

Production Notes

For believers of the Catholic faith, participation in the seven sacraments is necessary for salvation of the soul. The sacrament of penance, one of the sacraments of healing, is practiced often by the faithful. Penance begins with sincere remorse for wrongdoing or "sin." The penitent must confess to a priest who then offers absolution for the "sin." Although absolution takes away sin, it does not remedy all the disorders the sin has caused.

All of the characters in the play *Our Lady of 121st Street* are in pursuit of absolution. They are haunted by the past and indiscretions of their youth. Some of them are even unaware of how heavily their mistakes, or the mistakes of their fathers, weigh upon and affect their lives. Most are mired in denial and regret, petrified by fear. Their lives are at a standstill, unable to release "sin" and move closer to salvation through absolution. It is the death of their beloved Sister Rose that grants them the opportunity to "confess" and begin healing.

Sister Rose herself was trapped by her past and tried to atone for her mistakes and the mistakes of her father with extreme dedication to the faith. Through the course of her life as a teacher in the small Catholic school on 121st street, she saved her students with love, devotion and a "big stick." Her death seems almost like a final selfless act bringing her students, family and friends together for penance. As the characters "confess" to each other, the possibility of grace presents itself. Her classroom becomes the confessional and her death the atonement for the "sin" of those she loved.

- Kristin Kundert-Gibbs, *director*

During our initial discussion, the director and I agreed that setting this story in a realistic funeral home would hinder us from effectively relaying our interpretation. It isn't Sister Rose's death that is the focus here, but instead the profound influence she had on all of these characters while she was living. We saw the Catholic school classroom as an appropriate setting since this is where Sister Rose made most of her impact. We replaced the empty casket with her vacant teacher's desk and drew visual influences from Jackson Pollock, graffiti, stained glass and the New York City skyline. Our color scheme is pulled directly from the plaids in Catholic school uniforms.

- Victoria Fisher, *scenic designer*