

## Theater in Delaware: 'King's Men' a loopy take on corruption

Hall's light drama drawn out, but relevant

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Written by

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### IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** "All the King's Men," Adrian Hall's re-adaptation of the Robert Penn Warren novel. Recommended for adult audiences.

**WHEN:** 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. today; 2 p.m. Sunday; continues through March 6.

**WHERE:** Roselle Center for the Arts, 110 Orchard Rd., Newark

**TICKETS:** \$7-\$24

**INFORMATION:** 831-2204 or [www.rep.udel.edu](http://www.rep.udel.edu)

Adrian Hall's "All the King's Men" is not what theatergoers might expect: A compelling, sharply realized -- and relevant -- take on the miasma of political corruption.

Author-director Hall's semi-drama, semi-musical comedy, now being performed by the University of Delaware's REP troupe, is light entertainment. It manages to stretch what is essentially a one-hour narrative into three very, very long hours.

The mostly excellent acting is sabotaged by woolly-headed, unnecessary back-story tableaux, unnecessary nudity and "newsreel" projections, unnecessary audience participation, unnecessary characters, and the noisy moving of a million unnecessary pieces of furniture and props.

The esteemed Hall loosely bases his play on friend Robert Penn Warren's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1946 roman a clef about the quicksilver rise and fall of messianic, mostly venal Southern politician Willy Stark.

Hall's almost light-hearted approach denatures this demagogic character's vaunted, if self-serving, hokey backwoods populism that's so appealing to the cracker crowd.

The playwright has deeply edited his own 1987 script. Not deeply enough; the plot takes us on more detours than a dysfunctional global tracking system.

Hall's admittedly experimental play is, at base, the elongated journey of Jack Burden, a Southern scion and Stark flunky. And the play's high point is the confrontation between blackmailer Burden (played by Matthew Simpson) and the "upright" Judge Irwin (Stephen Pelinski).

Eugene Lee's backdrop serves as something of a grounding point for the audience.

"All the King's Men" is for grownups.

It's telling that the play's final image is a huge photo portrait of Robert Penn Warren -- descending from above. One would hope that, with extensive reworking, this play becomes less a fuzzy homage to Warren and more a taut validation of Lord Acton's assertion that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."