

Play depicts Baha'i persecution

Followers continue to face present-day challenges

By SARAH BAKER
Senior staff writer

More than 100 years ago, a young Persian man, a follower of the Iranian Baha'i faith, believed so strongly in his religion that he was tortured and killed because of his dedication.

At the beginning of this month, two Iranians were sentenced to impending death for the same reason: their undying belief.

Dying for one's faith has been the fate of Baha'i followers for the past century.

This weekend, one of their stories comes to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, but this time, it's on stage.

"The Kingfisher's Wing" is based on the birth of the Baha'i faith in Iran, during which more than 20,000 followers were brutally massacred by corrupted secular and religious leaders in the late 1800s.

But the story doesn't just represent an important piece of history; it represents events happening across the world even today.

The persecution of Baha'is in Iran has continued. On Oct. 1, two Baha'is in Iran were sentenced to death, while 32 Baha'i teachers were arrested because of their beliefs.

The story, interpreted by theater artist Bill George, follows the trials of a 17-year-old boy who was tried and executed in 1869 because of his Baha'i faith.

George described the play as a post-modern storytelling piece and said it uses music, shadow work, abstract movement and puppetry. George plays numerous characters himself, and his partner Styve

Homnick adds music to the show. "It's not just about politics," George said. "It's about families and where we get the courage to live."

He said religion, although important to the show, isn't the only theme.

"It's about the way we embody truth and pass it on from one generation to the next," he said. "It lets us connect not only to the past but also to the future, and to things that are at the heart of what life is about."

Chad Dumas, president of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Baha'i Association, said the play is an important event not only to UNL students, but to the Lincoln community.

"This story is about a very heroic youth who gives his life for his faith," Dumas said. "It's neat to see how much of an influence one person can have."

George said he has considered writing this piece for the past 20 years and said it was an important departure for him.

"There is a taboo when it comes to dealing with religious faith on stage because we have a very secular attitude about the arts," he said. "I had to reach a certain degree of maturity before I could do this. I'm glad I finally reached it and did it."

The faith originated in Iran in the 1840s, according to Doug Boyd, spokesman for the Lincoln Baha'is.

Baha'is believe in the oneness of humanity and that all the religions in the world are divine in origin, Boyd said.

Boyd said the play, in an emotional sense, could give viewers insight into the religion.

"People are going to come away

“It's not just about politics. It's about families and where we get the courage to live.”

BILL GEORGE
theater artist

with their own understanding of the situation, and it will be personal," he said. "In that sense, they may be able to identify with it."

Many Baha'is remain in their home country despite the atmosphere of religious intolerance. As recently as July, a Baha'i in Iran was executed because of his religion.

Dumas said his organization has four members who are UNL students, but there are about 100 practicing Baha'is in Lincoln.

Homnick, the play's musician, said he decided to be a part of the show because he had never seen a production like this one before.

"The show lets people know that to change things that are really worth changing, it takes incredible dedication and sacrifice," he said.

"The Kingfisher's Wing" plays this Saturday in the UNL Culture Center at 7 p.m.

For more information, call Boyd at (402) 474-5534.

Professor May receives state's Carnegie award

By ADAM KLINKER
Staff writer

In an era when research tends to dominate much of a professor's time, Ann Mari May is getting back to what she knows really matters in education: the students.

May, an associate professor of economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was honored Thursday with the Carnegie Foundation's Nebraska State Professor of the Year Award.

"I'm thrilled," May said. "It's very exciting for me."

The award is given annually to professors in each state in the nation. May becomes the fourth UNL professor to win the state award for Nebraska since the program started in 1981.

"I'm very happy for her," said Jill Braband, a junior finance and economics major.

"She goes above and beyond the expectations of a professor. She cares about her students and wants them to understand what she's teaching," said Braband, who had May for two classes last year.

May, who has been at UNL for 12 years, said the award is an excellent honor, considering the size and commitment to education that the Carnegie Foundation has.

"(The foundation is) moving towards bringing the focus back to teaching," May said. "They're the driving force behind making the students the important part in education."

May said receiving the award has allowed her to look back at the success

she has had in teaching and the students she has enjoyed in her classes.

"(Teaching) is excitement about an idea," May said. "It's an excitement about sharing and getting others to understand what you're saying."

May is known for challenging her students with high academic standards and a strict grading policy, but Braband said it's all worth it.

"She incorporates a lot of critical thinking into classes," Braband said. "She took us outside of our comfort zone and made us think about things we hadn't thought about before."

Braband wrote a letter of commendation to the foundation on May's behalf.

There were 12 nominations from the state of Nebraska and three from UNL in the Carnegie program. Professors were nominated by the administrations at their institutions.

Steve Weiss, a coordinator for the award program and spokesman for the foundation's Council for the Advancement and Support of Education in Washington, D.C., said the competition for the award is always very tough, based on the strict nomination requirements.

Nomination and selection for the award is based on four criteria laid out by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

The criteria include: impact and involvement with students; scholarly approach to teaching; service to students, the institution, the community and the profession; and support from colleagues and students.

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