

# NO DOUBT ABOUT IT

John Patrick Shanley's thought-provoking drama comes to Newport

By BARBARA B. COVELL  
For the TODAY

If certainty is the human conviction or sureness that something is true, then what is doubt? Is it that nagging uncertainty or lack of sureness for something construed as fact? And how do doubt and certainty play a role in our lives, our belief systems and our society as a whole?

This is the gripping concept of "Doubt: A Parable" by John Patrick Shanley, the latest production from Red Octopus Theatre Company. It oozes relevance to our society today, yet Shanley penned this script in 2004. Relevance is timeless, as told in this riveting story about the human tendency to ignore evidence and reason. Are ethical concepts always presented as truth?

Director Bonnie Ross guides stunning performances by Nathan Bush and Linda Capshaw, theater veterans who deliver polished interpretations as Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius at the St. Nicholas Church School in 1964. Father Flynn is a much-beloved, progressive parish priest who addresses head-on the value of uncertainty.

"Doubt can be a bond as powerful and sustaining as certainty," he says.

Sister Aloysius is the rigid and conservative principal, driven by a sense of duty to be constantly vigilant. Aloysius fosters deep mistrust toward her students, her fellow teachers and society in general.

Sister Aloysius conveys her severe manner and harsh criticisms to the impressionable, naive young nun, Sister James, portrayed by Autumn Green. Green is exceptional in delivering a pliable performance and plays right into Sister Aloysius' hand. Sister James tells Sister Aloysius she witnessed Father Flynn meeting privately with Donald Muller, the first African American student to attend St.



Nathan Bush as Father Flynn and Autumn Green as Sister James

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Nicholas Church School. The circumstances surrounding the private meeting lead Aloysius to suspect sexual misconduct.

The following interactions between Flynn, Aloysius, James and Mrs. Muller, played by Meagan Amos, are so beautifully crafted that audiences will understand why the Shanley won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Tony Award for Best Play. Director Ross' interpretation honors the writer's work.

Shanley's message, as stated in the preface to the play: "There is an uneasy time when belief has begun to slip but hypocrisy has yet to take hold, when the consciousness is disturbed but not yet altered. It is the most dangerous, important, and ongoing experience of life. The beginning of change is the moment of Doubt. It is that crucial moment when I renew my humanity or become a lie."

"There are no resolutions — only questions, only doubt," Ross said. "Why if we hold doubts, why do we not heed them? We can't know everything with certainty.

Father Flynn says certainty is an emotion, not a fact. If so many of our beliefs and decisions are based on partial information, how can we be certain of anything? And how do we live with doubt? How can we be so certain and yet be so wrong? If we must live with doubt, then we should embrace it, as well as our certainty."

This is not a religious or political play, but a narrative that explores ethical concepts. It runs 90 minutes and there is no intermission. But clearly the "second act" is what happens when audiences leave the theatre and discuss their opinions of the events.

"It is a parable which delineates a universal truth," Ross said, "the relevancy of which is profoundly apparent in our time, when so much misinformation is spread so rapidly, and we simply don't take the time to process or question."

Ross achieves her intent with excellent actors. The set, designed by Ross, is minimal, which pays homage to an "actor's play" with tasty dialogue.



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Linda Capshaw as Sister Aloysius (foreground) with Autumn Green as Sister James



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Nathan Bush as Father Flynn

Stage manager is Barbara Berge, light design by Ron Miller, light operator is Dean Seanor, sound operator is Desiree Cole, costumes by Bonnie Ross, and crew is Karole Vesnaugh-Pickett.

"Doubt: A Parable" runs from November 1 through 17, with performances at 7 pm every Friday and Saturday as well as Thursday, Nov. 14; and 2 pm matinées on Sunday, Nov. 10 and 17. Tickets, \$22 for adults or \$16 for students and seniors, are available at [www.coastarts.org](http://www.coastarts.org) or by calling 541-265-ARTS.