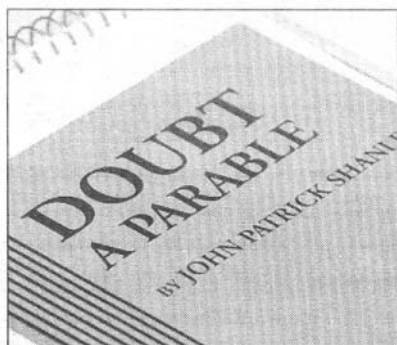


When in 'Doubt'

Pulitzer Prize-winning drama launches
new theater venture



Three years ago, John Patrick Shanley's thoughtful and questioning play "Doubt" opened on Broadway to critical acclaim, and Tony and Pulitzer prizes. Now, the founders of the new Emerson Theatre Collaborative are mounting the play to launch their new dramatic venture. "We are hoping to start a new, professional theater company for the Southeastern Connecticut region," says Camilla Ross of Colchester, who founded the ETC with Emma Palzere-Rae of Groton, the executive director of the Chorus of Westerly.

"We're really interested in the classic dramas, the plays that aren't done anymore," Ross says, "and we want to make good theater accessible for the community, to have great, quality theater here - we deserve it. It's a wonderful community of people, and there is always room for a new entity. I think we have what it takes to make it successful."

Ross and Palzere-Rae are both gradu-

ates of Emerson College in Boston, and they've used the college's alumni association as well as their own personal contacts to build a new regional company based on Emerson alumni. "We're everywhere," Ross laughs, "and it's wonderful to be able to draw on the institution for talent."

Ross says that she started meeting with Palzere-Rae, with whom she acted in college some twenty years ago, to come up with a new outlet for their love of performing. "We started having coffee about two years ago, talking about forming a company. Finally we said, well, we should just go ahead and do it."

So this spring they began reading scripts and chose "Doubt," one of the most powerful American dramas of recent years. "Doubt" tells the story of Sister Aloysius, the headmistress of a Catholic school for boys in the Bronx in 1964, and her growing conviction that one of her most popular and dynamic teachers, Father Flynn, has sexually molested a student.

Despite the paucity of hard evidence and the introduction of numerous doubts from various quarters - including other nuns at the school, and the boy's own mother - Sister Aloysius carries through with her determination to expose Father Flynn, though her own career may be on the line if she continues to do so.

"The plot turns on so many issues, and the playwright is just masterly in the way he develops the theme of doubt versus faith," says Palzere-Rae, who's been seen on many local stages and who plays Sister Aloysius in this production. "He doesn't waste a word in this play, and actually, not even a syllable - you'll go through a bit of dialogue and realize how packed it is, how tight with meaning. Race, gender, sexuality, you go to all these places where you don't expect to be going."

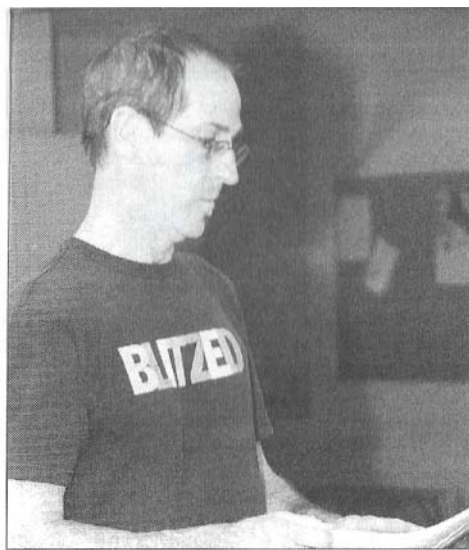


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- Director Albert Cremin

"We want people to think," adds Camilla Ross. "We want to leave people with different impressions, to go away talking about this play. The things we do and the things we way are so important, and a lot of times we lose that, for whatever reason. What this play does is bring that to the forefront - it makes us think about what comes out of our mouths. And if we thought about that a little more than we do, there would be so much less unhappiness."

Another Emerson alumnus, Albert Cremin of Malden, Mass., will direct the production. "I worked with him in New York, at Plays For Living," says Palzere-Rae, "and we're blessed to have Albert as our director. There is so much that's ambiguous in this play, and so much meaning in the words that it totally requires a director

to orchestrate it, where the emotion should be, and where it should be more lacking in emotion. Everything is so highly charged, and Albert is having us make choices very carefully, so the story is told clearly."

Cremin, who is also designing an abstract, modular set to go in the sanctuary of Union Baptist Church in Mystic, where "Doubt" will be performed, works as an actor, dancer, choreographer, director, producer, teacher, coach and designer. He made his professional debut in Pennsylvania playing Felix in Neil Simon's "The Odd Couple," and has been seen in many theaters around Boston.

"Our director and his vision for this show are phenomenal," says Ross, who plays Mrs. Muller, the mother of the boy who may have been molested. "Just when you think something is going to turn out one way, it throws you for a loop. And Emma, of course, is just fantastic."

Joining Ross and Palzere-Rae on stage are Stephen Daniel Sherman of New York as Father Flynn, and Heidi Harger of Niantic as Sister James, an enthusiastic young nun who witnesses some of the questionable activity between Father Flynn and the boy, but who also questions Sister Aloysius' reactions to the events.

Harger has acted in several outdoor Shakespeare productions with the Flock Theater of New London, and has also appeared at the Spirit of Broadway theater in Norwich, and in New York City.

Sherman's career in New York City includes the Off-Broadway production of "Tony and Tina's Wedding," and touring productions of "The Who's Tommy," "Aladdin," and Cheap Sunglasses."

Bronx-born playwright John Patrick Shanley has explored ethnic Italian life in New York with such plays as "Italian-American Reconciliation" and "Moonstruck," which was made into a film with Nicholas Cage and Cher. More recently he directed his own screenplay, "Joe Versus the

Volcano," with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan.

The Emerson Theater Collaborative's mission is "to serve youth, underrepresented communities, and artists with an emphasis on diversity by producing innovative and exhilarating theater in southeastern Connecticut," says Ross, the current president. "By exploring timely themes and issues through original works and modern theatrical classics, ETC develops and nurtures emerging and professional artists by collaborating with the Emerson College network of alumni and students. We'd like to be a place for them to be able to stop and learn, before getting to New York, or going to L.A."

Ross, who teaches accounting at Three Rivers Community College in Norwich, lives in Colchester with her husband Jack Ross and 16-year-old son Joe Caruso. She is also a theater advisor at Three Rivers, sings with the Connecticut Lyric Opera Company, and is a playwright who has appeared in play readings with the Writer's Block and other local writers' groups.

"We looked around at the theater being offered in southeastern Connecticut," Ross says, "and considered the people who live and visit here and we felt there was an opportunity that has been overlooked - and that is to present quality, professional theater that would entertain, inspire and get people talking and thinking. *Doubt* came to mind immediately as the kind of play we could get excited about producing and we hope the people in the region will be excited by it too."

"Doubt" will be presented by the Emerson Theatre Collaborative at Union Baptist Church in Mystic on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 15, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24. All performances are at 8 p.m. except Sunday, Aug. 17, which will be at 4 p.m. Proceeds will benefit Noank Baptist Group Homes, Inc., serving the youth of southeastern Connecticut. Additional information is available at EmersonTheatreCollaborative.org.



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- From left, Stephen Daniel Sherman, Heidi Harger, and Emma Palzere-Rae rehearse a scene from "Doubt."

- Camilla Ross listens apprehensively.