

Controversial play packs a punch

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"Bang Bang, You're Dead!"

This used to be innocently exclaimed by children, imitating their favorite hero, as they stopped the bad guy. Now, in the midst of headlines announcing the latest school shooting, the phrase reveals a chilling reality.

Ironically, Theatre Whatever hopes to make a positive impact with those very words.

The play, "Bang Bang You're Dead", is the centerpiece of the "Peace in Our Schools" project, a joint effort by Theatre Whatever and Community Church of Barrington.

John Faust, the theater's artistic director, was intrigued by the concept of this controversial work.

William Mastrosimone, a Seattle-area playwright, wrote the play in 1998, following incidents of school violence that hit too near home.

On May 21 of that year, Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon was the scene of a tragic shooting spree by a freshman student. The next day, emblazoned on a blackboard at Mastrosimone's son's own high school, was the message, "I'm going to kill everyone in this class and the teacher too."

Although this turned out to be a student's twisted joke, the frightening exploit profoundly impacted Mastrosimone.

Hoping to stem the tide of school violence, he composed a powerful play and posted it on the Internet. In exchange for the royalty-free script, Mastrosimone has stipulated that the productions are made available to audiences free of charge.

The fictional story takes place in a jail cell, centered on Josh, the 15-year-old prisoner. Josh is convicted of having shot and killed his parents in their home and then proceeding to his high school to murder five classmates.

His teenage victims appear in the cell, having been conjured up by Josh's guilty conscience. Josh realizes that this is not a video game - that his actions are real and permanent. The actors conclude the drama by leading discussions with the audience.

Mastrosimone's strong message immediately caught the attention of the grassroots organization "Ribbon of Promise."

Created to end school violence, ROP promotes prevention and intervention. "Bang Bang You're Dead" aims to spread this message and to initiate discussion among teens and

adults. ROP is a national sponsor of the play. Details about the campaign can be found on ROP's Web site at <http://www.ribbonofpromise.org>.

Faust, a retired Barrington High School drama teacher, is excited about the project.

"An artistic nudge to provoke thoughtful, concerned reaction on the local level to a national problem - that's what this whole thing is about. Kids helping kids. People concerned with kids searching for creative, vibrant ways to help make our corner of the world a tad safer, more productive and livable. Altruistic? Maybe. Practical? I hope so!"

Local students in the cast include Kelly Knutsen, Bryan Kunz, Derrick Loafmann, Suzanne Meyer, Dylan Nelson, Becca Norris, Laurie Beth Oefelein, Adam Strojney, Matt Toussaint, Scott Viohl, Katie Voss, and Zach Watson.

Performances will be held at Community Church of Barrington at 7:30 p.m. from Wednesday through Saturday. A Sunday performance will be held at 7:30 p.m. July 30 at St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Cary. Admission is free.

For information, call (847) 381-1294.

Caption: Actors at Community Church in Barrington rehearse for this week's production of "Bang Bang You're Dead," - part of a community effort to prevent violence in area schools. Daily Herald Photo/Paul Beaty

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