

15<sup>th</sup>



The Actors Company Theatre  
15TH ANNIVERSARY

**CRYSTAL  
GALA**

HONORING  
**JULIE HARRIS**  
Monday, March 3, 2008  
at the historic  
Hudson Theatre

15TH ANNIVERSARY  
**CRYSTAL  
GALA**  
HONORING  
**JULIE HARRIS**

We are proud to celebrate the 15th Anniversary of The Actors Company Theatre with our Guest of Honor, the legendary **JULIE HARRIS**. Please join us in raising our glasses in tribute to her sparkling career and achievements. Ms. Harris' artistry, integrity, and longevity provide inspiration to all of us determined to keep the art of great acting alive and thriving. Her luminous presence is sure to make this an extraordinary evening for **TACT** and our treasured supporters. Joining the company to salute Ms. Harris will be some of the theatre's most illustrious stars, including: **F. Murray Abraham, Tyne Daly, Blythe Danner, Rosemary Harris, Cady Huffman, Dana Ivey, Ann Meara, Lee Roy Reams, Rufus Sewell, K.T. Sullivan, Jerry Stiller**, and others to be announced.

For more information, please call the **TACT** Office, **212-645-8228**

**Crystal Gala Committee:**

Elaine Wolbrom, Chair, Nora Chester, Linda Greenberg, Warren Handelman, Cynthia Harris, Stephen Lindenmuth, Susan Mindel, Margaret Nichols, Louise Schraa, Ashley West

Gala printing generously donated by **The Mines Press, Inc.**

Don't miss Tennessee Williams' **THE ECCENTRICITIES OF A NIGHTINGALE** at the Clurman Theatre 24 April 27 through May 24



Winter News 2007/08

900 Broadway Suite 905 New York, NY 10003

The **ACTORS** COMPANY THEATRE



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15<sup>th</sup>

TACTics

tact

Vol. 15 No.2

Winter 2007/08

The **ACTORS** COMPANY THEATRE Newsletter  
Scott Alan Evans, Cynthia Harris and Simon Jones, Co-Artistic Directors

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What the critics are saying about our productions:

achingly beautiful  
*The New York Times*

brilliant  
*Time Out New York*

thoroughly enchanting  
*Theatermania.com*

☆☆☆☆  
a superlative production  
*Time Out New York*

positively virtuosic  
*The New York Times*

poignant  
*Curtain Up*

simply exquisite  
*The New York Times*

as good as theater gets  
*Stage and Cinema.com*

Discovering a **Williams Classic**

Director Jenn Thompson on *Eccentricities*

I first came across Tennessee Williams' *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* several years ago when I was cast as "Miss Alma" (its breathless and breathtaking heroine) at a regional theatre in the middle of the country. At the time I was surprised there was a Tennessee Williams play I had never heard of, but quickly realized I was far from alone. I was also instantly moved by its depth and language, which read like poetry on the page, yet played with a sharp contemporary flair on the stage. Rarely done regionally and not seen in New York since its premiere in 1976, I couldn't understand how a play of this momentous worth, by one of the world's greatest playwrights, had managed to slip through the cracks.

I came home to New York brimming with questions. Why had this play been ignored for so long? Why weren't actresses across the globe beseeching theatres to do it? Ironically enough, I even recall asking fellow **TACT** company member and friend, Mary Bacon, if she had ever read or heard of the play? She hadn't. "It's a great part for you Mary," I enthused. "If you ever get the chance to do it - you must!" A tiny seed was planted.

Tennessee Williams was famous for rewriting his work. In fact, it was practically an obsession. Fourteen of his full length plays have been published in different versions, some with minor changes and others with completely different endings or even titles. His close friend Maria Britneva said that Williams "was never satisfied with anything."

**Williams Classic** continues on page 5



The **ACTORS** COMPANY THEATRE presents

The **ECCENTRICITIES OF A NIGHTINGALE**

by Tennessee Williams  
Directed by Jenn Thompson

April 27 through May 24 only!  
Clurman Theatre at Theatre Row  
410 West 42nd Street, NYC

**ALL SEATS JUST \$20\*\***

On line: [www.ticketcentral.com](http://www.ticketcentral.com)  
Phone: Ticket Central 212/279-4200  
or visit the Theatre Row Box Office



with Mary Bacon\*\*, Nora Chester\*\*, Francesca Di Mauro\*\*, Todd Gearhart\*, Larry Keith\*\*, Darrie Lawrence\*\*, Greg McFadden\*\*, James Prendergast\*\*, & Scott Schafer\*\*

Scenic Design <b>Bill Clarke</b>	Lighting Design <b>Lucrecia Briceno</b>	Costume Design <b>David Toser+</b>
Sound Design <b>Daryl Bornstein+</b>	Original Music <b>Jonthan Faiman+</b>	
Assistant Director <b>Jay Cohen</b>		

\*Member of Actors Equity Association  
\*\*TACT Company Member  
\*\*additional charges may apply.  
Cast information and subject to availability  
An AEA Approved Showcase.

Our 2007/08 season is made possible with public funds from the **New York State Council on the Arts**, a State agency and is supported in part by public funds from the **New York City Department of Cultural Affairs**



tact

1. takt; 2. taet, n.  
dedicated to presenting *infrequently-seen* plays of *literary merit* with an emphasis on creating theatre from its essence: the text and the actor's ability to bring it to life.

**Infrequently-seen:** *adj. phrase.* unproduced in a first-class production in NYC within the last 15 years.  
**Literary merit:** *n.* laudable language of particular interest, uniqueness; or representative of a specific period or era.  
With original incidental musical scores commissioned exclusively for our production through a unique partnership with **The Manhattan School of Music.**

a lovely sensitive production that leaves one deeply moved...

Wolf Entertainment

Winter Newsletter

2007/2008

# COMPANY NEWS

Compiled by Scott Schafer

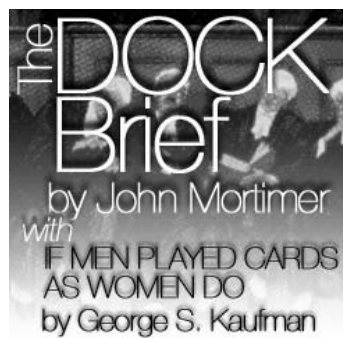
## Rounding out the Salon Series:



Feb. 9 - 11, 2008  
at the TACT Studio

With TACT Members: Sean Arbuckle, Jamie Bennett, Richard Ferrone, Simon Jones, Larry Keith, James Murtaugh, John Plumpis, James Pendergast, Scott Schafer, and guests: Shannon Michael Wamser & David Christopher Wells

Directed by Gregory Salata  
Original Music by Amir Khosrowpour  
Stage Manager - Mel McCue



March 8 - 10  
at the TACT Studio

With TACT member: Larry Keith  
and guest: John Horton

Directed by John Plumpis

For more information or to make reservations (required), please call the TACT Office:  
212/645-8228

The holidays are over, a new year has begun, and TACTORS continue to pop up on stages everywhere!

**NEW MEMBERS!** The company welcomes **JOHN P. GORDON** to our Board of Directors and **AMIR KHOSROWPOUR**, composer, to our Adjunct Company. John Gordon is the President and founder of USA Corporate Services Inc, a 24 year old New York City firm that helps entrepreneurs and nonprofits with their startup compliance and insurance needs. He is a recent graduate of the Global Executive MBA program, a combined program of Columbia University and London Business School that recruits talented business people from around the world into a diverse and sophisticated learning environment. John is a life-long theatre lover.

Amir began his association with TACT two years ago when he composed the original music (and songs) for *The Cherry Sisters Revisited*. Since then Amir has worked on 6 TACT productions, most recently, *The Andersonville Trial*.

**SEAN ARBUCKLE** spent a fantastic winter traveling, managing to see both the Acropolis in Athens and the Grand Canyon. This spring he'll return to the Stratford Shakespearean Festival (note its slightly different name!) in Canada, where he will be playing Cliff in *Cabaret* and Talthylbius in *The Trojan Women*.

**MARY BACON** is currently playing Gillian and Magda and Tom Stoppard's *Rock 'n' Roll* on Broadway (currently running until March 9th). Mary has also shot a *Criminal Intent* and a new *Law and Order*.

**JAMIE BENNETT** spent the holidays in Dallas where his in-laws taught him to deep-fry a turkey. Jamie gratefully reports "everyone's relatively healthy, although our doxie has some weird rash." (By the time this goes to print, I am SURE that will be all cleared up...)

**EVE BIANCO** and children are busy packing for their move back to the city in February ("and we can't wait")! Eve has also been busy recording books on tape.

**CYNTHIA DARLOW** reports she is "in full recovery mode from bilateral total knee replacement surgery. This has been the toughest physical challenge I've ever faced. Fortunately, the worst is behind me." She will be recording another *Murder She Wrote* the end of this month, and continues to be the spokeswoman for Meijer Stores in the Midwest. Cynthia's audiobook recordings were highlighted in AUDIOFILE Magazine's 2007 yearbook for her excellent recordings (Congratulations, Cynthia, and we all look forward to you skipping across a TACT stage very soon.)

**FRANCESCA DI MAURO** is a busy lady: busy with voiceovers: mostly commentaries, documentaries

"fascinating," and industrials "interesting, not as fascinating"...busy at her daughter's school PS/IS187 where she is the Vice President of the Parents' Association, BookPALS Coordinator & Reader, and member of the School Leadership Team. Francesca reports, "In my spare time, I am busy with auditions, family, homework, play dates and sleepovers. I am looking forward to upcoming TACT appearances and a week in Paris in March.

**SCOTT ALAN EVANS** continues to keep out of trouble as best he can. In fact, this Spring, will be completely trouble free as he won't have a spare moment. Besides his many TACT duties, such as overseeing the Salon Series, helping to plan the big GALA (March 3<sup>rd</sup>), and getting the production of *Eccentricities* rolling along, in March Scott will be directing a particularly interesting concert for The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: Joseph Hayden's *The Seven Last Words*. Then in April, he'll be directing a production of *The Constant Wife* by Somerset Maugham for the Graduate Acting Program of NYU.

**MARY LOUISE GEIGER** reports a very busy fall. Not only did she light our recent production of *The Runner Stumbles*, ML also lit *Arsenic And Old Lace* at Great Lakes in Cleveland, *The Women* at ACT in Seattle, *Crimes Of The Heart* at Playmakers in Chapel Hill, NC, and a one man Christmas show "in which a guy tells us the story of the movie *It's A Wonderful Life* called *This Wonderful Life* in Pittsburgh. It was charming, actually." This winter brings *The Miracle Worker* at Papermill, *Mad 7* at McCarter, and 2 operas in LA in the Spring.

**DELPHI HARRINGTON** will be starting off the New Year playing Mary Tyrone in a reading of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* at the NY Theatre Workshop. She was "brushing up her Shakespeare" with Dakin Matthews of Old Globe fame and worked on *Witness For The Prosecution* at TACT.

**CYNTHIA HARRIS** will leave for California at the end of March to appear in the new Richard Greenberg play currently titled *The Injured Party* at the South Coast Repertory Theatre. Before Cynthia heads west she will participate in the Symphony Space 30th Birthday Bash on March 10th. And, before any of that, Cynthia will be busy making sure that our TACT 15th Anniversary Gala (Mark your calendars for March 3<sup>rd</sup>) is going to be a marvelous event. As most of you know, TACT benefits are legendary and this special anniversary year gala will top them all, so get your tickets while you can!

**SIMON JONES** has recently returned from the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, where he played 60 performances of Brian Friel's latest play, *The Home Place*, to widespread critical acclaim. Simon has recorded two more audiobooks: *Charlie Bone And The Beast* by Jenny Nimmo for Scholastic, and *Predictable Irrationality* by Dan Ariely for Harper Collins. Also due out soon: *The Labrador Pact* by

The Actors Company Theatre's production is just about everything one could want in theater

New York Theatre Wire

Winter Newsletter



## TACT Lights Up the Sky in PA

TACT's annual summer sojourn to the beautiful Susquehanna River Valley took place again last July. The program, now in its ninth year, features a special theatre workshop for the high school students at the Upward Bound program at Bloomsburg University and a performance by the company at the Degenstein Center at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove.

TACT presented *Light Up The Sky* by Moss Hart (TACT 1997/98) with a cast that included company members: **Mary Bacon, Jamie Bennett, Cynthia Harris, Simon Jones, Jack Koenig, and James Murtaugh**, and guests **Bonnie Black, Curzon Dobell, Joel Rooks, and Dana Smith-Croll**. **Scott Alan Evans** directed and **Amir Khosrowpour** (our newest company member), created the music. Our stage was also graced with three local "actors" who portrayed the rowdy and boisterous Shriners in the play: **Sam Craig, Bob Gronlund and Roger Lyons**.

Mary, Jack, Jamie, Amir and Scott also conducted the workshop for the students of the Upward Bound program. This was the first time the workshop included a TACT's composers, and it was a great addition. Working with the 60 participants, TACT's teaching artists led the group through a series of warm-ups, and exercises, which culminated in the creation of five improvised scenes based on the story of Snow White, each told in a different style - including one that was a musical! The results were hilarious and extremely creative. This is the fourth year TACT has worked with Upward Bound and the experience continues to be very gratifying.

Once again, our program was made possible by a generous grant from the **Degenstein Foundation**, to whom we are eternally grateful. Special thanks also goes to The Pennsylvanian Committee: **Nancy and Samuel Craig, Lore Degenstein, Dede and Robert Gronlund, Clayton and David Lightman, Kay and Roger Lyons, Ruth Anderson and William Payn, Gayle and Charles Pollock, Nancy Rizzo, Rose Marie and Fredric Schluter, Sandra and Gary Sojka, Connie Timm and Neil Anderson, Joanne and David Wilson, and Janet Weis**, for making the trip such a success. TACT is particularly grateful to the generosity of Susquehanna University, and its President, **Jay Lemons**, and his wife **Marsha**, and to **Ruth and Cliff Melberger** for all their amazing support.

But most of all, we thank our Chairman, **Stephen Lindenmuth**, who's tireless dedication and great enthusiasm and exceptional generosity made the event such an enormous success.

## COMPANY NEWS continued from page 6

Matt Haig for Highbridge. He also made his debut in December at the Algonquin's famed cabaret venue, The Oak Room, performing *The Letters Of Noel Coward*, edited by Barry Day (who brought us *Long Island Sound*, TACT's first Off Broadway venture), and he makes a surprise appearance in the Broadway production of *The 39 Steps*.

**DARRIE LAWRENCE** spent the holidays in Salt Lake City at the Pioneer Theatre playing Betty Meeks in *The Foreigner* and is now under study to Brenda Wehle (Mrs. Coffman, the neighbor) in Manhattan Theatre Club's Broadway production of *Come Back, Little Sheba* with S. Epatha Merkerson (Darrie says she's absolutely fab) directed by Michael Pressman (who directed the TACT Salon production of the play in our 05/06 season). In her always gracious and funny way Darrie reports, "I pray daily for Brenda's continued good health." (As do we, Darrie, although we would love the chance to see YOU in the role!)

**JAMES MURTAUGH** spent a "magical evening" at the Met Gala on New Years Eve. Jim reports, "...saw a fabulous *Romeo Et Juliette* and then a black tie dinner dance afterwards on the grand tier overlooking the Lincoln Center fountain and the beautifully decorated tree. Danced, ate and drank champagne with the cast and guests until 1:30 AM." (It does sound magical!)

**JOHN PLUMPIS** reports that he "is happy to be back with TACT after five years on tour with *The Lion King*." He has recently been resettling into the city and a new apartment with his "lovely and amazing new wife Celia." They were married on October 8th at the historic Southern Theatre in Columbus, Ohio, and honeymooned in England, Scotland and Wales.

**JAMES PRENDERGAST** wins the award for TACTOR MOST TRAVELLED. He continues to travel the globe in the name of corporate theatre. Coming up are trips to Tokyo, Dubai, Munich (again) to say nothing of San Diego, Sherman Oaks, and Bethesda. (Any room in that suitcase for a stow-away, James?)

**SCOTT SCHAFER** has been eating flies in the loony bin as Renfield in a production of *Dracula* at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park followed by a run at the Repertory Theatre of St Louis. The production was "perfectly" directed by Stephen Hollis, who has directed several shows for TACT, most recently last season's *Dandy Dick*. The holidays were cele-



Top of page: students of the Upward Bound program listen to TACT teachers. Above: Students improvising

brated in Maryland with his in-laws, followed by a visit to his sisters' new home in Pittsburgh. "Most of it is a blur", as Scott admits to discovering Paula Dean's recipe for "Velveeta fudge" and spending most of the holidays in a bit of a sugar coma!

**DAVID STALLER** continues his work as the artistic director and founder of the Gingold Theatrical Group, which is just beginning the third of its four-year PROJECT SHAW series, devoted to presenting presentations of every play ever written by George Bernard Shaw. (Projectshaw.com). GTG is also producing the PRESS CUTTINGS: NEW PLAYS series. The writers chosen for this program are all currently theatrical critics, following Shaw's lead.

**ASHLEY WEST** is actually heading west, traveling to Colorado Springs to play Elvira in *Blithe Spirit*. Then in mid-February she's off to St. Louis, to reprise the role of Izzy in *Rabbit Hole* at the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis.

So there you have it, lots of exciting work involving our TACTORS, personal and professional. Before your next trip, make sure to check what cities your favorite company members are working in. And remember that TACT is well represented in New York too! In addition to the work already mentioned, don't miss **Kyle Fabel** in *The Farnsworth Invention* and **Jack Koenig** in *The Lion King*. Broadway has never before been so TACTFULLY lit!

tact  
The ACTORS COMPANY THEATRE  
Scott Alan Evans, Cynthia Harris & Simon Jones  
Co-Artistic Directors

**COMPANY**  
Sean Arbuckle, Mary Bacon, Jamie Bennett, Eve Bianco, Nora Chester, Cynthia Darlow, Francesca Di Mauro, Kyle Fabel, Richard Ferrone, Rachel Fowler, Delphi Harrington, Kelly Hutchinson, Larry Keith, Jack Koenig, Darrie Lawrence, Ron McClary, Greg McFadden, James Murtaugh, Margaret Nichols, John Plumpis, James Prendergast, Gregory Salata, Scott Schafer, David Staller, Jenn Thompson, Ashley West, Lynn Wright

**ADJUNCT COMPANY**  
Daryl Bornstein, Dawn Dunlop, Jonathan Faiman, Mary Louise Geiger, Amir Khosrowpour, David Macdonald, Colin McGrath, Marcus Paus, Yuzuru Sadashige, John Slover, Jonathan Smith, David Toser

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TACT is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and a member of the Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York

# The Season Round-Up

Winter Newsletter  
2007/2008

Winter Newsletter  
2007/2008

The **ACTORS** COMPANY THEATRE

Mainstage Season  
at Theatre Row  
410 West 42nd St. NYC

## THE RUNNER STUMBLES

by Milan Stitt  
Directed by **Scott Alan Evans**  
October 27 through November 24

with **Jamie Bennett\***, **Cynthia Darlow\***, **Christopher Halladay\***, **Chris Hietikko\***, **Julie Jesneck\***, **Christina Bennett Lind\***, **Mark L. Montgomery\***, **James Murtaugh\*+**, **Ashley West\*+**

PSM Assistant Director ASM  
**Dawn Dunlop\*** **Barry Satchwell Smith** **Mel McCue**  
Press & Publicity General Manager  
**Joe Trentacosta/Springer Associates PR** **Cathy Bencivenga**  
Sound design by Props Music by  
**Daryl Bornstein** **Esther Neff** **Joseph Trapanese**  
Scenic design by Costume design by Lighting design by  
**Dana Moran Williams** **David Toser** **Mary Louise Geiger**

\* member Actors' Equity Assoc.  
+TACT company Member



Left: James Murtaugh and Jamie Bennett.  
Right: Mark Montgomery and Chris Hietikko

Top: Mark Montgomery. Center: Cynthia Darlow Above: Ashley West

## The New York Times

By ANNE MIDGETTE  
Published: November 12, 2007

Images of metal bars, white on black like Wedgwood patterning, run around the shallow stage where the Actors Company Theater revival of "The Runner Stumbles" is set. The bars sometimes denote a prison, sometimes a church confessional; often the sense of constraint that fetters the lead characters, a priest and a nun; and always the eye to detail that makes this production, directed by Scott Alan Evans, so compelling.

That kind of detail also informs every moment of Mark L. Montgomery's performance as Father Rivard, a priest on trial for the murder of a nun. At the start, defeat is etched in the lines of his body: his clothes don't quite seem to fit him and his arms are held stiffly, as if he were not fully inhabiting a body that has grown strange to him. As the play progresses in flashback, he recreates the passionate young priest he once was and then demonstrates, step by step, exactly how he got from then to now: beaten down by his superiors, constricted by the rules of the church, reining in his passions with such an iron hand that what remains is a shell of a man on the brink of sanity, his eyes in his rawboned face flickering now deep feeling, now madness.

The play is not flawless, but it certainly has legs. Written by Milan Stitt, set in 1911 and based on a true story, it had a successful run on Broadway beginning in 1976. It was revived at the Circle Rep with William Hurt and, in 1979, made into a film with Dick Van Dyke. But since then it has become the kind of neglected work on which this fine company, now in its 15th season, seems to thrive.

The performances are strong across the board. Cynthia Darlow is positively virtuosic as Mrs. Shandig, playing Father Rivard's devoted and addled housekeeper as an elderly woman with a thick German accent. The idealistic young nun Sister Rita, for whose death Father Rivard is on trial, is a tricky role that borders on stereotype — think of Maria von Trapp in "The Sound of Music" — but Ashley West invests her with her own square-jawed integrity. Among the good supporting cast, Julie Jesneck is particularly notable in a small but effective role as a member of Father Rivard's flock.

Even the music, by Joseph Trapanese, is precise and evocative: a montage of church songs and courtroom speeches that blend and fade into wistful, ringing melodies.



Salon Series  
at the TACTStudio  
900 Broadway, NYC

SEPT. 29 - OCTOBER 1  
**A SHOT IN THE DARK**  
By Marcel Archard,  
adapted by Harry Kurnitz

Directed by **Draw Barr**  
Music by **Sung J. Hong**  
SM: **Kristin Vaphides**

With company members: **Delphi Harrington, Margaret Nichols, James Prendergast, Gregory Salata, Lynn Wright** and guests: **David Christopher Wells, Michael Anderson**

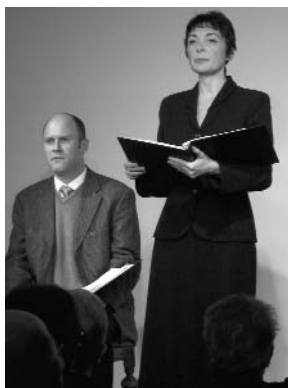


Margaret Nichols and David Christopher Wells in *A Shot in the Dark*. September 2007

DECEMBER 8 - 10  
**MY 3 ANGELS**  
By Sam & Bella Spewack

Directed by **Jenn Thompson**  
Music by **Amir Khosrowpour**  
SM: **Syche Hamilton**

with company members: **Francesca Di Mauro, Cynthia Harris, James Murtaugh, Margaret Nichols, John Plumpis, James Prendergast, Gregory Salata**, and guests **Todd Gearhart, Matt Fraley, David Christopher Wells**



Top: Simon Jones as Sir Wilfrid Robarts. Above: Sean Arbuckle and Francesca Di Mauro as Lenord Vole and Romaine Vole in *Witness for the Prosecution*. January 2008

JANUARY 12 - 14  
**WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION**  
By Agatha Christie

Directed by **Harris Yulin**  
Music by **John Slover**  
SM: **Syche Hamilton**

With company members: **Sean Arbuckle, Francesca Di Mauro, Richard Ferrone, Delphi Harrington, Simon Jones, Larry Keith, James Murtaugh, John Plumpis, Gregory Salata, Scott Schafer, Lynn Wright** and guests: **Michael Anderson, Nicola Victoria Buck**



Seated: Francesca Di Mauro, Margaret Nichols, James Prendergast. Standing: Gregory Salata, John Plumpis and Todd Gearhart in *My 3 Angels*. December 2007

We're asking company members to name their favorite five roles with TACT. Larry Keith is a Founding Member of the company...

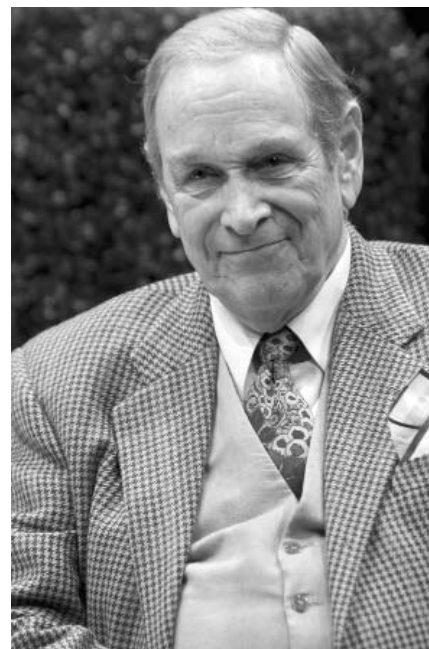
## Larry Keith MY FAVE 5



As the Unidentified Guest in *The Cocktail Party* by T.S. Eliot



As Captain Shotover in *Heartbreak House* by Bernard Shaw



As Harry in *Home* by David Storey

When I was asked to write about my five favorite TACT roles, it proved to be harder than I thought it would be. To be sure, actors do have favorite roles, but in looking back over what I've done with TACT, it's not easy to pick "faves."

All roles offer a challenge, whether they're leading or supporting, and in a company like TACT, we embrace large and small roles alike. At least I try to, ego notwithstanding.

What matters more to me is what we're able to accomplish and what many might consider unlikely, if not impossible: the ability to bring to our audiences the essence of the play without scenery, sets or costumes, but by creating reality through use of words, text, context, character and performance, allowing the audience to fill in the rest through imagination. It is most satisfying to be part of an acting company which has crated a personal relationship with a loyal, supportive and appreciative audience. Without all of you, there's no reason for us to exist.

That said, we still can't ignore the Ego part! So, among the roles I have enjoyed, I must note the following: solving the mysteries of HARRY in *Home* was a formidable challenge.



As Sheridan Whitesides in *The Man Who Came to Dinner* by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman



As the Caesar in *Androcles and the Lion* by Bernard Shaw

The stripping away of his ability to disguise his isolation, pain and hopelessness was heart-breaking. Playing the UNIDENTIFIED GUEST in T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*, a role created by Alec Guinness, was wonderful fun. I loved the mystery of it. And who wouldn't want to portray CAPTAIN SHOTOVER in Shaw's *Heartbreak House*, or CAESAR in his *Androcles and the Lion*, a role originally done by Noel Coward (a theatre giant, with whom I had the honor of working in the Broadway production of his *High Spirits*). But for sheer fun, the role of SHERIDAN WHITESIDE in George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart's *The Man Who Came to Dinner* take the prize. Scheming, manipulating, dominating, the character of "Sherry" is an actor's gift.

But I suspect I may have a couple of new "faves" to add to the list soon. In March, after the upcoming reading of the wonderfully funny *Dock Brief* by John Mortimer, which I hope you all will come and see (TACT Studio, March 8, 9, & 10 - I think you'll love it.) I'm sure to add the role of Fowle. And then in April/May when I'll be tackling the fascinating role of Rev. Winemiller in TACT's Mainstage production of *Eccentricities*.

## TACT & Tennessee a BARNES & NOBLE Event

FREE!

Tuesday, April 15th  
7:00 PM

Barnes & Noble  
2289 Broadway (at 82nd St.) New York, NY

Join TACT company members for an insightful look at the life and work of one of the world's greatest playwrights! Reading from *The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams, Vol. 2: 1945-1957* by Albert J. Devlin (Author), Tennessee Williams (Author), Nancy Marie Patterson Tischler (Editor) - along with chosen scenes from some of Williams' most stirring dramas, **The Actors Company Theatre** sheds light on Tennessee's most intimate feelings about his dramatic process. Seating is on a first come first served basis so mark your calendars now!

- 1911** March 26. Thomas Lanier Williams is born in Columbus, Mississippi.
- 1927** Wins third place in a national essay contest sponsored by *The Smart Set* magazine.
- 1929** Attends University of Missouri.
- 1931** Withdraws from school due to family pressure. Works in a St. Louis shoe factory.
- 1937** *Candles to the Sun* and *The Fugitive Kind*, produced by Mummies of St. Louis.
- 1938** Graduates from the University of Iowa.
- 1939** Moves to New Orleans and changes his name to "Tennessee" - the state of his father's birth.
- 1944** December 26. *The Glass Menagerie* premieres at the Lyric Theatre in Chicago.
- 1945** March 31. *The Glass Menagerie* opens on Broadway at the Playhouse. Receives the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play.
- 1947** December 3. *A Streetcar Named Desire* opens at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Broadway. Receives first Pulitzer Prize. Williams meets and falls in love with Frank Merlo.
- 1948** October 6. *Summer and Smoke* opens at the Music Box Theatre on Broadway.
- 1951** February 3. *The Rose Tattoo* opens at the Martin Beck Theatre on Broadway. Receives Tony Award for Best Play. **Completely rewrites *Summer and Smoke* for upcoming London premiere. New title: *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*. It is rejected.**
- 1953** March 17. *Camino Real* opens at the National Theatre on Broadway.
- 1955** March 24. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opens at the Morosco Theatre on Broadway. Receives his second Pulitzer Prize and another Tony Award for Best Play.
- 1956** Screenplay for *Baby Doll*. *Time* magazine calls film "just possibly the dirtiest American-made motion picture that has ever been legally exhibited."
- 1957** March 21. *Orpheus Descending* opens at the Martin Beck Theatre on Broadway.
- 1959** March 10. *Sweet Bird of Youth* opens at the Martin Beck Theatre on Broadway.
- 1960** November 10. *Period of Adjustment* opens at the Helen Hayes Theatre on Broadway.
- 1961** December 28. *The Night of the Iguana* opens at the Royale Theatre on Broadway, earning Williams another Tony Award for Best Play.
- 1963** January 16. *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* opens at the Morosco Theatre on Broadway.
- 1964** **Rewritten version of *Summer and Smoke* is published as *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*.** His partner, Frank Merlo, dies of lung cancer and Williams falls into a deep depression that will last for a decade.
- 1968** March 27. *The Seven Descents of Myrtle* opens at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Broadway. It closes after only 29 performances.
- 1973** March 1. *Out Cry* opens at the Lyceum Theatre on Broadway. It closes after only 12 performances.
- 1976** **November 23. *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* opens at the Morosco Theatre on Broadway.**
- 1977** May 11. *Vieux Carré* opens at the St. James Theatre on Broadway. It closes after only 6 performances.
- 1980** March 26. *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* opens at the Cort Theatre on Broadway. It closes after only 14 performances.
- 1983** February 24 Tennessee Williams dies in his New York City residence at the Hotel Elysee. According to official reports, he choked to death on a bottle cap. He is buried in St. Louis, Missouri.



## Mary Bacon and Alma Winemiller

**Mary Bacon, TACT company member since 2001, and currently appearing on Broadway in Tom Stoppard's *Rock n' Roll*, spoke to us recently about her upcoming role in TACT's production of *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*:**

**TACT:** You're going to be playing this very interesting part, Alma Winemiller, really one of Tennessee Williams' most iconic characters. How did this come about?

**Mary Bacon:** Well, Jenn Thompson, [TACT company member and director of the production] first mentioned the play to me when she was thinking of suggesting it for TACT's Salon readings a year or two ago. So I read it and was instantly impressed by its intensity and intimacy. When Jenn told me this fall she was going to be directing the TACT Mainstage production of the play, and that she wanted to talk to me about Alma, I was flattered. Then I read it again – and got very nervous – I called her back – I felt I was nothing like Alma – she seemed hysterical, overwrought, overly-dramatic – all of her lines have exclamation points throughout them! I think of myself as very direct and straightforward. As the only girl with six older brothers, I tend to try to appear tough and together ... more of a grounded Stella – and Alma seemed more akin to Blanche – did Jenn want to recast? Jenn reassured me – simply asked me to calm down, and come to call-backs for the casting of Dr. John. As I was reading her lines aloud for the first time – I began to taste Alma's intense passion – it dawned on me that I had mistaken hysteria for a great hunger for life and intense interest in the world – she suddenly seemed more full of life than anyone around her, especially among the social duds and mores of Glorious Hill, Mississippi.

**TACT:** There are enormous differences between the Alma in *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* and the Alma in *Summer and Smoke*. We know that Williams wrote *Summer and Smoke* first, but was never satisfied with it, and was constantly rewriting it. When the London production of *Summer and Smoke* got underway in the early 1950s after its Broadway run, he presented the producers with *Eccentricities* – what they saw, apparently in some alarm, as a totally different play and which they felt unable to mount as the show that had run on Broadway.

**MB:** Well, they have different titles!

**TACT:** Exactly. Can you talk a bit about the differences in the two works?

**MB:** All I know was that Williams much preferred

this rewritten version, as he says on the dedication page in the acting edition. I am rereading *Summer and Smoke* now, and it is a very different play – the characters are different people. Alma in *Summer and Smoke* is constantly trying to reign John in, to improve him – characterized in that first scene when the girl Alma first gives the boy John handkerchiefs to clean his face. She later stops him from an imprudent marriage – a marriage and a rival that don't exist in *Eccentricities*. She is ever attempting to remind John of his inherent decency, his higher nobler nature. And John in *Summer and Smoke*, is a rake – boozing, womanizing, and tantalized by other women in the play – I think he resembles Stanley from *Streetcar*. In *Eccentricities*, we see the two as adults who rarely see each other, as John has been to college and is headed for a career and a life elsewhere. He's only back to visit his mother on holidays and there in Glorious Hill he finds this rare bird in the Alma he knew as a kid. Alma herself is more mature, more aware of her need for human connection than in *Summer and Smoke*, less interested in propriety – more aware of what's really valuable to her in life from the get-go, and aware of her potential to give the right man her full self – and that she



Preliminary costume designs for Alma Winemiller in *Eccentricities* by David Toser

may never get that chance. I prefer this Alma...but they are simply different plays, different people. Reminds me of what's been said of Shakespeare – that Kate in *Taming of the Shrew* was the template for Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, which is a later play. Beatrice is the Shrew with a strong voice and reason and feeling and sensuality. Not that Alma and *Summer and Smoke* lacks that capacity but I think Williams clearly desired to show this evolved more complex woman, and a more complex finely drawn John as well.

**TACT:** *Summer and Smoke* went ahead in London. And was subsequently filmed in an overwrought fashion by Peter Glenville with Geraldine Page and Laurence Harvey (Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide writes kindly that "torrid performances (made) up for frequent staginess.")

**MB:** Oh my!

**TACT:** There was also a rather famous Off-Broadway production which made Geraldine Page a star. Though we know Williams preferred his final rewrite, *Eccentricities* kind of disappeared. It surfaced again in 1964 when it was finally published, but it wasn't staged until 1976, 25 years after he wrote it. There hasn't been a production of it in New York since.

**MB:** Why?

**TACT:** We think by 1976, public fashion had really turned against Williams, and the piece was unfairly dismissed by audiences as another one of his latter less-ground-breaking works. The production only ran 24 performances, despite getting quite good notices. Most people didn't realize that the play actually came out of Williams' golden period.

**MB:** So TACT is presenting the first full production of this play in New York City since 1976? Wow! What a coup!

**TACT:** Yes, we actually had to get special permission from the Williams Estate to do it.

**MB:** That should generate some heated interest.

**TACT:** Are you still nervous about playing her? Do you find something in her you to relate to?

**MB:** I am thrilled and scared, which is always a good way to begin. I feel there is definitely something for me in her. She awes me. Alma is not afraid to be the sexual aggressor. She's a realist and a survivor when all is said and done. Her society thinks she is an hysteric, headed down the same path of mental illness as her mother. What I relate to – as one who wasn't taught how to flirt - in Alma's world, men are used to being flirted with, cajoled, and enticed. Alma's enticements are her passionate mind and that she is "supremely alive." Alma doesn't fit in. She's misunderstood by the world around her – everyone can relate to that.

**TACT:** You certainly aren't left with the impression that Alma's life is over at the end of the play...

**MB:** The ending is yet to be discovered in rehearsal! Look, now I am talking in exclamation points! I am infected by this play! I guess people will just have to come and see the production...

**TACT:** Indeed!

exquisite performances  
*The New York Times*



Williams Classic continued from page 1

He was always sitting down and correcting. He was never happy with what he had done." One of his most drastic rewrites was the complete overhaul of his 1947 play *Summer and Smoke*. The result was so different from its original that Williams gave the play a new title, *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*.

But despite it having been written at the height of Williams' career in 1951, *Eccentricities* would continue to live in the shadow of its hot and bothered predecessor. When it was finally published in 1964, Williams wrote in his notes, "Aside from the characters having the same names and the locale remaining the same, I think *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, is a substantially different play from *Summer and Smoke* and I prefer it. It is less conventional and melodramatic." He went on to add, "I hope that its publication in this volume may lead to a production and that the production may confirm my feeling that it is a better work than the play from which it derived." That production would not come until its Broadway premiere in 1976, and the timing could not have been worse for Williams, who was in the midst of a personal and professional downward spiral. Despite receiving positive reviews, it closed after only 24 performances.

A sensuous story of longing and rebellion, *Eccentricities* charts the delicate journey of Alma Winemiller, known as "the nightingale of the Delta," who lives in her stifling parents' home in a small-minded Southern town. Suppressed by her joyless father and ostracized by the community for her artistic temperament, she finds solace in her music – and in the secret lifelong love she has for the boy-next-door, turned handsome grown-up, Dr. John Buchanan. Driven by her desire for truth and beauty, Miss Alma finally confesses her longing to John and what emerges is one of the theatre's most startlingly modern and complex love stories.

A special affinity for the play's main character, Alma Winemiller, may have been the driving force for Williams' rewrites. "Alma may well be the best female portrait I have drawn in a play," Williams wrote. "She simply seemed to exist somewhere in my being and it was no effort to put her to paper." And while the play is still set shortly before the First World War in Glorious Hill, Mississippi (the mythical literary landscape mentioned in at least a dozen Williams plays), the *reconsidered* Alma of *Eccentricities* bears little resemblance to the repressed spinster of Williams' earlier work. A sensitive and misunderstood artist, this earthier, warm-blooded incarnation comes far closer to Williams' original vision of the character, found in his celebrated short stories "Yellow Bird" and "Oriflamme." Indeed, Williams so identified with "Miss Alma" that he declared her to be the dearest and most emotionally autobiographical character in any of his plays.

Perhaps the playwright's deeply felt connection to Alma is the key to what feels so immediate about the character and the play itself. Whereas the overwrought *Summer and Smoke* is a study of the black and white battle between the body and the soul, *Eccentricities* sets its sights on something infinitely more personal: the human search for authenticity. It resonates so clearly because it's something everyone can relate to and is found here with a grace and humanity that lives in its subtler shades of gray.

I am certain that *my* personal connection to Alma is what fuels my passion for this material. I don't think it's a total coincidence that soon after my exposure to the play I began to earnestly pursue the daunting transition from acting to directing. And so, it is with infinite pleasure, I find myself miraculously associated with a company dedicated to unearthing these kinds of buried treasures. I am thrilled to be a part of presenting this lost gem to New York audiences for the first time in over thirty years. It's about time.

Jenn Thompson

is a Company Member and the Associate Producer of TACT.