

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN THEATRE FESTIVAL

A Deep Look Within

"Everything You Touch" to examine contrasts of fashion industry

Editor's Note: Every Sunday, The Journal will preview one of the five plays featured in the 2015 Contemporary American Theater Festival in Shepherdstown. The CATF runs from July 10 to Aug. 2, with previews held July 5-9.

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SHEPHERDSTOWN — New plays by their very nature are laden with risk. There isn't a fall-back performance to base things off of for the cast and crew. Audience members do not have the luxury of reading a critical reception as a preparatory measure.

It seems daunting, but CATF founder Ed Herendeen warmly embraces it.

"I'm attracted to dangerous writers," Herendeen said. "I'm attracted to writers who aren't afraid to ask the kinds of questions that we talk about at the dinner table, but even more importantly, the kinds of questions we're afraid to talk about at the dinner table."

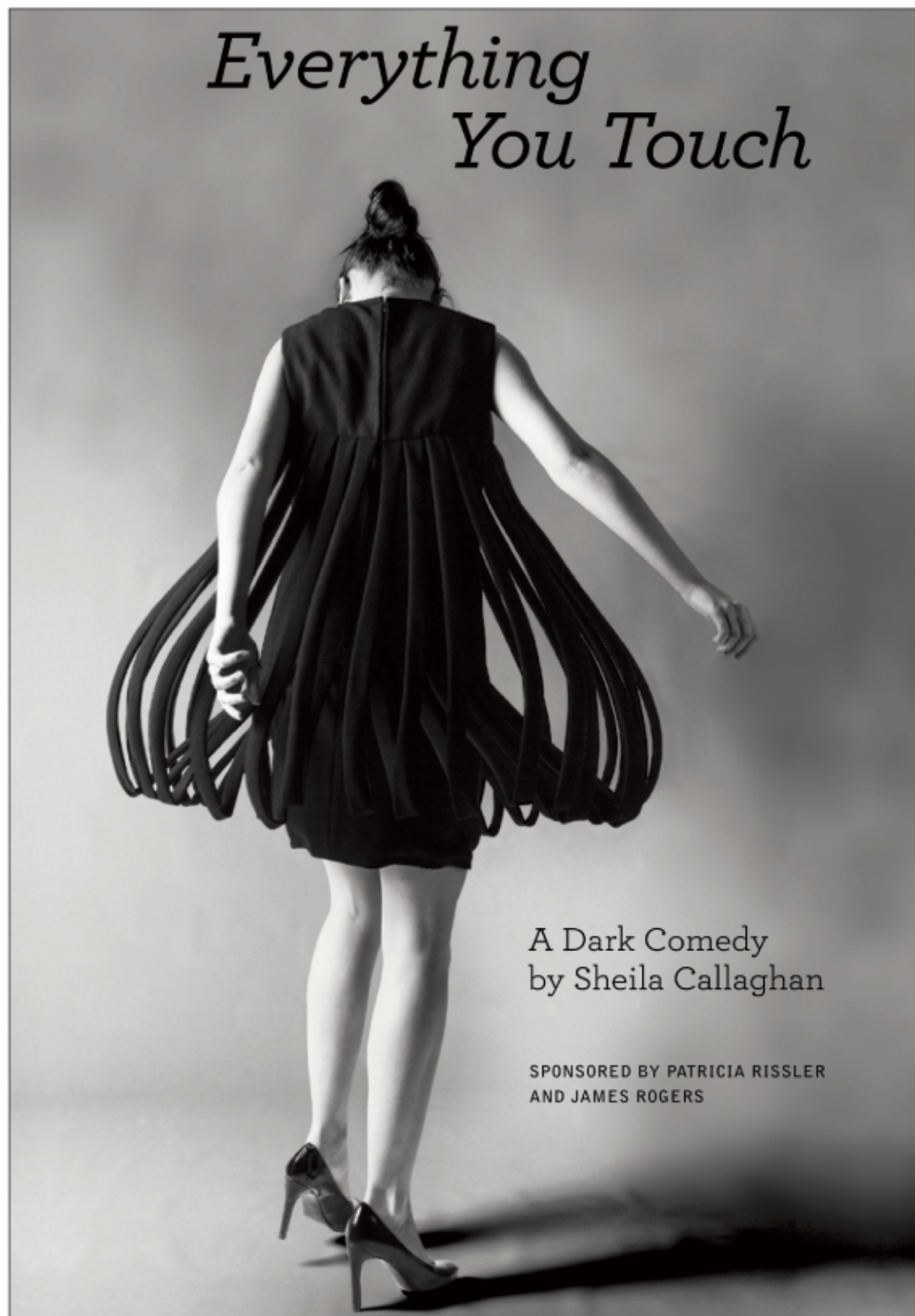
He calls Sheila Callaghan one of those particular writers, and her play "Everything You Touch" is among the five that make up the 2015 Contemporary American Theater Festival in Shepherdstown.

"Sheila Callaghan is one of those writers who isn't afraid to ask the difficult questions while entertaining us by telling us a very theatrical story," Herendeen said.

Unlike the other four in rotation this year, "Everything You Touch" is not a world premiere. Its first performance was held at The Theatre @ Boston Court in Pasadena, California, in April 2014.

"Sheila Callaghan has since reworked the play and continues to work on it, so our audience is still seeing the birth of a new American play," Herendeen said. "We're committed to new American theater, we're dedicated to developing and producing new American theater because we believe that the American theater persists because of new plays."

Directed by May Adrales, "Everything You Touch" is a multi-layered dark comedy that explores the depths of the fashion world from the perspective of two separate eras. In the 1970s, the



Submitted photo
Sheila Callaghan's "Everything You Touch" is a multi-layered dark comedy that digs into the beautiful yet callous world of the fashion industry.

audience is given the story of Victor Cavanaugh (played by Jerzy Gwiazdowski), a famous but ruthless fashion designer who undergoes a shift in the philoso-

phy of his wares. "Victor's now interested in making his art more acceptable and more wearable to the masses. And he struggles with questions:

If he makes his art more accessible, is he selling out, is he becoming more commercial, because he is known for very provocative and innovative fashion designs,"

Herendeen said.

The play seamlessly weaves between that story arc and its second, which takes place a generation later and chronicles Jess (Dina Thomas), who is grappling with her self-image and own turbulent ordeals with the fashion world. She is on a journey to go home and see her mother, although they have a rather broken history, Herendeen said.

"Her mother, years ago, berated her for not dressing nice enough, for being overweight, for not being attractive enough, and so she has real self-esteem issues," he said.

The fashion industry is a place many recognize for its colorful and vibrant surface, but dark undertones often lay underneath what we see and hear. The play itself is full of resplendent costumes and designs, but also calls into question how we value ourselves. Identity is a major focal point.

"The play is a spectacle and it's entertaining. We will see an incredible set and the costumes will be a spectacular event, with runway fashion shows," Herendeen said.

"Sheila is also looking at the fashion world and the danger that the fashion industry has created in how women view themselves, their image," he said. "She will question women's and people's self-esteem and body images."

The play is 120 minutes. It is for mature audiences only, as it contains explicit language and partial nudity.

"It's a very dangerous, entertaining, provocative new play," Herendeen said.

Callaghan has featured on compilations such as "18 Successful Women Who Are Changing the World" and "10 Screenwriters to Watch." She is, among other things, a writer/producer for the Showtime TV series, "Shameless."

The play will premiere at 8 p.m. Saturday, July 11, at the Frank Center.

— Assistant City Editor
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