

When you hear the name Doug Jarecki, you probably think of the actor. Maybe you saw the Milwaukee native in one of several Next Act productions since his first, *7 STORIES*, in 2009. Perhaps you've heard that he's involved in our summer program, Next Actors, or have even seen him around the Waukesha Civic Theatre running their education program.



Debra Babich, Doug Jarecki & Robert W.C. Kennedy in *7 STORIES*.

Only a precious few know Jarecki as a playwright. His first play, *TWAS THE MONTH BEFORE CHRISTMAS*, premiered at Next Act in 2015 and will return this December.

This play, which started as a comedy sketch about Joseph and Mary in couples counseling, looks at the Biblical characters through a contemporary light. "Virgin birth? Son of God? What if someone made these claims today? Of course people would have doubts," Jarecki points out. "We always view these figures as not real people but characters in *'The Greatest Story Ever Told,'*" referencing the 1965 Biblical epic about the life of Jesus. "There's never any focus on possible doubt or second guessing." The finished play adds the three wise men, as well as the innkeeper and his daughter, to the main story.

Jarecki reveals that the three wise men offered "the most wide open storyline." All of the characters have doubt about something, but one wise man in particular has more than just geography to overcome on this journey. Jarecki reflects, "I thought it was fascinating to have a real discussion about faith and what it feels like when you believe."

The show was met with great praise after its first run. "One of the best compliments we received was that it was very silly and sweet but very respectful, and that's hugely important to me," he remembers. It is clear how much this story means to Jarecki,

who was raised Catholic. Even if an audience member isn't a person of a professed faith, "these are real issues that happen to be set against the backdrop of the greatest story ever told. You will be able to connect with something in this story no matter where you're coming from."

Jarecki's last appearance at Next Act was in *UnSILENT NIGHT*, in which he played multiple characters, a feat all the actors (including Jarecki himself) accomplish in *TWAS THE MONTH*. As Jarecki says, "I like the idea of people jumping around in this play. It almost has the feel of just filling whatever role is needed as we push toward that night in Bethlehem."

While some of the script has been modified to clarify ideas, the cast, the director, and, most importantly, the message of his play are still the same. "One of the kings says, 'It couldn't hurt to try to be a little more generous one night out of the year,'" Jarecki explains. "That's where it starts, that feeling you get on Christmas, that warmth and how far can you take that, how can you carry that into the rest of your life. I view Christmas as a starting point of something better and bigger."

Jarecki likes the Next Act venue so much that he is renting it again in March to produce his second full length play, whose working title is *ONE KNIGHT IN POLAND*. He describes it as "a very fun, silly show, but, a lot like the Christmas show, it has a definite heart to it."



John Cramer, Sara Zientek, & Lindsey Gagliano in *TWAS THE MONTH BEFORE CHRISTMAS 2015*

***TWAS THE MONTH BEFORE CHRISTMAS* runs December 15 – 23. Tickets are \$25 and may be purchased through the Next Act ticket office, 414-278-0765.**