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Alumna's Play Opens to Rave Reviews in New York

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— “Falling” a play by Illinois Wesleyan University alumna Deanna Jent, Class of 1984, received rave reviews after its opening on Oct. 15 at the Minetta Lane Theater in New York.

The play, with the tagline “ Family’s not the most important thing, It’s everything,” is about how an autistic adolescent named Josh, affects the lives of his family members who are trying to balance what is best for the family and what is best for themselves. The delicate equilibrium of their home, however, is disturbed when a relative comes to visit. The storyline explores love and relationships, hopes and dreams and poses the question, “How do you love someone who is difficult to love?”



Deanna Jent '84

In the *New York Observer*, Rex Reed, film critic and former co-host of the syndicated-television show “At The Movies,” said in his review of the play, “Graceful writing, great acting, exquisite direction, suspense, profound subject matter—you rarely find even one of those elements in a contemporary play opening in commercial New York theater, and never all in the same play at the same time. That’s what makes Falling such a shock.”

Frank Scheck, long-time member of the New York Drama Critics Circle and columnist in *New York Post* had an excellent review for the play as well, “this heartfelt and nuanced family drama is shot through with dark humor, as cathartic for the audience as it is for its conflicted characters.” Scheck wrote in his column, “Superbly staged by Lori Adams and wonderfully acted — Murney is gut-wrenching as a mother who sacrifices her happiness for a son who barely acknowledges her presence — “Falling” soars.”

According to *Daily News* critic Joe Dziemianowicz, Jent “wisely avoids maudlin movie-of-the-week sentimentality. Her script is sharp and observant.”



The cast of "Falling" performs a scene from the play.

The play has been equally well received by the viewers. The play’s website is flooding with positive comments by the audience with remarks such as, “A deeply moving play about a difficult subject. Beautifully written, excellently performed.”

Jent is delighted by the response her play is receiving on its Off-Broadway run.

“I am thrilled that the story of “Falling” continues to be told. While it deals specifically with a family caring for a child with autism, the play really explores the messy reality of loving someone who is hard to love -- and that’s a universal theme. I also love that I met our brilliant director, Lori Adams, while I was an undergrad and she was a teacher at IWU! We’ve maintained a personal friendship and professional collaboration since then.”

Jent, who graduated from IWU with a bachelor’s degree in theatre arts, is the artistic director of Mustard Seed Theatre in St. Louis, Mo., and a professor of theatre at Fontbonne University, St. Louis.

Her writings for stage include adaptations of "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austin, "Till We Have Faces" by C. S. Lewis, and "Imaginary Jesus" by Matt Mikalatos. "Falling" was developed at Mustard Seed Theatre in the fall of 2011 and won the 2012 Kevin Kiline Award for Best New Play. Jent also won the Kevin Kline Award for Best Director of a Musical for her production of "Godspell." She is a free lance director and a former theater critic for Riverfront Times.

Adams, a native of Nebraska, was an adjunct faculty member at IWU during the 1980s while Deanna was a student at IWU. She is currently the head of the Acting Program at Illinois State University. Apart from the premiere of "Falling," Adams has directed "Fires in the Mirror" at Mustard Seed Theatre in 2012. Her directing credits at ISU include "The Grapes of Wrath," "Picnic," "To Kill a Mockingbird," "Crime of the Heart," "A View from the Bridge," and "The Diary of Anne Frank."

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