

arts

Duke Summer Theater

'A Child's Play' definitely not for children

By Martha Johnsen

A Child's Play, running through June 8 at Duke's Summer Theater, is definitely not for children.

Robert Marasco's Tony Award-winning drama has the audience on the edge of their seats and bewitched. The story takes place at St. Charles, a Catholic preparatory school for boys, where both students and teachers seem to lose their self-control. Students walk and talk as if hypnotized. Teachers and priests have black-outs and wander the halls disoriented.

Something destructive is influencing the people at St. Charles. A basketball game becomes a vicious eye-losing battle and

later a lacerated boy is found hanging on the crucifix in the chapel.irate parents call to find out what's happening to their children. But no one can give them an answer.

Some blame it on Lash, the devilishly demanding Greek and Latin teacher that everyone hates. Others blame it on the dark atmosphere at St. Charles, where we see confrontation and conflict from the very first line in the play. But all agree something needs to be done—and fast—because every moment holds the potential for bloodshed.

"Lash," the nickname of Jerome Malley, is played by Walter Smith, a UNC statistics professor. Smith articulately conveys all

the different sides of the ill-reputed Lash—his defensiveness, his insecurity, his overwhelming fears and jealousy.

theater

Lash is befriended by rookie teacher Paul Reese, played by Duke student Mark McNabb. McNabb's performance makes the audience lean forward in their seats and grip their chairs as he conveys Reese's struggle to uncover the forces at work at St. Charles.

The amiable old Joe Dobbs, who has

been at odds with Lash for 10 years, is played by Lloyd Borstelmann, a Duke psychology professor. The soft-hearted Joe is not what he appears and Borstelmann conveys well this ambiguity.

Director John Clum and his well-chosen cast have created a drama that's mysteriously suggestive in every point. A red lesson book, a red teacup, a red whistle chain suddenly become significant as we see a body bleeding red across the stage. The black robes of the priests seem more closely linked to darkness than to holiness. Bells toll and organ music eerily echoes to enhance the dark mood.

A Child's Play is a heart-clutching drama that shouldn't be missed.

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