

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF
WRITERS' THEATRE

ISSUE TWENTY-SEVEN
NOVEMBER 2009

THE BRIEF CHRONICLE



WT
WRITERS'
THEATRE

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“I WAS BORN
INTO A WORLD THAT
TOOK LIGHT
MUSIC
SERIOUSLY.”

- NOËL COWARD

THE BRIEF CHRONICLE

THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF WRITERS' THEATRE

ISSUE TWENTY-SEVEN NOVEMBER 2009

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Michael Halberstam
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Dear Friends:

Oh Coward! represents a number of firsts for the Books on Vernon theater. This production is the first musical to be staged in our extraordinarily intimate venue and *Oh Coward!* marks the first time we have the pleasure of working with director Jim Corti. Furthermore, for the first time in five years, the seating configuration has been re-imagined, transforming the theatre into a 1930's nightclub.

This production celebrates Noël Coward, who you probably know as a playwright, screenwriter, actor and director of the early 20th century. But what may surprise you is that he is also a remarkable and prolific songwriter. It is truly no wonder that he was known as "The Master" throughout his career. This issue of *The Brief Chronicle* explores the fascinating life of Noël Coward, offers you a closer look at the nature of the musical revue and the life of the artists involved with the production.

Behind the scenes, we have had a busy summer and fall at Writers' Theatre! Besides hosting a beautiful garden party in July, we have toured to Canada's Stratford Festival and we are delighted to welcome several new Trustees. We are also excited to launch our fourth annual production of *The MLK Project: The Fight for Civil Rights* this winter and reach even more students across Chicago and the North Shore.

As always, we are grateful to present yet another one-of-a kind experience. In the intimacy of our bookstore theater, *Oh Coward!* takes you on a journey into the past. Through the magic of music, we bring you a rare opportunity to wile away an hour or two with one of the world's most versatile and prolific entertainers—truly a master of his form.

Yours Sincerely,

Michael

Kate



OH COWARD!

A MUSICAL COMEDY REVUE

WORDS AND MUSIC BY **NOËL COWARD** DEvised BY **RODERICK COOK**
MUSICAL DIRECTION BY **DOUG PECK** DIRECTED BY **JIM CORTI**

November 17, 2009 – March 21, 2010

Performed at 664 Vernon Avenue

You're invited to a marvelous party! *Oh Coward!* celebrates one of the theatre's greatest entertainers—Noël Coward. Best known for his comic masterpieces *Blithe Spirit*, *Private Lives* and *Hay Fever*, Coward was one of the most prolific songwriters of his day. Now, acclaimed director Jim Corti brings his effervescent music, satirical quips and witty repartee to life. With the intimate Books on Vernon venue transformed into a 1930's nightclub, *Oh Coward!* is a must-see evening of the most memorable tunes of the 20th century!

THE CAST: **KATE FRY, ROB LINDLEY AND JOHN SANDERS**

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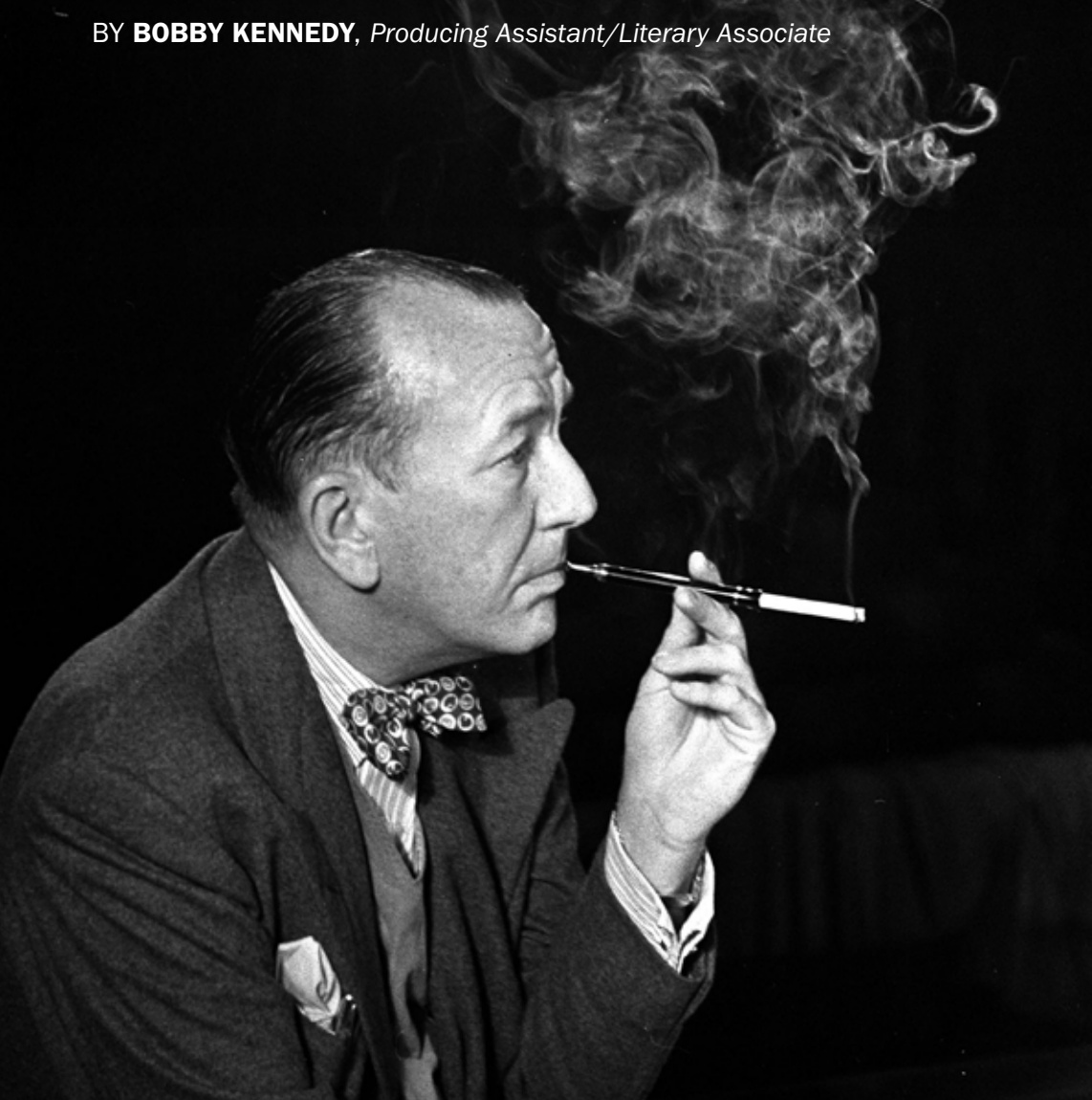
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This program is partially supported by a grant
from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

NOËL COWARD: THE MASTER

BY **BOBBY KENNEDY**, *Producing Assistant/Literary Associate*



"There are probably greater painters than Noël, greater novelists than Noël, greater librettists, greater composers of music, greater singers, greater dancers, greater comedians, greater tragedians, greater stage producers, greater film directors, greater cabaret artists, greater TV stars. If there are, they are fourteen different people. Only one man combined all fourteen different labels—*The Master*." – Lord Mountbatten

Noël Peirce Coward was born in December 1899, the second child in a financially struggling suburban London family. The Cowards moved frequently, which prevented the children from regularly attending any educational institution. Even when he was enrolled in a school, Coward would regularly be pulled out by his mother in order to attend a play or take dance lessons.

In 1910, Coward's mother saw an advertisement in the newspaper seeking boys for a production of *The Goldfish*. His audition impressed the producers and he earned his first professional West End role, even though the show was not a success. However, the part did lead to a succession of roles for young Coward, ranging from *Peter Pan* in the West End to a D.W. Griffith film, *Hearts of the World*. At this time he also began to meet some of his future collaborators, including Esmé Wynne (with whom Coward wrote his first plays), Charles Hawtrey (the actor-manager who took Coward under his wing) and actors/singers Ivor Novello and Gertrude Lawrence. This ascendance to fame was briefly interrupted by World War I when Coward

was drafted into the Artist Rifles, a volunteer regiment of the British Army. However, he was discharged because of his health nine months later without ever seeing combat.

Coward's career truly started to take off in 1923 when he wrote a string of successful plays and musical revues. With his play *The Young Idea*, in which he also played one of the leading roles—a Coward trademark—and his revue *London Calling*, Coward started his ascent to the celebrity status he

**"HE DABBLED
IN ALL FORMS
OF MUSICAL
THEATRE."**

would hold unchallenged for the next two decades. His next play, *The Vortex*, became his first great critical and financial success, creating a demand for more of his work in both London and New York. He obliged with the plays *Fallen Angels* and *Hay Fever*, with the latter becoming Coward's first to enter the perennial theatre canon with its portrayal of an eccentric English family and their weekend guests. At one point in 1925, Coward had three plays and one revue running in London's West End simultaneously. However, this frenetic ascent took a toll on Coward's health, leading to a collapse onstage in 1926 and an

extended rest in Hawaii.

Despite this setback, Coward returned to the entertainment world to create some of his most timeless pieces. With *Bitter Sweet*, he tackled operetta—a musical form that was quickly falling out of fashion—managing to make it a huge success upon its 1929 premiere. He followed this up with two more canon-worthy plays: *Private Lives* (1930), where he co-starred with the inestimable Gertrude Lawrence and *A Design for Living*, which premiered in New York to avoid censorship by England’s Lord Chamberlain’s office for sexually risqué content. Most of his best known songs were written during this period (1929-1939), as he dabbled in all forms of musical theatre including revues (*Words and Music* and *Set to Music*), operetta (*Conversation Piece*), conventional musicals (*Operette*) and one-act play cycles with music (*Tonight at 8:30*).

“YOU MUST SEE HIM IN CABARET.”

When Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, Noël Coward attempted to serve his country by managing the British war propaganda office in Paris. However, the government soon decided his best contribution to the war effort would be his talent to entertain. Using his celebrity status, Coward toured the world, entertaining a despairing

public and doing his best to bring the Americans into the war on the side of the allies. He also continued to write plays, premiering one of his most enduring works, the dark comedy *Blithe Spirit* (1941) in repertory with two other gems, *Present Laughter* and *This Happy Breed*.

Following the war, Coward found himself in a world whose values and tastes had been significantly altered. He continued to write plays and musicals but they fell short of his pre-war material. However, he found new life as a cabaret performer, having honed this craft entertaining the troops. Theatre critic Kenneth Tynan once said, “to see him whole, public and private personalities conjoined, you must see him in cabaret.” During the 1950’s and 60’s, he also acted in a number of memorable supporting roles in films such as *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956) and *The Italian Job* (1969).

In 1973 at the age of 73, Noël Coward passed away at his home in Jamaica with his long-time partner Graham Payn by his side. Over the course of his lifetime he had published more than fifty plays and written hundreds of songs. He had also been knighted and elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. In 1970, an Honorary Tony Award was bestowed upon him “for his multiple and immortal contributions to the theatre” and he was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1988. Fittingly, *Oh Coward!*—a glorious tribute to all The Master’s many talents—was the last production of his work that Noël Coward ever saw. ■

REVIEWING THE MUSICAL REVUE

Oh Coward! employs one of the theatre’s most unique styles, the musical revue, which combines music, dance and comedy sketches into a night of playful theatrical entertainment. Although they can sometimes follow a theme, revues do not rely on a narrative unlike “book musicals” that dominate the current musical theatre landscape. In a musical revue, songs and sketches are compiled from multiple sources or exclusively feature works from one writer, as in the case of *Oh Coward!*.

Immensely popular between World War I and the Great Depression, the revue was born out of vaudeville entertainment. However, they focused entirely

on theatrical acts, disregarding the more obscure novelty acts of vaudeville. The streamlined format allowed for greater sophistication and higher production values. As a result, revues generally catered to the upper classes of society, appearing in the largest Broadway houses.

With revues, American musical theatre usurped the live entertainment monopoly long held by Europeans. The late 19th century was dominated by continental operettas (Jacques Offenbach and Johann Strauss II) and British comic opera (Gilbert and Sullivan). Pioneering this new art form was producer Florenz Ziegfeld, whose *Ziegfeld Follies* symbolized the excess

“THE INNOVATION OF AMERICAN THEATRE WAS UNMATCHED.”

and spectacle of early American musical theatre and was quickly imitated. Incorporating new popular trends such as jazz and ragtime, the innovation of American theatre was unmatched by the Old World.

Revue attracted premiere talent from across the globe because of their popularity and financial success. Fanny Brice, Eddie Cantor, W.C. Fields and Bert Williams all made a name for themselves starring in revues. Additionally, most popular music of the early 20th century originated in the theatre. New York's Tin Pan Alley songwriters (including Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, George M. Cohan, Jerome Kern and Cole Porter) all had their songs featured and even wrote revues of their own. The great composer/lyricist team of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart also began their prolific career writing revues. Meanwhile, British songwriters such as Ivor Novello and Noël Coward enjoyed a similar level of success with their revues continually spawning popular music hits. However, their writing tended to be either more contemporarily satirical or traditionally sentimental, appealing more to British audiences than Americans.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, expensive theatre tickets became a luxury few could afford. Revues, in their prevailing form with lavish sets and costumes, were impractical to produce in such turbulent economic times. Instead of letting the form die, songwriters began adapting their music for cabarets and smaller performance venues. Removed from the Broadway stages, the revue found new life, relying on superior songwriting and performances instead of the glitz and glamour that were once its lifeblood.

While most modern revues excise the comedy aspect and present a collection of songs in a structured order (what is called a “song cycle”), *Oh Coward!* is unique in that it celebrates both the infamous Noël Coward and the revue itself. By embodying the classical revue structure (song, dance and comedy) while at the same time assembling content from all of Coward's best works, Roderick Cook (who devised *Oh Coward!*) has given the world a piece of musical theatre that honors a legendary theatrical form using the greatest hits from one of the 20th century's most revered entertainers. ■

MUSICAL MINDS

Esteemed director Gary Griffin, seasoned music director Richard Carsey (who lent his talents to last season's A Minister's Wife) and Oh Coward! musical director Doug Peck reflect on the unique format and opportunities presented by Oh Coward!.

GARY GRIFFIN: I love *Oh Coward!* because I believe it achieves a complete whole. Audiences are completely immersed in the breadth and depth of Coward's talent and world view. Revues are fiendishly difficult because they must survive on the development of an idea rather than a story and structure becomes crucial to the experience. *Oh Coward!* has been crafted to carefully take us on the journey of what it means to be human as expressed by one very clever and observant artist.

RICHARD CARSEY: In the best revues of the last 30 years—*Ain't Misbehavin'*, *The World Goes Round* and *Oh Coward!* to name a few—there is a palpable sense of discovery in the evening. Most audience members arrive knowing some of the material being presented, but the revelations of the evening are in finding music that is unfamiliar or finding familiar music presented in a different context.

The music of Noël Coward is ripe for such discovery. His lyrical dexterity and his unerring dramatic and comedic talents make most of his songs into lovely mini-plays. His songs live “on the word” in much the way that Stephen Sondheim's music or Cole Porter's music does. In other words, his songs are the perfect vehicle for the revue format! The challenge for director, actor and musical director alike is to mine the music for all of its variety and theatricality—working hand in hand to bring the music alive in the moment.

DOUG PECK: Musical revues like *Oh, Coward!* continue to fascinate us because they celebrate the author. When we see a specific play or musical, we are celebrating the author through the lens of plot and character development. When we watch a revue, we experience the author's personality in a more focused way. Noël Coward is such a strong personality; it will be thrilling to feel his spirit in the room through a collection of his finest material.



DIRECTOR'S SIDEBAR: **JIM CORTI**

TO BROADWAY AND BACK

Oh Coward! director Jim Corti has worn many hats throughout his impressive and wide-ranging career. Over the last 35 years he's been an actor, dancer, singer, teacher, choreographer and now has settled in as an acclaimed director. His work has taken him from Chicago to Broadway and back again and Writers' Theatre is delighted to welcome him to the Books on Vernon venue.

A Chicago native, Corti graduated from Loyola University Chicago and

packed his bags for San Francisco. He continued his studies at American Conservatory Theatre, eventually teaching classes there, but what he really wanted to do was answer the call of the Great White Way and try his talents on Broadway.

Despite being a rookie, Corti was snapped up after his third New York audition for an ensemble role in the Broadway premiere of *Candide*. Produced by the venerable Harold

Prince and with music by Leonard Bernstein, Corti's first Broadway experience surrounded him with the best in the business and was the perfect environment to fine-tune his performance skills. After his turn in *Candide*, Corti was cast as Paul San Marco in the Chicago leg of the Broadway tour of *A Chorus Line*, eventually moving with the show to New York to perform for nearly two years as Al DeLuca in the Broadway production. All of these high-caliber Broadway experiences were preparing him for his next role working under the direction of Broadway legend Bob Fosse in *Dancin'*.

Dancin' combined Bob Fosse's quintessential choreography into a dynamic revue celebrating American music. Eliciting each dancer's strengths to best serve his choreography, Fosse both challenged and excited the dancers. "It was a thrill being a part of that experience and knowing that you were doing the best Broadway choreography that existed at the time," recalls Corti. "I learned so much from Bob Fosse: precision, dancing artfully and the duality of making hard work look effortless."

After two years on the road with *Dancin'*, Corti returned to Chicago to direct and choreograph the musical, *Your Move*, at Victory Gardens, marking his professional directing debut. He subsequently directed and choreographed at different theatres throughout Chicago and across the country. Corti garnered his first Broadway choreography credit with *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*, a Steppenwolf Theatre

Company production that transferred to New York. He was also nominated for a Helen Hayes award for Outstanding Choreography for *Dancing at Lughnasa*, a Goodman Theatre production that transferred to Arena Stage in Washington D.C. Additionally, he started his long-standing relationship with Drury Lane Theatre, choreographing *Singin' in the Rain* and directing *Damn Yankees* and *Bye Bye Birdie*. Corti's hot directing career was interrupted only briefly by a turn back on Broadway performing in the world premiere of *Ragtime* as Harry Houdini and for the Broadway national tour of *Urinetown*, performing as Old Man Strong/Hot Blades Harry.

It was just after Corti completed the national tour of *Urinetown* that Drury Lane Theatre called on him to direct the *The Full Monty*, the inaugural production at their brand new downtown Chicago Water Tower Place venue. It was while working on *The Full Monty* that Corti realized his passion was for directing. "Acting no longer consumed me. The work that consumed me was directing," recalls Corti, "my work was reaching so many more people and focusing my pursuits on directing was a prospect that really thrilled me."

Since directing *The Full Monty*, Jim Corti's work has been seen at numerous Chicago institutions and most recently directing *Cabaret* at Drury Lane Oakbrook to significant critical acclaim. Writers' Theatre is honored to welcome such a seasoned theatre artist and looks forward to him bringing his unique perspective to *Oh Coward!* and future collaborations. ■

ACTING COWARD

The cast of *Oh Coward!* welcomes back Kate Fry and John Sanders, fresh from performing on the Tudor Court stage in *A Minister's Wife* as well as Bach at Leipzig alumnus Rob Lindley. Here they share their thoughts on *Oh Coward!* and performing in a musical revue.



John Sanders



Rob Lindley



Kate Fry

WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT OH COWARD!?

JOHN SANDERS: Working with this fantastic group of artists who are all at the top of their game.

ROB LINDLEY: I love researching music of this era. I feel like I know lots of Cole Porter, Johnny Mercer, Harold Arlen, Ira Gershwin, Frank Loesser—but I have shockingly little familiarity with Noël Coward's work. The minute I was cast I put every piece of Coward music I could on my iTunes and have been enjoying reading his plays and various biographies. Besides being such a gifted composer, lyricist and playwright, he was an amazing performer. I'm excited to bring this material to an audience. It's a real privilege.

KATE FRY: Basking in the glow of two talented and handsome men. Really, is there any girl luckier than I am?

HAVE YOU EVER PERFORMED IN A MUSICAL REVUE BEFORE?

J.S.: I did *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* a year and a half ago, but overall my musical revue experience is pretty limited. I'm looking forward to learning all I can

about this style and this author.

R.L.: My early performance career in Chicago was based heavily in the cabaret world. I have performed many, many times in musical revues, and cabaret is in many ways what I feel most comfortable doing.

K.F.: No, this will be my first!

DO YOU HAVE ANY EXPERIENCE WITH NOËL COWARD'S WORK, MUSICAL OR OTHERWISE? WHAT DO YOU THINK OF HIM AND HIS WRITING?

J.S.: I have absolutely no experience with his music and was astonished to find how much I enjoy his songs, but I have performed in *Design for Living*. What I appreciate most about Noël Coward is the pathos underneath the sparkling veneer of his language and persona.

R.L.: I have never performed any of Noël Coward's work. I'm excited to have a completely fresh crack at his wonderful, witty, touching material. Plus, I love satire that uses comedy to point out society's weak points, and I think that Coward's music and sketches do that brilliantly.

K.F.: I have never done any Coward except a star turn opposite Tom Mula as Mrs. Bradman in *Blithe Spirit* at Peninsula Players.

IN WHAT WAY WILL YOUR APPROACH TO THIS PIECE BE DIFFERENT THAN THE WAY YOU APPROACH OTHER MUSICALS OR A STRAIGHT PLAY?

J.S.: The biographical nature of this piece will mean basing performances largely on actual people, so that may affect the preparation and approach. However, the stark contrast from traditional musicals or most straight plays is the way we will directly include the audience in our journey. In this respect, I think we will be served beautifully by the intimacy of the Books on Vernon stage.

R.L.: Character is probably the biggest difference when doing a revue. In this instance, I have more creative power to figure out my character. It is nothing like playing a character with a life and a backstory that might be spelled-out in the script. We will have the opportunity to explore relationships and character building that isn't on the page.

K.F.: I would say that not having a character's journey to chart would push us to

make each song quite personal, but I suppose that should always be the case.

FOR ALL THREE OF YOU, THIS WILL BE YOUR FIRST PERFORMANCE AT THE BOOKS ON VERNON VENUE. WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL BE THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF WORKING IN SUCH AN INTIMATE SPACE?

J.S.: I actually love performing in small spaces, as it opens up the possibilities for subtlety and connection.

R.L.: I love working in a small venue. Doing a show in a huge theatre is fun, but there's nothing better than being close to the audience. The exchange of energy is so much more pronounced in an intimate space, and it's the perfect space for a show like this.

K.F.: The benefits: not having to shout and really being able to have the musicians be part of the action. The challenges: trying to mask the ravages of having two young children without looking like a drag queen.

WHY HERE? WHY NOW?

The Brief Chronicle series continues exploring what brings a director and a particular production together with Jim Corti and Doug Peck, director and musical director of *Oh Coward!*.

The late Noël Coward continues to be one of the most widely produced writers in the theatre. Why do you think he still captivates audiences?

Jim Corti: I have found that his writings have very succinct insights regarding the hopes, fears and frustrations shared by people universally. Coward was born into a poor working class family and his formal education entailed only a few years. What he lacked in schooling he made up with voracious reading and a keen sense of observation.

Doug Peck: Noël Coward's writing is as powerful as ever! The social commentary and wit boil as if he were speaking the words right now.

Writers' Theatre audiences have been delighted by the plays of Noël Coward with *Private Lives* in 1998, followed by *Fallen Angels* in 1999. What does this musical revue offer audiences that they have not previously enjoyed?

J.C.: I think audiences will enjoy how his words and music marry hilarity to precision and his portraits of love lost and found. The songs he composed have a singular beauty and loveliness and reach a poignancy as great as any of his peers.

D.P.: When you see a Noël Coward play, you get to hear a few of his brilliant songs, which often serve as divertissement from the main entertainment. When you watch *Oh Coward!* you will enjoy the music as the main course.

Why are Writers' Theatre and the Books On Vernon stage wonderfully suited for this production?

J.C.: Writers' Theatre patrons are in for a stunning surprise at Books on Vernon. The doorway to the theatre becomes a threshold to an art deco nightclub, designed especially for this production and custom tailored to the style and sophistication of The Master's realm. It's my hope that *Oh Coward!* will be experienced with rare intimacy and immediacy so that audiences really feel a part of the production. Writers' emphasis on the word will be given the focus audiences have grown to expect and will shine in this new environment. They'll discover what makes Coward an incomparable artist, up close and personal.

D.P.: Hearing Noël Coward sung by Kate Fry, Rob Lindley and John Sanders on the Books on Vernon stage will be an unforgettable experience. Being so close to three witty, heartfelt performers will help us hear each word that The Master wrote. I'm excited to accompany them at the grand piano and tailor arrangements to fit each actor's unique responses to the material.

During World War II, Noël Coward helped raise British morale by using his unparalleled wit to distract the public from the horrors of war. Sixty years later, do you think he can once again entertain and temporarily distract us from the difficult time our country has been facing?

J.C.: Coward dove into World War II to make up for his honorable discharge after a head injury during training, and when Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, he actually became a secret agent! Distracting the public from the war was the effect of his plays written at the time: *Present Laughter*, *This Happy Breed* and *Blithe Spirit*.

There's more to the man than I think most people ever imagined. In his autobiography, *Future Indefinite*, he wrote about the celebration of the surrender of Germany in 1945 with a cautionary tone, "there was, as in all celebrations of victory, an inevitable undertow of sadness. Parades generate only a superficial gaiety, because we all know they cannot last, and though this was the end of the war it was far from the end of the world's troubles." It's fascinating—the sobering depth of this composer, lyricist, actor, director, novelist, painter—it's not difficult to understand why he is called, "The Master."

SETTING THE SCENE

You're in for an exciting treat! For the first time in many years, the Books on Vernon performance space has been completely reconfigured and transformed into a 1930's nightclub complete with cocktail tables, a baby grand piano and a new seating configuration giving us general admission seating!

The creative team behind *Oh Coward!* always knew they wanted to try something new and unexpected at Books on Vernon. To better serve the musical, they developed a scenic design based on a three-quarter thrust seating arrangement. This new layout allows the actors to better connect with the music and the audience while performing this cabaret-style revue.

Completely re-imagining the performance space has resulted in **general admission seating**, giving patrons a chance to try a new location in the theatre from their regularly assigned seats and get even closer to the action. Audiences will be transported back in time as they enter the Books on Vernon venue and we know they'll enjoy the ride!

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT *OH COWARD!*
VISIT WRITERSTHEATRE.ORG.

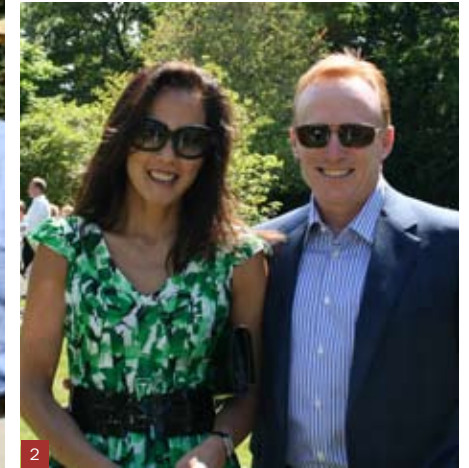
WHAT'S
HAPPENING
AT WRITERS' THEATRE
BACKSTAGE

THE DIRECTOR'S SOCIETY ANNUAL GARDEN PARTY

On July 12, 2009, 100 of Writers' Theatre's closest friends gathered at a private home in Winnetka for the *Director's Society* 2009 Garden Party. A stunning English garden and cloudless sky provided the perfect backdrop for the afternoon. Guests, many donning festive garden hats, savored elegant hors d'oeuvres and sipped refreshing Pimm's Cups with Writers' Theatre staff and artists while enjoying the lovely summer day. The highlight of the party was a special performance of Tom Stoppard's *15 Minute Hamlet*, a comedic prelude to the season opener *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The much-anticipated event was generously sponsored by Premier Landscape Contractors, who designed the fabulous garden.

The Annual Garden Party is just one of the exclusive events offered to members of the *Director's Society*, a group of Writers' Theatre's most generous supporters. *Director's Society* members provide a secure financial foundation for the Theatre through annual contributions of \$1,000 or more.

For information on becoming a *Director's Society* member, please contact Development Manager Amber Bel'cher at 847-242-6012.



1: Barry Weinstein, Dorie Sternberg, Hilary Weinstein, Trustee Susan Belgrad and Donald Belgrad 2: Linda and Brian O'Toole 3: Board President Christopher Knight with Betsy and Dale Pinkert 4: Matthew Means and Beth Kronfeld 5: William and Amalia Mahoney 6: Garden Party hostess Amy Brock with Executive Director Kate Lipuma



THE MLK PROJECT A CLOSER LOOK



Photo of Tawny Newsome in *The MLK Project: The Fight for Civil Rights* by Michael Brosilow.

This year, Writers' Theatre is thrilled to present the **fourth annual tour** of *The MLK Project: The Fight for Civil Rights*. This cross-cultural, multi-media performance, written by Yolanda Androzzo, interweaves the personal interviews of Chicago-based Civil Rights Activists, including both celebrated and unsung heroes of the Movement. In a tour-de-force performance, a solo performer gives voice to Reverend Jesse Jackson, Puerto Rican poet and activist David Hernandez and Founder of the DuSable Museum of African American History Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs—among many others. The play weaves together poetry, hip-hop and history as students follow a young girl searching for truth and self-discovery as she learns about the Civil Rights Movement.

Writers' Theatre has been touring *The MLK Project* to schools in January and February for the past three years. In that time, the production has reached more than **75 schools and 20,000 students** throughout Chicagoland.

This year, we are thrilled to welcome back actress **Tawny Newsome**, who performed in *The MLK Project* last year. We asked Tawny

a few questions about what draws her to *The MLK Project* and her unique perspective on student audiences.

What excites you about working on *The MLK Project*?

Tawny Newsome: I think the idea of bringing this type of theatre into schools and non-traditional performance spaces is really great. It's a different way to tell a story than perhaps many people in these audiences are used to seeing.

How is a student audience unique?

T.N.: Students, and young people in general, are far less predictable than adult audiences. When you've done a lot of theatre, you feel as though you can read an audience pretty easily. A younger crowd keeps you on your toes because you never know what's going to land, what might resonate with them or what might seem boring. It reminds me to focus on communicating effectively in each moment.

What was your favorite moment from last year's tour of *The MLK Project*?

T.N.: It's tough to isolate a single moment as being my favorite. I can say that some of the comments from Sheridan Math and

Science Academy were really touching and at times, hilarious. They happened to be one of our youngest audiences and some of them had written poems and other responses to the material beforehand and then asked to read them during our post-show discussion. That was very cool.

How does this piece challenge you as an artist?

T.N.: A lot of the challenge lies in what makes the piece so powerful—the juxtaposition of the weighty and poignant information being presented, with the casual habits and nature of teenage life. It's a difficult balance to strike.

What is your favorite part in the script?

T.N.: I have a soft spot for Dr. Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs...I really enjoy her poem.

What was your favorite interaction with a student?

T.N.: We had lots of great comments during our last two shows at Northside College Prep High School. I spoke with a few students after the show and had a great discussion with them about the power of hip-hop poetry and whether we thought it was

a useful teaching method. I love Northside College Prep—at that school it's definitely hip to be bright.

What was the funniest interaction with a student?

T.N.: I'd love to narrow it down to one instance but it happened at nearly every show: inevitably, someone wanted to know where my shoes came from! Our costume designer presented us with a lot of great shoe options, and we chose some really hot kicks. They were a definite hit! In addition to lots of great shoe comments and compliments, I think it helped them identify with me rather than some unreachable actor in an outreach program.

To bring *The MLK Project* to your school, or to underwrite a performance for another school, contact Nicole Gilman, Director of Education at 847-441-6840 or ngilman@writerstheatre.org.

Writers' Theatre would like to recognize the following education sponsors: Bank of America, Credit Suisse, The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust, Polk Brothers Foundation, Target, Dr. Scholl Foundation, and three anonymous foundations.

A Carol Marks Jacobsohn Arts & Education Program

SPONSOR SALUTE



Andrew P. Studdert, Chairman and CEO of NES Rentals and his wife and Writers' Theatre Trustee, Mary Pat Studdert

Writers' Theatre is delighted to welcome NES Rentals back as Production Sponsor for *Oh Coward!*. This marks NES Rentals' third consecutive year collaborating with Writers' Theatre, following successful partnerships on our critically acclaimed productions of *Picnic* and *The Lion in Winter*. We are tremendously grateful to NES for its sustained and enthusiastic endorsement of the daring work Writers' Theatre seeks to present.

"NES is pleased once again to support the artistry and imagination of Writers' Theatre. We're happy to partner with an organization that always strives for excellence and that contributes to the vibrancy and prosperity of the community," says Andrew P. Studdert, Chairman and CEO of NES Rentals. Writers' Theatre commends NES for its vision and generosity, and for its invaluable help in making Writers' Theatre a cultural anchor of Chicago's North Shore.



STRATFORD TOUR SUMMER 2009



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2

1: Mary Jane Pollack and Marilyn Alsdorf 2: Barry Weinstein, Hilary Weinstein, Trustee Mary Pat Studdert, Linda Cornell Weinstein, Director of Institutional Advancement Rachel Weinstein and Jill Schield enjoy a picnic before a matinee performance

Several times a year, Writers' Theatre invites our patrons to explore the best theatres outside of Glencoe on one of our unique theatre tours. This summer, 16 friends joined Artistic Director Michael Halberstam and Richard Christiansen, former chief theatre critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, on a four-day getaway to The Stratford Festival in Ontario. The tour packed five performances into three days—the highlight of which was a seminal production of *West Side Story* directed by Writers' Theatre alum and Chicago's own Gary Griffin. The productions were enhanced by daily educational seminars, including a private Q & A with Mike Shara, one of Stratford's leading actors.

In their free time, patrons enjoyed exploring the picturesque town and meandering along the river before meeting up for gourmet meals at Stratford's finest restaurants. All in all, it was a fabulous weekend filled with good food, great company, glorious weather and excellent theatre!

For information about future tours at Writers' Theatre, please contact Amber Bel'cher, Development Manager, at 847-242-6012 or abelcher@writerstheatre.org.

WRITERS' THEATRE WELCOMES

Writers' Theatre is delighted to welcome the following people to the Board of Trustees:

AMY POPE BROCK

Amy is on hiatus from practicing law, and has law and undergraduate degrees from Northwestern University. Raised in Glencoe, followed by a stint in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Amy now resides in Winnetka with her husband Clay and their three children. Amy serves on the Board of Willow Wood Preschool, the Women's Board of the Winnetka Community House, the Guild of the Chicago Botanic Garden and the Associate Board of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago.

CHRISTINE FARRELL POMPIZZI

Christine (Tina) was raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She attended Penn State and worked in banking management for 11 years in the Philadelphia area. She has resided in Glencoe for 21 years with her husband Michael and their four children. Tina previously served on the school board of Sacred Heart School in Winnetka where she presided as President for one year. She was also President of Sacred Heart's Parent Teacher Organization and chaired the annual fundraiser Nite Lites (which generates approximately \$250,000 for the school). Tina also served on the board of the Glencoe Newcomer's Club. Currently, Tina serves as a member of the Winnetka Community Associates of the Art Institute and heads the Sacred Heart Women's Group. Tina joins the Board after co-chairing the Writers' Theatre annual *WordPlay* Gala for the last two years.

IN THE KNOW

Save-The-Date:

WordPlay Gala

Friday, April 16, 2010

The Peninsula Chicago

Co chairs: Jan and Lloyd Culbertson & Sara and Christopher Pfaff

Shall we be merry?

-William Shakespeare

Don't miss out on what has become one of the most fun and talked-about events of the Chicago social season!

Last year's Gala sold out two months in advance of the event so be sure to reserve your place early by calling 847-242-6012.

SHOP TO SUPPORT WRITERS' THEATRE AT IGIVE.COM

When shopping online, did you know that you have the opportunity to direct a portion of the money you spend to Writers' Theatre? At iGive.com/writerstheatre you have access to 700+ online stores including Amazon, Pottery Barn and Nordstrom—and each vendor will contribute a percentage of the proceeds from your purchase to Writers' Theatre. It's simple, and best of all, there's no extra cost to you! Plus, you'll receive all kind of other terrific benefits, like coupons, free shipping deals and secret sales exclusively available through iGive.

While completing your holiday shopping (or any time of year), you can support Writers' Theatre and give the additional gift of superb theatre to the entire community! To join, create your free iGive account, select Writers' Theatre as your charitable cause and then start shopping. **Visit iGive.com/writerstheatre to register today!**

AUDIENCE ENRICHMENT

Join us for the pre-show lectures and post-show discussions for *Oh Coward!*

Pre-show lectures give you an opportunity to learn more about the play, playwright and artists by exploring the time period, context, and history. Post-show discussions allow you to engage with the artists involved in the production by asking questions following the performance. Both are great ways to enrich your experience in the theatre!

OH COWARD! PRE-SHOW LECTURES:

- Sunday, January 3, 2010 at 5pm
- Sunday, January 31, 2010 at 5pm
- Sunday, February 7, 2010 at 5pm

OH COWARD! POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS:

featuring actors from *Oh Coward!*, will take place immediately following the performance on the following dates:

- Wednesday, December 9, 2009
- Wednesday, December 16, 2009
- Tuesday, December 22, 2009
- Tuesday, January 5, 2010
- Wednesday, February 17, 2010
- Tuesday, February 23, 2010
- Wednesday, February 24, 2010
- Tuesday, March 2, 2010

OH COWARD!

NOVEMBER

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
		17 7:30	18 7:30	19 8:00	20 8:00	21 4:00/8:00
22 2:00/6:00	23	24 7:30	25 2:00/7:30	26	27 8:00	28 4:00/8:00
29 2:00/6:00	30					

DECEMBER

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
		1 7:30	2 7:30	3 7:30	4 Private Event	5 4:00/8:00
6 2:00/6:00	7	8 7:30	9 2:00/7:30**	10 8:00	11 8:00	12 4:00/8:00
13 2:00	14	15 7:30	16 7:30**	17 8:00	18 8:00	19 4:00/8:00
20 2:00/6:00	21	22 7:30**	23 7:30	24	25	26 4:00/8:00
27 2:00/6:00	28	29 7:30	30 7:30	31		

JANUARY

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
					1	2 4:00/8:00
3 2:00/6:00*	4	5 7:30**	6 2:00/7:30	7 8:00	8 8:00	9 4:00/8:00
10 2:00	11	12 7:30	13 7:30	14 8:00	15 8:00	16 4:00/8:00
17 2:00/6:00	18	19 7:30	20 7:30	21 8:00	22 8:00	23 4:00/8:00
24 2:00/6:00	25	26 7:30	27 7:30	28 8:00	29 8:00	30 4:00/8:00
31 2:00/6:00*						

FEBRUARY

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
	1	2 7:30	3 2:00	4 8:00	5 8:00	6 4:00/8:00
7 2:00/6:00*	8	9 7:30	10 7:30	11 8:00	12 8:00	13 4:00/8:00
14 2:00/6:00	15	16 7:30	17 7:30**	18 8:00	19 8:00	20 4:00/8:00
21 2:00/6:00	22	23 7:30**	24 7:30**	25 8:00	26 8:00	27 4:00/8:00
28 2:00/6:00						

MARCH

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
	1	2 7:30**	3 7:30	4 8:00	5 8:00	6 4:00/8:00
7 2:00/6:00	8	9	10 2:00/7:30	11 8:00	12 8:00	13 4:00/8:00
14 2:00/6:00	15	16	17 2:00/7:30	18 8:00	19 8:00	20 4:00/8:00
21 2:00						

*Pre-Show Lectures **Post-Show Discussions

