



“a very honest telling of a horribly true story”

***columbinus* explores painful, essential questions**

MARCH 17, 2008 | PORTLAND, OR — Blue Monkey will put its mantra of “be fearless” to the test in a couple of weeks, when it presents *columbinus*, an unflinchingly honest portrayal of the tragic events at Columbine High School. Created by the United States Theatre Project, *columbinus* focuses on the loneliness, anxiety and yearning that can lead to such alienation and rage. It combines fact and fiction in a compelling docudrama that is based on police transcripts, diary entries, home videos and interviews with hundreds of adolescents across the country.

“*columbinus* is a very honest telling of a horribly true story,” says cast member Sara Simon, a junior at Beaverton’s Arts & Communication Magnet Academy. “The things that the two boys actually said to counselors, to peers and to each other are included in the show. And it was that realization of the depth of truth in the script that so eerily attracted me to it.”

The first act journeys through a proverbial high school day, portraying each part of the day through a unique point of view and style to illuminate the world underneath each “typical” adolescent, as their interactions and problems advance two outsiders toward a violent destiny. The second act examines the two actual shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, with a fictionalization of the days before the shootings. They wrangle with issues of suicide, the afterlife, personal motivations, fears, and longings. As the shooters face the reality of their decision, the dialogue moves into fact, documenting the entire shooting from the perspectives of the survivors. The piece ends with an audience discussion, giving both the actors and audience a chance to process the ideas expressed.

“I think it is vital that parents, teenagers, teachers, and anyone who remembers what it was like to be in high school should attend the production,” says cast member Keiler Beers, a sophomore at Beaverton High School. “The discussion created by the replication of high school interaction and cruelty is an invaluable one that everyone should participate in. It is also important that we look at what led to the Columbine massacre so that we make sure we are taking steps to avoid similar events in the future.”

The choice to present a play like *columbinus* is not one that Blue Monkey takes lightly, and it is definitely not intended for younger audiences*. But as a theater company dedicated to taking artistic risks and empowering the unique, fresh, fearless voice of the young artist, Blue Monkey believes *columbinus* provides a valuable opportunity to truly deliver on the promise of its mission. Blue Monkey Artistic Director John Monteverde says he is amazed at the fearlessness of these young performers in tackling frightening but important subject matter.

“They bring an insight to the material that no adult artist could and they face the topic with unflinching focus that few of us could handle,” Monteverde says. “This is tough stuff, but these are tough kids and the result is a daringly insightful discussion of an important social topic as well as vibrant, gripping theater.”

WHAT: *columbinus*

WHEN: April 4–12 ~ Thu–Sat @ 7 pm

WHERE: West End Theater, 1220 SW Taylor

AGES: Mature teens & adults*

TICKETS: \$20 Adults ~ \$16 students/seniors
Special: Students \$10 on Thurs!
Online at bluemonkeytheater.org
or by phone at **503.593.2466**

* Mature themes, strong language, sexual references, and suggested violence. Children under the age of 13 will not be admitted without a parent or guardian.

MORE ON COLUMBINUS...

- 2 [Cast/Production Team](#)
- 3 [Director Notes](#)
- 4/5 [Perspectives of Teen Cast](#)
- 6 [About *columbinus*](#)
- 7 [Photos/Captions](#)

Additional Information (click link to access):

- [Promotional Flyer](#)
- [United State Theatre Project Website](#): background, reviews, study guide, etc.

CAST

Keiler Beers*
Nathan Daniels* (Dylan Klebold)
Kai Hayashi*
Kaia Maarja Hillier*
Kisky Holwerda*
Mike Schuster (Eric Harris)
Derek Stutz
Sara Simon

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director John Monteverde
Stage Manager Karen Wilkinson
Fight Director John Armour
Video Design J.J. Kaczinski
Lighting Design Alexzandria Eccles
Sound Design Martin De Jardins
Asst. Stage Manager / Wardrobe Tamara Burgess*
Sound Technician..... Michael Chaffee*

STAFF

Artistic Director John Monteverde
Managing Director Bob Peart
Education Director Brian Allard
Volunteer CoordinatorSue McNeilly

* 2007-08 Blue Monkey Interns

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Blue Monkey Theater Company is about taking artistic risks, coloring outside the lines and empowering the unique, fresh, fearless voice of the young artist. We're committed to expanding the vision of what theater for young people is and can be, by creating experiences that are challenging, honest and unforgettable. If you can't be brave when you're young, when can you be?

NOTES FROM DIRECTOR JOHN MONTEVERDE



I am amazed by the fearlessness of these young performers in tackling this frightening but important (and tragically relevant) subject matter. They bring an insight to the material that no adult artist could and they face the topic with unflinching focus that few of us could handle. This is tough stuff, but these are tough kids and the result is a daringly insightful discussion of an important social topic, as well as vibrant, gripping theater.

Our production seeks to find an answer to this horrific modern phenomenon: the “why” of high school shootings. I’m not sure we succeed in answering every question, but I know that if a complete answer is to be found, it will be through the exploration of courageous young people like these. Only they really know the right questions to ask in the first place.

We at Blue Monkey are proud to premiere this daring and thought-provoking play to the Pacific Northwest. It’s a bold vision of the kind of work young artists are capable of, and it’s a perfect example of what our company is committed to.

NOTES FROM PLAYWRIGHT PJ PAPARELLI

{from the forward to *columbinus*}

I always thought this piece would be an answer to the notorious question: “why?” After traveling to Littleton and meeting parents, children, survivors, and community leaders, I realized there were many answers from every perspective, including from the shooters themselves. With all these answers, I noticed things had not changed even in Littleton. Life went on. And all the reasons “why” remain. I asked myself, “what could this piece suggest as a different means of prevention?” I was afraid that we wouldn’t find an answer.

I eventually answered that question with more questions: How do we treat each other? Why do we treat each other the way we do? Why do kids, who will soon ask these questions about their kids, continue to treat each other the same way? Why does this cycle never change, even after the kids themselves resort to bombs and guns and butchering their fellow students to prove a point? Why do we look for an easy answer- a pill to take, a program to turn off- when we know in our hearts that something deep inside us has to change? What are we afraid of?

columbinus is not a play; it is a theatrical discussion. The title (Latin for “dove-like”) is similar to a medical term, suggesting an examination or procedure. Its creators wanted to create a fictional world of adolescence, born out of our collective experience. Just as this fictional high school could be anywhere in America, so could the potential for a school shooting. We spoke with hundreds of adolescents to hear what they had to say about their world, We let them be the teachers, guiding us to their answers. At the same time, we collected as much written and aural fact about Columbine as we could gather from every source under the sun, including many conversations with people in Littleton. The merger of these two worlds would be the subject for discussion.

columbinus is dedicated to all the voices that were silenced by the shootings on April 20, 1999.

No one should ever feel that alone again.

—PJ Paparelli, Director/Co-Writer/Conceiver
United States Theatre Project
May 1, 2006

PERSPECTIVES OF BLUE MONKEY'S TEEN CAST

**KISKY HOLWERDA**

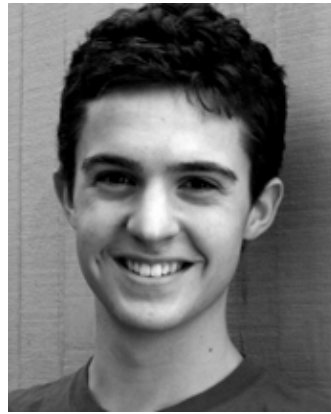
Age: 16

Lake Oswego High School

**KAIA HILLIER**

Age: 16

Wilson High School

**KEILER BEERS**

Age: 16

Beaverton High School

**SARA SIMON**

Age: 17

Arts & Communication

What is it about *columbinus* that interested you?

KEILER BEERS (16): I think one of the primary things that drew me to the project was an opportunity to be part of such a meaningful discussion of the isolation and loneliness of high school.

KISKY HOLWERDA (16): *columbinus* attracted me because it is so different from any other play that I've been in. Just the way it was written and put together was really interesting to me, and I wanted to be a part of it. Also, the characters were relatable, and the message that the play gives is one that I think is very important.

SARA SIMON (17): *columbinus* is a very honest telling of a horribly true story. The things that the two boys actually said to counselors, to peers and to each other are included in the show. And it was that realization of the depth of truth in the script that so eerily attracted me to it.

How is this play relevant in terms of your own experiences?

KEILER: While I myself have never actually been picked on to the extent that Eric and Dylan were, I have witnessed bullying in many forms during my time in high school. To see what this can lead to—in the most extreme example—and delve into what causes these interactions and cliques interests me greatly.

KISKY: *columbinus* is relevant in terms of my own school experiences because all the different stereotypes portrayed throughout the play, I have seen at my own school. Cliques and bullying are prevalent in almost any school and so to be in a play that addresses the effects and goes behind these different types of people is very interesting to me.

SARA: I don't want to say that my involvement with this production has made me scared to sit in class, but it has definitely altered my way of thinking and behaving. Ever since my initial read of the script, I think I've subconsciously been a bit more cautious about the things I say and do in my high school. It's interesting to think of how the script has affected me like that.

Why would you encourage your own school or peers to attend *columbinus*?

KEILER: I think it is vital that parents, teenagers, teachers, and anyone who remembers what it was like to be in high school should attend the production. The discussion created by the replication of high school interaction and cruelty is an invaluable one that everyone should participate in. It is also important that we look at what led to the Columbine massacre so that we make sure we are taking steps to avoid similar events in the future.

KISKY: I would recommend that my school and peers attend this show because it is so real, and it goes behind the facades that everyone puts on when they wake up in the morning. It is also really interesting to learn about what went on in the days leading up to April 20th. In general it's a show about teenagers and what we're all going through every day, and so people can relate.

KAIA: *Columbinus* is important for every high school student to see. It deals with everything: self esteem, the pressure to fit in, and what the consequences are when we don't treat one another well. (*continues next page...*)

SARA: Young people need to be aware of what is going on in this world. Yes, the shootings at Columbine happened nearly a decade ago, but that is no excuse for why so many of my peers have never heard of it. If students attend the production, they will go home and talk about it. They will discuss how it made them feel, and that kind of communication is so necessary for teenagers.

What did your parents think of the script? Did they have reservations about it? Did you?

KEILER: At first, I didn't want my parents to read the script before opening night, so that the impact of the play would not be diminished by having prior knowledge of the script. However, as I began to read the script more and more, I realized that I wanted someone to talk to about the production. It took my mom a few sittings to be able to make it through the script because of the emotional impact, which proved that it will have a similar impact when she sees it performed. Although I know it is hard to stomach because of its intense impact, I never doubted my desire to be involved with the project.

KISKY: The script made my mom cry, because the story really touched her. However, my parents were definitely a little nervous about the language and some of the content, but they could see how much being in this show means to me, and even though they won't let my grandma see the show, for the most part they accept it. I didn't really have any reservations about the script. I love it and there are some parts that I know are going to be hard emotionally, but I'm ready to take it on.

SARA: My parents haven't read the script yet. I'm still a bit uncomfortable every time I read through the scenes. It's a very disturbing story, but one that needs to be told.

In light of the controversy at Sherwood Middle School about *Higher Ground* (the play that was cancelled and then performed off campus), how does it feel to perform in this play?

KAIA: The content in this show is, well...extreme, I guess you could say. Some might wonder how teenagers would have the maturity to pull it off, or how we could possibly understand what's really going on. I think it's important that it's such a young cast. In this way, we are able to connect with younger audiences. And the thing is, all of us can relate to any one of the characters, whether it be Rebel, Perfect, Jock, or Dylan Klebold—everyone can relate to one another.

SARA: I know many people will be offended by the language in the show, but high school students swear. There's not much else to say about that. As for the nature of the story itself, I really just hope the production makes an impact. I hope people can walk away from the show and see the need for acceptance in our culture. I hope people can understand the influence their words or actions might have. I hope people will learn to respect one another.

Did you have a particular part in mind and is it the one you ended up being cast for? What about the role resonates for you?

KEILER: The roles that interested me the most from the first part time I read the script were the roles of Loner/Dylan and Prep. Loner interested me because I thought it would be terrifying and extremely challenging to play a role of that depth. I also liked the part of Prep because he is a character that I know very well simply because he shows up in many teenagers. I think his disregard for other people, combined with his inner struggles with his own insecurities and fears, makes for a very well-rounded character.

KISKY: The part that I had in mind was Perfect, and I was cast in that role. This role resonates for me in that I've had times in my life where I felt like I had to keep things from my parents, or I couldn't ask their advice. I also think that behind the perfect lifestyle that Perfect shows to everyone else, there are definite problems and secrets, much like any other teen.

KAIA: Rebel is the part that I aimed for, and it's the part I ended up getting. I think it's what really pulled me into this show in the first place. She's extremely tough on the outside and seem so "different," but once you take a look inside, you see that there's more heart in this character than is being presented. That happens with all of the characters; they all think they're so different, or they try hard to fit in, but in the end, they have to realize that they're more alike than they could imagine.

SARA: I play a very religious girl. It feels like she is always bound by her faith to see the best in people. That's really something that stands out to me, and something that I'd like to take away from the character. I think people in today's society focus on negativities far too often.

Note: With the exception of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold in the second act, the characters in Columbinus are never identified to the audience by name; they are simply a group of teenagers. The iconic names, such as Perfect, Faith, Rebel and Prep, are used only for reference in the script.

ABOUT *COLUMBINUS*

From the United States Theatre Project website: <http://unitedstatestheatreproject.org/columbinus/index.html>

Project Statement

columbinus is the meeting of fact and fiction, illuminating the realities of adolescent culture and behavior while exploring the events surrounding the shootings at Columbine High School in 1999, the worst school shooting in American history.

Project Summary

In a modern tribal ritual, the actors transition into eight teenagers from any high school in America. The first act journeys through a proverbial high school day. Each section of the day uses a unique point of view and style to illuminate the world underneath each “typical” adolescent, as their interactions and problems advance two outsiders toward a violent destiny. Victims of harassment, isolation, and rejection, the two outsiders’ personal issues and violent tendencies escalate as they search for a means of expression and help. By the end of the first act, as each “typical teenager” has shared their atypical inner life, the outsiders have now found each other as a way to express their hatred of their world around them and begin to merge their fantasy life into a violent reality. The first act combines fact and fiction using actual dialogue surrounding the Columbine shootings as well as interviews with hundreds of adolescents from across the country.

The second act examines the two actual shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, with a fictionalization of the days before the shootings. They wrangle with issues of suicide, the afterlife, personal motivations, fears, and longings. As the shooters face the reality of their decision, the dialogue moves into fact, documenting the entire shooting from the perspectives of the survivors. Using police transcripts, media coverage, and interviews, as well as an actual seven minute 911 call, the audience experiences the survivors’ stories. As they grieve and ask questions, the shooters are present, post mortem, trapped in an everlasting purgatory, forced to examine their actions and witness the consequences. The piece closes with an actual graduation speech written by a Columbine student days before the shootings asking for tolerance, respect and understanding among her fellow students, and most of all, hope for the future. The piece ends with an audience discussion, a chance for both actor and audience to process the ideas expressed.

Conclusion

Nothing is more important to our growth and development as a nation than our children. School shootings have fallen off the radar screen of the nation as larger concerns of terrorism and war dominate our attention. The culture that spawned this phenomenon in the nineties has not been fully addressed, and most certainly the next school shooting is bubbling beneath the surface of the typical American high school. *columbinus* is a way to affect change by both its process and product. The project relies on adolescents themselves— both as actors and consultants— to express themselves and further their understanding of each other through sharing. Spending time in Littleton allows us to glean insights into the nature of the crime and its aftermath. The project builds on these untapped sources of wisdom. The project is not afraid to illuminate how this particular tragedy happened, and how communication and consideration among adolescents and between the generations may, in the end, be more effective than all the violence prevention programs and plans that are now routine in the nation’s schools. This dramatic work brings audiences inside the experience with all the immediacy that theater allows, leaving them deeply moved with fresh perspectives.

To download high-res photos click on any of the images below, or visit http://www.bluemonkeytheater.org/press_photos. If you would prefer to receive it via email, just let us know. Photo credit: Jerry Rousselle



Michael Schuster, left, and Nathan Daniels, right, as high school shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold reenact the horrors of Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999, in Blue Monkey Theater Co.'s daring production of *columbinus*.



The cast of *columbinus* (left to right: Kisky Holwerda, Kai Hayashi, Nathan Daniels, Kaia Hillier, Derek Stutz, Mike Schuster and Keiler Beers) explores the all too topical subject of high school shootings and the tragedy of Columbine High School. (Not pictured: Sara Simon)



Bullying (left to right: Kai Hayashi, Mike Schuster and Keiler Beers) leads to acts of rage and violence for the students of Columbine High School in Blue Monkey Theater Co.'s production of *columbinus*.



An awkward teen outcast (Mike Schuster) is ill prepared to protect himself from the physical and psychological abuse of modern high school life in *columbinus*.

columbinus

by the united states theatre project
written by Stephen Karam and PJ Paparelli

“Ever since that day we’ve been obsessed with moving on, or getting back... so we’ve gone to gun control...the music...computer games... the school...columbinus...the police...the parents...looking for someone to blame. But we always find ourselves back where we started asking the same question...”

PHOTO BY JERRY ROUSSELLE



directed by John Monteverde

April 4–12 at the West End Theater, 1220 SW Taylor

Tickets and times at bluemonkeytheater.org or 503.593.2466

April 20, 1999, is a date forever burned into the memory of our nation. This award-winning docudrama exposes the cultural and personal pathologies that gave rise to the horrific events at Columbine High School, where two students went on a deadly rampage. Based on interviews with high school students across the country, the play focuses on the loneliness, anxiety and yearning that can lead to alienation and rage.

PLEASE NOTE: MATURE THEMES, EXTREMELY STRONG LANGUAGE, SEXUAL REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED VIOLENCE. CHILDREN UNDER 13 WILL NOT BE ADMITTED WITHOUT PARENT OR GUARDIAN.

Blue Monkey Theater Co.

Be fearless.®