

Beacon explores selective mutism in spring theater production

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WOONSOCKET – It's clear from the harsh words slung at the titular character in the opening scene that Beacon High School's production of "Hush Little Celia, Don't Say a Word" is different from last semester's rowdy musical.

The play, written by Joseph Wallace, follows Celia from kindergarten to high school as she strug-

gles with selective mutism and the bullying that comes with it. It was first produced in 2001 at Cranston High School East, and Theater Director Alura Razza first encountered it when she was an assistant director for the show in high school, said senior Jamie Brannon.

Brannon, starring as Celia, said she'd been hoping Razza would choose the play since she first considered putting it on at Bea-

con two years ago. Though Brannon has transitioned back to the cast after assistant directing and stage managing "Mama Mia" last semester, Brannon still finds herself slipping back into stage manager habits in rehearsals.

"I'm very protective over this show," she said. "I relate to the character so much."

In the show, Celia experiences bullying and grapples with her parents'

divorce, elements Brannon said were applicable to her own life, as was Celia's passion for poetry. For her audition, Brannon wrote a poem and a monologue in the voice of the character.

"It's so real to my life it's sometimes hard to separate," she said.

Brannon's co-star Breau "Moose" Aikens takes the opposite approach, he said, creating a



Photo by Ernest A. Brown

Beacon Theatre presents its spring production "Hush Little Celia, Don't Say a Word."

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mental image of the character based on the dialogue rather than "becoming" the character himself.

Aikens plays the role of Todd, who tells Celia's story from his perspective

as the only student who took the time to befriend her. With three previous shows at Beacon, including a supporting character role as Sky in last semester's "Mama Mia," Todd is Aikens's first lead.

"It's been insane for me," Aikens said. "I've been having fun, but it's been

stressful learning all these lines."

Aikens said he doesn't have a trick for memorizing all of the lines; it just comes down to repetition and practice.

Wallace himself is expected to attend one of the three performances at Beacon. Brannon said he

reached out for a ticket after seeing Razza's Facebook post about Beacon's production.

"It lights a fire under us," she said of Wallace's attendance. "It gets us to all get out stuff together."

"Hush Little Celia, Don't Say a Word" will be performed on Friday and

Saturday at 7:00 p.m. and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. in Beacon's Blackbox Theater on Main Street. Tickets are on sale for \$15 online at our show/hushlittlecelia.

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