

Doubt, A Parable

March 27 - April 11, 2009

Friday - Saturday at 8 pm

Sunday April 5 at 2 pm

Tuesday April 7 at 8 pm

Reviewed March 27 by [Brad](#)[Hathaway](#)

Running time 1:30 - no intermission

♦ A Potomac Stages Pick for a superb play with performances to match

Tickets \$14 - \$16

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John Patrick Shanley examines the essence of doubt in ninety minutes of intense and absolutely absorbing human drama. He certainly gets to his point right up front. The opening line of the play is "What do you do when you're not sure?" He never takes the easy way out and never gives the audience a chance to either, with no revelations, no certainties and no easy answers. When you leave the theater, you, too, will still have ringing in your ears the final line: "Oh, I have such doubts!" Indeed, you may find yourself debating long into the night whether the priest is guilty or innocent and whether the sister was right in her actions. There is no correct answer and there is no end of justification for either side of either question. What isn't debatable is the quality of the play or the quality of the performance. Both are superb.



Storyline: A Roman Catholic nun who runs a parish school suspects that the young parish priest has established an inappropriate relationship with one of the boys in the school, but she has no proof. How should she deal with the situation?

The storyline above doesn't tell you exactly what the "inappropriate relationship" might be - neither does the author. He's not setting up a concrete "whodunit" or even a "what's-he-done." Instead, to see what Shanley's intent is, look to the subtitle: "A Parable." The moral dilemma facing Sister Aloysius is that she has doubts, not proof. She has duties and responsibilities too. The time is 1964. Today's revelations of pedophilia among clergy dating to that period make this a highly topical play, but its approach to the central question is timeless. No wonder Shanley received both the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for best play.

Shanley's script presents just four people as it lays out its conundrum. There's the sister herself. What a role! No simple stereotype of a set-in-her-ways, officious official. This nun is a widowed woman with a strength based on her discovery late in life of the certainty of the church, a certainty tempered by a lifetime of seeing how temporal things work. Cherry Jones earned a Tony for her performance in the role on Broadway and the Helen Hayes Award here when she brought the show to the [National](#). Laura Giannarelli gave a stunningly effective performance in it at Baltimore's [Everyman](#) last year, and now Adriana Hardy continues the tradition with a heart-touching performance. She teams nicely with Corrine Brush, who is convincing as the young teacher in the school who surfaces the initial suspicions. Blakeman Brophy plays the priest in question with charm and a nice sense of humor combined with dignity. The quality of the cast is maintained by Anissa Parekh in her one scene as the mother of the boy the sister suspects is the priest's victim.

Director Frank Pasqualino makes no effort to impose a unique interpretation on the script, letting its own strengths shine through and getting his cast to support each other in dialogue scenes. He also designed the sets for the four locations of the play's one dozen scenes. A large swinging structure constitutes the exterior wall of the church/school for some scenes and then is rotated by a team of stagehands to reveal the interior of the sister's office for others. Ken and Patti Crowley use tight pools of light at times to isolate such moments as the priest's sermons. For those sermons they add a nice touch by projecting the image of stained glass windows on the walls of the theater to bring the audience right into the church. The entire package -- design, direction, acting and that marvelous script -- is first rate.

Written by John Patrick Shanley. Directed by Frank Pasqualino. Design: Frank Pasqualino (set) Nicole Zuchetto (costumes) Ken and Patti Crowley (lights) Donna Reynolds (properties) Anna Hawkins (sound) Douglas Olmstead (photography) Robert Kraus (stage manager). Cast: Blakeman Brophy, Corrine Brush, Adriana Hardy, Anissa Parekh.