DOUBT: A PARABLE

BY JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY
DIRECTED BY WILLIAM BROWN
Dear Friends,

Welcome to our final production of our 2014/15 Season, and our first site-specific production in the company’s history! We’re deeply grateful and very excited to have the opportunity to create a production of John Patrick Shanley’s Pulitzer Prize-winner, Doubt: A Parable, at Glencoe Union Church as we continue with construction of and transition into our new home – the stunning new theatre center designed by Jeanne Gang!

It is particularly fitting that this partnership with the Church takes place at this time, and for this production, as they have generously provided rehearsal space to WT for many years. Therefore it is all the more thrilling to be able to present a fully realized production in their library space, and to welcome WT audiences inside the four walls of a place of deep faith to ponder the weighty questions raised by a masterful work of theatre like Doubt.

You’ll have an opportunity to hear more about the unique dynamic between faith and doubt in a letter from Reverend David Wood, the leader of Glencoe Union Church, in the “About the Play” section of this issue of The Brief Chronicle. Also in the “About the Play” section, Literary Manager Bobby Kennedy will explore the culture and setting surrounding the play, providing context for the action that takes place.

In the “Meet the Artists” section of this issue of The Brief Chronicle, we’ll provide some background on playwright John Patrick Shanley, offering some insight into the life that helped create one of the most respected writers of our time.

In the “Conversation” section at the back of this magazine, Director William Brown will explain what makes this site-specific production unique, and how he and scenic designer Kevin Depinet have transformed the church library into a theatre space. We’ll also chat with each of the actors appearing in our production as they reveal their understanding of the characters that they play, and how they approach such an intricate collection of manipulations and motivations.

Finally, in our “Engagement” section, we’ll hear from Sheri Goldstein, English Department Chair at Ida Crown Jewish Academy, about the work that her students did with WT teaching artists, and how they approach such an intricate collection of manipulations and motivations.

And, of course, next year marks our Inaugural Season in our new home! We’ll first celebrate our history with a production in our beloved bookstore space, then move in to our new home with two productions in the center’s 250-seat Alexandria C. and John D. Nichols Theatre and one in its jewel-box 50 to 99-seat Gillian Theatre! See the back pages of this magazine for more information about our exciting season, as we begin the next chapter in the Writers Theatre story.

As always, your support makes all of this possible. We’re thrilled to have you with us for the journey, and look forward to sharing great theatrical experiences with you for years to come!

Yours sincerely,

Michael

Kate
John Patrick Shanley doesn’t write traditional bios for his playbills. Instead, he writes about being kicked out of multiple Catholic schools, put on academic probation in college, and then joining the Marines. “When you see Doubt, I think it’s illustrative to realize that is my history.”

The writer was born in 1950, the youngest child of Irish immigrants living in the East Bronx. He attended Catholic school for most of his upbringing until constant rebellion in high school led to his expulsion. Reflecting on his childhood, Shanley recalled in a 2004 interview with The New York Times Magazine, “People would look at me and become enraged at the sight of me. I believe that the reason was they could see that I saw them. And they didn’t like that. I was in constant fistfights from the time I was six.”

After being expelled, Shanley ended up at a Catholic boarding school in New Hampshire. The priests and nuns at the school encouraged his love for writing, eventually leading to his enrollment at New York University. But after a semester of poor grades, Shanley dropped out and joined the Marines. He served stateside for a few years, eventually returning to NYU and graduating in 1977. While in college, he took a playwriting course and started writing for the theatre. “I tried the dialogue form, and it was instantaneous. I wrote a full-length play the first time I ever wrote in dialogue, and it was produced a few weeks later.”

After a few early short plays were produced to little acclaim, Shanley had his first real success with Danny and the Deep Blue Sea which played in both New York and London in 1984. However, he was still forced to work odd jobs to support himself, including stints as an elevator operator, apartment painter, and bartender. A grant from the National Endowment for the Arts allowed him to support himself for a little while, but Shanley had a better idea on how to generate a sizeable amount of income. He would write a movie.

Moonstruck, a romantic comedy Shanley based on the Italian-American families he had known growing up in the Bronx, was a huge success in 1987, winning an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. While accepting the award, the writer thanked “everybody who ever punched or kissed me in my life and everybody who I ever punched or kissed.”

Shanley continued to work on Hollywood projects—including The January Man, Joe Versus the Volcano, Alive, Congo and Live from Baghdad—but by the early ’90s was turning his attention largely back to the theatre.

Throughout the 1990s, Shanley wrote a number of successful works for the stage, including Italian American Reconciliation, Beggars in the House of Plenty, and Four Dogs and a Bone. Despite the frequency with which his plays were produced, the playwright was never nominated for any major awards or saw his work transfer to Broadway. That would all change with Doubt.
When asked in a 2008 interview about where the idea for the play came from, Shanley explained that he felt “surrounded by a society that seemed very certain about a lot of things. Everyone had a very entrenched opinion, but there was no real exchange, and if someone were to say, ‘I don’t know,’ it was as if they would be put to death in the media coliseum. There was this mask of certainty in our society that I saw hardening to the point that it was developing a crack—and that crack was doubt. So I decided to write a play that celebrated the fact that you can never know anything for certain.”

Shanley continues to put most of his focus into writing for the stage. Defiance (2006) and Storefront Church (2012) along with Doubt form a trilogy of plays about “church and state.” Just last year, another new play, Outside Mullingar, premiered at Manhattan Theatre Club. Shanley’s passion is for the Theatre and his opinions on writing for it are as strong as ever. “Playwriting is the last great bastion of the individual writer,” he explains. “It’s exciting precisely because it’s where the money isn’t. Money goes to safety, to consensus. It’s not individualism. That’s why sometimes I get very frustrated watching plays. I mean you could do or say anything that’s within the bounds of the law if you don’t harm anybody physically, and this is what you’re doing? Theater is just too exciting a prospect to be left to dullards.”

Doubt: A Parable premiered at Manhattan Theatre Club in November 2004 to universal acclaim, and transferred to Broadway in March 2005, where it ran for over a year. The original cast included Cherry Jones as Sister Aloysius, Brian O’Byrne as Father Flynn, Heather Goldenhersh as Sister James, and Adriane Lenox as Mrs. Muller, under the direction of Doug Hughes. The Broadway production won the Best Play Tony Award in 2005, as well as awards for Jones, Lenox and Hughes. In 2008, Shanley adapted his play to film and directed the adaptation, starring Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams and Viola Davis, who were all nominated for Oscars.
At that time, the Catholic Church, which had changed so little over the centuries, was also moving into the modern era. Pope John XXIII announced the formation of the Second Vatican Council (or Vatican II, as it was later called) in 1959, the first in almost one hundred years. Between 1962 and 1965, over two thousand bishops convened at St. Peter’s Basilica and ended up drafting 16 documents that set a new course for the church.

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Religious scholar Mark S. Massa writes in his book *The American Catholic Revolution: How the ’60s Changed the Church Forever*, “Most Catholics before Vatican II took it for granted that what they did on Sunday mornings looked like what the Church had always done: the sacred (if sometimes misunderstood) drama of the Mass was understood as timeless. The Mass of the Roman Rite was a ritual not only of ancient provenance, but something outside of time altogether.” Starting with Advent in 1964, Mass would now be conducted in the local language of the church, instead of Latin. Lay people would have a greater involvement in church operations and services. And the Church, which has always stood separate in church operations and services. And the Lay people would have a greater involvement

Doubt occurs in the months immediately preceding the implementation of those changes. The instructions from the Vatican, however, would already have been communicated internally and the priests and nuns were aware of and grappling with the changes to their lives and professions. “For the first time in their history,” writes Massa, “Catholics now addressed how ‘relevant’ their religious symbols and worship should be. Questions of what Eucharist and prayer actually meant were presented as real, live issues that could be debated in print and at public meetings. The forces of modernity, so long held at bay outside the strong fortress of the Church, now pounded at the door and demanded attention.” The instability caused by such questioning bred discontent between those enthusiastic about the reforms and those who preferred the old way.

What did not change was the strict hierarchy of roles within the Church. Women were still only allowed to be nuns, one of the lowest levels of the church’s leadership structure. They were required to report to priests and bishops, men who were higher in the structure. In the case of the abuse scandal, this chain of command contributed to the mishandling of the response to many cases. “This had to create very powerful frustrations and moral dilemmas for these women,” Shanley acknowledged in a 2004 interview with *American Theatre*. “Because nuns were the ones who were noticing the children with aberrant behavior, distressed children, falling grades, and in some cases they had to be the ones who discovered what was happening.”

“Walking around the Bronx in 1964,” Shanley recalled to an interviewer in 2008, “you’d see nuns in their bonnets and habits, but you didn’t realize that within just a few years, they wouldn’t be wearing them anymore and that time would be gone forever. Father Flynn is very much a product of the early 1960s in the way he is questioning institutions as they stand, while still working within the system. He wants to make the church that he loves viable in a changing world.”

“Doubt requires more courage than conviction...”

American cities were also experiencing profound change. The era of “white flight” was in full swing; with middle-class white families relocating to the newly developed suburbs and lower-income black and Latino families moving into the inner-city neighborhoods that were being abandoned. The Bronx had historically been populated by European immigrant groups, such as the Irish, Italians, Poles and Russians. Between 1960 and 1970, the white population of the Bronx fell from 1.1 million to less than 800,000, while both the black and Latino (mostly Puerto Rican) populations doubled to between 300,000 and 400,000 each. In 1965, Herman Badillo became the first Puerto Rican to be elected borough president. The church, schools and other institutions were forced to adjust to the changing ethnic and economic makeup of the neighborhood.

In the preface to the published edition of *Doubt: A Parable*, John Patrick Shanley reflects on the 1960s and where our society is at now:
THOUGHTS ON DOUBT: A PARABLE

By Reverend David J. Wood, Senior Minister of Glencoe Union Church

I love the fact that Writers Theatre is performing a play in our church building. The intrinsic connection between spirituality and the arts has a long and important history.

We here at Glencoe Union Church feel privileged to play our part. That the play being performed is Doubt: A Parable is all the more gratifying.

For too long, over too many church doors, it was as if a sign had been hung saying (to adapt Dante), “Abandon doubt all ye who enter here.” However, these days it’s almost impossible to enter any mainline Protestant congregation (the faith community I am most familiar with) and not hear doubt affirmed, if not celebrated. At a minimum, doubt is acknowledged as natural to the human condition and not, in and of itself, injurious to faith or belief. As one popular Christian writer quipped, “Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.”

One of the icons of the life of faith in the 20th Century was Mother Teresa of Calcutta. To the surprise of many and to the comfort of many more, her journals published after her death revealed a life of struggle with her faith in God—a struggle in which doubts were real and enduring. I know of no more solid proof that the presence of doubt need not undermine one’s courage or convictions.

Another of my favorite authors in recent years is the poet, Christian Wiman—former editor of the Chicago-based Poetry magazine. In his wonderful book, My Bright Abyss: Meditations of a Modern Believer, he writes about “honest doubt.” “Honest doubt, what I would call devotional doubt, is marked, it seems to me, by three qualities: humility, which makes one’s attitude impossible to celebrate; insufficiency, which makes it impossible to rest; and mystery, which continues to tug you upward—or at least outward—even in your lowest moments.”

I think Wiman gets it just right.

“One Doubt are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.”

The play is titled Doubt: A Parable. According to the Bible, Jesus spoke often in parables. In one of his brief parables, he spoke of faith as being the size of a tiny mustard seed. Perhaps doubt is not the negation of faith but the soil in which it is cultivated.
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BMO Harris Bank is proud to be Season Sponsor of Writers Theatre.
Whenever I tell people I’m going to be directing *Doubt: A Parable* in a church, they say “wow!” in a mix of surprise and intrigue. If they know the play or the movie, they begin to think about what it means to see it performed there. Walking up the driveway to the large wooden doors, climbing the interior staircase, seeing into the sanctuary on your way up: all of it is going to put audiences into a different mindset than a traditional theater.
My first thought on visiting Glencoe Union Church to explore staging the play there was, “what a friendly, open and Protestant church.” Which is not the sort of church that *Doubt* takes place in. My designers and I wanted to give the room the sense of authority that a pre-Vatican II Catholic church and school would have had in the early ‘60s.

We’ve chosen to add screens on the stage to create the feel of a chancel area, where only the priest was allowed to go. The screens are also designed to evoke Catholic confessional booths.

There are several existing architectural details to the Great Hall that I couldn’t resist featuring. The stained glass windows at the rear will be very present. The tall windows on the west side of the room will also be used. We’ve taken inspiration from the original woodwork in the room and added a wood floor to match. The paintwork we are doing is based on the woodwork too.

—

**William Brown returns to WT to direct *Doubt: A Parable*, WT’s first site-specific production. Here’s a look at some other notable William Brown firsts at WT:**

1997 – Brown makes his WT acting debut in Noel Coward’s *Private Lives*.

1998 – With *The Glass Menagerie*, Brown becomes the first actor at WT to go on to direct a production, following Michael Halberstam.

2000 – Brown wins a Jeff Award for his portrayal of Henry Kissinger in *Nixon’s Nixon*.

2003 – Brown directs *Our Town*, the first production staged in the Woman’s Library Club.

2009 – Brown directs the world premiere of *Old Glory* by Brett Neveu, the first commissioned play to come out of WT’s Literary Development Initiative.

2015 – Brown directs a site-specific production of *Doubt: A Parable* at Glencoe Union Church.

2016 – Brown will direct *Company*, the first musical performed in the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre.
Eliza Stoughton

I identify with many of Sister James’ reactions and sympathies—I love that she sees the sunny side of people, situations and life in general. And I admire that her positive perspective comes from her love of life rather than stupidity or ignorance. Having experienced an abuse of power as a young adult, I am much more alert than Sister James to behavior that could be construed as "inappropriate," but I completely empathize with the difficulty of facing the idea that someone or something isn’t what you previously thought. There is a feeling of being betrayed by the Universe that I think Sister James encounters during the course of the play. And once you see it, it is so hard to un-see it—"I must be careful not to create something by saying it."

Karen Janes Woditsch

I think in any pressurized situation I am slow to react. I always need to step away from something and truly figure out what I feel about a situation. The only time the opposite happens, is when I have time to stew over a hurt without having all the facts. The more I monologue about these situations in my head the more likely I am to blurt something out that shortly thereafter I find is unfounded. I have a very good imagination and from one offending sentence can come up with a world of hurt. Then when I find out the actual information, this world deflate in seconds and I feel like a simpleton.

Steve Haggard

Father Flynn has an admirable sense of discretion. He is a public figure, a friend to many and a community leader, but he keeps many aspects of his life to himself. He doesn’t feel the need to always explain his thoughts or actions. He is an open and outgoing professional, but also a private man—something I respect and relate to in many ways. I myself am not naturally inclined to share details about my life. There are thoughts and experiences I prefer to keep private because it is important for me to feel like these belong to me. As an actor, my work naturally requires an audience, and because of that it can be hard at times to maintain privacy. Sometimes people who have seen you onstage feel like they may know you in life. Perhaps as a priest in a similarly public setting, the same may be true for Father Flynn.

Ann Joseph

I don’t believe that anyone could watch or read this play and not be moved by a sense of familiarity with the characters and their actions. However, it is Mrs. Muller's lack of action, her enigmatic stance, that I find most fascinating. As a mother, I would do anything within my power to ensure the safety and happiness of my children. I wonder what greater jeopardy there must be for Mrs. Muller to determine her son is better left alone. Whether it is choosing a political candidate or a dinner date, we’ve all had to make tough choices, select the lesser of two evils. While I have oversimplified Mrs. Muller’s challenge I can empathize with her position, which is simply to do what you think is best for your child and hope and pray you don’t screw it up.
WT TEACHING ARTISTS EXPLORE *HAMLET* WITH STUDENTS AT IDA CROWN JEWISH ACADEMY

Writers Theatre in Residence for Full School Year

By Sheri Goldstein, English Department Chair

“To be or not to be” echoed through our hallways in January as the seniors of Ida Crown Jewish Academy found joy in studying *Hamlet*. Because our dual curriculum necessitates a demanding class schedule, we struggle to find time for drama and arts; our study of plays is limited to the English curriculum. This year, we received the Shay Endowment Fund, a grant awarded to a department that seeks to enrich the secular studies at our school, and we looked for ways of bringing in the arts. We decided to partner with Writers Theatre after learning about their excellent educational work in area schools. As Chair of the English Department, I wanted to find a way to bring the arts into every student’s life and contacted Nicole Ripley to see what her Education Department could offer us. The results of this connection have transformed the way our students approach texts.

In order to reach every student, we decided to devote the first quarter to the sophomore study of *Antigone*, the second quarter to the senior study of *Hamlet*, the third quarter to the junior study of *The Great Gatsby*, and the final quarter to the freshman study of *The Odyssey*, each culminating in an evening performance. Under the guidance of Stephanie Chavara, a gifted actor and WT teaching artist, students have participated in close readings, choral recitations, group tableaux, vocal training, and other experiential exercises to make these texts come to life. English teachers work with Ms. Chavara to implement her lesson plans and bring the students to their feet. Every session starts with warm-up activities focused on team building and collaboration. Then, Ms. Chavara adds text so that by the end of each quarter, students memorize key passages.

Each of the four sophomore classes presented newly adapted versions of *Antigone* using news reporting, staging, and echoed choral reading. The performance in November allowed the sophomores to showcase their understanding of this classic text, and how pleased I was with their work!

Tackling Shakespeare was our next goal, and each of the five senior classes was responsible for a different Act. After seven weeks of immersion, Elsinore came to life for both students and audience. Some students focused on the soliloquies, others on dialogue, while some performed the sword fight complete with stage combat and blood! For most of our students, this was their first experience with theater, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. With exercises teaching voice and gesture, text analysis and in learning text-driven character choices, each student found a new level of understanding of Shakespeare’s words. One student commented that “experiential learning” really lifted the text off of the page.

This spring, Ms. Chavara brings her enthusiasm and expertise in elevating the text of two literary classics. I can already hear the buzz in the hallways about Gatsby “believing in the green light” and I cannot wait to see how they bring their ideas to the stage.

Our partnership with Writers Theatre will impact these students for years to come. When asked to evaluate the program, the seniors commented on their appreciation and understanding of Shakespeare, and they now want to study Shakespeare in college. Every time they read a play or approach a new text, they will remember to look for repetition, to focus on punctuation, and to use their own voices to find meaning. I am so grateful for working with these fine professionals. Bravo!
UPDATE: THE MLK PROJECT

The 2015 Tour marked the 9th consecutive year of The MLK Project: The Fight for Civil Rights. To date, The MLK Project has been celebrated by over 55,000 students in over 350 schools throughout its history. This year’s tour featured many exciting partnerships, including opening for the sixth year at the Chicago History Museum, and performances at Old Town School of Folk Music, Skokie Public Library, 100 Black Men of Chicago mentoring program, East Village Youth Program, and a two-week engagement at Chicago Children’s Theatre’s Ruth Page Center for the Performing Arts. Writers Theatre is especially grateful for the support of Allstate, whose support as Major Corporate Sponsor helped make The MLK Project possible.

The MLK Project’s ability to excite and engage community members across Chicago was reflected in increased attention by local media outlets in 2015; the program was featured in the Chicago Sun-Times, the Chicago Tribune, The Barbershop Show on WBEZ/Vocolo Radio, and TV spots on Windy City Live and ABC7 News.

- We offered 40 performances
- We reached approximately 7,500 students and community members
- We served 32 low-income schools, including 19 schools within the Communities in Schools of Chicago network reaching public schools most in need of programming
- Approximately 90% of our audience were from underserved neighborhoods

THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK

BY FRANCES GOODRICH AND ALBERT HACKETT
NEWLY ADAPTED BY WENDY KESSELMAN
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**MARJORIE PRIME**

*By Jordan Harrison*

**Directed by Kimberly Senior**

October 21, 2015 – February 21, 2016

Performed at Books on Vernon: 664 Vernon Ave, Glencoe

It’s the age of artificial intelligence, but 86-year-old Marjorie is worried that her memory may be fading. That is, until the appearance of Walter, a mysterious and charming young visitor programmed to help Marjorie uncover the intricacies of her own past. As Walter’s true nature is revealed, new levels of complexity emerge, leading to profound questions about the limits of technology and whether memory might be a purely human invention.

Directed by *Kimberly Senior* in the Writers Theatre bookstore venue, *Marjorie Prime* will take audiences on a twisting journey into uncharted theatrical terrain.

**DEATH OF A STREETCAR NAMED VIRGINIA WOOLF: A PARODY**

*By Tim Sniiffen, with additional material by Tim Ryder*

**Directed by Artistic Director Michael Halberstam and Stuart Carden**

April 27, 2016 – July 10, 2016

Performed in the Gillian Theatre: 325 Tudor Court, Glencoe

What happens when the most recognizable characters from some of the greatest American plays of the 20th century suddenly find themselves sharing the same stage?

When a mysterious invitation brings Blanche DuBois back to New Orleans, she finds herself once again face-to-face with the smoldering Stanley Kowalski. They are soon joined by luckless salesman Willy Loman and hard-drinking, hard-fighting couple George and Martha, and suddenly all bets are off. Add a folksy Stage Manager and the comic genius of The Second City team, and the question quickly becomes: Will the American Theatre ever be the same?

Co-directed by Artistic Director Michael Halberstam and Stuart Carden, this deliciously satirical mash-up of A Streetcar Named Desire, Death of a Salesman, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and Our Town opens the Gillian Theatre with a tongue-in-cheek salute to these celebrated icons of American drama.

**ARCADIA**

*By Tom Stoppard*

**Directed by Artistic Director Michael Halberstam**

March 16, 2016 – April 24, 2016

Performed in the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre: 325 Tudor Court, Glencoe

In the heart of a 19th century English country estate awash in secret desires, illicit affairs and professional rivalries, a brilliant young student proposes an earthshaking scientific theory. Two hundred years later at that same estate, academic adversaries Hannah and Bernard race to unravel the enticing mysteries left behind in a heated battle for intellectual and sexual dominance.

Part detective story and part comedy of manners, Tom Stoppard’s elegant, masterpiece forges a complex comedy of wit and romance, sex and scientific theory.

Directed by Artistic Director Michael Halberstam, who previously helmed WT’s hit productions of Stoppard’s The Real Thing and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, *Arcadia* serves as an ideal first production in Writers Theatre’s new home, serving as bridge between the Theatre’s celebrated past and its exciting future.

**COMPANY**

**Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim | Book by George Furth**

**Originally produced and directed on Broadway by Harold Prince***

**Original orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick**

**Directed by William Brown | Musical direction by Tom Vendafreddo**


Performed in the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre: 325 Tudor Court, Glencoe

It’s Bobby’s 35th birthday and he’s still single, trying to find a way to have a serious relationship, without a serious commitment. But as his friends impose their ideas of relationship function and dysfunction on him over the course of a hilarious series of dinners and cocktail hours, Bobby is forced to consider relaxing his determined grip on bachelorhood and begin exploring one of life’s greatest questions: what does it mean to be alive?

Winner of seven Tony Awards, *Company* is a witty, sophisticated and deeply honest look at contemporary relationships. Featuring some of Stephen Sondheim’s best known songs, including “Side by Side by Side,” “Marry Me a Little” and "Being Alive."

Directed by Writers Theatre favorite William Brown, who previously helmed WT’s hit production of Sondheim’s A Little Night Music, *Company* will continue the Theatre’s tradition of breathing fresh life into great American musicals.
Writers Theatre has come together with three of the North Shore's most acclaimed cultural attractions—Chicago Botanic Garden, Kohl Children's Museum and Ravinia Festival—to bring awareness of the rich artistic, cultural, community and family activities available in the area.

As a Subscriber of Writers Theatre, you are eligible for discounts and perks at our partner Do North organizations.

- **Chicago Botanic Garden**: half-price parking (admission is already free) to members of its partner organizations.
- **Kohl Children’s Museum**: two-for-one admissions after 1pm daily to members of other Do North institutions.
- **Ravinia Festival**: two-for-one pavilion tickets on selected Chicago Symphony Orchestra concerts. Members of any Do North organization will also receive a 10% discount on their Ravinia Gifts purchases at the park.

For a complete list of discounts and more information go to [donorth.org](http://donorth.org).

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### July

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**Writers Wednesdays** - Post-show discussion following evening performances

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**Doubt: A Parable**

### APRIL

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