



In "The Dining Room" six actors portray 58 characters, including 18 overlapping vignettes all taking place in the same generic room. CW / Lindsey Leonard

Character variety brings intrigue to UATD play

By Laura Testino | Staff Reporter

When loved ones share meals around the dinner table, much more is exchanged than dishes of vegetables, breads and desserts. Inevitably, the conversations that blossom from dinner time foster an atmosphere that is either humorous or serious and often somewhere in between.

This common phenomenon is portrayed in the snapshot-like scenes of "The Dining Room," a play by A. R. Gurney, which premieres Monday in the Allen Bales Theatre. In the show, six actors portray 58 characters, including 18 overlapping vignettes all taking place in the same generic room.

Steve Burch, the director of UATD's production of the play, led the cast in the portrayal of these different snapshot scenes.

"Some of the characters in some scenes are the star of the scene, and some of them are supporting, but everybody has center stage for more than once in the play," said Burch. "It's quite a display of acting."

PLAN TO GO

WHAT: "The Dining Room"
WHEN: Sept. 29 - Oct. 5
WHERE: Allen Bales Theatre

Rehearsals started at the beginning of the semester, and actors were challenged to expand their range as each took on the roles of nine or 10 distinct characters for the play, Burch said.

Each actor's set of characters vary in age, physical attributes and dialects. Although Gurney's script focuses on WASP households of the Northeast, Burch included dialectic changes to suggest the universality of the scenes in the play.

"What I take from [the play] is that whether you belong to this subset of culture or not, I think we all recognize the family tensions; we recognize the

aspirations; we recognize the disappointments; and we see it in ourselves and our families and our friends," Burch said.

Corey Rives, a senior majoring in musical theatre and advertising, said he has enjoyed exploring his set of characters and making some of his own artistic choices with Burch's guidance.

"My favorite part of any rehearsal process is getting in costumes and makeup," Rives said. "I think you can develop a character, but once you actually put on what that character would wear and see how that character would move in those clothes, that's when I feel like I'm really able to sink in."

Working with the cast through a set of multiple characters was a valuable learning experience because each actor has different strengths, Rives said.

"I feel like I definitely had favorite scenes when I first started, but all the characters are so completely different that I end up just liking each one for

different reasons," Rives said.

Andrea J. Love, a third-year MFA acting student, works with Rives in two scenes of the play, which she said turned out to be her favorite scenes of the entire play. In addition to playing multiple characters, Love also composed a piano piece that will be used in various parts of the show.

"[Burch] gave me a CD of some of the music he had wanted, and then I worked off of that with some of his instructions for mood and style and atmosphere and created a fairly simple, but hopefully evocative, three-minute piano piece," Love said.

The rehearsals for "The Dining Room" have fostered a creative atmosphere, allowing the cast to work well with one another, Love said. She said ideally the vast amount of characters in the show will allow audience members to relate to at least some portion of the play.

"There are so many characters and so many scenes that it's such a beautiful buffet of humanity, I suppose," Love said.