

at play

Issue 4 Fall 1999

In Kindergarten with the Author of WIT

Maggie Edson — the celebrated playwright who is so far Off-Broadway, she's below the Mason-Dixon line — is performing a daily ritual known as Wiggle Down.

"Tapping my toe, just tapping my toe" she sings, to the tune of "Singin' in the Rain," before a crowd of kindergarteners at a downtown elementary school in Atlanta. "What a glorious feeling, I'm — nodding my head!" The kids gleefully tap their toes and nod themselves silly as they sing along.

"Give yourselves a standing O!" Ms. Edson cries, when the song ends. Her charges scramble to their feet and clap their hands, sending their arms arcing overhead in a giant "O."

This willowy 37-year-old woman with tousled brown hair and a big grin couldn't seem more different from Dr. Vivian Bearing, the brilliant, emotionally remote English professor who is the heroine of her play WIT — which has won such unanimous critical acclaim in its small Off-Broadway production.

Vivian is a 50-year-old scholar who has devoted her life to the study of John Donne's "Holy Sonnets." When we meet her, she is dying of ovarian cancer. Bald from chemotherapy, she makes her entrance clad in a hospital gown, dragging an IV pole. "It is not my intention to give away the plot," Vivian tells the audience, "but I think I die at the end."

In this fierce, funny and unforgettable play, the uncompromising scholar becomes herself an object of study, as her doctors put her through a grueling course of experimental treatments. In scenes in the hospital and flashbacks to her past, we watch wry, caustic Vivian struggle with her ultimate lesson: how to face her own death. "I know all about life and death," she tells us. "I am, after all, a scholar of Donne's 'Holy Sonnets,' which explore mortality in greater depth than any other body of work in the English language." It is one of WIT's triumphs that Vivian makes us see exactly what she means. Caught in this play's powerful searchlight, poems such as "Death be not proud" spring to life — with the



Dave Smiley

very placement of a comma crystallizing mysteries of life and death for Vivian and her audience. For this feat, one critic demanded that Ms. Edson be handed the Harvard English department.

But she'd never take it. Kindergarten is where the action is.

"Learning to read — that's the biggest thing you learn in your whole life," she says over dinner after a long day of teaching and lesson-planning. "Alphabet letters represent sound, text maps speech — once you learn that, that's the hardest thing. It's the thing that opens your mind the most, that gives you the most power."

Ms. Edson — Miss Edson, to her students — grew up in Washington, D.C., and studied history at Smith College in Northampton, Mass. After graduation, she worked in an Iowa bar pouring drinks for hog farmers, then spent a year living in a Dominican convent in Rome. Back home in Washington, she got a job in the oncology/AIDS unit of a research

continued on page 5

congratulations

WIT

by Margaret Edson
1999 Pulitzer Prize for Drama

BEST PLAY

NY Drama Desk Award
NY Drama Critics Circle Award
NY Outer Critics Circle Award
NY Drama League Award
Lucille Lortel Award

SIDE MAN

by Warren Leight
1999 Tony Award, Best Play

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

by Arthur Miller
1999 Tony Award, Best Revival

THE WEIR

by Conor McPherson
1999 Olivier Award, Best Play
London Evening Standard Award
for Outstanding New Playwright
London Critics Circle Award
for Most Promising Playwright

CLOSER

by Patrick Marber
1999 NY Drama Critics Circle Award
for Best Foreign Play
1998 Olivier Award, Best Play

time magazine names top ten

Three Dramatists Play Service titles were named among the year's ten best plays of 1999 by Time Magazine: THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE by Martin McDonagh; CORPUS CHRISTI by Terrence McNally; and WIT by Margaret Edson.

playwrights honored

The American Theatre Critics Association presented its top New Play Award this year to Lanford Wilson for BOOK OF DAYS. The award was presented during the 23rd annual Humana Festival of New American Plays in Louisville, KY. Also recognized for new works premiering outside of New York City were two other Dramatists Play Service authors: Donald Margulies for DINNER WITH FRIENDS; and Lisa Loomer for EXPECTING ISABEL. New Play finalists were Steven Dietz for ROCKET MAN; Richard Greenberg for SAFE AS HOUSES; and Jon Klein for DIMLY PERCEIVED THREATS TO THE SYSTEM.

Congratulations to composer and Dramatists Play Service board member Polly Pen, recipient of the Gilman & Gonzalez-Falla Theatre Foundation Award for promising composers and lyricists creating American musical theatre. Pen is the Obie Award-winning composer of BED AND SOFA, which she wrote with librettist Laurence Klavan. Her earlier work GOBLIN MARKET, created with Peggy Harmon, was nominated for five Drama Desk Awards. Ms. Pen is currently an artist-in-residence at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, NJ.

Tony Winner Warren Leight, Side Man No Longer

Warren Leight's Tony-winning play, SIDE MAN, is autobiographical in more ways than one. It's well known by now that Leight drew upon the life of his unsung trumpeter father to pen his paean to the lost world of jazz journeymen. But change the play's characters from musicians to writers, and SIDE MAN could be the story of its author. Before SIDE MAN made its unlikely fairy-tale journey to Broadway, Leight was something of a side man himself: writing screenplays, night club acts, one-acts — anything to make a living. Even at this late date, Leight hasn't forgotten those days. He spoke to Playbill On-Line about the great chasm which separates a gig at Starbuck's from a lunch with Christian Slater.

Playbill On-Line: The jazz world, which you capture in SIDE MAN, the upcoming GLIMMER BROTHERS and a bit in STRAY CATS, is a rather neglected milieu in recent American drama.

Warren Leight: I find it appalling. It is America's only native art form, and completely neglected. There have been a few interesting things that have caught on, but if you compare the number of plays about painting and painters to the number of plays about jazz musicians, it must be a hundred-to-one ratio, and you can't tell me it's any more exciting to watch a painter onstage than a musician. And even plays about writers, plays about dancers, plays about actors; for some reason — partially racial — jazz, in particular, has been [ignored]. I had a hard time getting a first production of SIDE MAN because jazz was considered a bad topic for a play.

Were there any jazz-themed plays that influenced you?

I wish there were. There were all those bad jazz movies when I was a kid, which I was very aware of. Musicians hated them, whether it was "The Benny Goodman Story" or "The Glenn Miller Story" — a bunch of guys saying "Hey, man! Dig it!" At the age of eight, I knew that stuff to be "jive." I think Maynard G. Krebs was about as close as America ever got to depicting jazz.

After years of knocking about, did you begin to feel like a side man yourself?

Yeah. I was able to make a living writing screenplays that didn't get made, or, if they did get made, were humiliating. There was a period in the early eighties, when every nightclub act, every bad cabaret act, every girl singer, I had written their act. I used to hope they wouldn't go see each other's shows, because they'd hear



Carol Rosegg

the same lines. I got \$10 an hour; that was my rate. But that's not a great way to spend your life. Ultimately, that's pretty dispiriting. For whatever reason, I couldn't crack one Off-Broadway theatre in New York; none of the not-for-profit institutions. There were a few people who were looking out for me, but they were struggling: There was Alice's Fourth Floor, on Dyer Avenue right by the tunnel; or John McCormick, when he was at Naked Angels — he now runs All Seasons Theatre; and the West Bank Cafe. But that was it. Every institution just seemed like a closed set. Apparently Margaret Edson sent WIT around for eight years before she got a New York production. It did feel like there was no way into New York theatre. I'd been doing one-acts here and there for the last ten years and I'd get the occasional reading, but nobody would give even a workshop production of a full-length play. I just wasn't in whatever their group or loop was. I didn't fit their profile or agenda, or I just hadn't gone to college with them. I don't know what it was. I knew my father to be a beautiful trumpet player, and for whatever reason, he didn't get asked to record as much as some other guys who, in retrospect, weren't any better or any worse than he was. I did begin to worry whether I'd get a shot at it, like a 34-year-old minor leaguer. "I swear if they let me up to the bigs, I could hit .260."

In all those years, you must have had some interesting experiences as a playwright. What's the most embarrassing thing that ever happened in connection to one of your productions?

Well, I did STRAY CATS, that evening of monologues, at a Starbuck's on Astor Place, with really good, lovely actors. And the entire time that the actors were doing it, they were being drowned out by the

sound of frappacino machines and people yelling "Two short decaf lattes!" People walked by us as if we were crazy people shouting. That was pretty bad.

SIDE MAN has an odd, highly improbable road to success, something like an MGM musical plot. Did it ever become surreal for you?

There was this very awkward period — the very first production [of SIDE MAN] was at Vassar College at New York Stage and Film in 1996. I'm at the point where I get nervous when people say, "Kid, you've got a big show here." People were coming up to Poughkeepsie in limousines to see it. It sold out and played beautifully, with four of the actors who are still in it to this very day. Zoe Caldwell was clutching my hand to her bosom, saying, "You're the young man who's going to save American Theatre." I'd never met her in my life. And how long does one leave one's hand on her bosom? And I said, "Oh, I loved you in MASTER CLASS." And she said, "Why didn't you come backstage?" I said, "Um, you don't know me."

That was one of the first surreal moments. I was assured by everyone that this play was going straight to the top and then, over the next 20 months, every attempt to get a production fell apart. It was turned down by every not-for-profit theatre in New York and New Jersey and Long Island. Everyone said, "Seven actors — that's too many," or "Narration — that's old fashioned." Then, the reviews [of the 1998 Off-Broadway production] on 13th Street were quite

wonderful, and then we were going to close after five weeks. I remember being told the night before our last show by one of the producers, "Look, you've had a lovely *succes d'estime*, and your next play all of these theatres will take a serious look at." And I thought, my next play? Do you have any idea how hard something like this is to write? I didn't know whether I could write something as good as SIDE MAN. And then [Roundabout Theatre Company artistic director] Todd Haimes called; lucky for me, the Burt Bacharach musical they were planning fell apart. Someday, I will buy Bacharach a steak.

What about when Christian Slater was suddenly up there saying your lines?

Yeah, he showed up and suddenly everyone was, "Well, can we afford him?" and "Is he right for it?" Michael Mayer and I had lunch with him and it was, "Where has this guy been all our lives?" He just wanted to be in the play. He didn't care about his name. He was just, "Can I do it? Would it be alright with you if I did this?" And I thought, "What the hell is going on here?"

Have any jazz greats come to see the play?

That's been a blast. I was very nervous about those guys coming. This will sound strange, but the person I was most excited about was [legendary jazz trumpeter] Clifford Brown's widow, LaRue Brown. Still alive, very cool LA chick. And she came backstage on a Sunday afternoon. There are all these celebs from

time to time, but to meet Clifford's widow! I was very nervous about how she'd react. She said, "How did you know about that solo?" She then told me the story of Clifford's last night on earth, which features prominently in the play. I don't know if I made it up, but I have the father telling the son, "[Brown] played like he must have known he was going to die." She said, "I heard that line and I almost popped out of my chair, because that's what I've always known. After he died, I didn't understand why he was at that jam session. Clifford was the best trumpet player in the world, but he never played that beautifully. I always thought, he must have known he was going to die."

You don't play an instrument, do you?

I'm a bad trumpet player. I just started noodling when I was 15, which is egregiously late to begin work on an instrument.

Do you have a dream project?

It was probably SIDE MAN. In some strange way, I had wanted to write about that world. I wanted to capture those guys, and capture the loss of that world and how hard that world was. So, not that I'm without dreams right now, but that was pretty good. It felt like a monkey off my back when I finished the first draft.

by Robert Simonson, Editor, Playbill On-Line.

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THE WEIR: Weaving Stories into Drama

Conor McPherson turned 27 only slightly before THE WEIR's triumphant engagement at London's Royal Court Theatre. That makes three curtain calls for the young Irishman, who has already enjoyed success with two other acclaimed productions, ST. NICHOLAS and THIS LIME TREE BOWER, both of which premiered in New York at the Off-Broadway theatre Primary Stages. And now McPherson has received nothing less than a Broadway encore for THE WEIR.

THE WEIR is also McPherson's first success at writing a play that unfolds through dialogue. Prior to this production, McPherson wrote mostly monologue-based plays, challenging audiences to find drama in the most direct form of storytelling. His signature was endowing one single, continuous voice with a truly interactive theatricality. The success of McPherson's earlier plays, ST. NICHOLAS and THIS LIME TREE BOWER, in London Fringe venues caught the attention of Ian Rickson, Artistic Director of the Royal Court. Rickson commissioned McPherson to stretch his talent into a play based in dialogue, which resulted in THE WEIR. Still, McPherson continues to rely on his strength in dramatic monologue to fuel the ghost stories in THE WEIR, which provide the most stunning moments of the play.

McPherson's inspiration for the piece was his widowed grandfather, who lived on his own in a rural Irish town called Leitrim. McPherson remembers "him telling me once that it was very important to have the radio on because it gave him the illusion of company. We'd have a drink and sit by the fire. And he'd tell me stories. When you're lying in bed in the pitch black silence of the Irish countryside, it's easy for the imagination to run riot." The play is also set in a pub which recalls the Leitrim pub McPherson used to visit with his grandfather.

Like Leitrim, the world of THE WEIR is "a remote, tough place where there were so few women around that if one appeared, twenty men would be swarming around her in minutes." There's Brendan, the landlord and barman who pulls the pints, and two of his regulars, Jack and Jim. The talk that evening is of Finbar, the town big shot, who arrives at Brendan's with Valerie, the new owner of an

old manse in town. During the night, the men compete jovially for Valerie's attention with ghost stories.

The bounds of the imagination are the thematic anchor of this piece, and McPherson's stories remain unflatteringly dynamic. It's ironic that in his challenge to write a dialogue-based play, McPherson's monologues emerge richer than ever. McPherson stands behind his trademark: "I love monologues, because they are intrinsically more theatrical than 'conventional' plays. You're not pretending the stage is a battle field or a courtroom; you're saying, 'Here we all are, in a theatre, and the actor is going to use this space to take us on a journey.'"

His ghost stories offer us twinges of laughter, a playful touch of supernatural, and yet carry a curiously mournful tone. McPherson states, "When I got the commission to write a play for the Court, I thought people in a pub telling stories was a stonking idea. But soon after I started writing it, my grandfather died. That imbued the play with a sense of loss which I hadn't initially planned to give it."

"People say it's the best play they've ever seen," says McPherson. "I think it's because it's not a play which needs the fuel of argumentative characters to keep it going." Instead, this gentle chamber play is full of stories through which characters invoke each other for company, for community, and for a little escape from the gray desolation of a rural winter in western Ireland.

With a dramatic palette of monologue, dialogue and silence, McPherson cradles and unravels basic human desires with both the poetic sensibilities of a storyteller and the theatrical craftsmanship of a dramatist.

by Alyse Rothman/Manhattan Theatre Club

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Jean Marcias

Sex, Lies and Cyberspace



Broadway's nasty-talk season continues with Patrick Marber's Tony-nominated and Olivier Award-winning CLOSER, about two pairs of deceptively honest lovers.

Is it a coincidence? That just twelve days after THE BLUE ROOM closed, another friskily hyped British import washed ashore to take its place? CLOSER, which began previews at the Music Box Theatre on March 9, also promised a glamorous cast (one fourth Natasha Richardson, one fourth Rupert Graves, one fourth Ciaran Hinds, one fourth Anna Friel) and, more important, delectable filth: Its best-publicized scene, cited endlessly in reviews and the copious literature of coming attractions, involves a cybersex encounter between its two male characters, who sit at individual terminals while their ribald dialogue pops up on a big screen behind them. One, pretending to be a woman, says he fantasizes about tending to strangers and ends the scene by faking a virtual orgasm, pounding out a string of "oh-oh-oh"s and QWERTY nonsense to show his rapture.

CLOSER, it should be noted, isn't nearly as shallow as THE BLUE ROOM, a mere slip of a play starring Nicole Kidman in a mere slip. It won its 34-year-old author, Patrick Marber, London's most prestigious awards, including the Critics' Circle, the Evening Standard, and the Olivier. But CLOSER does seem to invite the same lurid headlines, and like THE BLUE ROOM, it isn't nearly as bawdy as advertised. In fact, to American audiences, the most striking thing about CLOSER probably won't be its explicit language — there really isn't all that much, aside from that brief cyber scene — but the aggressive candor with which its characters discuss their sexual and romantic indiscretions. It's as if they've all come down with a case of lover's Tourette's.

Sample exchange between a married couple:

I slept with someone in New York. A whore. I'm sorry. Please don't leave me.

Why?

For sex. I wanted sex. I used a condom...

Was it...good?

Yes.

In the context of the recent impeachment proceedings, such talk, and there's a lot of it, is almost unimaginable. It inflicts so much pain, it makes Clinton's lying seem virtuous. By disclosing what they truly think and feel, the characters of CLOSER seem familiar but also stylized: How many people really speak this way? Isn't the ability to euphemize what separates us from beasts?

"I'm a bit more repressed than the characters in

the play," says Marber, "but I believe people would behave in this way. They just don't necessarily exist next door." His characters aren't your friends and neighbors, in other words — or, for that matter, in *Your Friends and Neighbors*, a heartless movie to which CLOSER has sometimes been compared. (In fact, CLOSER made its debut in May 1997, long before Neil LaBute's film, and the play is much funnier and more forgiving at its core.) For all their emotional guerrilla tactics, it's also clear that Marber's charac-

**"I WAS A
VERY DARK
VERSION OF
PEE-WEE
HERMAN."**

ters deceive one another as much as they come clean; it's just that we don't see it. The play, which takes place over the course of three years, spotlights a series of pivotal moments in relationships — which happen here to be literal moments of truth.

"On some level," muses Marber, "you could say that CLOSER is about love as a poker game. I'm obviously interested in the dynamic of power, the way people operate with and against each other, and how your best friend might be your worst enemy." The analogy makes sense. Marber's first and only other play, DEALER'S CHOICE, is all about the interpersonal politics of gambling.

Patrick Marber has a pretty good poker face himself. While studying at Oxford, he would sneak away to the Golden Nugget on Shaftesbury Avenue in London and lose more money than he now cares to think about. Today, as he sips on a Coke at the Paramount (the butt of one of CLOSER's funniest jokes), he seems determined to remain as vague as smoke. "I disclaim this interview," he jokily says at one point. "There's always a deception in an interview," he adds at another. Still later: "You feel alive when you tell a lie. You lie to someone, you have a little secret."

So the question eventually arises: Does Marber lie

to journalists? "Oh, yeah," he says, unexpectedly. "I've told the odd little lie." Such as...? "I can't remember. I've been doing it for years. Everyone lies in interviews." He smiles and reaches for a piece of cheese. He's a nice-looking man with an open smile and several charming nervous habits, including the tendency to play with whatever scraps of paper are available to him — napkins, empty sugar packets. "I've determined that from now on, I'm going to lie a bit more in interviews," he continues. "What I want to do is invent an alternative back story for my life."

The company of CLOSER, whom Marber is also directing, probably wouldn't find this admission terribly shocking. "Every time he gives me a note," says Hinds, the only cast holdover from the London production, "I say to him, 'You're cajoling me, you're seducing me. What am I to believe?'"

Marber grew up in a middle-class Jewish family in Wimbledon, near the tennis club — at least, that's what he tells journalists. After graduating from Oxford in 1986, he tried for several years to be a stand-up comic, but he wasn't especially funny. "I was a very dark version of Pee-wee Herman," he says. "My routine was a bit absurd. It was stupid." He moved on to writing for television and radio, and in 1995, the Royal National Theatre gambled on DEALER'S CHOICE. It paid off big-time, earning both great notices and profits. (The play also did well here, albeit on a more modest scale, at the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1997.)

But with CLOSER, Marber earned himself comparisons to Harold Pinter. "I'm a newcomer with two plays," he marvels, "and yet I'm being treated as someone whose opinions are of value. I'm still developing a style — I'm not a full-grown writer yet — and as you've found out, my opinions are nonexistent, or they're of no value, because I'm a fledgling. I demand to be treated like a fledgling!"

At playwriting, perhaps. But in relationships, the subject so brutally examined in CLOSER, Marber appears to be excelling, which should give his fans some hope. The playwright dedicated the work to his girlfriend, an actress he has been seeing for three years. "It's weird," he says, "because I worked on this play, which is about the horrors of it all, but I couldn't be happier myself."

by Jennifer Senior

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WIT *continued from page 1*

hospital in 1985. "I was a unit clerk, which is a very low level job — scheduling appointments, keeping supplies going," she says. "Because it was very low level, I got to see everything."

She left after a year, but the experience haunted her. So in January 1991, Ms. Edson quit her job at a mental health organization to write a play inspired by her time in the cancer unit. Why? "Because I wanted to go see it," she says simply, "and I thought someone has to write it."

She had less than a year. The following fall, Ms. Edson was to begin a master's degree in literature at Georgetown University — the kick-off, presumably, to an academic career. As she began work on her play, she started thinking that maybe her heroine would be an academic, too. "I wanted to write about someone who would lose their power. I saw that in the hospital. You build up a certain set of tools. What happens to you if those tools don't serve you anymore?"

Ms. Edson decided to make Vivian a specialist in the poems of John Donne, for the simple reason that she'd always heard that they were the most demanding in English literature. Not that she had read any of them: Her own formal studies of poetry were limited to one college course — "a very good class, but I don't think I read any John Donne." So she hit the library. "If you know how to study something, you can study anything," she explains.

But her first reading of Donne baffled her. "The harder I worked, I didn't get an answer," she says. "Some of these poems are too complicated. What's the point if they don't flow as poems?" She began "a pretty comprehensive study," which eventually led her to an understanding that "Donne is being suspicious of simplicity" — much like Vivian herself.

At the same time, she delved into medical texts on cancer, both at the public library and at the National Library of Medicine. The more she read, the more she was struck by the unlikely correspondences between poetry and medicine — correspondences that are used to great effect in WIT. "When you really study a poem, you anatomize it," Ms. Edson says. "You can't make that up."

Ms. Edson finished WIT on schedule and sent it out to two theaters — both of which promptly rejected it. She put her play away and began her master's program. "The idea was, I would fall in love with it and do a Ph.D.," she says. "That didn't happen." Instead, she discovered her life's work off-campus, when she began tutoring a young boy from the Dominican Republic in English through a volunteer program at her church. After she finished her degree, she took a job at a Washington elementary school.

That year, she sent WIT out to a new batch of theaters. In 1995, WIT was produced by California's South Coast Repertory Theater, then in 1997, at New Haven's Long Wharf Theater — under the

direction of her childhood pal, Derek Anson Jones (he played Vivian at the very first reading of WIT, around Ms. Edson's mom's kitchen table). By the time the play made it to New York's tiny MCC Theater, Ms. Edson had moved to Atlanta, where her partner Linda Merrill had accepted a curatorial post at the High Museum.

On opening night, she caught a flight to New York after a long day of teaching and administrative meetings and reached the theater just before the play ended. "I was there changing in the restroom as everyone was coming out," she recalls. "This woman was in the next stall crying and blowing her nose." The following Monday, she was back in kindergarten.

Her day begins at 7:00 a.m., when she and her co-teacher prepare for their class of 24 children, most from the inner city and many from what are termed "print-poor" homes. "The best hope these kids have is if they learn to read by the third grade," says Ms. Edson. Her classroom is bright and cheerful, with alphabet letters on the walls, a terrarium, a clutch of computers and low-to-the-ground work tables with tiny chairs.

From the moment the five-year-olds come in at 8 until they break for lunch at 11:30, the classroom's primary colors blur with activity. Ms. Edson and Ms. Reid lead their charges through math exercises (they count up to today's date), a reading lesson, a science project (planting seeds in plastic cups of dirt), and lots and lots of songs — many of them penned by Ms. Edson herself. "We sing a lot in our class," she explained. "Singing is really good for language awareness." The children also work on their journals, drawing pictures of themselves and their families and copying out simple phrases about them.

Nothing escapes Ms. Edson's eye. Troublemakers — "I have six boys ready to get in a fist fight at any time" — are taken aside and spoken to quietly. Another little boy is singled out for praise. "He needed a purple crayon to do his drawing, and so he said, 'May I please get a purple crayon?' What do you think class, thumbs up or thumbs down?" The class gives him a unanimous thumbs up. The contrast between Ms. Edson and the implacable Vivian — who in one scene stonily refuses to grant an extension to a student whose grandmother has died — couldn't be more dramatic.

But then, Ms. Edson isn't quite sure that she likes Vivian. "I'm not saying smart is bad," she says slowly. "Smart is not bad — but kind is good."

by AmyGamerman

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new to the play service

AMONG FRIENDS by Kristine Thatcher
A poker game inspires three friends to cut all that male bonding stuff and start getting real.

BEAUTIFUL THING by Jonathan Harvey
In the desperate atmosphere of a London housing project, two teen-age boys discover their first loves: each other.

THE BIG SLAM by Bill Corbett
A '90s satire about corruption, seduction and infomercials.

BLESSED ASSURANCE by Laddy Sartin
During the Freedom Summer of '64, a lone black cook stages a sit-in at the cafe where she has worked her entire life.

THE CIDER HOUSE RULES
by Peter Parnell, from the novel by John Irving
A majestic, two-evening stage adaptation of Irving's Dickensian novel about orphans, New England, parental love and abortion.

CLOSER by Patrick Marber
Nominated for the 1999 Tony Award. Winner of the 1998 Olivier Award for Best Play. "...a brilliant and bracingly adult new play from London...bruisingly beautiful, shatteringly funny and devastatingly sad..."
— Variety

THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK
by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett
newly adapted by Wendy Kesselman
This darker version of the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning play of 1956 incorporates both material originally edited from the diaries and actual survivor accounts from the Holocaust.

DIMINISHED CAPACITY by Tom Dulack
A corrupt justice system comes apart during a hostage crisis.

THE ENGLISH TEACHERS by Edward Napier
A flamboyant community theatre actress throws her town into chaos over Allen Ginsberg's "Howl."

THE EROS TRILOGY by Nicky Silver
Three short plays about which feels better: emotional intimacy or simple sex.

FOUR PLAYS by Conor McPherson
By the author of THE WEIR. Includes ST. NICHOLAS, THIS LIME TREE BOWER, RUM & VODKA and THE GOOD THIEF.

FREEDOMLAND by Amy Freed
Finalist for the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.
Three quarrelsome siblings have a long overdue showdown with their father.

FROM ABOVE by Tom Donaghy
An affecting comedy about a widow and the handsome stranger who might be her husband reincarnate.

THE GENERAL OF HOT DESIRE
and OTHER PLAYS by John Guare
Includes GREENWICH MEAN, TALKING DOG and NEW YORK ACTOR.

GINT by Romulus Linney
An Appalachian retelling of Ibsen's PEER GYNT.

HYSTERICAL BLINDNESS by Laura Cahill
A woman's stress-induced blindness forces her to confront her life.

IMPOSSIBLE MARRIAGE by Beth Henley
A misguided wedding flies off the rails in this wildly funny and moving play about a balmy southern family.

LABOR DAY by A.R. Gurney
Faced with his family's criticism over a script he has written, it becomes obvious to an aging playwright and father that he doesn't know much about his family or himself.

new to the play service

THE MEMORY OF WATER by Shelagh Stephenson
Three very different sisters reunite for their mother's funeral with a healthy dose of booze, dope and festering resentments.

MERCY by Laura Cahill
A dinner party deteriorates when two ex-lovers dine through their tears.

MR. PETERS' CONNECTIONS by Arthur Miller
A smoky old club serves as the dreamscape for Harry Peters' ruminations about the end of his life.

THE MOST FABULOUS STORY EVER TOLD by Paul Rudnick
An all-gay version of the Bible, complete with floods, plagues, and no less than two lesbian nativities.

MY BOY JACK by David Haig
When Rudyard Kipling's son is prohibited from serving in World War I, Kipling secures him the commission that leads to his death.

OUR LADY OF SLIGO by Sebastian Barry
Barry's meditation on his grandmother's life also reflects the political and spiritual destitution of the Irish 1950s.

OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS by Joe DiPietro
Two sets of Italian-American grandparents scheme to keep their beloved grandson from taking a job on the other coast.

SEVEN ONE-ACT PLAYS by Wendy Wasserstein
Includes MEDEA, written with Christopher Durang.

SIDE MAN by Warren Leight
Winner of the 1999 Tony Award for Best Play. "...captures the pulse and climate of the New York jazz scene, with crisp dialogue and clearly drawn characters." — Variety

SNAKEBIT by David Marshall Grant
"...grips like a boa constrictor with a great sense of humor...an extraordinarily acute ear for the way people talk and a shrewd, handsomely workable theatricality. Not to be willingly missed." — NY Post

STAGE FRIGHT by Charles Marowitz
A venomous theatre critic receives his comeuppance when kidnapped by a husband-and-wife team of actors.

STOP KISS by Diana Son
Seize the day is the message of this tender story of two young women who slowly discover they're in love.

STUPID KIDS by John C. Russell
"Few recent plays capture the horror and humor of hormone-stricken teenhood with the wicked specificity of John C. Russell's peer-pressure satire." — USA Today

THIS IS OUR YOUTH by Kenneth Lonergan
The sleeper hit of the year. A living snapshot of the moment between adolescence and adulthood.

THE UNEASY CHAIR by Evan Smith
A romantic comedy of errors ensues when a Victorian spinster sues the military boarder she thought wanted to marry her.

VISITING MR. GREEN by Jeff Baron
An accident results in an unlikely relationship between an elderly widower and the young man charged with his care.

THE WEIR by Conor McPherson
Winner of the 1999 Olivier Award for Best Play. In a bar in rural Ireland, the local men swap spooky stories hoping to impress a young woman from Dublin who recently moved into a nearby "haunted" house.

WIT by Margaret Edson
Winner of the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. An extraordinary first play that is as intellectually challenging as it is emotionally immediate.

rights & restrictions

Extending Their Run



I often get calls from people wondering if an older play is still under copyright. Well, if you're interested in a play that was written since the beginning of 1923, you might want to hold those calls for . . . oh, say another 20 years.

by Craig Pospisil
Director, Non-Professional Rights

In 1998, an important change was made to United States copyright law. When copyright laws were first enacted, works were protected for a period of up to 56 years. A novel or play, for example, was protected for an initial 28-year term, which could then be renewed for another 28-year period. In 1976, the copyright law was revised so that works created after January 1, 1978 would be protected for the author's life plus 50 years. For works created and published before that date, the length of the second term was extended from 28 to 47 years.

On October 27, 1998, President Clinton signed H.R. 2589 (the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension bill) into law. The Copyright Term Extension bill extends the period of protection afforded to a work by 20 years, and this has been applied retroactively to all works still under copyright. Thus the term of copyright is now 95 years for works created and published before 1978, and the author's life plus 70 years for works created after January 1, 1978.

The one caveat to this, however, is that any work that has already lapsed into the public domain will remain that way; no play that is now in the public domain may come back under copyright protection. Therefore, any play published before January 1, 1923 is in the public domain. Any play published after that time, however, will be protected for an additional 20 years.

Eugene O'Neill's *THE HAIRY APE*, for example, was copyrighted in 1922. The play is now in the public domain and may be produced without the need to obtain written permission or to pay royalty fees.

O'Neill's *DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS*, however, was published in 1924. Without the Copyright Extension bill, it would have lapsed into the public domain at the end of this year, but it will now remain protected until 2019.

One of the reasons for drafting and enacting the extension bill was the fact that most countries, especially the European nations, had adopted a "life plus 70 year" copyright term in recent years. This created a situation in which the works of European authors were still protected under international copyright agreements, but those of American authors were not afforded the same privileges.

In a move to alleviate the concerns of some academics and others who opposed the extension bill, Congress inserted language that allows schools and libraries broader use of protected materials during the final 20 years of the term. Under this provision, material can be used for strictly academic and historical purposes without obtaining permission from the copyright holder. (NB: This does not apply to performances of plays by schools or colleges, but rather to reprinting or quoting lengthy sections of a text for study, etc.)

If you want more information, visit your local library or contact the Copyright Office at the Library of Congress. If you have access to the Internet, the Library of Congress has a very informative Web site: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright>. And for a chart that summarizes the effects of the new law, check out the University of North Carolina's web site, created by Laura N. Gasaway, professor of law. Its address is: <http://www.unc.edu/home/unclng/public-d.htm>.

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

- ALABAMA**
THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO by Alfred Uhry. Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Montgomery. November.
- ARIZONA**
MASTER CLASS by Terrence McNally. Arizona Theatre Co. Tucson, Phoenix. January.
SIDE MAN by Warren Leight. Arizona Theatre Co. Tucson, Phoenix. January.
- CALIFORNIA**
THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE by Martin McDonagh. Berkeley Repertory Theatre. November.
CRIMES OF THE HEART by Beth Henley. Civic Light Opera. Redondo Beach. February.
GOLDEN CHILD by David Henry Hwang. East West Players. Los Angeles. January.
MASTER CLASS by Terrence McNally. PCPA Theaterfest. Santa Maria. February.
THE MOUND BUILDERS by Lanford Wilson. Pacific Alliance Stage Co. Rohnert Park. February.
OLD WICKED SONGS by Jon Marans. Sacramento Theatre Co. February.
A SENSE OF PLACE by Lanford Wilson. Actors Theatre of San Francisco. January.
- COLORADO**
DIMLY PERCEIVED THREATS TO THE SYSTEM by Jon Klein. Aurora Fox Theatre Co. Aurora. January.
FULL GALLOP by Mark Hampton and Mary Louise Wilson. Denver Repertory Theatre. November.
SHAKESPEARE'S R & J by Joe Calarco. Theatre on Broadway. Denver. January.
- CONNECTICUT**
THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE by Martin McDonagh. Polka Dot Playhouse. Bridgeport. January.
CURSE OF THE STARVING CLASS by Sam Shepard. Yale Repertory Theatre. New Haven. February.
ITALIAN AMERICAN RECONCILIATION by John Patrick Shanley. 7 Angels Theatre. Middlebury. January.
TAKING SIDES by Ronald Harwood. Stamford Theatre Works. November.
- DELAWARE**
FLYIN' WEST by Pearl Cleage. Delaware Theatre Co. Wilmington. February.
THREE VIEWINGS by Jeffrey Hatcher. Delaware Theatre Co. Wilmington. January.
- FLORIDA**
AS BEES IN HONEY DROWN by Douglas Carter Beane. Civic Theatre of Central Florida. Orlando. February.
THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI book and lyrics by Mark St. Germain, music and lyrics by Randy Courts. American Stage Co. St. Petersburg. December.
GROSS INDECENCY, THE THREE TRIALS OF OSCAR WILDE by Moises Kaufman. Orlando UCF Shakespeare Festival. January.
INDEPENDENCE by Lee Blessing. Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. Tampa. February.
THE KENTUCKY CYCLE by Robert Schenkkan. Asolo Theatre. Sarasota. November.
THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO by Alfred Uhry. Civic Theatre of Central Florida. Orlando. November.
- STUPID KIDS** by John C. Russell. Hippodrome State Theatre. Gainesville. January.
SYLVIA by A.R. Gurney. Pirate Playhouse. Sanibel Island. December.
TALLEY'S FOLLY by Lanford Wilson. Pirate Playhouse. Sanibel Island. November.
THREE DAYS OF RAIN by Richard Greenberg. Orlando Theatre Project. November.
VISITING MR. GREEN by Jeff Baron. Asolo Theatre. Sarasota. November.
- GEORGIA**
SCOTLAND ROAD by Jeffrey Hatcher. Georgia Ensemble Theatre Co. Roswell. February.
THE WAITING ROOM by Lisa Loomer. Theatre in the Square. Marietta. January.
- ILLINOIS**
FIRES IN THE MIRROR by Anna Deavere Smith. Illinois Theatre Center. Park Forest. February.
HAVING OUR SAY by Emily Mann. Adapted from the book by Sarah L. and Elizabeth Delany with Amy Hill Hearth. Chicago Theatre Co. February.
MINUTES FROM THE BLUE ROUTE by Tom Donaghy. Green Room Project. Chicago. November.
NIXON'S NIXON by Russell Lees. Writer's Theatre. Glencoe. February.
THE OLD SETTLER by John Henry Redwood. Organic Theatre Co. Evanston. November.
THE OLD SETTLER by John Henry Redwood. New American Theater. Rockford. January.
THIS IS OUR YOUTH by Kenneth Lonergan. Roadworks Productions. Chicago. January.
- LOUISIANA**
HAVING OUR SAY by Emily Mann. Adapted from the book by Sarah L. and Elizabeth Delany with Amy Hill Hearth. Dog and Pony Theatre. New Orleans. November.
- MAINE**
A CHRISTMAS CAROL adapted by Christopher Schario. Public Theatre. Auburn. December.
COLLECTED STORIES by Donald Margulies. Portland Stage Co. January.
THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN by Martin McDonagh. Public Theatre. Auburn. December.
ITALIAN AMERICAN RECONCILIATION by John Patrick Shanley. Public Theatre. Auburn. January.
NIXON'S NIXON by Russell Lees. Portland Stage Co. November.
- MARYLAND**
THREE DAYS OF RAIN by Richard Greenberg. Round House Theatre. Silver Spring. January.
- MASSACHUSETTS**
ELEMOSYNARY by Lee Blessing. Worcester Foothills Theatre. January.
STUPID KIDS by John C. Russell. SpeakEasy Stage Co. Boston. January.
- MICHIGAN**
BLUES FOR AN ALABAMA SKY by Pearl Cleage. Gray and Gray Productions. Detroit. December.
THE MEETING by Jeff Stetson. Gray and Gray Productions. Detroit. January.
- MOLOCH BLUES** by Phillip Hayes Dean. Gray and Gray Productions. Detroit. February.
RIFF RAFF by Laurence Fishburne. Gray and Gray Productions. Detroit. November.
- MINNESOTA**
THE WAITING ROOM by Lisa Loomer. Park Square Theatre. St. Paul. January.
- MISSOURI**
THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE by Martin McDonagh. Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. January.
TAKING SIDES by Ronald Harwood. Missouri Repertory Theatre. Kansas City. January.
- NEW JERSEY**
THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO by Alfred Uhry. Forum Theatre. Metuchen. November.
MASTER CLASS by Terrence McNally. George Street Playhouse. New Brunswick. February.
THE NOTEBOOK OF TRIGORIN by Tennessee Williams. 12 Miles West Theatre. Montclair. February.
- NEW YORK**
THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE by Martin McDonagh. Studio Arena Theatre. Buffalo. January.
DEALER'S CHOICE by Patrick Marber. Kavinoky Theatre. Buffalo. February.
A DOLL'S HOUSE adapted by Frank McGuinness. Irish Classical Theatre. Buffalo. November.
THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO by Alfred Uhry. Syracuse Stage. December.
THE MEMORY OF WATER by Shelagh Stephenson. Kavinoky Theatre. Buffalo. November.
THE OLD SETTLER by John Henry Redwood. Studio Arena Theatre. Buffalo. February.
PTERODACTYLS by Nicky Silver. Studio Arena Theatre. Buffalo. November.
- NORTH CAROLINA**
A CHRISTMAS CAROL adapted by Christopher Schario. Flat Rock Playhouse. December.
GROSS INDECENCY, THE THREE TRIALS OF OSCAR WILDE by Moises Kaufman. Charlotte Repertory Theatre. November.
MOLLY SWEENEY by Brian Friel. Actor's Theatre of Charlotte. November.
- OHIO**
THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO by Alfred Uhry. Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. January.
THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO by Alfred Uhry. Contemporary American Theatre Co. Columbus. November.
THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO by Alfred Uhry. Human Race Theatre Co. Dayton. January.
THE MISANTHROPE by Moliere, translated by Richard Wilbur. Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival. December.
- OKLAHOMA**
THE FOREIGNER by Larry Shue. Pollard Theatre. Guthrie. January.
- OREGON**
BLUES FOR AN ALABAMA SKY by Pearl Cleage. Portland Center Stage. February.
WIT by Margaret Edson. Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Ashland. February.
- PENNSYLVANIA**
COLLECTED STORIES by Donald Margulies. Walnut Street Theatre. Philadelphia. January.
THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO by Alfred Uhry. Walnut Street Theatre. Philadelphia. January.
NINE ARMENIANS by Leslie Ayzavian. Act II Playhouse. Ambler. January.
PRIVATE EYES by Steven Dietz. Pittsburgh Playhouse. November.
- TENNESSEE**
MASTER CLASS by Terrence McNally. Playhouse on the Square. Memphis. January.
- TEXAS**
ABUNDANCE by Beth Henley. Zachary Scott Theatre Center. Austin. January.
THE AMERICA PLAY by Suzan-Lori Parks. Zachary Scott Theatre Center. Austin. February.
DRIVING MISS DAISY by Alfred Uhry. Granbury Opera House. January.
HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE by Paula Vogel. State Theater Company. Austin. January.
THE MEMORY OF WATER by Shelagh Stephenson. Stages Repertory Theatre. Houston. February.
OLD WICKED SONGS by Jon Marans. Stages Repertory Theatre. Houston. February.
THE SANTALAND DIARIES by David Sedaris. Zachary Scott Theatre Center. Austin. November.
THE SANTALAND DIARIES by David Sedaris. Theatre for a New Day. Dallas. December.
SHAKESPEARE'S R & J by Joe Calarco. Stages Repertory Theatre. Houston. January.
WIT by Margaret Edson. Alley Theatre. Houston. January.
- UTAH**
THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN by Martin McDonagh. Pioneer Theatre Co. Salt Lake City. January.
THE RIDE DOWN MT. MORGAN by Arthur Miller. Salt Lake Acting Co. November.
- VIRGINIA**
THE HEIRESS by Ruth and Augustus Goetz. Theatre Virginia. Richmond. January.
A ROSEN BY ANY OTHER NAME by Israel Horovitz. Center Co. Fairfax. February.
- WASHINGTON**
THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE by Martin McDonagh. Spokane Interplayers. January.
MASTER CLASS by Terrence McNally. Spokane Opera. December.
- WISCONSIN**
THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE by Martin McDonagh. Milwaukee Repertory Theater Co. January.
THE HERBAL BED by Peter Whelan. Milwaukee Chamber Theatre. February.
MERE MORTALS by David Ives. Milwaukee Chamber Theatre. November.

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Remembering Flora Roberts

The officers, Board of Directors and staff of Dramatists Play Service fondly remember an esteemed colleague and friend, theatrical agent Flora Roberts, who died last December after spending a life in the theatre that spanned over 50 years and which resulted in the nurturing of an entire generation of writers, composers and lyricists.



Roddy McDowall. Courtesy of Helen Brann.

A colorful, outspoken woman, Ms. Roberts was a native New Yorker who trained as an opera singer at the Manhattan School of Music. She even sang for Arturo Toscanini at one point, but her real fondness was for torch songs as they favored the gravelly depths of her voice.

After graduating, Ms. Roberts became an assistant to theatrical producer Kermit Bloomgarden where she rubbed elbows with the leading playwrights of the day. At one point, she was asked to critique a new play of Lillian Hellman's to the author's face. Fearing the worst, she was surprised that Hellman not only agreed with her assessment, but suggested that the fledgling agent be given a raise. Ms. Roberts later advised Bloomgarden to produce an early draft of Arthur Miller's ALL MY SONS, but Bloomgarden was overextended and not able to pursue the production at the time. Later he would go on to bring Mr. Miller's DEATH OF A SALESMAN to the stage.

By the 1950's Ms. Roberts had borrowed money from friends to open her own literary agency.

Discovering talent and arranging artistic marriages was Ms. Roberts' passion. At the urging of Frank Loesser, she invited an unknown composer named Sherman Edwards to her home to play some of his songs for her. Little did she realize she was hearing the musical she would take to Broadway: 1776. After reading a draft of D.L. Coburn's THE GIN GAME, Ms. Roberts was the one to call Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy about the play even though they weren't her clients. The play went on to win the Pulitzer

Prize. When Alfred Uhry approached Ms. Roberts about writing a television mini-series, she suggested instead he write about his own background. The result? Another Pulitzer Prize winner, DRIVING MISS DAISY.

Ms. Roberts' clients included such other Pulitzer Prize winners as Stephen Sondheim (SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE), and Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett (THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK).

For her commitment to the theatre and to her clients, and for the unique personality she brought to our profession, we remember and miss Flora Roberts.

Worth seeing? yes; but not worth going to see. - Samuel Johnson