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UA theatre department brings “Ghosts” to life

Sam West

The death of a lord throws an aristocratic family into turmoil. A mother is left without her husband, and a son returns home to learn his father wasn't the man he thought he knew.

This is the story of “Ghosts,” a play by Henrik Ibsen that will be performed starting Feb. 22 at 7:30 p.m. in the Allen Bales Theatre. Though the story takes place in 19th century Norway, the cast and director are confident its themes of family drama will appeal to modern viewers.



“What’s kind of amazing is that the playwright wrote this so, so long ago, but some of the themes of missed connections with your family still resonate today,” said Zach Stolz, a junior majoring in theatre and dance who plays the son in “Ghosts.” “I think the audiences are going to see themselves reflected in the play, whether they want to or not.”

This is the second show this school year by Raines Carr, a master’s student in directing. Last semester, he led the production of “Seduced,” a story based on the life of Howard Hughes. Though “Ghosts” is a very different play, he said he was interested in it because he admired its writer and themes. To the director, “Ghosts” is about how we deny ourselves who we really want to be because of our duty to family.

“There’s the issue of, how do you become yourself, an individual, within a family unit?” Carr said. “We all struggle to attain that.”

To effectively portray his role as Oswald, the family’s oldest son, Stolz said he often tapped into feelings and friction from his own family life. The actor described this as an essential process, especially to make an older work understandable to modern audiences.

“If you’re not relying on very real emotions and motivations, you’re doing a disservice to the audience, and, more importantly, the story,” Stolz said.

This week begins the final rehearsals before the show is performed before an audience. In the next few days, lights and technical work will be incorporated into the play. Stolz said the actors are beginning to get in sync.

“It’s been really fun to watch everyone start to fly and take ownership of the play,” Stolz said.

The director said he's seen bonds and chemistry grow amongst his cast members, none of whom really knew each other before the start of the play.

As a director, Carr said he tried to be as open as possible. He described his role as guiding the actors in understanding the play, and making sure they performed to the best of their abilities.

"I like to be as open as possible, so the actor has the opportunity to discover the play for themselves," Carr said.

Stolz confirmed this process, describing Carr as an adaptive director concerned with the individual growth of each cast member.

"From the first day, he said he wanted it to be 80 percent us and 20 percent him," Stolz said.

Carr's last show, "Seduced," ended with a surprise for audiences – gunfire. One character shot another using a real handgun loaded with blanks. The director wouldn't give specifics, but said there would be more unusual props in "Ghosts."

"There are some organic things that will happen, that you'll see, feel and hear," Carr said. "It's a play that will leave you very unsettled at the end."