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Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe we are already running the final show of our second season in our beautiful new venue on Tudor Court. Arms and the Man is an exciting conclusion to another adventurous season. We hope you will enjoy reading this issue of The Brief Chronicle before you come to the theatre. We have created lobby displays with additional fascinating facts related to each production. Do be sure to peruse them, along with the expanded background information we include in your programs, either before or after the show.

Please don’t forget that The Subject Was Roses is simultaneously enjoying its long run into July at our theatre in Books on Vernon. Artistic Associate Shade Murray has breathed a wonderful contemporary vitality into this chestnut and filled its environs with pitch-perfect flavorings of nostalgia.

Next season presents a whole new realm of possibilities for theatrical exploration of the human condition. In keeping with our traditional variety of programming, we are including another great American play, a recent script of great wit and style and a wonderful, rarely-produced classic from a contemporary of Shakespeare. Bringing these gems to life will be another gathering of some of the finest actors in the country. You can read more about the selections on page 22.

Amidst all the excitement surrounding next season there is the ever present fact that producing theatre on such a professional yet intimate scale involves a great deal of skilled artisanship. Arms and the Man necessitates the hiring of seven actors, three understudies, a director, a set designer, a lighting designer, a sound designer, a costume designer, a props designer, a stage manager, a production assistant, a wardrobe mistress, a seamstress, a soundboard operator, two scenic painters, eight electricians, five carpenters and a technical director to oversee the building of the set. On hand at every performance, we have three staff members and a total of ten full-time employees supporting the entire organization. (By the way, most organizations our size would have around 20 full-time employees, but we focus resources heavily into our artists and maintain a leaner, very hard-working, highly motivated staff). Ticket prices cover less than half of this expense.

We thank all of you who have donated this season and have made so much depth and exploration possible. To those of you who have yet to donate, and to those of you who are moved to give more, we appeal to you to help bridge the gap between ticket sales and expenses and to send us boldly into another adventurous season.

We are also entrusted with the awesome responsibility of revealing the intricacies and nuances of the human condition. With the world in such turmoil, live theatre provides an opportunity for sharing, reflection and learning. We thank you for your participation and support.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Halberstam
Artistic Director
Jennifer Bielstein
Managing Director

Michael Halberstam
Artistic Director
Jennifer Bielstein
Managing Director
SCOGIN ON SHAW

Robert Scogin has enjoyed a long association with Writers’ Theatre having appeared in six productions, including Seagull and The Doctor’s Dilemma. His expertise in Shaw met its perfect union in 1996 when he was appointed Artistic Director of ShawChicago. Since then, he has produced and directed over 25 readings of plays by Shaw and his contemporaries. He shares with us some of his knowledge of Arms and the Man.

PRODUCTION HISTORY OF ARMS AND THE MAN

“Very few people would know anything about love if they hadn’t read about it.”
François La Rochefoucauld

In 1893 the actress Florence Farr received a large sum of money from another member of “The Golden Dawn,” an occult society to which she belonged. The money, donated by Annie Horniman, heir to the Horniman Tea fortune, was to be used to finance a season starring Farr at the Avenue Theatre in London.

Farr immediately asked each of her playwright friends, William Butler Yeats and George Bernard Shaw (G.B.S.), to write a play for the season. Yeats soon complied with his short play, The Land of Heart’s Desire, dedicated to Florence, and intended as a curtain raiser for the Shaw work. Even though Shaw’s play was to be the evening’s main attraction, he dawdled over the writing and no script was ready for the opening of the season. Farr turned in desperation to John Todhunter who gave her his play, A Comedy of Sighs, as a replacement for Shaw’s unfinished work. Todhunter’s play was a disaster, and the day after...
the opening Shaw received a telegram from the Avenue Theatre management pleading for the right to produce one of his works. He hastily put the finishing touches on Arms and the Man and delivered it to the theater.

Florence Farr played Louka in the first production.

Shaw's early working title for the play had been Alps and Balkans, and his friend Henry Salt suggested he call it Battlefields and Boudoirs, but he eventually settled on Arms and the Man, from the opening phrase of Dryden's translation of Virgil's (Publius Vergilius Maro) The Aeneid: "Of arms and the man I sing," this prompted Salt to compose the Ogden Nash-like doggerel:

Since G.B.S. from P.V.M.
For title took that ancient gem,
Arms and the Man, how many quote it?
How few give thought to him
who wrote it?
And now methinks it savors less
Of P.V.M. than G.B.S.

Arms and the Man began rehearsals on April 11th, 1894, and opened a mere ten days later on April 21. Needless to say, the actors were terrified. Writing of the premiere to his friend, Henry Arthur Jones, Shaw said:

"In Arms and the Man, I had the curious experience of witnessing an apparently insane success, with the actors and actresses almost losing their heads with the intoxication of laugh after laugh."

The critics agreed: "It was applauded," wrote G.K. Chesterton, "by that indescribable element in all of us which rejoices to see the genuine thing prevail against the plausible. "We laughed at it wildly, hysterically," said William Archer, "and I exhort the reader to go and do likewise."

When Shaw went on stage for a short curtain speech, he was greeted by deafening applause and braves from the audience. One young man, however, stood up and delivered a resounding "Boo!" "My dear fellow," Shaw responded, "I quite agree with you, but what are we against so many?"

The play ran for a total of 50 performances, and then toured the provinces. Arms and the Man was the first of Shaw's plays to be staged in America. Richard Mansfield produced the play in New York.

The American premiere took place at the Herald Square Theatre on September 17, 1894, with Mansfield in the role of Bluntschil, and his wife Beatrice Cameron as Raina.

"In Arms and the Man, I had the curious experience of witnessing an apparently insane success, with the actors and actresses almost losing their heads with the intoxication of laugh after laugh."

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
THE ROMANCE OF ARMS AND THE MAN

WILLIAM BROWN EXPLAINS THE POLITICS OF ROMANCE AND THE ROMANCE OF POLITICS

BY ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE SHADE MURRAY

Listening to director William Brown describe the opening moments of Arms and the Man, one envisions a perfect romantic scenario more closely associated with Puccini than Shaw. "Shaw set this in some idea of Bulgaria. So there's just enough distance, color, and romanticism that one can associate with Eastern Europe. On a cold snowy night, a beautiful young girl alone in her bedroom, wrapped in furs, is surprised by an enemy soldier who has shimmered up the drain pipe."

But despite our expectations of such a scene, the romantic ideal is quickly undercut by a pragmatic reality. "The soldier neither attacks, nor does he make love. They talk. And it's smart talk, and it's funny talk, and it's surprising talk. The fact that the soldier is muddy and tired and a fugitive also belies the romantic setting with which we've started. The fact that he may not be exactly what her idea of a soldier is belies the romantic setting in which we find ourselves. To a large extent, Arms and the Man is a riff on just that kind of juxtaposition, where a frequently romantic ideal is challenged by the cold facts of the case."

Arms and the Man is a comedy about the efforts we go to in order to live up to the perfect ideal - be it social, political or personal.

"One only has to look around the world we live in to see the ideals people try to uphold based on how they dress, what cars they drive, how big their houses are. And, in the bigger picture, the people we vote for, the wars we fight, the social and political ideals we hold sacred. Shaw is all about challenging these ideals."

Such a comic juxtaposition can be found in the play's setting, an aristocratic Bulgarian home, obvious in its attempts to appear Western. This Bulgarian family has their own notions of what Western society is, what's modern, what's top-drawer. They don't quite have the information to pull it off. It is making fun of the things that all of us do to impress."

"In terms of how that takes shape: costumer Rachel Healy brought in a sketch of the mother, who Shaw refers to as someone who will dress in a formal tea gown to have breakfast in the front yard. Now, she brought in an ink drawing that gave us the silhouette and details of something quite acceptable as an afternoon tea gown. But then we started talking about the fabric, or the color, or the accessories, you know perhaps she has an underskirt of a stripe that's just a little too broad for what this is trying to be. Perhaps there are too many jewels. Perhaps she wears a headpiece that's more appropriate for the evening. So we begin to have fun with aspirations and how we get them and how we don't achieve them. How we get it wrong becomes comic fodder here. And because it's such a well-written play - well-written, multi-dimensional characters - I don't think it's ever abusive, I don't think we're making fun of aspirations. But we'd all do well to look at ourselves and our ideals."

Those ideals include our visions of the perfect romance, the perfect relationship. "I think this is one of his sexiest plays," says Bill. "Setting it in far-off Bulgaria allows for a looser, earthier dynamic, in terms of the relationships. There are more man-woman scenes than in most Shaw plays I can think of, and they are always a 'Who's on top?' situation. This is illustrated in the play's quadrangle of fiery young lovers: Raina, a young aristocrat who learned about love strictly from romance novels and opera; Bluntschli, a mercenary who forsakes all ideals in the interest of self-preservation; Sergius, a soldier who cannot reconcile his celebrated war hero status with his personal oblandering, and Louka, a pragmatic servant who sees relationships in a socioeconomic light. Their high ideals are questioned and even abandoned as they find themselves in a romantic pursuit of one another."

"The play is equally about our need to romanticize politics, especially in times of warfare."

"Shaw really can't be bothered to tell us the details of this particular war and that's his point. It is more about how people have to translate war in order to deal with it. I think that we can see that in today's politics, where slogans and 'bumper sticker ideals' frequently trump the facts of the case. Shaw recognized these principles and has decided to mine them for comic value."

And in Bill's estimation, this is why Shaw reigns as the most frequently produced playwright at Writers' Theatre. "Shaw's work remains smart, funny, challenging, surprising, and sexy. And I don't know a lot of playwrights who can do that," he says.

Originally from Beckley, West Virginia, Bill attended West Virginia University as a music major. He received his Master's in acting from the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco.

Bill's first season at Writers' Theatre introduced him to audiences as both a director (The Glass Menagerie) and an actor (Private Lives). As a Writers' Theatre actor, Bill also appeared in Candida, Dear Master, Butley and Nixon's Nixon. Other Writers' Theatre directing credits include Incident at Vichy, Miasma, Rocket to the Moon, and Our Town.

In 2003, Bill was recognized alongside Kimberley Mellen as theatre's "Chicagoans of the Year" by the Chicago Tribune. Bill also received the Joseph Jefferson Award for Outstanding Actor in a leading role for his portrayal of Henry Kissinger in Nixon's Nixon.

Bill's recent and upcoming projects include directing Lady Windermere's Fan at Milwaukee Rep, Gymbeline at Montana Shakespeare and Henry V at Notre Dame.
In Shaw's Own Words

This interview, "A Talk with Mr. Shaw about His New Play," appeared in the *Pall Mall Budget*, April 19, 1894, with Shaw as both the interviewee and the interviewer:

"About this play of yours — Arms and the Man?" I said, as Mr. Bernard Shaw curled himself into an armchair in a certain club smoking room, after a morning of rehearsal at the Avenue.

"The scene is laid in Bulgaria," began Mr. Shaw.

"Why Bulgaria?" I asked.

"There is a place called Bulgaria, isn't there?" said Mr. Shaw anxiously, sitting up in his chair. I thought there was. But I wanted to know why he had selected it as the scene of a play.

"Well, let me give you the history of an idea," said Mr. Shaw. "A month or two ago I thought that Miss Farr would be wanting a play for her enterprise at the Avenue. It struck me that some interest might be got from the clash of romantic ideals with cold, logical democracy. The play was nearly finished before I had settled on its locality. I wanted a war as a background. Now I am absolutely ignorant of the Servo-Bulgarian war, which was the very thing. Put a Republican — say a Swiss — into the tyrant-ridden East, and there you are. So I looked up Bulgaria and Servia in an atlas, made all the names of the characters end in 'off,' and the play was complete."

"But what about local colour?" I asked. "Did you go to Bulgaria and live the life of the people, study their aspirations and?"

"Never heard of it until this year," replied Mr. Shaw. "But I thought of that. So I asked Stepniak, who is a friend of mine, to come and hear me read the play, and set me right on points of detail. He came, and brought with him the Admiral who had commanded the Bulgarian fleet during the war. I asked them to suggest bits of local colour. I told them that the play opened just after the first Servian victory.
"That won't do,' said the Admiral; 'there was no Servian victory.'

"Not even a cavalry skirmish?" I suggested.

"No," said the Admiral, 'the Bulgarians simply walked over.'

"Of course I should have asked Sidney Webb which side won the war. However, it was easy to make the victors Bulgarians instead of Servians.

"The heroine's father - a Bulgarian general - I proceeded, but the Admiral stopped me.

"That won't do,' he said. 'There were no Bulgarian generals. There was nobody in the army above the rank of major.'

"So I degraded the general, and went on to the heroine, who was a young lady of ancient lineage and high ideals. The Admiral stopped me again. 'That won't do,' he said. 'There is no ancient lineage in Bulgaria. The oldest family can only trace its history back eighty years. And as for ideals - I! So I docked the heroine's pedigree and moderated her ideals. Then I started on the first scene - the heroine's bedchamber on the first floor. A fugitive climbed up a waterpipe to her room, when the Admiral stopped me again. I had to pull down the house, for the architecture was all wrong.

Before the end of the reading it seemed that the play itself was tumbling about my ears. But I altered it, and patched it, and corrected it, until I believe it is a fair presentation of Bulgarian life."

"Do you wish to be regarded as a real dramatist, or merely - shall I say an excursionist?" I inquired.

"I don't mind at all," replied Mr. Shaw. "I don't make a business of writing plays; I have other work to do. If I strike on an idea, I work it out in railway trains and on buses. But I have always thought I should like to write a good play. A man must learn a trade, and he can only learn to do a thing by doing it over and over again. If I can write twelve plays I may be able to write a good one. This one may be regarded as the fourth of the series. If the public do not like my ideas and my style I shall turn to something else. I have plenty of other work to do, and I am the laziest man in London."

"Is this to be a play with a purpose?" I asked. "Will it turn the limelight on our ethical system, and furnish texts for advanced clergymen?"

"I don't think so," answered Mr. Shaw rather vaguely, as if he were looking around for a purpose. "I do not believe in a didactic drama, though I believe it is an educational power. One may compare it with painting. The labourer who has never seen a picture does not know that the scenery round his village is worth looking at. By looking at pictures one learns to appreciate nature. And by looking at plays - if they are reproductions of life as they ought to be - one learns to look intelligently at life. But the material which the dramatist uses must be familiar to the audience, or they will turn away for fear of learning something."

Michael Halberstam: What is your experience with Shaw and do you have any memorable anecdotes or discoveries that you would like to share?

Kymberly Mellen: Pygmalion was the first play I was exposed to in high school. I understudied Eliza Doolittle. A few years ago I understudied Eliza again in My Fair Lady at Court Theatre. For a long time I've wanted to play a juicy part in a Shaw play, wrap my tongue around his words and claim his wit as my own.

Elizabeth Lede: I don't even recall doing scenes from his work in school, though I do remember others tackling the material. I'm overjoyed to be embarking on what I feel is one of his finest pieces, and doing it with such a splendid group of artists. Arms and the Man will be my very first Shaw experience.

MH: What most excites you about this play and production?

EL: Having the opportunity to work with the gang at Writers Theatre. I have been seeing plays at Writers' since I came to Chicago and I've always walked away from the productions with some treasure that I didn't have going in. I am honored to be a part of a thrilling and generous theatre and very eager to play with such a terrific cast and one of the greats, Bill Brown.

KM: I'm also excited to be working with such an amazing ensemble; I admire and am in awe of everyone. I think the production will challenge me to find the serious moral message underneath all the wit and romance and fluff.

EL: I love the honest dishonesty in it, the fearless nature of some and the cautious air of others. The characters each hold a mighty thread to the entire story and the action is unwavering. I love plays where you really get to know everyone that you meet. No one comes and goes in this play without being exposed to and shared with the audience in a full way.
I LOVE THE HONEST DISHONESTY IN IT, THE FEARLESS NATURE OF SOME AND THE CAUTIOUS AIR OF OTHERS

MH: Elizabeth, what do you feel will be most challenging for you?

EL: The challenge for me in doing this particular piece is perhaps the style and the fact that it is a first for me. I always have a great deal of fun leaping into a new groove but I also am aware of the angst that comes with doing something for the first time. Shaw is a picky particularities that I will need to comprehend and embrace and any time one does a play set in a certain time or period, one must be sure to truly adopt that essence as well. But, those are challenges that I think make acting one of the greatest ways to spend your hours.

MH: Do you find it difficult to find contemporary relevance in his writing? Why show we do this play now?

EL: I feel there is indeed contemporary relevance in Shaw's writing and that doing this particular piece now is timely and important. When I reread the play this past summer I was warmed by the romantic ideal that threads its way through the story. I can easily relate to these characters using their imagination to conjure up a reality that they need to hold on to in order to tolerate and accept what is indeed truth. War, being a truth in the play and a truth in our present time, is the relevant foundation for doing this play now. It is that unfortunate truth that one tries to tame and soften with romantic ideals and solutions. It is important to witness, at times, how people try to believe in the hero overcoming the foe. Of course, what is so lovely about Shaw's play is that we get a chance to see things work out well and witness the essence of love and romance doing exactly what it does best, cause havoc.

KM: I agree. I think this play is chosen at a very apt time in our country's history. I think most of us in the United States have a grossly romantic idea of war, unless one is directly involved in it. It's amazing that people not very far removed from a wartime situation can ignore it so completely - just as the play's characters do.

MH: What impressions would you like the audience to take home with them?

KM: It really depends on Bill's vision of the play. I finished reading the play with a resolve to be more honest, more intimate and familiar relationships and to become more knowledgeable about the world and politics surrounding me.

EL: I hope they will leave the theatre having been charmed. I think everyone in this play is trying to obtain the ideal end, in doing so, are exposing very honest urges and needs. It is charming to me that the characters are all good at heart and therefore find themselves being dishonest with very honest intent. It sounds like a backward statement, I am sure, but I really think this play allows an audience to sit back, witness some very genuine colorful characters just trying to snag their ideal and then being surprised by the change in their ideals. In doing so, they also expose some of the wall traits that they themselves don't even know. All this happens in such a delightful way.
Arms and the Man

By George Bernard Shaw
Directed by Associate Artist William Brown

May 17 – July 24, 2005

Performing at 325 Tudor Court

Anxiously awaiting her fiancé’s victorious return from military battle, the daughter of a prominent family is surprised to find a soldier from the opposing side seeking asylum in her bedroom! Her unexpected guest prefers the taste of chocolates to the taste of battle, and soon the girl comes to understand a very different notion of both love and war. Featuring a delicious cast of characters, Arms and the Man offers an extraordinary love story filled with wit and wisdom, shifts and turns, moments of passion, and a romantic ending.

The Cast of Arms and the Man

Sarah Gabel
Brad Eric Johnson
Timothy Edward Kane
Elizabeth Leno

Scenic Design
Brian Sidney Bembridge

Costume Design
Rachel Anne Healy

Lighting Design
Rita Pletraszek

Sound Design
Andy Hanson

Properties Master
Sara Walsh

Production Stage Manager
David Castellanos
WordPlay
Saturday, February 26, 2005

On Saturday, February 26, nearly 300 supporters gathered at the Hotel Orrington in Evanston for WordPlay, a black-tie gala in celebration of the word and to honor the artists of Writers’ Theatre. The event, which raised more than $200,000 for the theatre, featured an intimate evening of special performances showcasing the talented artists often seen on the Writers’ stage. The live auction, led by auctioneers and Writers’ Theatre artists Steve Hinger and Jonathan Weir, raised more than $80,000 and featured a selection of unique items that offered unparalleled access to the art and artists of Writers’ Theatre.

The evening’s highlight was a collection of romantic balcony scenes from Romeo and Juliet, Cyrano De Bergerac and Private Lives, all directed by Artistic Director Michael Halberstam, and featuring Jason Bradley, William Brown, Susan Hart, and Elizabeth Ledo. Between each balcony scene, the musical team of Joel Hatch and Carol Kuykendall performed romantic melodies.

The Writers’ Theatre Board of Trustees thanks and congratulates Gala Chair Emily Knight and the Gala Host Committee: Janice and Philip Beck, Kitty Bliss and Jerry James, Betsy and Keith Colburn, Carolyn and David Colburn, Emily and Christopher Knight, Denise and Eric Macey, Alexandra and John Nichols, Pam Phillips and Roger Weston, Irene Pritzker, Stephanie and William Sick, Marcie and Avy Stein and Marilyn and Carl Thoma.

A special thank you to our sponsors for the evening. Premier Sponsor – LaSalle Bank Benefactor – British Airways, Photos by Michael Braslow.
Above – Bill & Dian Taylor and Trustee Gillian Goodman & Ellis Goodman

Right – Jennifer and Alec Litowitz

Below – Terry Livingston & Debra Cafaro, Trustee Barb Melcher and Anne Tucker

Below Left – Sesh Patena & Jeff Weiss and Trustee Sara Cohan and Dan Cohan

Above – Trustee Christine Pooe, Denise Macey, Ann & Bob Bates

Right – Irene Pritzker and Janet & Roger Owen

Bottom Right – Trustee Carol Dawley, Artistic Director Michael Halberstein, and Tamara Dempsey

Top Left – Craig Millard, Kimberly Handier, Dianne Millard and Janice Beck

Middle Left – Louise Weiss, Steve Barnhart & Meg Barnhart

Below – Managing Director Jennifer Biekstein, Elissa Poistion & Trustee David Poiston
On behalf of the Board of Trustees, staff and artists of Writers’ Theatre, we thank you for your continued support and participation through your 2004/05 subscription. As your loyalty allows us to thrive artistically and bring first-rate productions to our theatre, we are pleased to include you among the first to know our very exciting 2005/06 season, full of wonderful plays and new programs. If you have sent in your renewal, thank you. If you have not, there is still time. Please contact the Box Office at 847-242-6000 before June 1st in order to save your seats.
1 THE UNEASY CHAIR
BY EVAN SMITH
DIRECTED BY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL HALBERSTAM
SEPTEMBER 27 – NOVEMBER 27, 2005

When stubborn, thrifty and independent Amelia Pickles rents a room to the stubborn, thrifty and independent Captain Wickett, their relationship unexpectedly escalates from tenant-landlord to plaintiff-defendant to husband-wife. Featuring Linda Kimbrough, Ross Lehman and Greg Vinkler, this sparkling comedy about the contrary nature of marriage wittily pays homage to Oscar Wilde and Charles Dickens.
Performed at 325 Tudor Court

2 BUS STOP
BY WILLIAM INGE
DIRECTED BY RICK SNYDER
JANUARY 24 – MARCH 26, 2006

Dreams, desperation, love and lawlessness all intersect at a small roadside diner where a busload of travelers is forced to wait out the storm. Featuring gripping dialogue and dynamic ensemble acting, Bus Stop realistically captures the hopes and ambitions of the Midwest heartland. Steppenwolf ensemble member Rick Snyder directs Writers' Theatre favorites William Brown and Kimberly Mellen in this modern American classic.
Performed at 325 Tudor Court

3 THE CHOSEN
ADAPTED BY AARON POSNER AND CHAIM POTOK FROM THE NOVEL BY CHAIM POTOK
DIRECTED BY ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE SHADE MURRAY
MARCH 14 – JULY 9, 2006

Adapted from Chaim Potok’s classic novel, The Chosen follows the unlikely yet enduring friendship between two Jewish teenagers; one Orthodox and the other Hassidic. Despite their radically different outlooks on the world, the boys learn to rely on each other as they bridge the divides within their faith, their neighborhood, and their families. Artistic Associate Shade Murray (The Subject Was Roses) directs this heartfelt story about understanding, respect and reconciliation.
Performed at 664 Vernon Avenue

4 THE DUCHESS OF MALFI
BY JOHN WEBSTER
ADAPTED AND DIRECTED BY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL HALBERSTAM
MAY 30 – JULY 16, 2006
WORLD PREMIERE ADAPTATION

This rarely performed Jacobean drama has all the trappings of a summer blockbuster thriller. The Duchess of Malfi’s brothers are outraged when they learn of their sister’s forbidden marriage to Antonio, her servant. Politically threatened by this union, the brothers create a web of lies, betrayal, espionage, insanity and murder to guarantee the downfall of the Duchess. Penned by one of England’s great early dramatists, the play is rich with poetry and filled with surprising turns and circumstances.
Performed at 325 Tudor Court

5 OPTIONAL FIFTH PRODUCTION!
A CHRISTMAS CAROL
BY CHARLES DICKENS
ADAPTED AND PERFORMED BY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL HALBERSTAM
SUNDAY DECEMBER 16, 2:30 PM, TUESDAY THROUGH THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20-22, 8 PM.

An intimate one-man telling of this remarkable story returns for a limited engagement.
Performed at 325 Tudor Court

10TH ANNIVERSARY
OVERSEAS ADVENTURE

BY RICHARD CHRISTIANSEN
FORMER CHIEF CRITIC, CHICAGO TRIBUNE
AUTHOR, A THEATER OF OUR OWN: A HISTORY AND A MEMOIR OF 1,001 NIGHTS IN CHICAGO

You'll forgive us — all 27 of us — if we look just a bit smug these days. We were the happy few who went on the Writers' Theatre trip to England in late December and January, and in our eight days there, we saw the latest and the best that London stages had to offer. And that's not idle boastage. When the Olivier Awards were handed out earlier this year, most of the shows we attended were nominees and winners in that prestigious annual competition for London theaters.

For example: The Royal National Theatre's brilliant production of The History Boys by Alan Bennett took the prizes for best play, best director (Nicholas Hytner) and best actor (Richard Griffiths). Bennett's very funny, very moving story of a group of eight high school boys and their free-spirited teacher (Griffiths) ranked No. 1 on our list too.

Close behind in our estimation was another Olivier award nominee, Festen (The Celebration), the English playwright David Eldridge's sensational dramatization of the 1998 Danish film about a birthday party and a family reunion from hell. This last-minute addition to our playgoing agenda took us all by surprise with its stark, severe style and its perfectly choreographed staging by director Rufus Norris.

Our two big new musicals were Mary Poppins, the lavish stage version of the 1964 Disney movie, with its spectacular special effects and buoyant dance numbers, and The Woman in White, composer Andrew Lloyd Webber's romantic take on the 1860 novel by Wilkie Collins, with its mind-boggling (and eye-crossing) video projection scenery.

All of these shows will be on their way to America in the next season or two, and Woman is due in Chicago this November in its North American pre-Broadway premiere at the LaSalle Bank (formerly Shubert) Theatre. So — if you want to know more in advance about how Mary Poppins flies into the audience, or what fun's stand out in Webber's score, just ask us. We saw and heard them first.

We also saw a few shows that were not quite worth writing home about. (Don't ask me, for example, about the National's frenetic revival of Nikolai Erdman's 1925 Russian social satire The Maids. And a lot of us found playwright Peter Whelan's The Earthly Possessions, about the romantic triangle between the artist's William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Morris's wife Jane, pretty much a snooze.) But even the lighter, special entertainments, such as the jolly Christmas pantomime of Aladdin, with Sir Ian McKellen in drag, had their peculiar charms.

Meanwhile, with Michael Halberstam leading the post-show seminars and with the ever-present skills of Irene Kogan handling all living and transportation matters, we had a comfortable, convenient home base at the Waldorf Hilton hotel and a series of meetings with such artistic guests as Michael Billington, theater critic of The Guardian, and Nicolas Kent, artistic director of the small, enterprising bicycle theatre.

We found time to do a little shopping amid London's post-Christmass crowds. We took in the splendid Ralphit exhibit at the National Gallery. We had a rousing Champagne toast on New Year's Eve at our hotel and watched the nearby fireworks at midnight. We even managed to squeeze in a day trip to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and, for good measure, that same day, a buffet lunch on a snug river barge.

We had a great time, and, you bet, I'm all ready to go on the next trip.

UPCOMING PERFORMING ARTS TOURS WITH MICHAEL HALBERSTAM AND RICHARD CHRISTIANSEN

SHAW

SHAW FESTIVAL, AUGUST 3-7, 2005
Our annual trip to the Shaw Festival includes best available tickets to six top notch productions, all transportation, four nights at the luxurious Queens Landing Inn, delicious breakfasts, a gourmet dinner at the hotel, a sumptuous meal at the Peller Estates Winery, and seminars with Artistic Director Michael Halberstam and Richard Christiansen (Former Chief Critic, Chicago Tribune). There will also be exclusive and vibrant discussion and seminars with Richard Christiansen & Michael Halberstam and a meeting with Shaw Festival Artistic Director Jackie Maxwell (subject to her availability).

London

LONDON TOUR, DECEMBER 29, 2005 - JANUARY 7, 2006
Our popular and highly acclaimed New Year's visit to London includes best available tickets to six productions, eight nights at the luxurious historic London Hilton-Waldorf, round trip air on British Airways (optional), visits with a London Theatre VIP (past guests have included Sir Ian McKellen), all coach transfers, a gourmet welcome dinner at one of London's finest restaurants, a wonderful New Year's Eve dinner with live music and champagne at the hotel, an exclusive private gallery tour, and a meeting with The Guardian chief drama critic Michael Billington. We are considering an optional day trip to Paris.

Space is limited. Like our theatre, we chose to keep our tours intimate. Don't delay — call today! For more information on either tour, contact Dennis Hull at 847-242-6004.

(All travel arrangements by Irene Kogan of Travel 100 Group/Stage & Page, Kenilworth.)
ALUMNI UPDATE

Every once in a while we like to let you know where some of our regular Writers’ Theatre artistic family are performing and directing.

KAREN ALDRIDGE
Karen Aldridge just completed her run of Regina Taylor’s wonderful new play The Dreams of Sarah Breedlove at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

WILLIAM BROWN & KATE BUCKLEY
William Brown just directed a new production of Oscar Wilde’s Lady Windermere’s Fan for Milwaukee Repertory and completed his third year as Scrooge in The Goodman Theatre’s Christmas Carol, directed by Kate Buckley who just directed Little Women for Missouri Repertory.

NEW YORK
Orson’s Shadow recently opened in New York to great reviews, and features many Writers’ Theatre artists! John Judd (The Price, Crime and Punishment), Jeff Still (The Price, Rough Crossing), and Lee Roy Rogers (The Price) are reprising their roles as Orson Welles and Laurence Olivier in Orson’s Shadow by Austin Pendleton (Booth) directed by David Cromer (Oscar Remembered, The Beats, Booth, The Price). Joining them in the highly acclaimed production is Susan Bennett (Crime and Punishment).

SHANNON COCHRAN & MICHAEL CANAVAN
Shannon Cochran (Private Lives, The Father) completed a very successful run of Bug by Tracy Letts in New York and was joined in performance by her husband Michael Canavan (The Father).

COBY GOSS & NATASHA LOWE
Coby Goss (Seagull) and his wife Natasha Lowe (Benefactors) are pleased to announce their greatest production to date, the birth of Nathaniel Wakefield Goss.

KYMBERLY MELLEN
Kymberly Mellen just completed a successful run of Intimate Apparel at Steppenwolf.

SCOTT PARKINSON
Scott Parkinson (Crime and Punishment, The Doctor’s Dilemma) just finished a run with Brian Bedford in School for Scandal at the Mark Taper Forum in LA and is currently based in New York, where he recently completed performing in Rose Rage. He will be appearing as Hal in Henry IV for the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival.

HOWARD WITT
Howard Witt (The Price) is currently appearing on London’s West End in Boor Falls’ revival of Death of a Salesman.

SUSAN HART
Susan Hart (Glass Menagerie, Loot, Our Town, Benefactors, Seagull) is currently appearing in Chicago Shakespeare’s production of Romeo and Juliet at Navy Pier.

KAREN JANES-WODISTCH, KEVIN GUDAH & ROBERT SCOGIN
Karen Janes-Wodistch (Love and Lunacy, Candida, Rocket to the Moon, The Doctor’s Dilemma, Seagull) recently appeared in Measure for Measure at Chicago Shakespeare along with Kevin Gudahl (The Doctor’s Dilemma) and Robert Scogin (Niedecker, The Doctor’s Dilemma, Seagull).

CHRISTOPHER MCCLENDEN
Christopher McClenden (Seagull) just appeared in Vincent in Brixton at Apple Tree Theatre.
Building off of last year’s successful residency at Northbrook’s Meadowbrook Elementary School, Writers’ Theatre teamed with School District 28 to launch a district-wide after school drama program for students grades 1-5. The classes in creative drama were offered to the students at Greenbriar, Westmoor and Meadowbrook Elementary Schools. Working as an ensemble, the students learned the value of teamwork, tolerance and accepting the ideas of others.

Writers’ Theatre especially thanks Lauren Bondi and Michael Chanon for introducing Writers’ Theatre to School District 28, and we look forward to future collaborations.

“It is always gratifying to see students come together and create something larger than any one person could create alone,” says teaching artist Janet Brooks. “Students begin to trust the concept of listening and sharing ideas – learning that the outcome will be better if everyone takes part in the creative process.”