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by Scott McCrea

# UAF's 'Speech and Debate' is refreshing

Theatre UAF's production of "Speech and Debate" is a breath of fresh air on the local community theater scene, a bold and innovative production backed with an engaging storyline and stellar performances. The show's playwright, Stephen Karam, mixes together serious and rather controversial social issues such as homophobia, teenage alienation and sexual predators along with an unexpected blend of campy and at times riotous humor. It's an eye-opening experience that is at times solemn, other times laugh-out-loud funny, that will leave you captivated from start to finish.

Directed by Carrie Baker, "Speech and Debate" centers on three outcast high school students in Oregon who come together in the wake of a sex scandal involving one of their teachers. There's the nerdish Solomon, an ultra-serious and ambitious reporter for the high school newspaper who is looking to break the story; Howie, the openly gay new student, who cruises gay chat rooms looking for companionship; and Diwata, a stage-struck anguished teen who expresses herself through her weekly podcast. The idea that the three of them, despite their differences, would band together is nothing new and has a bit of a John Hughes feel to it.

However, any resemblance to Hughes — or anything else — ends there. "Speech and Debate" is as original as they come and surprisingly modest given some of the direction it goes off in, in particular, the hyster

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