

atplay

Issue 13, Fall/Winter 2008



From the *Hollywood Arms* to *Broadway* by *Carol Burnett*



New Year's Day, 2003

Four and a half years ago,
my daughter Carrie called me
from her home in Colorado.
She was a writer, actress and
musician, who made a living
doing all three.

"Mom?"

"Hey, Punkin'."

"This has been on my
mind for some time and
I want to pitch it to you."

(Continued on page 2)

NEWPLAYS

ALL THAT I WILL EVER BE by Alan Ball

A privileged California native and an enigmatic immigrant from the Middle East search for a sense of belonging in this darkly funny tale of cultural provocation.

ALL THE RAGE by Keith Reddin

This modern-day Jacobean Revenge Tragedy presents a picture of a world spinning out of control, as ten interconnected characters collide, and each of them has a gun and is ready to use it.

ART OF MURDER by Joe DiPietro

At a remote Connecticut estate, Jack, an accomplished painter, awaits the arrival of his art dealer. Jack is intending to kill the man, and Jack's wife may or may not go along with the plan.

BACK OF THE THROAT

by Yusef El Guindi

An Arab-American writer finds himself accused of possible ties to terrorists. As an interrogation proceeds, government officials reveal their evidence, but is it evidence or have innocent events been distorted?

BEAUTY OF THE FATHER by Nilo Cruz

In this play by Pulitzer Prize-winner Nilo Cruz an American girl who travels to Spain to meet her estranged father becomes romantically involved with his Moroccan companion.

BFF ("Best Friends Forever")

by Anna Ziegler

Teenagers Lauren and Eliza are "best friends forever," but soon sex and cruelty intrude on their idyll, as their relationship experiences the inevitable trials of young-adulthood.

BHUTAN by Daisy Foote

After the death of her father, Frances wonders how she ended up with such a family. Her mother is driving her crazy. Her brother is in prison. She dreams of the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan but can barely find the kitchen door.

BOURBON AT THE BORDER

by Pearl Cleage

The story of a black couple who went South to register voters during Freedom Summer, only to find that, even decades later, the price of freedom is never paid in full.

BLACKBIRD by David Harrower

Ray and Una, who once had an illicit affair, meet again fifteen years later. Guilt, rage and raw emotions run high as the two recollect their relationship when she was twelve and he was forty.

BLUE DOOR by Tanya Barfield

A disorienting insomnia inadvertently conjures Lewis' ancestors as three generations of men (all played by one actor) challenge Lewis to embark on a night journey of self-discovery.

A BODY OF WATER by Lee Blessing

A middle-aged couple wakes up one morning in an isolated summer house near a picturesque body of water. There's only one problem — neither of them can remember whom they are.

From the Hollywood Arms to Broadway (Continued from cover)

"I think we could take the first part of your memoir and make a play out of it. Just for the fun of it. You and me ... together. How about it?" And we began to collaborate ... long distance. She would write in her mountain cabin, and I would write in my Los Angeles apartment. The faxes flew. Nanny, Mama and Daddy were all coming to life in a different form. "Just for the fun of it," she had said ... and it was certainly that, but there was much

more that was going on. Carrie and I had always been close, able to read each other's moods and thoughts ... and yet, this exercise was bonding us deeper, bringing us even closer than either one of us could have ever imagined. She was getting to know her family in the most profound way ... putting words into their mouths that echoed in my deepest memories. It was a little eerie. She had never known them in life, but now she knew them by writing them ... not writing "about" them, but by writing *them*.

In 1998, we sent a rough draft to the head of the Sundance Theater Lab workshop, Philip Himberg. Ours was accepted along with eight other projects that summer. Delighted, we packed our bags and



Carol and Carrie triumphant.

headed for the mountains in Utah. Sundance provided us with wonderful actors and highly experienced dramaturgs for an intense eight days. We would sit around a table in a bright sunny rehearsal hall and read the play aloud. Suggestions would fly from everyone, and then we'd retire to our lodgings and head for our laptops, to write new scenes and dialogue. One problem was that the work we had done was more like a screenplay, and we needed to address the very real aspects of scenery and costume changes.

Carrie and I continued to work in the same manner: apart. She would take one scene, and I would take another. The next morning, we'd hand out the new stuff and begin all over again. We were thrilled that no one could tell who wrote what. We had the same voice. And mother and daughter were having a ball.

The following spring, we did another workshop with Sundance helping ... this time in New York. Although it still had a "cinematic feel," a stage play was beginning to take shape.

Late in 1999, there was interest from a producer, who gave us the names of two (fairly new and highly respected) Broadway directors. Carrie and I didn't have a clue about which one to pursue so I called my friend Hal Prince, for advice. Hal (The "Prince" of Broadway) knew both directors, thought they were great, and offered to read it so he could give us a recommendation. He read it and offered to direct it himself. Hal Prince! The director of *Phantom of the Opera*, *Evita*, *Cabaret*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Follies*, *Company*, and countless others ... the winner of twenty Tony Awards ... wants to work with us? Carrie and I were over the moon.

Off and on over the next couple of years he helped us turn it into a real stage play. Our first "assignment" was to put all the action in room 102 and the rooftop. This was quite an undertaking, as we had scenes taking place in several different settings. Hal said, "Confinement is your friend." We tackled his notes and suggestions with a vengeance. Carrie was still in Colorado, I was still in L.A., and Hal was in New York. Once again, the faxes flew. We found out that the building had been called Hollywood Arms when it was first built in the twenties. There was our title. (I wish I had known that when I wrote the memoir!)

Hal sent the play to Robert Falls, the Artistic Director of The Goodman Theater in Chicago, and we were offered a limited run beginning in April of 2002. We were beside ourselves. An honest-to-God production!

In the spring of 2001, Hal and his scenic designer Walt Spangler were in Los Angeles with another show and wanted to see 102. We arranged a visit through the landlady. *Here I was back again*. We entered the room and it was squalid. It was empty, ugly and depressing. We spotted a used hypodermic needle on the threadbare faded blue carpet. Walt took

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A Brooklyn Boy Visits Home

by Michael Q. Fellmeth

Brooklyn in the fifties occupies a unique place in the popular imagination. We glimpse it in old black-and-white photographs and snatches of old film, a teeming, ethnically diverse, working-class and gloriously vibrant city within a city. Trolley cars, parades on Flatbush Avenue, sledding in Prospect Park, Ebbets Field and the Dodgers, these images of its heyday inform our sense of Brooklyn as a kind of post-WWII utopia, the urban ideal of home. For Eric Weiss, however, the Brooklyn boy of Donald Margulies' brilliant and emotionally complex Broadway play, the Brooklyn of our collective dreams had already ceased to exist by the time of his adolescence. By the sixties, Brooklyn had been drained of much of its vitality and, for Eric, had come to represent a provincial stasis from which he longed to escape. Columbia University became the portal through which he passed on his journey to the literary figure he willed himself to become. And it is at this point, when Eric's third novel has reached the bestseller list, that the play picks up his story.

It is one of Margulies' many deft touches of irony in the play that Eric's successful novel, entitled *Brooklyn Boy*, appropriates his childhood for its subject. The very identity that Eric has sought to reject provides the means for his success. And so with his novel now a bestseller, the stage is literally set for Eric's return to Brooklyn. It is a homecoming that should prove triumphant, except that his father is gravely ill; his marriage is falling apart; and, as he soon learns, those he left behind are bitter about being left behind. And why wouldn't they be? Implicit in Eric's rejection of his former identity is also a rejection of his father, his old friends, his culture, Brooklyn itself, even his wife. His success, however unintentionally, has left a trail of collateral damage.

In Margulies' hands, however, success is not a straightforward matter. One of the more nuanced aspects of the play is that Eric's successes and failures are neither unadulterated successes nor failures for him but are rather more ambiguous. His bestseller is down on the list, number eleven to be exact. His film adaptation has spiraled out of his control. He cannot enjoy the sexual attentions of a literary groupie. While, on the flip side, his father's hostility toward him is tempered by something unspoken. And his wife, perhaps unfairly, blames him for *her* lack of commercial success as a writer. From one angle, *Brooklyn Boy* provides an object lesson in the consequences of ambition. Success, we discover, is a mixed blessing.

Even so, it may be that there is nothing more American than reinventing yourself in the service of ambition. It is one facet of that elusive gem of an idea, the American Dream. An invented identity, however, is a fragile construct, one that is likely to crack under sustained pressure. The envy and bitterness that Eric's success engenders in those around him begin to apply that pressure, so much so that Eric comes to feel himself besieged, at first obliquely as his father expresses dissatisfaction with the book's dedication: "For my mother and my father." "Don't we get our names?" his father asks, "Couldn't you say: 'For Phyllis and Manny Weiss?'" And later the attacks become more overt, as when he runs into his childhood friend Ira. "People outgrow each other," Eric says when Ira asks about the distance between them. "I didn't outgrow you," Ira responds. "How come I didn't outgrow you?" From his father, from this encounter, indeed from all that Brooklyn represents, Eric desires nothing more acutely than escape.

But when Eric's father dies, without a real reconciliation between the two men, Eric realizes that an accommodation must be made with his past, that his sense of self can be large enough to incorporate both the man he has willed himself to become and the boy he was that his father and his friends surely loved. One suspects that in his bestselling novel Eric had already reached this conclusion. It remained for Eric to reach it for himself. And Margulies, with consummate skill, guides Eric and us along this bittersweet journey, leaving us the richer and the wiser for it. ■

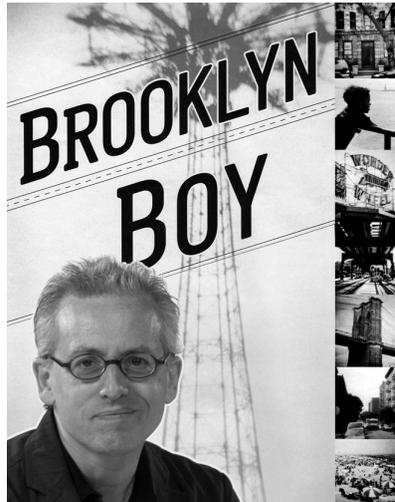


Photo by Henry DiRocco/SCR

CHEMICAL IMBALANCE: A JEKYLL AND HYDE PLAY by Lauren Wilson
A fast-paced and darkly comic adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic story.

CHRISTMAS BELLES by Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope, Jamie Wooten
From the authors of the wildly popular *Dearly Beloved* and *Dearly Departed*. A church Christmas program spins hilariously out of control in this Southern farce about squabbling sisters, family secrets, a surly Santa, a vengeful sheep and a reluctant Elvis impersonator.

DARK MATTERS
by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa
When Bridget Cleary goes missing, in the dead of night, her husband and son scramble to find her. Then, as suddenly as she vanished, Bridget reappears, talking about strange visitations and otherworldly beings.

DEDICATION OR THE STUFF OF DREAMS by Terrence McNally
Love of the theatre infuses every aspect of this tale of passionate producers longing for a grand new home for their children's theatre in upstate New York.

DEFIANCE by John Patrick Shanley
Two U.S. Marines, one black and one white, are on a collision course over race, women and the high cost of doing the right thing.

THE DINOSAUR MUSICAL music by Rob Reale, book and lyrics by Willie Reale
Prehistory is rewritten in this rollicking musical about a mother and daughter pair of dinosaurs, down on their luck, until they come upon the Paradise Hotel — a safe haven for vegetarian dinosaurs looking to escape meat-eaters.

DOUBT, A PARABLE
by John Patrick Shanley
Winner of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award. Sister Aloysius, a Bronx school principal, takes matters into her own hands when she suspects the young Father Flynn of improper relations with one of the male students.

DUMB SHOW by Joe Penhall
TV-star Barry believes he is to get the five-star treatment that he deserves. However, a tense game of power and manipulation ensues when two bankers pry into his offstage life.

DURANGO by Julia Cho
To the outside world, the Lee boys look perfect. But when their widowed father decides to take them on a road trip to Colorado, the carefully constructed facades of all three begin to crack.

DYING CITY by Christopher Shinn
A year after her husband's death in Iraq, Kelly, a young therapist, confronts his identical twin brother, who shows up at her apartment unannounced.

NEWPLAYS

ELLIOT, A SOLDIER'S FUGUE

by Quiara Alegria Hudes

While on leave from the war in Iraq, Elliot learns the stories of his father and grandfather who served in Korea and Vietnam before him. Will he go back to war a second time?

FLAG DAY by Lee Blessing

Two short plays, "Good Clean Fun" and "Down and Dirty," examine white/black relations in our society with an unblinking eye.

A FLEA IN HER EAR a new version of Georges Feydeau's farce by David Ives

Winner of a 2006 Jefferson Award for Best Adaptation. The greatest of French farces, and perhaps the greatest farce ever written, in a new adaptation by the inimitable David Ives.

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF HEDDA GABLER by Jeff Whitty

What is one of drama's most famous suicides to do? Beginning just as Ibsen's classic ends, this story finds Hedda mired in an alternative hell: a place where death is only possible when a fictional character is forgotten by the real-life public.

GREY GARDENS book by Doug Wright, music by Scott Frankel, lyrics by Michael Korie

The Tony Award-nominated, hilarious and heartbreaking story of Big Edie and Little Edie Bouvier Beale, the eccentric aunt and cousin of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, once bright names on the social register who became notorious recluses.

GUARDIANS by Peter Morris

A tour de force in two monologues for one male and one female actor, this unflinching look at the war in Iraq mingles fierce irony with human warmth.

GULF VIEW DRIVE by Arlene Hutton

The third play in Hutton's *Nibroc Trilogy* takes May and Raleigh from Kentucky during WWII to 1950s Florida. The couple's dream house shrinks as relatives descend, and they learn to make unconventional decisions in a changing world.

ICE GLEN by Joan Ackermann

In this touching period comedy, a beautiful poetess dwells in idyllic obscurity on a Berkshire estate with a band of unlikely cohorts.

KLONSKY AND SCHWARTZ

by Romulus Linney

The turbulent relationship between struggling writer Milton Klonsky and his mentor, the brilliant poet Delmore Schwartz, is the basis of this engrossing drama.

THE LADY WITH ALL THE ANSWERS by David Rambo

Late on a 1975 night in Ann Landers' Chicago apartment, an ironic twist of events confronts her with a looming deadline for a column dealing with a new kind of heartbreak: her own.

(Continued from page 2)

pictures of the tiny area, as he was about to start designing the scenery for the Goodman production. He called from New York ten days later and asked if he could get a couple of more shots as some of his didn't come out too well.

I went back to Yucca and Wilcox, and found the door to 102 wide open. There were workmen sanding the old wooden floor. Scraps of the faded carpet were piled in a corner. The Spanish landlady was there.

"What's happening here?"

"A new owner. He's fixing up the place."

A young man had bought the building and had plans to restore it to what it was in the 1920s ... and he was starting with 102!

What was it I was feeling? Happiness: At least it wasn't going to be torn down. Frustration: I was supposed to be the one to fix it up ... *to redo the past* ... So I rented it. I moved in some old furniture I had in storage: A small couch, a couple of chairs and a desk.

Carrie gave me some sage to burn in the four corners of the room, "to exorcise any bad spirits that had lived there." We even had a small champagne celebration when the movers left.

Why did I rent it? I didn't know. I just knew I had to do it. I thought that if I took my laptop there every so often, some ideas or feelings might crop up that I could write about ... maybe Nanny might talk to me ... reveal some of her long-buried secrets ... I might hear Mama sing something ... Daddy could show up at the door wanting to take me for a soda on the boulevard, so we could bond some more. They were good intentions that never panned out.

Carrie got sick.

She was diagnosed with lung cancer in the summer of 2001. Determined to lick it, she moved back to Los Angeles, where she would drive herself to her chemotherapy and radiation treatments the first few months. She was in and out of the hospital, rallying on occasion, and getting sprung to go home. I remember the final time she was readmitted to Cedars-Sinai, in the late fall. I entered her room. It was around five in the morning, and she was stirring. I looked down at her, and she opened her eyes and smiled at me. I feebly joked, "So you wanted to come back here to the hospital again, huh?"

"I missed the food." We both howled.

She died January 20, 2002.

I knew I had to continue with Hal. I had to complete what she had begun.

Flying to Chicago that April to begin rehearsals, I closed my eyes and thought, "Carrie, let me know you're with me. Give me some 'signs.' I need you to get me through these next few weeks. I need your strength." I checked into the hotel room, and waiting for me was a huge bouquet: "Welcome to Chicago. See you tomorrow! Love, Hal." It was a beautiful array of Birds of Paradise. I nearly fell over. Hal had no idea that was Carrie's favorite flower ... she even had a tattoo of one on her shoulder. The next night, Hal and I went out to dinner. The maitre d' offered us a complimentary bottle of champagne. He showed us the special label: "Louise." That was Carrie's middle name and Mama's first name. I had what I needed to keep me going.

Hollywood Arms opened on Broadway October 31, 2002. Hal had provided a beautiful production with a perfect cast.

My baby and I went the distance. ■

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Almost, Maine					
Phoenix Theatre	Phoenix	AZ	1/9/2008	-	1/27/2008
Colony Theatre Company	Burbank	CA	2/6/2008	-	3/9/2008
Shadow Theatre	Edmonton, Alberta	CN	10/18/2007	-	11/4/2007
Florida Repertory Theatre	Ft. Myers	FL	11/30/2007	-	12/23/2007
Artists' Ensemble	Rockford	IL	11/30/2007	-	12/16/2007
Public Theatre	Auburn	ME	10/19/2007	-	10/28/2007
Tipping Point Theatre	Northville	MI	1/17/2008	-	2/23/2008
Bickford Theatre	Morristown	ND	1/24/2008	-	2/17/2008
Theater Barn	New Lebanon	NY	9/21/2007	-	10/7/2007
South Carolina Repertory Company	Hilton Head Island	SC	3/20/2008	-	4/6/2008
Tennessee Women's Theater Project	Nashville	TN	2/1/2008	-	2/16/2008
WaterTower Theatre	Addison	TX	2/14/2008	-	3/2/2008

Doug Wright on *Grey Gardens*

interview by Robert Vaughan

ROBERT. Ana Matronic of Scissor Sisters recently had the word “staunch” tattooed on the inside of her lip! Why do you think *Grey Gardens* has developed such a cult following? DOUG. Sometimes in extreme characters, we can most readily discern our own foibles, because they’re writ so large. The prudish or delusional among us may watch the two Edies and smugly keep them at a comfortable distance, writing them off as eccentric or Grand Guignol. But — when we assess them honestly — we can’t help but see ourselves, and the terrifying, universal dilemmas that we all face: breaking free from the tyranny of family, weathering the indignity of time, the pain of lost opportunity. Both Big and Little Edie confront these conundrum head-on; and with a trenchant, caustic humor that renders them almost heroic.

ROBERT. If the Kennedy Clan is American royalty, where do the Bouvier and Beale family fit in?

DOUG. Darling, royalty tends to gravitate to royalty. The Bouviers claimed to be descended from French aristocracy; the Beales were patrician Southern folk. They’re all fancier than us, and that’s all that matters. We put women like the Bouviers on pedestals, mostly so we can see up their skirts.

ROBERT. When working on *Grey Gardens*, what most struck you about Big Edie and Little Edie?

DOUG. Their unapologetic sense of themselves, and their own homegrown, miraculous philosophies. So quotable, those two gals! When Big Edie says of her relationship to her adult daughter, “It’s very hard, bringing up a child fifty-eight years of age,” it’s priceless. I wish I could claim responsibility for all the bon mots in the script, but I owe most of them to those indomitable ladies.

ROBERT. Scores of people can’t get enough of the documentary and the musical of *Grey Gardens* — yet many people are unnerved watching the film. Your work made the transformation palatable as it gave us the history and showed what life could have been like prior to the decay. That must have been some research job — something you’re used to after having given us *I am My Own Wife*.

DOUG. The original documentary is harrowing and brilliant; I hope our work hasn’t leavened it. But film and theatre require different storytelling mechanisms; onstage, we felt obliged to provide glimpses of life at Grey

Gardens before its ruination. I have to confess, I’m no Kennedy or Bouvier fanatic; and when Scott Frankel and Michael Korie brought me to the project, they’d already done most of the original research. But we found John Davidson’s book on the Bouviers enormously helpful; and Albert Maysles let us see outtakes from the film, which were instructive as well. And heaven knows, there’s no dearth of books on Jackie Kennedy and her clan!

ROBERT. Were Big Edie and Little Edie truly alone out there in *Grey Gardens* — had they been abandoned by their family?

DOUG. Their family did try to intervene on occasion, but — like so many elderly or eccentric people — the Beale ladies often pridefully refused their help. Big Edie’s boys both wanted to see her in a nursing home or an institution, but she was adamant about living out her days at *Grey Gardens*. I think their families found them both hopelessly irascible. ROBERT. After being threatened with eviction, and with all their names dragged through the mud in the press, did Jackie ever offer any help?

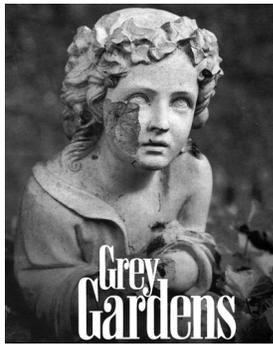
DOUG. Most definitely, despite Little Edie’s occasional claims to the contrary. Aristotle Onassis gave the women over a million dollars for a massive clean-up of the property. The house was restored, piles of garbage were removed, and the cats were contained. But just a few short months after the restoration, the ladies allowed the house to slide right back into grave disrepair. I think Jackie probably threw up her hands in frustration. On some level, Big and Little Edie were living in squalor by choice; a kind of passive-aggressive protest against their family’s very conventional values.

ROBERT. How funny or sad is it that Jackie could save Grand Central Station, but she couldn’t save them from themselves? There’s *STAUNCH* for you, huh?

DOUG. No kidding! (I’m glad the city of New York wasn’t as willfully idiosyncratic as the Edies, or we wouldn’t have that gorgeous train station!)

ROBERT. Jerry, *The Marble Faun*, is a fascinating one, isn’t he? How did he fit into this family? What do you know about him — is he still a New York City cabdriver?

DOUG. Jerry is a really lovely man. He attended early performances of the show *Off-Broadway* at Playwrights Horizons, and subsequently saw it on Broadway several times.



LEVITTOWN by Marc Palmieri

Amidst the thin walls of their Levittown home, the members of a beleaguered family are forced to confront the self-destructive nature that has plagued them for generations and the failure of faiths to which they have desperately clung.

THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED

by Douglas Carter Beane

Mitchell is a budding screen idol who could hit big if it weren’t for one teensy-weensy problem. His agent, the devilish Diane, can’t seem to keep him in the closet and away from the cute rent boy who’s caught his eye.

LOVE-LIES-BLEEDING by Don DeLillo

A free-spirited artist is left invalid after a second stroke. His estranged son, wife and ex-wife struggle over the ultimate question: How do they let him die with dignity?

LOVERS’ QUARRELS by Richard Wilbur

In Molière’s second full-length comedy in verse, a young woman has worn masculine disguise since childhood for the sake of an inheritance.

MARIE ANTOINETTE: THE COLOR OF FLESH by Joel Gross

Elisabeth Vigée le Brun, a beautiful, social-climbing portrait painter, uses her affair with Count Alexis de Ligne, a left-leaning philanderer, to get a commission to paint the naive young Queen Marie Antoinette.

MEASURE FOR PLEASURE

by David Grimm

Restoration comedy meets modern sex farce in this romantic adventure, exploring the elusive nature of happiness and featuring mistaken identities, duels and double-dealings.

THE MISTAKES MADELINE MADE

by Elizabeth Meriwether

Struggling with a soul-crushing job as a personal assistant, Madeline develops Ablutophobia, the fear of bathing, and wages a furious, funny war against all things complacent, pampered and clean.

MY NAME IS RACHEL CORRIE taken from the writings of Rachel Corrie,

edited by Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner

In 2003 Rachel Corrie was crushed to death by an Israeli Army bulldozer in Gaza as she was trying to prevent the demolition of a Palestinian home. This one-woman play creates a moving portrait of the young American activist.

NERVE by Adam Szymkowitz

A dark comedy about falling into a relationship on the first date.

NICKEL AND DIMED by Joan Holden

A vivid and witty, yet deeply sobering stage adaptation of Barbara Ehrenreich’s bestseller that chronicles her odyssey into the world of low-wage, working-class America.

(Continued on back cover)

NEWPLAYS

NO CHILD... by Nilaja Sun

This tour-de-force exploration of the New York City public school system is not to be missed by anyone who is concerned about the state of our education system.

ON THE LINE by Joe Roland

Three lifelong friends take on management, the union and ultimately each other when a strike wreaks havoc on their working-class town.

THE PAIN AND THE ITCH by Bruce Norris

What begins as an average Thanksgiving for one privileged family unravels into an exposé of disastrous choices and less-than-altruistic motives. A scathing satire on the politics of class and race.

PIG FARM by Greg Kotis

On a struggling pig farm somewhere in America, Tom and Tina (with the help of Tim, their hired hand) fight to hold onto everything they own — namely, a herd of fifteen thousand restless pigs.

A PLACE AT FOREST LAWN by Luke Yankee and James Bontempo, based on the one-act play by Lorees Yerby

Friendship is the tie that binds in this bittersweet and candid look at remembered love, forgotten promises, living with choices and dying with dignity.

PORT AUTHORITY THROW DOWN by Mike Batistick

Pervez is a cab driver on the run from the FBI. Hiding out in his cab outside Port Authority, he meets a Christian missionary and a homeless man searching for a connection from a world in which they feel alienated.

PURE CONFIDENCE by Carlyle Brown

The high-stakes world of Civil War-era horse racing is the stage for this riveting drama of slavery and Reconstruction.

RABBIT by Nina Raine

Bella is celebrating her birthday with her best friend and two ex-boyfriends in a trendy wine bar. Meanwhile her terminally ill father preoccupies her mind.

REGRETS ONLY by Paul Rudnick

A powerhouse attorney, his wife and their fashion designer friend share quips and cocktails in the couple's Park Avenue apartment in this hilarious comedy of Manhattan manners.

RIDICULOUS FRAUD by Beth Henley

A disastrous New Orleans wedding rehearsal dinner is the latest in a series of unfortunate events that befall the Clay brothers in this boisterous and bittersweet new comedy.

SATELLITES by Diana Son

New parents Nina and Miles, an interracial couple, have a new house, a new baby, and only one of them has a new job. (Hint: It's not Miles.)

Keith Bunin's *Busy World*

interview by Robert Vaughan

ROBERT. As this is our "Family Issues" newsletter, I'll start off with this: In *The World Over*, Adam is on an epic mission, but ultimately does it come down to finding his family? Is that what is most important to him?

KEITH. I wrote *The World Over* because I've always had a very powerful emotional reaction to those Shakespeare plays that some people call "romances," where narrative logic is thrown out the window and all these insane and fantastical things happen. When I was working on the play, my life was really chaotic and crazy, and that kind of play seemed like the best way to express what I was struggling with. Adam was abandoned as an infant, and he doesn't know anything about his parents. He comes to believe he's the lost prince of a country that may or may not exist. He's so obsessed with reclaiming this kingdom that he winds up abandoning his own wife and children. And I think he does come to learn, maybe too late, that his inherited family is far less important than the family he's created himself.

ROBERT. We've seen very different types of families in your work. Traditional and not so traditional — in *10 Million Miles* Duane is willing to accept a readymade family he's not responsible for; in fact, he desperately needs it.

KEITH. Duane grew up with an abusive father and a deeply self-destructive mother. As soon as he was old enough, he ran away to join the army, and when that didn't work out, he just kept running. It's probably no accident that he's an auto mechanic by trade: He has a great need to be constantly in motion. He's also a fabulist: He keeps reinventing his history because his real life is too dingy for him. But he knows he's stuck, so when he finds out that this girl he's on a road trip with is pregnant, he starts inventing a future for them together. It's a dangerous thing to do, because the girl is deeply fragile and susceptible to his inventions. And when the chips are down, he might not be up to the task. But he needs to believe that he can have a family of his own and build a decent, stable life for himself. Plus he also wants to save this girl in a way that he couldn't save his mother, and to love a child in a way that he was never loved.

ROBERT. Two of your plays have families — sons — who've lost their father and handle it very differently. Jamie in *The Credeaux Canvas* is quite something, isn't he?

KEITH. I knew a lot of guys like Jamie, both at the Quaker high school I went to, and later when I moved to New York. Jamie is the child of a very messy divorce, and

essentially he's been erased from his father's life. He has almost no self-esteem so he devotes himself entirely to his friends. And he's consumed by his hatred of his father: He's constructed his life so it's this huge act of revenge against his dad.

ROBERT. Fathers and sons. Edmond and James Tyrone, Willy and Biff, and even Big Daddy and Brick. What's the draw?

KEITH. Well, it's one of those relationships that you never get to the bottom of. It seems to me like we're always either seeking revenge against our parents (like Jamie in *Credeaux*) or else trying to avenge them. Or some deeply convoluted combination of the two. In *The Busy World is Hushed*, Brandt talks about reading his father's college entrance essay, and wondering "how much of my life is just his un-lived." That's something I think about all the time.

ROBERT. In *The Busy World is Hushed*, Thomas and his mother Hannah have a very interesting relationship. Into Hannah's life, and then Thomas', comes Brandt. These people all need something and for a time, they get it. Is it a new sense of family — if only for a moment?

KEITH. The three of them do create this fragile little family, which is based on a deep and genuine love they all have for each other, but it's also built on a series of white lies and deceptions and evasions. It's something I find really troubling — the damage we can do to each other when we're trying to love each other. We're capable of great crimes when we're afraid of losing the people we love the most.

ROBERT. Brandt's father is ill and then passes away at the end of the play leaving us with a stunning curtain line (I can still hear Jill Clayburgh saying it), "Let's bury our dead." You said about the play, and perhaps your plays in general, that they're meant to start conversations. If I recall correctly, you said, "I think about these things, do you think about them too?" I do and I wonder what your thoughts are on Hannah, Thomas and Brandt now?

KEITH. That's a very timely question, because the play is just starting to get produced in a bunch of different places, so I get the opportunity to revisit the characters whenever I see a new production. Lately I find that I have great hope for Brandt and Hannah and Thomas, even though the story leaves them all very isolated and bereft. Brandt is in deep mourning, but even in his despair he's still actively questioning and seeking. And maybe the events of the play will force Hannah to

look at the ways in which she's used her religion to shut out the world. As far as Thomas is concerned, some days I think he's doomed and some days I think he'll be all right. The truth is, I have great admiration for all three of them, despite how self-destructive they can all be: They really are looking for connection with each other in a deep and genuine way.

ROBERT. Hannah is a very smart woman who makes a very interesting decision in the play and it backfires on her, doesn't it?

KEITH. She sees that Brandt and Thomas might be falling in love, and because she thinks love is God's grace, she believes these two boys can heal each other. So she encourages or maybe even manipulates Brandt, against his better judgment, to pursue Thomas. She's convinced herself that this is the holy thing to do, but she's blind to the fact that she's also doing it for her own reasons — because she's afraid that otherwise, her son will abandon her. And that's why it all backfires on her.

ROBERT. What do you think Thomas is looking for that he's not finding at home?

KEITH. Despite Hannah's best efforts, Thomas grew up believing that he was the cause of his father's suicide. Also, so much of

his mother's faith is wound up in her feelings about him — she actually says at one point that he's the only reason she didn't kill herself after her husband died. It's an impossible burden to place on him, so he's caught in this terrible double bind. He loves his mother desperately, but whenever he tries to truly communicate with her, he hits this brick wall. But he also realizes that until he can either fully reconcile with his mother, or else fully write her off, he'll never really be able to move forward. That's why I think he's constantly running away from her and then running back to her.

ROBERT. You have an interesting background, don't you? Is it too personal to ask about your family?

KEITH. I should probably talk about my religious upbringing first, since that's a question people always ask in regard to *The Busy World is Hushed*. My father is half-Jewish and my mother is a lapsed Catholic, and for some reason I was baptized and confirmed Episcopalian. My family stopped going to church almost immediately after I was confirmed, but then by coincidence I ended up getting a scholarship to attend this Quaker school down the road from where we lived, so that's where I spent my last three years of high school. Quaker school was my first experience of a truly liberal and progressive Christian community, and it had a huge positive impact

on my adolescence. So a lot of the roots of that play are in my weird polyglot religious background. I grew up in Poughkeepsie, New York, which is known for two things: IBM and Vassar College. My dad worked as a manager for IBM, and my mom worked in alumni affairs at Vassar. I have one younger sister, and she's a doctor who lives in Rhode Island. My sister and I both knew what we wanted to do from a pretty early age, and our parents have always been extremely supportive of us. As you know, it's hard enough to try and earn a living as a writer, so I'm very lucky I didn't have to fight my parents along with all the other battles that anyone working in this profession encounters on a daily basis.

ROBERT. I love your characters — Tess and Winston, all three of them in *Busy* and I loved Duane. You have a remarkable ability to make your audiences fall in love with these characters, even when some of them are all too flawed and human. Do you have a particular favorite or is that too much like asking which of your children you like best?

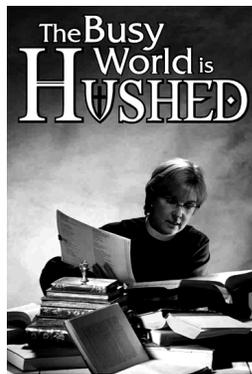
KEITH. It's definitely hard to pick a favorite. I'm still very attached to the characters in *The Busy World is Hushed*. I don't know that I'll move on from them 'til I finish a new play, so they're definitely the people who are closest to my heart at the moment.

ROBERT. Do you have a favorite family in the world of plays?

KEITH. What a great question. I'm really fond of the Shotover family in *Heartbreak House* — totally screwed-up and impossible but really extraordinary. And this is probably obvious but the family I'd most like to live with is the Sycamores in *You Can't Take It with You*. You've got to love a family where the mother decided to become a playwright because eight years ago a typewriter was delivered to the house by mistake.

ROBERT. One last thing — we'd love to know what you're going to give us next?

KEITH. I've never written anything overtly political, and I think it's probably high time. Bill Clinton was the first President I was old enough to vote for, and 2008 is the first election year when I'll be legally old enough to run for President myself. Not that I have any plans to do so. But I would like to investigate the way my view of politics and the country in general has shifted from 1992 to now. I'm about halfway through a first draft, and that's the point when I usually hit a huge brick wall. Which means I'm either going to press forward or I'm going to abandon the game entirely. So check back with me again in a few months. ■



SAVAGES by Anne Nelson

Shot through with similarities to our present situation, this play is set a few years after the United States' invasion of the Philippines to free them from Spanish colonial rule, and American troops now find themselves fighting a costly war against the people they originally came to liberate.

SEE WHAT I WANNA SEE music and lyrics by Michael John LaChiusa

A breathtakingly original musical about lust, greed, murder, faith and redemption, named by *New York Magazine* as one of the Best Musicals of 2005 and nominated for nine Drama Desk Awards, including Best Musical.

SEVEN IN ONE BLOW, OR THE BRAVE LITTLE KID by Randall Sharp and Axis Company

A young boy, who kills seven flies with a single swat and makes a belt emblazoned with "Seven in One Blow" to commemorate the event, travels about meeting colorful characters and learning valuable life lessons.

SHINING CITY by Conor McPherson

A guilt-ridden man reaches out to a therapist after seeing the ghost of his recently deceased wife. Routine visits between the two men quickly become a gripping struggle to survive.

SIX YEARS by Sharr White

In five scenes spanning twenty-four years of post-WWII life, Phil and his wife, Meredith, take an intimate journey to an unspoken side of the Greatest Generation.

A SONG FOR CORETTA

by Pearl Cleage

At the end of a long line of mourners waiting to pay their respects to Mrs. Coretta Scott King, five fictional characters share memories of Mrs. King's extraordinary life and sorrow at her passing.

THE SUNSET LIMITED

by Cormac McCarthy

From the acclaimed Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist comes the story of an ex-con from the South who saves the life of an intellectual atheist who wasn't looking for salvation.

TEMPODYSEY by Dan Dietz

A temp worker named Genny launches us on an epic, fantastical journey through corporate America, Appalachia, astrophysics and beyond.

TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE

by Jeffrey Hatcher and Mitch Albom

Mitch Albom, an accomplished journalist driven solely by his career, is reunited with Morrie Schwartz, his former college professor, and what starts as a simple visit becomes a weekly pilgrimage and a last class in the meaning of life.

THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

by Harley Granville-Barker, adapted by David Mamet

When Edward takes over the family firm, he discovers the embezzlement that has been keeping his relatives in a life of luxury.

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syncratic family. Jerry still drives a cab in New York City. Once — after the show — director Michael Greif, composer Scott Frankel and I all agreed to share a taxi downtown. We hailed one. We'd been in the car

(Continued from page 5)

He was a townie in East Hampton who felt no more at home in that blue-blood community than the Beale women did; like them, he was a maverick. In *Big Edie*, he found a surrogate Mom. In his heart, he felt every bit as bohemian as they did, and together they formed their own makeshift, idio-

syncratic family. Jerry still drives a cab in New York City. Once — after the show — director Michael Greif, composer Scott Frankel and I all agreed to share a taxi downtown. We hailed one. We'd been in the car

for two or three blocks, when we realized Jerry was our driver! He pulled over by the curb, and we sat, listening to him recount hilarious, heartbreaking memories of an adolescence spent with the Beales.

ROBERT. The end of the musical is heartbreakingly beautiful. Did this mother and daughter truly love one another or were they just simply all they had?
 DOUG. I hope the musical itself answers this question unequivocally, or as authors we've failed. The story of *Big and Little Edie* is, I think, one of the most poignant, harrowing and truthful parent/child love stories of all time. They loved each other ferociously; they hurt each other as only lovers can. Theirs is a universal dance; parents may unwittingly

wound their children, but they're also the ones who tenderly nurse them back to health. That creates a savage, irrevocable bond. Little Edie's haunting admission: "What could I do? I loved my mother." ■

We are delighted that the "Season Preview" issue of *American Theatre* magazine reports that seven of this season's Top 10 most-produced plays are DPS titles, including the number-one most-produced, *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley. The others include *Rabbit Hole* by David Lindsay-Abaire, *Moonlight and Magnolias* by Ron Hutchinson, *9 Parts of Desire* by Heather Raffo, *The Little Dog Laughed* by Douglas Carter Beane, *The Santaland Diaries* adapted by Joe Mantello from David Sedaris, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* adapted by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett.

SEASON PREVIEW 2007-2008

A COMPREHENSIVE LISTING OF PRODUCTIONS, DATES AND DIRECTORS AT NYC THEATRES NATIONWIDE

THE SEASON'S TOP 10

Is there any *Doubt*? You bet! John Patrick Shanley's Pulitzer-winning drama, about a struggle of power and conscience between a priest and a nun, leads out its nearest competitor by more than four-to-one as this season's most-produced play at NYC member theatres. Actually though the list below doesn't show it, August Wilson is rising at Shanley's heels as the season's most produced writer—he scores a total of 20 productions, 15 of which are represented on the list.

Not surprisingly, none repeats once or twice on the year's countdown, such as David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole* which leads their more productions this year than next and Ben Hutchinson's *Moonlight and Magnolias* has two productions. As usual, the list omits the season's numerous adaptations of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (10) and the season's most-produced production, which this year has theatres gravitating toward *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* (10 productions each). —*Ellie Reid*

Kenneth Chesney and Corey Blech in *Book of David* at Seattle Repertory Theatre in 2006.

DOUBT by John Patrick Shanley 34
RABBIT HOLE by David Lindsay-Abaire 12
THE CLEAN HOUSE by Sarah Ruhl 12
MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS by Ron Hutchinson 10
9 PARTS OF DESIRE by Heather Raffo 8
A YEAR WITH FRIDS AND TOAD Book and lyrics by Willie Reale; music by Robert Reale 8
THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED by Douglas Carter Beane 8
THE PIANO LESSON by August Wilson 7
THE SANTALAND DIARIES adapted by Joe Mantello from David Sedaris 8
GEM OF THE OCEAN by August Wilson 7
IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE adapted from Frank Capra 7
THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK adapted by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett 7

A Note from the Play Service

Beginning in February 2008, the Play Service will make the transition to electronic billing as a part of our efforts to reduce our environmental footprint. Currently, invoices for purchases and licenses are mailed on a daily basis, and your account statements are mailed monthly. Our new billing practice will allow us to send emails to you with invoices and monthly statements as attachments in the popular Adobe PDF format. If needed, you will be able to print these invoices or simply forward them to the appropriate department in

your organization for payment. If it remains necessary for you to receive hard copies by mail, you will be able to opt out of electronic delivery. We hope that your organization will also take a good look at the impact of using paper and begin the process of adjusting your practices to an electronic workflow. We at the Play Service will continue to look for alternative ways of doing business that take advantage of technology to provide better service to you and to contribute to all of our greater benefit. ■

—Rafael J. Rivera, VP Finance and Administration