
THE DALTONIAN

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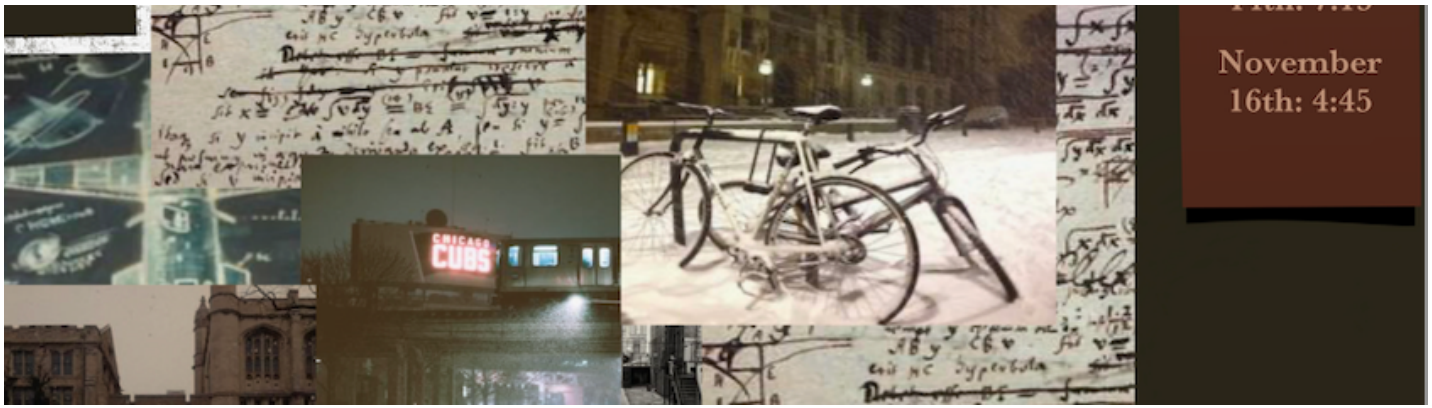
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Previewing: Dalton's 2024 Fall Play Festival!

NOVEMBER 10, 2024 BY MIKA HIGGINS-WOO

This fall, three wonderfully inventive and engaging shows are coming to the Martin Theater during our theater department's Fall Play Festival. Taking place from November 11-16, this year's festival includes *Pride and Prejudice*, *Tartuffe*, and *Proof*.

In the past, a large-scale musical was performed in the fall, and the festival took place in the winter. However this year, Dalton's theater department decided to switch things up by moving the festival to the fall. Despite the timing change, the festival still features the same components as last year: a smaller, more intimate stage with seating on three sides instead of just one, a variety of shows each directed by different people, and smaller casts. "The play festival is honestly always the highlight of the performance year," said Tessa Chaet ('25), "I think it really showcases some of the talent we have hidden in the theater department."

From plot summaries to interviews with directors and cast members, below is everything you need to know about this year's shows!

Pride and Prejudice

Pride and Prejudice, directed by Ernie Johns, is a classic story centered around a gentry-class family of four daughters: Lizzy, Jane, Mary, and Lydia. In 1800s Britain, only male heirs could legally inherit land, so the girls' mother, Mrs. Bennet, is frantic to marry off her daughters quickly before they lose their land. While the play centers around the silly and awkward

shenanigans of an overly eager mother trying to marry off her daughters, it still brings forth the unfortunate fact that these marriages were Mrs. Bennet's only means of survival. In this way, Kate Hammil's version (but also the play in general) is quite the feminist play, remarking on the struggles of being a woman in a time period that wasn't kind to them. As each daughter has their own, unique personality, this play displays many attitudes towards marriage and love, from anger to excitement to disdain. The plot focuses on the clumsy yet wholesome relationship between Lizzy, a fierce and fiery soul intent on staying single, and Darcy, an arrogant gentleman from outside the county. The relationship between Lizzy and Darcy was essentially a blue-print for the modern day trop of enemies to lovers.

Originally published as a novel of manners by Jane Austen in 1813, the story has been adapted into multiple movies, a BBC mini-series, and numerous plays. The particular play adaptation that is part of Dalton's festival is by Kate Hammil. Despite the fact that Kate Hammil's version keeps the necessary dramatic and serious scenes, many current cast members will agree that this version is very comical, as it includes silly costume changes, over-the-top characters and stage directions, and many high-spirited characters.

Amalia Locker-Olesker ('26), who plays the main daughter Lizzy, exclaimed in an interview, "I am so excited to be involved in Ernie Johns's production of *Pride and Prejudice* this year! Ever since I first read *Pride and Prejudice* in my freshman year English class, I have loved both the story and the characters Jane Austen created. I am so excited to be able to bring a wholesome and comedic version of one of my favorite stories to life in the Martin Theater this fall alongside so many of my friends."

Ilana Breitman, Dalton art teacher and costume designer for all three plays, adds that "*Pride and Prejudice* is one of my most favorite stories, and it's a real joy to revisit it. I'm aiming for a more traditional Regency design for these looks, but balanced with the comedic double casting and slapstick."

Tartuffe

Tartuffe, a hilarious comedy told entirely in couplets, will be directed by Robert Sloan, the Dalton Theater Department Chair. In an interview with *The Daltonian*, Sloan recounted a brief

summary of the plot: "In *Tartuffe*, the fabulously wealthy Orgon is ready to give up his home, his money, even his daughter's hand in marriage all to gratify the charlatan Tartuffe, so besotted is he by the man's pious posturing." A play centering around obsession and submissiveness to a fault, *Tartuffe* is extremely captivating. Although it's set in mid-17th century France, many connect it to present-day by drawing parallels between some of the characters and current-day politicians in a way that makes it "more approachable than other pieces of the time," explains cast member Molly McCoy ('26).

McCoy goes on to explain that just as the play can be described as a bridge between the past and the present, the costumes reflect two fashion periods as well. Costume designer Ilana Breitman reveals that she plans to "experiment mixing current fashions with fashions of the 1660s, when the play premiered. The 1660s are already one of my absolute favorite time periods because the clothes, particularly the menswear, was insanely over the top. Working to find the exact right blend of old and new is a lot of fun as long as I don't lose any of those insane period details!"

As mentioned before, this production is going to be told in couplets. As this is similarly complex to Shakespearean iambic pentameter, cast members must work to find balance between honoring the couplet format while maintaining a rhythm that allows an audience to understand the nature of what they are saying. Tessa Chaet ('25), explains this concept well: "[A]n actor's job to understand and dramatize the rhyming language while also finding truth to what they're saying is a complicated yet exciting process."

Proof

Proof, directed by new Dalton director and beloved stage combat teacher Jose Maria Aguila, is a Tony and Pulitzer Prize-winning play. It centers around the death of a math genius working at the University of Chicago, whose mental health struggles impact his daughter Catherine. She seems to have inherited this genius for math and fears that she might end up like her father, tangled in mental health issues until his death. All of this is interrupted when a paradigm-shifting mathematical proof is found in one of her father's notebooks, and Catherine is forced to prove its authenticity. Additionally, Catherine finds herself in an unexpected relationship with her father's former student. Felix Norris-Lindsay '25, who plays Catherine's father, remarked that "The play explores everything from sexism, to family relationships, to

prime numbers, and playwright David Auburn ensures there is a remarkable depth in each and every character." Filled to the brim with drama and nuance, this play will be very thought-provoking for audience members.

Aquila is stepping into the role of director at Dalton for the first time. Already an accomplished choreographer, martial artist, and actor, he remarked that this play "is a masterwork by American playwright David Auburn. A winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, *Proof* explores genius, mental illness, family heredity, free will, the fleeting nature of creativity, and the passage of time. In this American-Chekhovian drama, we meet a family on the brink of a great change where characters are driven by duty, sacrifice, and the universal math that connects us all."

One exciting part of the *Proof* rehearsal process was a visit from David Auburn himself! Auburn sat in on a rehearsal, gave a talk about the writing process and even signed scripts. It was a very memorable and exciting experience for all cast members.

Aquila has stressed that outside research and script analysis are very beneficial to an actor before going in and rehearsing and memorizing lines. It provides context and additional information for actors to build off of. Norris-Lindsay explained that "[o]ur director Jose Maria Aguila has embraced the opportunity that a four-person play provides; that is, more rehearsal time dedicated to character analysis and table work." So far in the process, cast members have researched mathematicians and other important figures in the time period that may have been an influence in the creation of their characters, creating a wide base of collective knowledge which will help all of them inform our choices on stage.

Stella Miller '26, who plays Catherine, exclaimed in an interview "I'm really excited about *Proof*! It's been a lot of work already, but it's really rewarding. The play itself is so beautiful and well-written, and discusses themes that are extremely important and topical, especially to Dalton students. Playing Catherine has been an absolute honor, and I'm really excited for everyone to see the work everyone has put into their respective shows." Breitman remarked on the surprisingly difficult nature of costume designing this show: "*Proof* provides the opposite challenge as *Tartuffe* and [*Pride and Prejudice*] – designing contemporary clothes. Some people think period or fantasy designs are more impressive or more difficult than

contemporary, but this isn't true. Contemporary is harder because each individual audience member will know if even the slightest detail is off."

In all, this year's play festival brings a lot to the stage. With couplets and comedy, drama and prime numbers, aristocrats and marriage, there is truly something for everyone to enjoy.

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