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Review

# Without a 'Doubt,' this show's a winner

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A priest stands alone on the stage bathed in a dreamlike light that seems to filter through a stained-glass window.

"What do you do when you're not sure?" he asks. "Doubt can be a bond as powerful and sustaining as certainty. When you have doubt, you are not alone."

And so begins the Tennessee Repertory Theatre's production of *Doubt*. On the surface, the play might appear to be a simple game of cat and mouse. But with its well-drawn characters and multi-layered script, *Doubt* spins a rich tale of suspicion and uncertainty.

Set at a Bronx Catholic school in 1964, the play pits the domineering Sister Aloysius against the more progressive Father Flynn, whom she suspects may be carrying on an improper relationship with a young boy — and the school's first black student.

Written by John Patrick Shanley, this taut drama earned the 2005 Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Not surprisingly, the play is set to move to the big screen later this year starring Philip Seymour Hoffman and Meryl Streep. Meanwhile, the Rep is utilizing star power of its own with producing artistic director René Copeland assembling a remarkable cast that includes Rona Carter, Jessejames Locorriere, Jenny Littleton and Delali Potakey.

Carter, a true chameleon of the stage, transforms into Sister Aloysius. As with so many great performers, Carter is able to communicate just as much with her pursed lips and steely eyes as with Shanley's brilliant words. Locorriere is quite likeable as mild-mannered Father Flynn. And yet when painted into a corner by Sister Aloysius, he bares his claws and fights like a wounded tiger.

Littleton is perfectly cast as Sister James, the enthusiastic young teacher who nearly collapses under the crushing weight of her suspicions. It would be easy to over-play the role's naiveté, but Littleton is subtle, allowing her innocence to die slowly over the course of the play. And while Potakey is onstage for only one scene, she plays a pivotal role. As Mrs. Muller, the mother of the student in question, she adds an entirely new dimension to the play. She even manages to take Sister Aloysius by surprise with stunning revelations and a terse reminder that "we all have our reasons."

In the end, that's what makes *Doubt* so powerful. There are no real answers, only questions.