

THE DALTONIAN

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THE DALTON PLAY FESTIVAL



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Dalton Presents: **Witch**

Written By Jen Silverman Directed By Ashleigh Bragg



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NEWS

Dalton's Winter Play Festival: An Overview

MARCH 18, 2025 BY MIKA HIGGINS-WOO

The third annual Dalton Play Festival ran from March 2-6. This year, for the festival, the Theater Department presented two plays: *Eleemosynary* by Lee Blessing and *Witch* by Jen Silverman. Each play is double-cast, meaning that there are two separate casts for each play. Unlike the previous two years when the Play Festival has been presented on a thrust stage (a stage with audiences seated on three sides), this year the theater was configured as a theater in the round.

Eleemosynary is a play that has only three characters—a woman named Dorothea, her daughter Artie, and her granddaughter Echo. The play concerns these women's attempt to reconcile years of family dysfunction. It premiered in 1985 at the Park Square Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota, and has been produced many times since then in other venues across the country, including the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1989.

Dalton's production of *Eleemosynary* was directed by Ernie Johns. Johns describes the play's message this way: "We live in family systems; it's the basic building block of society. But sometimes those systems fail us, and the ramifications can be felt across generations. And how we deal with this is, at its core, what *Eleemosynary* is about."

Stella Miller ('26), who played Dorothea in one of the casts of *Eleemosynary*, told the *Daltonian* that it "is a really rewarding show to work on, in part, I think, because the cast is so small. Because every character is onstage basically the whole show, we've really connected as a cast. Watching the show come together has been incredible; I'm really proud of the work we've done, and I'm excited for everyone to come see it."

Amalia Locker-Olesker ('26), who played Artie in one of the casts, observes that *Eleemosynary* is unique because all the characters are women and "their relationships are really foregrounded in the play." Also unique for Locker-Olesker is that "for the first time in [her] life, [she is] playing a mother, which is really interesting as someone who is 17 years old." She has been working hard to portray the mother-daughter relationship "so that it feels real and authentic and not like a caricature of what motherhood or being a mother or being a daughter is." She believes "that many other girls, no matter their age, when they come to the show, will see parts of themselves and their relationships with their mothers" reflected on the

stage. "Throughout the entire rehearsal process, it's just been so much fun," Locker-Olesker concludes, "just to kind of be in a girl group – I mean, other than our fantastic director Ernie. It really just feels so supportive and kind, and like we're all there for each other. It really does feel like a family, and I mean not only my cast but also our amazing Stage Manager, Sophie Lyons, and our amazing tech Ella Glassman. The show is just already one of the highlights of my Dalton theater career."

Violet Farmerie ('29), who played Echo in one of the casts, agrees. "Because the cast is so small, it's easy to bond with the rest of the members," she says. "Ernie and Sophie are a duo that make rehearsals really fun."

The other production, *Witch*, is an inventive retelling of a Jacobean drama involving passion, humor, the devil bargaining for people's souls, and a woman who has been labelled a witch. It had its world premiere at the Writers Theatre in Glencoe, Illinois, in 2018, and has been produced many times in regional theater and school settings since then.

New Dalton Theater Teacher Ashleigh Bragg directed this production of *Witch*. She explains: "At the heart of this story, the playwright...is asking the audience and particularly those of marginalized and oppressed groups to try to reimagine a new world – one in which the patterns of violence and patriarchy do not rule over all. Is it possible to imagine a world in which this does not exist? And if it does not exist, is it worth selling your soul to the devil to destroy that patriarchal, imperialist, capitalist world, the only world we've all ever known, and trade it for a new one, liberated from all of that? This play was written in 2018, but its central question of 'what is a soul worth?' is timeless. These themes are parallel to our current reality, as our youth will help shape our future. A future that stands on the verge of possible war/revolution/rise and fall of civilization as we know it. What hope do we have right now? This play is a reflection of our times, and I chose it because, as my favorite High Priestess of Soul Nina Simone once said: 'An artist's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to reflect the times.'"

Several freshmen made their straight play debuts at Dalton in *Witch*. Sophie Gelman ('29), who played Sir Arthur Banks in one of the casts, reports that "rehearsals are going smoothly. We've seen our costumes; we've run through the show; we've used fake blood; the bulk of the work is done. I am excited for dress rehearsals, because I think that seeing everyone in costume, saying lines, full set, will be so great."

Veronica Steele ('29), who played Winnifred in one of the casts of *Witch*, agrees that "the rehearsal process has been going great! This is my first ever play, and it's also my second production ever at Dalton, so it's still pretty new to me. The cast and crew are so welcoming, and it's been so much fun to get so involved in my character. It's amazing to see a play with representation; I absolutely love the queer aspect, as it's something I can connect to."

Chizaram Utobunwa-Nwachukwu ('29), who played Elizabeth Sawyer in one of the casts of *Witch*, says she likes the show "because it's interesting and I believe, and I like how all of the stories [within the play] connect."

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