

Douglas Anderson students tackle British accents, multiple characters

By Sandy Strickland

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First, they have to master British accents.

Then for an hour or so, they're dashing in and out of doors at a breakneck pace, as they maneuver dinner guests so they're never in the same room.

The topper is that Caiti Wiggins and Cole Marshall are playing five characters between them. The Douglas Anderson School of the Arts seniors are part of a double bill of one-act comedies called "The Two of Us" by Michael Frayn. Showtime is Wednesday, Sept. 30, through Saturday, Oct. 3, in the Southside magnet school's Black Box Theatre at 2445 San Diego Road.

In their play, "The Look-Alikes," Wiggins and Marshall are hosting an ill-fated dinner party. He has inadvertently asked the husband of a separated couple while she has invited the wife and her new hippie boyfriend. The aim is to keep them apart, and in so doing, everyone gets plastered.

The other one-act comedy, called "Mr. Foot," stars Benjamin Peltz and Kristin Alexander in the tale of a jiggling foot and a little man who isn't there.

During a recent dress rehearsal for "The Look-Alikes," director Michael Higgins said he chose the farce for the illusion of having two people play everyone.

"It was such a big acting challenge, and there was the fun of doing those costume and character changes so quickly," Higgins said. "It's more of a character comedy than a situation comedy."

He said it's an English farce trying to be French with slamming doors and people colliding.

Higgins said Marshall and Wiggins were naturals for “The Look-Alikes” because they like to do make-believe and looked so malleable when he saw them in the hallway.

“I watched them do goofy faces and goofy voices, and they are really children at heart,” he said.

Marshall, who lives in Arlington, said the play is a great experience for him because his personality is so unlike his two characters - an uptight husband and a drunk bemoaning the loss of his wife.

It’s the sixth play he’s done in his four years at Douglas Anderson, and he plans to pursue a theater degree from Florida State University.

As for that British accent, he and Wiggins took a voice and dialect class in their junior year that helped them capture the nuances. Just for the fun of it, Wiggins even spoke to her mother in a British accent when she was a kid.

“The hardest part for me was the fact it was a farce,” said Wiggins, who has done community theater at Players by the Sea and the Limelight Theatre in St. Augustine. “I feel like I’m a dramatic actress.”

The Ponte Vedra Beach resident had no trouble adapting to the frenetic in-one-door-out-the-other activity.

“When you get up there and start doing it, it goes so quickly that you don’t even realize how fast it’s going by,” she said. “It kind of engulfs you.”

She plays Jo, the hostess; Bee, a crazy female with a wild head of blonde hair; and Alex, her hippie boyfriend whom her estranged husband takes for a female. Bee was the hardest to portray because she’s so outrageous, said Wiggins, who plans to attend the North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem after graduation.

Curtain rises at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 30; 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 1; 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 2; and 7:30 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 3. Tickets are \$12 and available at the door one hour before showtime.