June 10, 2014

Conference on Whedon works coming to Sac State

Joss Whedon and his critically acclaimed works – Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog and The Avengers – have been the focus of academic interest for almost two decades. Now the sixth biennial conference about his work, convened by the Whedon Studies Association and its blind peer-reviewed journal Slayage, is coming to Sacramento State.

Sac State Professor Alyson Buckman is bringing “Much Ado About Whedon” (http://scw6.whedonstudies.tv/) to the campus June 19-22. Registration begins at 11 a.m. Thursday, June 19, on the first floor of Mendocino Hall. The cost is $175 for all four days.

The event will cover all aspects of the Whedonverse, is expected to draw about 200 people, and will feature scholarly presentations on various themes and meanings in Whedon’s works. Those will include a look at The Avengers’ Black Widow character as a radical icon of third-wave feminism; the view of feminism in the movie Much Ado About Nothing; and social control, intelligence and surveillance as presented in his television programs and films.

Presenters will include representatives from diverse fields – English, philosophy, humanities. Buckman will be a presenter and will cover Whedon’s repeated use of selected actors in several of his works.

The keynote speaker at 4 p.m. Saturday, June 21, is Jessica Neuwirth, a founder of Equality Now, a group that works for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls around the world – Whedon’s favorite cause.

At 8 that evening, the conference will present Can’t Stop the Serenity, a screening of Whedon’s movie Serenity. Donations made at that time will go toward Equality Now.

The considerable academic interest in Whedon’s works is mainly generated by how multilayered they are, according to Buckman. “You can watch the programs and movies more than once and keep getting more and more out of them,” she says.

Buckman adds that Whedon’s commitment to global women’s issues also is reflected in his writing and productions. “That’s something he’s really provided for his
audiences – strong, powerful women in media that do not generally portray strong, powerful women.”

Despite the scholarly nature of many of the presentations, Buckman believes members of the general public would find some of them to their liking. “It is an academic conference, but we are a lively group,” she says, adding that Neuwirth’s address and the Serenity screening probably have the most mass appeal.

About 30 Sacramento State students and faculty have volunteered to work the conference. Sac State students may attend for free with student ID. There also are special day passes available for non-Sac State students.

This is the sixth Slayage Conference, named for the character Buffy the Vampire Slayer. The most recent was held in Vancouver, British Columbia. Buckman expressed gratitude for the support she has received, especially from her Humanities and Religious Studies Chair Bradley Nystrom, College of Arts and Letters Dean Edward Inch, and Communication Studies’ Carly Guide.

To register or for more information about the conference, visit the website or call Buckman at (916) 798-4684. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Craig Koscho

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