



3-3-2011

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Recommended Citation

Hatch, Rachel, "First-Year Theater Students Take to the Stage in Almost Maine" (2011).
News and Events. 1752.

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First-Year Theater Students Take to the Stage in *Almost Maine*

March 3, 2011

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Next to the Coffee Shoppe in the Memorial Center of Illinois Wesleyan University are a set of steps leading down to an area lovingly called the Underground. At the end of a stretch of tables lies a plain, beige door that opens to an area that could be considered little more than a black box of a room. It is here, in this box, that student creativity comes to life through performance. It is here – in the Phoenix Lab Theater – that a group of first-year theater students will perform.



Seven first-year students have put together the show *Almost Maine, a romantic comedy*, scheduled for 8 p.m. on Thursday, March 3 and Friday, March 4 in the Phoenix Lab Theatre (104 E. University St., Bloomington). The event is free and open to the public.

The cast includes: Kate Fitzgerald, Jenna Haimes, Will Henke, Morgan Latiolais, Ben Mulgrew, and Adam Walleser, with Matt Hohmann as technical director.

The production was completely organized and orchestrated by the first-year students, who share an acting class. “Freshmen are not allowed to audition for main stage productions,” said Mulgrew, “but we knew we could perform in the Phoenix.” Mulgrew applied to perform *Almost Maine*, and discovered his acting teacher had already secured rights so her students could perform scenes in class. “It was an amazing coincidence.” Mulgrew, Latiolais and Walleser cast the remaining parts of the show, intent to put on the production in the Phoenix.

Preparing for rehearsal, Latiolais and Fitzgerald hang a black curtain, which creates a small backstage area for the performers. “This has really been a collaborative effort,” said Latiolais. “Everything from blocking to lighting, sound and costumes came from all of us. It’s been incredible, frustrating, exhausting and pretty much beyond fun in every way.”

In between adjusting lighting gels, Hohmann gives a glimpse of why the group would fit in the production in between classes and other theater duties. “We live for this stuff,” he said simply.

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