

# Review: Stuff Happens

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## ***Stuff Happens*, playing at the Randolph Academy, brings the political aftermath of 9/11 to the Toronto stage**

On September 11, 2001 two of New York City's most iconic skyscrapers toppled. And on that fateful day, the world was forever changed. Many of us can vividly recall exactly where we were and what we were doing at that very moment, but what of the politicians who were charged with leading their nations in the aftermath of that tragedy?

[Stuff Happens](#), presented by the [Randolph Academy for the Performing Arts](#), examines the political aftermath of 9/11 through the eyes of its key influencers.

A poignant and intensely paced work of theatre, this production masterfully knits together fact and speculation in order to create a narrative that hypothetically exams the backroom goings-on in America, Britain and France.

The dialogue itself consists of actual sound bites and fictitious conversations as imagined by playwright David Hare. The writing – in particular, the political rhetoric – is so strong and convincing that it's often difficult to distinguish between what was actually said by the various politicians and what is fiction.

And while Hare's anti-war slant is apparent, there are no circumstances where the characters' lines ever seem too implausible.

Even in dialogue where moral judgement is implied, the conversations never seem so unrealistic that a politician would never utter them.

“Politicians start wars. Soldiers die and fight.”

Indeed, it's this sense of realism that allows the play to assert its side without becoming unbearably preachy.

The success of this play could not have been brought to life without the skilled young actors of the [Randolph Academy](#), whose abilities on stage presence far exceed their age.

On a side note, what was really intriguing about this play was the removal of gender from the parts. The role of many key male politicians, most notably George W. Bush and Tony Blair, were played by female actors. This made me realize that rhetoric is indeed so powerful that it transcends gender: words themselves can take on a life of their own.

Each member brought something fresh and unique to the performance. And while they were all playing politicians at least twice their age, the subject matter was presented as skillfully as any seasoned actor would have presented it.

As with any production, there are always going to be some actors who really resonate with you. In this case, I was simply enamoured by three of the night's performers.

Playing the man at the centre of it all, George W. Bush, was Chiamaka Umeh. While many plays of this genre chose to portray Bush as a bumbling idiot, [Stuff Happens](#) instead chose to portray him as a man on a crusade. Umeh was able to effortlessly channel this sense of self-righteousness, adding a sense of credibility to the performance. Much credit should be awarded to her, as she never once overacted her lines in such a way as to turn her role into a farce.

Troy Goldthorp played U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell. In real life, Powell was known for his even demeanor, which Goldthorp captured brilliantly. However, in one of the behind-the-scenes parts of the play, Powell completely loses his temper amidst failed diplomatic negotiations. It was at this moment where the most compelling performance of the night occurred. Goldthorp dug deep and gave a compelling, heart-wrenching performance of Powell during his moment of truth.

Rounding out the list of shout-outs is Lucia Forward, playing the role of British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. By many accounts, Blair was a very likeable man – a trait that Forward exuded on stage. She played her role with an air of dignity and grace. It's not often that many people feel empathetic towards a politician, but Forward was able to channel Blair's demeanor during his very public test of loyalty towards America.

To say the casting for this production was on point, would definitely be an understatement.

Spectacularly performed and brilliantly acted, [Stuff Happens](#) marks a triumphant debut to Toronto's spring theatre season.

*Details:*

- [Stuff Happens](#) run until April 5<sup>th</sup> at the [Annex Theatre](#) (730 Bathurst Street)
- Tickets are available [online from Ticketmaster](#)<sup>®</sup> and start at \$22 plus applicable fees. Some tickets may also be available in person at the Annex Theatre box office, starting one hour before show time.