



Thursday, October 29, 2015

by Gary Black

## Theatre UAF tackles LGBT issues with the play “Stop Kiss”

One minute, Callie and Sara are walking down the street, getting to know one another, and stopping to share their first kiss. The next, a savage attack changes the course of their burgeoning relationship, leading them to examine their lives, friends and families, and each other.

That is the theme throughout “Stop Kiss,” the fall mainstage production by Theatre UAF and directed by professor Carrie Baker, who’s tackled socially conscious topics before such as income inequality in “Speech & Debate” in 2013 and the death of gay college student Matthew Shephard in “The Laramie Project” in 2008. “Stop Kiss,” written by Diana Son and first premiering in 1998, is Baker’s sixth Theatre UAF production as director since joining the faculty in 2005.

“For me, I’m seeing a trend in my own play choices of feeling drawn to plays that address issues of social justice,” Baker said. “So much goes into the selection in terms of what students need and what appeals to the audience base. It’s always sort of a mix of those factors. We hope to entertain but also open perspectives. If someone watches a play about two women falling in love and feels empathy for their characters, maybe they’ll look at their lesbian neighbor in a different way.”

The production stars senior theater students Katrina Kuharich and Sierra Trinchet in the roles of Callie and Sara, respectively. Both are using the play as their thesis projects. That means the two actors are delving into the psyche and mechanisms of the playwright, the play and their characters.

“The most interesting thing for me is actually the writing of the play,” Kuharich said. “She creates these two tracks of the story — the A track of Sara and Callie falling in love and the B track of the attack and the aftermath. My take is it’s a story about not only two people finding their relationship but all of the things that come into creating a relationship. It’s been a huge process trying to go back and forth between these two tracks. It’s incredibly challenging, which makes it a great thesis role.”

The play is told in a nonlinear format, meaning it jumps around chronologically, hence the reference to two “tracks” in the production.

“That’s also the beauty of watching the show as an audience,” Kuharich said. “You’re creating the story and putting it together for yourself since you’re not seeing it in a linear timeline. The nonlinear storytelling is multipurpose. It’s used to push actors and used to tell the story of the couple.”

Despite the underlying story — two women who are attacked for being gay — the production consists of a well-written play with a funny and tender side as well, Trinchet said.

“It’s beautiful,” she said. “It looks good, it sounds good and I love the story. It’s a story lots of people can connect with.”

The role of Sara is one Trinchet called the most technically difficult role she’s tackled to date because of the quick scene changes and timing on stage because of the nonlinear format. The issues addressed in the play are also ones Trinchet said she has no problem standing up for.

“It’s essentially about two people who fall in love and get punished,” she said, “and I’m very happy to be in a play that addresses that. I hope it opens some eyes.”



The cast of Theatre UAF’s “Stop Kiss” (left to right) Cynthia Jones, Mallory Smyth, Sierra Trinchet, Katrina Kuharich, Corey Dirutigliano and Nate Cole.

Kade Mendelowitz, Theatre UAF Photo

### IF YOU GO

**What:** “Stop Kiss,” written by Diana Don, directed by Carrie Baker, produced by Theatre UAF

**Where:** Lee H. Salisbury Theatre in the University of Alaska Fairbanks fine arts complex

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and Nov. 6 and 7, and 2 p.m. Sunday and Nov. 8.

**Tickets:** If purchased ahead of time online at [www.uaf.edu/theatrefilm](http://www.uaf.edu/theatrefilm) are \$8 students; \$12 seniors, military and UAF; \$16 adults. At the door, tickets are an additional \$2. Tickets are also available by calling the box office at 474-7751.

**FYI:** After the matinee performance at 2 p.m. Sunday, there will be a panel discussion about LGBT issues raised in the play. The talk-back panel is comprised of representatives from P-FLAG, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Fairbanks, Green Dot, and the University of Alaska Fairbanks faculty, staff, administration, and students. The production should be considered rated “R” for language and implied nudity.

### Cast

Nate Cole — Detective Cole

Corey Dirutigliano — George

Cynthia Jones — Mrs. Winsley/Nurse

Katrina Kuharich — Callie

Mallory Smyth — Peter

Sierra Trinchet — Sara

### Crew

Carrie Baker — director

Kade Mendelowitz — scenic and lighting designer

Stephanie Sandberg — costume designer

Chris John George — sound designer

Colby Freel — stage manager

Sam Thompson — assistant director