

For Immediate Release  
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**U.Va Drama Department Ends Season on a Delightful High Note with Musical *The Mystery of Edwin Drood***

For its final show of the 2004-2005 season, the U.Va Drama Department presents *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, an innovative and zestful musical comedy by Rupert Holmes. Based on Charles Dickens' uncompleted final novel, the production runs April 14-16 and 20-23 at 8 p.m. at the Culbreth Theatre. This unique musical who-dunnit will charm theatergoers with its engaging audience participation, hilarious storyline, and memorable score.

An eccentric Victorian musical troupe, called the Music Hall Royale, begins the performance by reenacting their version of Dickens' book. Immediately, the Master of Ceremonies, (portrayed by Winston Noel), invites audience members to play the part of the *troupe's* audience and contribute interactively. Because of its status as an unfinished work, the audience can vote on various options throughout the performance, directly shaping its action. When the nephew of the troupe's choirmaster, Edwin Drood, (played by Heather Mayes), mysteriously vanishes, audiences must examine the clues themselves to determine his murderer. Against the backdrop of Victorian vaudeville, the play brims with colorful characters, startling plot twists, and a diverse array of music—ranging from upbeat group numbers to haunting ballads.

Originally produced by Joseph Papp at the New York Shakespeare Theatre Festival in 1985, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* went on to achieve widespread critical acclaim and to win five Tony Awards, including Best Musical. Mr. Holmes—who wrote the show's book,

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music, lyrics, and score— had previously enjoyed an accomplished career writing and producing pop music songs, his most famous being “Escape” (“The Pina Colada Song”). However, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* marked Holmes’ debut work for the stage. Since then, he has written numerous plays and musicals, including *Accomplice*, *Solitary Confinement*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as well as the acclaimed mystery novel *Swing*.

A talented ensemble—under the guidance of director Bob Chapel— brings *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* to life. Dr. Chapel, who also serves as Chair of the Department of Drama and producing artistic director of the Heritage Repertory Theatre, has directed such favorites as *The Pajama Game*, *A Chorus Line*, and *Into the Woods* for the Drama Department. Erin Hall, a B.A. candidate in Drama, serves as the show’s stage manger.

“There is a special challenge—and thrill—in the impulsiveness of this production,” Ms. Hall says. “By the math there are over 500 possible endings... so we’ll be going into each show just like the audience: excited about the unknown.” Jane Mayer, a fourth-year B.A. candidate in Drama who portrays Princess Puffer, one of the suspects, agrees that this helps to distinguish the production. “It’s rare that you actually get to play an actor on stage,” she says. “We really get to appreciate the role of the audience, and together, enjoy the spontaneity of theatre from their perspective.”

Tickets for the *Mystery of Edwin Drood* are \$14 for adults, \$12 for seniors and \$9 for students; full-time U.Va students can use their ART\$ Dollars to purchase tickets. For more information, call the Drama Department Box Office at 434-924-3376. The box office is open from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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