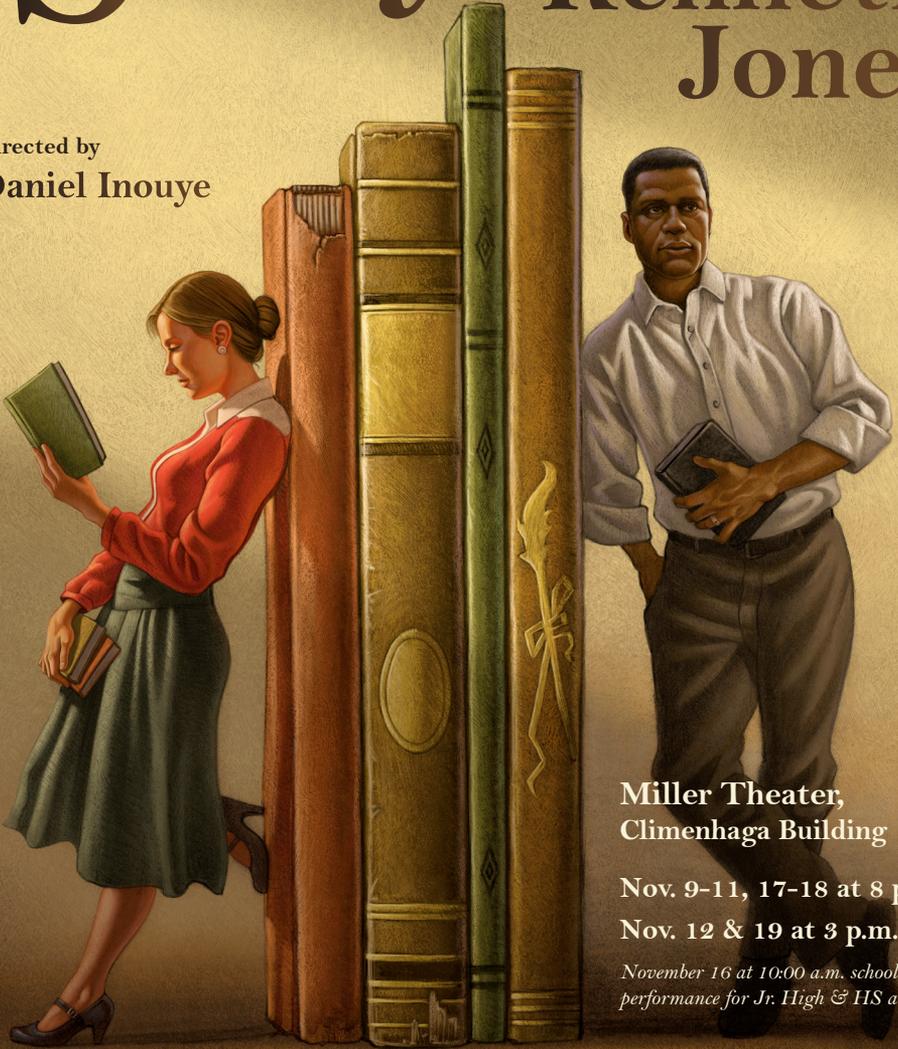


Alabama Story

Written by

Kenneth Jones

Directed by
Daniel Inouye



Miller Theater,
Climenhaga Building

Nov. 9-11, 17-18 at 8 p.m.

Nov. 12 & 19 at 3 p.m.

*November 16 at 10:00 a.m. school series
performance for Jr. High & HS audiences*

Image by Greg Newbold © www.gregnewbold.com

2023-2024
SEASON

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Messiah_Univ_Theatre_and_Dance 

 MESSIAH
UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF
THEATRE AND DANCE

Messiah University Department of Theatre and Dance presents

Alabama Story

Written by

Kenneth Jones

ALABAMA STORY is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC, servicing the Dramatists Play Services collection. (www.dramatists.com)

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DEPARTMENT OF
THEATRE AND DANCE

Mission Statement: As a community of Theatre and Dance artists, we cultivate the stewardship of intellect and imagination in a forum for civic dialogue as we seek to understand our calling in Christ.

messiah.edu/departments/theatre

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saw tonight, please
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social media!



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Messiah_Univ_Theatre_and_Dance

ARTISTIC TEAM

Director.....	Daniel Inouye
Assistant Director.....	Megan Eich
Stage Managers.....	Madalyn Oliver, Reannah Weiss
Scenic Designer.....	Tymberley Whitesel
Costume Designer.....	Lydia Matson
Assistant Costume Designer.....	Abby Crispin
Faculty Costume Advisor.....	Elizabeth Angelozzi
Lighting Designer.....	Tristan Stasiulis
Sound Designer.....	Carmi Wilmot
Properties Masters.....	Julia Itson, Adahlee Schroeder
Hair and Make-up Designer.....	Ella Murray
Technical Director.....	Benjamin Roberts
Production Manager.....	Patricia DuBois
Publicity Coordinator.....	Hannah Wilburn

CAST

Emily Wheelock Reed.....	Sammi-Jo Shuma
Thomas Franklin.....	Jack Jones
Joshua Moore.....	Matthew Featherson
Lily Whitfield.....	Abby Crispin*, Ella Murray^
Garth Williams.....	Josh McCleaf
Senator E.W. Higgins.....	Michael Casey
Bobby Crone.....	Alden Walker
Henry Branch.....	Ethan Stroud
Herschel Webb, Passerby.....	Josh Easley
U/S Emily, Passerby, Coffee Cart Server.....	Ashley Sheffe

* November 10, 12, 17, 19 performances

^ November 9, 11, 16, 18 performances

RUNNING CREW

Assistant Stage Manager.....	Rebecca Zheng
Wardrobe	Ashley Sheffe
Light Board Op.....	Eleanor Mund
Sound Board Op	Yanira Perez
House Manager	Chloe Richards
Run Crew	Julie Osburn

SET & COSTUME CONSTRUCTION

Set and costume construction was completed with the help of the Messiah Theatre and Dance Department Work Study Students.

There will be one 15-minute intermission.

SYNOPSIS

It's 1959, and the Civil Rights Movement is starting to grip America. In Montgomery, Alabama, a gentle children's book stirs the passions of a segregationist senator and a no-nonsense librarian. A contrasting story of childhood friends — an African-American man and a woman of white privilege who are reunited in Montgomery that same year — provides private counterpoint to the public events of the play. Political foes, star-crossed lovers, and one feisty children's author inhabit the same page to conjure a Deep South of the imagination.

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

Conjuring a Deep South of the Imagination for “Alabama Story”

In May 2000, while reading *The New York Times*, I came across the story of Emily Wheelock Reed, the former state librarian of Alabama who had been challenged by a segregationist politician in 1959. Alabama State Senator E.O. Eddins demanded that a children’s picture book — Garth Williams’ *The Rabbits’ Wedding*, about a rabbit with black fur marrying a rabbit with white fur — be purged from the shelves of Alabama libraries on the grounds that it promoted racial integration. Their conflict was reported worldwide. Before I finished reading the article, I knew this was an idea for a play.

Strong characters and richly contrasting conflicts rarely just fall into my lap, but that’s exactly what happened here. Vivid opposites — male and female, black and white, insider and outsider, Southern and Northern, private and public, child and parent, innocence and ugliness — were immediately evident in this now-forgotten slice of American history.

Emily Reed’s story was widely documented in newspapers and magazines at the time, so a lot of source material existed, allowing me to draw from and expand upon actual language and public personalities. In fact, the play’s most outrageous proclamations from the bullying politician (renamed Senator Higgins) are direct quotes from the man who used to be known as “Big Ed.” And when I read Emily’s statement that “the free flow of information is the best means to solve the problems of the South, the nation and the world,” I was inspired by the grandeur and universality of the sentence: This is a story about *access*, a basic human right. Little did I know at the time that the words “*free flow of information*” make up one of the foundational tenets of librarianship itself.

On research trips to Alabama, it came into focus that I was writing a play about censorship rather than Civil Rights, although the two are certainly tangled in *Alabama Story*. This was a tale about white people threatening to devour each other — and seeking to

protect each other — in a time of extraordinary social change. And about how talking to one another, face to face, about difficult matters is on that continuum of “the free flow of information.” Conversations matter.

My trip to the small town of Demopolis, Alabama, was particularly inspiring. It’s the senator’s real-life stomping ground, in the middle of the state’s “black belt,” where the soil is rich and plantations once thrived. I borrowed the setting to be the hometown of two characters I created for the play’s reflective story. Lily and Joshua, a white woman and a Black man who were once childhood friends in Demopolis, reunite in Montgomery the same year that Emily Reed was challenged. Lily and Joshua are meant to suggest the private heart of the public controversy. Like the others in the play, they have a deep connection to books (the Bible, primarily, in their case). As with the others in the play, the quality of their character will be challenged in their exchanges.

I didn’t want to write a docudrama that told the strict truth, but to create a collage of a play that was a mashup of theatrical forms I love, telling an artistic truth. I say that the play is set in “the Deep South of the imagination.” So, what you will experience is a political thriller, a workplace comedy, a courtroom drama, a romance, a history play and more.

Mostly, I hope that *Alabama Story* sparks a memory of a beloved book, the person who gave it to you and the day that you realized that a “turning of the page” — whether moving forward in a book or in your personal evolution — could be both terrifying and wonderful. Maybe the play will also be a reminder that no matter what our differences, on some level, we all share the same story.

Kenneth Jones, Playwright (September 2023)

Kenneth Jones is a playwright, lyricist and librettist who writes about his own work and advocates for other theater makers at ByKennethJones.com.

CAST BIOS

Michael Casey (Senator E.W. Higgins) is a junior English middle education major. He enjoys listening to music and hanging out with friends and family. He's performed a few roles in his high school productions, his favorites were Chef Louis in *The Little Mermaid*, and Fire Chief Beatty in *Fahrenheit 451*. In addition to his passion for education and music, he is thrilled to bring his love for storytelling to the stage in this production of *Alabama Story*!

Abby Crispin (Lily Whitfield) is a sophomore musical theatre major and excited to be a part of this show! Previous Messiah credits include *Shoeless Joe*, *Steel Magnolias* (Truvy Jones), and *Into the Woods* (Rapunzel). She's thankful for the opportunity to work with Dan and this amazing cast and crew. She also wants to thank her parents for always supporting her and God for helping her share the gifts he has given her.

Josh Easley (Herschel Webb, Passerby) is a sophomore civil engineering major who helps bring *Alabama Story* to life. This is his first Messiah University production. It has been a very pleasurable experience for him getting to work with all the talent and expertise of his cast mates. He would like to thank his family and friends for their ongoing support.

Matthew Featherson (Joshua Moore) is a senior communications major at Messiah University. He is from North Wales, Pennsylvania, just about 45 minutes outside Philadelphia. Matthew is involved in Messiah's student ministries serving as the student chapel director for the second consecutive year. Through chapel, Matthew has had several speaking opportunities and works alongside four other students to foster a Spirit-led space. *Alabama Story* will be Matthew's first theatrical experience as he plays the role of Joshua Moore.

Jack Jones (Thomas Franklin) is a first-year at Messiah and is majoring in math education with a minor in theatre. While he has done many shows in the past, *Alabama Story* will be his first production at Messiah. He is excited that this show will kick off what he hopes to be a successful acting career at this college, and maybe afterwards as well.

Josh McCleaf (Garth Williams) is excited to be returning to the Messiah stage for *Alabama Story*. Josh is a senior broadcasting major with minors in marketing and theatre. His most recent roles include The Visitor in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* at the Little Theatre of Mechanicsburg and the Narrator and Mysterious Man in *Into the Woods* here at Messiah.

Ella Murray (Lily Whitfield) is excited to be back on stage at Messiah after previously playing Babe in *Crimes of the Heart*, being a part of *Shoeless Joe* this fall and last, Shelby in *Steel Magnolias*, and Snow White in *Into the Woods*. She has performed with theaters in the Lancaster/Lebanon area including Gretna Theatre as well as Servant Stage Company and Piercing Word. Love and thanks to my parents, family, and friends for their encouragement and support.

Ashley Sheffe (Emily Wheelock Reed Understudy, Passerby, Coffee Cart Server) is a first-year, majoring in theatre, and is very excited to be bringing this story to life for her second performance on the Messiah stage. Highlights of her acting career include *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Helena), *Macbeth* (1st Witch), and *Who Will Carry the Word?* (Yvonne). She would like to thank her family, especially Emily, for being supportive, and the directors for being amazing!

Sammi-Jo Shuma (Emily Wheelock Reed) is a senior film and musical theatre major who is excited to help bring this *Alabama Story* to life. Previous shows she has been in include *The Addams Family* (Wednesday Addams), *Crimes of the Heart* (Lenny Magrath) and *Silent Sky* (Williamina Fleming). It has been a pleasure for her to work alongside such talented people! She would like to thank her friends and family for their ongoing support.

Ethan Stroud (Henry Branch) is a senior molecular biology major who is thrilled to be involved in theatre again. Previous roles include Sebastian in *The Little Mermaid*, Mike Teavee in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, and The Gingerbread Man in *Shrek the Musical*. Ethan has enjoyed getting to know his fellow cast members and being part of a community of actors once more. He would like to thank his friends and family for their love and support.

Alden Walker (Bobby Crone) is a junior commercial music major and is glad to be playing Bobby Crone in his fifth Messiah mainstage production! Previous theatre credits include *Into the Woods* (The Baker) and *A Year with Frog and Toad* (Snail). Many thanks to Dan, Megan, and the cast and crew for the dedication and work they put into this amazing show. Also, a big thank you to his friends and family for their continual love and support!



The Kennedy Center

*The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, part of the Rubenstein Arts Access Program, is generously funded by **David M. Rubenstein.***

Special thanks to The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust for supporting the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival.

Additional support is provided by The Honorable Stuart Bernstein and Wilma E. Bernstein; and the Dr. Gerald and Paula McNichols Foundation.

Kennedy Center education and related artistic programming is made possible through the generosity of the National Committee for the Performing Arts.

This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants and awards for actors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights, designers, stage managers and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for invitation to the KCACTF regional festival and may also be considered for national awards recognizing outstanding achievement in production, design, direction and performance.

Last year more than 1,500 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.

WHO WILL CARRY THE WORD? Written by Charlotte Delbo, Directed by Ed Cohn and Carmi Wilmot

"Who Will Carry the Word?" is a deeply moving recount of French writer Charlotte Delbo's survival during the Holocaust. The play depicts the atrocities during this unfathomable time in history, painting an emotionally raw picture of enduring the unimaginable. While "Who Will Carry the Word?" is based on existence in concentration camps, it also portrays how in times of despair, mankind comes together—bonded by strength and courage—to find hope and the will to escape a dire fate.

Poorman Black Box Theater Oct. 5 - 7 at 8 pm; Oct. 8 at 3 pm

SHOELESS JOE Directed by Susan Hurley

Fall musical theatre cabaret.

Poorman Black Box Theater Oct. 28 at 8 pm; Oct. 29 at 3 pm

ALABAMA STORY Written by Kenneth Jones, Directed by Daniel Inouye

As the Civil Rights movement is brewing, a controversial children's book about a black rabbit marrying a white rabbit stirs the passions of a segregationist State Senator and a no-nonsense State Librarian in 1959 Montgomery, Alabama. Meanwhile, the story of two childhood friends — an African American man and a woman of white privilege, reunited in adulthood — provides a private counterpoint to the public events swirling in the state capital. Political foes, star-crossed lovers, and one feisty children's author inhabit the same page in a Deep South of the imagination that brims with humor, heartbreak and hope. Inspired by true events.

Miller Theater Nov. 9-11, 17-18 at 8 pm; Nov. 12 & 19 at 3 pm; *Nov. 16 at 10 am special school performance

BLUE CHRISTMAS Directed by Gregg Hurley

Messiah University dance students acknowledge the struggles and challenges of this broken and fallen world with this lament-driven dance experience. Reflect with us through the medium of dance with this intimate evening of words, music, and dance that will tenderly prepare us all for the joyous season of Advent.

Poorman Black Box Theater Nov. 16 at 7pm

FALL SENIOR SERIES

An evening of performance created and presented by department seniors.

Poorman Black Box Theater Dec. 1 at 8 pm, Dec. 3 at 3 pm; Pollock Dance Studio Dec. 8-9 at 8 pm, Dec. 10 at 3 pm

2024 HUMANITIES SYMPOSIUM DANCE CONCERT Directed by Gregg Hurley

Dancing is a scholarly pursuit. Watch and consider how the dance program tackles the annual Humanities symposium topic in its own unique way.

Poorman Black Box Theater Feb. 23 at 4 pm; Feb. 24 at 8 pm

THE SPITFIRE GRILL Music and book by James Valcq, Lyrics and book by Fred Alley, Based on the film by Lee David Zlotoff, Directed by Ed Cohn. Based on the hit film, "The Spitfire Grill" is a heartwarming and inspirational musical tale of redemption, perseverance, and family. A torn page from an old travel book sparks parolee Percy Talbot to journey to a small town in Wisconsin. There she finds a new life working at the Spitfire Grill. The folks in this depressed town have more to worry about than Percy's past, but fear and hesitancy turn to friendship when Percy schemes to revive the old grill by raffling it off. The entry fee is one hundred dollars, and the best essay on why you want the grill wins. Soon mail is arriving by the wheelbarrow full, and things are definitely cookin' at the Spitfire Grill.

Miller Theater Feb. 29, March 1-2, 5-7 at 8 pm; March 2-3 at 3 pm; *March 5 at 10 am special school performance

SPRING SENIOR SERIES

An evening of performance created and presented by department seniors.

Poorman Black Box Theater March 22 - 23 at 8 pm; Miller Theater April 18-19 at 8pm

CULMINATION '24: SPRING DANCE CONCERT Directed by Gregg Hurley

Dancing is an artistic endeavor. Celebrate spring and the dance accomplishments of Messiah University's theatre and dance department in an offering of favorite dance pieces from the year, new faculty work, student adjudicated creations, and senior capstone projects all in one fun and glorious dance concert!

Miller Theater April 12 at 8 pm; April 13 at 2 pm

ONE-ACT FESTIVAL & SHOELESS JOE COMBINED

A festival of student-directed and fully produced one act plays! Join us for several evenings of fresh, inventive, and innovative story telling.

Poorman Black Box Theater April 26 - 27 at 8 pm; April 28 at 3 pm