at a local bakery undergoes an operation to increase his intelligence. The ostensibly successful surgery increases Charlie's IQ to way above average level. However, his emotional growth is not so rapid. He struggles to balance his genius aptitude with the nightmares and the realization that people are not as nice as he thought. Like the mouse Algernon, who underwent the same surgery, Charlie is trapped in a maze as his mind begins to deteriorate.

In a show composed of many short scenes, the cast was able to effectively emotionally fill each interaction. Varied distinct reactions to Charlie's transformation differentiated every distinct character. While sometimes dropping in energy, the entire cast mesmerized the audience with their distinctive interactions from acceptance to mockery of Charlie's mental deficiencies.

Mitchell Buckley perfectly portrayed the kindhearted but slow-minded Charlie Gordon. His slow speech and over enunciated words were always believable and passionate. He effectively illustrated his immense intellectual growth with his emotional stunting in all of his relationships particularly his heartrending struggle to emotionally connect with Alice Kinnian (Madeline Bloxam). Struggling from smiling about blobs of red ink on a page to anguishing over images of nightmares from his past, Buckley maintained a clear character and conviction while altering his pace of speech and compelling physical gestures. His slow and painful regression was foreshadowed with slips into old character physical struggles as Buckley enthralled the audience with an impressive and depressing deterioration.

As the lab technician Julian Sanchez (Burt Seldon) provided a necessary link between the stiff intellectual doctors and emotionally unstable Charlie. Sanchez's frustration with the Rorschach tests mirrored the frustration Charlie was struggling to express. He contrasted the clinically white walls of the hospital and the rigid walls of the maze. Charlie's mother (Sarah Schweit) and his father (TJ Vinsavich) gave very powerful performances. The tangible tension between them provided a window into Charlie's fragmented childhood. Silhouette images but vivid vocal inflection symbolized the disjointed memories of his past.

Costumes designed by Zoe Hawryluk were all time period and appropriately reflected each scene. Charlie's costume tracked his emotional growth as his clothing developed from a sweater and childish baseball hat to a sophisticated suit and back to a baseball hat as his intelligence deteriorated. The simple yet effective lighting design (Robert Palack) conveyed the serious mood. The running crew quickly and quietly made the many transitions very efficiently moving simple but detailed set pieces.

The audience was moved to tears in the stunning conclusion that intelligence and happiness are not directly related. Westfield High School's heartbreaking performance of "Flowers for Algernon" exposed the struggles of a mental illness with no cure.

by Hattie Clougherty of Chantilly High School

Mental illness. These words not only conjure up images of the alienated, the violent, the lost, and the abnormal but also pose serious ethical questions. Do we need a cure? What is the cure? What is normal? With compelling performances and wonderful costumes, Westfield High School's production of "Flowers for Algernon" poignantly portrayed the ethical tension between the limits of medical experimentation and the fragility of the human mind.

Flowers for Algernon was written as a novel by Daniel Keyes in 1958 and then turned into a play by David Rogers in 1965. Algernon is a laboratory mouse whose brain is surgically altered to increase his intelligence. The play partly narrated by Charlie Gordon, the first human test subject for the surgery, through a series of progress reports. Charlie rapidly increases in aptitude and as he does he begins to learn the faults of the experiment he consented to. As the story progresses he must rush to find a solution to his situation or else regress to his original state of mind.

The skillful ensemble provided the perfect backdrop to the enticing main characters through ideal reactions and energized movements. From strutting through the bakery to quietly chatting in a business party the talented cast kept pace with the progressing story and quick scenes.

Wringing hands clutching the striped ends of a long sweater accompanied by the slow drawling voice meticulously pronouncing simple syllables, Mitchell Buckley as Charlie Gordon tactfully portrayed his mentally challenged character through outstanding vocal choices and creative fiddling. From crunching his red cap and rocking back on his heels as he snorted out giggles of laughter or stomping about the stage in an angered haze at the peak of his intelligence Buckley managed to maintain a believable character despite the fluctuating changes of Charlie's disposition.

Burt Seldon, played by Julian Sanchez, expertly illustrated his dynamic character by artistically changing his vocal tones and stage stances. Beginning as a smooth voiced lab technician fervently working to better the scientific discoveries that accompanied Charlie's experiment he slowly progressed to a caring friend who sobbed at the inevitability of Charlie's regression. Madeleine Bloxam, Alice Kinnian, also dexterously crossed the wide stage with commanding gestures and compassionate alterations in her soft tone of voice. Her eye contact and confidence in front of a rapt audience contributed to her believable character.

Quick transitions were eased along by gentle piano music that wafted through the theater and danced across the frayed heart strings of the captivated audience. Despite the occasional minor mishap the lights as designed by Robert Palack fantastically provided needed accompaniment to the emotionally jarring scenes through a blue green glow on a tiny barbershop and red blaze that streamed across the stage and cast shadows on the faces of Charlie's flashbacks.

Westfield High School presented a fabulous interpretation of the emotionally touching story, "Flowers for Algernon," through the actor's passion and heart-wrenching conviction.

by Justine Clougherty of Chantilly High School

Heartbreaking. It is sometimes stunning how discriminating society can be. People who are different are often excluded, insulted, and even persecuted. Matthew Dicks put it best when he said "You have to be the bravest person in the world to go out every day, being yourself when no one likes who you are." This seems terrible to most people, but the heartbreaking truth is, it happens every day.

Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon was precisely that: heartbreaking. In 1965, a time before mental illness was fully understood and respected; Charlie Gordon becomes the guinea pig for an experiment in intelligence. Charlie gets an operation that is based primarily on work done on a mouse named Algernon, which improves his mental condition drastically. At the peak of Charlie's intellectual growth, Algernon shows frightening signs of regression. This show follows Charlie's mental, social, and emotional struggle throughout his experiences.

The show's most definitive attribute was the mood that connected every scene. Each scene held the hopeful yet terribly apprehensive tone which transfixed the audience. This mood was accompanied by a cool-colored set and dramatic lighting, and was ultimately set by the actors' line delivery and careful timing. Additionally, student-written music was a delightful accompaniment to the scene transitions. Of course, the most prominent influence on the show was Charlie, whose performance was excellent.

Mitchell Buckley brought Charlie to life on the stage. His tragically adorable representation of Charlie's life before the operation was incredibly accurate and touching. His progression from vocally impaired and physically awkward to a confident, intellectual man was perfection. Amidst these drastic changes, he maintained an accurate emotional instability that made his character extremely believable.

Charlie's experiences would not be nearly as moving had it not been for the interaction with and response of the supporting cast. An important character, Alice Kinnian, was effectively played by Madeline Bloxam. Her chemistry with Charlie was very convincing, which made the eventual downfall all the more tragic. Burt Seldon, played by Julian Sanchez, also made a distinct impact with his compelling interactions with Charlie. Unlike certain characters, he reacted to every situation accurately, making his character appear pleasantly genuine.

The technical performance in this show was an all-around success. Despite some mistakes, the overall production was advanced by the lighting, sound, sets, costumes, hair and makeup. The costumes were a standout because of the attention to detail and research done by Zoe Hawryluk. She created thoughtful character development through costumes, while maintaining a color scheme for consistency.

Flowers for Algernon was a stunning success. Every member of the cast and crew clearly worked hard and added to this beautiful show. The authentic performance and emotion was devastating in such a wonderful way, and was partnered with tone-setting technical features. To put it simply: the show was beautifully heartbreaking.

by Mia Rickenbach of Chantilly High School

"How strange it is that people of honest feelings and sensibility, who would not take advantage of a man born without arms or legs or eyes – how such people think nothing of abusing a man born with low intelligence". With the some 5 million "retarded" people living in America in the year 1965 they were treated very poorly in society because of their gullible nature and willingness to please everyone around them. In the play, Flowers for Algernon by David Rogers, the character of Charlie Gordon perfectly represents the spirit of those 5 million people and in Westfield High School's Production of Flowers for Algernon the same spirit lived on through all of the actors. The original science fiction short story, Flowers for Algernon, was written in 1958 by Daniel Keyes, and in 1966 he published a novel of the same name. It was adapted for the stage by David Rogers and Charles Strouse in 1978 and has since them been adapted into many stage, cinema, and radio productions the most famous of which being the 1968 Academy-Award winning film, Charly, starring Cliff Robertson as Charlie Gordon.

Algernon is a laboratory mouse that has undergone surgery to increase his mental capabilities. Charlie Gordon, a mentally challenged 32-year-old man, is brought to Dr. Strauss, Professor Nemur, and Burt Seldon by his night school teacher Alice Kinnian to receive the same surgery, which had never been experimented with a human subject. Charlie's surgery takes him on a journey to great intelligence, but ultimately leaves him back where he began.

Mitchell Buckley, who played Charlie Gordon, had a complete understanding of his character, the hardships he faced, and his disability which were evident in his performance. He took the audience on a wonderful journey of self-exploration while seamlessly cruising from the gullible, ditsy, people pleaser Charlie, to the serious, aloof, genius Charlie. His chemistry with Madeleine Bloxam, who played Gordon's teacher Alice Kinnian, was remarkable and made the audience root for the couple to succeed despite their obvious separation at the end of the play when Charlie digresses to his original condition.

Brandon Sanchez who played Dr. Strauss and Alex Mann who played Professor Nemur, beautifully highlighted their characters' maturity and level of intelligence through their subtle character choices. Another stand out was Julian Sanchez who played Burt Seldon used what fairly limited stage time he had to evoke emotions from the audience about how he felt about Charlie and the relationship he had built with him. He executed his last scene with Charlie perfectly, breaking down, when he realizes what the operation has done to him.

The costumes designed by Zoe Hawryluk fit the time period perfectly and followed the development of each character. The costuming of Alice Kinnian and Charlie Gordon was executed with attention to the character development displayed by each of the characters and it only made the show easier to watch.

The set designed by Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt, displayed a maze in the center of the stage which, when looked at closely, was recognized as a dead end maze, symbolizing the dead end nature of Charlie's procedure and recovery.

The original score composed by Alex Mann and performed by Joe Drzemiecki added to the somewhat gloomy nature of the show, and was very befitting to each scene throughout the show.

Although it seemed there were some pacing problems in some of the second act, Westfield High School brought justice to a difficult and mature themed play and took the audience on the journey of one man.

by Corinne MacLean of Freedom High School

You typically don't go to a high school to see a show that deals with a touchy topic such as mental disability. That is, you typically don't go to a high school unless it's Westfield High School's production of Flowers For Algernon. The Westfield Theater department put on this show by David Rogers in an inventive way while remaining true to the core themes of the story.

The show Flowers for Algernon was originally an award-winning short story, and was adapted into a novel by Daniel Keyes in 1966, and later into a play by David Rogers in 1969. The story follows a year in the life of Charlie Gordon, a mentally challenged individual whose life takes a turn for the better and then for the worse. Scientists used a special surgery that allows lab mice to attain higher levels of intelligence, but none more so than Algernon, a particularly smart mouse. With an initial intelligence quotient of 68, it is decided that Charlie is fitting for a lab experiment that will allow him to improve his intelligence. The experiment is a roaring success, with Charlie's IQ skyrocketing upwards. But when he finds that this change is ephemeral and will wear off, Charlie begins to question the nature of his intellect and the very purpose of his life.

Stage presence was no issue for Charlie Gordon, played by Mitchell Buckley. His character choices and his command over the script was impeccable, and definitely picked up by the audience. The audience was wrapped up in Charlie's story, and Buckley did a spectacular job at getting the audience to care about what was important to Charlie. Charlie Gordon is the show's most dynamic character, and Buckley captured this aspect, showing Charlie's progression towards genius, and his regression back to his mental handicap.

The supporting cast did well to commit to their characters and to really bring the story of Charlie Gordon full circle. Laudable performances were given by several, including Madeleine Bloxam (who played Alice Kinnian) and Julian

Sanchez (Burt Seldon). These individuals provided interesting perspectives through which one might view Charlie Gordon's story. These performances were top-notch and did justice to this very heavy story. Stunning featured actors included Maggie Mitchell (Norma) and Paolah Urista (Mrs. Mooney). Together, the supporting cast created a world both friendly and hostile towards a maturing Charlie Gordon.

Technical aspects of the show did well to complete the world of Charlie Gordon. All stops were pulled to ensure that dress, hair, makeup, props, and set were all accurate to the time period of 1965. This attention to detail was duly noted. Set changes were smooth, not too long, and appeared to happen by magic. This is crucial, as there are an exorbitant amount of very short scenes in the show, and even with the smooth transitions, choppiness was not a problem.

Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon was beautifully executed. When all was said and done, a piece of Charlie Gordon and his incredible story was stamped on the hearts of every individual watching the show.

by Hershel Holiday of Freedom High School

Come enter the world of 1970s and meet Charlie Gordon(Mitchell Buckley) a 32 year old who has the IQ of 68. Charlie's whole life changes when he is chosen to have an operation that will increase his intelligence three times. After going through the operation Charlie grows exponentially emotionally and intellectually. As Charlie progresses he comes to realize that not everyone is as nice or as smart as he once thought. Things start to take a turn for the worse when Algernon, the lab mouse who has had the same operation as Charlie, suddenly starts to lose his intelligents. Realizing that his intelligence will not last forever Charlie furiously tries to stop the regression before he too will regress.

Though the set and music, composed by Alex Mann and Joe Drzemiecki, were very simple it still brought more surrealness and made you focus more on the actors. All costumes fit into the time period and there was a great variety. The costumes for Charlie matched how he progressed in the beginning of the story and then regressed in the end. The sound effects were always on time and did not overpower the actors. But in the party scene the piano at one point was too loud and the actors could not be heard, but it did not take away the mood of the scene.

All actors remained in character even as they were walking off stage. Buckley showed Charlie's progression and regression in the story really well not to mention his body language changing as his character changed. The mother(Sarah Schweit) and Norma(Maggie Mitchell) were the most climactic scene. Though they were not on stage as long as Charlie both actors made themselves very memorable. All actors were great vocally and even if you were not watching them for one second you could still sense the realism in their voices.

Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon showed a very realistic and relatable show that was very pleasing.

by Jackie Coates of Freedom High School

Society has not always been kind to everyone. The way we have treated people has been evolving constantly. Flowers For Algernon depicts a saddening time when mentally handicapped people were looked at as abnormal and unable to contribute to society. Westfield Theater put on a prodigious performance of the well-known story of a man who is willing to learn and a genius mouse.

Flowers For Algernon started as a short story, published in 1959, and then became a novel in 1966, both written by Daniel Keyes. Debuting in London, the play adaptation was written by David Rogers. This heavyhearted science-fiction tale is said to have been drawn from Keyes' own experiences. The show opens with a mentally disabled man, Charlie Gordon, applying to a brain surgery that will increase his intelligence. This experiment has been tested many times before on mice, the most successful Algernon, but Charlie will be the first human to receive the treatment. The show then progresses with his intellectual growth and how his knew found knowledge effects relationships that he has had for a majority of his life.

Charlie becomes frightened when Algernon starts to regress, and he soon learns that his operation was only temporary. Once Algernon dies, Charlie's own regression begins and we see a genius transforming back into a mentally-handicapped man once again.

Mitchell Buckley's performance of Charlie Gordon was exceptional, he handled the character with such sensitivity and care. His interpretation of a grown, disabled man was simply stunning. Flashbacks into Charlie Gordon's childhood that were brought to life by actors Sarah Schweit, Andrew Sharpe, TJ Vinsavich, Hanna Soudah, Stephen Cox and Mitchell Buckley were some of the most intense of the show. Buckley's handle on these scenes were remarkable and impressive.

The standout scene of the night was between actors Buckley and Julian Sanchez (who played Burt Seldon). As a man trying to help Buckley's character you see Sanchez go through the struggle of staying true to the work at hand while knowing that the end result of the experiment is going to be the worst possible outcome. Sanchez's portrayal of a man watching a man getting to his highest point only to drop even farther than before was truly heartbreaking. Brandon Sanchez (Dr. Strauss) and Bayleigh Aschenbrenner's (Mrs. Donner) efforts should also be noted for their wonderful command of the stage and their characters as well.

The tech aspect of the show was fantastic. Sticking with the 1965 feel the costumes, created by Zoe Hawryluk, and sets, by Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt, were superb. The attention to detail by both, aging of Charlie Gordon's hats and even outlets on the walls, were very pleasing. The enormous maze that was used as a sort of backdrop in the show was appreciated for its symbolism towards the show. The composition by Alex Mann and Joe Drzemiecki was beautiful and contributed much to the effectiveness of the show. Other than a few lighting mishaps and actors crossing some sight lines the show ran rather smoothly.

Westfield High School presented a spectacular production of Flowers For Algernon that left audience members in awe once Charlie Gordon put flowers on Algernon's grave and walked into the maze that is life.

by Meena Knowles of Freedom High School

Is ignorance truly bliss? In life, is it better to be happy but in the dark about the truths of humanity or fully knowledgeable but bitter? Westfield High School's recent production of Flowers for Algernon set out to answer this question. The 1968 play by David Rogers follows the scientific attempt to artificially increase the intellect of Charlie Gordon, a mentally disabled man in his early thirties. With Charlie being the first human participant, the prior testing was on a mouse named Algernon, whose intelligence sky rocketed. However, when the same happens to Charlie, he finds that both he and the mouse's lives are crumbling under their supposed "improvement."

Originally a short story of the same name published in 1958, the work was turned into a full-length novel in 1966, and both were written by Daniel Keyes. The pieces were met with equal critical acclaim and the novel, in particular, is often taught in schools across the nation. However, the story also happens to be one of the most challenged books in schools across America due to its varying thematic elements, ranging from treatment of the mentally disabled to Charlie's struggles with certain newly-discovered desires.

With the aforementioned difficulty of material in tow, Westfield had a heavy show to bring to life. Yet, the production did not disappoint. Leading the show unfailingly was Mitchell Buckley playing Charlie Gordon. His portrayal remained on point even as the story and his character morphed and twisted in devastating directions. As other actors experienced troubles with following through on their characterization, Buckley magnificently chronicled the rise and fall of Charlie, making the audience feel every moment. Buckley's depiction shined specifically in scenes with Charlie's teacher and love interest,

Alice Kinnian, played by Madeleine Bloxam. The pair's chemistry managed to both successfully hold them together but also show their strained moments with all the more poignancy.

Another standout of the performance was Alex Mann as Professor Nemur. Mann dominated this character as he navigated the questionable waters of experimentation on humans and its ethics alongside his colleagues. However, what set the actor out from the crowd in this show was his superb believability in his representation of a middle aged man. Even as others struggled to find this difficult characterization, Mann persisted in his unswerving mannerisms and detail.

Effectively setting the scene across the production was the theatre's stylistic uses of lighting and sound. With an original score, the high intensity scenes were complemented stupendously by the simple yet beautiful piano pieces. On top of this, the show's heavy use of voice recordings pulled the viewer even further into the story. The lighting aspect of the show commendably defined scenes, even if at times the blacking out of lights between divisions became overdone. Yet, the laudable lighting effects surpassed any shortcomings with the use of different colored illuminations of specific scenes, which successfully added deeper layers to heavily emotional moments.

Ultimately presenting a tremendous range of ideas and emotions, Flowers for Algernon at Westfield High School captivated its audience, leaving the viewer feeling the timeless story long after the final curtain. If you can, catch a performance and ask yourself: is ignorance truly bliss?

by Aiden Orr of Heritage High School

The drama and intrigue that comprises the plot of Flowers For Algernon was captured in Westfield High School's production. The cast of this play attracted the audience with true emotion by producing a show that was accurately uplifting, chilling, and heartbreaking.

Flowers For Algernon was written by David Rogers specifically for the stage. This play was based on a famous novel by Daniel Keyes. The story follows Charlie Gordon, a mentally disabled adult in 1965, as he seeks higher intelligence. Algernon is a mouse that was a successful example of a new operation that was developed to artificially increase the subjects learning capacity, and therefore intelligence. Charlie, after being brought to the developers of this scientific procedure by his night class teacher, becomes the first human subject of the experimental operation. He becomes more and more intelligent and learns things about the world and human nature that is not as nice as he thought it was. As the plot progresses further, Charlie and the audience alike ponder the question: is ignorance truly bliss?

Leading the show as Charlie, Mitchell Buckley shaped a distinct and loveable character. He accepted the challenge of character progression and regression, and transcended every audience member's expectations with his ability to create such a dynamic character. Madeleine Bloxam, as Alice Kinnian, also portrayed her character with much obvious skill and understanding. Together, these two actors had apparent chemistry and a great stage relationship.

Supporting Charlie were three intellectuals: Dr. Strauss (Brandon Sanchez), Professor Nemur (Alex Mann), and Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez). The portrayal of these characters was on-point; each of the actors creating a distinct character. Mann, especially, stepped into the shoes of a middle-aged man and filled them with his tone of voice and physicality. Another group of characters that provided a bit of comic relief to the audience was the Bakers. Mrs. Donner (Bayleigh Aschenbrenner) was an especially distinct and cheery character that brought smiles to the audience. Although sometimes there was a general lack of energy or reaction among the ensemble members, they created the appropriate atmosphere

that Flowers For Algernon demanded.

The tech for this show was particularly strong. The sound for this show was near impeccable: all sound effects came through the speakers both clearly and audibly. Also along the line of sound, student-composed music was included in the show and definitely added to the emotion of the production. The set was versatile, two side scenes and one middle scenery piece that split to expose a maze background. The lighting, although at times transitions were too abrupt or bright, was consistently well focused throughout the show. The hair, makeup, and costumes were also on-point for the time period of the show.

Although at times pacing was slow, Westfield drama department gave life to a truly fascinating and heartfelt story that taught the audience to appreciate every person as they are.

by Jessica Littman of Heritage High School

The idea of super-human intelligence is one that has fascinated people for years and has been a central theme in dozens of movies in the past decade alone. One story stands out from the others due to its unique moral and ethical dilemma. Flowers for Algernon follows the tale of Charlie Gordon, a mentally disabled man, and Algernon, a mouse, who both undergo surgeries to enhance their intelligence. Charlie triples his 68 IQ in a matter of weeks but excitement is muddled when it is reported that Algernon has refused to eat and seems to be losing his intelligence. He must now use his heightened intelligence to figure out why this is happening to the pair of "guinea pigs," even if the result is negative. This provocative play was recently performed at Westfield High School in Fairfax, VA.

The dynamic lead character, Charlie Gordon, could easily have become a challenge for actor Mitchell Buckley. However, Buckley had a clear understanding of his motivation for each line and reacted to his fellow actors wonderfully. There was a clear distinction between the mentally disabled Charlie at the beginning of the show and the super-intelligent, post-operational Charlie. The audience could clearly see the transition occurring in Charlie and immediately began rooting for him. He never seemed like an actor reciting lines, but rather the actual character and was experiencing every emotion that Charlie would have felt. Buckley was complimented by Madeleine Bloxam (Alice Kinnian), his teacher and love interest. Bloxam made obvious character choices that translated well offstage and the chemistry between her and Buckley was clear to the audience.

This show has several very important supporting characters that help Charlie along, emotionally and intellectually. Dr. Strauss (Brandon Sanchez), Professor Nemur (Alex Mann), and Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez) are huge parts of Charlie's life after the operation. The three actors portrayed very different characters and successfully made a distinction between each of them, especially in scenes where they were all interacting with each other. Sarah Schweit, who played Charlie's mother, gave a compelling performance alongside Maggie Mitchell, who played Charlie's adult sister. Schweit portrayed the conflicting emotions that the mother had about raising a mentally disabled child and, at the climax, gave the tortured and almost creepy performance that the role demands. Some supporting characters made questionable choices in terms of their physicality, which proved to be distracting and take the audience out of the moment. Also, many potentially important or comically relieving lines were skipped over.

Westfield should be commended for the elaborate tech work that students designed and executed for this show. Most impressive was the original music composed by Alex Mann and Joe Drzemiecki. The gentle music helped the audience become emotionally involved with the show and helped along the pace in what could have been a potentially slow show. The costumes in the show were time-period appropriate and suited each character's personality and role in Charlie's life. Props for this show, though not necessarily extensive, were very well done. In each scene, particularly the Doctor's office, the props were suitable for the place/time and made the scene feel more authentic.

Flowers for Algernon is a very difficult show to perform, due to its emotional depth and the maturity of the issues involved. Everyone involved with Westfield's production clearly understood this and spent countless hours preparing everything from the acting to the tech. They gave a stunning performance and made the story feel real.

by Marisa Dodd of Heritage High School

A story about the experience of the mentally challenged is presented in the book Flowers for Algernon written by Daniel Keyes in the 1960s, adapted into a play by David Rogers. Charlie Gordon the protagonist of the play is a mentally challenged man, who goes through an operation that increases his intelligence in a short amount of time but not without the struggles that come with the experiment. Westfield Theatre presents Flowers for Algernon on the weekend of February 15th, 2013.

In the 1960s new issues like the mentally ill was being faced, an operation to advance the mind started on a mouse named Algernon, when the project seemed successful scientists wanted to try a human a subject with a lower mentality than average: Charlie. A sweet man destined to please others and try his hardest he's the best subject yet, delightful but oblivious. As the play progresses Charlie battles his patronizing peers, his broken past, and his emotional connections.

Charlie Gordon portrayed by Mitchell Buckley had the arduous task of being childlike to being a condescending genius in a manner that didn't 'seem rushed or slow. This heartfelt performance touches on sensitive subjects of the mentally ill and how it affects Charlie himself and his family. On Charlie's journey he takes us along through his progress reports, while he's learning languages and calculus his emotional side isn't up to par with his intellect. While Charlie became a genius, he lost his humanity where his intellect didn't match with his ability to emotionally connect.

Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam), Charlie's night school teacher who was there on Charlie's entire journey, and the one who brought out Charlie's emotions. The contrast of Bloxam's gentle interaction with Charlie and the scientists' cold, patronizing approach was a realistic portrayal of this situation.

The portrayal of Alice phoning a man, to the retro costumes kept the ambiance of the 1960s on stage. The conservatism of the era in terms of the dresses and suits was well researched and executed (Zoe Hawryluk). The sound was flawless as projection and articulation was never a problem no matter where on stage (Ariana Willis). The artistic choice of the red lights when reflecting back on Charlie's memories and bright white lights on science lab scenes was ingenious and well timed (Robert Palack). With this play there are more scenes than ever but with a melodic piano through transitions it made everything clean and still in the moment (Alex Mann and Joe Drzemiecki).

The emotional connections lacked in terms of the moment, whether if it was sympathetic or charged with hate; the vocals matched the mood but the emotion wasn't as real. Even so with the thematic concept of internal struggle of Charlie's life being nothing but turmoil, romance, confusion, and ridicule -big emotions that felt tangible in the air that night it was still conveyed to the audience. Big moments of arguments and goodbyes was taken away because cheating out was a problem but because the pacing was moving at a commendable pace it was only a minor issue. The heartbreaking truth of the mentally ill was brought to life by Westfield, what a life altering journey.

by Mikayla Spencer of Heritage High School

One would not have been prepared for the raw, emotional performance that awaited in the auditorium. Mental retardation

is a subject many find too sensitive to handle, but the students of Westfield High School grasped it with maturity and professionalism that made their show a tearful journey that nearly all watching could appreciate. Westfield gave a phenomenal tribute to the theatre arts with their riveting production of "Flowers For Algernon".

The play, written by David Rogers, is based on the short story and subsequent novel by Daniel Keyes during the 1960s. The short story won the 1960 Hugo Award for Best Short Story and the novel jointly won a 1966 Nebula Award for Best Novel. Both stories follow 32 year old Charlie Gordon, who suffers from mental retardation due to a genetic disorder, as he undergoes an operation to boost his intelligence. The operation succeeds, but Charlie is led to face the world around him as he understands the personal cruelty and indifference towards him, as well as confronting his blurry and heart-wrenching past.

The greatest commemoration goes to Mitchell Buckley as Charlie Gordon, whose performance left the audience awe-struck. Buckley had overwhelming commitment to his character, highlighting the show with his emotional connections, transitioning diction, and various physical movements to identify his mental state. Buckley's steps from slow talking and grasping his shirt to erect posture and loud diction supported the show immensely. Buckley's emotional connection truly revealed his versatility, tackling the complex situation and sensitivity of his role with great strength. Nearly every speech Buckley gave on his suffering left the audience breathless, ending with echoed sniffles and sobs that complimented Buckley's connection with the audience.

Julian Sanchez (Burt Seldon) put excellent development into his role, starting out stoic and professional in his studies, then breaking down at the sight of Charlie's drastic changes. Successful layering was also seen in Madeleine Bloxam's (Alice Kinnian) performance, starting gentle and warm with Charlie but successfully tackling the frustration and confusion she endures. Her chemistry with Buckley also picked up pacing, which lacked at times.

Sarah Schweit and TJ Vinsavich (Mother and Father) gave commendable determination, pushing the show further with their explosive tension and hard focus. Maggie Mitchell also showed emotional commitment in her one scene as an adult Norma (Charlie's estranged sister for 17 years) that made her memorable for her building grief.

Alex Mann and Joe Drzemiecki's original composition added a surreal yet haunting mood, achieving the audience's attention while enhancing scene transitions and heightening emotional scenes. Sound (Ariana Willis) and lighting (Robert Palack) helped assist many scenes, with blended sound cues to reflect Charlie's bad memories smoothly and red backdrops to add to scenic intensity. Costumes (Zoe Hawryluk) were period appropriate, plausibly done to convey the development of the characters with more complex colors and designs as the show proceeded.

In summary, "Flowers For Algernon" was an emotional gem that is scarce to find in other places, and Westfield's generous showmanship and earnest dedication made for a show to remember. The entire show was a work of pure brilliance.

by Chris Hrozencik of Herndon High School

The innocence of childhood is a trait that many wish to recapture once they enter the bizarre and troubling reality of the world, but the simplicity, even the ignorance of innocence is not something that people miss. In Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon, book by Daniel Keyes, play by David Rogers, the love of life is tangible from the first moment.

The play follows the progress of Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley), age 32, an IQ of 68, with a joy for learning that surpasses the most dedicated doctoral student. Three enthusiastic researchers, Dr. Strauss (Brandon Sanchez), Professor Nemur (Alex Mann), and Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez), select Charlie for an operation to boost his intelligence, based on the recommendation of his teacher, Ms. Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam). A laboratory mouse, Algernon had successfully gone through the procedure, spurring Charlie to his affirmative decision. Through a series of progress reports, memories, and scenes, Charlie's triumph reaches a peak at the same time that his IQ does. But Algernon's behavior becomes erratic, the mouse regressing mentally before his sudden death. Charlie is a man that sees his own descent into incoherence, a struggle that is impossible to win.

Mitchell Buckley's portrayal of the steady incline and rapid but bumpy decline of intelligence within his character is precise and knowledgeable. Charlie's ascent into genius shows from the costumes, to the state of his hair, to the specific mannerisms and the particular facial expressions the actor uses. The decline is not quite so smooth, but it mirrors Algernon's unpredictable behavior before his death.

The characters that flitted in and out of Charlie's life were individually distinct. As Charlie's focus and knowledge of the world increased, each character became particularly three-dimensional, as they reacted to Charlie's intelligence in varied ways. From Mrs. Donner (Bayleigh Aschenbrenner) and her workers fearing his new intelligence, to Mrs. Mooney (Paolah Urista) that cared for him during his humiliating descent down, all the characters had specific reactions that differed from any other persons.

The set was not only constructed with extreme attention to detail, shown when there were even electrical sockets in the walls, but the set designers, Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt, placed an incredible amount of symbolism in those details. A maze that was shown whenever Charlie unearthed memories didn't have an exit and the figurines in the office represented 'hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil'.

The costume design was filled with symbolism. The costume designer, Zoe Hawryluk, explained that each of the colors had a meaning, red being "simple-mindedness" and white being "detachment" as a couple examples from her explanation. The big-picture ideas that went into each specific costume and accessory piece is remarkable, especially as most of the pieces were individually foraged from thrift stores and student closets. The way Hawryluk wove each piece within a costume to tell a story is inspiring and noteworthy.

Simple-mindedness may be as foreign to the actors as the Stone Age, but they succeeded in delivering a message to the audience. As Charlie walked into the bright sterile light and the maze, the audience was left with an iconic picture that struck a chord, representing everything unfortunate and joyful in the show. Westfield has once again given their audience something to ponder.

by Alex Poirier of Loudoun Valley High School

"I am afraid. Not of life, or death, or nothingness, but of wasting it as if I had never been." Flowers for Algernon, a beautifully written play based of the novel, Flowers for Algernon, written by Daniel Keyes. A story about a mentally challenged man, Charlie Gordon, played by the one and only Mitchell Buckley, who becomes a scientific experiment to see if scientists can make a "retarded man" into a super genius. Back in the 1960's, where the show takes place, the word "retarded" or "moron" was used freely as a medical term. Charlie's journey to becoming somewhat "normal" was full of challenges, his friend, Algernon, a mouse, who was used first in the experience helped him acquire his mind.

Zoe Hawryluk, the costume designer, created a story in each outfit. The idea of Gordon's costumes somewhat "growing up" with Charlie flawlessly fit in. Alice Kennian's(Madeleine Bloxam) costumes also changed as her character did. Her

color evolution, as Hawryluk puts it, was such a natural progression.

The lighting in this production had a few mishaps, but did not take away from the show. Robert Palack, the lighting designer, has incredible timing and colors to create a deeper meaning. In the bakery he used a purple wash to make the walls look purple, although they were the same walls in the laboratory, it seemed like you traveled to a different place. In Charlie's memories, Palack used dark red lighting so you couldn't see Charlie's parents faces, this also was like the audience was in Charlie's mind, seeing what he was seeing.

Buckley's interpretation of a mentally handicapped man was completely mesmerizing. You could tell he never made eye contact, his speech impediment stayed consistent through out the time when he was still challenged. Charlie Gordon's transformation was so subtle, but captivated the whole audience. When Charlie started to regress you could almost see the characters mind working as he was trying to fight the inner demon inside himself, it was almost haunting. Buckley's attention to detail was phenomenal.

Flowers for Algernon was a truly captivating show. The tech crew was silent, quick and nearly invisible. With a small ensemble, this show did a fine job including different characters. A huge kudos to Alex Mann, Professor Nemur, who also composed all the music in the show. Mann captured the simplicity of Charlie's mind. The sets, designed by Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt was great, the maze in the back was actually a dead end, which symbolized that the whole experiment was a dead end.

Westfield's rendition of Flowers for Algernon took each audience back in time. Mitchell's exit in the last scene was inspirational, and left many with so many comments on how people were so insensitive back then. The quote used in the first paragraph was some of Charlie's last words that everyone should live by today.

by Alie Campbell of Loudoun Valley High School

Something about Westfield high School's Flowers for Algernon was resonant in a way that few school productions are. Everyone from the actors, who called upon surprising maturity and classic acting styles to the costume designer, who drew inspiration from actual '60s icons, collaborated to bring the audience into this classic piece of literature in a way that was thoroughly unprecedented at a high school production.

The play revolves around Charlie Gordon, a mentally disabled man who undergoes an experimental brain surgery which causes his simple life to become increasingly volatile, as he begins to remember incidents from his past that make him question his whole life. His story is mirrored by a lab mouse named Algernon. Mitchell Buckley, who performed as Charlie Gordon tackled a difficult role with tremendous commitment, heartwarming depth and nuances that could only have come from extensive character preparation. For example, Buckley's character develops in an arc, skyrocketing from an IQ of 68 to one of 185 and plummeting back down again. To aid the audience in following his IQ fluctuations, he subtly loses and regains specific mannerisms from the beginning of the play, such as clutching at his clothing and stuttered speech. He

used every opportunity within the script to show contrast between warm, childlike pre-op Charlie and harsh, intellectual post-op Charlie in a way that made audiences really care about the character.

Although Teen-age Charlie, portrayed by Stephen Cox, had no spoken lines, his raw emotional reactions made him a joy to watch, and easy to feel compassion for. His downtrodden, needy demeanor provided excellent contrast when newly brilliant Charlie was forced to confront his traumatizing past in a scene rife with symbolism.

Although the script is powerful enough to stand on its own, a whole new dimension was added in the form of original piano accompaniment. Written by Alex Mann, who also played Dr. Nemur, the simple, surreal melodies not only seamlessly transitioned scenes and covered set changes. They often underscored the childlike emotional state of Charlie. The fact that the music never evolved into something more complex even as Charlie seemed to was representative of the fact that his sudden maturity, which seemed too good to be true, was never truly complete or permanent. He was granted a temporary lens through which to view the world, but his desperate wish to become "normal" was in vain.

During the performance, the costumes simply seemed to serve the purpose of fitting the time period and not distracting from the action, which they did with ease. But, upon looking at the detailed costume descriptions and thinking about their contributions to the show, it became clear that they were one more wonderfully symbolic way to view the arc of the story. For example, during Charlie's progression, Alice Kinnian was dressed in a flower pattern. Since flowers symbolized love, this foreshadowed that love would soon be introduced between these two characters.

Overall, Westfield High school's Flowers for Algernon was a surprisingly powerful performance, brought from simply well done to truly heartbreaking by a diverse array of spectacular contributions.

by Emily Ratliff of Loudoun Valley High School

Westfield's Flowers For Algernon

Imagine a cold laboratory filled with success hungry doctors and scientists. And in the center of this uncompassionate environment gleams a delightfully lovable man named Charlie Gordon, who more than anything just wants to be smart.

The play of "Flowers For Algernon" written by David Rogers, tells a moving story of Charlie Gordon. A mentally disabled man who is chosen for an experimental procedure to severely increase his intelligence in a rapid amount of time. Throughout the story you follow Charlie as he progresses in intelligence, struggle with new found emotions and battle with his memories of childhood and those who molded it as he tries to determine if happiness really comes from knowledge. The difficult material in this show was tackled by the Westfield cast and produced a truly brilliant show.

The Westfield production was lead by cast of exceptional talent that lit the stage with pure emotion. The controversial theme of science versus compassion was rivetingly played by Professor Nemur (actor Alex Mann) and therapist Dr. Strauss (actor Brandon Sanchez). While these actors used the plot tension to further there characters, some other groups of featured and supporting characters lacked consistent character choice and comedic timing to have the same scene strengthening effect.

Astonishingly portraying his unique and challenging character was Mitchell Buckley as Charlie Gordon. Buckley was able to play both sides of Charlie, the sweet less advanced one prior to the operation, and the more conceited intelligent

Charlie following the procedure with subtle and smooth progression this character came to life. During this solid performance you follow Charlie on a roller coaster of emotions as he starts to progress. In the early stages of his excelling Buckley traps your attention making you feel like you are a part of his journey. As Charlie feels pride and joyous excitement with his early accomplishments, the audience's hearts soared along with his.

Along with a strong lead this cast had several powerful supporting and featured actors. Opposing his colleagues is one sympathetic graduate student named Bert portrayed by Julian Sanchez. Sanchez shows compassion and patience towards Charlie in a remarkable fashion. Unexpectedly he pulls on the strings on your heart and leaves a lasting impression. Along with this exceptional character is Charlie's unstable mother portrayed by Sarah Schweit. The erratic and bizarre behavior portrayed by the mother is so authentic and genuine that the audience is left stunned after every scene.

In addition to a great cast Westfield had a wonderful set and crew. The set was perfectly dated and paid impeccable attention to detail, along with smooth and rapid scene changes the set stood out. One important effect to the show was the lighting. Although there were a few mishaps were it seemed the lighting cutoff the scene, overall the lighting impacted Charlie journey and represented his memories and progression. The creativity that really tied the scene transitions all together was the student written score by Alex Mann. It represented the character and shows emotions beautifully.

Passion and emotion filtered the stage from beginning to end as the captivated audience was taken on a phenomenal journey by one man and thirty-three actors.

by Gabriella Huelsman of Loudoun Valley High School

We are extremely fortunate to live in a very tolerant time. Of course, there will always be prejudice, but for the most part the environment of twenty-first century America is lenient, open to those who are different, and understanding. The same cannot be said for the sixties, where those who weren't considered "normal" were outcasts. Social tensions and the struggles of outcasts were effectively conveyed in Westfield High School's Flowers for Algernon.

The classic American story chronicled one man's rapid IQ raise after being operated on as part of an experiment to become smarter, having previously been considered "retarded", and with no hope for a future. The play showed the conflict between the man and society, as before the experiment he was considered a nobody, and only once he is smart is he deemed worth considering.

Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley) is a happy, mentally deficient young man, who does not remember the horrors of his past, and doesn't understand the cruelty in some people. Buckley had an amazing performance, showing the rage and confusion of post-operation Charlie, effectively showing the audience what the tormented young man felt. Buckley performed a mentally deficient man accurately, but not insensitively.

The show consisted of short, but dramatic scenes. Charlie's progress reports included the date every time. The dates helped move the show along and provide a timeline, which showcased the fact that his genius happened extremely fast. As the play progressed, the number of flashbacks increased, displaying Charlie's brush with insanity.

The sets for the play were incredible, simple but clean and professional. They also featured a variety of props from the time period, including an old typewriter and a television. Nemur's office, in particular, had fantastic detail on the brick walls, and classy furniture.

The hair and makeup was the perfect accompaniment to the play, as costume designer Zoe Hawryluk designed multiple outfits that reflected each character, all of which were a "blast to the past". Authentic sixties clothes were used, fresh from the thrift shop. The outfits also contained symbols, shown in Charlie's switch to more suits and ties from the previous sweaters and baseball caps as he became smarter.

The problems of America in the sixties may be out of the comfort zone for the actors, but they all captured the parts perfectly. Alex Mann especially captured the mannerisms of middle-aged Professor Nemur, and getting into the screaming match with Dr. Strauss. Each actor seemed to embody their character and understand what went through their mind. Mitchell Buckley (Charlie) and Sarah Schweit (Charlie's mother) were especially good at conveying emotion through facial expressions.

Westfield High School's Flowers for Algernon was an emotional experience that opened your eyes to the struggles of people often overlooked and underappreciated.

by Marysia Serafin of Loudoun Valley High School

Retarded. This "slang" word that today reflects negatively on the mentally handicap once was simply a clinical term used to describe a person with a low IQ level. The true meaning and insight behind this phrase powerfully came to light in the 1965 stage based rendition of Flowers for Algernon presented by Westfield High School.

This play depicts the life of a mentally challenged man, Charlie Gordon, and the changes he goes through after receiving a groundbreaking operation intended to boost his intellect. Throughout the course of this show, the emotions and intelligence of all the characters are affected by the changes in Charlie, both for the better as well as for the worse.

Some very gifted members of the cast and crew were able to bring a show with deep adult subject matter to life on a high school stage. The usage of lighting heightened the mood of the play while the beautifully written score was delivered with the upmost intensity by the cast as a whole.

The Westfield production of this immensely challenging work of the stage was glued together by the jaw-dropping performance of Mitchell Buckley (Charlie Gordon). While the supporting cast executed the show with characterized maturity and 1960s style, Buckley's internal transformation of the character left the audience with gaping mouths and tear stained cheeks.

Burt Seldon, played by Julian Sanchez, was a thoroughly brilliant character played by an actor who put armfuls of heartfelt emotion into every word spoken and every movement made. Alex Mann (Professor Nemur) too made a very believable and emotive character that built throughout the course of the show. Certain characters let their energy levels drop, and at times, character choices were unclear. There were momentary issues concerning the lighting, specifically the cut outs and entrances. However, the overall feel of the production remained professional and emotionally stimulating. The set changes and scene shifts, in particular, all went off without a single noticeable hitch.

Technical aspects concerning this show were right on point. The lighting (Robert Palack) was beautifully done as it depicted the inner changes within Charlie's very mind; the more intelligent he became, the darker and starker his world became. White lights used in the lab scenes provided a very sterile and almost terrifying feeling. The costumes for this show were true to the 1960s period, and the attention to detail made by Zoe Hawryluk created an entirely believable production. Specifically, the costuming for the character Alice and the symbolism behind each flowered piece she wore greatly added to the depth of the show in an illustrative manner. Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt designed a very efficient and visually pleasing set. The different settings all had very realistic features as well as feelings, due to the neutral color choices and various props. The maze containing the two dead ends showed the symbolism of the failed experiment, and it is this attention to the little things that made for an acknowledgeable show.

Westfield High's performance of *Flowers for Algernon* was an extremely difficult production to put on in general, especially for a high school. Despite this however, the cast and crew managed to pull it off with the grace and understanding of a cast years beyond them.

by Sarah Midolo of Loudoun Valley High School

A spotlight softly illuminates a lonely bent head. A man wilts over grave of Algernon, flowers trembling in his hand as he places them on the ground. He stands, solemn for a moment, before breaking out in a trademark silly smile. He turns to the bright white light behind him, red hat solidly on his head, beginning another step through the maze of life, alone. Westfield High School's touching production of *Flowers for Algernon* boldly portrayed a heart-wrenching journey through the dramatic rise and fall of Charlie Gordon.

Flowers for Algernon originated as a science-fiction short story by Daniel Keyes in 1958, and was later adapted into a novel by the same author in 1966. The play presented by Westfield was written in 1969 by David Rogers. Charlie Gordon, a man with an IQ of only 68, is selected as the first human subject to undergo an experimental surgical technique to increase his intelligence because of his kind nature and eagerness to learn. However, as his intellectual prowess increases, Charlie's innocence slowly becomes lost as he begins to remember his past and understand his present. What goes up must come down, and Charlie Gordon's fall will be harder and faster than most.

Mitchell Buckley bravely took on the formidable challenge of playing Charlie Gordon with magnetic energy and affecting emotion. His slow progress of mental growth was remarkably illustrated through subtle mannerisms and speaking patterns. Buckley also worked well with the other actors in the show, crafting distinct and varied relationships with his

doctors, his family, and his love interest, Alice. He and Alice (Madeleine Bloxam) had profound chemistry, their sincere connection adding validity to their sweet relationship.

The supporting cast was also remarkable, particularly in the case of Charlie's doctors and his family. Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez) displayed strikingly poignant reactions both to Charlie's growth and regression. His relationship with the other doctors, Dr. Strauss (Brandon Sanchez) and Professor Nemur (Alex Mann), was well-defined and honestly portrayed. Charlie's mother (Sarah Schweit) and grown-up sister, Norma (Maggie Mitchell) possessed great presence and strong understanding of their characters. Both skillfully showcased tense emotional climaxes, especially Mitchell in the scene where Charlie comes back to visit. The family dynamic was brilliantly defined.

The tech was strongly designed and implemented overall. Despite some infrequent technical slips, lighting added staggering emotion to scenes through the use of color and shadows. The set also featured amazing attention to detail, down to the last electrical plug in the wall. Costumes were painstakingly crafted as well, with every accessory and piece of jewelry perfectly appropriate for the time period of the show as well as for the character themselves. Scene transitions were also very smooth, the stage crew silently and swiftly opening and closing the back wall for flashbacks and other effects.

While intelligence is admittedly an important and essential trait, perhaps it is not the head but the heart of a person that truly matters. The tragic story of Charlie Gordon teaches that everyone, regardless of their disabilities, is a person and deserves to be treated as such. Westfield High School's passionate performance of *Flowers for Algernon* truly showed that even the simplest of men can make a huge difference in so many lives.

by Emma Paquette of McLean High School

Imagine that a pill was designed to increase your intelligence. The medicine is untested and the possible defects to yourself are unknown and could be fatal. But the possible benefits are outstanding and would be a gigantic success to the medical world. You would be famous, or you could be dead. The pros and cons extend to infinity and create a labyrinth of ethical dead ends and moral crossroads seeming unnavigable. But in the end, the choice is simple: yes or no. This exact maze was brilliantly traversed by the cast of Westfield's production of "*Flowers for Algernon*".

Mitchell Buckley captured the intense internal struggle within Charlie during his arc from simple-mindedness to genius and back. His incredible physicality told the story of his progression as his stature heightened and hands became unattached to his sweater and his degeneration as the confident adult regressed to the child-like man once again. The difficulty of his gradual growth and his fitful downfall exemplified his immense acting skills. Buckley's chemistry with Alice (Madeline Bloxam) aided them both in creating a touching and realistic relationship.

The trio of doctors, Dr. Strauss (Brandon Sanchez), Professor Nemur (Alex Mann), and Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez) personified the many different viewpoints in this show. Brandon Sanchez calmed the audience with his soothing voice during the multiple therapy sessions. Mann ambitiously portrayed his fears of becoming less intelligent than his man-made genius and ironically showed his childlike nature. Julian Sanchez also lulled the audience as the calming presence of a doctor, but exhibited incredible emotional depth after the death of Algernon.

The technical elements of "*Flowers for Algernon*" helped take the story and bring it to life. The simple white walls transformed to a staunch laboratory to a seemingly friendly bakery, and even folded inward to reveal an elaborate maze backdrop lit with blood-curdling red that was utilized during Charlie's recollections of early childhood memories. The lighting was clean, bright and created beautiful stage pictures for the audience to absorb. The costumes were perfectly sixties like on the classic television shows and pleased the eye with their complimentary color scheme that brought out the blues and greens of the set. The lovely piano melodies aided the army of black clad figures during the swift and smooth

scene changes. The original music was simple and charming, but had undertones of eeriness that fit the themes of the show perfectly.

As the walls rose up on Charlie, the audience found themselves trapped within an unnavigable network of passages. The cast of “Flowers for Algernon” captured the tragic story of Charlie Gordon and left the audience with the bitter taste of loss and made the wonder about their own choices in similar situations.

by Rachel Lawhead of McLean High School

Westfield High School’s production of Flowers for Algernon was an unsettling trip through the world of mental disability, social stigmas, and the universal human phenomenon of loneliness. With a self-conscious sensitivity, the cast brought to life a very different scientific and cultural image of the 1960s than the one we are so commonly presented.

Flowers for Algernon is the wrenching story of Charlie Gordon, a man dealing with acute mental disability. His teacher, Alice Kinnian, recommends Charlie for a groundbreaking neurological procedure. The procedure is initially a success, with Charlie’s intelligence skyrocketing. However, as Charlie questions the permanence of the procedure’s effects, he begins to notice a decline in the mental health of the procedure’s first successful test subject – a laboratory mouse by the name of Algernon, with whom Charlie cannot help but identify. As Charlie’s awareness of his role in the whole project increases, he begins to notice flaws in the researchers’ hypothesis, showing how the best laid plans of mice and men can go devastatingly awry.

Demonstrating an almost-superhuman acting range, Mitchell Buckley was striking as Charlie Gordon. His acute, yet sensitive, portrayal of the mentally impaired Charlie was riveting, and his depiction of Charlie’s mental progression carried a flavor of authenticity hard to attain. Julian Sanchez had a gut-wrenching performance as Burt Seldon, and his heartfelt questioning of the laboratory’s treatment of Charlie resonated deeply with the audience. Madeleine Bloxam’s representation of Alice Kinnion enriched the play as a whole, as her warmth and perspective of Charlie provided new windows for the audience into Charlie’s troubled life.

The cast as a whole displayed deep well thought out characters, each with distinctive mannerisms that added depth and dimension to the whole tale. Many actors displayed excellent chemistry, and the complexity of their interactions rose well above a high school level.

The set was elegant, and effective. The simplicity of the main body of the set provided for quick, seamless set changes that helped the production as a whole remain cohesive, despite the numerous scene changes. The massive maze that dominated the upstage portion of the stage was very impactful, an effect magnified by the lighting used. Demonstrating an impressive attention to detail with the props and furnishings, the actors were given excellent context. The musical score was sublime, guiding the audience’s focus, and providing excellent emotional insight into the scenes.

As the play drew to its dark conclusion, the audience was forced to confront the all-too-common stigmatism that often comes with mental illness. Westfield put forth a thought-provoking performance, with both conscience and maturity well beyond their years.

by Amanda Courtney of Oakcrest School

The year is 1965. The soft harmonies of the beach boys float through the air as a man and a mouse struggle to understand the labyrinth of their own minds. However, as the poet Robert Burns once wrote, "The best-laid schemes of mice and men/ often go awry." This sentiment rang more than true as Westfield High School explored the affects and ethics of tampering with the mind in their thought provoking production of "Flowers for Algernon."

This heart wrenching play, Adapted from Daniel Keyes' novel for the stage by David Rogers, tells the story of Charlie Gordon, a mentally challenged man, who wants to be able to consider himself "smart." However, after an experimental operation causes his IQ to skyrocket, he realizes that throughout his life he has been treated as if he were less of a person, just because he brain was different. So, as he struggles to make peace with his past, he must also use his new found knowledge to understand what the future holds, by observing a mouse named Algernon, who underwent the same surgery. Although, when Algernon's progress takes an emotional turn for the worse, Charlie realizes that the affects of his surgery may not be permanent.

Mitchell Buckley expertly led us on the emotionally riveting journey to understand Charlie Gordon. He masterfully embodied the characters mental transition, by fading seamlessly from the stuttering, drawing, mentally challenged Charlie, who's innocent grin often flashed across his face, to the angered, but intelligent Charlie, who always felt alone and trapped in the maze of the world, and back again. All the while, capturing Charlie's emotional journey, as he learns who his real friends are, reflects on his difficult childhood, and even falls in love.

The exceptional talent could be seen throughout the entire cast. Madeleine Bloxam, who played Alice Kinnian, seamlessly evolved from Charlie's teacher to his love interest, with superb poise and grace. Another standout was Julian Sanchez, who played Burt Seldon, the emotionally concerned doctor, who truly seemed to care about both Algernon and Charlie. He had the audience in tears when he slowly sauntered on stage with his head in his hands, to announce Algernon's death.

The stage crew for this show was flawless. Every set piece was quietly moved into the exact location it was needed with speed and precision, while beautiful and poignant original music written by Alex Mann and Joe Drzemieki was played. The many sets in this show were unbelievably detailed and ranged from a fully stocked bakery, an office complete with everything a psychologist could need, and a giant maze. There were a few problems with lights suddenly going on, or off, but all issues were quickly handled, and the actors never dropped character.

A classic and emotional show such as Flowers for Algernon can be a real challenge to produce. However, the cast and crew of Westfield High School put on a breathtaking performance that was both emotionally and intellectually stimulating.

by Bonnie Newton of Oakcrest School

Westfield High School skillfully performed "Flowers for Algernon," a philosophically deep, tear-jerking story of a young man's struggles as he undergoes drastic mental change.

Charlie Gordon is a 32-year-old man with an IQ of just 68, but he has a love of learning and an eagerness to please. Algernon is a little, white, laboratory mouse. Algernon had brain surgery that tripled his intelligence, and Charlie decides to be the first human to have the same procedure. Charlie's identity and fate become deeply linked with that of Algernon; both skyrocket in their brain capacity. However, Charlie's painful childhood memories, his awakening to humanity's faults, and his uncertain future plague his now genius mind. Then, as Algernon starts acting strangely, Charlie worries that his

intelligence might not be permanent like the doctors said. "Flowers for Algernon," written by Daniel Keyes, was originally a short story, published as a novel in 1966, and adapted for the stage by David Rogers. It provokes serious thought about the treatment of the mentally disabled.

Mitchell Buckley brilliantly, and also "not-so-brilliantly" in this case, developed the character of Charlie Gordon. Every scene, new character choices were needed to show Charlie's light-speed growth into an intellectual wonder, and Buckley delivered all of them. From his innocent grin, childlike chuckle, and lovable stutter while mentally disabled, to his proud stance, dissatisfied scowl, and bitter sarcasm while a genius, and every stage in between, the vocal and physical characteristics of Charlie were extraordinarily well executed.

The entire cast projected and spoke with clear diction throughout the whole performance. Each character created a unique personality and embraced it. For example, Mrs. Donner (Olivia Witt) played Charlie's magnanimous employer at the bakery, encouraging him in a motherly New York accent and defending him with a no-nonsense attitude. Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam) effectively showed her conflicting emotions about Charlie, who went so suddenly from being her pupil to being in love with her. Miss Kinnian's love towards Charlie was evident through her compassionate tone, however as Charlie became too smart to talk with, she convincingly portrayed how her hurt her ego was.

Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez) nailed his character as the kind, young assistant in the hospital office, particularly in his scene comforting the distraught and furious Charlie Gordon, where he himself broke down crying. Professor Nemur (Alex Mann) believably acted the part of the middle-aged, arrogant, glory-seeking brain specialist. Also, Charlie's sister Norma (Maggie Mitchell) had great emotions during her reunion with her brother, particularly when describing how hard it was caring for their unstable mother. Occasionally, some actors sounded as though they were reciting lines and some points of climax could have had more build-up to them.

The music for the show was composed by Alex Mann and Joe Drzemiecki, and played on the piano by Drzemiecki as well. The score accurately captured the mood of the scene, and for the most part it did not overpower the actors. The lighting succeeded in moving the plot quickly as it highlighted one of the three different sections of the stage for each scene. With the exception of a few technical errors, it also added to the atmosphere. Stage changes were swift and noiseless. The costumes, designed by Zoe Hawryluk, were period appropriate (late 1960s), aesthetically pleasing, and thoughtfully detailed to bring out each character's persona.

Westfield's "Flowers for Algernon" truly brought the tale of Charlie Gordon to life, drawing on heavy emotion through sophisticated acting and technical workmanship.

by Laura Cermak of Oakcrest School

Everyone thinks that smarter is better, but this may not always be the case. Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon eloquently displayed this theme through incredible performers and an amazing attention to detail, bringing this moving story to life.

Based on the short story and subsequent novel by Daniel Keyes, Flowers for Algernon was adapted into a play by David Rogers in 1969. The play focuses around a man by the name of Charlie Gordon who is clinically retarded. Scientists, who have tested producing artificial intelligence in a mouse named Algernon, give Charlie the same operation. Charlie's intelligence skyrockets shortly after the operation to the point that he is a genius. However, these effects are not permanent. The play follows Charlie's journey to the height of intelligence and back down to the bottom, as well as the people he affects along the way.

Charlie Gordon, played by Mitchell Buckley, was obviously the heart and soul of the show. Buckley displayed incredible acting prowess in his ability to slowly change his physical and vocal mannerisms as he moved between levels of intelligence. Buckley accurately portrayed the character of mentally disabled person and later displayed the inner turmoil of the character as he realizes he will lose his intelligence. He successfully produced a powerful emotional response from the entire audience and really brought the show to life.

The many technical elements of the show helped complete the performance. The music was student composed by Alex Mann, providing a good flow between scenes and often setting the proper mood. The sound was stellar. Many pre-recorded portions of the script had to be played to simulate tapes or words from a memory. This was done seamlessly and added a lot to the scenes. The lighting also contributed to the quality and mood of the scenes. Red lights were used during the flashback scenes, each time revealing a little more as Charlie remembered different elements of his past. Bright white lights created the sterilized feel of a clinical institution and good spotlight work separated Charlie during his important monologue moments.

The set was beautifully designed with an exact attention to detail. Props contributed to making places like the doctor's office with its cluttered desk, the clinic with its whitewashed walls, and Charlie's apartment complete with a window really come to life a be a realistic portrayal of the setting.

Despite an occasional lack of reactions and energy, the cast of Westfield High School's Flowers for Algernon produced a wonderfully moving, powerful show that brought the audience to tears.

by Madeleine Lucas of Oakcrest School

How far can science go in its invention and reformation of creation? In Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon, this question is repeatedly asked, provoking the audience to deeper thought.

The captivating show began with Charlie Gordon, a mentally disabled young man, who is the first human subject of a new operation designed by Professor Nemur and Doctor Strauss that has in the past significantly increased the intelligence of mice, most importantly Algernon. Frankenstein-like, Charlie changes and quickly becomes "normal" as his parents had always wished him to be. However, as his intelligence and that of Algernon, with whom Charlie closely relates, peak, the thought arises that their transformation may not be as permanent as the doctors first believed. With that knowledge, Charlie races against time to discover what Doctor Strauss and professor Nemur could not tell him: will he lose everything that he has worked for?

Playing the role of Charlie Gordon, Mitchell Buckley was mesmerizing. He stole the audience's heart as the naive and sweet natured Charlie before his operation, with an incredibly realistic portrayal of a young man with mental disabilities struggling to learn. The detail that he gave to his role was admirable; he slowly changed his character's expressions, body language, and mannerisms with Charlie's climb to intelligence and then reverted back to those traits with Charlie's descent in the second act. Buckley's portrayal of a man tortured by the thought of all that he is losing and his inability to stop his deterioration was heart wrenching, and by the conclusion of the show, there were audible sniffles throughout the theater.

Also excellent were Brandon Sanchez and Alex Mann as Dr. Strauss and Professor Nemur respectively. Onstage they

had an incredible awareness for the reactions of the other and responded well, making them very believable as colleagues somewhat at odds. Madeleine Bloxam portrayed Alice Kinnian, doing a magnificent job of expressing her concerns about Charlie's welfare, though initially lacking some needed depth. The part of Burt Seldon, the kind lab assistant, was acted by Julian Sanchez, who had incredible timing on his lines, making them seem life like rather than overly rehearsed. Other commendable performances included Bayleigh Aschenbrenner as the bossy, yet lovable Mrs. Donner, Sarah Schweit as Charlie's overwrought mother, TJ Vinsavich as his father, and Stephen Cox as the highly emotive Teen-age Charlie.

The set, designed by Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt was superb, bringing Charlie's world to life. The attention to detail overall was impressive and the props were all very appropriate for the time and setting. Bright and put together with obvious care, the splendid costumes designed by Zoe Hawryluk were a tremendous asset to the show. Their reflection of certain characters' progression throughout the show was genius.

In conclusion, the talent and attention to detail of the theatre department at Westfield High School revealed their dedication and hard work, and was impressive. From the first scene to the curtain call, their production of Flowers for Algernon was entrancing and poignant.

by Mary Cate Diederich of Oakcrest School

It's a story of humanity, of happiness, of heartbreak. The tale of a mouse and a man "improved" through callous scientific exploitation. Charlie, the "retarded" man with a glowing smile. Algernon, the world's smartest mouse. Their identities fuse together in a paralleled rise to manic genius. Together they must face the mazes of life, and deal with the fallout that comes with the harshness of understanding.

Based on the 1966 novel by Daniel Keyes, and later adapted into film and stage productions, Flowers for Algernon chronicles the story of a mentally handicapped man, Charlie Gordon, who undergoes a breakthrough operation that transforms him into a genius. As Charlie escalates into his intelligence, audiences watch as his faith in the world and happy disposition falls away. Even more heart wrenching is watching his spiraled regression, as it turns out his "success" will only be temporary. Westfield High School displayed astounding maturity and grace in their approach to such a difficult topic, but managed to find the lightness in a show so full of the dark.

Mitchell Buckley was stunning in his role as Charlie. Essentially playing two different characters, Buckley nailed the idiosyncrasies of his disabled version, the subtleties and harshness of genius Charlie, and always managed to portray the internal struggle his character was facing. Buckley dealt with searing flashbacks that punctuated his reality with impressive reactivity. His attention to detail and physicality created a dimensional character who won the audience over with his joyful smile.

Dr. Strauss (Brandon Sanchez) and Professor Nemur (Alex Mann) were the scientific masterminds behind Charlie and Algernon's transformation. The two played their parts with a severe believability. Their interactions with "retarded" Charlie, and distinctive insensitivity were very human, even hard to watch at times. Sanchez and Mann did a wonderful job playing off of each other, never completely alienating themselves from the audience, but making their thirst for success sharply clear.

Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam) was Charlie's teacher turned love interest. Although their interactions were awkward at times, the sheer complexity of their relationship was more at fault than the actor's. Bloxam was notable, and portrayed very realistic emotions. Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez) was another outstanding role as the lab technician. Unlike Strauss and Nemur, Burt radiated an innate kindness that contrasted the sterile hospital atmosphere.

Westfield's technical side was nearly flawless. The sets were polished and effective, with extensive attention to detail, such as outlets in the walls and a fully stocked bakery display. Charlie's transformation was visually arresting, with evolving costumes to parallel his intellectual state. The show was fraught with choppy scenes and brief soliloquies, but the tech crew and lighting choices made transitions smooth and did not distract audiences visually or emotionally.

Westfield High School took a risk with *Flowers for Algernon*. They did not hide behind flashy costumes or over the top effects. They took a grounded approach to an emotionally complex show, and they demonstrated maturity beyond the high school level. "The path you choose through the maze makes you who you are" and Westfield chose the exact right path.

by Emilia Brennan of Oakton High School

An incredibly heartfelt and powerful message was delivered at Westfield High School's rendition of *Flowers for Algernon*. Rendition is certainly the right word, for the audience was rendered speechless, but certainly not tearless, by this deeply thought-provoking, and tragic story.

Flowers for Algernon is a play written by David Rogers in 1969, based off of the 1966 novel by Daniel Keyes. A mentally disabled man, Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley), agrees to undergo a surgery, never before performed on a human, so he will be "smart", something he wants more than anything else in the world. The surgery worked on a mouse named Algernon, and it works on Charlie, who quickly becomes the most intelligent man in the world. But this miracle of science doesn't last long. Algernon is suddenly unable to run the maze, and all that Charlie has gained through his intelligence-knowledge; opinions; memories; love- is about to be taken from him. This play shows the path of a man's internal conflicts as he discovers a world that can offer him a future; and love; but in so doing sees the cruel side of this world that treats human beings like tools of society.

Mitchell Buckley lit up the stage in his role as Charlie Gordon. His adorable grin showed the lovable side of the character, but in contrast were the exceptionally powerful, thought-provoking lines, which he delivered in a way that demanded silence of the entire auditorium. Buckley conveyed Charlie's internal struggles in his physical reactions and tone of voice; showing the character's violent emotional fluctuations as he retrogressed from the light gained through his surgery, back to the darkness he knew before.

Julian Sanchez gave life to the character of Burt Seldon, a doctor who analyses and performs surgery on Charlie. Sanchez showed that Dr. Seldon was much more than a scientist; he affectively conveyed the character's sensitivity and humanity, and he showed the contrast between himself and the other scientists when he stood up for Charlie as a human being, and not an experiment.

Stephen Cox played the haunting Teen-age Charlie, seen in intense flashbacks in which red lighting added to the emotionally jarring scenes. This "other Charlie" showed the violent conflict playing out in Charlie Gordon, and Cox was a morbid mirror-image of this conflict, which he conveyed with dramatic gestures and postures, and pitiful facial expressions.

The powerful meanings of this play were strongly felt reverberating through the hearts of the audience, and this mood was contributed to throughout every scene by the music of the piano. The music, composed by Alex Mann and Joe Drzemiecki, helped the flow of the quick, quiet set changes, and helped to put us in the time period already put forward by

the extremely detailed sets. Dramatic background music in some of the most intense scenes made the audience feel the emotion all the more, and augmented the effect of this awe-inspiring, tragic story of Charlie Gordon and Algernon.

by Allison Fantz of Robert E. Lee High School

Here tonight at Westfield High School the breath of many were taken away when we all experienced the amazing performance of the play Flowers for Algernon.

It all started with the phenomenal laboratory mouse Algernon, who served a wonderful role as the original test subject on the new operation to become smarter. Charlie Gordon played by Mitchell Buckley who played the role of a mentally challenged man was the next step, a human subject to attempt the procedure on.

Charlie Gordon was quite ambrosial and I absolutely just fell in love with his character right from the start. I applaud Mitchell Buckley for being able to perform his character so well. The authenticity developing from him throughout this play was amazing. And being able to see him really grow and improve overtime was outstanding.

The scenery in this play was just wonderful. The entire atmosphere contained 3 rooms, yet was still able to match everything perfectly to each scene being performed. Each prop was placed perfectly to match what was going on around it. I was especially intrigued by the background of one of the scenes containing a maze. I love how it tied in with the theme of the play.

At the end of each scene, beautiful music came flooding through my ears through the angelic music coming from the piano. Although it was loud at times, it was all very calming and would prepare you for the next scene to come. That indication was very helpful and enjoyable all at the same time.

The time period of this play was back in the 1960's and everything that came on and off that stage fit perfectly. The vintage clothes and jewelry were amazing, the use of a type-writer and a tape recorder were marvelous, even the vocabulary fit the time period!

My favorite part overall was the few powerful scenes performed of Charlie telling a story from his childhood and being able to have it reenacted right next to him all at the same time. It left me in awe.

This performance was remarkable, I am so glad to have been able to view it!

by Erica Greer of Robert E. Lee High School

Flowers for Algernon performed by Westfield High School was amazing. Scientists in the 60's were trying to figure out how to reach the level of genius through the brain. First testing on a rat named Algernon, they test a mentally challenged man named Charlie Gordon. His journey through the world takes him to sudden realizations and accomplishments that people have never seen before, reaching new heights and passing the level of genius itself. Not waiting for the

experiment's results, scientists Bert Seldon, professor Nemur, and Dr. Strauss push the limits and end up in a dead end of the maze.

Charlie Gordon, played by lead actor Mitchell Buckley, did an amazing job of keeping the audiences' attention and keeping the pace of Charlie Gordon progressing and regressing very well.

Lead actress Madeline Bloxam played the role of Alice Kinnian the teacher and lover of Charlie Gordon. She did a wonderful job of finding the right relation between Charlie Gordon and herself and also being very clear in her dialect.

Alex Mann, played the role of Alex Mann, played a believable character that never broke character. He reacted to everyone and everything so believably.

The make-up was so well done and, surprisingly, the whole cast acted their ages. They all acted so mature and that was needed for this play. The sound was outstanding! There was not a single time that there was a mess-up in the sound. The audience could hear everyone clearly and there was not a word that was missed. The set was great and it worked with the time period and could work with a lot of the different sets. They could put the wonderful props on that one set and it could take the audience to a different location.

Westfield High School did a wonderful job on the stage performing Flowers for Algernon.

by Tiffany Greer of Robert E. Lee High School

Everyone wants to be intelligent, but what if super human intelligence was only an operation away? This was the case in Westfield High School's gripping production of "Flowers for Algernon".

"Flowers for Algernon", originally a novel by Daniel Keyes, was first published in 1966. This version of the play was adapted by David Rogers in 1969. A science fiction classic set in the 1960s, "Flowers for Algernon" tells the story of a new operation that can increase intelligence at an astronomical rate. In the beginning, the operation had only been tested on a mouse named Algernon. However, an eager group of scientists was ready for their first human subject. Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley), a mentally handicapped 32 year old is volunteered by his night school teacher Alice Kinnian (Madeline Bloxam) to receive the operation. Within a span of weeks, Charlie's intelligence shoots through the roof. However, his newfound intelligence doesn't come without a price. The once happy-go-lucky Charlie becomes plagued with memories from his early life and begins to lose touch with reality. The once successful operation begins to wear off and the play culminates to an emotional ending with Charlie having regressed to the way he was before the operation.

The lead character Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley) was an instant audience favorite. Charlie is a very dynamic character; going from a mentally handicapped bakery delivery boy, to a genius who defies all odds, and back again. Buckley handled his difficult part with poise and maturity. His talent stood out in scenes such as the reuniting between Charlie and his mother and sister. His delicate portrayal of both a mentally handicapped adult and a quickly progressing genius left the audience intrigued and wanting more. There was not a dry eye in the house with his final scene when the regressed and mentally handicapped Charlie laid flowers on the grave of Algernon the mouse. Overall, Buckley gave an impressive and heart wrenching performance to a difficult role.

A minor but standout character was Charlie's Mother (Sarah Schweit). At first only appearing as a faceless figure in Charlie's vague retellings of his childhood, Schweit played a frustrated and abusive mother who didn't know what to do with her handicapped son. However, Schweit shined later on when she was reunited with Charlie. At this point she is an aging woman losing touch with reality. She was unpredictable and dangerous, going from humming a nursery rhyme to drawing a knife on Charlie. Schweit made excellent acting choices which allowed her to give a gripping performance that left the audience reeling.

The real star of this show, however, were the technical aspects. Every costume, set piece, and prop was time period. The costumes, especially those worn by Alice Kinnian and Professor Nemur (Alex Mann) were exceptionally thought out and well achieved. The set was simple and clean yet very functional. The most useful set piece was the mid stage wall that split in two. It added an other-worldly dimension to Charlie's flashback scenes. Lastly, the props brought the 1965 setting full circle. From important props such as Charlie's typewriter and tape recorder to minor props such as the fan in Charlie's apartment, nothing was overlooked.

Westfield High School achieved a successful rendition of "Flowers for Algernon" which left the audience gripping their seats and drying their eyes. Although the energy waned at times throughout this lengthy production, the cast was strong and no detail was overlooked. Every member of the audience left with a newfound respect for all those with a mental handicap.

by Alyssa Howell of Stone Bridge High School

Which is better: to be ignorant and blissfully happy, or at a genius-level IQ and miserable? Last week, Westfield High School's heartwrenching "Flowers for Algernon" suggested that intelligence isn't worth the dissatisfaction with the world.

Originating as a science-fiction short story by Daniel Keyes, "Flowers for Algernon" was adapted as a play in 1969 by David Rogers. "Flowers for Algernon" follows Charlie Gordon, a mentally handicapped man, as he undergoes a surgery to increase his intelligence. As his intellect escalates to genius level, he becomes smitten with his former teacher, Alice Kinnian. He soon discovers that his intelligence will not be permanent, and his regression experiments with the relationship between emotion and intelligence. The play follows the novel's epistolary style of presenting Charlie's personal progress reports, which serve to develop the character over the course of the show.

Charlie (Mitchell Buckley) anchored the production with heartbreaking realism and vulnerability. His subtle increase of intellect and later regression allowed for a depth in the character that propelled the story through its occasional lags. As his former teacher turned love interest, Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam) graced her role with confidence and believability, and brought a clear purpose to every scene she appeared in.

Though some principles in the show lacked chemistry with one another, Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez) was the exception. Sanchez brought an earnest authenticity to his scenes, most notably in the multiple ink blot tests. Contrasting the occasionally sleepy second act with life and spark, Norma (Maggie Mitchell) took advantage of her featured role as Charlie's sister. Mitchell energized the stage and brought the emotion needed to her reunion with her brother.

Performing the show without individual microphones, the entire ensemble of "Flowers for Algernon" showcased perfect projection and diction. Though many characters' energy lagged, particularly in the second act, the entire cast held the intensity and power required to tell the tragic story.

All technical aspects for the show were strong, most notably the appropriately simple, melancholy music composed by Alex Mann and Joe Drzemiecki. The music brought the drama of certain scenes to a heightened level and rarely detracted from the actors. The set, composed of three basic settings, was aesthetically pleasing and displayed an impressive attention to detail with props. All scene transitions were done with impressive speed and subtleness.

The incredible projection and intensity of the cast and the attention to detail of all technical elements are what elevated and dramatized "Flowers for Algernon" to its full capacity. Westfield High School's production left us all with the moral that "it is the path we choose through the maze that makes us who we are."

by Chris Sanderson of Stone Bridge High School

Mazes. We see them all the time; a mix of lines on a square grid whose sole purpose is to get us to think about how to get to the end. For some, however, a maze is more than a fun activity or a simple, mindless task to complete. For a select few, a maze could have been the obstacle between a life with mental handicaps and a life of pure brilliance. The story of one man's journey to get to the end of that maze, and what happens after, was strikingly told in Westfield High School's production of Flowers for Algernon.

In Flowers for Algernon, Charlie Gordon (played by Mitchell Buckley), a mentally handicapped man with an IQ of only 68, is chosen for a series of scientific experiments at Beekman Hospital to see whether or not they can change Gordon into a genius through brain surgery. Although the experiment is at first a success, troubles soon come when Gordon, now with an IQ of 185, begins to recount parts of his life that may best have been forgotten, including his detestable family life and love for his teacher, Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam). When Gordon's mental capacity peaks and his IQ begins to diminish as fast as it climbed, Gordon goes on a journey of forgiveness and remembrance before it is too late.

As Charlie, Mitchell Buckley masterfully grasped the full scope of this character. Although many would find trouble in dealing with a role that changes entirely as the show goes on, Buckley was able to do so with ease, delivering a delightful performance full of emotion and determination. Perhaps most striking about Buckley's performance was his relatable quality, as from start to finish the entire audience was on his side, laughing as he laughed and crying as he cried. Clearly demonstrating his mastery of the role, Buckley's performance a true gem.

Not to be outdone was Julian Sanchez, who, as Burt Seldon, gave a captivating and invigorating performance that was perhaps the best of the evening. Although only portraying a minor character, Sanchez owned the stage every time he was on it. Sanchez encompassed his character fully throughout the show, delivering every line gracefully and tactfully, truly developing his character to a place where the audience questioned whether or not he actually was a professional psychologist.

On the technical side, the evening was superb. Lighting, headed by Robert Palack, was executed phenomenally throughout the entirety of the show, specifically when accenting Charlie's point of view in the story, including blacking out just the faces of Charlie's family in times where he could not remember what they looked like. The set, built by Brandon Sanchez and Olivia Witt, was also visually strong, as the detail put in to each set piece, including the individual definitions of the bricks and even the insertion a real wall plug into one of the pieces of set, truly gave the show a real-life feeling.

Overall, Westfield High School's cast and crew did a terrific job on a show with such difficult subject matter. Despite lags of energy and generalized characters from some performers, the cast stayed strong and proficient much of the time, giving the audience a real treat. Although the house lights came up once during the performance, the lighting and other departments in the technical side of the show proved masterful, allowing the audience to get the full scope of the

production. All in all, Westfield truly gave a wonderful performance, leaving the audience with much to consider as we go about our daily lives.

by Kevin Buckley of Stone Bridge High School

Is ignorance truly bliss or is it better to be aware of the evils in the world? Westfield High School's production of Flowers For Algernon took on the responsibility of answering this timeless question and ,as a result of their power and specificity to detail, did an exceptional job doing so.

Based on the science fiction short story and subsequent novel written by Daniel Keyes, Flowers For Algernon touches upon many ethical and moral themes such as the treatment of the mentally disabled. The short story, written in 1958, won the Hugo Award for Best Short Story in 1960. Algernon is a laboratory mouse who has undergone surgery to increase his intelligence through scientific means. Charlie Gordon, the first human test subject for the surgery, goes through a similar intellectual growth, but as he gains his intelligence he begins to question what he's lost.

The powerful Westfield cast was impressive in the fact that every actor had gone through detailed character work. Although a handful of scenes suffered from dead air between lines, the relationship between characters was often realistic and compelling. Some of the cast were very reserved in their performance; however, this was not true for Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez). Sanchez never missed a beat and every movement he made was precise and purposeful. He gave Burt Seldon his all, and the show profited from his work. The show chose to have their performers project rather than use microphones. Westfield succeeded in their risky endeavor: all actors were heard and understood.

The highlight of the show was Mitchell Buckley's performance as Charlie Gordon. His strong delivery and detailed characterization evoked the necessary emotion the piece demanded. When he came running onstage proclaiming "I beat Algernon," the audience could not help but burst into applause. As Charlie began to return to his former self, Buckley showed subtle signs of regression that succeeded in their implication.

Many technical aspects were very impressive and added a needed depth to the production. Lighting was impressive in it's precision. Spotlights were well executed and, while there were some questionable color choices, the flashback scenes were visually stunning. The set was impressive in it's creative use of the space as well as in it's intense attention to detail. The incorporation of the iconic maze into the set was especially inspired and a profitable addition. The set, along with the props, remained true to the period. The fluidity of the scene changes was remarkable; the audience was never left sitting in the dark for too long. The costumes helped the progression of the show, most obviously in the choice to adapt Charlie's wardrobe to his level of intelligence at certain intervals throughout the show. The same could be said for hair and make-up.

The show was well presented. All aspects of Westfield theater came together to bring Daniel Keyes' story to life, and he would be proud. Westfield High School's production of Flowers For Algernon will leave you in tears and you won't regret it for a second.

by Sierra Carlson of Stone Bridge High School

Charlie Gordon is a man with a big heart and an IQ of 68, a third grade level. When his teacher, Alice Kinnian gives him the opportunity for a new life with a revolutionary operation, Charlie's life is changed forever.

Flowers for Algernon is a play written by David Rogers, based upon the science fiction novel written by Daniel Keyes. The novel and short story have both won many awards, including the Nebula Award for Best Novel in 1966. The story has been adapted many times, including an Academy Award winning film and multiple musicals and plays. Keyes' script included events inspired by personal experiences in his life.

The play follows Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley) after he is the first human test subject for a medical experiment to try and permanently increase a person's IQ. The operation is conducted by three men, Professor Nemur (Alex Mann), Burt Seldon (Julian Sanchez), and Dr. Strauss (Brandon Sanchez). Throughout the play, Charlie finds himself connected to Algernon, a mouse who has had the same operation as he has. Charlie's teacher, Ms. Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam) also helps him throughout the experiment and ultimately finds herself falling in love with him.

Charlie experiences difficulty with the realization that he was treated poorly when he was mentally challenged as he begins to become smarter and more socially aware. The scientists, (Mann, Sanchez, and Sanchez) notice the change in Charlie's happy-go-lucky personality as the experiment goes on and he becomes more irritable and unpleasant.

Westfield High School maintains the integrity of the original script with the overall seriousness of the production, especially with the use of the word "retarded", which in this time period was a medically appropriate term to use for a person with low intelligence. The cast handled the mature theme very well. As the show was exclusively upperclassman, the cast was small but did not lack character.

Standout performances include Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley), who was consistent in performing the regression of the character and being emotionally impactful with every scene, especially the first person progress reports. Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam) also had a fantastic grasp on the character and had palpable chemistry with Charlie throughout the story. Powerful flashbacks to Charlie's past also included impactful scenes by his mother (Sarah Scheweit).

As the play was set in the 60's, the hair and makeup were time period and well executed. The costumes stole the show with the details and care taken with the color choices and the design esthetic. Even Charlie's red hat experiences the transition on his journey to genius intelligence. These details made the costumes an important part of the story line.

Technically, the show took care to use lighting to their advantage by setting the tone in multiple scenes. The scene changes, although abundant, were always quick and never disrupted the flow of the show. Sound was also critical to the play with Charlie's taped progress reports and the "Three Blind Mice" music used for the flashback scenes. The set remained a perfect background that the characters interacted with, especially the transition from Charlie's old apartment to his new condo as he experiences his intellectual journey.

Charlie Gordon taught the audience a valuable lesson in this production of Flowers for Algernon. Treating others the right way and understanding that all individuals have purpose were themes that ran the course of the play. The cast and crew held a heavy burden in the presentation of such a serious play, but with such excellent execution, Westfield High School gave the audience the gift of powerful life lessons.

by Sydney Bair of Stone Bridge High School

As Charlie walked backwards he seemed to fade into nothingness, as the lights came down and the curtain closed on Westfield's Flowers for Algernon. This deeply affecting show—a rollercoaster of emotions and ideas (for the audience as well as the characters)—left some in tears at its close, and left everyone deep in thought. Adapted for the stage in 1969 by David Rogers, the original 1966 novel of the same name by Daniel Keyes has been adapted many times into media of all kind, to great success across the world.

The narrative follows Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley), a mentally-challenged adult desirous of intelligence, who is taken by his teacher Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam) to be the first human test subject of an operation supposed to greatly augment intellect. Over a matter of weeks Charlie's mind changes and evolves as he realizes things about the world around him, and his emotional maturity struggles to keep pace with his artificial growth in intelligence. Eventually his mental faculties reach such a peak of clarity that he begins to study his own condition and the operation which created him, discovering frightening truths as he grapples with his identity.

Due to Charlie's nigh-omnipresence, the play must be supported and carried by the actor's performance, and it was. Mitchell Buckley, overall had a powerful performance as he portrayed what were essentially multiple different characters as Charlie's intelligence changed, distinguishing each one with its own mannerisms, speech patterns, physicality, etc. But while Buckley's monologues were a treat, scenes with other characters often fell a bit short, usually due to a lack of persistent characterization or constant reaction on the part of other supporting actors. This was especially evident in climactic or crowded scenes, when the lack of necessary emotional participation and energy was palpable.

Despite the lack of energy and the sometimes awkward interactions, the fantastic abilities of Charlie and other supporting actors were incredible to watch. The show's tech also helped, as the stunningly realistic sets strewn with props helped immerse the audience and the immaculate sound quality left no complaints. The sharp lighting helped dramatize and highlight the scenes, though there was the occasionally distracting technical difficulty.

Even with some difficulties the abilities of the cast, especially of Buckley, are capable of creating some poignant and deeply affecting scenes, and the complex ideas communicated by their performance will leave a lasting impression on any audience member.

by Alexander Eichner of T.C. Williams High School

"Flowers for Algernon"

Prepare yourself, because you're in for a whirlwind of emotions with the production of "Flowers for Algernon" by Westfield high school. Based on the book by Daniel Keyes, the story of Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley) is one to remember. Now, we are about to embark on a heart-wrenching journey into his world.

The play "Flowers for Algernon", written by David Rogers in the 1960's, is based on a book consisting of a series of journal entries of Charlie Gordon. The curtain opens to a discussion about Charlie's future, for he has a mental disability that causes him to have a low IQ of 68. The doctors are enrolling Charlie into a clinical trial which will increase intelligence to possibly a genius level. After the operation, we watch as Charlie grows intellectually and he starts to question more things in life, such as, "Why must I do this?" and "What is the purpose of that?" He soon learns some things in life are not always as great as they seem. The cast of "Flowers for Algernon" was held together closely by a few key actors. They

helped by filling in blanks sometimes left out by the ensemble. They took the script and made it come alive with purpose and feeling.

Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley) was given a very difficult role to play, one of someone with a mental illness. Mental illnesses have always been a touchy topic in society, but I feel that he did the best he could. He fidgeted quite often and acted very nervous, which were well chosen characterization points to hit. Overall, he had a decent performance which kept the audience's attention.

The supporting cast was decent, but quite often lacking in energy, characterization, and overall performance. Some scenes, especially the concert scene, the ensemble was not reacting well to the situation in which they were in. There wasn't much facial expression or actions done to react to something like the arguments that took place. However, some other characters performed quite well. Mrs. Donner (Bayleigh Aschenbrenner) had superb characterization and was easily one of my favorite characters in the play. Aschenbrenner really gave off the motherly feeling you would expect from a character such as hers. Dr. Strauss (Brandon Sanchez) also had excellent "non-spotlight" acting skills. When the attention was not focused on him, he still remained in character and was subtly participating in the scene. As said before, the ensemble was held up by a few strong and talented actors.

The most pronounced tech element in this play was costuming. Characters such as Charlie Gordon (Mitchell Buckley) and Alice Kinnian (Madeleine Bloxam) has phenomenal costumes that progressed through the story as their characters progressed, for example as Charlie became more sophisticated, as did his costumes. Alice's costumes as well had hints of foreshadowing, such as flowers. On another note, lightning choices tended to be a bit awkward for some scenes, such as green lights and blue lights for scenes that would have been much better in natural lightning. However the red lightning in the multiple flashbacks scenes were well chosen. Overall the tech was average for a high school, with the exception of astounding costuming.

The story of "Flowers for Algernon" addresses difficult topics in ways that people can understand and relate to. We felt connected to some of the characters, and pitied their lives in which they lived in.

by Brendan Zack of T.C. Williams High School

"Who's to say my light is better than your darkness?" This is the question that Charlie Gordon struggles with, torn between two versions of himself. In Westfield High School's rendition of Flowers for Algernon, Charlie is a man with an IQ of 68 who undergoes a surgical experiment that augments his intelligence to the point of genius. However, despite the superhuman ability that comes with his new mind, Charlie begins to realize that his personal relationships are deteriorating, and wonders about his future as the experiment progresses.

Flowers for Algernon was written in 1969 by David Rogers, and was based on a book of the same name written by Daniel Keyes in 1966. The story has been adapted for television and radio as well, and in 1968 was awarded an Oscar as the movie Charly. Keyes wrote the story originally as a short work for a science fiction magazine, and was inspired by an accumulation of experiences from medical school and while teaching English to students with special needs. Though because of the dark nature of the story's ending, Keyes had difficulty finding publishers both for the story and for the subsequent novel, since its publication the novel has never gone out of print.

Westfield's Flowers for Algernon was led by an amazing Mitchell Buckley as Charlie, who especially came into his own after his character's operation, when he was able to portray Charlie's rapid rise to intellectuality and consequent disillusionment. Buckley's mannerisms for Charlie, including most notably the tugging and wringing of his jacket that

happened whenever Charlie felt nervous or overwhelmed, were use masterfully to illustrate Charlie's state of mind during different parts of the play. Other notable actors were Sarah Schweit, who was absolutely chilling as Charlie's mother, and Alex Mann, who convincingly portrayed the near-fanatical desperation of a scientist on the brink of breakthrough. Mann was doubly impressive in that he also composed the haunting, beautiful piano music featured during scene changes throughout the show.

The actors at Westfield were complemented by excellent sound and lighting choices, all of which contributed to the foreboding and almost fantastical mood of the play. The lights were jarring, and would flash or fade off as if to represent Charlie's own feelings and emotions. The set was changed from bakery to scientific laboratory almost seamlessly, and all of the sets were well made and, along with the props, displayed excellent attention to detail. For example, Charlie's red hat, which is seen on his childhood self during a flashback, reappears in a drawer in his apartment.

Thanks to a passionate cast and a combination of music and lighting that perfectly dovetailed with the content of the show, Westfield's Flowers for Algernon was moving and captivating, and served well to ask the question of whether the light really is always so much better than the dark.

by Charlotte Clinger of T.C. Williams High School

As the dramatic light first illuminates the stage, a soft piano riff fills the auditorium. Echoing through our ears, the song tells the audience that what we are about to see is both charming and haunting, lighthearted and breathtaking. Westfield High School's Flowers For Algernon is a production that leaves your mind running in a labyrinth.

A play originally by David Rogers, Flowers for Algernon centers around a mentally disabled man named Charlie Gordon who undergoes a novel operation that is designed to dramatically increase his IQ. To track Charlie's progress, he is asked to write in a journal everyday. Although the experiment is initially a success, the plot focuses on the psychological breakdown of Charlie, who's increased self-awareness brings back painful memories from his childhood. In addition to these painful flashbacks, Charlie also struggles with the disconcerting idea that he is being treated only as a lab rat and is eventually confronted with the very real possibility of regression. The production is set in New York City in the 1960's with the primary action taking place at Dr. Strauss' office at Beekman Hospital and in Charlie's apartment.

Mitchell Buckley, playing the role of Charlie Gordon, dominated the production. His ability to transform from a mentally disabled character to one of superior intelligence and then back again was remarkable. He had numerous powerful lines and always stayed in character. Throughout the play, Buckley was able to bring both laughter and tears from the audience. Madeleine Bloxam, playing Alice Kinnian, also was commendable. Just as Buckley effortlessly endured transformation, Bloxam was able to develop her reactions accordingly and with similar ease.

Also notable was Sarah Schweit. Her spot on performance of Charlie's emotionally unstable mother was absolutely captivating, adding an even greater element of drama to the production.

Brandon Sanchez and Alex Mann, who played Dr. Strauss and Professor Nemur, respectively, were key to one of the central issues within the play. The analysis of Charlie that is parallel with the analysis of a lab rat, paired with their constant bickering provides an essential conflict to offset the success of raising Charlie's IQ. The two actors reveal through their characters that Charlie is "not something in a test tube," he is a man.

The stage crew did an excellent job between scenes, with every set change being quiet and efficient. Lighting was impeccable and truly added a vital element to each scene. For example, the bright white lights during a scene in the hospital were really able to allow the audience to be transported to the operation room. Aside from an accidental turning on of the house lights in the middle of the show, everything went very smoothly.

The set and costumes were both very detailed and perfectly time period. Charlie's costume changes throughout the show definitely added to his psychological changes by mirroring his personality. For example, pre-operation, he wore more casual clothes to mimic his light-hearted attitude. As he gained more intelligence he began to wear suits, which demonstrated his more solemn view of his life.

What truly brought the show together, however, was the use of symbolism. Charlie's red hat, the flowers, the maze, and the singing of Three Blind Mice, which were prevalent throughout the show, took *Flowers For Algernon* to a level that surpasses most high school productions.

by Emma Bartley of T.C. Williams High School

It is 1965, and one of the greatest psychological experiments is about to be performed. A simple man will be turned into a genius. Yet, an ethical dilemma is often at the heart of most great scientific experiments, and this one is no different. Is it wrong to force intelligence on a human being as if he were a lab rat? In *Flowers for Algernon*, Westfield Theatre explores the meaning of intelligence, happiness, and the cost at which both come—and go.

The 1969 play *Flowers for Algernon*, written by David Rogers, is based upon the short story and novel of the same name by Daniel Keyes. The latter was published in 1966, and also inspired the movie version, *Charly*, starring Cliff Robertson, who won an Academy Award for his role.

From the moment he appeared on stage, Mitchell Buckley created the poignant, wonderfully earnest character of Charlie Gordon, blithely happy in his day job as a janitor at the bakery, but secretly ridiculed for his 68 IQ. His blunt, child-like way of speaking evoked pathos, and was very sincere at times. Buckley's progression from naïve, happy, pre-operation Charlie to jaded, cynical genius Charlie was gratifying yet also painful to watch, as he lost most of his faith in human compassion. In memory dream scenes, which were bathed in an eerie red light, Buckley's anguished reactions to his past were primal and raw, expertly showcasing the trauma of Charlie's childhood.

A scene quite startling in that respect was Charlie's reunion with his sister Norma (Maggie Mitchell). Charlie's mother (Sarah Schweit), gave a disturbing portrayal of a crazed, depressed woman, too anxious and obsessed to lead a normal life. Mitchell's emotional climax of frustration and grief over her wasted childhood, her awful treatment of her brother, and her stressful, empty life caring for her mother was heart-wrenching, and upped the pace of the play.

Charlie's relationship with the doctors performing his experiment was most interesting to watch, due to their professional, clinical demeanors, juxtaposed with Charlie's childlike wonder, and then his contemptuous mocking of their experiment. Most notable of the doctors was Professor Nemur (Alex Mann), whose middle-aged mannerisms and pretensions stemming from his Ph.D. created a believable, cerebral scholar. Also commendable was Burt Seldon, (Julian Sanchez), whose tears and sympathy for Charlie's plight signified a welcome deviation from the scientific, dispassionate nature of the other doctors, and was extremely touching.

The set was versatile, adapting to every scene with ease, and was characterized by minute details, such as a painting on the wall, or a crocheted blanket on Charlie's bed, or a Ph.D. diploma hanging on the wall of the doctor's office. The stage crew was phenomenal, working efficiently with the short scene changes and never being noticed.

Actors had almost flawless projection and enunciation; however, some had problems with anticipating lines and not reacting. Pacing also became more of a problem in the second act, but the performances of certain actors injected some energy into the show.

Yet, sweet, simple Charlie Gordon showed us, through his miraculous transformation and heartbreaking regression, the honesty that intelligence often mars, because we as a society are afraid of the truth. He showed that happiness can be found—if one simply stops looking and just enjoys.

by Sarah Paez of T.C. Williams High School

This is a test. This is only a test. But what happens when a test becomes a man's life? Westfield High School explored this phenomenon in their winter production of *Flowers for Algernon*.

Flowers for Algernon is a play written by David Rogers in 1969 and is based on a novel and short story by Daniel Keyes. In *Flowers for Algernon*, a mentally disabled man named Charlie Gordon undergoes an experimental operation that rapidly improves his intellect to genius level. As he gains intellect, he also becomes haunted by memories from his past. Charlie's progress is paralleled by that of the lab mouse Algernon with whom Charlie has a deep emotional tie.

Mitchell Buckley who played Charlie Gordon created a lovable and emotional character, making such a challenging character very accessible and relatable. Buckley's subtle progression and regression intellectually and emotionally during the play was displayed expertly, adding a realism to a somewhat unbelievable story. Buckley carried a small number of Charlie's mannerisms throughout the story such as the throatiness of his voice. Other mannerisms, such as his wide-toothed grin and the tugging of his shirt, only appeared in Charlie prior to the operation and as he regressed at the end of the story. These little adjustments in character allowed the audience to follow the arch of the character.

Being a slow-paced show, this play called necessity to consistently high energy in the entire cast to liven up the show. Such energy was lacking on the whole. On the other hand, all of the actors on the stage displayed a level of maturity appropriate to their characters. While many of the actors lacked emotional connections with one another, reactions, and seemed to lack motivation at times, all showed distinct mannerisms and full dedication to their characters.

The show as a whole had many stand-out actors. One such performer was Paolah Urista who played Mrs. Mooney, Charlie's landlady. Urista made a very small character stand out with her deep understanding of the character which showed through every movement she made. Another such actor was Julian Sanchez who played Burt Seldon, the psychologist at the lab. Sanchez visibly reacted to every situation the character was placed in and showed true connection to Charlie. Burt's emotional expression offered an alternative window through which the audience could look on Charlie's development. A third character who greatly contributed emotionally to the play was Teen-aged Charlie, played by Stephen Cox. This character haunted grown Charlie in his everyday life. Cox was able to reflect Buckley's expression of the character in a slightly skewed and immature way that made his presence very haunting as well as heartbreaking.

Every aspect of the set was clean and detail-oriented. The lights that came up on every scene were very striking, harsh colors. These lights were emotionally jarring and helped emotionally involve the audience on a less conscious level.

Throughout the show an original score composed by Alex Mann and Joe Drzemiecki was played during transitions and helped set the tone of each scene and facilitate the transitions of the plot line. This creative device added a dimension to the play not yet provided.

Westfield High School took this test and succeeded, producing an enjoyable and emotionally provoking production.

by Kelleen Moriarty of The Madeira School

Imagine you are trapped in a maze, and have no way of getting out. Imagine that no matter how hard you try, you will never understand all that you've learned and experienced. This is all that Charlie Gordon, a mentally disabled adult, has known—until he undergoes a surgical experiment that will artificially increase his IQ from 68 to genius level.

Written in 1966 as a novel, *Flowers For Algernon* tackles many moral and ethical issues that still haunt our society today. Is a person of lesser value if they don't have an IQ over 100? Does our intelligence determine our status and our character? This cathartic play urges the audience to appreciate the purpose of each individual, regardless of his or her mental or physical disabilities.

Westfield High School did a beautiful job communicating the emotional heft of *Flowers For Algernon*, especially through Mitchell Buckley's superb interpretation of Charlie Gordon. Portraying a mentally ill adult is extremely difficult, but Buckley stunned the audience with his honest and poignant acting. Buckley's talent was exhibited through his ability to stay true to his character while he progressed and regressed intellectually.

Madeleine Bloxam, who played Alice, Charlie's teacher and lover, impressed the audience with her strong characterization and zeal, particularly through the scenes where Alice is hesitant to love Charlie. The three doctors had wonderful chemistry onstage and were able to successfully communicate their struggle between morality and advancing their own careers.

The most striking scene in the play featured Sarah Schweit as Charlie's mentally disturbed mother and Maggie Mitchell as Norma, Charlie's sister. Schweit was absolutely chilling onstage as she hauntingly hummed the children's rhyme, three blind mice, and the dynamic between Mitchell and Buckley was outstanding. Although the play was excellent, it sporadically lacked a sense of motion from the actors. Some of the actors had slightly delayed reactions to what was going on around them, particularly in some of the larger or more intense scenes.

The set was extremely impressive and detailed, from the light behind the window that made it look like the sun was shining in to the inclusion of electrical outlets. The lighting choices throughout the play were extremely effective and symbolic, which added to the emotional intensity of the play. The use of light to highlight Charlie's memories, vignettes, and internal struggles was one of the most notable aspects of the play.

Westfield High School took on a very controversial play and did a magnificent job interpreting the heavy subject matter with grace and integrity. A successful play is one that the cast and crew are passionate about and leave the audience happy. That was obvious in *Flowers For Algernon*. But Westfield exceeded that standard and made the audience think and question themselves and society. And that is what true success is.

by Rachel Bondy of W. T. Woodson HS

While many shows set in the sixties focus on the progressive reforms of the decade, *Flowers For Algernon*, by David Rogers, instead focuses on painfully unsophisticated medical terminology and treatment of people with special needs. Today, research and knowledge have spread into a societal awareness, leaving us with sympathetic views for the disabled, but conditions have not always been so easy. Westfield High School brought the production to poignant and disturbing life on stage last weekend.

The play follows the arc of a young man named Charlie Gordon. Undergoing a breakthrough experimental surgery to increase his intelligence, he develops from a happy-go lucky, "retarded" man going through life with the eyes of a child, into a genius who speaks 20 languages, capable of mature thought and feelings. It is his inner turmoil through being split into two selves: the new Charlie, and the old Charlie still inside of him, that leads to trauma and insanity. Since all arcs must come down after their peak, Charlie's descent back into his original emotional and mental intelligence brings all the viewers to a heartbroken, disappointed loss.

It can be difficult to play such a dynamic, complex character such as Charlie, but Mitchell Buckley pulled it off well. His chemistry with the rest of the cast was phenomenal and Buckley was not daunted by such raw emotional trauma. His portrayal of a man with special needs was not only not offensive, but endearing as well.

Other cast standouts were Julian Sanchez, who played Burt Seldon, a young scientist working on his doctoral degree who tests Charlie with mazes and Rorschach tests, as well as Alex Mann, who played Professor Nemur, the lead scientist on the experiment and the one with the strongest, most objective support of the experiment. Julian was adorable and charming throughout the play, but he made the audience's eyes well up with tears when he was working with Charlie through his slow descent back to his original state. Alex Mann had the opposite effect, making the audience constantly irritated with his character throughout. Both actors had consistent, focused performances that were equally effective in drawing out emotion from the audience.

The commitment and high energy of the actors is what kept the audience going through the somewhat slow pacing of the show. The actors had a sense of open, trusting chemistry between them that is hard to pull off in a show with such heavy

emotion. It was this chemistry and strong character development that made the show so maddeningly sad.

The sets were kept simple because a big theme of the show was there is more to the surface of an object. While simple there was an immaculate attention to detail, even with background objects like bookshelves and desks. Costuming was period, detailed, and expansive, especially with characters such as Alice Kinnian, played by Madeleine Bloxam. Makeup was detailed, effective, and period, a rare but inspirational attribute to shows. There was never a noticeable mic issue and special sound effects were realistic and well done. Lighting had some issues but they were minor and hardly distracted from the rest of the show.

Flowers For Algernon is difficult for a high school to do well, but Westfield not only mastered any challenges, but garnered a standing ovation of critics and audience members alike.

by Robyn Smith of W. T. Woodson HS

Based on the book by Daniel Keyes, Flowers for Algernon is a play about a 32 year old man named Charlie Gordon, and his journey before, during, and after an important operation which will make him more intelligent.

On Saturday, February 17th, Westfield High School in Chantilly, VA put on a moving performance of the loved story. Mitchell Buckley played the role of Charlie Gordon. Buckley's performance was intriguing and his stage presence demanded attention. His energy, even in scenes that were not written to be energetic, was consistent throughout the show and it was evident that he was very involved and dedicated to the performance. Madeleine Bloxam (Alice Kinnian) had great chemistry with Buckley and found a balance between the character's motherly and romantic aspect. Some other great performers were the three doctors, played by Brandon Sanchez, Alex Mann and Julian Sanchez. These three actors were able to make the audience believe that they were actually mature men, rather than high school students.

The lighting for the performance was very fitting, although the changes between every scene could have varied more. With smooth and quiet transitions, the backstage crew deserves recognition! The set was detailed and well done! Costumes were very time period appropriate, even down to the jewelry on each character! With more than one costume for most of the cast, it can be difficult for all of the costumes in the production to be well done, but WHS seemed to have no problem with doing this! Hair and makeup, along with costumes, were well done and appropriate. All of the actors had great projection, and the two mics at the front of the stage were very helpful and well placed.

Overall, Westfield's performance of Flowers for Algernon was very enjoyable. The cast was very invested and the audience could see that this show meant a lot to them. Although there were a few technical difficulties, the cast members were able to deal with them in a way that didn't effect their performance.

by Carla Astudillo of Wakefield High School