

## Giving It All They've Got: Stageworks presents 'The Giver'

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Husbands and wives are paired up based on statistics of compatibility and personality. Technology plays only a minor role in society; computers and television do not exist. Families routinely share their dreams and feelings with each other in order to diffuse emotional buildup. All possible steps have been taken in order to eliminate feelings of love, sexuality, pain, anguish and loss.

This is the society created by Lois Lowry in her Newbury Award-winning novel, *The Giver*. In her 1994 acceptance speech, Lowry stated, "I tried to make Jonas' world seem familiar, comfortable and safe, and I tried to seduce the reader. I seduced myself along the way. It did feel good, that world. I got rid of all the things I fear and dislike; all the violence, poverty, prejudice and injustice, and I even threw in good manners as a way of life because I liked the idea of it."

Although Lowry's world at first appears utopian, the novel quickly takes on a dystopian theme, as it asks the question: "What are we willing to erase in order to achieve perfect equality?"

This month Stageworks Youth Theatre will address this question by presenting the stage adaptation of the novel, published in 2005 by Eric Coble—a feat the talented cast is embarking on bravely. Not only has the novel been surrounded by controversy since its publication, but the play has only been performed approximately six times—ever.

Director Gina Gambony commented, "I have tried desperately to express the core message of the story." Gambony has made many bold choices in the staging of the show, including the casting of what she calls "a very interesting Giver." Die-hard fans of the novel may be surprised to see the spin that Gambony decided to take on the show's main character, who is electively remaining anonymous at this time. Other features of the show that promise to be intriguing are the use of shadow play in order to portray memories, one of the play's main themes. Of this choice Gambony stated, "portraying [them] has been a long journey."

Also embarking on this journey is Oskar Galileo Gambony-Steding, who plays Jonas, The Receiver of Memories. Gambony-Steding is a 13-year-old student at The Friends School of Wilmington and is a veteran Stageworks performer. Performing in "The Giver" has been a challenge for the young actor. "How [Jonas] changes has been hard to grasp," Gambony-Steding said. "How he reacts from being The Receiver has been difficult." In order to relate to the transition Jonas experiences, Gambony-Steding has been spending a lot of extra time at home rehearsing. He is willing to go the extra mile, though, because performing the role of Jonas is accomplishing his goal. Of his experience in "The Giver" he revealed, "It feels really rewarding."

Since its publication "The Giver" has sold more than 5.3 million copies and has become part of many schools' reading lists. However, it has also been the subject of much controversy, finding inclusion on a banned book lists. Due to some disturbing content and serious themes, Gambony recommends this show for ages 10 and up. The staging of this immensely popular book promises to be a memorable experience, so plan to see it at the Thalian Hall Studio Theater, September 21st-23rd and 28th-30th. Friday and Saturday shows are at 7pm; Sundays are at 3pm. Tickets are \$9.—Susan Zedella



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