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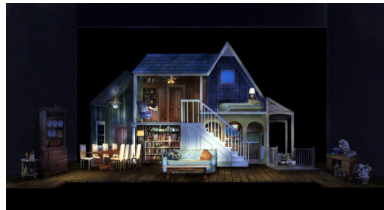
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AUGUST // OSAGE COUNTY PLAYING AT UA THEATRE AND DANCE

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(<https://theplanetweekly.com/author/planet/>)

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AUGUST // OSAGE COUNTY PLAYING AT UA THEATRE AND DANCE

Before heading home for Thanksgiving break, the University of Alabama's Dance and Theatre department is taking you on a quick detour to Oklahoma. There you'll spend three acts with the Westons and Fordhams in "August: Osage County."

Stacy Alley, interim director of musical theatre, makes her directorial return after helming this season's production of "A Chorus Line." Taking a break from the musical world, Alley wanted to put her MFA in acting to work and "sink my teeth into a straight play."

"I have always wanted to direct this play, as I am drawn to its humanity and its darkness and humor," Alley said. "It also provides "meaty:" roles for actors with unforgettable characters that explore multi-generational conflict."

Written by acclaimed playwright Tracy Letts, "August: Osage County" follows a dysfunctional family brought together by the disappearance of patriarch Beverly Weston, who has been missing for a week at the start of the play. Left with only Violet, their cigarette-smoking, cancer-stricken matriarch, the occupants are forced to face their demons.

Joined with Alley is Dianne Teague, who plays the loud-mouthed lead. During the director's graduate studies, the two worked together on a production of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Over the course of the show's run, Alley proposed that if she were ever to take on the play, Teague would be her leading lady.

One of Lett's more popular plays, "August: Osage County" made its debut at Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre in June of 2007 before making its way to the Big Apple in December. During its run on Broadway, the production split time at the Imperial and Music Box Theatre. In addition to winning the 2008 Pulitzer's Prize for Drama, the dark comedy made a clean sweep during award season, earning 5 Tonys and 3 Drama Desk Awards.

In 2013, the play was adapted for the big screen. Directed by John Wells (West Wing, Shameless), the theatrical version featured all-star cast members Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts, Benedict Cumberbatch and Abigail Breslin. Like its stage counterpart, the film was overall lauded by critics and garnered several accolades, which included two Academy Award nominations for the film's leads, Roberts and Streep.

Despite the film's commercial success, many cast members like Cindy Spitko, who plays eldest daughter Barbara Weston-Fordham, decided against watching the film to prep for their respective roles. That isn't to say that the MFA student isn't walking into the part blindly. Originally from Pennsylvania, Spitko saw a production that starred a colleague playing her character.

While not an Oscar-nominated actress, her friend's performance provided insight on how to approach the role. An avid fan of Lett's and his macabre style of writing, Spitko admitted that physically playing the character bolstered her comprehension of the playwright's work.

"[She is] Opinioned. Incredibly strong, but having a hard time, because she's missing her father she's really having family issues that are coming to light and she's dealing with things that she wouldn't normally deal with, but things happen," Spitko said. "Tragedy happens. She's trying to keep it under control all the time."

Shameless plugs aside, Spitko said that this production would be a good introduction to Lett's work. Where his other work lingers on the symbolic and magical side, the actress explained that this play doesn't believe in sugar coating things.

"August: Osage County is very straight-forward," Spitko said. "It's like realism 101. It's the textbook definition of what realism is."

Despite the play's dark tone, the actress noted that audiences might find themselves chortling at "inappropriate" moments, but it isn't anything to be ashamed of.

"The fact that they're laughing at things that aren't necessarily funny," Spitko explained. "That happens throughout the play."

Ultimately, the show narrows down to two heavy themes: family and perspective. In a household of various generations, lifestyles and personalities, things are destined to be rocky. While watching the show patrons can empathize with characters, because of the universal experiences of awkward family encounters.

"The characters talk about different point of views and neither one is right or wrong, they just are," Spitko said. "I don't think you can hate anyone in this show, but you can find empathy."

August: Osage County runs from Nov. 11-17 with a matinee performance on Nov. 19 at Rowan-Johnson Hall on the campus of the University of Alabama.

Ticket range from \$14-20 and can be purchased at the box office or online at Ua.tix.com

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