

'Arcadia' ties math into lives, relationships

Fermat's Last Theorem went unsolved for nearly 358 years until mathematician Andrew Wiles released a successful proof in 1994, a year after Tom Stoppard's play "Arcadia" debuted in London. It was announced last month that Wiles was awarded the Abel Prize – similar in prestige to a Nobel – for his proof of Pierre de Fermat's number theory, and this month, "Arcadia" opens in the Allen Bales Theatre.

Fermat's Last Theorem is central to the play, which won the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play in 1993, and later received several Tony nominations, for a tight, purposeful script that makes apparent the presence of mathematics in our lives and relationships.

"Tom Stoppard has made it so that there are no accidents," said Alaric Rohl, a cast member. "He has put every single word, every single subject matter, every single concept, abstract or literal, into that show because it helps tell the story and send the message."

Being in the play is a dream come true, said Rohl, a freshman majoring in math and minoring in theater. He is the only actor in "Arcadia" playing two roles, Augustus Coverly and Gus Coverly, who cross between time periods. Half the play deals with events in an English home between 1809 and 1812 (Augustus), while the other half is set in the same home, present day (Gus).

"(Math)...is both part of nature and something that is a part of our minds," Rohl said. "It is a language. It's the language in which the universe is written. To have someone like Tom Stoppard put that – and he puts some of the most important mathematics in the show – and bring them to life with these different characters and other actors is absolutely brilliant."

In both periods, Rohl is younger brother to a sister known for proposing wild ideas. Augustus' older sister Thomasina Coverly (Caroline Ficken) shows interest in concepts such as chaos theory and the laws of thermodynamics to her tutor, Septimus Hodge (Evan Ector), said to be a friend of Lord Byron. The present-day includes writer Hannah Jarvis (Julia Martin) and literature professor Bernard Nightingale (Blake Williams), both studying the house and the people who lived there between 1809 and 1812.