

# New play at Allen Bales Theatre deals with Catholic Church scandal



*Alpha Psi Omega the University's theatre honor society. CW File*

The stage of the Allen Bales Theatre transforms many times a year, telling stories that excite, entertain and make students think. Starting on the Sept. 19, “Doubt” will have students wondering about the true meaning of the word.

Written by John Patrick Shanley, “Doubt” first premiered in 2004 in the Manhattan Theatre Club. The play is set in 1964, where a priest that wants to be more inclusive is caught in an inappropriate scandal. Along with sexual issues, the play also deals with themes of race and society.

“I think we’re far enough removed from the scandal in the Catholic Church that it’s not something that is so fresh and raw and hard to deal with,” Tom Alsip, the director of the University’s production of “Doubt,” said. “Yet, at the same time, it's also something that is fresh enough that we do understand it still.”

Alsip has worked as an actor in off-Broadway productions and taught classes at NYU, where he began directing. He came to the University to get his MFA degree and is currently in his second year of the

program.

He said that while the narrative discusses issues within the Catholic Church, the play itself deals more with questions of authority, changing ideas, the concepts of crime and what role doubt plays within a person's life.

“What makes this play so brilliant is that the narrative is, on its face, incredibly compelling as it is,” Alsip said. “But when you dig deeper and start looking at the broader concepts that they're discussing and the higher-level philosophical debates that are being waged with these characters, that's what really makes this play well-rounded and fleshed out.”

The cast of the play has been helpful, Alsip said, with most of the them being familiar with the story before auditioning. Blake Williams, a second year graduate acting student, plays Father Flynn. “Doubt” was the very first play Williams saw when he was attending a Catholic school during his undergraduate.

“‘Doubt’ is important because it's a fairly recent show, especially considering some of the others that we've done, but it could not be more relevant than it is now because we have issues such as progression in the Catholic Church,” Williams said. “Which, it's a very progressive denomination, but there are still people that may not be as progressive as the church would intend. Issues lightly on homosexuality, race relations, that sort of thing — it's very relevant to problems in our society today.”

Sarah Grace Valleroy, a junior majoring in musical theatre, shared the same views, saying that the story had a lot to cover, but was still relevant. Her past experience acting in UA Theatre productions, such as playing Regina Engstand in “Ghosts,” helped her get into the role of Sister James.

“I think each time that you can take a new part of yourself and make it into a character, it prepares you a little more for the next one by saying goodbye to that one,” Valleroy said.

She said connecting with the character of Sister James has been inspirational and has allowed her to reconnect with sides of her own personality.

Cheyenne Ford, a senior majoring in theatre, plays Mrs. Muller, the mother of the boy caught in-between the main conflict of “Doubt.” While her character isn't on stage long, she said that Mrs. Muller's presence within the play helps sets the stage for the climax.

“I couldn't imagine being faced with a predicament like that in my own personal life, so it's been kind of hard to watch sometimes, but I think that's what makes you keep watching is the fact that it kind of puts you in an uncomfortable position of things that you wouldn't usually have to confront in a situation,” Ford said.

The play will run in the Allen Bales Theatre from Sept. 19 through the 23rd at 7:30 p.m, with an extra showing at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on the 25th. Tickets can be bought online on UA Theatre and Dance's

website or at the box office in Rowand-Johnson Hall for \$10.

“At the end of the day, is it probably gonna read exactly like 1964,” Alsip said. “I don’t know, it’s 2016, but who is this audience who is coming to see it and can we serve the play as people in this world, at this time? I think we can.”