Sons of the Prophet

By Stephen Karam

Presented by QUT Precincts and the Creative Industries Faculty
Featuring QUT Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting) final-year students

By arrangement with Hal Leonard Australia Pty Ltd,
on behalf of Dramatists Play Service, Inc New York.
Acting careers for creative futures

QUT Acting is Australia’s leading degree in acting specialising in screen performance. It is highly regarded nationally for its graduates’ readiness to work in film and television. Applicants are selected on the basis of their audition.

If your ambition is to build a career in film and television, and still develop as an artist on stage and elsewhere, then our course offers you the range of learning, training and performance opportunities you need. Your passion is shared by your fellow students and by your teachers who continue to pursue successful careers in film, television and live performance.

Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting)

The course is exhilarating, demanding and life changing, and is a full-time commitment physically, mentally and emotionally. You will receive extensive training in voice, speech production, physical expressivity, character, acting methodologies, script analysis, theatre and local and international film & TV industries.

You will undertake three years of intensive training and performing, graduating as an employable film and stage actor. Your film shoots have professional film crews, and your performance seasons provide opportunities to work with professional directors and designers of national standing. Our specialised screen training, small group size and superb facilities, give QUT acting graduates a distinctive edge.

Find out more: qut.edu.au/courses/bachelor-of-fine-arts-acting

QUT 2019 Showcase Productions

QUT acting students’ showcase season provides an enriching and intimate learning opportunity for senior students studying Drama, Theatre Studies or English in Years 10 – 12.
CAST AND CREATIVE

**Creative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playwright</td>
<td>Stephen Karam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Kate Wild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting Designer</td>
<td>Glenn Hughes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set and Costume designer</td>
<td>Raymond Milner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vison designer</td>
<td>Callie Roebuck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound designer</td>
<td>Dominic Guilfoyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Stage Manager</td>
<td>Nicholas Seery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cast**

---

**Estimated running time:** xgxgxg

**Recommended**

Grade 10-12

**Warnings**

- Discussions of faith and philosophy

**Themes of the production**

Family, Suffering as a part of life, Carrying burdens of others, Impacts of death and grief
Subject Matter (aligning to 2019 Drama Syllabus)

Purpose
To challenge, To empathise, To empower, To entertain

Dramatic Style
Realism

Dramatic structure
Episodic, linear narrative

Conventions
Emotional authenticity
Minimalist setting, with suggestive props and staging
Chronological sequence of events
Transformations of space and time
Symbolic use of music and image
Intertextual references
Projections
Use of humour
by Kate Wild

This brilliant and funny play is about suffering. Suffering and how randomly and unequally it is thrust upon us. We are all only one thoughtless prank away from tragedy, one gene mutation away from disease and pain, one failure of judgement away from professional disgrace.

Suffering is an unavoidable part of human experience and Karam’s play, by heaping misfortune on the hapless Douaihys, shows us the many ways pain and loss can be encountered.

Like Karam himself, the Douaihys are Lebanese Americans carrying the accumulated trauma of generations of geo-political misfortune. Joseph Douaihy and his family are handed the additional burdens of grief, chronic pain, the indignities of aging and financial hardship.

Why then, amongst all this misery, is the play so funny? Perhaps because, like Chekhov, Karam finds significance in the absurdities of day-to-day existence. Awkward social negotiations, petty familial skirmishes, the rudeness of bus station attendants and the uncaring geniality of automatic phone messages are the realities of a life Joseph must continue to lead, even as disaster unfolds.

So perhaps this is the answer to the question of how suffering must be borne: not through religious faith or inspirational quotes, not even in the connections we make with one another. In the end, it seems that suffering must simply be lived through. Putting one foot in front of the other with humour and hope.
by Raymond Milner

Set and Costume

As a scenic designer (Set and Costume) it is my responsibility to conceive and develop the visual world of a play on stage. The brief for QUT’s Season of Contemporary American Plays was to create a single design that fit both *The Ladies* by Anne Washburn and *Sons of the Prophet* by Stephen Karam.

*The Ladies* is an episodic, non-linear piece that uses historical female figures to comment on power. The play includes many nondescript locations and spans a wide timeline. *Sons of the Prophet* on the other hand uses a conventional structure with a linear narrative taking place over six months in only a handful of locations which would be familiar to audience members including a house, office, hospital and bus station.

When designing a space for two plays with considerably different performance styles I first had to study the plays to find a common thread.

The first step in conceiving a design for these two plays came from the plays themselves. Karam at the beginning of the play describes the space as “spare” and that “the various locales should suggest human spaces, but not be burdened by realistic details.” Similarly Washburn also uses the word spare; “Staging is as mobile and spare as possible, with minimal props.” Following from this I looked closely at the historical time periods of the plays. *The Ladies* spans a time of great social and political change around the world. *Sons of the Prophet* also takes place in a time of great change, however the changes are personal. Both plays showcase themes of pain both physically and emotionally.

*Sons of the Prophet* is set in a working class town where the steel mill, a once flourishing industry, has closed and been left to decay and a family marked by tragedy must overcome their pain. Using this visual metaphor I designed a two level “island” which draws on the notion of decay through the use of texture and the box like architecture that is found in brutalism.

The set splits the acting area into 5 sections, two on the upper level, two on the lower level and one at stage level. This allows for seamless transitions from scene to scene without breaking rhythm. The design also permits lighting to play a large role in setting time and place, directing the audience focus to the relevant stage area.

Costume plays a large role in reinforcing the narrative. Karam’s descriptions of each character whether direct or indirect, were to develop a personal style for each character. In addition to research of the time, place and social norms of each character.

I hope the design provides an environment that both engages the audience and provides a space which serves both plays well.
SET DESIGN

Initial set design sketch for The Ladies and Sons of the Prophet.
Initial costume design for Joseph in *Sons of the Prophet*. 
Sons of the Prophet

*Sons of the Prophet* is a sophisticated piece of writing that connects the suffering experienced by the Duaihy family to ideas of faith. The character Joseph resists these messages of these texts, but in the final scene of the play perhaps the same message is delivered in a different form to a more receptive Joseph.

Some of the key references of the text are discussed further below.

Intertextuality & Sons of the Prophet

*Sons of the Prophet* uses references to other texts to underline the messages and themes of the play. Some key references are Kahil Gibran’s text *The Prophet*, prayers of the *Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary* and the hymn *Come ye saints*.

*Sons of the Prophet* makes reference to *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran. The play is centred around the Douaihy family who are distant relatives of the author Kahil Gibran. Gibran is best known for a text called *The Prophet*. The book figures around a prophet who shares his wisdom through twenty-eight poetic essays. The essays offer insights into life, including love, pain, friendship, family, beauty, religion, joy, sorrow, and death.

*The Prophet* was a very popular text during the 1960's with an audience seeking spiritual advice.

Throughout the play direct references are made to the text including a key phrase ‘All is well’ and the use of the chapter titles as projections to signal the narrative progression of the production.

Sorrowful Mystery of the rosary

The Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary is a set of prayers that form part of the Catholic faith’s Holy Rosary. Catholics believe the Rosary is a remedy against severe trials, temptations and the hardships of life. The Mysteries of the Rosary are meditations on episodes in the life and death of Jesus. The Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary is comprised of The Agony in the Garden, The Scourging at the Pillar, Crowning with Thorns, Carrying of the Cross and The Crucifixion.

The *Sons of the Prophet* examines life’s sorrows and how the characters bear these sorrows. The recitation of the sorrowful mystery of the Rosary is spoken by Bill and Charles as a way of confronting their sorrows.
Come, Come, Ye Saints (music played at station)

Come, Come, Ye Saints is a hymn written in 1846 by Mormon poet William Clayton. It was originally titled ‘All is well’. The hymn assures that life’s hardships and unknowns should be borne in the knowledge that God will not forsake; ‘All is well’. Charles plays this hymn on guitar.

The Lyrics of Come, Come, Ye Saints (Lyrics)

Come, come, ye saints, no toil nor labor fear;
But with joy wend your way.
Though hard to you this journey may appear,
Grace shall be as your day.
Tis better far for us to strive
Our useless cares from us to drive;
Do this, and joy your hearts will swell -

All is well! All is well!
Why should we mourn or think our lot is hard?
’Tis not so; all is right.
Why should we think to earn a great reward
If we now shun the fight?
Gird up your loins; fresh courage take.
Our God will never us forsake;
And soon we’ll have this tale to tell-
All is well! All is well!

We’ll find the place which God for us prepared,
Far away, in the West,
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid;
There the saints, will be blessed.
We’ll make the air, with music ring,
Shout praises to our God and King;
Above the rest these words we’ll tell -
All is well! All is well!

And should we die before our journey’s through,
Happy day! All is well!
We then are free from toil and sorrow, too;
With the just we shall dwell!
But if our lives are spared again
To see the Saints their rest obtain,
Oh, how we’ll make this chorus swell-
All is well! All is well!
Saint Rafqa

Saint Rafqa is a motif that appears throughout the text. The placement of her painting in the home of the - family is a direct reference to suffering and bearing suffering as an aspect of life.

Saint Rafqa, was born in Lebanon (same as family)??. She devoted her life to Jesus as a nun in the Lebanese Maronite order. Rafqa repeatedly heard messages from heaven.

Her devotion was so strong that she prayed to Jesus to share in his suffering. She immediately began to experience pain in her head, which moved to her eyes. Rafqa’s superior was concerned about her pain and ordered that she be examined by doctors who suggested surgery.

During the surgery she refused anaesthesia and the doctor made a mistake which caused her eye to emerge from its socket and fall to the floor. Sister Rafqa, instead of panicking, blessed the doctor saying “For Christ’s passion, god bless your hands and may God repay you. A short time after the pain spread to her left eye.

From then on she experienced pain and headaches. Rafqa was known for remaining joyful in prayer and patient in her suffering. Her health declined further and she became blind and paralysed.

Eventually a wound developed on shoulder, which she referred to as “the wound in the shoulder of Jesus.” It remained for seven years.

After Rafqa died, she was buried and witnesses report a light shining on her grave for three nights.

In 1925, a case for her beatification was opened in the Vatican and the investigation into her life began in the following year. She was canonised as a saint on July 10, 2001.
Responding Activity 1

The play’s action moves between a series of locations and across time. Discuss how the use of space and directorial decisions have made these transitions clear for an audience.

Responding Activity 2

*The Sons of the Prophet* utilises symbol and motif to underscore the dramatic meaning of the text. Discuss how the production has exploited symbol and motif to communicate dramatic meaning.

Responding Activity 3

This production features a prologue establishing that the cultural heritage of the actors in this production does not align with those of the characters in the playscript. Discuss how this prologue was presented and the dramatic and ethical impact of the director to employ this dramatic convention.