The following essays appear as a feature item in *On the Boards* – the playbill for the ACT ONE theatre program at DeSales University.

- You Never Can Tell
- Joseph & the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat
- A View from the Bridge
- Dance Ensemble Concert
- Anything Goes
In his new book, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character and Achievement*, the *New York Times* essayist David Brooks argues that deciding whom to love is an inherently emotional business. He writes: “People who succeed in courtship are able to pick up the melody and rhythm of a relationship. Through a mutual process of reading each other and restraining themselves, their relationship will or will not establish its own synchronicity, and it is through this process that they will establish the implicit rules that will forever after govern how they behave toward each other.” The book offers fascinating details about the intricacy and complexity of what lies below the surface of our relationships.

But, as you’ll learn by way of the comedic show on our main stage, *You Never Can Tell!* Matchmaking surely has its foibles and often can be frustrating. George Bernard Shaw’s lesson in this show, according to James Moore, is that “It’s unwise to be human ... but we do it anyway. We make dreadful mistakes in the process, but sometimes we have fun in spite of ourselves.”

At the folly of ourselves we do rightly laugh, even, perhaps especially, when it concerns the misadventures of romance and the misplaced social mores that can attend the process. But for *FRANCIS DE SALES* (1567-1622), love is what makes us so much more than social animals.

For our patron saint, friendships born and nurtured by love are an essential means by which we become who we are, and marriage is the highest form of loving friendship. The process by which this relationship develops is twofold. It begins with “complacence” – in the Latin sense of that term – as we are “pleased with” some good we see in the other person. Love then proceeds by “benevolence.” Moved by the delight we feel in a deep emotional sense, we then “will the good” of the other person; that is, we choose and we act to make that person’s goodness grow in some way. Then the cycle begins anew; as we take more delight in what is good, we act again and again for the good of the other. In this way, the circle of love is unending.

The sources may be hidden, and at times the process may be hilarious. But in the end, our ability to decide for the good of another person – our ability truly to love – is what sets us apart from other animals. When we love, we can tell for sure that we are human. *Enjoy the show!*
But for religious believers, it’s not a dream at all … it’s reality! Even though it seems to last only through December, the truth is that what this season celebrates – the human birth of the eternal God – is timeless. It is, indeed, something at which we can all be “amazed.”

This season’s production tells another amazing story, this one from the Hebrew Bible. The story of Joseph, the one who ultimately saves his brothers (and, by extension, all the clans of the chosen People) prefigures the Christmas story in as much as Jesus, too, subjected himself to the trials of our existence (“taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” as St. Paul says) only later to rise up with salvation for all God’s people.

For Francis de Sales (1567-1622), the story of the Incarnation is a defining reality, not only for our Christian faith but also for our daily life. He sees in this sacred mystery the high point of history. That God would so deign to become one of us – to live all the ups and downs of our human life, while at the same time demonstrating to us and enabling for us a still greater life – this is, for our patron saint, the culmination of creation, the apex of all ages, the pinnacle of perfection. Here, where the divine and the human are fully united, is the amazing story of our world. This is why he characterizes the road to happiness in terms of giving birth: “Our souls should give birth, not outside themselves, but within, to the dearest, most charming and handsome child that one could wish for. It is Jesus whom (we) must form and bring to birth in ourselves” (Letters of Spiritual Direction, p. 129).

This, too, may seem like a dream to us. But as we see on this stage, dreams can still be inspiring. And, oh, what an amazing story it would be! Enjoy the show!

A View from the Bridge  February 22 to March 4, 2012

No matter the point from where you take your view, every human life has a tragic dimension. As this show’s playwright, Arthur Miller, argues in a famous essay, “The tragic night is a condition of life” that is not limited to royalty but can (perhaps even should) be the experience of the common man. Why? Because it derives from a common “fear of being displaced,” it reveals our shared search for “a sense of personal dignity,” and it exalts the innate human “thrust for freedom.” In our own stories, each one of us can gain a tragic stature “to the extent of (our) willingness to throw all (we) have into the contest, the battle to secure (our) rightful place in (our) world.”

For our patron, St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622), the view was not from a bridge but from a university! While he was a student in Paris, he was confounded by the competing viewpoints on God, as one who loves (as in the biblical Song of Songs) or as one who judges (as in having predestined everyone to heaven or hell). For whatever reason, Francis came to be convinced that he was to be damned for all eternity, and the fear of being displaced there forever mired him in a state of depression lasting some six weeks. It only ended by a supernatural grace, which he
experienced at prayer one day before the black Madonna (a variation of which sits atop the DSU campus). (For more about this story and our statue, read the commentary linked here.)

But from this experience, in which the not-yet-saint freely thrust himself upon divine Providence, Francis de Sales grasped his dignity as a child of God and found his rightful place in the world. And from then on, as is evident throughout his writings, he was imbued with an imperturbable hope that was based not on human achievement or even the worthiness of human nature, but solely and completely on the realization that God’s mercy surpasses whatever good we do and whatever bad we suffer.

In this, he is surely a heroic figure. With what Miller calls “the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity,” Francis de Sales remains a sure and certain guide for each of us common men and women. Enjoy the show!

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**Dance Ensemble Concert**  March 16-18, 2012

BALANCE – it’s not just something we admire in dancers. We all seek it. We could all certainly benefit from more of it, especially in a world whose pace seems quicker and whose demands appear relentless. And even when we’re not actually doing many things, we still busy ourselves interiorly with thoughts of what we could do or desires of what we’d like to do.

But even 400 years ago, the need to maintain balance in a hectic life held an ideal place in the thought of the sages. What wise advice St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) offers to readers of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* when he writes (in part III, chapter 37): “Do not desire faraway thing, that is, things that cannot happen for a long time, as many people do, and by so doing wear out and waste their hearts to no purpose and expose themselves to the danger of becoming very discontented. … [T]hese useless desires usurp the place of virtues I ought to have.”

So, at least for the time you are seated in our theatre, think not of where else you could be or what else you should be getting done. Take advantage of this all-too-brief moment, and of the practiced grace you see before you on stage. In other words ... Enjoy the show!

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**Anything Goes**  April 25 to May 6, 2012

Taking a cruise, to us, usually means a leisurely ride. Traveling aboard a ship these days can be a relaxing getaway, filled with relaxation and entertainment. By way of the Labuda stage, you are now invited to enjoy a virtual getaway festooned with familiar music and madcap antics in this classical farce aboard the S.S. American!
Back in the day, however, travel by ship was a necessity if one wanted to go far, and it was not always a leisurely voyage. Rollicking amid the waters created a swell of doubts and a wave of fears. Unsettling to the mind, such ups and downs also wreaked havoc on the soul.

Our patron, St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622), adopted this imagery many times to describe the ship of life itself. Whether beset by stormy situations around us, or troubled by powerful passions within us, the journey that we undertake every day is not always smooth sailing. Still, he says, we can always be at peace, because the port from which we go, in being created, and the one to which we are headed, in heaven, is that of divine love. In one of his letters (to Persons in the World, p. 373), he writes:

Be on your guard not to let your carefulness turn to solicitude and anxiety; and though you are tossed on the waves and amid the winds of many troubles, always look up to heaven, and say to our Lord: O God, it is for you I voyage and sail, be my guide and my pilot. Then comfort yourself in this, that when we are in port, the delights we shall have there will outbalance the labors endured in getting there. But we are on our way there, amid all these storms, if we have a right heart, good intentions, firm courage, our eyes on God, and in him all our trust.

So take a break from your labors and come aboard to enjoy the show!