

out of the Rabbit

Story by Terah Kelleher

Photos by Alex Thibadeau &

Douglas Reyes-Ceron

In a 2006 New York Times article, playwright David Lindsay-Abaire shared a story about his teacher at Juilliard, Marsha Norman. According to Abaire, Norman told the class: "If you want to write a good play, think of the thing that scares you most in the world."

As soon as Abaire became a father, the perfect play came to mind. He called it "Rabbit Hole."

On Friday, Feb. 11 in the Sternberger Auditorium, the theatre studies department's production of Abaire's Pulitzer Prize winning play will open in Sternberger Auditorium.

Directed by Jack Zerbe, professor of theatre studies, "Rabbit Hole" is a play that demonstrates the different ways a family copes with the unexpected loss of a child. The theatre studies department chose this play based on diverse criteria.

"You look for engaging, stimulating, thoughtful material that is varied in nature," said Zerbe. "But our primary mission is to educate and train people who want to make theatre."

Zerbe also has a personal tie to the subject matter of the play. In ninth grade, his family suffered the loss of his youngest sibling.

"The Rabbit Hole is the dark place that a grieving person goes," said Zerbe. "And there are five people in five different holes. The story is how they come out of the holes together."

The concept of rabbit holes also influenced the design of the play. The design sketches of Zerbe and Robin Vest, visiting professional guest artist and scene designer, went from looking like the rabbit hole out of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" to a design rooted more in reality.

Burke Brown, lighting designer, and Badger Koon, sound design, both graduated from Guilford in 2000 and were Zerbe's students.

"From working with Jack and Burke before, I had a sense of what they like," said Koon. "So I tried to bring things to the table and collaborate with them."

According to Zerbe, the actors arrived at the auditions prepared to take on the intense roles ahead of them.

First-year Connor Bayne plays Jason Willette, the unintentional harbinger of tragedy.

According to Bayne, his character mainly seeks forgiveness. Bayne shares the benefits of being a part of the plays at Guilford.

"A play's an acting class unto itself," said Bayne. "You learn so much of it as a craft simply by experience."

Sophomore Puja Tolton plays Becca, a woman who is trying to come to terms with the loss of her son.

"In the more heated scenes, I found that I wanted to just be generally angry and that wasn't what it was all about," said Tolton. "I needed to find the nuance and make sure she came off as three-dimensional. Not just this raging monster."

Howie, Becca's husband, is played by junior Marcus Edghill. His character demonstrates his grief in a different manner.

"He's a real maternal kind of guy," said Edghill. "He just really wants to get his family back together. Especially his wife, he wants to make sure that she's is in a stable place first and foremost."

Sophomore Elizabeth Wray plays the role of Becca's sister Izzy.

"This play is a really powerful piece for anyone who has experienced any kind of loss or struggle in their family," said Wray. "There's something really human about it that students will find easy to connect to."

Emily Morazan, a first-year, plays Becca and Izzy's mother in the play. Like Izzy, her character's lines may cause the audience to laugh at unexpected moments.

"She has a lot of opinions and she's definitely not politically correct," said Morazan.

Ivey Long, sophomore and assistant stage manager, shares another reason to see the show.

"I'd want people to come to the show because we worked really hard on it," said Long. "And it's great to see all that work on display."

At first glance, this play could be seen as simply melancholy but those hesitant to come should not judge so quickly.

"In the midst of all this deep grief, there are moments of rage, laughter, tears and there are giggles," said Zerbe. "The last moment (of the play) is so powerfully moving; it is both a moment of great sadness and great hope."

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