

Welcome to The New Moon Rising

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Satellite Theatre

By Shamrock McShane

Practicing Players

On a Saturday morning when many college students would still be in bed, the Florida Players are rehearsing David Auburn's heady drama *Proof* in one of the Acting Studios of the Nadine McGuire Theatre and Dance Pavilion at the University of Florida.

Director Danny Sharron and his production team of Stage Manager Jessica Daugherty, Set Designer Christina Gonzalez, Lighting Designer Shaun Suchan, and Costume Designer Stephanie Cytron arrange themselves at a long table with laptops and clipboards, while the ensemble stretches and vocalizes.

As theatricians in training, Florida Players, the student-run company within the School of Theatre and Dance at the University, approach their craft with a novice's reverence. While the other theaters in town are motivated at least in part by box office concerns, academia offers its own justification — to learn.

In this play the lessons include the design and uses of the box set, which takes on metaphysical dimensions, given the play's themes. The box set, to see how a jest can come about, traces its origins to the comic opera, where, Oscar Brockett informs us, Paolo Landriani, designed the prototype for the Teatro alla Scala in Milan in the eighteenth century. Now, the box is set at angle that juts toward the audience, and it offers not only interior but also exterior scenes in and around the house where Catherine, played with smoldering intensity by Samantha Walsh, lives with her brilliant but damaged father, a mathematician gone mad.

"The set is still under construction next door," Danny Sharron tells me. Opening night is nearly a week away, and the actors measure their steps on a taped outline of the set on the black rubber floor. "Today we're having an 'exaggerated' rehearsal," he further informs me. "So it might get kind of wild."

That's the idea. Rising out of Konstantin Stanislavsky's system of acting, modified by the Method Acting of Lee Strasburg's Actors Studio, and onto the Sense Memory of Sanford Meisner's Group Theater, the 'exaggerated rehearsal' turns the play into a kind of opera.

Steve Schmitz, who plays Robert, the mathematician, is adept at this, filling his sails with largeness of character, turning the father into an apt symbol of lost grandeur.

"I cast four people who had the heart that I feel is absolutely necessary to do this play justice," Sharron writes in his Director's Notes. "As actors, they all have amazing impulses, and strive to convey absolute truth instead of emotion."

This is plainly evident in the scenes between Catherine and her love interest, Hal, a math student played by Ryan Ruby. In the 'exaggerated rehearsal,' there is an even greater investment of energy, bigger physicality, greater emotional intensity. And the sparks fly.

"The characters themselves are what drive this play," Sharron insists. "What is unique about this particular

play is that I truly believe each of the four characters has a beautiful heart, a heart which they may hide but is revealed as the play progresses. My main themes for this production are uncertainty, inherent in both mathematics and the world as a whole, and hidden beauty."

Alicia Giangrisostomi plays Claire, Catherine's sister. She is vivacious, outgoing, passionate, all qualities she radiates in contrast to the character she portrays, who is cunning, superficial, and dense. Before she steps on stage Alicia borrows a notebook from Danny to use as a prop.

"I would prefer that you not write in it," he asks politely.

"I won't," Alicia assures him. "I'll just pretend to write. I'll act."

"That'd work," says her director.

Proof was performed at the Phillips Center Blackbox Theatre, as was Martin Sherman's *Bent*, directed By Rob Smith, in November.

From December 1–3 Florida Players will present *Too Much Light Makes The Baby Go Blind*, A Neo–Futurist Play by Greg Allen, directed by Chris Rovente at the Phillips Center Black Box.