

atplay

Issue 8, Spring/Summer 2002

WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS

A scene from Kia Corthron's *Seeking the Genesis*.



Photo by Joan Marcus

La Femme Kia

While we usually do one-on-one interviews here at DPS, with scheduling conflicts, Director of Professional Rights Robert Lewis Vaughan and playwright Kia Corthron ended up communicating by e-mail. Robert asked several seemingly small questions to get the ball rolling, and he and Kia planned to talk in person later — to finish off the interview. But that wasn't necessary. Kia answered the questions (or as she put it, "Those weren't small questions, those were BIG questions!"). Obviously we here at DPS love Kia's writing, and we decided to just let her tell you all about herself in her own words. We're sure you'll fall in love with her too —

Continued on page 2

I grew up in Cumberland, a factory/mill town in Western Maryland. The skinny part of Maryland, kissing Pennsylvania and West Virginia. From my house it was less than a ten-minute walk to West Virginia. I had zillions of West Virginia relatives in another town about a half-hour's drive away. Very white, very working class — *Boys Don't Cry*. In my high-school graduating class of about three hundred there were ten blacks, and we were the only people of color.

I was encouraged since second grade to be a writer. From my own memory and my mother's, it probably all began when my sister, fifteen months my senior, started first grade, and I had no one to talk

On the night I was to receive the \$2,000 check, I had to ask my roommate if I could borrow money for a subway token to attend the award ceremony.

to, so I started what was referred to by my elders as “talking to myself,” but, in reality, these “dialogues” were dramatizations, various serial stories I'd keep coming back to. The “actors” could be pens or leaves or clothespins — the last I recreated in the twelve-year-old character of Ness in *Digging Eleven*. That play is the closest I've ever come to autobiography.

It wasn't until my very last semester at the University of Maryland that I took a playwriting class. I had always been flattered as the “class star” in writing classes. The difference with this class was in our final presentation — a staging of fifteen minutes of our plays. At the end of my piece, rather than being answered with all sort of compliments, there was silence. And gradually people began making one-word comments like “Poignant.” A woman who I thought in the dark had been sighing bored had actually been crying. It was the first I witnessed my writing *affecting* an audience, and I was so taken with the realization that this was a singular moment, that there was a connecting between these actors and this audience, an experience that would never be repeated, I was so excited by the *immediacy* of it all that I've been writing for the theatre ever since.

That play was called *A Horseshoe Nail* and took place on the day a U.S. soldier in Vietnam returned home from the war. It's one of the ex-plays, as I call them. No longer in existence. I don't have a copy, and it was typed on a typewriter: no files.

After college I worked as an editor in a company outside of D.C. that did government pubs. In that time I took a tuition-free playwriting workshop through George Washington University led by Lonnie Carter. While with that group I wrote a play in the fall semester that addressed child sexual abuse, and in the spring I wrote another that dealt with breast cancer. Lonnie suggested grad school, specifically his old Yale professor who was now at Columbia: Howard Stein. I applied, met Howard and got in.

At Columbia I wrote three plays: one about a schizophrenic young woman at a bus stop; another, *Wake Up Lou Riser*, materialized out of an exercise in which Howard Stein simply asked for a “reversal” — in its pivotal scene four sisters, ages twelve to twenty-four, don black Klan robes and prepare to lynch the white Klan member who they believe lynched their brother; and *Come Down Burning*, which focused on reproductive issues with respect to poor women. *Wake Up Lou Riser* was chosen by a student director for her thesis production — the first time a director in that program had chosen a fellow student's play for her thesis, I believe; was later workshopped at the old

Circle Rep LAB; and afterwards was produced by students at Ramapo, a small state college in New Jersey. I did massive rewrites every time. Ultimately I submitted it to the Connections Contest, a new award offered by Delaware Theatre Company for a play dealing with race in contemporary America. It won; I got some badly needed bucks; and Delaware, the mysterious theatre I would see on the train home but had previously known nothing about, produced the play.

Come Down Burning was workshopped in the first Voice & Vision retreat at Smith College. Paige Evans, new in the literary office of Manhattan Theatre Club, had seen it there, which in part led to my being nominated for the first year of their fellowship, which I won, making me, apparently, the first Van Lier fellow. Marya Mazor, co-artistic director of Voice & Vision, had submitted *Come Down Burning* to the Long Wharf Theatre. They workshopped the shortish play and asked that I write a “companion piece” to fill out the evening. I had to use the same cast: three women and two children. Without the possibility of male actors, I decided it was time to explore women's prisons, a subject I had been interested in for a while. Within a couple of months, *Cage Rhythm* was selected to be published in Sydné Mahone's *Moon Marked and Touched by Sun: Plays by African-American Women*, the first time I had been published which, of course, always makes a writer feel like a writer. At a time when I was broke again, *Cage Rhythm* won the New Professional Theatre Playwriting Award. On the night I was to receive the \$2,000 check, I had to ask my roommate if I could borrow money for a subway token to attend the award ceremony.

For my Van Lier at MTC I wrote *Catnap Allegiance*. The main character was a young black soldier named Jeddie, during and just after the Gulf War, which had happened a year before I was awarded the fellowship. At that time I had stopped writing because all of my time was taken up with political demonstrations and other actions against the war. A friend of mine from Columbia, the same friend who had selected *Wake Up Lou Riser* for her thesis production, was teaching at Otterbein College in Ohio near Columbus, and this connection eventually led to my being a visiting artist there, and the students — *very* talented, it turned out — performed the only production of the play. Ideal casting for many of the roles: The students were military age. And one student was the perfect consultant: He had been a Gulf War soldier.

Second Stage had gotten funding to commission “Intergenerational” plays — they called it something like that. The idea was to create pieces for a multiage audience — to bring young people into the theatre, along with their parents. Under one of these commissions I wrote *Digging Eleven*, which takes place in a small working-class town, not unlike Cumberland (though I really kept it fiction in my mind), with a little girl who had clothespins talk to each other and with a grandmother who was given many of the stories of my own grandmother. In one of her stories — *He came from the South and no shit from no white man did he take, “Nigger nigger” they called but he not a stumble not a eye twitch. ‘Til one of ‘em “Nigger nigger” and shoved him, that's the one wound up with the buckshot in*

his hide, he came from the South and went back down South. For good. That was husband number one. They was three. They got the shotgun. I seen it settin' in the sheriff's office. They look to me for clues, but he weren't nothin' more in my life but a memory, not a birthday card, not a rumor. Sheriff wait his seven years. I wait mine.

Not long before I wrote that play I learned from my mother that Mom Mom (who died when I was in high school) had had a husband before Pop Pop. Gram in the play had three husbands. Mom Mom only had two. The rest is true.

Besides a lot of workers' issues stuff, I was thinking about homophobia in the black community at that time. Though I wasn't being deliberate about it in any way, I guess because where I come from if you're not slinging fast food or a department store cashier it's pretty much the mines or the mill or the factories, I was kind of surprised that what impressed many people was the idea that I had gay men doing heavy work in a plant. The play wasn't produced until years later with Michael Wilson's inaugural season at Hartford Stage.

I had been a part of an African-American playwrights unit at Playwrights Horizons, and Tim Sanford, the literary manager, asked us to write one acts, four of which he produced in the upstairs space. My piece was *Life by Asphyxiation*. I had been wanting to write a play for a while with Crazy Horse and Nat Turner in it. At the time of Tim's offer, I had been thinking a lot about the death penalty. So I wrote a play that takes place today in which Crazy Horse and Nat Turner are sitting on death row. It was too big to be in an evening with three other plays so Crazy Horse and some other stuff got cut. (He later was reinstated when I redeveloped the piece for Crossroads Theatre Company's Genesis Festival.) The main character is Jojo, a man who committed an ugly, violent crime thirty years ago. He is very different per-



Photo by Bruce Katz

son than he was then, and his death appointment is imminent. The writing of the play really took off when I brought in fifteen-year-old Katie, his tough, bossy, basketball-playing murder victim.

I call myself a political writer. I don't consider my stuff agit-prop — I try not to preach to the audience — but whether an audience member agrees with me or not, I have failed if they don't know where I'm coming from. If, with *Life by Asphyxiation*, they could leave the theatre and not know *I'm* against the death penalty, I've erred inexcusably. I don't think that was a problem; I think I helped audience members *feel* for this human being that the media had trained them to hate. And if at least one person left the theatre feeling or thinking a little differently than when she or he had come into the theatre, then I've been successful.

For years I have listened to left-progressive WBAI-FM. Dr. Peter Breggin, a radically anti-drug

Continued on page 5

PAMELA'S ODYSSEY

Pamela Gien, author and erstwhile performer of the long-running Off-Broadway success *The Syringa Tree*, talked with Director of Publications Michael Fellmeth about South Africa, writing her first play and winning the Obie Award.

FELLMETH. Where in South Africa were you brought up, Pamela?

GIEN. I was born in Emmarentia, Johannesburg, and was raised in Ferndale, a suburb of Johannesburg. I'm what we call a Joey's girl!

When did you leave? And why?

I left in 1983. The reasons were complex. I was like many young people there, curious about the world, wanting to live and work in America, but I also had complicated feelings about the place — anger, denial, frustration. In retrospect, I think I was deeply fearful about what was happening there, and ashamed, without really being able to articulate that. I would avoid speaking about it, if I could, and just wanted to get away from it. My father had often said to me never to consider making that place my home — that what was being done there was evil, and since it didn't seem possible that things would change, I suppose I felt from a young age that I would leave.

How did you end up in Boston as an actor at American Repertory Theatre?

I first came to live in New York. I was offered some wonderful work, but I had a work permit that did not allow me to accept any Equity work. I had a three-year wait for a Green Card and then wrote to Robert Brustein who had offered me roles in productions by Andrei Serban and Susan Sontag, which I'd had to turn down. To my astonishment, he wrote back and asked me to come up to Cambridge to re-audition. I did, and he asked me to join the company. It was a miraculous day, and to this day I think one of the great gifts of my life. I got to work as a principal company member with some of the finest artists in the world, people who had previously only existed to me in books! Andrei Serban, David Mamet, Christopher Walken and on and on. I'm enormously grateful to have had that opportunity, and I stayed there for just over five years, loving it.

What inspired you to try your hand at playwriting?

I never imagined in a million years that I would ever write a play. I suppose I'd secretly always wanted to write. I love literature and was an English major, but I never had any confidence about writing my own work and always loved to perform other writers' words. I was in a class taught by the gifted teacher Larry Moss and had been studying with him for about three years. One night, in a class just like any other, Larry said, "Turn to the person next to you, and tell them a story. It could be something that happened long ago or something that happened in the bank this morning ..." I turned to my classmate, and the memory of my grandfather's murder on his farm, Clova,

came flooding into my mind. I tried quickly to think of something else, appalled by this sudden horrible remembrance. As I tried to think of something else to tell, Larry said, "Don't censor whatever it is that comes into your mind. It will choose you ... Just tell that story." I did, and the second part of the exercise was to stage the story we had just told, using whatever we wished to do so. I think I was the first trembling soul to bring the exercise back and to stage it, about a week later. I say trembling because I felt as though I had an earthquake occurring in my body. The memories were enormously painful, and I felt terribly vulnerable dealing with my own life on the stage. At the end of it, about twenty minutes of staged "story exercise," I looked out to see my classmates standing, many of them weeping. Larry said, "This is extraordinary material. You have to write it as a play, and you have to write it as a film." And so I began the rather astounding task of writing about my life.

What was your process like? Did you sit down and write *The Syringa Tree* out? Or did you have a more nontraditional approach?

It began in a nontraditional way, with the staging of the first exercise in class. I listened to music from my early life and really just improvised up on my feet to create the scenes. The voice of Elizabeth, the child, came to me very early, like a little spirited gift, very, very quiet, almost inaudible the first time I performed her. She came from such a private, buried place within myself. But she was a constant presence through the piece I staged and really became my guide and the audience's guide.

After Larry told me to write this as a play, I must say, I really did sit down and write. I had no idea what I was writing really, and yet it poured out relentlessly, opening a well of grief and love and joy. The play really has taught me so much about what I felt for that place, the love, despair, sorrow and shame, all buried, all tucked away for so long. I wrote for about eight weeks and then gave Larry the screenplay. He said, "Write the play," and I did. I just sat down and wrote it. Several weeks later, I gave it to Larry, and we began what would be a three-year process, rehearsing, refining, cutting, cutting and cutting some more. I also had the privilege of working with a superb dramaturg, Mame Hunt, at ACT Seattle, where we staged the premiere of the play.

Obviously the play is deeply personal, but how much is rooted in your actual experience?

It's been a hard question to answer. I started out writing about my actual life for the exercise, but as I wrote, I began to love the freedom of combining those events with the poetry of language and imagery. I would say it's not more than semi-autobiographical, based on two true incidents, one being the attack at Clova, which I tell almost exactly as I remember it being told to me at the age of ten. Also, there was a child born at our house, illegally, and hidden for a while, and I've used names of people I loved and knew there, and some family names combined with some fictitious names, really to honor those I remember. But there are large portions of it that are purely fiction, characters who were combinations of people I knew and loved and who inspired me. Salamina is a combination of women who cared for me. The parents are inspired by my own parents but are not actually them. So it's all interwoven. I read with interest about how Wendy Wasserstein has used names of people in her family and circumstances from her life. I was glad to read that, because I felt funny about it at

first and then comforted reading about her process. And Athol Fugard. I loved to read about what he was trying to fictionalize from his actual life. It's fun, and a mystery, I suppose. And, of course, carried in the story are many of my deepest feelings about the place, and leaving it and returning to it. Those are all real to me. It's filled with wishes. Some might come true.

What have your experiences been with the various productions of the play?

The first production was at ACT in Seattle. Julie Harris saw a workshop performance of it and told Gordon Edelstein about it. We were enormously grateful for the chance he gave us. Matt Salinger had asked during the early workshop days in Larry's studio if he could take this piece to New York, and after Seattle, after what seemed like an interminable wait for a theatre to come available, we brought it to Playhouse 91. It's been a fascinating journey all around, particularly since I've been the performer and the writer. Wearing both hats simultaneously has been thrilling and made more so by the dedication, vision and skill of Larry Moss, the director. The experience, from the moment I unsuspectingly

brought the exercise to class, has exceeded my wildest expectations. It has been enormously exciting but also rigorous. It has invited me to be the best of myself, as an artist and a human being. And I'm still learning.

Has your family seen the play?

Yes, some of them have. My parents saw it first. They had read it, and I was very anxious about their response. But they have been enormously supportive, and I'm profoundly grateful to them.

What was their reaction?

They wept a lot when they saw it. And laughed a lot. It's difficult for my family, because it's so deeply rooted in our lives, but much of it is fictional. I'm grateful for their love of the play. It has meant everything to me. I dedicated the play to them.

Was it difficult for you to see another actor take over the role in New York after you'd been so completely invested in it for so long?

Yes, to begin with. In fact, I kept thinking Matt Salinger, my producer, wouldn't insist on it, as I was just so anxious about it. I had worked on this piece for close to five years. I couldn't imagine someone else performing it, and Matt kept assuring me that they were seeing excellent people at auditions and that I had nothing to fear. I suppose it felt to me like leaving my baby on a doorstep, but I had done over three hundred performances and couldn't continue. Matt kept saying that the play should be done by as many different actors as possible, in as many different venues, and that it was important for me as a playwright to allow someone else to perform it. And now I'm so glad I agreed. Kate has brought tremendous skill and courage to the performance and astonished me by taking over after only five weeks of rehearsal. I'd had four years to work on it! She's a joy, and the extraordinarily sweet person she is made it easier to pass the torch to her. I'm so grateful for her beautiful work in the play. And also for the gift of knowing that it works beautifully without me!

Audiences love this play. There's hardly a dry eye in the house by the end. What is it in *The Syringa Tree* that has the power to move us so deeply?

the
Syringa
tree



NEWPLAYS

THE ALTRUISTS by Nicky Silver

A merry band of dedicated young radicals has their morality put to the test.

BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL by Keythe Farley, Brian Flemming and Laurence O'Keefe

A musical comedy/horror show about a half boy/half bat creature who's discovered in a cave in West Virginia.

BLOOD WEDDING by Federico García Lorca, translated by Lillian Groag

Two families in a semi-mythical rural Spain are intricately bound in an unbreakable cycle of murder and revenge.

THE BOOK OF LIZ by David Sedaris and Amy Sedaris

Sister Elizabeth Donderstock makes the cheese balls that support her religious community, but feeling unappreciated among the Squeamish, she decides to try her luck in the outside world.

BREATH BOOM by Kia Corthron

The story of Prix, whose fascination with fireworks increases as the pyrotechnics of her harsh everyday existence begin to explode around her.

THE CARPETBAGGER'S CHILDREN by Horton Foote

One family's history spanning from the Civil War to WWII is recounted by three sisters in evocative, intertwining monologues.

CELLINI by John Patrick Shanley

Chronicles the life of the original "Renaissance Man," Benvenuto Cellini, the sixteenth-century Italian sculptor and man-about-town.

CHAUCER IN ROME by John Guare

An urbane and provocative meditation on art, sin and salvation.

THE COMING WORLD by Christopher Shinn

A young woman struggles with the death of an ex-boyfriend and the mysterious feelings that arise as she grieves with his distant and very different twin brother.

THE CREDEAUX CANVAS by Keith Bunin

A forged painting leads to tragedy among friends.

DEAD CERTAIN by Marcus Lloyd

A taut psychological thriller where truth and illusion become entangled in a game of cat and mouse between an actor and a wheelchair-bound ex-dancer.

THE DEAD EYE BOY by Angus MacLachlan

An unflinching look at the hardscrabble lives of white working-class recovering drug addicts.

THE DESIGNATED MOURNER by Wallace Shawn

A harsh and poetic play about the pursuit of beauty in brutal times.

ENIGMA VARIATIONS by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, translated by Jeremy Sams

A journalist arrives to interview a reclusive Nobel Prize-winning author whose evasions and lies twist into increasingly complex puzzles.

FIFTH PLANET AND OTHER PLAYS by David Auburn

An exciting collection of one-act plays from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Proof*.

FOUR by Christopher Shinn

Four people struggle desperately to connect in this quiet, sophisticated, moving drama.

THE STATE OF WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS

by Julia Miles



Women's Project & Productions has been producing the work of women playwrights and celebrating women theatre artists since 1978. During these twenty-four seasons, women in theatre have altered the landscape of American drama, entered the dramatic canon and irrevocably changed its nature. We're proud, but not satisfied.

We have made progress artistically as well as statistically. Based on a survey of *American Theatre's* October 2000 Season Preview issue, 390 of 1,900 productions nationwide were written by a woman playwright, or 20.5 percent. This is a marked improvement since WPP's beginning, when a survey of playwrights yielded only seven percent, which included such inspiring writers as María Irene Fornés and Wendy Wasserstein. Since then, numerous talented American women theatre artists — such as Eve Ensler, Beth Henley, Emily Mann, Marsha Norman, Suzan-Lori Parks, Anna Deavere Smith and Paula Vogel — have become well known, acclaimed and established. And many more are seen with increasing frequency on stages around the country, including Kia Corthron, Margaret Edson, Rebecca Gilman, Julie Jensen, Heather McDonald, Lynn Nottage, Regina Taylor, Naomi Wallace and Cheryl L. West, to name only a few. This progress comes thanks to their talent and to producers who share an awareness that women's voices need to be heard.

We still have far to go. Even today, nearly eighty percent of the plays seen on stages in the United States are written by men. And the actual number of women writers produced is lower than the percentages would imply; of the 390 productions mentioned previously, fifty-two were regional productions of two plays (*Wit* by Margaret Edson and 'Art' by Yasmina Reza). Women are still fighting to forge writing and directing careers on a par with their male colleagues and to become part of the nation's theatre leadership in order to help bring balance to our rich, diverse chorus of theatre voices.

The theatre world is full of amazing women artists who speak eloquently and passionately to audiences on every topic. As Women's Project & Productions approaches our twenty-fifth anniversary, we are happy to continue developing and producing talented, inspiring female artists. We hope that you, too, will explore their work. Investigate the plays of Jo Carson, Pearl Cleage, Kia Corthron, Julie Jensen, Wendy MacLeod, Emily Mann, Lavonne Mueller, Sybille Pearson, Joan Vail Thorne, Kathleen Tolan, Diana Son, to name a few of our playwrights published by Dramatists Play Service. Relish and enjoy the discovery of new voices and the opening of fresh perspectives on our world. ■

Julia Miles is Founder and Artistic Director of Women's Project & Productions

2001 BESTSELLING ACTING EDITIONS BY WOMEN

1. THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK
by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, newly adapted by Wendy Kesselman
2. CRIMES OF THE HEART
by Beth Henley
3. HARVEY by Mary Chase
4. WIT by Margaret Edson
5. HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE
by Paula Vogel
6. 'ART' by Yasmina Reza,
translated by Christopher Hampton
7. THE CHILDREN'S HOUR
by Lillian Hellman
8. THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
by Eve Ensler
9. THE HEIDI CHRONICLES
by Wendy Wasserstein
10. THE LITTLE FOXES
by Lillian Hellman

psychiatrist, was a speaker one day and mentioned “The Violence Initiative,” a program so named by its critics. The reference was to an alleged contemporary federal strategy to “treat” youth violence with psychotropic drugs, all stemming from theories that violence may have cerebral-genetic origins. Dr. Breggin, who resides in the D.C. area, addressed a huge audience in Harlem — enraged at the implications of Breggin’s findings, grateful he was bringing them to light. At that lecture I also learned a new word: Ritalin, the common brand name for the drug prescribed for children to combat hyperactivity, an alleged disease. I read several of Breggin’s books at that time, specifying abuses against society by psychiatry, and, under the auspices of my commission with the Goodman Theatre, wrote *Seeking the Genesis*, addressing both The Violence Initiative and Ritalin. By this time I had had several commissioned pieces that had gone unproduced so when the Goodman opted to produce the play in their studio space, suddenly, unexpectedly, my faith was reinstated in the commissioning process.

Nonetheless, the summer before that fall production, I felt this odd sense of freedom writing a play commissioned to no one but myself during my month-long stay at Hedgebrook, a retreat for women writers, on Whidbey Island, north of Seattle. *Beautiful*. Six gorgeous two-story cottages, each for one of six writers in residency at any one time. During my four weeks, I’d communed with novelists, a poet, short story writers, an essayist and two women — one was sixty-six — who were writing their own contributions and introductions to their anthology of Buddhist women writing about their bodies. I was the only playwright. It was amazing to be in the presence of other smart, talented writers, who would approach my writing from a perspective not steeped in theatre savvy. Living in a cottage in the Pacific Northwest woods, walking distance to a beach of Puget Sound, I was in an ideal setting emotionally and physically to address environmental justice in *Splash Hatch*. (I’d have a similar experience years later at a retreat in Lake Placid courtesy of my New Dramatists membership — staring out at the breathtaking Adirondacks while scribbling about corporate culpability in cancer for my ten-minute Goodman Theatre/Regina Taylor-commissioned *Safe Box*.) I researched and wrote *Splash Hatch*, beginning to end, in the four weeks on Whidbey Island. On my penultimate day, a resident masseur gave me my first massage. She asked how my writing was going.

“I finished the play! But no title yet.”

“Well. Maybe you should ask the masseur for a title.” Very New Age. Sure, what the heck? I did, and a third of the way into the massage it came to me — to that date, my strongest title.

With no initial commission attachment, it quickly became my most-produced play. The following summer it premiered on the mainstage of New York Stage and Film (directed by Derek Anson Jones); over that same fall/winter it was co-produced by Center Stage and Yale Rep (directed by Marion McClinton); and a year later it was one of three pieces in a festival of American plays at London’s Donmar Warehouse — a particular surprise: By that point I had a commission with the Royal Court and assumed my London debut would be there.

A year after the Donmar I was back in London at the Royal Court for the premiere of *Breath, Boom*, about girl gangs in the Bronx. I think for most people, particularly women, there’s a fascination — the idea of females taking things into their own hands. But the more I researched (mostly books and articles, though some stuff came from my experiences teaching playwriting in prison, primarily a week-long intensive at

Rosewood, the high school for girls on Riker’s Island), the more I realized that the violence either inflicted by or against the girls was so overwhelming, there was no room for even the vaguest hero worship.

It spans fourteen years: The main character, Prix, is sixteen at the top and thirty at end. No other play of mine covers more than a year in the life of the characters. This wasn’t the original plan. What goes around comes around seemed to be the natural destiny for Prix. The top of the play she kicks the crap out of her gang “sister” Comet. I thought of having Comet come back and do the same to Prix, but it felt forced. Meanwhile I had already written in that eighteen-year-old Comet has a two-year-old daughter, Jupiter. What would happen when Jupiter grew up? That informed the span of the play.

In a meeting regarding my Atlantic Theatre Company commission with artistic director Neil Pepe and then-literary manager Toni Amicarella, I expressed my interest in addressing police brutality. By the time *Force Continuum* was in production at the Atlantic, I referred to the piece as “a play about the relationship between the black community and the NYPD.” Brutality was a part of it, excessive force a major issue, but it had become more than both of these. I wanted not to just state the problems but to really try to find solutions. I talked with cops, of course, past and present, as well as lawyers. I gained a new friend: playwright Andrew Case who had served on the Civilian Complaint Review Board and generously provided a wealth of information (without betraying any confidential info). Particularly useful in my efforts was a white female police officer who was trained twenty years ago by black housing cops.

A couple of years ago I went to a few shows in the Human Rights Film Festival at Lincoln Center. That year ten filmmakers from around the world were commissioned to make shorts — like three minutes or less — focusing on the issue of land mines. I began to think how Americans, myself included, are not insensitive regarding the topic; we just rarely have to think about, despite some American corporate responsibility for the fact that a human being (vast majority civilians and many of these children) steps on a mine every twenty-two minutes. Which began the writing of *The Venus de Milo is Armed* — replacing *Splash Hatch* as my best title. (I think it’s provocative — but *Playbill Online* just listed *Venus de Milo* with a group of maybe forty others as “goofiest” titles of the year!) I decided to challenge myself to write the entire first act in one scene — new for me. It was *hard*; keeping the action alive was one thing but what I hadn’t anticipated was that, in the course of an act, my plays usually span days or weeks — with *Breath, Boom*, of course, years. Now I had to keep the audience interested for an hour of *Real Time* in the life of the characters. I had an idea that the second act would be the opposite: many short scenes. But in the end Act One informed the subsequent structure: Act Two, Scene 1 — ninety percent of the second act, took place in the same room as Act One (actually Act One moved back and forth between two adjoining rooms; Act Two, Scene 1 in just one of these rooms); and the short Act Two, Scene 2 is outside. I made use of music for the first time. A character has a Ph.D. in musicology, specializing in spirituals. And, also new, I focused on a black bourgeois family, very different from my working-class upbringing.

The basic story: Landmines are mysteriously exploding all over the U.S. I decided that the only way for Americans to understand the horror of landmines was to bring them home. On September 10th, Alabama confirmed its plans to produce the play next season. I wondered if the events that occurred twenty-

NEWPLAYS

FORCE CONTINUUM by Kia Corthron

Tensions among black and white police officers and the neighborhoods they serve form the backdrop of this discomfiting look at life in the inner city.

THE GARDENS OF FRAU HESS by Milton Frederick Marcus

When Rudolph Hess’ wife requests a gardener, Isaac arrives from a concentration camp and an unexpected relationship develops.

HEAVEN AND HELL (ON EARTH): A DIVINE COMEDY short plays from Actors Theatre of Louisville

A marvelous collection of short plays in which vice and virtue, salvation and damnation are explored with amusing revelations and surprising insights.

HIGH DIVE by Leslie Ayzazian

An American woman about to turn fifty stands on the high dive of a pool in Greece and considers her life.

HOUSE ARREST: A SEARCH FOR AMERICAN CHARACTER IN AND AROUND THE WHITE HOUSE, PAST AND PRESENT by Anna Deavere Smith

A compelling assortment of letters, speeches and interviews that give a vivid look at the American experience and politics from the time of Jefferson to the Clinton presidency.

HOWIE THE ROOKIE by Mark O’Rowe

A white-knuckle ride through a nightmare Dublin, where enemies and allies are interchangeable and where the most brutal events take on a mythic significance.

JAR THE FLOOR by Cheryl West

A quartet of black women spanning four generations makes up this hilarious and heartwarming dramatic comedy.

THE LAST OF THE THORNTONS by Horton Foote

A nursing home in Harrison, Texas, provides the setting for this rich meditation on the lives of its residents.

LOBBY HERO by Kenneth Lonergan

When a luckless young security guard is drawn into a local murder investigation, loyalties are strained to the breaking point.

NEBRASKA by Keith Reddin

The Cold War is over, but for the men and women stationed at an air force base outside of Omaha, the tensions of existence seem to increase each day.

NO NIGGERS, NO JEWS, NO DOGS by John Henry Redwood

North Carolina in 1949 is the setting of this provocative play, which exposes racism and hate crimes of the day in the light of 2001 and beyond.

OTHER PEOPLE by Christopher Shinn

A cool and witty portrait of troubled East Village friends.

OUTSTANDING MEN’S MONOLOGUES 2001-2002 and OUTSTANDING WOMEN’S MONOLOGUES 2001-2002 edited by Craig Pospisil

Drawn exclusively from Dramatists Play Service publications over the last two seasons, each collection features over fifty monologues for auditions and class work.

THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY by Edward Albee

Concerns a young couple who have just had a baby and the strange turn of events that transpire when they are visited by an older man and woman.

Continued on page 8

NEWPLAYS

PRAYING FOR RAIN

by Robert Vaughan

Examines a burst of fatal violence and its aftermath in a suburban high school.

QUACK by Charles Marowitz and Michael Valenti

A delightful vaudevillized musical version of Molière's *The Physician in Spite of Himself*.

RACE by Ferdinand Bruckner, adapted by Barry Edelstein

In a university town in 1930s Germany, two young medical students debate the future of their country as the Nazis rise to power.

SEEKING THE GENESIS by Kia Corthron

A riveting drama chronicling one woman's struggle to hold her family together while her older son deals drugs and her younger needs medication to combat hyperactivity.

THE SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS

by Carlo Goldoni, translated and adapted by Jeffrey Hatcher and Paolo Emilio Landi

A fresh commedia dell'arte romp with mistaken identity, murder and true love, lost and found.

SLEEP DEPRIVATION CHAMBER

by Adam P. Kennedy and Adrienne Kennedy

A broken taillight leads to the brutal beating of a highly educated, middle-class black man by a policeman in suburban Virginia.

SPLASH HATCH ON THE E GOING DOWN by Kia Corthron

A pregnant fifteen-year-old girl is determined to give birth to a healthy baby despite the environmental hazards in her poor neighborhood and the progressive illness of her boyfriend.

SUMMER CYCLONE by Amy Fox

A wise and compassionate play about a cancer patient and the medical student who falls in love with her.

THE TALE OF JEMIMA PUDDLE-DUCK

by Katherine Patterson, Stephanie Tolan and Steve Liebman

A light-hearted musical adaptation of Beatrix Potter's classic tale.

TEN UNKNOWNNS by Jon Robin Baitz

An iconoclastic American painter in his seventies has his life turned upside down by an art dealer and his ex-boyfriend.

THEDA BARA AND THE FRONTIER

RABBI by Bob Johnston and Jeff Hochhauser

A delightful, nostalgic look at a scandalous silent film star and the rabbi with whom she falls in love.

THIEF RIVER by Lee Blessing

Love between two men over decades is explored in this incisive portrait of coming to terms with who you are.

TO FOOL THE EYE by Jean Anouilh,

adapted by Jeffrey Hatcher from a literal translation by Stephanie L. Debner

A gorgeous, gentle-spirited riff on lost love.

TWILIGHT — LOS ANGELES 1992 by Anna Deavere Smith

An inspired and unique exploration of the riots that shook Los Angeles in the wake of the Rodney King verdict.

WORLD OF MIRTH by Murphy Guyer

This look at the grim lives of the people who work a carnival holds a mirror up to our own in this dark and disturbing new comedy.

The Wit Educational Initiative

by Craig Pospisil

Margaret Edson's *Wit* is more than a Pulitzer Prize-winning story of one woman's fight with ovarian cancer. It's more than a hit play or an HBO movie with a stellar cast. *Wit* has become a medical miracle.

For over a year and a half performances of *Wit* have been the centerpiece of a teaching program for doctors and other health-care workers. In February 2000 Carl Lorenz, a doctor who works at the Department of Veteran's Affairs, came out of Los Angeles' Geffen Playhouse production of *Wit* deeply affected by what he had just seen. It occurred to him that the play could be used as a tool in training doctors to care for gravely or terminally ill patients. It could be used to get doctors to look up from their charts and into the faces of the people who were suffering.

And so, with Margaret Edson's cooperation, the "*Wit* Educational Initiative" was born. Dr. Lorenz, along with Ken Rosenfeld and Jillisa Steckart, other doctors at the Department of Veteran's Affairs, founded the Initiative and developed its program. The idea was to use productions of *Wit* as a springboard for getting health-care workers to talk about the issues and review their own actions in similar circumstances to those of the play. Using lists of upcoming productions of *Wit*, provided by Dramatists Play Service, the staff at the Initiative set up two-day conferences with health-care workers at hospitals in connection with productions of the play in their area. Actors from local productions would be invited to perform the play for the conference attendees so they could experience this affecting drama.

On the first day there would be a pre-performance lecture, dealing with doctor/patient relations, as a primer. During the second day, conference attendees would watch the readings of Edson's play and afterwards split into small discussion groups. The staff of the Initiative created a handbook to guide the discussions, asking the groups to consider such questions as: How does Vivian remind you of any of your patients? Or how does her personality change her experience? And how are doctors portrayed in the play? The groups also addressed topics from doctors' use of medical and technical language with patients to asking doctors if they thought their patients died lonely. A week after the conference, the attendees gather again for a talk-

back session with actual cancer survivors, care givers and current cancer patients, taking doctors out of a fictitious setting and transferring the experience into reality.

Dr. Jillisa Steckart feels the Initiative has been an enormous success, based on the responses received from evaluations on the attendees. The survey asked such questions as: How would you rate the play overall? with 97 percent answering "excellent or very good"; and, how accurately does the play portray the emotions of these situations? with about 90 percent replying "excellent or very good." As a teaching tool, the response to *Wit* has been phenomenal. When asked how viewing the play compared to a lecture on the subject, 87 percent replied "very or somewhat more useful." When asked how it compared to articles on the subject, 88 percent said "very or somewhat more useful." In fact, as many as 69 percent of respondents felt that seeing the play was "very or somewhat more useful" than bedside rounds at hospitals. The survey responses also gave *Wit* an 80–90 percent success in its realistic depiction of the end of life.

The *Wit* Educational Initiative has brought its teaching message to almost 3,000 people at more than thirty different conferences around the country since its inception. Unfortunately, funding for the Initiative ended on November 30, 2001, but Steckart and the others are trying to extend the life of the program by seeking new sources of funding and even taking salary cuts.

But even if the Initiative does come to an end, they plan to make their handbook and other materials available to any group that wants to replicate the program on their own for free. HBO is also helping by providing the Initiative with 450 videotape copies of the film version for use at meetings if a stage production is not available. Furthermore, the Initiative is hoping to install their handbook and video copies of the film at teaching hospitals and other medical training facilities for continued use with medical students around the country.

Steckart says the program has opened eyes, and changes to the health-care system are forthcoming. More and more hospitals are creating Palliative Care units. These are units dedicated to the alleviation of suffering, as opposed to the traditional curative only approach to doctoring, where fixing the problem is far and away the main concern, with less regard to quality of life. "The life stories that come out of this have been really fulfilling," said Steckart.

Art, it seems, may now cure the body as well as the soul. ■

Dramatists Play Service licenses hundreds of professional productions each year. For your convenience, here's a schedule of some of them. You can access an even more comprehensive list of professional and select nonprofessional productions by visiting www.dramatists.com and viewing PAGE TO STAGE.

page to stage

MARCH – AUGUST 2002

ALABAMA

A DOLL'S HOUSE by Henrik Ibsen, adapted by Frank McGuinness. Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Montgomery. March.

ARIZONA

FULLY COMMITTED by Becky Mode. Arizona Theatre Company, Tucson. Tucson/Phoenix. March.
VISITING MR. GREEN by Jeff Baron. Arizona Jewish Theatre. Phoenix. April.
VISITING MR. GREEN. Invisible Theatre. Tucson. March.

ARKANSAS

THE NERD by Larry Shue. Murry's Dinner Playhouse. Little Rock. May.

CALIFORNIA

THE ALTRUISTS by Nicky Silver. Actors Theatre of San Francisco. San Francisco. March.
DRIVING MISS DAISY by Alfred Uhry. Hermosa Beach Playhouse. Redondo Beach. April.
MOLLY SWEENEY by Brian Friel. Pacific Repertory Theatre. Carmel-by-the-Sea. June.
OLD WICKED SONGS by Jon Marans. Rubicon Theatre Company. Ventura. April.
SISTER MARY IGNATIUS EXPLAINS IT ALL FOR YOU by Christopher Durang. Pacific Repertory Theatre. Carmel-by-the-Sea. March.
SYLVIA by A.R. Gurney. Rubicon Theatre Company. Ventura. July.
THIS IS OUR YOUTH by Kenneth Lonergan. Ensemble Theatre Project. Santa Barbara. June.
WIT by Margaret Edson. Solano College Theatre. Suisun. March.

COLORADO

'ART' by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton. Aspen Theatre in the Park. Aspen. July.
ELEEOMOSYNARY by Lee Blessing. Aurora Fox Theatre Company. Aurora. March.
FUDDY MEERS by David Lindsay-Abaire. Curious Theatre. Denver. March.
T BONE N WEASEL by Jon Klein. Aurora Fox Theatre Company. Aurora. March.
WIT by Margaret Edson. Nomad Theatre. Boulder. May.

CONNECTICUT

DEATHTRAP by Ira Levin. Polka Dot Playhouse. Bridgeport. April.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

BRILLIANT TRACES by Cindy Lou Johnson. Source Theatre Company. Washington. June.
CORPUS CHRISTI by Terrence McNally. Source Theatre Company. Washington. March.
LOBBY HERO by Kenneth Lonergan. Studio Theatre. Washington. May.
OLEANNA by David Mamet. Source Theatre Company. Washington. March.
THIS IS OUR YOUTH by Kenneth Lonergan. Studio Theatre. Washington. June.

FLORIDA

BETRAYAL by Harold Pinter. Sarabay Arts Center. Sarasota. July.
CRIMES OF THE HEART by Beth Henley. Stageworks. Tampa. May.
DRIVING MISS DAISY by Alfred Uhry. Jacksonville Stage Co., Jacksonville. March.
FULLY COMMITTED by Becky Mode. Asolo Theatre Company. Sarasota. May.
LAST TRAIN TO NIBROC by Arlene Hutton. Riverside Theatre. Vero Beach. April.
ME AND JEZEBEL by Elizabeth L. Fuller. Angel Cabaret Theatre. New Port Richey. March.
THE MEMORY OF WATER by Shelagh Stephenson. Red Barn Actors Studio. Key West. March.
MIDDLE AGES by A.R. Gurney. Riverside Theatre. Vero Beach. April.
PROOF by David Auburn. Hippodrome State Theatre. Gainesville. April.
SIDE MAN by Warren Leight. Gorilla Theatre. Tampa. May.
SIDE MAN. Jacksonville Stage Co. Jacksonville. May.

GEORGIA

LOVE LETTERS by A.R. Gurney. Art Station. Stone Mountain. April.

PROOF by David Auburn. Alliance Theatre Company. Atlanta. March.

IDAHO

FUDDY MEERS by David Lindsay-Abaire. Boise Contemporary Theatre. Boise. April.

ILLINOIS

THE LONESOME WEST by Martin McDonagh. Famous Door Theatre Company. Chicago. March.
TALLEY'S FOLLY by Lanford Wilson. Northlight Theatre. Skokie. May.

IOWA

LAST TRAIN TO NIBROC by Arlene Hutton. Old Creamery Theatre Company. Amana. July.
SIDE MAN by Warren Leight. Riverside Theatre. Iowa City. March.

KENTUCKY

'ART' by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton. Actors Theatre of Louisville. Louisville. April.
RED HERRING by Michael Hollinger. Actors Theatre of Louisville. Louisville. May.

MAINE

'ART' by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton. Portland Stage Company. Portland. April.
FUDDY MEERS by David Lindsay-Abaire. Public Theatre. Auburn. March.
A PERFECT GANESH by Terrence McNally. Portland Stage Company. Portland. March.

MARYLAND

COLLECTED STORIES by Donald Margulies. Olney Theatre. Olney. April.
THE LARAMIE PROJECT by Moisés Kaufman and the Members of the Tectonic Theater Project. Olney Theatre. Olney. July.
SIDE MAN by Warren Leight. Everyman Theatre. Baltimore. May.

MASSACHUSETTS

THE BEST MAN by Gore Vidal. Cape Playhouse. Dennis. August.
MASS APPEAL by Bill C. Davis. Cape Playhouse. Dennis. July.
NIXON'S NIXON by Russell Lees. Huntington Theatre Company. Boston. March.
THE UNEXPECTED MAN by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton. Nora Theatre Company. Cambridge. April.
THE WEIR by Conor McPherson. Merrimack Repertory Theatre. Lowell. April.

MICHIGAN

THREE DAYS OF RAIN by Richard Greenberg. BoarsHead: Michigan Public Theater. Lansing. April.

MINNESOTA

'ART' by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton. Park Square Theatre. St. Paul. March.
DANCING AT LUGHNASA by Brian Friel. Park Square Theatre. St. Paul. April.
THE FOREIGNER by Larry Shue. Actors Theatre of Minnesota. St. Paul. April.
VISITING MR. GREEN by Jeff Baron. Park Square Theatre. St. Paul. June.

MISSOURI

FULLY COMMITTED by Becky Mode. Unicorn Theatre. Kansas City. June.
THE LARAMIE PROJECT by Moisés Kaufman and the Members of the Tectonic Theater Project. Mostly Harmless Theatre. St. Louis. June.
THE MINEOLA TWINS by Paula Vogel. Mostly Harmless Theatre. St. Louis. July.
PROOF by David Lindsay-Abaire. Unicorn Theatre. Kansas City. May.
SYLVIA by A.R. Gurney. American Heartland Theatre. Kansas City. May.

NEBRASKA

DINNER WITH FRIENDS by Donald Margulies. Nebraska Repertory Theatre. Lincoln. July.
WIT by Margaret Edson. Nebraska Repertory Theatre. Lincoln. July.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

FULL GALLOP by Mark Hampton and Mary Louise Wilson. Peterborough Players. Peterborough. June.

NEW JERSEY

BURN THIS by Lanford Wilson. George Street Playhouse. New Brunswick. March.
THE FOURTH WALL by A.R. Gurney. Our House Productions. Maplewood. April.

NEW YORK

BED AND SOFA by Laurence Klavan and Polly Pen. Kitchen Theatre Company. Ithaca. April.
DEATHTRAP by Ira Levin. Cortland Repertory Theatre. Cortland. August.
DRIVING MISS DAISY by Alfred Uhry. Forestburgh Playhouse. Forestburgh. August.
THE LARAMIE PROJECT by Moisés Kaufman and the Members of the Tectonic Theater Project. Buffalo United Artists. Buffalo. June.
MASTER CLASS by Terrence McNally. Kavinoky Theatre. Buffalo. May.
MISS EVERS' BOYS by David Feldshuh. Melting Pot Theatre. New York. March.
THE MISS FIRECRACKER CONTEST by Beth Henley. Cortland Repertory Theatre. Cortland. June.
OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS by Joe DiPietro. Emelin Theatre for the Performing Arts. Mamaronek. April.
SIDE MAN by Warren Leight. Ujima Theatre. Buffalo. May.
TALLEY'S FOLLY by Lanford Wilson. Bay Street Theatre. Sag Harbor. May.

NORTH CAROLINA

BABY WITH THE BATHWATER by Christopher Durang. Triad Stage. Greensboro. March.
BOOK OF DAYS by Lanford Wilson. Actors Theatre of Charlotte. Charlotte. March.
FUDDY MEERS by David Lindsay-Abaire. Actors Theatre of Charlotte. Charlotte. May.
PROOF by David Auburn. Charlotte Repertory Theatre. Charlotte. April.
SWEET BY 'N' BY by Frank Higgins. Temple Theatre Company. Sanford. April.
SYLVIA by A.R. Gurney. Temple Theatre Company. Sanford. June.

OHIO

HEAVEN AND HELL ON EARTH short plays from the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Ensemble Theatre. Cincinnati. May.

OKLAHOMA

OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS by Joe DiPietro. American Theatre Company. Tulsa. April.

OREGON

THE LARAMIE PROJECT by Moisés Kaufman and the Members of the Tectonic Theater Project. Artists Repertory Theatre. Portland. May.
STEEL MAGNOLIAS by Robert Harling. Willamette Repertory Theatre. Eugene. April.

PENNSYLVANIA

BREAKING LEGS by Tom Dulack. Totem Pole Playhouse. Fayetteville. June.
THE LONESOME WEST by Martin McDonagh. Act II Playhouse. Ambler. March.
MURDER IN GREEN MEADOWS by Douglas Post. Totem Pole Playhouse. Fayetteville. July.
OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS by Joe DiPietro. Act II Playhouse. Ambler. May.
OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS. Gretna Theatre. Mt. Gretna. July.
RED HERRING by Michael Hollinger. Mountain Playhouse. Jennerstown. June.
VISITING MR. GREEN by Jeff Baron. Totem Pole Playhouse. Fayetteville. June.
WENCESLAS SQUARE by Larry Shue. Walnut Street Theatre. Philadelphia. April.

RHODE ISLAND

PETER PAN by J.M. Barrie, adapted by John Caird and Trevor Nunn. Trinity Repertory Company. Providence. April.
WIT by Margaret Edson. Trinity Repertory Company. Providence. May.

SOUTH CAROLINA

FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE by Terrence McNally. Trustus. Columbia. April.

THE MOST FABULOUS STORY EVER TOLD by Paul Rudnick. Trustus. Columbia. May.

TENNESSEE

ALL IN THE TIMING by David Ives. Clarence Brown Theatre Company. Knoxville. May.
DINNER WITH FRIENDS by Donald Margulies. Playhouse on the Square. Memphis. June.
THE FOREIGNER by Larry Shue. Cumberland County Playhouse. Crossville. May.
GOD'S MAN IN TEXAS by David Rambo. Tennessee Repertory Theatre. Nashville. April.
THE MOST FABULOUS STORY EVER TOLD by Paul Rudnick. Playhouse on the Square. Memphis. June.

TEXAS

BOOK OF DAYS by Lanford Wilson. Watertower Theatre. Addison. May.
DINNER WITH FRIENDS by Donald Margulies. State Theater Company. Austin. May.
GOD'S MAN IN TEXAS by David Rambo. Theatre Three. Dallas. March.

UTAH

TARTUFFE by Molière, translated by Richard Wilbur. Pioneer Theatre Company. Salt Lake City. April.

VERMONT

DINNER WITH FRIENDS by Donald Margulies. St. Michael's Playhouse. Colchester. July.
ST NICHOLAS by Conor McPherson. Weston Playhouse. Weston. August.

VIRGINIA

CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY by Lynn Nottage. TheatreVirginia. Richmond. April.
THE EXACT CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE by Joan Vail Thorne. Barksdale Theatre. Richmond. April.
TALLEY'S FOLLY by Lanford Wilson. Barter Theatre. Abingdon. May.
VISITING MR. GREEN by Jeff Baron. Center Company. Fairfax. April.

WASHINGTON

VISITING MR. GREEN by Jeff Baron. Spokane Interlayers Ensemble. Spokane. April.

WISCONSIN

SIDE MAN by Warren Leight. Next Act Theatre Company. Milwaukee. April.
STEEL MAGNOLIAS by Robert Harling. Fireside Dinner Theatre. Fort Atkinson. May.

CANADA

'ART' by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton. Alberta Theatre Projects. Calgary. Alberta. April.
'ART'. Belfry Theatre BC. Victoria, BC. April.
'ART'. Grace Media. Toronto, Ontario. April.
THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE by Martin McDonagh. Alberta Theatre Projects. Calgary. Alberta. April.
CLOSER by Patrick Marber. Neptune Theatre. Halifax, Nova Scotia. April.
THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN by Martin McDonagh. Centaur Foundation for the Arts. Montreal, Quebec. May.
DESDEMONA by Paula Vogel. BANG! Productions. Toronto, Ontario. March.
DINNER WITH FRIENDS by Donald Margulies. Arts Club Theatre. Vancouver, BC. March.
DINNER WITH FRIENDS. Centaur Foundation for the Arts. Montreal, Quebec. April.
HONOUR by Joanna Murray-Smith. Shadow Theatre. Edmonton, Alberta. March.
LOVE LETTERS by A.R. Gurney. Manitoba Theatre Centre. Winnipeg, Manitoba. April.
A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY by Ivan Turgenev, adapted by Brian Friel. Theatre Junction Society. Calgary, Alberta. April.
MOJO by Jez Butterworth. Theatrefront. Toronto, Ontario. March.
OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS by Joe DiPietro. Sudbury Theatre Centre. Sudbury, Ontario. April.
STEEL MAGNOLIAS by Robert Harling. Port Stanley Festival Theatre. Port Stanley, Ontario. June.
SYLVIA by A.R. Gurney. Victoria Playhouse Petrolia. Petrolia, Ontario. July.

440 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10016

Phone (212) 683-8960
Fax (212) 213-1539

www.dramatists.com
postmaster@dramatists.com

AT PLAY:
MICHAEL Q. FELLMETH, Editor
TIMOTHY MUTZEL, Design
ROBERT VAUGHAN, Contributing Editor
CRAIG POSPISIL, Contributing Editor

© 2002 Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
All rights reserved.

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.
OFFICERS:
STEPHEN SULTAN, President
HOWARD ROSENSTONE, Vice President
WILLIAM CRAVER, Secretary
DIEP NGUYEN, Assistant Treasurer

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
William Craver Polly Pen
Peter Franklin Howard Rosenstone
Mary Harden Paul Rudnick
Donald Margulies John Patrick Shanley
Stephen Sultan

ROBERT VAUGHAN, Professional Rights
CRAIG POSPISIL, Nonprofessional Rights
MICHAEL Q. FELLMETH, Publications
TAMRA FEIFER, Operations
TOM WACLAWIK, Finance

we as a culture have spent so much time harping on how we are so *unlike*, honing our stereotypes of Arab and Muslim and Middle Eastern society and how it is just so *different* from the American way of life, I felt that maybe the important thing is that I am writing these characters as I write all my American characters because, in the end, our similarities as struggling human beings so dramatically outweigh our differences.

Last year I was the first Fadiman playwright-in-residence, a new fellowship administered by the Taper. Under the Fadiman commission I wrote *Slide Glide the Slippery Slope* (working title) which was workshopped in the Taper New York Festival. I had always been fascinated by identical twins and more recently had been thinking about genetic engineering and cloning: This seemed to be the time

For me, it's that I really wrote it from my heart, purely, vulnerably, and I wept and wept as I wrote. And laughed a lot too, of course. I think little Elizabeth invites us back to that forgotten but cherished very young place in all of us. She knows no judgment. She's simply a witness, and the audiences get to make their own judgments. It's not a piece that hammers you over the head with a political message. It's a human story, the story of two children, their destinies decided by the color of their skin. It's a story about hope and promise and terrible loss. It's a story about deep friendship and family, about abundance and deprivation, and about the idea that good and evil live in your heart and not in the color of your skin. The audience comes to love the blissful joy of the child and to mourn deeply the loss of innocence. And finding the courage to go on is moving. The price Salamina has to pay, her devastating loss, and her strength at the end. She's a miraculous character, filled with grace, filled with love.

Kia Corthron Continued

four hours later would make them reconsider. But they have never swayed in their commitment to the production.

Last spring I was invited by the Artists Network of the left organization refuse 'n' resist! to participate in a project which eventually came to be called "Imagine: Iraq." Nine writers each wrote a ten-minute play which addressed the suffering of the Iraqi people under sanctions. This happened in a variety of ways. I didn't have to set my play in Iraq; one of the other pieces, for example, takes place on the streets of New York. But I chose to focus on an Iraqi family, intimidating though it was for a writer who had never been to the Middle East, let alone Iraq. I gave myself courage in the idea of universal family emotions. And since

The Obie Award must've been thrilling. Did it take you by surprise?

Profoundly so. I never expected anything like that. I was thrilled for many reasons. It was given for performance and for the play. Winning Best Play was the best moment of all, because it was for all of us, for Larry Moss, Matt Salinger and me. I really felt it was for all our efforts, my long journey from South Africa, my journey as an artist and our long odyssey to New York. New York was my first home in America, and to be given that honor, something I'd read about so many times when I lived there, was very emotional. Lots of people came up and said how special this Obie is and that they don't give it every year, and as a new writer, I must say, I felt blessed beyond belief. Above all, it's wonderful in the sense that it means the story will continue to go out into the world, a story about tolerance, courage and love, and the bravery of those children in South Africa. That's the best of it all.

I understand the play has been optioned for film. What has that been like for you?

Very exciting. We want to make as much of it as possible in South Africa and that will be an extraordinary journey and homecoming. I want to keep the integrity of the piece as much as possible in the translation to another medium, and I'm enormously grateful for all the help I've had along the way. I have to be the luckiest fish alive!

Will we be seeing more of Pamela Gien the playwright?

I have another film I've written, called *The Lily Field*, in the works now, and I've also been commissioned to write *The Syringa Tree* as a novel for Random House, so I'll be busy for a while doing those. But I'd be honored to have another play in my life. Writing has come to me as a profound and surprising gift. I look forward to seeing where it leads me and grateful for every step along the way. So perhaps another play. It would be my joy! ■

Presorted Standard
U.S. Postage
PAID
Grand Rapids, MI
Permit #1

Return Service
Requested