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Alumnus returns to direct fall mainstage show

September 27, 2022



When Travis Spangenburg ('13) stepped on the Jenkins Hall Mainstage to direct theater students on Georgia Southern University's Armstrong Campus, he was immediately taken back to his days as a student performer.

"It was where I met some of my closest friends and began to grow my own confidence as a performer," he said. "It's my chosen lifelong obsession. This space started it all and it's so, so wonderful to be back."

As an alumnus of the theater program, he has performed with the likes of the Savannah Shakes, Odd Lot Improv and the Collective Face Theatre Ensemble.

Now, he has returned to the Armstrong Campus to direct students on the stages he trained on himself.

He stepped into a role on the Jenkins Mainstage for the first time in spring of 2011. It was his first Shakespeare

show and his first proper stage show ever.

Ethan Goble, a theater sophomore, said Spangenburg has been able to connect with the students because of his understanding of their experiences as performing artist students.

"He's also showing us what we're able to achieve if we're able to continue putting in the work and if we're diligent about it," Goble said. "Hopefully we can get to that level and potentially be able to give back to the school in the same ways. It's really great and it's something to aspire to."

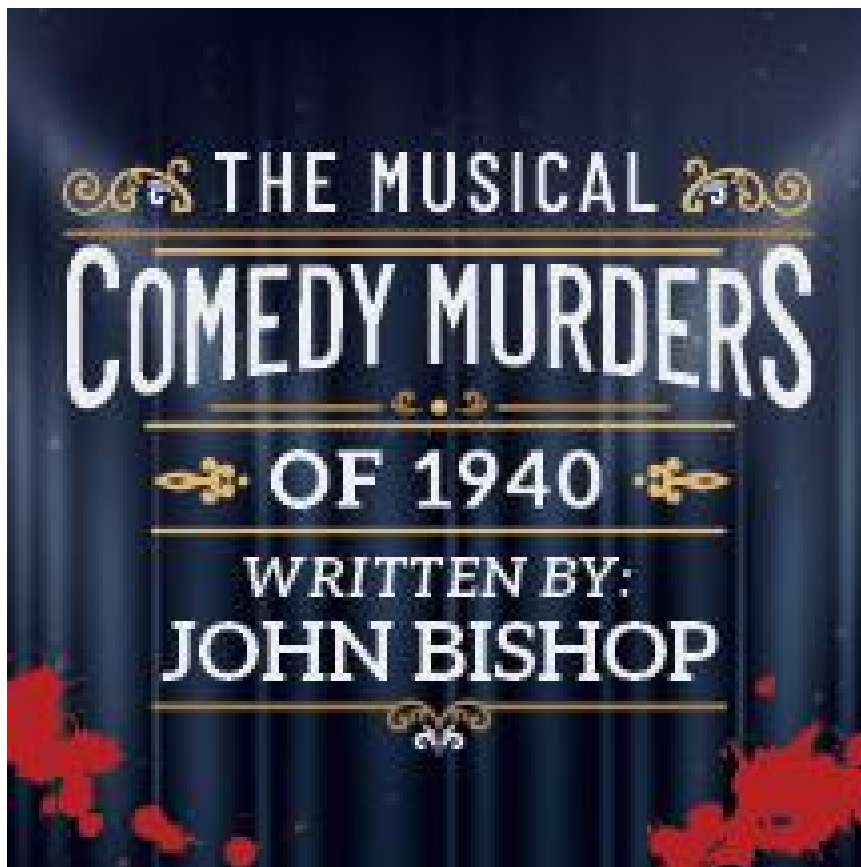
Spangenburg is well seasoned in Shakespeare, and has an eclectic directing resume. His directing credits include "Titus Andronicus" (2017) and "Macbeth" (2019) with Savannah Shakes, and "Man of La Mancha" (2020) with Asbury Memorial Theatre Company.

When it came time to select a piece to produce for Georgia Southern, he turned to a genre he said he always wanted to do: Murder Mystery.

"The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940" is a play that pokes fun at the more ridiculous aspects of "show biz" and the corny thrillers of Hollywood's heyday. The show will run Sept. 29 through Oct. 1 at 7:30 p.m. and Oct. 2 at 3:00 p.m. in Jenkins Hall Mainstage Theatre on the Armstrong Campus.

“Musical Comedy Murders of 1940” follows the creative team responsible for a recent Broadway flop in which three chorus girls were murdered by the “Stage Door Slasher.” The team assembles an audition for their new show at a wealthy estate. The house is replete with sliding panels and secret passageways, all of which figure diabolically in the comical mayhem that follows when the infamous “Slasher” makes his reappearance and strikes again. As the team prepares for its performance, and a blizzard cuts off any possible retreat, bodies start to drop in plain sight, knives spring out of nowhere, masked figures drag their victims behind swiveling bookcases, and accusing fingers point in all directions.

Tickets are \$12 with discounts available for military, seniors and students. Georgia Southern students, faculty and staff can attend for free with an Eagle ID. Tickets can be purchased by calling (912) 344-2801, visiting georgiasouthern.edu/armstrongtickets or by going to the Fine Arts Box Office, located in Fine Arts Hall, which is open weekdays, noon-3 p.m.



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160 years later: Remembering the Battle of Antietam and the ‘preliminary’ Emancipation Proclamation that reshaped American history

September 27, 2022



On Sept. 22, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln changed the course of American history by announcing that enslaved people would soon be free. Commonly referred to as the ‘preliminary’ Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln’s action that day was emboldened by a Union victory at the Battle of Antietam only days earlier. It is considered the bloodiest battle in American history after nearly 23,000 men lost their lives in a single day.

Ben Parten, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of history at Georgia Southern University who specializes in 19th century politics, abolition, civil war, reconstruction and the slave trade. He recently earned a doctorate at Yale University, and returned to his home state of Georgia. He discusses the importance of these two events that occurred in September 160 years ago.

Question: When these dates come up in your mind, how do they stick out to you as moments in American history?

Parten: They are two moments that are naturally linked. Antietam leads in part to the issuing of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. But both moments, the battle

and then Lincoln issuing the preliminary Emancipation point in different directions and speak to different degrees of importance in different areas.

Question: They’re connected, but they’re pointed in different directions. What do you mean?

Parten: Antietam, if we take Antietam in and of itself, strategically, it was really important because it forced the Confederate Army out of the North. Antietam is a creek in Maryland. It was part of the Confederate Army’s invasion of the North. It’d be the first invasion of the North. The second would end at Gettysburg. And like Gettysburg, Antietam mattered because it forced the Confederate Army to retreat. They could have kept marching into D.C. further north to Philadelphia, or elsewhere. So from a strategic perspective, it’s really important because it prolonged the war and allowed the U.S. to eventually win the war in the long run.

Also, Antietam was important because it was so bloody. It was a disastrous battle. It was incredibly bloody, incredibly violent. It led to an inordinate number of deaths and it had the effect on the country, similar to what the Battle of Shiloh had, which was fought just a few months earlier. In April of 1862, Shiloh was one of the first big battles that basically woke everyone up to the fact that this was going to be a long war. This was not going to be a flash in the pan. It wasn't going to end in a year. It would be a multi-year affair costing countless lives and needing countless numbers of resources to expend a more sophisticated federal state to fight this war.



Listen to the podcast version of this story on Eagle Eye View, the official podcast of Georgia Southern University.

Question: When it comes to the Battle of Antietam, even with the 23,000 dead, it was clearly a union advantage coming out of it. But still, both sides took devastating losses with more than 10,000 lost on both sides. How was it that it was a turning point so significantly when both sides took such drastic hits?

Parten: It's a turning point because at the time the Union Army had been suffering a series of defeats. Robert Lee thought that if he marched his army into Maryland, there was actually this kind of substratum of Confederate support in Maryland. They didn't find that. And then, more importantly, they were defeated. It deterred the army from the North and forced them, the Confederate Army that is, back into Virginia. That's why it's seen as a Union victory. It's sort of a moment where public opinion begins to turn a little bit.

This is a moment where Northerners and Northerner electorate begin to think that maybe this war can be won. It's a moment where morale is high, and that's why Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation when he did. His cabinet knew this at the time, but he had been preparing that document for much of 1862. He'd been talking about it behind closed doors. However, because the army was getting beat so badly, if he announced it too soon, it would seem like a desperate plea for help, basically, or an act of desperation.

And so it was decided that they would wait for a decisive victory, for morale to rise and then release the document. Antietam is that battle that gives Lincoln and his advisers the confidence to announce the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. So that's why the two moments are linked the way that they are, and why they point in different directions, so to speak. They matter for what the war looked like on the ground, strategically, but also what the war would mean and what it would ultimately be about

Question: We all know the Emancipation Proclamation, but it's that word "preliminary" that may be unknown to some readers. What is the difference between the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and the actual Emancipation Proclamation itself?

Parten: The preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was really a threat to the Confederate Army. It's a preliminary document that would go into effect on Jan. 1, 1863, if the Confederate government didn't come to the negotiating table, which they didn't.

The government basically said that they would free enslaved people in the rebellious states unless the Confederate Army came to the negotiating table and basically surrendered and ended the war. Lincoln gave the Confederate government until Jan. 1 of 1863, knowing that that was a non-starter, it was never going to happen. But again, emancipation was not popular in the country at the time. And so this is Lincoln, in part, reading public opinion and putting his feelers out and trying to gauge where the general public was and what they would be willing to support. So by giving the Confederate government this option, this potential way out, Lincoln was opening the door to kind of soothing the public's mind, showing that he's doing everything he can to end the war as peacefully and as fast as possible, even if it meant retaining the status-quo.

Question: You've lived along the East Coast for most of your life, and you've been studying this era of American culture and history in these parts of the country. What is it about studying in Georgia that makes it different from studying in the other states you've lived in?

Parten: The Civil War in Georgia is one of, if not the state's most transformative moments, you know it's a formative historical moment. The Battle of Atlanta, Sherman's march through Georgia, his taking up Savannah; these are colossal historical forces that have shaped the state that we live in. There's a level of familiarity, proximity, too, to that history. And it's also just kind of on the roadsides. We can see it on historical markers and in other other ways as well.

My grandmother's a great example. She grew up in Dalton, Georgia, right alongside a railroad track. And she talks about as children one of her favorite pastimes with her cousins was to go back and to find basically minnieballs and other artifacts from the Civil War. They were just right in their backyard. And so there was a certain level of living history to the Civil War in the South, especially, that you can't quite find anywhere else.

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