

INTERVIEW: Andre Braugher examines grief and marriage in new play

[John Soltes](#) January 27, 2019



Photo: Andre Braugher and Michelle Pawk star in Tell Them I'm Still Young. Photo courtesy of Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade / Provided by Press Play with permission.

Celebrated actor Andre Braugher, of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *Homicide: Life on the Street* fame, has always had a dedication to the theater in between his powerful performances in film and television. In 2019, he is displaying that dedication once again by acting in a brand-new play from writer Julia Doolittle.

Tell Them I'm Still Young, which also stars Tony winner Michelle Pawk, is currently playing the [South Orange Performing Arts Center in South Orange, New Jersey](#), thanks to American Theater Group. Kel Haney directs the production with an all-female creative team.

The intimate play charts the difficulties faced by a married couple as they experience tragedy in life. When a lover from the past and a graduate student turn up, the dynamic of their relationship becomes even more complicated.

“It’s a very talented young playwright who I stumbled upon doing a reading at Ensemble Studio Theatre last summer,” Braugher said in a recent phone interview. “Her name is Julia Doolittle, and the director of that same reading I worked with eight years ago on another play. And we were all just simply impressed by the quality.”

Braugher knew that the piece needed a developmental production before heading to the big theaters in New York City. That’s where American Theater Group and SOPAC enter the picture.

“So we’ve assembled an interesting cast,” he said. “We, in our own way, discovered something new and special that hadn’t been revealed yet, and so I think what audiences are going to get is a very interesting, humane, well-written and moving play about two parents who have lost their child and their struggle to put their lives back together to save their marriage [and] reconnect across a divide of grief.”

The play, which continues through Feb. 3, focuses on the struggles of these spouses. Braugher’s role of Allen and Pawk’s role of Kay are two resilient people who try their best to bridge that divide of grief and come out on the other side.

“It’s beautifully written, and we’re having a hell of a good time putting it up

here in South Orange,” he said. “Eventually we’re going to head toward New York and see if we can mount a production there, but New Jersey audiences will tell us a lot about what works in the play and what doesn’t, as will the rehearsal process. And ultimately New York audiences will undoubtedly let us know pretty clearly how they feel about the play, but I’m pretty confident in its quality.”

Braugher has had a successful career for decades. His film work includes *Glory*, *Primal Fear* and *The Mist*, among other movies. His theater includes *Henry V* at the Public Theater’s Shakespeare in the Park and *Whipping Man* with the Manhattan Theatre Club.

This present role and play are proving to be a welcome challenge for the accomplished actor.

“I think I have a grasp on him, but like all plays, they take a tremendous amount of courage to get to the bottom of them,” he said. “So I think we’re right at that point where we’re really cracking it open in some basic and fundamental ways. ... We have a very talented and veteran cast who understand what’s necessary.”

To help him understand his role of Allen, Braugher has relied on his own successful marriage (27 years strong), and ditto for Pawk’s interpretation on stage.

“We know the characters,” the actor said. “It’s not like people are speaking a foreign language. We know what marriages are and how they are put together and what they’re made of. I’m speaking in general terms because everyone has a different experience. These roles are really attractive because Julia has written an older couple with a kind of clarity that is beyond her years. She’s 27 years old, and she’s writing about a 30-year-old marriage. And every step feels authentic, so I feel the underlying material allows us to connect and be

intimate pretty quickly.”

He added: “It’s a hell of a lot of fun. There’s nothing more exciting than being in front of a live audience. You get real feedback. You’re telling a story in real time, and an audience is absorbing it. When you’re dealing with good material, material that’s moving to the human spirit, it’s a lot of fun. We all deserve a little bit of that. I’m very fortunate to be an artist, to have discovered what I consider my calling. ... This is one occasion in which I feel that the underlying merit of the material that Julia has put together, along with a great cast, a terrific crew of designers and a terrific director, I think it’s just a unique opportunity to develop something here in South Orange and then take the next step and see how we can get it produced in New York.”

By John Soltes / Publisher / John@HollywoodSoapbox.com

Tell Them I’m Still Young, starring Andre Braugher and Michelle Pawk, runs through Feb. 3 at the South Orange Performing Arts Center in South Orange, New Jersey. The production comes courtesy of the American Theater Group. Click [here](#) for more information and tickets.