

A Civil War Christmas at Charter Oak Cultural Center

Scenes from Paula Vogel's *A Civil War Christmas* were performed on Saturday December 15th at the Charter Oak Cultural Center. They had been rehearsing afternoons twice a week for two months at Grace Lutheran Church.

The production began when the actor Forrest McClendon, a Connecticut native, and UCONN alum was already doing the musical at UCONN's Connecticut Repertory Theater. He wanted to give something back to his home state so he partnered with Anne D'Alleva the Dean of the School of Fine Arts at UCONN, and with the assistance of Elizabeth Foody, also of UCONN, they partnered with Donna



Berman at Charter Oak Cultural Center to create a pared down version that high school students could perform.

The seven students who participated came from Hartford Area High Schools and had responded to the flyer that was circulated at the beginning of the school year.

Wallis Johnson was enlisted to direct and Forrest, a Tony Award nominee mentored the students. It really came together when the student were able to go to UCONN to see the CT Rep performance and then talk to the actors afterward.

What made this project so exciting was the many partners that came together to make it happen. Forrest and Anne reached out to Donna Berman and Wallis Johnson, who directs at Colchester Community Theatre. Donna connected with Louisa Barton Duguay who was able to offer the space at Grace for the rehearsals. Bill Watson, the set designer at Colchester Community Theatre was able to provide the set and they also provided the costumes. Charter Oaks own Karl Messerschmidt took care of the sound and lighting, which were both, excellent.

In the end, the seven student performers, Paola Andino, who played *Mary Todd Lincoln* Ashley Castro, who played *Mary Surratt* Jada Dove, who played *Mrs. Elizabeth Keckley*, Chloe Eristhee, who was the *Narrator* Kennedi Hill, who played *Hannah Nancy Perez-Hernandez*, who played *Jessa* and Zyerra Shuff who played *Aggy* and *Anna Surratt* all learned a lot of valuable lessons and skills and the community was treated to an inspiring performance. Thanks to everyone who worked on this production. More photos can be seen at:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/S7ddZDqikTPDaqq38>