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‘Into the Breeches!’ Is a Love Letter to the Theater

Wartime play-within-a-play brings laughs, love for Department of Theatre and Film’s season opener

OCTOBER 2, 2022 BY KATHERINE STEWART



Ole Miss sophomores (from left) Ward Sikma and Hannah Rose Richards and senior Catrina Winters are the stage manager, director and seamstress of the fictional Oberon Play House in George Brant’s “Into the Breeches!” The UM Department of Theatre and Film production runs through Oct. 9 in Meek Auditorium. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – The arts are a naturally reflective discipline, and among all the visual and performing arts, theater is perhaps the most self-reflective: **plays about theater** are as common as songs about love.

“Into the Breeches!” the latest production by the University of Mississippi **Department of Theatre and Film**, is a tender, joyful example of this genre.

“This play is the ultimate love letter to the theater,” said Lindsay Rae Taylor, director and assistant professor of performance. “It’s very celebratory of the creative process.”

“Into the Breeches!” runs through Oct. 9 in Meek Auditorium, with performances at 2 p.m. Sunday (Oct. 2) and Oct. 8-9 and at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday (Oct. 4-8). Tickets are available online or in person at the **Ole Miss Box Office** or by calling 662-915-7411.

The story, written by George Brant, centers on the fictional Providence, Rhode Island-based Oberon Play House, shuttered in 1942 after its male artistic director and cast members have volunteered to fight in World War II.

Among those left behind is Maggie Dalton, who, with the notes of her director husband in hand, takes it upon herself to stage a production of Shakespeare’s “Henriad,” a four-hour epic comprising several of Shakespeare’s “history plays.” All these plays focus on kings and have majority male casts.

“There’s a beautiful parallel between what’s happening with the war, and what’s happening within the play because, of course, the ‘Henrys’ are also war plays.” Taylor said.

“George Brant has done a wonderful job of combining what’s happening in the real world and what’s happening in Shakespeare’s world. It wraps together very sweetly with a lot of comedy, a lot of heartwarming comments and a lot of fun characters.”

Hannah Rose Richards, a sophomore in the acting for stage and screen program from Brandon, loves her character, Maggie Dalton.

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Campus Briefs

Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children’s play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Ole Miss In the News

Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith’s Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school’s first African-American student.



Hannah Rose Richards (center), as theater director Maggie Dalton in George Brant's "Into the Breeches!" discusses the fictional Oberon Play House's production of Shakespeare's "Henriad" with that theater's stage manager, Stuart Lasker, played by Ward Sikma (left), and seamstress, Ida Green, played by Catrina Winters. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

"Her journey over the course of the show is about finding herself and independence," Richards said. "She finds herself because in the absence of her husband, she has to be able to become her own individual.

Richards acknowledged that her character's trajectory was not unlike her own as a college student.

"College is such a spot where you figure out who you are, and I think that's a very universal journey" she explained.

Alongside the tender moments, optimism, and characteristic can-do spirit of the era, the show asks cultural questions that remain relevant:

questions about inclusivity and exclusivity, prejudice, and moral obligation.

Ward Sikma, a sophomore from Water Valley in the acting for stage and screen program, plays Stuart Lasker, the Oberon's stage manager, who finds himself – without spoiling a plot twist – in some ways between worlds, unable to fully fit in anywhere.

"Considering the time and place, he's not at war for certain reasons," Sikma said.

"If I had to describe this show in one word, I'd say 'solidarity.' I think that's what this show is really about."

Aligning herself with Stuart is Ida Green, the Oberon's seamstress, who also feels herself to be on the outside looking in. But she uses her role as seamstress to guide the Oberon toward its point – and its progress – through the costumes she designs.

Senior Catrina Winters, from Vicksburg, plays Ida, and said the role was among her favorites from the many she's had the opportunity to perform during her time at Ole Miss.

"Playing the character Ida has been the most honoring yet challenging role I have ever had to step foot into in my time at the University of Mississippi," Winters said. "She carries a weight that I can relate to as a Black actress; however, there was a part of that weight that I couldn't understand until I fully stepped into her world."

"Into the Breeches!" doesn't shy away from difficult themes, but it treats these issues with humor and kindness; the play-within-a-play's rehearsals are filled with hilarious and heartwarming surprises, many of which come from Ida's clever costuming choices. Ultimately, these behind-the-scenes moments help the Oberon arrive at its poignant point.

"I think it's a beautiful story," director Taylor said. "I hope that people will connect with it ... and certainly find some comfort in it, and some empathy.

"But mostly I want people to laugh."

The lights go down on George Brant's "Into the Breeches!" just as the play's fictional Oberon Play House raises them on its "Henriad." And though audiences don't see the play-within-a-play, they know the Oberon will make its poignant point – as Brant does his, as all theaters do – on the stage.

FILED UNDER: **DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND FILM, NEWS RELEASES**

"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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