



# RANCHO MIRAGE

BY STEVEN DIETZ



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*This play is dedicated to the mission and impact  
of the National New Play Network (NNPN).*

RANCHO MIRAGE was commissioned by Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Martha Lavey, Artistic Director; David Hawkanson, Executive Director), Chicago, Illinois.

It was developed with the support of the Tennessee Repertory Theatre through its Ingram New Works Fellowship.

RANCHO MIRAGE was produced in a rolling world premiere by Olney Theatre Center, Olney, MD; New Repertory Theatre, Watertown, MA; Phoenix Theatre, Indianapolis, IN; and Curious Theatre, Denver, CO, as part of the National New Play Network's Continued Life Program.

The production credits for the participating theatres are as follows:

Olney Theatre Center (Jason Loewith, Artistic Director), September 2013. It was directed by Jason Loewith; the scenic designer was Russell Parkman; the costume designer was Ivania Stack; the lighting designer was Joel Moritz; the sound designer was Veronika Vorel; and the stage manager was Shari Silbergliitt. The cast featured Tracy Lynn Olivera (DIANE), James Konicek (NICK), Tonya Beckman (LOUISE), Paul Morella (TREVOR), Susan Lynskey (PAM), Michael Russotto (CHARLIE), and Sydney Lemmon (JULIE).

New Repertory Theatre (Jim Petosa, Artistic Director), October 2013. It was directed by Robert Walsh; the scenic designer was John Howell Hood; the costume designer was Amanda Maciel Antunes; the lighting designer was Deb Sullivan; the sound designer and composer was Dewey Dellay; and the stage manager was Leslie Sears. The cast featured Tamara Hickey (DIANE), Lewis D. Wheeler (NICK), Abigail Killeen (LOUISE), Robert Pemberton (TREVOR), Cate Damon (PAM), John Kooi (CHARLIE) and Marion Mason (JULIE).

Phoenix Theatre (Bryan Fonseca, Producing Director), October 2013. It was directed by Bryan Fonseca; the scenic designer was Dan Tracy; the costume designer was Ashley Kiefer; the lighting designer was Jeffery Martin; the sound designer was Tom Horan; and the stage manager was Chelsey Stauffer. The cast featured Jolene Mentink Moffatt (DIANE), Earl Campbell (NICK), Sara Riemen (LOUISE), Bill

Simmons (TREVOR), Diane Timmerman (PAM), Joshua Coomer (CHARLIE), and Amber Beaty (JULIE).

Curious Theatre Company (Chip Walton, Producing Artistic Director), November 2013. It was directed by Christopher Leo; the scenic designer was Guy Wright; the costume designer was Kevin Brainerd; the lighting designer was Richard Devin; the sound designer was Alex Ruhlin; and the stage manager was Claudia Carson. The cast featured C. Kelly Leo (DIANE), Bill Hahn (NICK), Karen Slack (LOUISE), David Russell (TREVOR), Emily Paton Davis (PAM), Erik Sandvold (CHARLIE), and Devon James (JULIE).

The author is also grateful for the contributions of the following organizations and their artists: Trinity Repertory Company (Providence, RI), City Theatre Company (Pittsburgh, PA), ACT Theatre (Seattle, WA), and the University of Texas at Austin.

## **CHARACTERS**

DIANE DAHNER

NICK DAHNER

LOUISE PARKER (NEESE)

TREVOR NEESE

PAM CALDWELL

CHARLIE CALDWELL

JULIE

*Note on ages:*

All the couples are in their forties.

Julie is seventeen.

## **TIME and PLACE**

The present. A gated community in an American city.

## **SETTING**

The front/sitting room of Diane and Nick Dahner's home.

Three hallways/doorways: one leads off to the front entrance;  
one leads off to the kitchen; one leads off to the other  
rooms of the house.

The room is furnished with taste and originality—an inviting  
blend of elegance, comfort and wit.

## STONE

This play is a comedy until it is *not*. It is intended to be funny, fierce, and honest. The events and consequences—however extreme at times—are real for the characters, throughout. This play is not a farce.

## TEXT

The vitality and impact of this play is greatly improved if the smallest of interrupted lines (“*Look, I just—*”) are given the largest vocal punch and attack. These lines are not throwaways, nor are they meant to “underlap” what’s going on; they are intended to wrest the conversation back toward the line’s speaker.

*We're coming upon a time in our lives  
when the little dream lives  
but the big dream dies*

—Eliza Gilkyson  
“Hard Times in Babylon”



# RANCHO MIRAGE

## ACT ONE

### Prologue

*A light isolates Charlie. He speaks into a small camera on a tripod.*

CHARLIE. There. Okay—hello—the little red light is on so I think this is working...

*He stands very still, facing front.*

Hello—this is Charlie—this is your...

*Stops.*

...oh, my...I'm sorry. I'm not ready to say the word, yet.

*A shy smile.*

Tonight we are going to the lovely home of Diane and Nick Dahner. They live at Rancho Mirage. It's a gated community—"The Homes at Rancho Mirage"—very nice, with a polite guard at the little guard-house who always says hello. Several of our friends, like Trevor and Louise, also live in that community. But we don't. We live closer in, nearer the city. Closer to where I work and where the, um...*city is.*

*Beat.*

We always gather together—Thanksgiving, Christmas, Fourth of July, all the really important days—the memorable nights—we spend them there, in that nice home...together with those friends. They are the very best people we know.

*Pause, waves.*

Okay. Bye for now.

*The light on Charlie vanishes.*

## Scene 1

*Nick and Diane are doing final preparations for the dinner party: straightening the room, replacing candles, etc. It is something they enjoy.*

*Nick is dressed for the party. Diane is not.*

DIANE. (*Holding up two wine bottles.*) And I just stood there trying to remember what she loves more: “Three Lovers” or a “Ménage à Trois”?

(*Off Nick's look.*) The wine that Louise always drinks: It's either “Three Lovers” or “Ménage à Trois.” We always have it at their house.

NICK. Why don't you call and ask her?

DIANE. I can't do that.

NICK. Why not?

DIANE. I'm her friend—I'm supposed to *know this*—

NICK. And again I am baffled by your entire gender.

DIANE. —so I stood at the store, asking this blushing little teenage clerk if he preferred “Three Lovers” or a “Ménage à Trois”—

NICK. Best day of his life.

DIANE. —and as I talked to him he kept putting his hands deeper and deeper into his front pockets and little bit of *spittle* started to form at the corner of his mouth—

NICK. Okay I get the picture!

DIANE. (*Overlapping.*) —so finally I just walked away and threw caution to the wind and bought the “Ménage.”

NICK. It's the other one.

DIANE. No!

NICK. It's the “Three Lovers”—

DIANE. You're sure?

NICK. —which, of course, represents only a *fraction* of the lovers that Louise has actually *had*.

DIANE. (*A smile.*) You're terrible.

NICK. It's true.

*They are busy in the room.*

DIANE. She's testing him, you know.

NICK. Huh?

DIANE. Louise thinks Trevor might have a little something going on—*don't you dare breathe a word of this!*

NICK. Trevor is not the one who fools around in that marriage.

DIANE. Yes, but still—Louise suspects there might be a little *flirtation* in the air—

NICK. With who?

DIANE. (*Overlapping.*) —and even though she's always said that Trevor had a “freebie” coming—

NICK. Carte blanche.

DIANE. (*Nods.*) —carte blanche—one free pass to get back at her for all her sexual shenanigans—

NICK. Who is it?

DIANE. *You cannot say a word about this.*

*Nick “crosses his heart.”*

It's Julie.

NICK. (*Who?*) Julie?

DIANE. The baby sitter.

NICK. *Our babysitter?!*

DIANE. Who is not quite *eighteen*. YOU CANNOT BRING THIS UP. Louise is *testing them*. She leaves them alone together. Has Trevor drive Julie home late at night. Just to see.

NICK. Why don't I get babysitter action like this?!

DIANE. (*Knows he's joking.*) Because I trust you.

*She gives him a quick kiss and begins to light the candles.*

NICK. Still. Carte blanche.

DIANE. *Once.*

NICK. It's a free pass. He's gotta use it.

DIANE. Maybe he already has.

NICK. No way.

DIANE. Like you'd know.

NICK. Of course I'd know.

DIANE. You don't hang out.

NICK. What?

DIANE. You and Trevor. You used to always—

NICK. We hang out. We still—

DIANE. Not like you used to. You used to play poker over at Charlie's—you used to—

NICK. Trevor's busy—I'm busy—it's—

DIANE. Not like you were.

NICK. Huh?

DIANE. You're not busy like you used to be—I mean you're—

NICK. I'm busy having *conversations like this one*—

DIANE. Okay—

NICK. —so something's gotta give.

*Beat.*

DIANE. So you know he's sewing.

NICK. He's *what*?

DIANE. Louise says Trevor's taken up sewing. Well...*mending*, really. Stitching up a hem on her skirt, a tear in his coat, stuff like that. He says it "meets a need."

*(Off Nick's look.)* This never came up in any of the *man-talks* you never have?

NICK. Never once.

DIANE. I should get dressed.

*Nick lights the remainder of the candles.*

Oh—and you can't bring up their house.

NICK. Okay...

DIANE. Louise and Trevor's remodel is a total disaster—everything's ground to a halt.

NICK. (*This hits a nerve.*) I could have told them.

DIANE. Yes, we know—

NICK. If they'd dared to hire *me* to do the design, instead of that prick, Ohlendorfer—

DIANE. —*we've been through all of this, Nick!*

NICK. (*Terse.*) What else can't I bring up?

DIANE. Anything about our vacation.

NICK. To Italy? That was nearly a year ago.

DIANE. Still: You shouldn't bring it up. Trevor and Louise didn't go anywhere *nearly as nice as we did*, so—

NICK. Right, okay. What about Pam and Charlie?

DIANE. Don't bring up Pam's dad. The Alzheimer's is much worse.

NICK. And Charlie—anything?

DIANE. Just the normal: God, Church, Faith, stuff like that.

NICK. Right, right.

DIANE. Oh and I forgot to have you buy ice, so Trevor said he'd stop and get some.

NICK. *You can never have too much ice.*

*Beat.*

DIANE. Thank you, Brandy.

(*Off his look.*) That's a "Brandy-ism," right? After nearly eight years, I thought I'd heard 'em all.

NICK. Yes, in fact it is a "Brandy-ism."

DIANE. Whaddya know.

NICK. So I can still surprise you?

DIANE. (*Wry.*) With little pearls of wisdom that your *ex-wife* used to say: Yes, apparently, you can still surprise me.

*Nick starts toward the kitchen—*

Nick...

NICK. Hmm?

# RANCHO MIRAGE

by Steven Dietz

*"I used to believe my life was something out there, some wonderful thing that hadn't happened yet...but there is not some other thing that's going to be our lives. Our lives are this."*

3M, 4W

RANCHO MIRAGE is a biting funny black comedy about what happens when the fictions that hold our lives together are exposed. In this sharp and surprising sojourn into the psyche of modern-day America—where affluence is perhaps our greatest mirage—three couples, long-time friends, find themselves at a dinner party where everyone finally decides to tell the truth. RANCHO MIRAGE asks what connects us when our youth, our dreams, and our last bottle of wine are gone.

*"...[an] enlightening comic gem with raw realistic undertones...this rapid-fire comedy is a roller coaster of witty banter... Dietz crafts brilliance into his script... Dietz is a master when it comes to building tension into a scene and molds stunning twists and shocking curveballs into the plot..."*  
—**DCMetroTheaterArts.com**

*"... witty... well-crafted... a scathing satire of life in a gated community that is frequently hilarious and occasionally moving. ... brilliantly structured..."*  
—**Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)**

*"Rife with recognizable aches as well as biting laughs...sharp-tongued... RANCHO MIRAGE arrives as fulsome theater not easy sitcom, laughs aplenty, lessons intact."*  
—**The Denver Post**

*"Dietz serves up a sumptuous menu of topical themes while skewering the denizens who believe their privileged lives should cloak them from suffering the indignities of the less advantaged. ... unsettling, yet comical... totally entertaining..."*  
—**TalkinBroadway.com**

**Also by Steven Dietz**  
HALCYON DAYS  
LAST OF THE BOYS  
ROCKET MAN  
and others

**DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.**

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