

New Clarence Brown production to show feminist, psychological drama

Moira Charnot, Contributor
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On Sept. 26 at 7:30 p.m. the Clarence Brown Theatre will be giving their preview show of “Alias Grace.”

There will be a pre-show reception prior to the matinee performance on Sept. 30, and a panel discussion with the playwright and other expert panelists in the sociology, criminology, and law fields after the performance.

The production will be featuring visiting guest actors such as Katie Norwood Alley and Tim Decker, UT faculty and graduate and undergraduate Theater students of UT.

“Getting to work with these professionals is definitely the best part of the Clarence Brown Theatre,” said senior in theatre Emily Helton, who will be playing the role of Nancy Montgomery. “(Working with professionals is) the best kind of education, and I feel like we’re getting what we paid for. They’re especially helpful in explaining to us how the industry works, not exactly sugarcoating – they’re really getting us ready.”

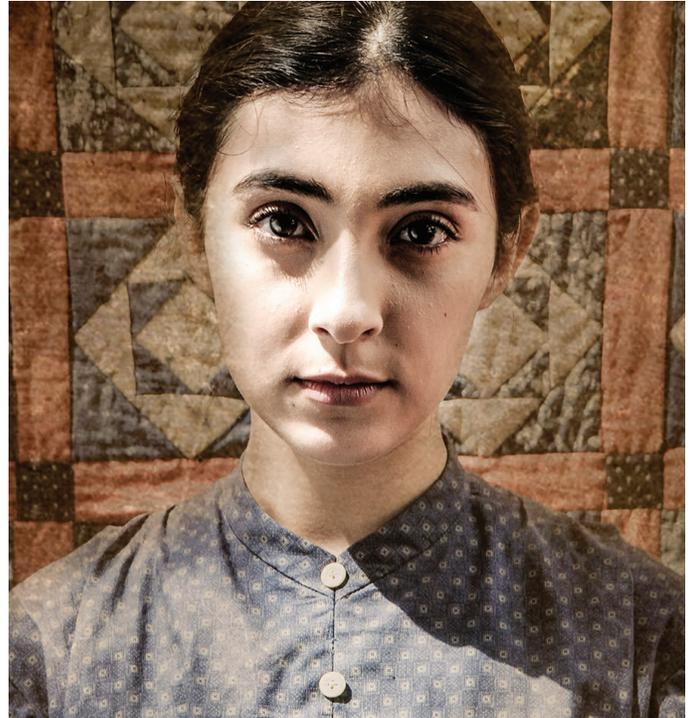
The production was adapted from the critically acclaimed book of the same title, written by award-winning Canadian author Margaret Atwood, based on a true story. In 2017, the production was adapted to the stage by Jennifer Blacker, directed by Karen Kessler and it premiered at the Chicago Rivendell Theater. Since its original performance there, “Alias Grace” has been nominated for, “Best New Play Adaptation” by the Chicago Joseph Jefferson Awards in 2018.

“Ms. Atwood is a brilliant writer and she created a brilliant character in Grace. Jennifer Blackmer also is a brilliant writer who rigorously and doggedly sifted through the book, and created a script that is a theatrical distillation of this novel. I’m the one lucky enough to be given the chance to bring Grace’s story to life,” Kessler said in the show’s press release.

Alias Gracetakes place in a prison in the 1860’s, and it explores the pre-Freudian days of psychology as Dr. Simon Jordan interviews several mentally ill patients. In this play, the main character, Grace Marks, is imprisoned for life for several murders that she claims she had no memory of committing. Dr. Jordan intends to find out the truth of the matter.

“This play is mainly a mystery that explores Grace’s path to the truth through psychology,” Emily Cullum, a senior theatre student, who will be playing the role of Mary Whitney, said. “My character’s role is to aid Grace in her journey to discover who she really is.”

“[Whitney is] a very dynamic and multi-layered character; she’s definitely the most challenging character I’ve had so far,” Cullum added.



Brenda Orellana as “Grace Marks” by Elizabeth Aaron

While the play has been rooted in mystery themes based off of the true story of several murders, the production also makes a somewhat political statement of the circumstances surrounding the murders when studying Grace's psychology.

"This is also a feminist play that tells a lot about a woman's place in society," Collin Andrews, a second year graduate student in theatre, who will be playing Thomas Linear, said. "There are also several modern parallels between the treatment of women then and now, in both society and psychology."

According to the stage manager, and senior in theatre, Delaynie Rizer, who has been involved with the Clarence Brown Theatre in stage management since her freshman year at UT, this performance will be "unforgettable" for the theatre.

Rizer described the director of the production as, "phenomenal," and the cast, "on fire," feeling that all her work has been leading up to, "this moment."

"I am so crazy-confident in this play; I would have to say I'm about one hundred and twenty percent confident. I'm really hoping this performance will blow people out of the water," Rizer said.

Showings of "Alias Grace" at the Clarence Brown Theatre will run Sept. 26 to Oct. 14.