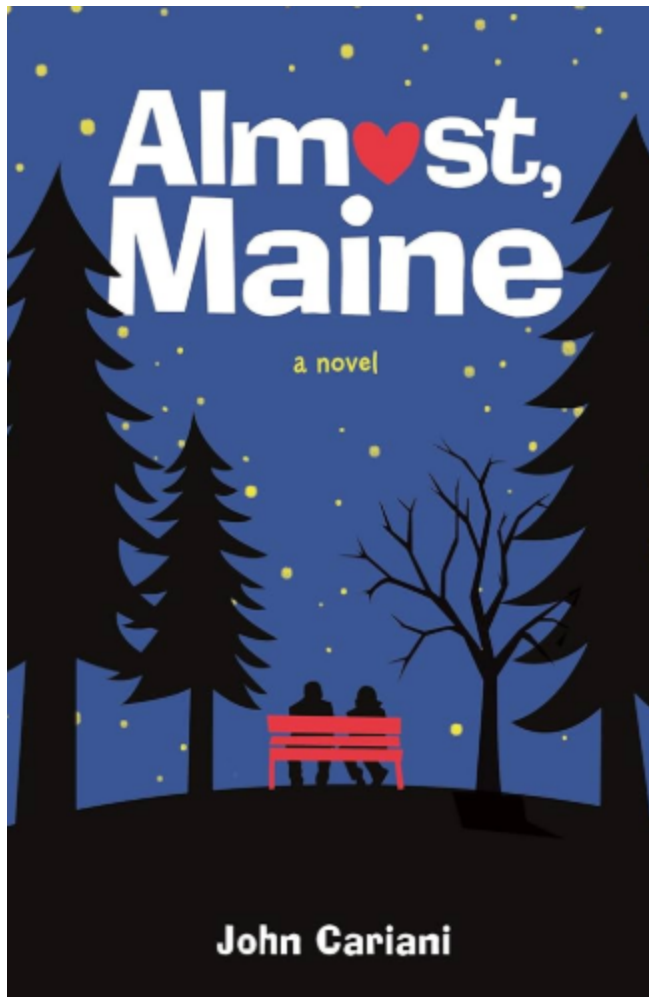

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NEWS

Previewing Almost, Maine!

MAY 19, 2025 BY MIKA HIGGINS-WOO

Every year, Dalton's Senior Performance course culminates in an intimate, student-directed performance in B06 known as the Senior Projects. Students enrolled in the course work all year in preparation to direct a piece, learning different directing techniques and preparing for the auditioning and casting process. Traditionally, the final Senior Project performance has been a collection of short plays—one 10-minute piece per student director. However, with the success of last year's Senior Project, *Machinal*, a full-length play directed by five seniors together, this year's Senior Performance class is again directing one piece as a team: *Almost, Maine* by John Cariani.

Almost, Maine, a sweet and well-known show (it was the show most produced by high schools in the 2010s!), is a play composed of nine vignettes about love. One of the quirks of the show is that each mini story is set in the same place: the town of Almost, located in Maine. Additionally, each story is also supposedly happening at the same time; the northern lights appear at the end of every scene, implying that each scene is happening within the same ten minutes. From a dramatic marriage on the brink of disaster, to a comedic proposal, to a heartwarming "friends to lovers" scene, *Almost, Maine* has every love trope imaginable.

Despite its wit, humor, and plot twists, the underlying theme driving *Almost, Maine* is hope. Oliver Katz ('26), one of the student directors, remarks that "I think what really sets *Almost, Maine* apart for me is the undercurrent of hope it carries. One of the reasons we chose to do *Almost, Maine* at all was the belief intrinsic in the show that there is magic in the mundane. The most beautiful moments can be the most ordinary. Sometimes, in today's crazy world, it's easy to forget that. Yet, every time I've read through the play I end up smiling because it captures the beauty and pure hope that comes in simple human connection. Very little is simple today. This play gives me hope that some things, some moments can be."

Annika Rajaram ('29), who plays "Steve" in Dalton's production of *Almost, Maine*, brings up another central theme of the show: community. Although each story is separate from each other, playwright Cariani will often have characters in one scene mention characters from other scenes, as neighbors often do. This recall of past characters creates a sense of familiarity and community which is central to the piece. Rajaram remarks: "Unlike other shows I've been in where they either are a collection of short, unrelated scenes or one large show that follows one or more characters, *Almost Maine* does a great job of building a community

by showing snapshots of different townspeople's lives, helping to tell a larger story of both the town and the community."

According to Katz, *Almost, Maine* is a perfect match for the senior project format. "One of the things I love about Senior Projects is the intimacy of the show. Every year, Senior Projects feature small person-centric scenes, each between just a few people. For that reason, I think *Almost, Maine* really captures the essence of Senior Projects...the small connections between the characters just feel so real and so poignant." Katz mentions that in deciding what show to direct this year, the Senior Performance class wanted to balance the collective community that *Machinal* created with its full cast of performers while preserving the intimate rehearsal process between a director and a small group of actors that had defined previous Senior Projects. Choosing *Almost, Maine*, a full-length play made up of smaller scenes, struck that balance perfectly, according to Katz.

The rehearsal process, like most Senior Project rehearsal processes, is notable in its difference from the processes of more traditional, mainstage productions at Dalton such as the musical and the play festival. As each scene consists of two or three characters, rehearsals are extremely intimate and actors can really take the time they need to dissect the text and feel out the blocking (movement and positioning of actors on stage) before performing. Gemma Parnell-Richardson ('27), who plays "Glory" in *Almost, Maine*, remarks that "[she is] enjoying getting to rehearse in such a small group (e.g. me, my scene partner, and director)! Going through the scene feels, in a great way, just like a conversation." Rajaram adds to this sentiment, exclaiming that "[she has] very much enjoyed working with the student directors (specifically Stella, [her] director!) who have been a part of the Dalton theater program for a while! They have so much to share, and learning from them and their advice has been both a wonderful experience and something that [she] will carry with [her] into future productions."

Although the format of the senior projects this year mimics that of last year, this year marks brings "firsts" to the tradition as well. This year, Theater Design teacher Meg Zeder's new "Design and Technical Theatre" class is also lending a hand in putting on the production. Students enrolled in that class are fully designing the sets, costumes, and props for the entire show, as well as consulting with the directors to incorporate their ideas into their plans. This process was created in order to parallel that of a professional production, with directors and

designers working in tandem to create a production on a short timeline. One of the highlights of the design team's process was a field trip they took around New York City to multiple thrift stores in order to purchase costumes.

Ultimately, whether you're looking for a comedy or a drama, a realistic story or a magical one, *Almost, Maine* is the performance to see. As Rajaram says, "It has a nice cozy vibe while also simultaneously feeling almost magical...it can truly speak to everyone."

Almost, Maine will be performed on May 18 at 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., and on May 19th at 4:00 p.m. in B06.

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