UNNATURAL ACTS
HARVARD’S SECRET COURT OF 1920

Written by Members of the Plastic Theatre
Conceived by Tony Speciale

McKenna Theatre

The production contains nudity, violence and mature, sensitive content.
On behalf of the students and faculty of the department, I want to welcome you to *Unnatural Acts* written by members of the Plastic Theatre, conceived and directed by Tony Speciale, stage managed by Caitlin Malczon, and produced with the support and participation of countless students and faculty working in every area of performance, production, and management you can imagine!

This year provides an opportunity to welcome you back to the theatre and I am thrilled that you have joined us in Mckenna Theatre which stands on the unceded land of the Munsee, Esopus and Lenape peoples. There are wonderful sources and I hope you take time to learn about our region’s indigenous people. It is important to acknowledge and understand our history.

A few years ago, the department produced a staged reading of this play in Parker Theatre as part of the PRAXIS Series. The events, the characters, and the language resonated with our audiences, and I am thrilled that we have been able to revisit this play, with Tony directing, in production for a new audience.

Producing theatre is complex, and even more so lately. Since the onset of the pandemic, we have followed the Campus COVID guidelines and practices. We have been able to rehearse, and now perform, this text by as we continue to prioritize the health and safety of our students, faculty, local and campus communities. While we have become used to it in everyday life, it may still seem strange to watch actors with masks on, but please remember performance and masks have a long-shared history. And, while we would love to be past the need, we must do all we can to protect our community, and I appreciate your understanding and your wearing masks in the theatre.

The Department of Theatre Arts at SUNY New Paltz provides an educational space for students to explore, discover, and nurture their scholarly/artistic and personal voices—it serves as an incubator for the American Theatre. And like the profession should, wrestles with the ever-changing context of the world. Engaging with and listening to the concerns and experiences of students, the Department of Theatre Arts has made significant changes to the curriculum, and department—this evolution is reflected in structural changes and the commitment to continued conversation and action. Both our curriculum and our production season provide educational opportunities for students and must provide space for stories that provoke timely conversations and resonate with our community. The titles we produce prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented voices and work from traditionally marginalized populations. The season is full of exciting titles, and I hope that you will join us for each of the productions.

Lastly, we hope to make our work accessible to our community. In that spirit, we have cut this season’s ticket price in half compared to the 2018-2019 academic year; however, once again, I feel compelled to say that the cost of these productions is not half of what was. If you find yourself in a position to support our work, please consider a donation to the Department or become a Friend of the Theatre.

And of course, thank you to everyone that has and continues to support the work of our students, and through them shape the return and the future of the American Theatre.

Enjoy the performance, and I look forward to seeing you again later in the season.

Ken Goldstein  
he/him/his  
Chair/Professor of Design  
Department of Theatre Arts
Dramaturgy Note by Erin Denman

This performance of *Unnatural Act* includes sensitive material such as physical violence, sexual intimacy, and references to suicide and death, which some may find triggering. If you need any support, resources are listed below.

Brace yourself for a tragic coming-of-age story of survival. What was once a close-knit group of like-minded friends connected down to the roots of their souls, disintegrates in front of our eyes as every man must fight for his very existence amidst betrayal, interrogation, and exile. Conceiver and director, Tony Speciale, alongside fellow members of Plastic Theatre—a constellation of 15 multi-disciplinary theatre artists—were originally inspired by student journalist Amit Paley’s article titled “The Secret Court of 1920.” What followed in its contents was a series of tragic and true events following the sudden death of Harvard sophomore Cyril Wilcox and the discovery of two letters addressed to him detailing the homosexual activities of a group of friends. Intrigued by these events, Speciale and Plastic Theatre combed Harvard University’s Archives for the historical documents and court transcripts surrounding the Secret Court. In total, they gathered over 500 pages of evidence and testimonies. With these fragments and the help of outside family correspondence, they constructed in painful detail a timeline of what happened to the accused men at Harvard University in the spring of 1920.

In the play, we see every facet of the young men’s lives in voyeuristic detail; from the moment we are introduced to them they are bared (quite literally, in some cases) to the audience in both flattering and unsavory ways. As the scenes progress, every facet of their interior lives is stripped to its core to the point where they are nothing but hollow shells by the time each character leaves the stage for good. This story’s intent is to show who these boys truly were, and through the puzzle pieces that depict the atrocities committed we are given just that. There are points in the play when the actors must double as the self-appointed jurors, assuming the blank-faced Court members in the background. In this transformation, they become entities of power and discipline, upholding cruel and archaic standards of the prestigious Harvard University in 1920. The Court feared that the men they hold on trial would infect others with the “disgusting” practice of homosexuality and overturn not only the established moral order, but the Western civilization as they knew it. In doing so, they set off scenes of interrogation that unravel each character like thread from a woven cloth.

Something to keep in mind is that these events all take place in a transitory period; between the final days of school and the freeing days of summer vacation--between the final days as a university student and the upcoming days as a college graduate. But these events also take place between the stagnancy
of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and the experimental innovation which takes place in the 1920s. Thus, we are also caught in between the old and surface-level ways of discrimination against queer individuals and an era of gradual acceptance of “the other” (no matter how short it may be). Harvard is the lens through which we view this conservative era, with these boys representing the queer youth population that is so full of life and itching to break free of society’s restraints. Their conduction of “sinful” acts in secret is an overarching theme to this play in both its literal events and its context.

In November of 2002 after the secret court documents were released, President Lawrence H. Summers issued an official apology for the incident on behalf of Harvard University. Amongst his remarks came the statement that whatever the attitudes which might have been prevalent at time, the persecution of 1920 would not be tolerated at their university today. With this in mind, we hope you leave tonight not buried beneath the weight of these painful truths but armed with the assurance that their voices are no longer silenced.

Additionally, we hope you leave tonight with a thought for those who still endure in silence. Despite how far we have come, we still have a long way to go. And if you are one of them, know that no matter who you are and who you love, you are not alone. We see you; we hear you, and we are with you.

\textbf{Mental Health Resources:}  
\textbf{SUNY New Paltz Psychological Counseling Center}  
845-257-2920  
\textbf{New York State/Office of Mental Health Crisis Text Line}  
Text GOT5 to 741741  
\textbf{NY Project Hope Emotional Support Hotline}

\textbf{Plastic Theatre} (Author) is a rolling ensemble of multi-disciplinary artists led by Tony Speciale. For \textit{Unnatural Acts} the creators include Catherine Barricklow, Jess R. Burkle, Joe Curnutte, Frank De Julio, Heather Denyer, Max Jenkins, Zach Kleinsmith, James MacBean, Jerry Marsini, Patrick McCaffrey, Nicholas Norman, Kila Packett, Adam Rihacek, Peter Allen Stone and Tony Speciale. Beginning with investigative research, followed by group improvisation and collaborative writing, Plastic Theatre created its inaugural play \textit{Unnatural Acts}. The play premiered off-Broadway in 2011 at Classic Stage Company (CSC), extended its initial run three times and was nominated for several awards including a Drama Desk Award and GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Play. For more information on the history and development of this play email info@plastictheatre.org.
Director.......................................................................................................................... Tony Speciale
Fight Director.................................................................................................................... Adam Rihacek
Intimacy Director............................................................................................................. Connie Rotunda
Production Stage Manager............................................................................................ Caitlin Malczon

Production Manager........................................................................................................ Catherine Doherty
Set Designer..................................................................................................................... Jo Winiarski
Costume Designer........................................................................................................... Charlotte Palmer-Lane
Lighting Designer............................................................................................................. Travis McHale
Sound Designer................................................................................................................ Keirsten Lamora
Dramaturg........................................................................................................................ Erin Denman
Original Music composed by............................................................................................ Christian Frederickson

Cast:
Cummings: Parker Howland
Roberts: William Reymann
Gilkey: Luke Anderson
Say: Christopher Lunetta
Lumbard: Matthew Doherty
Day: Mason Crowley
Smerage: Eugenio Namarubessy
Wollf: Cesario Tirado-Ortiz
Clark: Joseph West
Wilcox: Sean Walsh

Understudy Say, Gilkey: Ben Giordano
Understudy Cummings, Roberts, Smerage: Colin Gallagher
Understudy Lumbard, Clark, Wollf: Steven Fazzolari

VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO:
Donald P. Christian, President
Barbara G. Lyman, Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs
Jeni Mokren, Dean of Fine & Performing Arts
Mike Malloy, Director of Environmental Health & Safety
Scott Schulte, Director of Emergency Management
Russ Thompson, Box Office Manager
Kevin Saunders and The IT Department
Technical Director
Resident Technical Director
Assistant Stage Manager
Fight Production Assistant
Production Assistants
Assistant to the Director
Fight Captain
Intimacy Assistant
Scenic Charge
Assistant Costume Designer
Costume Shop Manager
Assistant Lighting Designer/Programmer
Production Electrician
Sound Board Operator
Sound Load-In Crew
Light Board Operator
Follow Spot Operator
Electricians
Hair and Make-up Supervisor
Assistant Hair and Make-up Supervisors
Wardrobe supervisor
Head Carpenter
Carpenters
Costume Crafts
Wardrobe Crew
Costume Stitchers
Prop Director
Paint and Prop Crew

Shannon Dodson
Sylviane Sherwin
Jessica Kacinski, Sky Rolnick
Mackenzie Baird
Genesis Ramos-Bravo, Gabby Salerno, Max Rosenfeld
Alexandra Lombardo
Emma Reifschneider
Sarah Ficara
Natasha D’Amico
Will Garneau, Summer Glodstein
Kaitlyn Kociela-Taylor
Martin Benesh
Abby Rose
Bailey Bennett, LeeAnn Epstein
Julia Dubinsky
Ashlie Morrison
Maya Battistella
Kathryn O’Connor
Mackenzie Baird, Maya Battistella, Khalil Coates
Jessica McGowan, Marianna Oropallo
Cesario Tirado-Ortiz
Freddie Rose, Arianna Tice
Summer Glodstein
Katie De Onis
Mackenzie Baird, Nate Benitez, Mason Crowley
Hunter Lypen
Arianna Tice, Natalie Goggin, Ryan Urbin, Shannon Neenan, Alex Vaynerchuk
Marianna Orpallo, Cassie Smith
Hunter Lypen
Timika Edwards, Summer Glodstein, Parker Howland
Isabela Leon Ferrer, Josh Lococo, Caroline Meyers, Max Rosenfeld
Jenna Sargent, Nico Torrez, Molly Walsh
2021-2022 Production Season:
For more information https://www.newpaltz.edu/fpa/theatre/productions/mainstage/

Play On Shakespeare’s **Macbeth**
By William Shakespeare Translated by Migdalia Cruz
September 11th at 8:00 and September 12th at 2:00

**The Wolves**
By Sarah DeLappe
Presented with permission of Concord Theatricals
September 30, September 1, 2, 14, 15, 16 at 8:00 and September 3 and 17 at 2:00.

**La fuerza de Antígona**
By Tlaloc Rivas
November 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20 at 8:00 and November 14, 21 at 2:00

**Stop Kiss**
By Diana Son
Presented with permission from Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
December 3, 4 at 8 and December 5 at 2:00

**Unnatural Acts**
Harvard’s Secret Court of 1920
Conceived by Tony Speciale
Collaboratively written by Members of Plastic Theatre
February 24, 25, 26 and March 3, 4, 5 at 8:00 and February 27 and March 6 at 2:00

**Songs for a New World**
Written and Composed by Jason Robert Brown
Presented with permission of Music Theatre International
March 31, April 1, 2, 7, 8, 9 at 8:00 and April 3 and 10 at 2

**Pages from a Love Manifesto**
Devised by Nico Torrez
April 29, 30 at 8:00 and May 1 at 2:00