

The Play Is the Thing

July 22, 2008 11:15 AM Fran Simon
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The Shakespeare Festival at Tulane is staging an original mystery set in post-Katrina New Orleans. *What, Has This Thing Appeared Again Tonight?*, a play conceived, written and directed by Jim Fitzmorris, associate artistic director, will be on stage on the Tulane uptown campus July 25â€“Aug. 3.



Left to right, James Bartelle, Kathlyn Tarwater, Will Connolly, Andrew Larimer (front, center), Peter McElligott (top, center), Sean Glazebrook, Claire Gresham and A.J. Allegra rehearse a scene from *What, Has This Thing Appeared Again Tonight?*, a new play written and directed by Jim Fitzmorris, assistant professor of theater at Tulane. (Photo by Brad Robbert)

The play, written for the NOLA Project theater company, blends Shakespeare, science fiction and horror. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a troupe of actors returns to New Orleans in search of artistic inspiration at the site of the disaster. They are seeking to discover who, or what, the “Thing” is before it's too late. The actors play themselves.

The “Thing” is not Hurricane Katrina, says Fitzmorris, an assistant professor of theater at Tulane. “It existed before Katrina. The play is more about the creation of theater ? of art ? than about Katrina.”

As the play unfolds, the actors travel through 2,000 years of history in search of the “Thing.”

The NOLA Project is a theater company dedicated to a renewed theater scene in New Orleans.

It began when a group of actors studying at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts set out to create a company with high dramatic standards in New Orleans ? a city ripe for theatrical revival. The NOLA Project existed before Hurricane Katrina. In fact, its premiere play was cut short by the storm. Since then, the company has strengthened its mission of presenting new works and relevant great works with high-quality performances.

The NOLA Project commissioned Fitzmorris to write the play, and he spent a year in the process, carefully observing each actor in the company. The result is a work that challenges the troupe and gives each actor an opportunity to shine, he says.

The title of the play comes from an opening line in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It also is an homage to the horror film, *The Thing*. The set is “designed for maximum shock effect,” says Fitzmorris, a big fan of horror movies, who hopes the play will involve and surprise the audience at each performance.

Other plays by Fitzmorris include *Something Akin to a Restoration*, which was produced in conjunction with the Fourth Unity Festival in New York and received a favorable review from the *New York Times*; *With Malice Towards All*, an American College Theater Festival regional finalist; *The Last Madam*; *The House of Plunder*, which won a Big Easy Award for best original play; *The Beignet Plays*; *The Visitation* and [*Yuletide*](#).

In the fall semester, Fitzmorris will teach “The Language of Performance” and “History of Theater III,” with a required reading list of 35 plays.

Performances of *What, Has This Thing Appeared Again Tonight?* are July 25 and 26, August 1, 2, 8, 9, 15 and 16 at 7:30 p.m. in Tulane's McWilliams Hall Lab Theatre. All seats are \$10. For tickets, call the Shakespeare Festival box office at 504-865-5105, extension 2.