

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES ON "DOUBT"

A few days into rehearsals of this play, I received an email from a friend. It consisted of only two words: "Did he?"

My friend was, of course, referring to the question that looms over any production of John Patrick Shanley's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "Doubt."

The dramatic tension in "Doubt" is built upon the suspicions that Sister Aloysius, principal of St. Nicholas Catholic School, has about the possible sexual misconduct of her parish priest, Father Flynn. Set in 1964, the story takes place on the cusp of the explosive changes in the Catholic Church after Vatican II, and long before the issues surrounding sexual misconduct became headline news. The play's central question is whether or not Father Flynn is guilty, or is he being falsely accused.

Although the word "pedophile" and the term "sexual abuse" are never mentioned, Shanley asks us to raise the power of doubt in our own minds, as he makes the viewer struggle to understand what kind of damage "doubt" as well as "certainty" can do.

"You can't know exactly what's going on in your neighbor's house or in his head or his heart," Shanley says. "You can make suppositions, you can make assumptions, but you always have to factor in that you can't know. The title "Doubt" really had the power for me, not the Catholic Church scandals. I meant that to be implied in a variety of ways as a powerful and useful tool to answer something in the culture."

A Bronx native who attended Catholic schools, Shanley may have put it best in one interview when he said, "Certainty is often a feeling and not often anything more. The power of that feeling can be corrupt and not founded on anything truthful or just."

It's important to point out that Shanley has *not* written an indictment of the church. This play never looks down on Catholicism, and it actually celebrates what good priests and nuns are all about.

In the best of all theatrical worlds, all that audiences need to be enthralled is an intriguing story illuminated by outstanding performances. I believe this production succeeds on both levels.

Theatre In The Park's production stars Lynda Clark as Sister Aloysius, David Henderson as Father Flynn, Rasool Jahan as Mrs. Muller, and Michelle Wood as Sister James.

The set for our production, designed by Steve Larson, is very minimalistic. We employ rear screen projections to help establish place and time. Costumes are by Susan Smith.

"Doubt" premiered at the Manhattan Theatre Club on November 23, 2004, before moving to Broadway, at the Walter Kerr Theatre, in March of the following year. It instantly became the most celebrated play of the season, taking the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama; Best New Play Awards from the New York Drama Critics' Circle, the Lucille Lortel Foundation, the Drama League, the Outer Critics Circle, and the Drama Desk; the Obie; and Four Tony Awards (Best Play, Best Actress in a Play, Best Featured Actress in a Play, and Best Director).

As for Father Flynn, did he or didn't he? If you come to Theatre In The Park's production seeking a tidy conclusion, be advised that "Doubt" lives up to its title. You'll find that, at the end, only John Patrick Shanley knows for sure. As he says: "Doubt itself is a passionate exercise."

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