



AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY

BY TRACY LETTS



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AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY premiered in June 2007
at Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, IL,
Martha Lavey, Artistic Director; David Hawkanson, Executive Director.

Steppenwolf's production of AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY opened on Broadway at the Imperial Theatre on December 4, 2007. It was produced by Jeffrey Richards, Jean Doumanian, Steve Traxler, Jerry Frankel, Ostar Productions, Jennifer Manocherian, The Weinstein Company, Debra Black/Daryl Roth, Ronald & Marc Frankel/Barbara Freitag, and Rick Steiner/Staton Bell Group.

In addition, if the music below is used in performances, the following acknowledgment must appear on the title page in all programs in size of type equal to that used for the production designers:

Original Music by David Singer.

SPECIAL NOTE ON MUSIC

A CD containing the original music by David Singer for the Broadway production is available through the Play Service for \$35.00, plus shipping and handling. The nonprofessional fee for the use of this music is \$20.00 per performance.

SPECIAL NOTE ON QUOTATION

Excerpt from *All the King's Men*, copyright 1946 and renewed 1974 by Robert Penn Warren, reprinted by the permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

For Dad

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Anna Shapiro.

Martha Lavey, David Hawkanson, Erica Daniels, Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

Jeffrey Richards, Jean Doumanian, Steve Traxler, Jerry Frankel.

Ian Barford, Deanna Dunagan, Kimberly Guerrero, Francis Guinan, Fawn Johnstin, Brian Kerwin, Dennis Letts, Madeleine Martin, Mariann Mayberry, Amy Morton, Sally Murphy, Jeff Perry, Rondi Reed, Rick Snyder, Troy West.

Ed Sobel, Todd Rosenthal, Annie Wrightson, Ana Kuzmanic, Richard Woodbury, David Singer, Deb Styer, Michelle Medvin.

Brant Russell, Mike Nussbaum, Sadieh Rifai, Penny Slusher, John Judd, Jeff Still, Katie Crawford, Lauren Katz, David Pasquesi, Mike Shannon, David Cromer, Henry Wishcamper.

Howard Starks, my late mentor. For the poem “August: Osage County.”

Nicole Wiesner, all my love.

Shawn and Shari, Dana and Deborah.

Billie Letts, Barbara Santee, Dewey Dougless. Your fortitude is a marvel.

Bill and Virginia Gipson. With love and letting go.

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY premiered in June 2007 at Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Martha Lavey, Artistic Director; David Hawkanson, Executive Director) in Chicago, Illinois. It was directed by Anna D. Shapiro; the set design was by Todd Rosenthal; the costume design was by Ana Kuzmanic; the lighting design was by Ann G. Wrightson; the sound design was by Richard Woodbury; the original music was by David Singer; the fight choreography was by Chuck Coyl; the casting was by Erica Daniels; the dramaturg was Edward Sobel; the dialect coach was Cecilie O'Reilly; the stage manager was Deb Styer; and the assistant stage manager was Michelle Medvin. The cast was as follows:

BEVERLY WESTON	Dennis Letts
VIOLET WESTON	Deanna Dunagan
BARBARA FORDHAM	Amy Morton
BILL FORDHAM	Jeff Perry
JEAN FORDHAM	Fawn Johnstin
IVY WESTON	Sally Murphy
KAREN WESTON	Mariann Mayberry
MATTIE FAE AIKEN	Rondi Reed
CHARLIE AIKEN	Francis Guinan
LITTLE CHARLES AIKEN	Ian Barford
JOHNNA MONEVATA	Kimberly Guerrero
STEVE HEIDEBRECHT	Rick Snyder
SHERIFF DEON GILBEAU	Troy West

The Steppenwolf production of AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY opened on Broadway at the Imperial Theatre on December 4, 2007. It was produced by Jeffrey Richards, Jean Doumanian, Steve Traxler, Jerry Frankel, Ostar Productions, Jennifer Manocherian, The Weinstein Company, Debra Black/Daryl Roth, Ronald & Marc Frankel/Barbara Freitag, and Rick Steiner/Staton Bell Group. The cast and artistic team were the same, except for the following changes: additional casting was provided by Stuart Howard, Amy Schecter and Paul Hardt. The casting changes were as follows:

JEAN FORDHAM	Madeleine Martin
STEVE HEIDEBRECHT	Brian Kerwin

CHARACTERS

THE WESTON FAMILY:

BEVERLY WESTON, sixty-nine years old

VIOLET WESTON, Bev's wife, sixty-five years old

BARBARA FORDHAM, Bev and Violet's daughter, forty-six years old

BILL FORDHAM, her husband, forty-nine years old

JEAN FORDHAM, their daughter, fourteen years old

IVY WESTON, Bev and Violet's daughter, forty-four years old

KAREN WESTON, Bev and Violet's daughter, forty years old

MATTIE FAY AIKEN, Violet's sister, fifty-seven years old

CHARLIE AIKEN, Mattie Fay's husband, sixty years old

LITTLE CHARLES AIKEN, their son, thirty-seven years old

OTHERS:

JOHNNA MONEVATA, housekeeper, twenty-six years old

STEVE HEIDEBRECHT, Karen's fiancé, fifty years old

SHERIFF DEON GILBEAU, forty-seven years old

PLACE

A large country home outside Pawhuska, Oklahoma, sixty miles northwest of Tulsa.

TIME

August 2007.

The child comes home and the parent puts the hooks in him. The old man, or the woman, as the case may be, hasn't got anything to say to the child. All he wants is to have that child sit in a chair for a couple of hours and then go off to bed under the same roof. It's not love. I am not saying that there is not such a thing as love. I am merely pointing to something which is different from love but which sometimes goes by the name of love. It may well be that without this thing which I am talking about there would not be any love. But this thing in itself is not love. It is just something in the blood. It is a kind of blood greed, and it is the fate of a man. It is the thing which man has which distinguishes him from the happy brute creation. When you get born your father and mother lost something out of themselves, and they are going to bust a hame trying to get it back, and you are it. They know they can't get it all back but they will get as big a chunk out of you as they can. And the good old family reunion, with picnic dinner under the maples, is very much like diving into the octopus tank at the aquarium.

—Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY

PROLOGUE

A rambling country house outside Pawhuska, Oklahoma, sixty miles northwest of Tulsa. More than a century old, the house was probably built by a clan of successful Irish homesteaders. Additions, renovations and repairs have essentially modernized the house until 1972 or so, when all structural care ceased.

The First Floor:

The three main playing areas are separated by entryways. Stage right, the dining room. The Mission-style table seats eight; the matching sideboard holds the fine china. A tatty crystal-tiered chandelier hangs over the table and casts a gloomy yellow light. An archway upstage leads to a sitting room. A rotary-dial telephone rests on a small side table, beside an upholstered chair. Further upstage, a doorway leads to a hallway, off.

Downstage center, the living room. Hide-a-bed, TV, hi-fi turntable, Wurlitzer electric piano.

Left, the study. A medium-sized desk is piled with books, legal pads, manila folders, notepaper. An archway upstage leads to the house's front door, landing, and a stairway to the second floor. Further upstage, a doorway opens onto a partial view of the kitchen.

Far left, the front porch, strewn with dead grass and a few rolled-up small-town newspapers.

The Second Floor:

The stairway arrives at a landing (above the sitting room on

the first floor). A cushioned window seat, a hallway leading to the bedrooms, off, and another stairway leading to ...

The Attic:

A single chamber, center, with peaked roof and slanted walls, inexpensively modeled into a bedroom.

The house is filled with books. All the windows in the house have been covered with cheap plastic shades. Black duct tape seals the edge of the shades, effecting a complete absence of outside light.

At rise: Lit dimly by his desk lamp, Beverly Weston, drunk, nurses a glass of whiskey as he "interviews" Johnna Monevata.

BEVERLY. "Life is very long ... "

T. S. Eliot. I mean ... he's given credit for it because he bothered to write it down. He's not the first person to say it ... certainly not the first person to think it. *Feel* it. But he wrote the words on a sheet of paper and signed it and the four-eyed prick was a genius ... so if you say it, you have to say his name after it.

"Life is very long": T. S. Eliot.

Absolutely goddamn right. Especially in his case, since he lived to be seventy-six or something, a very long life, especially in those days. And he was only in his thirties when he wrote it so he must've had some inside dope.

Give the devil his due. Very few poets could've made it through his ... his trial and come out on the other side, brilliantined and double-breasted and Anglican. Not hard to imagine, faced with Eliot's first wife, lovely Viv, how Hart Crane or John Berryman might've reacted, just foot-raced to the nearest bridge, Olympian Suicidalists. Not Eliot: following sufficient years of ecclesiastical guilt, plop her in the nearest asylum and get on with the day. God a-mighty. You have to admire the purity of the survivor's instinct.

Berryman, the old goat: "The world is gradually becoming a place where I do not care to be anymore." I don't know what it says about me that I have a greater affinity with the damaged. Probably nothing good. I admire the hell out of Eliot *the poet*, but the *person*? I can't identify.

VIOLET. (*Offstage.*) ... son-of-a-bitch ...

BEVERLY. Violet. My wife. She takes pills, sometimes a great many. And they affect ... among other things, her equilibrium. Fortunately, the pills she takes eliminate her *need* for equilibrium. So she falls when she rambles ... but she doesn't ramble much.

My wife takes pills and I drink. That's the bargain we've struck ... one of the bargains, just one paragraph of our marriage contract ... cruel covenant. She takes pills and I drink. I don't drink because she takes pills. As to whether she takes pills because I drink ... I learned long ago not to speak for my wife. The reasons why we partake are anymore inconsequential. The facts are: My wife takes pills and I drink. And these facts have over time made burdensome the maintenance of traditional American routine: paying of bills, purchase of goods, cleaning of clothes or carpets or crappers. Rather than once more assume the mantle of guilt ... vow abstinence with my fingers crossed in the queasy hope of righting our ship, I've chosen to turn my life over to a Higher Power ... (*Hoists his glass.*) ... and join the ranks of the Hiring Class.

It's not a decision with which I'm entirely comfortable. I know how to launder my dirty undies ... done it all my life, me or my wife, but I'm finding it's getting in the way of my drinking. "Something has been said for sobriety but very little." (Berryman again.) And now you are here.

The place isn't in such bad shape, not yet. I've done all right. I've managed. And just last night, I burned an awful lot of ... debris ...

Y'know ... a simple utility bill can mean so much to a living person. Once they've passed, though ... after they've passed, the words and numbers just seem like ... otherworldly symbols. It's only paper. Worse. Worse than blank paper. (*Johnna wipes sweat from her brow. Beverly takes a folded handkerchief from his pocket and hands it to her.*) This is clean.

JOHNNA. (*Wiping her forehead.*) Thank you.

BEVERLY. I apologize for the temperature in here. My wife is cold-blooded and not just in the metaphorical sense. She does not believe in air-conditioning ... as if it is a thing to be disbelieved.

JOHNNA. My daddy was the same way. I'm used to it.

BEVERLY. I knew Mr. Youngbird, you know.

JOHNNA. You knew Daddy?

BEVERLY. Small town. Bought many a watermelon from his fruit stand. Some summers he sold fireworks too, right?

JOHNNA. Yes, sir.

BEVERLY. I bought Roman candles for my children. He did pass, didn't he?

JOHNNA. Yes, sir.

BEVERLY. May I ask how?

JOHNNA. He had a heart attack. Fell into a flatbed truck full of wine grapes.

BEVERLY. Wine grapes. In Oklahoma. I'm sorry.

JOHNNA. Thank you. *(He finishes his drink, pours another.)*

BEVERLY. May I ask about the name?

JOHNNA. Hm?

BEVERLY. He was Youngbird and you are ...

JOHNNA. Monevata.

BEVERLY. "Monevata."

JOHNNA. I went back to the original language.

BEVERLY. And does it mean "young bird"?

JOHNNA. Yes.

BEVERLY. And taking the name, that was your choice?

JOHNNA. Mm-hm.

BEVERLY. *(Raising his glass.)* Cheers. *(Violet calls from offstage.)*

VIOLET. *(Offstage.)* Bev...?

BEVERLY. *(To himself.)*

By night within that ancient house

Immense, black, damned, anonymous.

(Lights up, dimly, on the second-floor landing. Just out of bed, wearing wrinkled clothes, smoking a Winston, Violet squints down the darkened stairway.)

VIOLET. Bev!

BEVERLY. Yes?

VIOLET. Did you pullish...?

BEVERLY. What?

VIOLET. Did you ... *(Long pause. Violet stares, waiting for an answer. Beverly stares, waiting for her to complete her question.)*

BEVERLY. What, dear?

VIOLET. Oh, goddamn it ... did. You. Are the police here?

BEVERLY. No.

VIOLET. Is this a window? Am I looking through window? A window?

BEVERLY. Can you come here? *(Violet considers, then clomps down the stairs, into the study, nonplussed by Johnna.)*

VIOLET. Oh. (*Vaguely.*) Hello.

JOHNNA. Hello.

VIOLET. (*To Beverly.*) I didn't know you were entertaaaaaaining.

BEVERLY. This is Johnna, the young woman I told you about.

VIOLET. You're tell me's a woman.

BEVERLY. Pardon?

VIOLET. A woman. Wo-man. Whoa-man.

BEVERLY. Yes, dear, the young woman I'm hiring. To watch the place.

VIOLET. Oh! You're hiring women's now the thing. I thought you meant the other woman.

BEVERLY. What other woman?

VIOLET. (*Pause; then, ugly.*) Huh?!

BEVERLY. I hope to hire her to cook and clean and take you to the clinic and to the —

VIOLET. (*Attempting to over-articulate.*) In the int'rest of ... civil action ... your par-tic-u-lars ways of speak-king, I thought you meant you had thought a whoa-man to be HIRED!

BEVERLY. I don't understand you.

VIOLET. (*Suddenly winsome, to Johnna.*) Hello.

JOHNNA. Hello.

VIOLET. I'm sorry. (*Curtsies.*) Like this.

JOHNNA. Yes, ma'am.

VIOLET. I'm Violet. What's your name?

JOHNNA. Johnna.

VIOLET. You're very pretty.

JOHNNA. Thank you.

VIOLET. Are you an Indian?

JOHNNA. Yes, ma'am.

VIOLET. What kind?

JOHNNA. Cheyenne.

VIOLET. Do you think I'm pretty?

JOHNNA. Yes, ma'am.

VIOLET. (*Curtsies again.*) Like ... this? (*Curtsies again.*) Like this ... (*Curtsies lower; stumbles, catches herself.*)

BEVERLY. Careful.

VIOLET. (*Still to Johnna.*) You're the house now. I'm sorry, I ... I took some medicine for my musssss ... muscular.

BEVERLY. Why don't you go back to bed, sweetheart?

VIOLET. Why don't you go fuck a fucking sow's ass?

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY

by Tracy Letts

WINNER OF THE 2008 PULITZER PRIZE AND TONY AWARD

6M, 7W

A vanished father. A pill-popping mother. Three sisters harboring shady little secrets. When the large Weston family unexpectedly reunites after Dad disappears, their Oklahoman family homestead explodes in a maelstrom of repressed truths and unsettling secrets. Mix in Violet, the drugged-up, scathingly acidic matriarch, and you've got a major new play that unflinchingly — and uproariously — exposes the dark side of the Midwestern American family.

"I'd bet the farm that no family has ever been as unhappy in as many ways — and to such sensationally entertaining effect — as the Westons of AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY, a fraught, densely plotted saga of an Oklahoma clan in a state of near-apocalyptic meltdown. Fiercely funny and biting sad ... [a] turbo-charged tragicomedy ..."
—The New York Times

"In Tracy Letts' ferociously entertaining play, the American dysfunctional family drama comes roaring into the twenty-first century with eyes blazing, nostrils flaring and fangs bared, laced with corrosive humor so darkly delicious and ghastly that you're squirming in your seat even as you're doubled-over laughing. A massive meditation on the cruel realities that often belie standard expectations of conjugal and family accord — not to mention on the decline of American integrity itself."
—Variety

"Tracy Letts, in his Broadway debut, creates a hugely ambitious, highly combustible saga that will leave you reeling. AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY may make you think twice about going home for the holidays ... it's a great big exhilarating gift."
—The New York Daily News

"Packed with unforgettable characters and dozens of quotable lines, AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY is a tensely satisfying comedy, interspersed with remarkable evocations on the cruelties and (occasional) kindnesses of family life."
—The New York Sun

"This is a play that will leave us laughing and wondering, shuddering and smiling, long after the house lights come back on."
—New York Newsday

"This original and corrosive black comedy deserves a seat at the dinner table with the great American family plays."
—Time Magazine

Also by Tracy Letts

BUG

MAN FROM NEBRASKA

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