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## 'The Columnist' portrays powerful man with a secret

June 06, 2015, 05:00 AM By [Judy Richter](#) Daily Journal

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Joseph Alsop was perhaps the most influential political columnist in the country for many years, but his power gradually declined.

David Auburn's 2012 "The Columnist," presented by Dragon Theatre in its Bay Area premiere, chronicles that decline in a fascinating glimpse at recent American history.

While he was professionally well known, Joseph, called Joe, had a secret life that's revealed to the audience in the opening scene, set in 1954. Joe (Randy Hurst) has just had an afternoon tryst in a Moscow hotel room with Andrei (Casey Robbins), who was working for the KGB — unknown to Joe at the time.

Before that decline, which came more than a decade later, the aristocratic Joe moved in the nation's most powerful political circles.

Joe, whose column was widely syndicated, admired JFK and ardently supported the war in Vietnam as a way to halt the spread of communism.

He was so convinced that the United States was winning that war that he tried to get younger reporters like David Halberstam (Drew Reitz) removed from their Vietnam posts because they were reporting otherwise.

After JFK's assassination in 1963, Joe continued to support the war. However, he failed to recognize the social upheaval wrought by the war as protestors and hippies took to the streets.

While these events serve as backdrops to the play, the focus is more personal, stressing Joe's family life. He was close to his younger brother, Stewart (Gary Mosher), with whom he co-wrote his column from 1945 to 1958.

He was married to Susan Mary Jay (Mary Price Moore) for several years. Even though she knew he was gay, they were good friends, so she agreed to the marriage. He also was fond of her teenage daughter, Abigail (Camille Brown).

Running about two hours with one intermission, the play ends in Washington in 1968 when Joe and Andrei happen to meet again while watching a demonstration on the Washington Mall.

Director Brandon Jackson paces the episodic action well. Scene changes are punctuated by songs of the time.

It's generally well acted, especially by Moore as Susan, Mosher as Stewart and Brown as Abigail. Hurst as Joe holds the stage and conveys his growing egotism and social unawareness well, but he frequently muffed his lines on opening night.

It's an interesting play offering insights to and bringing up memories of turbulent times as seen through one man's experiences.

"The Columnist" will continue through June 21 at Dragon Productions Theatre, 2120 Broadway, Redwood City. For tickets and information call (650) 493-2006 or visit [www.dragonproductions.net](http://www.dragonproductions.net).



**James Kasyan**  
Randy Hurst stars as Joseph Alsop in 'The Columnist.'

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- The carnival
- The music
- The food
- The animals
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