



Principia College to Stage Rare Play for Spring Performance

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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Principia College Department of Theatre & Dance presents

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE

by Sinclair Lewis and John C. Moffitt



A cautionary tale about the rise of American fascism

FEBRUARY 29 - 7:30PM

MARCH 1 - 7:30PM

MARCH 2 - 2:00PM

MARCH 2 - 7:30PM

DAVIS BLACK BOX
THEATRE

TICKETS ON PRINCIPIA MARKETPLACE
\$12 ADULTS / \$5 STUDENTS

ELSAH - Principia College will present a play about the rise of fascism in one of the first fully-staged productions in the U.S. since the 1940s.

“It Can’t Happen Here” will premiere at Principia College at 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 29, March 1 and March 2, 2024, and 2 p.m. on March 2, 2024. Director Chrissy Steele said students have been rehearsing since the spring semester began, and they’re excited to share the story with audiences next week.

“When we first started working on it, I felt like this was such a political play because there is this sense in our country of some people wanting a strong man, wanting someone to kind of come in and solve all of our problems, sort of a leaning toward authoritarianism. And so we felt like this play was really timely because it was dealing with some of those issues,” Steele explained. “But as we began work on it, we realized we can’t do a political play, we need to do a play that tells the story. And if it has political resonance for people, then that’s what the audience is going to get from it.”

“It Can’t Happen Here,” based on the 1935 novel by Sinclair Lewis, tells the story of a dictator’s rise to power in America through the eyes of a small Vermont town. As part of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, the play was produced through the Federal Theatre Project in the 1940s. Few theaters have produced fully-staged productions of “It Can’t Happen Here” since then.

John Williams, a political science professor at Principia, will lead a talkback after each performance to discuss this history. Principia students worked with professors in the history and political science departments to learn more about fascism and Nazism in the 1930s. Steele expressed her excitement to bring the play to the Riverbend and share its messages.

“Yes, our art can be political or it can be social commentary. It can be a call to action. We do all kinds of things with our art. But you don’t want to necessarily hit people over the head with it,” she added. “You want to tell a story. That’s what people are coming to see, to see a story, to see people, human beings, placed in situations that they then have to wrestle with the choices that they make and the results of those choices or how the choices that other people make affect them.”

Before rehearsals began, students worked with Chicago theater artist Dawn Arnold for a three-day workshop where they researched their characters and developed the play’s atmosphere. Steele said the intensive showed students how to work with professionals and engage with different elements of the play to tell the story. This helped students understand more about the play and the world in which it takes place, which was especially helpful since the play was written almost a century ago.

“That really set us up for creating the world that the play is taking place in and beginning to understand the story and the characters and how those characters were

fitting into the world, how they were telling the story,” Steele said. “It’s been really interesting to work with an older script and to bring that to our students’ attention. This is something that came from this other time, this other period in our history, and here we are resurrecting it today...It’s an educational process for us as well as a creative/artistic one.”

Tickets cost \$5 for students and \$12 for general admission. You can [purchase tickets online](#) or at the door. Email theatre.dance@principia.edu for more information.