

DOUBT

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The play became "Doubt: A Parable." Shanley set it at a Catholic school in the Bronx in the fall of 1964, after the Kennedy assassination had rocked the nation. In this one-act play, Sister Aloysius, the principal of St. Nicholas, suspects Father Flynn of "interfering" with Donald Muller, the school's first black student. She has no proof that anything untoward has happened, just her suspicions.

Shanley's widely known as the man who wrote the screenplay of the 1987 film "Moonstruck." He received an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay and the movie won six more Academy Awards. Bravo placed it at number 72 on their list of "100 Funniest Movies" and it's number 41 on AFI's "100 Years... 100 Laughs." Shanley penned other screenplays, including cult favorite "Joe Versus the Volcano," starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, which he also directed.

Shanley wrote the screenplays for "Moonstruck" and "Joe Versus the Volcano."

But theater is his first love, and among theater-goers, Shanley's known for his numerous off-Broadway plays, including "Italian American Reconciliation" and "Danny and the Deep Blue Sea." "Doubt: A Parable" was his first to hit Broadway. It opened off-Broadway at the Manhattan Theatre Club in November 2004, then opened on Broadway a few months later, starring Cherry Jones, Brian F. O'Byrne, Heather Goldenhersh and Adriane Lenox. The play won Obie Awards for Shanley and Jones, and after hitting Broadway was nominated for eight Tony Awards. It received four, including Best Play. It also received the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play and a Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Jones headed the national touring production and "Doubt" won the 2007 Touring Broadway Award for Best Play.

It has premiered in Australia, Singapore, the Philippines, New Zealand and Britain, and Roman Polanski directed it in Paris.

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—John Patrick Shanley



Lisa Morgan and Brendan Powers star in "Doubt: A Parable" at the Florida Rep.

Shanley says it's currently the most produced play in the United States. "Doubt" makes its Southwest Florida debut this month at the Florida Repertory Theatre, running from Jan. 11 through Feb. 3. Maureen Heffernan will direct Lisa Morgan, Brendan Powers, Rachel Burttram and Patricia Idlette in this powerful, thought-provoking play.

"Doubt" has a galvanizing effect on audiences, who often leave the theater arguing and discussing. (The actors claim that Act II of the play takes place after the curtain drops: the long, passionate conversations theater-goers engage in immediately after.) People have even written Shanley, asking him to solve arguments: is the priest guilty or not?

"Sometimes, that's sort of the murder-mystery level of the play that captures many people's imaginations, and they want to know the answer," Shanley says. "And many more people go beyond the murder-mystery of the play, the idea of solving something, to living with the experience of doubt as a positive and powerful force."

He's received strong responses to previous plays he's written, Shanley says, but the response to "Doubt" was unprecedented.

"The nature of this response, once people walked out of the theater, was different," he says. "People continued to talk about the play, not simply as a visceral experience. Virtually everyone was walking out, going to dinner, and talking about the play, and that was something new. It took me a while to perceive that, as it wasn't happening in the theater. There was a second wave [of conversation and reaction] after people have seen the play."

"Reactions absolutely didn't go along gender lines, it had to do with something else. People start to notice, while they're watching the play, their own preconceptions. They talk to people after. They think they've had the same experience as that person, and when they find out they didn't, it's a bit of a shock."

People go through phases, he says. They often start out trying to convince others that their own perception is correct, but then get to a point where they enjoy questioning their own response to the story.

"That's when people stop being Demo-

If you go

- >> **What:** "Doubt: A Parable"
- >> **When:** Jan. 11 through Feb. 3
- >> **Where:** Florida Repertory Theatre, at the Arcade Theatre on Bay Street between Hendry and Jackson in downtown Fort Myers
- >> **Cost:** \$17, \$34 and \$38
- >> **Information:** Call 332-4488 or go to BoxOffice@FloridaRep.org

crats and Republicans and start being human beings again, and that's what I like to see," says Shanley, who says that "this is not a left-leaning play or a right-leaning play."

During the same time "Doubt" is playing on the boards at Florida Rep, Shanley will finish directing the movie adaptation of his play. It's being shot on location in his native Bronx. Shanley wrote the screenplay, and found it interesting to return to the same material and rework it in a different medium.

"Originally 'Doubt' was conceived of as a play, because those seemed to be the right materials to express what I wanted to express," he says. "Over time, having done that, I'm returning to the source material and using materials that film provides: a lot more scope, expansion of the world, the neighborhood surrounding the church and the play. That's something I knew very well and grew up with, so it's a natural expansion."

In the movie, he says, audiences will get to see all the kids, the other teachers, and those in the rectory and convent. He hired his first grade school teacher, Sister James, now called Sister Peggy, to act as technical consultant.

The movie, produced by Scott Rudin, stars Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams and Viola Davis. His cinematographer is Roger Deakins, who most recently shot the Coen Brothers' "No Country for Old Men."

Filming, he says, "has been very good. Everybody is on the same page. Meryl and I have a terrific working relationship, and I've known Phil for several years... He's hands down the most serious actor I've worked with. He's so serious about what he's doing that I feel trivial working

with him. I might occasionally think about lunch," he jokes.

"Amy Adams is a wonderful, sprightly, and very able actress. Meryl is endlessly complicated in a great way, tremendously committed to the work ethic, willing to go to any lengths to find the more interesting corner of a moment. And Phil is this kind of complex Sherman tank who's going right through everything."

"It's an incredible cast. It's great to have a second fantastic cast of a different stripe, to see fresh colors coming out of it, as you don't often in life get a true second chance."

Miramax Films is slated to release the movie between Thanksgiving and Christmas later this year.

Like the play, the movie is likely to cause passionate discussions, and, he hopes, increase people's comfort level with their own doubts. There's a lot of gray in-between black and white, and growth comes from living in that gray, Shanley feels.

"When you talk about a play teasing people's minds," Shanley says, "it's an accurate representation of the way I experience life: with all its unsolved internal puzzles, open questions, provocations that I've returned to again and again, something in my life that provoked, that I could see always in a different way, in a different angle. And all of them are true, and each one adds to the prismatic effect of memory and morality and logistics. What did happen at any given moment of my life? As I returned to it again and again, it was a little bit different, a little bit more. Doubt doesn't reduce down, it expands. I see doubt as a positive force. Certitude shuts all the doors."

Doubt, which Shanley calls "the black sheep of emotion and ideas," has gotten a bad name.

"What's so great about certitude?" he says. "I don't get how somebody making up their mind that they no longer listen to any other information, no longer grow or change or evolve in their perspective [is a good thing.] How's that a stronger place than that person who says, 'This is how I think now. I know I'm going to learn more and my place will become more complex and utterly different.' That to me is a real grown-up." ■



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