

Columbia News

James Baldwin's *Another Country* Hits the Riverside Theatre Stage  
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<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/news/07/11/baldwin.html>

Columbia Stages, the producing arm of Columbia University's School of the Arts Theatre Division, is presenting an original theatrical adaptation of James Baldwin's classic novel *Another Country*. Set in Harlem, among other locales, this unflinching examination of race, sexuality and love still resonates as deeply today as it did when first published in 1962. Performances are taking place at the Riverside Theatre at Riverside Church from November 8 through 17.

Columbia School of the Arts MFA acting students perform in *Another Country*

"*Another Country* is a history lesson of life in America, one that is filled with outrage, brutal honesty and searing passion," said Diane Paulus, a renowned theater and opera director who has brought the current adaptation to the stage. Paulus herself graduated with an M.F.A. Degree from Columbia's theatre program in 1997.

"In staging *Another Country*, I found guidance in Baldwin's own words about the theatre," said Paulus. "Baldwin was, in his own words, 'born in the church.' He spent many years as a child preacher. Baldwin wrote: 'I knew that what I wanted to do in the theatre was to recreate moments I remembered as a boy preacher, to involve the people, even against their will, to shake them up, and hopefully, to change them.'"

His compelling stories are vividly brought to life by the actors of the Columbia M.F.A. Acting Class of 2008. "This production is the culmination of three years of intense vocal and physical training," says Steven Chaikelson, chair of the Columbia School of the Arts Theatre Division. "It's thrilling for our actors to be able to devote their considerable talents to such a significant ensemble piece."

A panel discussion analyzing and comparing *Another Country* and its relationship to themes of race, gender and sexuality in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, took place on Nov. 13 at the Malcolm X & Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial & Education Center. The panel

featured Paulus and Marcellus Blount and Brent Edwards, both professors of English and comparative literature at Columbia University. Columbia, the Upper Manhattan branches of the New York Public Library and New Heritage Theatre Company are co-sponsoring a month-long series of events around *To Kill A Mockingbird* as part of the National Endowment for the Arts' Big Read program.

Given his portrayal of adult themes and his frank discussion of racial and class conflict in America, Baldwin has often been at the center of controversy. "Most of the controversy surrounding his reception as an author," said Professor Blount, "stems from the fact, put simply, that he was a writer ahead of his time. For that reason, especially, Baldwin's work continues to be relevant today - his Harlem is still our Harlem."

- Story by Stacy Parker Aab. Photograph by Kate Raudenbush.