

Recent Graduate To Debut Play

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It's been a big year for Helen Jaksch. In May, she wrapped up her college career on a high note ? representing her class as the student commencement speaker. Now, Jaksch is preparing to debut a play at the Shakespeare Festival at Tulane.

The curtain will go up on *Fighting With Two Hands* on Thursday (July 16) for a three-night run. Jaksch wrote the play as her senior thesis project, but was later approached about adding her play to the [festival](#) lineup, something she calls "a huge honor."

"The artistic director and the associate artistic director for the festival came and saw the stage reading for my thesis and said they were trying to move in the direction where students from the department have the opportunity to be more active participants in the Shakespeare Festival," Jaksch says. "They said they wanted my piece to be a jumping-off point for more student-generated work to be presented at the festival."

As Jaksch originally conceived it, *Fighting With Two Hands* focused on Minnie Maddern Fiske, an influential actress of the late 19th and early 20th century who fought for artistic freedom against a monopolistic group called the Theatrical Syndicate, which controlled every aspect of the theater business in New York for almost 20 years. Jaksch says Fiske and her impact on the American theater was an interesting and inspiring story.

"I was just really fascinated with her spunk, and her willingness to take on such a big organization. So the play started off with the story of her struggle in the theater."

But as she developed the script, Jaksch says she reworked it to add a contemporary flavor. "When I revisited it, I thought it seemed like a historical book on stage ? a little dusty and a little old," Jaksch says. "So I combined that story with a second plotline about a modern theater company trying to put on this ridiculous play and

coming up against the same struggles as Minnie Maddern Fiske."

The cast of *Fighting With Two Hands* is mostly composed of new graduates from the theater department, something for which Jaksch has a great deal of pride.

"It's nice for us all to expand that relationship that we started in school," says Jaksch. "It's nice for the festival to recognize that there is this talented group of students that has put in so much time and has been trained here. So why not just continue that training in a professional environment in the summer?"