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Don't Miss *Crime and Punishment: 2026* at A.D. Players

A world premiere of physical theater at its best

by [D. L. Groover](#) | February 1, 2026



Ronald Roman-Melendez in the A.D. Players production of *Crime and Punishment: 2026*

Credit: Miranda Zaebst

Attention must be paid! There is something tremendous happening at A.D. Players – rules are being broken.

If you imagine Players to be a bit stuffy in their repertoire, perhaps a wee bit sanctimonious because of their Christian mission statement, or maybe not downtown enough or “with it” for your taste, then I urge you to attend its world premiere production of Jamye McGhan’s updated adaptation of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s classic novel (1866) of murder, overwhelming guilt, and eventual spiritual salvation.

Crime and Punishment: 2026 is not the company’s usual fare, and it may be off-putting to some of its subscriber base, but the endeavor’s adventure and novelty is stratospheric in its effectiveness. This is a theatrical event with uncommon imagination in its telling, riveting performances, hi-tech design, and

awash with love for the power that only live theater can present. Under Sophia Watt's whiplash direction, The George Theater crackles with the electric hum of physical theater at its best.

Like any immortal Russian novel, the play is long. A few scenes could be tightened or compressed; some pauses, especially in the scene changes, might be eliminated so the action flows unimpeded; and the denouement should be sped up for maximum efficiency. No need to dawdle when the ending is so clear. Polished playwright McGhan (*Apollo 8*, *A Texas Carol [with Kevin Dean]*, and *18 Birthdays*) knows and admires Dostoevsky and could easily revise without losing any of his tale's emotional wallop.

Sublimely updated to the present, the original story remains fairly intact. Poverty-stricken student Rodya Raskolnikov (a powerhouse performance by Ronald Roman-Melendez), beset by busted dreams of a law career and belittled by even those beneath him, twists his mind into thinking that he is "extraordinary" unlike those "ordinary" people who scurry about. There is no way out of his demented maze.

Old crone pawnbroker Liz (a croaking unrecognizable Shanae'a Moore) repeatedly maligns his self-worth even as he is forced to sell his dead father's beloved watch for food. With premeditation and the self-satisfaction of getting away with murder, he snaps and bludgeons her to death with an ax. When her young and pregnant sister inadvertently enters from the back room where she has been kept in virtual slavery, he panics and kills her too.

Inexorably, relentlessly the guilt suffocates him. His pride dissolves into nervous tics, sputtering, and psychosomatic illness. Detective Petrovich (Kevin Dean, in one of his four highly etched characterizations) is initially wary of this snotty little braggart after Rodya is summoned to the police station to be questioned about his unpaid back rent.

The other down-and-outers (a Dostoevsky specialty) are his destitute Mom Alyona (Pamela Vogel, at the top of her game); beloved and constant sister Dana (Ms. Moore, again, now dewy); Simeon, an alcoholic philosopher manqué (Spencer Plachy, chilling in all his various roles, especially sadistic Ivan on the make for Dana); Simeon's daughter Sonya (a sympathetic Gillian Konko), whose need for money forces her into sex work; former student friend Dimitri (Gabriel Regojo) who tries to help Rodya but is constantly rebuffed. Policemen, a young Rodya seen in flashbacks (Sebastian Ramirez), Dana's opportunistic and sleazy financé Peter (Dean, perfectly obnoxious), Simeon's ill mother Katherine (the exquisite Vogel once more), and various bar flies and hangers-on fill out this weighty drama.

Besides the top-notch acting from the entire ensemble, with Roman-Melendez and Plachy anchoring the play, what sets this production apart is its fantastic look. Conjured by scenic designer Kirk A. Domer into a three-walled gray box within which are panels that ascend to reveal another set behind, or a high platform that slides from the side wall for Rodya's bedroom. Like Raskolnikov, the room teeters on the edge.

Onto this Cubist setting are projected home videos, a city wharf, walking shadows, all manner of whizzing computer data, blood-stained faces, cell phone conversations, and a psychedelic stream of consciousness – all depicting the dehumanizing, mechanical society that has trapped Rodya. His psychosis is visceral and visual. The wizards behind the pictorial phantasmagoria are Michael Mullins and Jesse GrothOlson, abetted by David J. Palmer's *film noir* lighting design, Samantha Dante Patterson's

scruffy lived-in costumes, and Mullins' creepy electronic-buzz sound work. Everything meshes seamlessly and emotionally to make Raskolnikov's internal turmoil external.

McGhan's updated dialogue is a hip combo of now and archaic, as if cribbed straight out of a period translation from Czarist Russia. It has the creamy yet stilted quality of yesteryear-speak while everyone obsesses over their phones. Rodya's growing mental disassociation is now heard as well as seen.

McGhan and director Sophia Watt spur the artists and give them full rein to create. As associate artistic director of Rec Room Arts, Watt overlays that company's grit and grunge aesthetic onto A.D. Players. Surprisingly, it's a fit made in theater heaven. Along with the exceptional company, she and McGhan have made A.D. Players hot – and must-see.

Crime and Punishment: 2026 continues through February 22 at 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays; 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Saturdays; and 2 p.m. Sundays at A.D. Players at The George Theater, 4520 Westheimer. For more information, call 713-526-2721 or visit



D. L. Groover has contributed to countless reputable publications including the Houston Press since 2003. His theater criticism has earned him a national award from the Association of Alternative Newsmedia (AAN) as well as three statewide Lone Star Press Awards for the same. He's co-author of the irreverent appreciation, *Skeletons from the Opera Closet* (St. Martin's Press), now in its fourth printing.