

Repertory theater looking to initiate a conversation

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Play Back of the Throat explores terrorism, perceptions, racial profiling

Everyone remembers where they were when they heard about the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. “Back of the Throat,” the upcoming production by Chehalem Players Repertory, explores this subject. Not 9/11 specifically, but how facts, evidence and perceptions can distort the truth and the impact created by racial profiling.

“It is political. The play is about a man named Khaled, a Muslim-American writer,” said Kym Herbst, director. “It takes place entirely in his apartment where two officials from Homeland Security show up very innocently and start asking him questions.”

Herbst said initially, Khaled is eager to help, but as the play unfolds the questions begin to shift and both Khaled and the audience begin to realize he’s the target.

“He responds to that, what brought the agents to his door, it’s all part of the story,” she said, adding that the play was actually suggested by a board member who had seen it performed a few years ago.

“It was powerful enough it stayed with him all these years,” she said. “So I read it and thought it was really interesting. It’s kind of like a Rorschach test, if you will, because it’s never made clear if Khaled is guilty of anything. You walk away and take what you will.”

She said for her, the ambiguity of it all is what’s most interesting. And with rehearsals underway, it’s already leading to some thought-provoking conversations.

“I think it’s interesting because some people in the cast are younger than I am so they don’t have the recognition of 9/11 and what Zeitgeist was pre-9/11,” Herbst said. “One of people in our cast actually lived in New York at the time and worked at the World Trade Center and would have been there on the day of attacks had his father not been in from out of town visiting. That’s added an interesting undercurrent as well.”

But perhaps most exciting, she said, is the conversation she hopes the play initiates.

“The Chehalem Players Repertory mission statement talks about trying to do cutting-edge theater that brings the community together to have a conversation,” she said. “That’s what I’m really excited about, the conversation that starts around where were you, what was it like for you, before and after, and how far we’re willing to go to keep ourselves safe.”

Even more so, she said she’s hoping people will stay after the performance for a talk-back session and share their stories, where they were and their memories about that day in history.

“Back of the Throat” opens April 25. For more information, visit chehalemplayersrep.org.



by: GARY ALLEN - Opening soon - Michah Bevins (Khaled) and Ruth Mandsager (Bartlett) rehearse a scene for Chehalem Players Repertory's play 'Back of the Throat.' The play opens April 25.