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A Contemporary Theatre 2016 SEASON

Apr 8–May 8, 2016

STUPID FUCKING BIRD

By Aaron Posner

Directed by Jessica Kubzansky

Photo by Hayley Young Photography

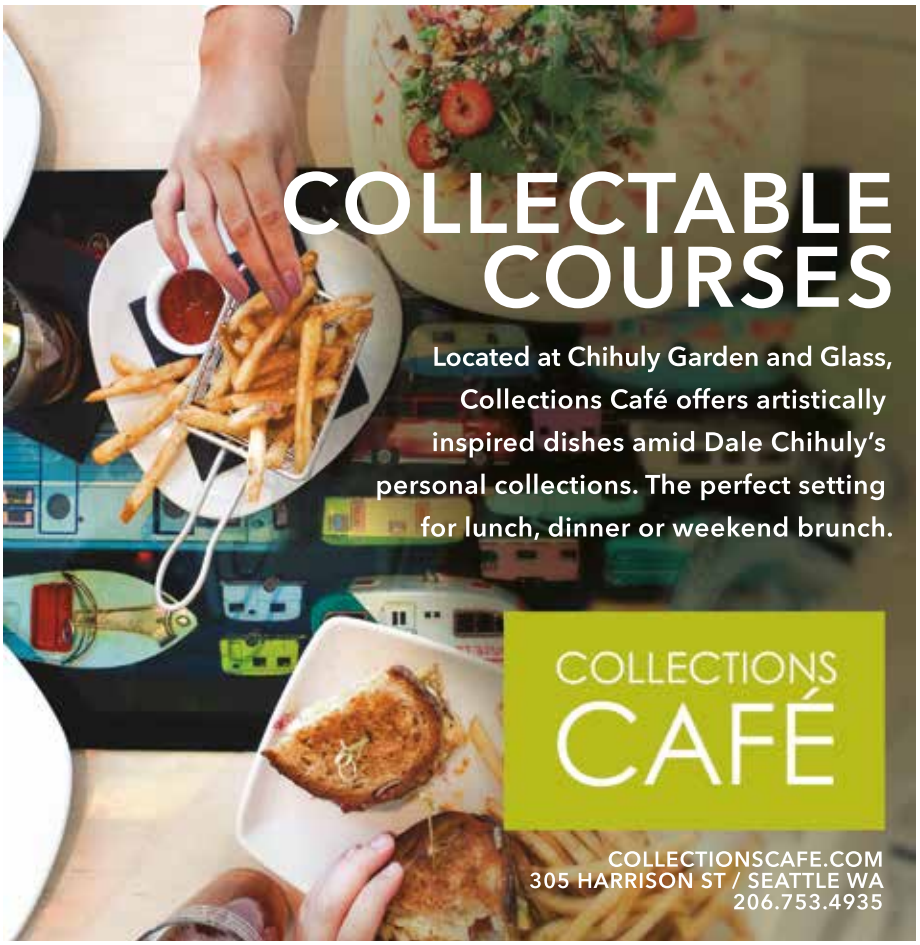

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PHOTO: KAT HENNESSEY

Q & A with

Sarah Rose Davis

The actor on singalong music, "second breakfast" and knowing yourself.

BY BRETT HAMIL

Sarah Rose Davis is an actor and Seattle native with a BFA in musical theatre from The Boston Conservatory who began her career in the Village Theatre's KIDSTAGE program. In 2014 Davis successfully tackled Barbra Streisand's signature role as Fanny Brice in Village's *Funny Girl*, for which the Seattle Times called her "highly appealing." You may have seen Davis at the 5th Avenue Theatre as Maggie in *A Chorus Line*, Frenchy in *Grease* and at least 15 other shows there. Most recently, she played the role of Rosemary Pilkington in their production of *How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.

What's the best performance you've seen lately?

Come From Away at Seattle Rep. It was beyond brilliant. It was captivating, intense, humorous, and had me completely enthralled. It's totally my kind of theatrical experience, both as an audience member and a performer myself. It's ensemble-driven—the whole cast was involved and onstage working together almost the entire show. The music was new and exhilarating with incredible rhythmic movement. The story, about a small town in Canada whose population doubled overnight when 38 planes were re-routed there on September 11th, was intense yet surprisingly relatable.

It was a show about human experience, about amazing strangers who were forced to work through an incredibly difficult time together. I could go on and on about this show! I love seeing new and inspiring theater in Seattle especially when I have so many friends involved in the process!

The best movie I've seen recently was a Disney Pixar animated short called *Lava*. Oh man, watch it. Disney tears.

What's the best meal in Seattle?

I have to admit I'm not much of a foodie—not that I don't LOVE food. I do, really. I'm just not good at finding all the cool places in Seattle to eat. I am, however, a huge breakfast person and a huge proponent of second breakfast as well. Sometimes one breakfast simply is not enough. My two favorite breakfast spots are The 5 Point Cafe and Brave Horse Tavern.

I could eat breakfast all day long. My boyfriend often makes amazing breakfasts as well. He can throw anything into an egg scramble and it is delicious.

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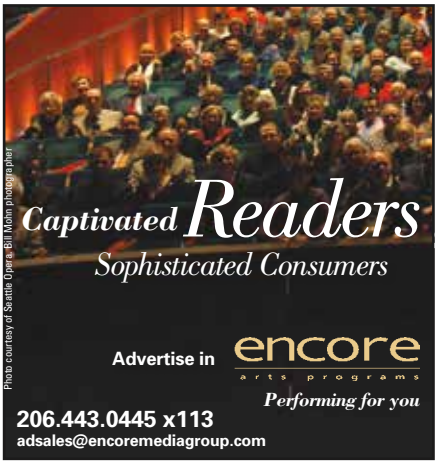

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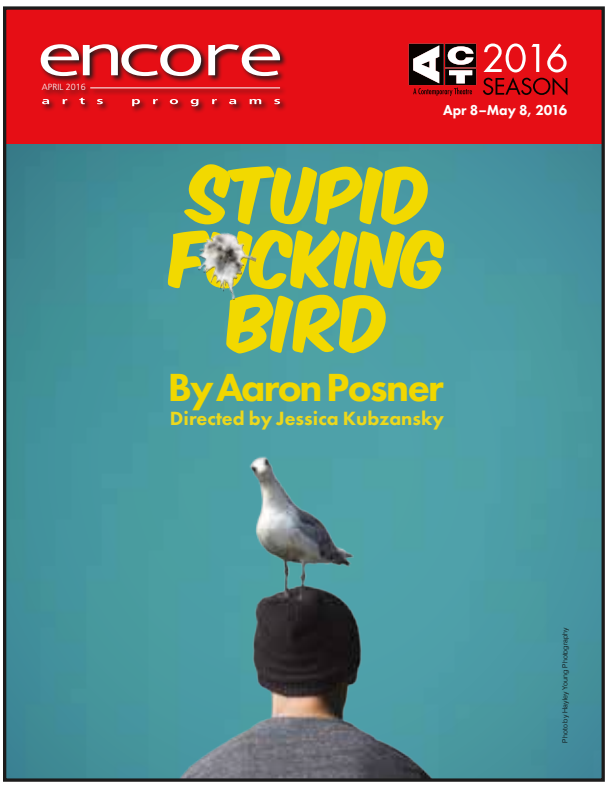

ACT
A Contemporary Theatre

Stupid F#@*ing Bird A1

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Sara Rose Davis, continued

What music gets you pumped up? What do you listen to when you're sad?
I love to listen to music I can sing along to. This usually means a female singer or high tenor—I've found that if I cannot comfortably sing along and belt out the songs, I won't really get that into it. I love listening to an album until I know absolutely every single word. Before my shows right now I've been listening to Demi Lovato. She's incredible and her range is outrageous.

I've also just barely started to scratch the surface on Lin-Manuel Miranda's new show, *Hamilton*, and I know how obsessed I'm going to be with it shortly.

If I need some completely calming music when I'm feeling a little down, I listen to Carole King's *Tapestry* (brilliant), which I belt out with joy, or Colbie Caillat's album *Breakthrough*.

What's the most crucial element of any production?
There are a million crucial elements that contribute to a successful production: story, casting, direction, production design, acting, etc., which is why I would say that communication is the most important element for a production to work. Let's assume that the story is already worth telling, which is why someone has decided to theatricalize it. For the production to be a success, everyone involved in the process needs to be on board in telling the SAME story, whether that be through the lights, costumes, sets or character relationships.

Whenever I am in a really successful production—and of course we could have a really long conversation about the definition of a successful production—I always attribute that success to awesome communication from everyone involved, both on the creative team and as part of the cast. For *How To Succeed*, I felt that our director, Bill Berry, was really great at making sure everyone was telling the same story and we were all living in the same world from set design to costume design and musical direction. Same world, same story. To me that is the key.

What's the most useful thing anyone's ever taught you about working in theatre?
Be yourself and keep learning. Keep learning about the arts and about yourself. Theater is an incredibly strange world in which you have to know so much about yourself that you can then completely lose yourself within a character. I don't mean hide yourself behind a character, because you need the personal connection in order to fully transform into this person, but if you don't understand who you are as a human, artist, friend, lover, daughter, etc., it's impossible to approach a character with any sort of authenticity.

It's really easy, especially in a musical theatre BFA program, to lose yourself in a million suggestions, but ultimately YOU have to decide which pieces of advice to follow. I have tattoos and currently have blue hair—never thought I could do that in theater with auditions as frequent as they are but then I decided: Why not?

I've also been told to never stop learning about your craft. I continue to study voice and I push myself to take more dance classes and improve my skills. I'm sure I could articulate more clearly, but as I understand it now, this is the best way I know how to share the advice I've been given. I am still learning.

John Langs
Artistic Director

Carlo Scandiuzzi
Executive Director

Becky Witmer
Managing Director

ACT – A Contemporary Theatre presents

By Aaron Posner
Directed by Jessica Kubzansky

Beginning April 8, 2016 • Opening Night April 14, 2016

CAST

Suzanne Bouchard*	Emma
Keiko Green*	Mash
MJ Sieber*	Dev
Jasmine Jean Sim	Nina
Adam Standley*	Con
G. Valmont Thomas*	Sorn
Connor Toms*	Trig

CREATIVE TEAM

Jessica Kubzansky	Director
Martin Christoffel	Scenic Designer
Heidi Zamora	Costume Designer
Rick Paulsen	Lighting Designer
Robertson Witmer	Sound Designer
Rachael Lincoln	Choreographer
Geoffrey Alm	Fight Choreographer
JR Welden*	Stage Manager
Stephanie Haire	Assistant Director
Marcella Barbeau	Assistant Lighting Designer
Verhanika Willhelm	Production Assistant

Running Time: This performance runs approximately two hours. There will be one intermission.
*Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.
The video and/or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever are strictly prohibited.
Original Music: James Sugg
Stupid Fucking Bird was developed and world premiered in
June 2013 at Wooly Mammoth Theatre Company, Washington, D.C.;
Howard Shalwitz, Artistic Director and Jeffrey Hermann, Managing Director.

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Katharyn Alvord Gerlich, Eulalie M. & Gian-Carlo Scandiuzzi, Nancy Alvord, Linda Brown & Larry True

Audience members are cordially reminded to silence all electronic devices. All forms of photography and the use of recording devices are strictly prohibited. Please do not walk on the stage before, during, or after the show. Patrons wearing Google Glass must power down the device if wearing them in the theatre.

John Langs
PHOTO BY ALABASTRO PHOTOGRAPHY

WELCOME to ACT

It was four years ago that I first experienced the power housed inside the writing of Anton Chekhov. Like many who grew up in the theatre or around it, I had been exposed to Chekhov on a number of occasions. First in acting class, where the work was oh-so-precious that I held it at arm's length. Then as an audience member, where I sat endlessly waiting for something to happen. I came to regard Chekhov as "theatrical spinach." I knew it was good for you, but "Ack!" to the taste. Perhaps a more accurate metaphor would be a child who steals a sip of wine from their parent's glass—overwhelmed by all the flavors and shocked that anyone could drink it willingly, much less enjoy it.

I agreed to direct my first Chekhov play because the thought of it terrified me, and usually when there is that much fear around an opportunity there's a great deal of learning to be had as well.

Fast forward, and I'm sitting in the rehearsal room watching a scene between Trigorin and Nina go terribly off the rails. We have hacked at it from every angle. It's just not working. We are frustrated and feeling defeated. Finally one of the actors says, "Can we just start over? Can we just sit down and talk to each other?" It's hard to describe the moment in a rehearsal room when two actors truly connect. Tennessee Williams may have come close when he said, "Sometimes there is God so quickly." In this moment of grace, I was introduced to the true power of Chekhov's writing. He taps into a vein of humanity that's deep and true. He has ultimate compassion for his characters, but no mercy when it comes to laying bare their existential, neurotic psychological quirks. And he draws all of this out of the seemingly simplest situations.

It is no wonder that his work continues to be a touchstone and a platform for so many great writers, including the one whose work you are going to see tonight. I had barely finished the script of *Stupid Fucking Bird* when I knew we had to program it. ACT is joyfully participating in the remarkable resurgence of Chekhov around the country and the world. With different commercial productions based on his work being launched this theatrical season and the proliferation of shows like *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, it's worth asking why Chekhov endures 100 years later. I think the answer is a simple one: he sees us for who we truly are, even as we blindly struggle to see ourselves. He records us with all our incredible flaws, and he loves us anyway.

It is a great goal of this theatre to help our community better see itself, and we try to work toward that end in a similar loving spirit. Thank you for sharing the journey.

John Langs
Artistic Director

A Note from Director JESSICA KUBZANSKY

"Love, which seems the realest thing, is really nothing at all; a simple grey rock is a thousand times more tangible than love is; and the earth is such a rock, and love only a breeze that dreams over its surface, weightless and traceless, yet love's more mineral, more dense, more veined with gold and corrupted with lead, more bitter and more weighty than the earth's profoundest matter. Love is a sea of desire stretched between shores–only the shores are real, but how much more compelling is the sea. Love is the world's infinite mutability; lies, hatred, murder even are all knit up in it; it is the inevitable blossoming of its opposites, a magnificent rose smelling faintly of blood. A dream which makes the world seem ... an illusion. The art of illusion is the art of love, and the art of love is the blood-red heart of the world."

—from Tony Kushner's adaptation of Corneille's *The Illusion*

I am writing this at the end of one of the most intense, passionate, painful, beautiful weeks of rehearsal I have ever had. And all because some guy named Aaron Posner, contemplating his complex relationship with Chekhov, decided to write a variation on Chekhov's *The Seagull* called *Stupid Fucking Bird,* and blew the doors open on a master that was for many people like theatre medicine.

In the original *Seagull*, Constantine desperately pursues a new form of theatre, as does his counterpart Conrad in Aaron Posner's variation. And in fact, since time immemorial, passionate theatre artists have been interested in reinventing the art form, both to be new, to "shake up" what is established, but also to be better, to be revitalized and truly alive. And if it succeeds, the new form shocks the possible, it jolts the audience out of the rut of expectations to make something so raw and unexpected that it holds the mirror up to nature with a much more telling light. There is something about *Stupid Fucking Bird* that feels like Aaron Posner has reinvented the form, given us richer, better access to Chekhov, and even more importantly, to the characters who inhabit his world and ours. Aaron has, to quote the play, made a world "so different in feel, it might be realer than real."

I've come to think of this play as a meta-theatrical love story, with all that that implies—both about what is "meta-theatrical" (you'll see) and what is "love" (see Kushner's quote above for the ways in which I mean *love*). But love stories, when they're real, are the most compelling stories we tell, and we seem to need to keep telling them.

So I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am that the *making* of this play has been such an extraordinary and joyous love story. Somehow, Aaron Posner, standing on Chekhov's profound text, has succeeded in making more three-dimensional than ever the human beings who breathe and sweat and labor upon the stage. I *love* these characters. These flawed, angst-ridden, neglected, seeking, needy, self-absorbed, passionate, yearning *people*. They are me. They are every love I've ever longed for and haven't gotten. They are every crushed dream I've ever experienced as I've watched art fail. They are every time I've ever wondered, "Why go on?" They are in as much pain as I have been, their stakes are so high, their passions are so huge, they have to settle or suffer or conquer in ways that are both terrible and *true.*

But that experience only happens when you have the privilege of working with a glorious design team, a dedicated and invested theatre staff, and great actors of towering talent and huge generosity of spirit, smart, passionate, and giving, endlessly inventive and unafraid of going to the darkest places and owning the ugliest parts of themselves in the service of the story they're telling.

So making this play has taken me, and perhaps all of us privileged enough to rehearse it, to the existential mountaintop. It's a place that I don't think any human being can stand to be for very long, because you see too much, you *know* too much to be able to tolerate that much reality. But while you're there the experience is *realer than real*, and the vividness of the agony we're in is both unbearable and revitalizing because it makes us know we're fully awake and alive.

For all of that, and for the privilege of sharing this experience with *you*, I am awed and grateful.

Thank you.

COMING SOON TO **ACT**

A Contemporary Theatre

"**Packed with humanity**...like a chart depicting the sexual and emotional anatomy of us all."
—The New York Times

The Mystery of Love & Sex

By Bathsheba Doran
Directed by Allison Narver

May 27–Jun 26

Show Sponsor

Photo by Hayley Young Photography

Worse Than Tigers
Mar 23–Apr 17

Olivia and Humphry's quietly failing marriage is ready to eat them alive. Unless the escaped tiger outside their door does first. A world premiere by RED STAGE, Seattle's newest theatre company.

Photo by Melyssa Lagervall

Bernie's Apt.
May 5–28

At once tragic and darkly comedic, Rose Cano offers a modern-day Latin-American exploration of Lorca's classic tale *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

The Great Soul of Russia
Apr 20

Join The Seagull Project and members of Seattle's vibrant artistic community as they explore how various Russian artistic roads, past and present, begin and end with Chekhov.

Photo by Karen Skunde

Icicle Creek New Play Festival
May 17–18

Now in its tenth season, the nationally-renowned festival brings two brand new plays to ACT, including scenes from the World Premiere, *Daisy* and Wendy MacLeod's *Mary's Girl*.

Endangered Species Project
Apr 24, May 16

Explore the great plays you seldom see. Join ESP for its sixth year of 12 book-in-hand presentations, chosen and performed by dozens of Seattle's best and bravest actors!

Things You Can Do
Jul 8–31

A drunken kiss, an icy plunge, and a reckless act of revenge. Live Girls! Theatre presents a fresh take on the issues of global climate change through the personal lens of a family on the verge of a critical meltdown.

acttheatre.org | 206.292.7676 | 700 Union Street, Seattle

Meet ACT's Core Company

ACT and Artistic Director John Langs are thrilled to announce ACT's first Core Company. Each year, a group of actors will join ACT in a yearlong creative endeavor, performing and contributing as artistic ambassadors for ACT's 2016 season. The Core Company encourages an environment of artistic excellence, while creating a home for local actors to experiment and grow.

"I'm excited to have such a talented group of artists representing ACT," Langs says. "It is the charge of great theatre to push the art form forward."

Each member is looking forward to embarking on this artistic journey, where they will push each other deeper into the craft of acting. "We have a safe space. We actually get to get down and dirty and give that excitement to the audience," Core Company Member Keiko Green says.

Core Company Members are eager for mentorship and partnership opportunities during the year. "To be around someone like G. Val or Bob Wright who have done this for decades is really important," Core Company Member Lorenzo Roberts says. "And that's the aspect I'm most excited about—the apprenticeship."

From left: Kirsten Potter, G. Valmont Thomas, R. Hamilton Wright, Connor Toms, Jasmine Jean Sim, Keiko Green, Lorenzo Roberts. | PHOTO BY ALABASTRO PHOTOGRAPHY

Keiko Green received her B.F.A. in Theatre from New York University and was seen in *The Comparables* (Seattle Repertory Theatre), *Othello* (Seattle Shakespeare Company), and *Amadeus (*Seattle Public Theater). Green will appear in *Stupid Fucking Bird, Dangerous Liaisons,* and *A Christmas Carol.*

Kirsten Potter appeared in *Rapture, Blister, Burn; One Slight Hitch;* and *Big Love* (ACT); as well as *Photograph 51; A View From the Bridge;* and *Or,* (Seattle Repertory Theatre). She has voiced dozens of vixens and evildoers in video games and has received numerous awards for her audiobooks. Potter will appear in *Worse Than Tigers* (RED STAGE and ACTLab), *Daisy,* and *Dangerous Liaisons.*

Lorenzo Roberts received his B.F.A. in Acting from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and appeared in *Othello* (Seattle Shakespeare Company), as well as *As You Like It* (ACTLab) with ACT's 2015 Kenan Directing Fellow. Roberts will appear *The Mystery of Love & Sex, The Royale,* and *A Christmas Carol.*

Jasmine Jean Sim graduated from Cornish College of the Arts as well as the Pacific Conservatory for the Performing Arts. She appeared in *The Children's Hour, John Baxter is a Switch Hitter* (Intiman) and *Dirty* (Washington Ensemble Theatre and ACTLab). Sim will appear in *Stupid Fucking Bird, Dangerous Liaisons,* and *A Christmas Carol.*

G. Valmont Thomas was in the acting company of Oregon Shakespeare Festival for 13 seasons and has appeared in *A Christmas Carol* (ACT), *Water by the Spoonful* (West of Lenin), and *The Piano Lesson* (Syracuse Stage and Seattle Repertory Theatre). Thomas will appear in *Stupid Fucking Bird, The Royale,* and *A Christmas Carol.*

Connor Toms appeared in *The Invisible Hand; In the Next Room, or the vibrator play* (ACT); and *Festen* (New Century Theatre Company). He has also worked at Seattle Repertory Theatre, Intiman, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Book-It Repertory Theatre, and many more. Toms will appear in *Stupid Fucking Bird, Daisy,* and *A Christmas Carol.*

R. Hamilton Wright has appeared in numerous ACT productions, including *The Revengers' Comedies, The Pillowman, Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike,* and *A Christmas Carol.* He is a regular actor and director with many of Seattle's theatres, and in recent years, also a playwright. Wright will appear in *Daisy, The Royale,* and *A Christmas Carol.*

TIME MAY CHANGE ME

BY GAVIN REUB, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE SEAGULL PROJECT

Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*

Chekhov's 19th century masterpiece reveals the passion and pathos of everyday life through an unforgettable cast of characters. On the shore of a magic lake, a family assembles to watch a play. Romantic and artistic conflicts collide, setting the stage for an unlikely comedy, at once tragic and absurd.

"I watch the ripples change their size
But never leave the stream
Of warm impermanence and
So the days float through my eyes
But still the days seem the same"
—*David Bowie*

Chekhov's *The Seagull* premiered 120 years ago.

Same year the first Ford vehicle was built. Washington State was ten.

Now we have driver-less cars, and a state so green you can smell the progress.

Chekhov's impact on drama and literature over that span is inarguable, but it's rare for any modern author—especially a non-American—to find his way into the American canon. Not to mention for them to bore so deeply into our psyche, that we seek further depth in our adaptations, extensive translations, and open "inspirations."

What is it about Chekhov? Why are the most popular theatre artists in the world—Annie Baker, Cate Blanchett—breathing new life into his work?

We are on the edge of political upheaval. Our modes of interaction have changed—Snapchats, digital lives, and virtual reality—growing into a frustrated millennial silent scream. People are murdered on sidewalks as systems of power crumble. The very fabric of our structures and form are shifting around us.

It's easy to be a passive observer. To sit behind a screen, and like Irina in *The Three Sisters*, plead into the void for a better life, from the comfort of our keyboards.

Chekhov built a live chamber where our own thoughts of inadequacy, turmoil, and fear echo with such force off the beautiful characters that we can do nothing but feel for their passions and eternal suffering. The clock strikes down on their heads, pinning them deeper and deeper into the earth. Until they just disappear.

Chekhov's final play, *The Cherry Orchard,* premiered in 1904. The play was a sign of the year to come. By 1905, Russia was in its first major revolution. Workers, the military, and students were all on strike. The Russian peasantry took up the torch, burning down 3,000 manors, amounting to 15% of Russia's estates.

Where are the peasants now?

At the polls, in the streets, on the stage.

Torches in hand, lighting the path toward dynamic change.

"Where's your shame
You've left us up to our necks in it
Time may change me
But you can't trace time"
—*David Bowie*

"Dreams of realities peace blow steam in the face of the beast
Sky could fall down, wind could cry now, look at me mother***ker I smile"
—*Kendrick Lamar*

The Seagull Project was formed out of a passion for the great works of Anton Chekhov. An ACTLab partner since 2012, The Seagull Project has brought ACT patrons exceptional performances of The Seagull *(2013) and* The Three Sisters *(2015), as well as quarterly readings under the helm "The Great Soul of Russia." Visit acttheatre.org for details on their latest programming.*

An interview with playwright Aaron Posner

BY JOHN LANGS, ACT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

JL: Well hello Aaron Posner, how are you? What's going on in your life?

AP: Well, I'm in Las Vegas.

JL: Wow, what's going on in Vegas?

AP: I'm actually working for Cirque du Soleil this week. Consulting on three of their shows, basically doing acting coaching and a little dramaturgy, that kinda thing. How are things there?

JL: They're good, man. We are right about to open *Assassins*, so I drop into tech right after this phone call.

Aaron Posner

AP: Wow.

JL: I am looking at the wonderful scenic design for your play. I'm such a fan of the tone of your play and how irreverent and sassy it is, that I thought we'd do a sort of irreverent and sassy John-and-Aaron back-and-forth about the nature of your work.

AP: You go.

JL: So my first question is "What the hell makes you think that you can rewrite a Chekhov play and unleash it on the world the way you have?" Where do you get the chutzpah?

AP: [Laughing] Yeah, good question. Well, 30 years of frustration with the state of theatre, I suppose. Too many nights in theatres feeling like I'll never get those couple of hours of my life back. A passionate desire to make theatre that has something more to do with authenticity than … *fakieositude.* You know, theatre is all lying, right, it's all pretend, but there's a certain kind of integrity to the lying that I'm interested in; some degree of reality and transparency. And of course, you know, not being a genius like Chekhov, or Shakespeare, or Shaw, or any of those guys, I needed to steal something with which to hold my ideas … so the Chekhovian playground, as it were, of the big questions about love, life, and the quotidian struggles of life, seemed like a really good vessel. On the other hand, I didn't know any of that theoretical shit when I started writing the thing. It really just started as a joke where people were talking about Chekhov and I talked about how much I loved and hated *The Seagull*, and literally as I was walking out of Woolly Mammoth, I said, "I should write my own adaptation of *The Seagull*; I should call it *Stupid Fucking Bird*" and everybody laughed, and that's how the play was born.

JL: I think that's fantastic.

AP: And then a couple of weeks later, I couldn't sleep one night, and I thought, "I should just do this". I started writing the first scene. I just thought, "How would I write Chekhov's first *I'm in mourning for my life* Masha/Medvedenko scene for *me*, thinking about what I think about in terms of relationships and people?" And then as I continued working on the play I needed to go back and read it, but the last thing I wanted to read was a good version, so I found the most unspeakably horrible translation on the internet that I could possibly find, which was like an old British literal translation that had lines like … rather than *"why do you always wear black?/I'm in mourning for my life, I'm unhappy"* it would be like *"why is the hue of your clothing so dark? Because of my deep sadness. I am sad about my life."*

JL: Ah, the Brits…

AP: Like it was so bad that I knew it wouldn't influence me and I wouldn't actually use any of it, but it reminded me of the scenes.

JL: Bone-dry British dramaturgy.

AP: [Laughs] Exactly.

JL: I'm nostalgic for it. You and I had a wonderful time

one summer in Wisconsin. I have a great picture of our kids, Maisie and Captain, sitting out on the porch. How has life, age, and fatherhood changed your perspective on some of these characters, or on your writing in general?

AP: You can feel it most particularly in the stuff about Dev having children at the end of the play. Dev and Mash gain perspective from parenthood. They gain humanity, and acceptance, and a wider view of the world through the addition of children into their lives. Con is horrified at the state of the world and how people continue to behave in such shortsighted, idiotic, insane ways. *Stupid Fucking Bird* was born almost at the same time as Maisie was. So I think it shows up in the play that way. It shows up on some level in the fact that I *wrote* the play. You know, it seems counterintuitive but of course, get a kid and then you get *more* productive because you *have* to. I needed to provide, and writing this play was a part of that.

JL: Ah, that's great.

AP: And of course there's just simply that fact that, it makes you think about your life on a larger canvas. So I feel like that perspective is in the play as well and is very much with me, certainly more so since Maisie's been born.

JL: Well it certainly sings in those scenes between Con and Mash. I wanna ask you the *Brain Teaser Question:* Which Chekhovian character did you most feel like when you were in your 20s and which one are you now?

AP: Obviously I was Con. How could I not be? You know, my middle name is Conrad ...

JL: [Laughing] Your secret is out!

AP: So there just might be a *little* identification with that young man, and his desire of making a real difference in the world. But the truth is I feel deeply connected to every character in *Stupid Fucking Bird* ... particularly, if truth be told, the men. The women are harder for me and take more research and conversation and ... excavation, or something. But one part of my younger self was definitely Con. Now I am more Trigorin ... there is a lot of me in that role, too. And a bunch of me in Sorn, too.

JL: Sort of like Trigorin with a Sorn rising.

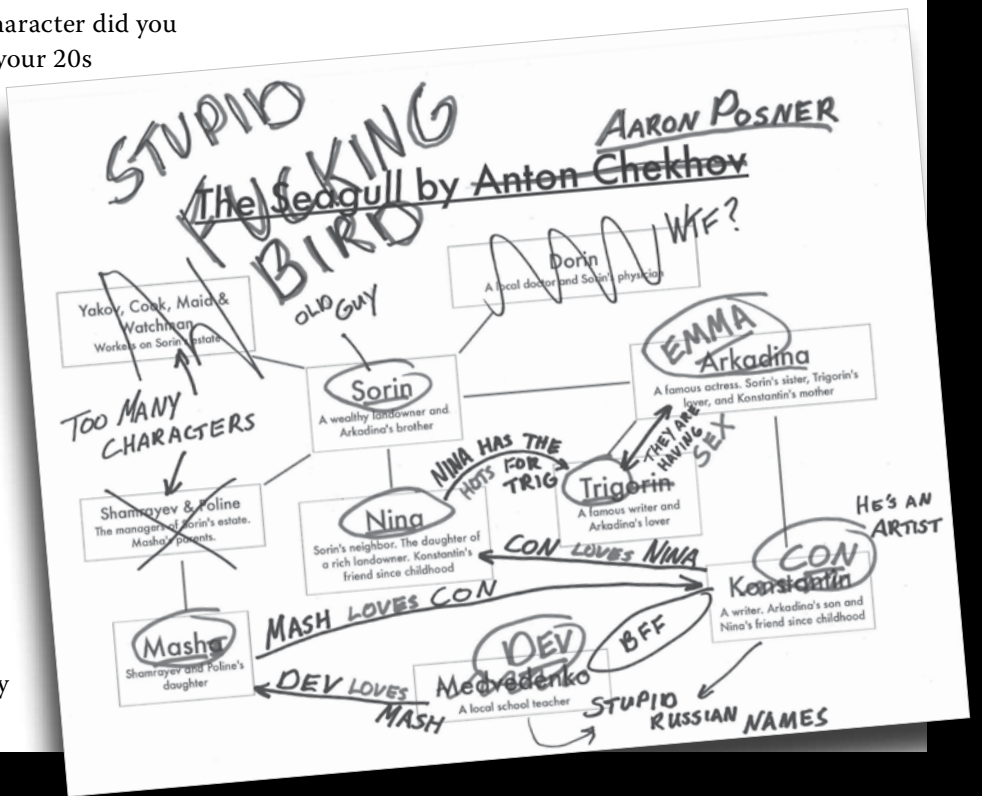
AP: [Laughing] Exactly! But then I feel really connected to Dev, too. And Mash!

JL: She's got the Posner Sass. So, I wanna ask you about your first preview of *Stupid Fucking Bird*. I'm always interested in the inner workings of a writer on their opening night when they're just about to face the public with a play for the first time. I'm interested in what it felt like to let this one out into the world.

AP: Well, this one felt pretty great from the start, I have to say. There's a certain *quality* of laughter that tells you that people are not just laughing because it's "haha funny", but because it's going deeper for them. It's something they think is true. There was a quality of laughter in response to a lot of this show that was very gratifying from the very start, and has been a continual delight and surprise.

JL: Well, I cannot wait. You and your play are remarkable, my friend.

Read more on ACT's blog at acttheatre.wordpress.com.



Who's Who in *Stupid Bird*

Suzanne Bouchard *(Emma)* was last seen in *Bethany* (ACT). Her favorite regional credits include Queen Elizabeth I in *Mary Stuart*, B in *Three Tall Women,* Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie,* Elizabeth Bishop in *Dear Elizabeth,* Charlotte in *A Little Night Music,* Catherine in *By the Waters of Babylon*, Amanda in *Private Lives,* and Brutus in *Julius Caesar.* Suzanne was an inaugural Lunt-Fontanne Fellow at Ten Chimneys in Wisconsin.

Keiko Green *(Mash)* is a playwright and performer, originally from Georgia. This is her first production with ACT, where she is a Core Company member this year. She will also be appearing in *Dangerous Liaisons* and *A Christmas Carol.* Recent work in Seattle includes *The Comparables* (Seattle Repertory Theatre), *Othello* (Seattle Shakespeare Company), *Water by the Spoonful* (Theatre22), *The Memorandum* (Strawberry Theatre Workshop), and *Amadeus* (Seattle Public Theatre). Keiko is a proud member of the Seattle Repertory Theatre Writers' Group. She and Bret Fetzer co-wrote *Puny Humans*, premiering at Annex Theatre on April 22. She is a performer for Living Voices, bringing the story of Japanese Internment camps to classrooms and theatres nationwide. Keiko serves as Community and Artist Liaison for RED STAGE, producing *Worse Than Tigers*, which runs in ACTLab until April 17. She received her B.F.A. in Theatre from New York University.

MJ Sieber *(Dev)* is a founding member of New Century Theatre Company where last year he appeared as Michael in *Festen* and directed the Pulitzer Prize-winning west coast premiere of Annie Baker's *The Flick*. Previously at ACT he appeared in *A Christmas Carol*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, and four seasons with Icicle Creek New Play Festival. He's also been seen in *Native Son* (Intiman); *Elephant Man*, *Gutenberg! The Musical!* (Strawberry Theatre Workshop); *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Outside Mullingar*, *Photograph 51* (Seattle Repertory Theatre); and has appeared at Seattle Shakespeare Company and Cafe Nordo. As a filmmaker MJ made the documentaries *Not Working*, about the Great Recession, and *Detroiters*, chronicling the lives of several men recently released from prison. His short film *The Good Days* won several awards at the 48 Hour Film Project and his feature film *Taste* (co-directed with Hans Altwies) concludes later this year. He is a graduate from Cornish College of the Arts with a degree in Original Work. He is currently working on a three-year project with Jaime Roberts tentatively titled *Furnace heats Penguin*.

Jasmine Jean Sim *(Nina)* graduated from the Pacific Conservatory for the Performing Arts (PCPA '13) in California, her home state, and most recently from Cornish College of the Arts ('15). Recent credits: *Dirty* (ACTLab), *John Baxter is a Switch Hitter* and *The Children's Hour* (Intiman), *A Christmas Carol* (ACT), and most recently *9 To 5* (Seattle Musical Theatre). She can be seen in *Dangerous Liaisons* and *A Christmas Caro*l (again) later this year at ACT. Jasmine has a great passion for Shakespeare, dance, and stage combat, and hopes to always continue learning! Jasmine is unendingly grateful to have been given the opportunity to become part of ACT's Core Company and to be challenged in the coming year with her fellow company members! All the love in the world to Mom, Dad, Andie, and Rory.

Adam Standley *(Con)* made his ACT debut in *Mr. Burns, a post-electric play*. In Seattle, Adam has worked at The 5th Avenue Theatre, Intiman, Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, and Seattle Opera. As a founding member of the new works ensemble, The Satori Group, his work there comprises the majority of the pride in his life. His wife and puppy take up the rest. Satori Group credits include *reWilding, Making of a Monster, Tragedy: a tragedy,* and *Winky*. Regional credits include Bud Frump in *How To Succeed In Business…*, Prior in *Angels in America: Part 1 and 2*, Lyle Webb in *John Baxter is a Switch Hitter*, Leo in *4,000 Miles*, State Trooper/et al in Jane Nichols' idiotic *We Won't Pay, We Won't Pay*, and Eddie in the beautiful *Trouble In Mind*.

G. Valmont Thomas *(Sorn)* returns to ACT after performing in *A Christmas Carol* (2013, 2015). Previous work at ACT includes another doctor, Sam in *Blues for an Alabama Sky* ('97). Other recent Seattle appearances include *Water by the Spoonful* (Theatre22), *Master Harold and the Boys* (West of Lenin), and *The Piano Lesson* (Syracuse Stage and Seattle Repertory Theatre). A member of the acting company at The Oregon Shakespeare Festival for 13 seasons, he played the title character in *Macbeth*, Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Feste in *Twelfth Night*, and Lincoln in *Topdog/Underdog*. Mr. Thomas has enjoyed creating theatre at ACT, as well as teaching theatre, whether it be at University of Nebraska at Lincoln, or at Freehold Studio.

Connor Toms *(Trig)* is thrilled to be joining ACT's Core Company for the 2016 season. Connor was previously seen in Ayad Akhtar's *The Invisible Hand* and Sarah Ruhl's *In the Next Room, or the vibrator play* (ACT). He has also worked at Seattle Repertory Theatre, Intiman, Arizona Theatre Company, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Artists Repertory Theatre, Book-It Repertory Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, New Century Theatre Company, New Victory Theater, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, and more. Overwhelming love and immense respect to his Dahlia, about to Bloom …

Aaron Posner *(Playwright)* is a freelance director, playwright, and teacher. He was the founding Artistic Director of Philadelphia's Arden Theatre Company, and is an Associate Artist at the Folger Theatre and the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre. He has won numerous awards as both a director and playwright including an Outer Circle Critics Award, The John Gassner Award, a Theatre Bay Area Award, a Los Angeles Drama Circle Award, an Elliot Norton Award, three Barrymore Awards, and five Helen Hayes Awards as both director and playwright. His published and produced plays include *Stupid Fucking Bird* (one of the ten most produced plays in America for the 2015/16 season); *Life Sucks* (Or The Present Ridiculous); *My Name Is Asher Lev*; *The Chosen*; *Who Am I This Time? (And Other Conundrums of Love)*; *Sometimes A Great Notion*; *A Murder, A Mystery & A Marriage*; and many others. Aaron has directed nearly 200 productions at major regional theatres across the country including Actor's Theatre of Louisville, The

Who's Who in *Stupid Bird*

Alliance, American Players Theatre, The American Repertory Theatre, The Arden Theatre Company, Arena Stage, California Shakespeare Theatre, Folger Theatre, Ford's Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Portland Center Stage, Roundhouse Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Signature Theatre, South Coast Repertory, Studio Theatre, Theatre J, Woolly Mammoth Theatre, and more. Aaron is an Eisenhower Fellow, a graduate of Northwestern University, is from Eugene, Oregon, and lives outside Washington, DC with his wife, actress Erin Weaver, and his amazing daughter, Maisie.

Jessica Kubzansky *(Director*) is the Co-Artistic Director of The Theatre @ Boston Court (T@BC) in Pasadena, and an award-winning director working nationally at The Cherry Lane, Rattlestick, ACT, Portland Center Stage, Illinois Shakespeare Festival, Silk Road, The Aurora, South Coast Rep, The Geffen Playhouse, Pasadena Playhouse, and others. Previously at ACT: Jeanne Sakata's *Hold These Truths* with Ryun Yu. Recently: the world premiere of Stefanie Zadravec's *Colony Collapse* (T@BC); Luis Alfaro's *Mojada*, *A Medea in Los Angeles* (Boston Court at The Getty Villa); *Pygmalion* (Pasadena Playhouse); the New York premiere of Sheila Callaghan's *Everything You Touch* (Rattlestick/True Love at The Cherry Lane); *RII*, her own three-person *Richard II* (T@BC); plus world premieres of *EYT*, Michael Elyanow's *The Children*, Jordan Harrison's *Futura*, Laura Schellhardt's *Courting Vampires*, Mickey Birnbaum's *Bleed Rail*, Carlos Murillo's *Unfinished American Highwayscape #9 & 32*, Jean Claude Van Itallie's *Light*, Cody Henderson's *Cold/Tender*, as well as *Camino Real* and *Mother Courage* (T@BC). Elsewhere: James Still's *I Love to Eat* (Portland Center Stage); *Macbeth* (Antaeus), *The 39 Steps* (La Mirada); *Hamlet* with Leo Marks, Jen Haley's Breadcrumbs (Theater 150); *Glass Menagerie*, *Toys in the Attic*, *Heartbreak House* (The Colony Theatre). World premieres of Julie Hébert's *Tree* (EST/LA), Bryan Davidson's *War Music* (Geffen Playhouse), Bob Clyman's *Tranced* (Laguna Playhouse), plus Sheila Callaghan's *Kate Crackernuts* (24th Street Theatre), and others. Other Chekhov riffs she has been privileged to direct: world premieres of Salamone/McIntyre's musicals *Gulls* (a riff on *The Seagull* at Boston Court) and *Moscow* (a riff on *Three Sisters* at Playwrights Arena), as well as Tom Jacobson's *The Orange Grove* (a riff on *The Cherry Orchard*, Playwrights' Arena). Kubzansky teaches at UCLA and has received numerous awards, including LA Drama Critics Circle Award for Sustained Excellence in Theatre.

Martin Christoffel *(Scenic Designer)* is a local designer, happy to be returning to ACT where previously he designed *An Evening of One Acts*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *The Lady with All the Answers*, *Assisted Living*, *The Woman in Black*, and contributed projections to *Alki.* Other recent shows include *Passing Strange* (Sidecountry Theatre and ACTLab); *Carousel*, *The Music Man* and *Rent* (The 5th Avenue Theatre), *Sleuth* and *The Odd Couple* (Village Theatre). His work can also be seen at EMP in the *Can't Look Away* horror film exhibit and *Indie Game Revolution*. In addition, Martin designs corporate events internationally.

Heidi Zamora *(Costume Designer)* has previously designed costumes for *Orphee et Eurydice* (Seattle Opera); *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Seattle Repertory Theatre); *If You Give A Mouse a Cookie*, *Hamlet* (Seattle Children's Theatre); and at Seattle Shakespeare Company, The Empty Space, Book-It Repertory Theatre, and Strawberry Theatre Workshop. Heidi is a co-founder, former co-Artistic Director, and former board president of Washington Ensemble Theatre and has designed costumes for 17 of the Ensemble's productions, including *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, *Crave*, *blahblahblahBANG*, and *RoboPop!*, which she also co-directed. Heidi is the Costume Show Manager and Resident Costume Design Coordinator at Seattle Opera. Heidi received her M.F.A. in costume design from the University of Washington in 2002.

Rick Paulsen *(Lighting Designer)* is delighted to be returning to ACT, where his lighting was first seen in 1984. Since then, Paulsen has lit more than 60 shows at ACT including *First Class*, *Vincent in Brixton*, *Fiction*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Lonely Planet*, *Becky's New Car*, *Yankee Tavern*, *Double Indemnity*, *One Slight Hitch*, *The Pinter Festival*, *Uncle Ho to Uncle Sam*, *Assisted Living*, and *Sugar Daddies*. Paulsen's work has appeared all around Seattle and across the nation. Some recent work of interest includes *Double Indemnity* (San Jose Repertory Theatre), *Goodnight Moon* (Young Peoples Theatre in Toronto), and *A Year with Frog and Toad* (Childsplay). A proud member of United Scenic Artists, IATSE Local USA-829, he serves on the Western Region Board and the National Board of this union. He is, most importantly, devoted to his wife Roberta and daughter Paige.

Robertson Witmer *(Sound Designer)* was seen recently onstage at ACT as the musician in *Mr. Burns, a post-electric play.* His recent sound design credits include *Seven Ways to Get There*, *The Three Sisters* (ACTLab); *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Mother Courage* (Seattle Shakespeare Company); and *The Flick* (New Century Theatre Company). His onstage appearances include *A Doctor in Spite of Himself* (Intiman, Berkeley Repertory Theatre); *Fiddler on the Roof* (Village Theatre), and *West* (On the Boards). In 2013, Rob received the Gregory Award for Outstanding Sound Design. He is a member of United Scenic Artists, IATSE Local USA-829.

Rachael Lincoln *(Choreographer)* is a choreographer, dancer, and dance filmmaker who, until recently, was based in San Francisco and Berlin. She has performed her work in Germany, Poland, Portugal, Cyprus, Indonesia, Ireland, and throughout the U.S. She has been nominated for two Isadora Duncan Dance Awards and was selected for the Bessie Schonberg choreographic residency at The Yard. In addition to her own work, Rachael has been a member of The Joe Goode Performance Group and the assistant director of Bandaloop. With Leslie Seiters, she is co-founder and director of the duet company Lean-to-Productions. Rachael is now on faculty at the University of Washington.

JR Welden *(Stage Manager)* has stage managed *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Invisible Hand*, *Uncle Ho to Uncle Sam*, *Mary Stuart*, *One Slight Hitch*, *Eurydice*, *The Underpants*, and *A Christmas Carol* at ACT. He stage managed 10 seasons at Intiman, working on productions including *The Grapes of Wrath*; *Nickel and Dimed*; and *The Mandrake Root*, with Lynn Redgrave. At Seattle Repertory Theatre, his credits include *Blue Door*, *The Chosen*, and *Pygmalion*.

John Langs *(Artistic Director*) John has been delighted to serve as Associate Artistic Director of ACT for three years, and is ACT's Artistic Director in 2016. John's 16-year freelance career has afforded him the opportunity to work with many prestigious theatre companies across the country. He has directed productions at Playwrights Horizons NY, Ensemble Studio Theater NY, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Lookingglass Theater Company in Chicago, Circle X in Los Angeles, The Resident Ensemble, New Century Theatre Company, Washington Ensemble Theatre, and Seattle Shakespeare Company. John received his directing degree from UNCSA. Some of his favorite directing credits include *The Shaggs Philosophy of the World* (LA Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Original Musical), and *Brothers Karamazov* (seven LADCC Awards including Best Production of the year and Best Direction) and directing Kurt Beattie in *King Lear.* John received the first annual Seattle Gregory Award honoring excellence in direction for *The Adding Machine.* Recent Seattle credits include *Mary's Wedding* (NCTC), The Seagull Project's *The Three Sisters,* and *Othello* (Seattle Shakespeare Company). As a dedicated fan of original work, John has shepherded over a dozen projects to their premieres.

Carlo Scandiuzzi *(Executive Director)* is a founder of Agate Films and Clear Pictures, producing such films as *Prototype, Dark Drive, Outpatient,* and *The Flats,* and Indieflix, a distribution company. In 1979, Scandiuzzi started Modern Productions, bringing to Seattle such legendary bands as The Police, Devo, Nina Hagen, Iggy Pop, The Ramones, John Cale, Robert Fripp, James Brown, Muddy Waters, and many more. He performed in several plays at Empty Space Theatre including *Aunt Dan and Lemon, The Return of Pinocchio,* and *Dracula.* In the early '80s, he collaborated with many Seattle performance artists such as Norman Durkee, Alan Lande, and Jesse Bernstein. He also acted in various films including *Bugsy, The Public Eye, Another You, Casanova's Kiss,* and *Killing Zoe.* He graduated from the Ecole Superieure D'Art Dramatique of Geneva. Carlo currently serves as a member of the Seattle Arts Commission.

Becky Witmer *(Managing Director)* has been with ACT since 2011, serving as the General Manager (2014-2015) and also the Director of Marketing and Communications (2011-2014). Becky began her career in arts management through marketing and communications. She was the Director of Marketing and Public Relations at Intiman Theatre (2008-2011) and Opera Colorado (2006-2008). She was the Associate Director of Marketing with Central City Opera (2002-2005). Becky is an advisory board member for TeenTix, a founding co-chair of the Cultural Resource Collective, an Arts Business Consultant with Shunpike, and she frequently appears as a guest lecturer for Seattle University's Arts Leadership M.F.A. program. She is a current participant in the Leadership Tomorrow program.

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In the event of an emergency, please wait for an announcement for further instructions. Ushers will be available for assistance.

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The theatre's emergency number in the Union lobby is 206.292.7667. Leave your exact seat location with your emergency contact in case they need to reach you.

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Smoking is NOT allowed in any part of the theatre or within 25 feet of the entrance.

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No firearms of any kind are allowed in any part of the theatre.

Food
Food is not allowed in the theatre. Tuxedos & Tennis Shoes is the exclusive caterer of ACT.

Accessibility
Wheelchair seating is available. The theatre is equipped with the Williams Sound® Listening System for the hard of hearing; headsets are available from the house manager for use, free of charge, with a valid ID and subject to availability. ACT offers American Sign Language interpreted and audio-described performances. For more information, email service@acttheatre.org.

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Making Her Way
Donor Rose Southall on why ACT is her theatre

St. James Cathedral, Northwest Harvest, and Seattle University are just a few of the organizations championed by ACT donor Rose Southall and her late husband John Southall. Rose believes passionately in giving back to the community through education, health and human services, and of course, the arts. As a subscriber, ACTPass and Legacy Society member, her ACT story started in 1968, when she saw *Waiting for Godot* at ACT's original home on Queen Anne.

Rose and her late husband, both longtime Boeing employees, were reintroduced to the theatre during its mid-90s move to a new home at Kreielsheimer Place. "There was a promotion for Boeing employees—it was a new opportunity to see theatre and we went," Rose remembers. The Southalls became subscribers and donors the next year.

"It's about giving back to something that's given me something," Rose says on why she's continued to be an Annual Fund donor. Her love of ACT stems from its diversity in programming and the unique format of presentations: "There's a special intimacy to these spaces," she says of The Falls and The Allen Theatres.

Executive Director Carlo Scandiuzzi with Rose at the 2015 Golden Celebration Gala.
PHOTO BY JOHN ULMAN.

"What we have spent is gone, what we have kept is lost, and what we invest in others is ours forever."

Rose is a consistent attendee at events such as Behind the Scenes and Tech Talk, but she's not just there for the wine! She loves Tech Talks, our exclusive receptions for donors of $250 and above where patrons get a sneak peek into technical rehearsal and some behind-the-scenes stories from ACT's production staff.

"You get an initial insight into the show, and [Technical Director] Steve Coulter does a great job of that." There's also a strong sense of community among Tech Talk attendees. She looks forward to seeing and speaking with regulars—the donors and trustees she's come to know over the years.

A Skyline resident, Rose is passionate about opportunities for her own community to further connect with the art on stage. Some of her favorite past events have been movie nights with Artistic Director Emeritus Kurt Beattie, who would have dinner with residents before watching the movie adaptation of a Mainstage show.

While benefits such as invitations to Tech Talk, Opening Night Dinners, and the Gala are enjoyable perks of giving, Rose's decision to support ACT is about investing in its future. For her, stewardship isn't just about maintaining the status quo—it's about taking theatre to a new level.

Since her husband's passing in 2014, Rose continues to honor his legacy and strikes out on her own, making her way and impacting the world with kindness and grace. There's a quote Rose gives, adapted from AARP founder Ethel Percy Andrus, to sum up her philanthropic philosophy beautifully: "What we have spent is gone, what we have kept is lost, and what we invest in others is ours forever."

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Q & A with

R. Hamilton Wright

"There has to be a surplus of joy at the end for it to be a really significant experience."

BY BRETT HAMIL

PHOTO: ALABASTRO PHOTOGRAPHY

R. Hamilton Wright is a Seattle actor and playwright who's been in more than 130 productions over 35 years of working in theatre. Most recently, he appeared in Seattle Shakespeare's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Seattle Rep's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and ACT's *Vanya, Sonia, Masha and Spike*.

His play, *Sherlock Holmes and the American Problem*, receives its world premiere at the Rep in April, directed by Allison Narver. He's also been chosen as a member of ACT's new Core Company, serving as an ambassador and regular contributor to their productions throughout the coming year.

Wright—his friends call him Bob—lives in a little brick house in North Seattle with his wife, the playwright and master baker Katie Forgette.

What's the best performance you've seen lately?
Whenever my dear wife, confronted by four day's growth of beard on my sorry face, says, "I love you." It is beautifully delivered and there are endless little variations in how she delivers this simple phrase. It is magic. I always buy it.

What's the best meal in Seattle?
In the winter, when the water gets cold, I love the oysters at The Walrus and the Carpenter. They are delicious—if you like oysters—and they make it possible for us to order the maple bread pudding for dessert, which is magnificent.

We live not far from Holman Road and we both grew up in Seattle so whether we need it or not we eat at Dick's once a month. When I was ten or eleven, I could get a hamburger, cheeseburger, fries and a shake for about a dollar. I get the same meal today.

What music gets you pumped up? What do you listen to when you're sad?
I don't listen to music to get excited. I don't listen to music if I'm doing anything else. I really don't listen to much music, actually, which sounds like I'm admitting to being an alien but it is true. I listen to The Beatles when I am in the car. Sometimes Django Reinhardt.

What's the most crucial element of any production?
A good play. Good actors. The text is important but the really crucial thing is the cast. Talent is critical but everyone has to want to work really hard and there has to be a surplus of joy at the end for it to be a really significant experience.

What's the most useful thing anyone's ever taught you about working in theatre?
Woody Allen has said that 80% of success is showing up. I learned a long time ago from older and wiser and far more talented men and women that you need to arrive at rehearsal on time and ready to work. Ready to talk, but more importantly, ready to listen.

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As spring turns the corner into summer, theatre houses conclude the season with a bang, from award-winning modern musicals to celebrated adaptations to world premieres.

Stupid F*cking Bird

April 8–May 8

This sort-of adaptation of *The Seagull* grapples with familiar Chekhovian themes around the role of theatre and the ossification of culture. Written by Aaron Posner, the LA Weekly called it "the best Chekhov adaptation in two decades."

ACT Theatre

Sherlock Holmes and the American Problem

April 22–May 22

In this world premiere by Seattle actor/playwright R. Hamilton Wright, the Victorian sleuth brings his powers of deduction to the American Wild West of 1887. Directed by Allison Narver.

Seattle Repertory Theatre

Billy Elliott

May 12–July 3

This charming musical tells the story of a boy who dreams of dancing ballet, set against the conflict and poverty of a Northern England miners' strike in in the mid-80s. Based on the hit movie and featuring music by Elton John, it won ten Tony Awards and has been called "best musical of the decade."

Village Theatre Issaquah

American Stories

June 3–12

This program brings together folk, jazz and classical in a selection of work from three of the world's greatest choreographers. Jerome Robbins's *Fancy Free* set to the music of Leonard Bernstein, George Balanchine's *Square Dance* and Twyla Tharp's *Waiting at the Station* featuring the music of recently departed jazz great Allen Toussaint.

Pacific Northwest Ballet

For more previews, stories, video and a look behind the scenes, visit EncoreArtsSeattle.com

PROGRAM ARCHIVE | CALENDAR | PREVIEWS | ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Breaking the Fifth Wall: Dying While Performing

BY BRETT HAMIL

Recently I was shocked to read the story of an Italian actor who accidentally hung himself during an immersive performance in Pisa. After reciting a monologue from Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* in a courtyard in front of just one audience member, Raphael Schumacher placed his head in a noose and an apparent malfunction rendered him asphyxiated. A second spectator arrived, noticed that something had gone wrong and rushed to help Schumacher, but it was too late. Doctors later declared him brain dead.

Sheer horror sent me scrambling to debunk the story. It seemed too awful to be true, but several reputable news sources confirmed it. The worst possible thing had occurred.

One likes to think of the performance space as an inviolable microcosm, a zone where the most terrible things that can happen are a flubbed line, a missed sound cue, a critically panned production. Death—the actual kind, not the theatrical facsimile—doesn't enter into the equation. But here the "fifth wall" had been breached.

I couldn't stop thinking about Schumacher: his last conscious moments, the shock of the onlookers, the heartbreak of his loved ones. Driven by morbid curiosity, I jumped on Google and started looking for other instances of mid-performance fatality.

Death onstage bears its own strange poetry; the literal embodiment of the old trope, "He died doing what he loved." The circumstances of each stage death—and there are many—stand out variously as ironic, or eerily appropriate, or even slapstick; consider the great Molière's death in 1673 by violent coughing fit while playing the lead in his own play, *Le Malade imaginaire* (The Hypochondriac). In 1888 the British bass-baritone Frederick Federici succumbed to a heart attack after singing the last note of the opera *Faust* in the role of the demon Mephistopheles as he was descending through a trap door to the Underworld.

The comedian Redd Foxx, known for faking heart attacks as Fred Sanford on *Sanford and Son*, died of an actual heart attack in 1991 during the filming of his new sitcom, and the cast assumed he was clowning on his signature role. In 1986, an actor named Edith Webster died at the close of her death scene in the play *The Drunkard* after singing the song "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone" and slumping to the floor, dead, as indicated in the script.

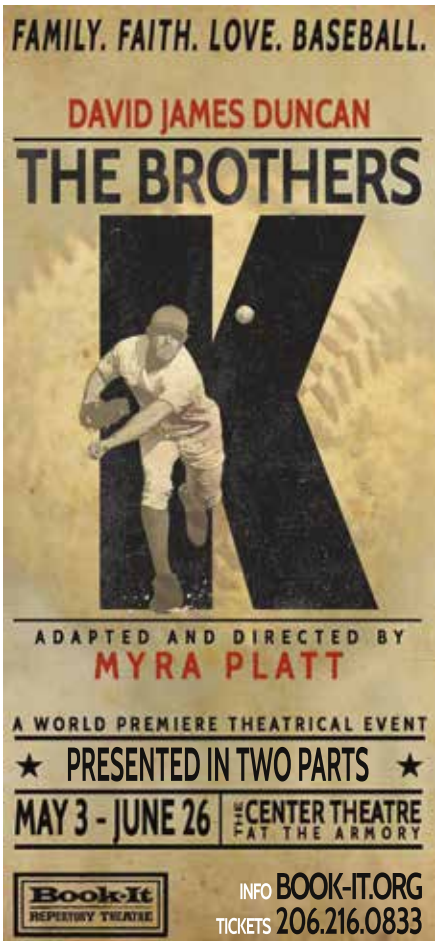
In a cemetery on Capitol Hill lies the final resting place of Brandon Lee, who became one of the most notorious modern on-set fatalities when a gun malfunctioned during the filming of the movie *The Crow*.

My macabre search turned up another Seattle connection to death-in-performance I hadn't known about. In 1985, the Japanese butoh troupe Sankai Juku came to town for the first stop on their tour, in which they opened their residency with a unique public performance. The piece, entitled "Jomon Sho" ("Homage to Prehistory"), consisted of dancers suspended from ropes mounted to the top of the Mutual Life Building in Pioneer Square. Over the course of a half hour they were to gradually unfurl themselves while being lowered to the earth. One of the ropes broke, sending Yoshiyuku Takada plummeting to the sidewalk below. He was pronounced dead at Harborview Medical Center later that afternoon.

Video footage still exists of that horrific event, recorded from Japanese news footage, but I wouldn't recommend watching it. The camera cheapens and flattens the existential shock of that tragedy, somehow robs it of its solemnity. It's disturbing to consider that now, in the age of the ever-present smartphone, the possibility of a public death not recorded on digital device becomes ever more remote. Some things you just don't need to see.

Sankai Juku cancelled the rest of that tour, but they chose Seattle as the first US stop on their tour the following year. Decades later, they're still at it; they performed here last October.

It's difficult to imagine what it would take to return to the stage after witnessing the death of a colleague, impossible to consider what's going on in the minds of Raphael Schumacher's fellow company members right now. Perhaps they're feeling the frivolity of theatre in the face of mortality, the taunting absurdity of dying over made-up diversions. But viewed another way, is there any greater symbol of the victory of art over death than the willingness to continue creating when confronted with such loss? As we mourn the departure of artists great and unknown, the show must go on.



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