

Seduced tells story of reclusive billionaire at Allen Bales Theater

By **Sam West** | Published 09/22/15 2:40pm | Updated 09/22/15 2:36pm



Photos courtesy of James Schor.

The story of a mad billionaire, a mysterious aide and two alluring women will be put on stage. “Seduced,” a drama by acclaimed playwright Sam Shepard, will run until the end of the week at the Allen Bales Theater.

The play tells the story of Henry Hackamore, a business tycoon turned recluse who is loosely based on eccentric entrepreneur Howard Hughes. Hackamore is visited in his hideout by two female figures from his past, and the mogul begins to reflect on why his riches drove him mad.

“It’s kind of a musing on Henry remembering his life and remembering his place in society, and what the American dream means to him as a billionaire pirate,” said Raines Carr, a MFA student and director of the production.

Carr is helming “Seduced” as a part of his graduate work. He pitched the play to the theatre department and was surprised when the school chose it for their fall season.

“‘Seduced’ is one I thought they would never ever pick,” he said. “I’ve been in love with Sam Shepard my whole life. As a kid, he was the first dramatist that I fell in love with when I first got into theatre in my teen years.”

Rarely produced in the United States, “Seduced” is one of Shepard’s lesser-known works. The play’s obscurity is one of the reasons Carr chose to put it on.

“One of my mantras is, if you’re at the University, see plays by famous writers that we don’t ever get to see,” he said.

Carr believes that, though “Seduced” was written in the late 1970s, the play deals with many modern issues like income inequality and the feasibility of the American dream.

“I think it all started around the time this play was written, and it’s now just coming to the fore in our political mindset,” he said.

Matt Gabbard, a junior majoring in Musical Theatre, plays Henry Hackamore. In preparing for his role, Gabbard did a lot of research into the life of Howard Hughes. The actor didn’t seem particularly phased by the idea of portraying an unhinged character.

“My goal is trying to figure out why he’s doing things and how to make sense of it,” he said. “What I’m trying to do is make sense of his craziness.”

But Gabbard also believes in the strength and synergy of his fellow actors.

“I’ve known everyone else in the cast, I’m great friends with them,” he said. “It’s a dream cast for me. They’re all so amazing.”

“Seduced” also features Ross Birdsong in the part of Raul, an assistant to Hackamore whose loyalty to the tycoon is unexplained. Molly Penny and Marie Videau star as Luna and Miami, the two mysterious women Hackamore invites to his compound.

“Seduced” premiered last night to a packed house at the Allen Bales Theatre. The intimate setting seemed to magnify the crowd’s response to the drama, and the room frequently echoed with both gasps and laughter. The exhilaration was most keenly felt during the final act when a surprise twist shocked the entire audience.

Tori Leonard, a sophomore majoring in Accounting, praised this unexpected ending.

“I didn’t see it coming at all,” she said.

“I think it’s a really exciting play live, and I think people are going to be thrilled to see something they don’t get to see all the time live,” Carr said. “It’s a very visceral, alive play.”