

PLAYWRIGHTS HORIZONS

416 West 42nd Street • New York, NY 10036

BOOK YOUR TICKETS
NOW FOR

ASSISTANCE

A NEW PLAY BY

LESLYE HEADLAND

DIRECTED BY

TRIP CULLMAN

FEBRUARY 3 – MARCH 11, 2012

Playwrights Horizons Mainstage Theater

This is the fourth of six productions
in the 2011/12 Season.

PERFORMANCE CALENDAR APPEARS ON PAGE 7

BACKSTORY HORRIBLE BOSSES

Just as any domestic drama would be incomplete without one real monster of a mother, no workplace play is fit to stage without one hell of a horrible boss, that man (it's almost always a man) so consumed by greed, ambition or sense of entitlement that he is blind to the humanity of his subordinates. In anticipation of *Assistance*, we offer a tour through theater's most infamous higher-ups. Of course, not all evil employers are created equal. Through rigorous, scientific analysis, we can place them into the following three-fold taxonomy:

THE TYRANT

The oldest and most oft-encountered, the Tyrant is the pre-industrial ancestor of all horrible bosses to come. He operates in the political sphere – typically he's a king or a pretender to the throne – and either he lusts after power (Richard III, *Richard III*, 1591) or doggedly pursues law and order (Creon, *Antigone*, 442 BC). Whatever his motives, though, his medium is murder. It's his body count that rises, not his stock. Though he's mostly a classical creature, the Tyrant has adapted to modernity. He's everywhere in movies, TV and comics – the supervillain (Lex Luthor, *Superman*, 1940-present) or the Disney villain (Scar, *The Lion King*, 1994) spring to mind – but he remains a fixture on-stage as well, if altered to suit a more democratic age. Alfred Jarry's 1896 *Ubu Roi* turns the Tyrant (the titular Ubu) into a grotesque, infantile id who is more a stand-in for a complacent, selfish bourgeoisie than an attack on an actual corrupt monarch.

THE DIVA

Though not the harmless, foolish master who appears through-

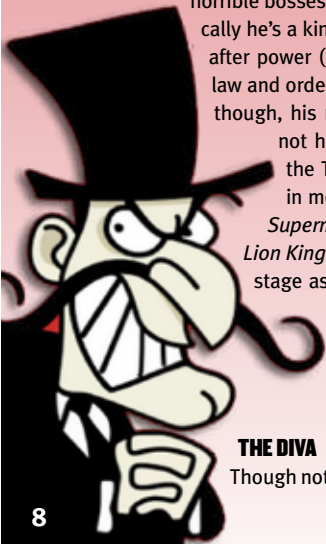
out the history of Western comedy, the Diva shares a common ancestor with the bumbling slave-owners of Greek and Roman comedy (Plautus's *Menaechmi*, 3rd century BC). Physical and emotional gratification are what he requires, and he gets what he wants by the sheer force of his overdeveloped sense of entitlement. He can provoke laughs, as does Sheridan Whiteside, the self-centered celebrity hell-bent on retaining his meek assistant in Kaufman and Hart's *The Man Who Came To Dinner* (1939). But he's just as apt to trigger fear and loathing, as does the offstage, bellowing Count in Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888). The Diva is alive and well today, and is the genus of horrible boss most likely to take female form, as recently evidenced by Gloria, the loopy book editor who compounds the suffering of the Job-like Joe in Stephen Karam's *Sons of the Prophet* (2011).

THE PROFITEER

The most recent and most recognizable addition to the group, the Profiteer is the soulless capitalist born of the industrial age. His only goal is to make more money as quickly and efficiently as possible. He treats his employees like machines, or better yet, substitutes machines for men. He's the Boss in the *The Adding Machine* (1923), Mr. Mister in *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937), Caldwell B. Cladwell in *Urinetown* (2001), and the profit-hungry son of the titular inventor in Karel Capek's landmark sci-fi drama, *R.U.R.* (1920). But he assumes subtler forms as well, such as Mitch and Murray, the offstage instigators of the sales contest that precipitates the desperate action of *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984).

Of course, there are bosses who push the boundaries. In *Angels in America* (1993), Roy Cohn has a clear touch of the Tyrant, even if his love for *La Cage* makes him an obvious Diva, and his "it's just business" attitude smacks of the Profiteer. You'll have to decide where you think Leslye Headland's hellacious jefe Daniel Weissinger fits. Whatever you think of him, we only hope you respect his firm placement in a long, time-tested tradition in the theatrical canon. □

– Alec Strum, Associate Literary Manager



WALMARTS



ASSISTANCE

A NEW PLAY BY
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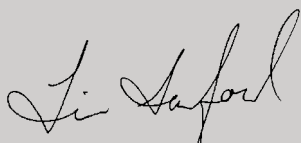
DEAR FRIENDS,

The title of Leslye Headland's ferocious new comedy, *Assistance*, yields a telling irony when you rub it against its homonym, "assistants." Five fabulously educated, with-it and curiously masochistic assistants to a wantonly abusive and apparently indefatigable offstage overlord comprise the entire population of *Assistance*. But one could hardly term the abject ministrations they perform for him "assistance." The implicit disparity between the dictionary definition of "assistance" as aid or charity and "assistant" as a subordinate could hardly be more dramatically demonstrated than in this play. No, "assistance" is what these assistants need, not what they give. And the greatest irony of all? They cling to their jobs as if to life itself. What keeps them going? The play never names the business they are in, but all indicators point to some amalgam of the entertainment business, probably something paradoxical like making high-toned movies. Do they believe they are part of a higher cause? None of them ever talk about art. Do they want power? The hope of promotion to a slightly higher subordinate position with a slightly less continuous diet of humiliation dangles as a distant possibility before them, but the most they can reasonably hope for is

an assistant of their own, not any real authority. Do they want money? None of them is given enough free time ever to spend anything. No,

the test before them seems to be more existential. The play has more in common with plays like *No Exit* and *Waiting for Godot* than a traditional workplace drama like *The Front Page*, so it did not surprise me at all to read that within Leslye's bulletin article. These plays have explicitly influenced her. You will also learn when you flip the page and read Adam Greenfield's adjoining article that *Assistance* is part of a cycle of contemporary Morality Plays Leslye has written about the so-called Seven Deadly Sins. It is worth noting that several Beckett scholars have compared the metaphysical landscape of his plays with that of the Morality Plays.

The most playfully obvious literary reference in *Assistance* lies in the names of its lead characters, Nick and Nora. On its simplest level, the names reference the easy banter that springs up between them. And they may not solve a murder between quips, but they certainly amuse themselves while they work, sans the martinis. On another level, the names point to something they're missing, just as the title does. Leslye's Nick and Nora are not a couple, nor do they even dare let themselves think they could be, even though it is obvious to us they should be. As the play develops, our rooting section begins to quiet. Extending Leslye's conceit, can love flourish in hell? Or could love transform hell to heaven? Or would they need to escape hell first? But if they were no longer bound together by this hell, would the bond weaken? These questions live in the afterlife of the play. But in the forelife of the moment, the banter reigns supreme, and as with *The Thin Man*, it generates a certain bliss, a bliss born from the collision of intelligence and chemistry. I hope you will encounter a similar bliss in your own collision with the intelligence and charisma of the house of fire that is Leslye Headland. It's rare to find a writer whose work is as fiendishly hilarious, deeply thoughtful, painful, and adventurous all at the same time. And she's only just begun.



Tim Sanford
Artistic Director



TOP ROW

MICHAEL ESPER BROADWAY: *American Idiot*, *A Man for All Seasons*. OFF-BROADWAY: *The Lyons* (Vineyard), *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide...* (Public/Guthrie), *Crazy Mary* (PH). FILM & TV: *Bittersweet Place*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *Dying is Easy*, "Bunker Hill," "Law and Order."

SUE JEAN KIM THEATER: *The Hallway Trilogy* (Rattlestick), *The Drunken City* (PH), *BFE* (PH), *The House of Bernardo Alba* (NAATCO). TV: "A Gifted Man," "Delocated," "Glee," "Nurse Jackie."

VIRGINIA KULL BROADWAY: *Man and Boy*, *Dividing the Estate*, *Old Acquaintance*. OFF-BROADWAY: *Orphans' Home Cycle* (Signature), *Theophilus North* (Keen Co.). FILM & TV: *A NY Thing*, "Law and Order," "Guiding Light."

BOTTOM ROW

LUCAS NEAR-VERBRUGGHE BROADWAY: *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, *The Ritz*. OFF-BROADWAY: *Oohrah!* (Atlantic), *Boom!* (Ars Nova). FILM & TV: *My Idiot Brother*, "Nurse Jackie," "Boardwalk Empire."

AMY ROSOFF THEATER: *Assistance* (IAMA Theatre Company), *Kagekiyo* (Shop Theatre), *Dangerous Liaisons* (Blue Heron), *The Just So Stories* (Hangar). FILM & TV: *Remember Me*, *Elektra Luxx*, "Flash Forward," "Entourage," "Private Practice."

BOBBY STEGGERT BROADWAY: *Ragtime* (Tony, Drama Desk noms.), OFF-BROADWAY: *A Minister's Wife*, *The Grand Manner*, *Camelot* (LCT), *Yank!* (York, Drama Desk nom.), *110 in the Shade* (Roundabout), *The Slug Bearers of Kayrol Island* (Vineyard, Drama Desk nom.). FILM & TV: *The Namesake*, *Kinsey*, "The Good Wife," "All My Children."

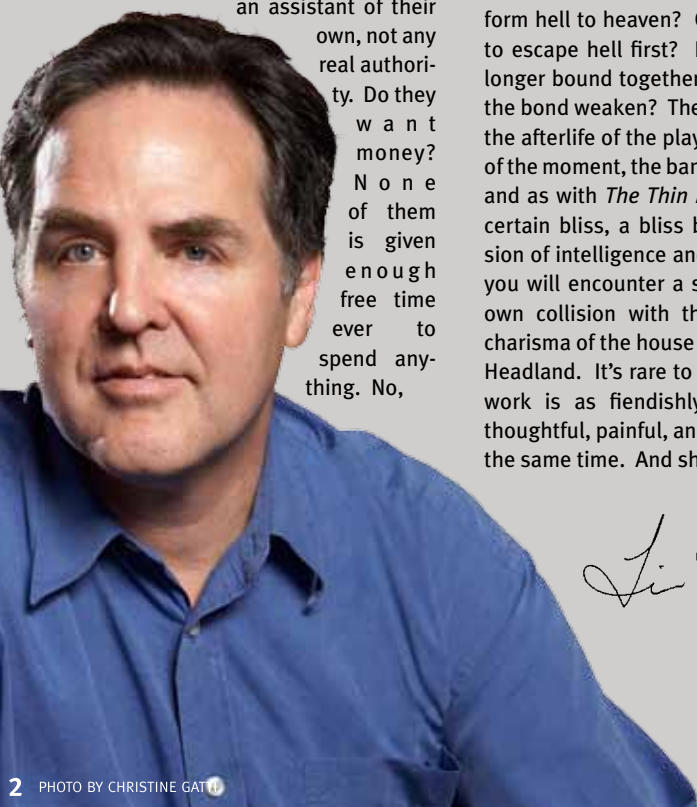
POST-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSIONS with Leslye Headland and Trip Cullman have been scheduled for the following dates:

Wednesday, February 8
Sunday, February 12 following the matinee
Friday, February 17

The Mainstage Bulletin is generously funded, in part, by the **LIMAN FOUNDATION**.

This production is supported in part by an award from the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

Special thanks to the **Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater** for its generous support of *Assistance*.



ASSISTANCE

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
MEMBER TICKETS TO ASSISTANCE are just \$30 for performances February 3-19 and \$35 for the rest of the run, February 21 - March 11.					FEBRUARY 3 8:00 PM	4 8:00 PM
5 2:30 PM 7:30 PM	6	7 7:00 PM	8 8:00 PM PPD	9 8:00 PM	10 8:00 PM	11 2:30 PM OC 8:00 PM
PPD 12 2:30 PM ★ 7:30 PM	13	14 7:00 PM	15 8:00 PM	16 8:00 PM	17 8:00 PM PPD	18 2:30 PM 8:00 PM
19 2:30 PM 7:30 PM	20	21 7:00 PM	22 8:00 PM	23 8:00 PM	24 8:00 PM	25 2:30 PM 8:00 PM
26 2:30 PM 7:30 PM	27 7:00 PM	28	29	MARCH 1 8:00 PM	2 8:00 PM	3 2:30 PM ★ 8:00 PM
4 2:30 PM 7:30 PM	5	6 7:00 PM	7 8:00 PM	8 8:00 PM	9 8:00 PM	10 2:30 PM 8:00 PM
11 2:30 PM ★ 7:30 PM	KID-FRIENDLY? We recommend <i>Assistance</i> for audiences aged 14+ (Strong language).					OC Open Captioned perf. for theatergoers who are deaf and hard of hearing
					PPD Indicates post-performance discussion	★ Playtime! childcare available at this performance

ASSISTANCE TICKET RESERVATION COUPON

To reserve your tickets using this form, complete this coupon and return it via US Mail to: ASSISTANCE, Ticket Central, 416 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036

NAME (REQUIRED)

ADDRESS (REQUIRED)

CITY STATE ZIP CODE

PRIMARY PHONE (PLEASE INCLUDE AREA CODE)

SECONDARY PHONE (PLEASE INCLUDE AREA CODE)

E-MAIL ADDRESS

SUBSCRIBER/FLEXPASS TICKETS

PLEASE LIST 2 PERFORMANCE CHOICES FOR YOUR TICKETS (IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE):

DATE DAY TIME # OF TICKETS

MEMBER TICKETS for *Assistance* are \$30 each for performances 2/3 - 2/19 and \$35 for performances 2/21 - 3/11. Please list 2 performances choices for your member tickets. **30&Under and Student Members:** Please order tickets online or by phone.

DATE DAY TIME # OF TICKETS @ \$30/\$35

TOTAL _____

GUEST TICKETS: SUBSCRIBERS

Order guest tickets for \$45 each (reg. \$70).

DATE DAY TIME # OF TICKETS @ \$45

TOTAL _____

GUEST TICKETS: MEMBERS

Order guest tickets for \$50 each (1 per membership, reg. \$70).

DATE DAY TIME # OF TICKETS @ \$50

TOTAL _____

TYPE OF PAYMENT

Check enclosed payable to Playwrights Horizons, Inc.

Please charge my American Express Mastercard Visa

CARD number _____

C.I.D. number* _____ Expiration date _____

*AMERICAN EXPRESS: The 4-digit number located on the front of the card above the last digits of card number. VISA/MASTERCARD: The last 3 digits located on the back of the card in the signature section.



CONTACT INFO & HOURS OF OPERATION

TICKET CENTRAL, the box office for Playwrights Horizons, is open **Noon-8pm daily** and can be reached via phone at **(212) 279-4200** and by mail and in person at **416 West 42nd St., New York, NY 10036** (between 9th and 10th Avenues).

PLAYWRIGHTS HORIZONS is open Monday-Friday from 10am-6pm and can be reached at **(212) 564-1235**. **PATRONS & GENERATION PH MEMBERS** may contact Eva Rosa for all inquiries at extension 3144.

GETTING TO THE THEATER

The closest subway stop is 42nd Street on the A, C, E, and 7 trains at 8th Avenue. You may also take the 1, 2, 3, N, R, W, Q, or S trains to Times Square, or the B, D, V and F to 42nd Street at 6th Avenue. The M42 Crosstown & M104 buses are also available for your convenience.

HOW TO RESERVE YOUR SEATS: SUBSCRIBERS AND FLEXPASS HOLDERS

► **ONLINE**, visit www.ticketcentral.com and click on MY ACCOUNT to log in and order your seats via our automated system.

► **BY PHONE**, call Ticket Central.

► **BY MAIL**, complete the order form on the following page with at least two possible dates when you are available to see the show and mail it to Ticket Central.

► **IN PERSON**, visit Ticket Central.

MEMBERS

Member tickets to ASSISTANCE are \$30 each Feb. 3-19 and \$35 each for all other performances Feb. 21-March 11. **YOUNG MEMBERS:** 30&Under Member tickets are \$20; Student Member tickets are \$10. Young members may

order online, by phone, or in person only.

PATRONS & GENERATION PH MEMBERS

You may reserve your house seats by calling Eva Rosa (contact info above).

GUEST TICKETS SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY

► **SUBSCRIBERS & PATRONS:** Order guest tickets for \$45 each (reg. \$70) when you reserve your own.

► **FLEXPASS HOLDERS:** You may use tickets in your account to bring guests. Add tickets to your account by calling Ticket Central.

► **MEMBERS:** Order one guest ticket per package per production for \$50 (reg. \$70) when you reserve your own. **YOUNG MEMBERS:** 30&Under guest tickets are \$25. Student Member tickets are \$15. Students may bring a 30&Under guest and vice versa.

► **GENERATION PH MEMBERS:** Generation PH Members may use tickets in your account to bring guests. Additional guest tickets may be added to your account; please contact Eva Rosa for further details.

TICKET PICK-UP AND RELEASE POLICIES

We would prefer to hold tickets for pick-up at the box office to expedite ticket exchanges. If you request that your tickets be mailed, they will be sent out immediately, UNLESS your performance date takes place in fewer than 10 days, in which case they will be held at the box office. **If you are unable to attend a performance for which you have a reservation, please call Ticket Central at least 24 hours' prior to your performance.**

EXCHANGES

SUBSCRIBERS, PATRONS & GEN PH have unlimited exchange privileges. **MEMBERS AND**

FLEXPASS HOLDERS may exchange once per production.

TAX DONATIONS

If you are unable to exchange for another performance, PH will issue a receipt for a tax-deductible contribution at the conclusion of the run upon your request. You must release your tickets 24 hours in advance, or we will be unable to provide seats for another performance or a tax receipt.

BENEFITS

SECOND LOOK REPEAT-VIEW POLICY

If you've already seen a show as part of your package and would like to see it again during its regular run, \$20 reserved-seating tickets are available. Simply call in advance of the performance you'd like to attend. Season ID required. Subject to availability. Limit one per Subscription, FlexPass, or Membership.

BRING THE KIDS DISCOUNT

Many of our shows are appropriate for young adults; you may bring children aged 22 and under to productions during the regular run for \$15 per ticket. Children must accompany package holder to production. Call Ticket Central at (212) 279-4200 (Noon-8pm daily) to reserve.

☆ playtime! CHILD CARE

Childcare is available during selected performances. Visit www.PlaytimeNYC.org or call Playwrights Horizons for more information and to reserve. Reservations must be made when booking tickets at least 5 days in advance of desired performance. **PLAYTIME! is FREE for SUBSCRIBERS & PATRONS.** One child per **FLEXPASS OR GEN PH** ticket is eligible for free childcare (additional children \$15 each). For **MEMBERS**, there is a cost of \$15 per child.

Listed below are local businesses that have agreed to participate in Playwrights Horizons' Neighborhood Business Circle. All generously offer a discount on their services to you, our patrons, subscribers, and donors. When you come to our area, please patronize these businesses, and be sure to show your season I.D. card when you order or make your purchase.

44 & X
622 10th Avenue
New American
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Mention PH and receive a complimentary fallen chocolate soufflé with dinner.

ABOVE
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Reservations suggested.

THE COFFEE POT
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EMPIRE COFFEE & TEA
568 9th Avenue
Coffee and Treats
(212) 268-1220
15% discount on all products excluding cups of coffee.

ETCETERA ETCETERA
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(212) 399-4141
10% discount on purchase.

FRAGOLINO TRATTORIA
653 9th Avenue
Italian
(212) 333-5300
10% discount on entire check when paying in cash. Discount unavailable on Friday & Saturday.

IL PUNTO RISTORANTE
507 9th Avenue
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(212) 244-0088
Complimentary dessert with purchase of an entree.

KYOTOFU
705 9th Avenue
Japanese Dessert & Sake Bar
(212) 974-6012
Complimentary glass of sake with dinner or dessert.

L'ALLEGRIA
623 9th Avenue
Italian
(212) 265-6777
10% discount on entire check when paying in cash. Unavailable on Friday & Saturday.

LANDMARK TAVERN
626 11th Avenue
Contemporary American
(212) 247-2562
10% discount on purchase.

THE MEAT FACTORY STEAKHOUSE
"Brazil Brazil"
330 West 46th Street
Brazilian Steakhouse
(212) 957-4300
10% discount on entire check when paying in cash. Discount unavailable on Friday & Saturday.

SARDI'S
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Complimentary glass of house wine with entrée. Reservations suggested.

THEATRE ROW DINER
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Complimentary glass of house wine with entrée, per person.

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YUM YUM BANGKOK
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Thai
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10% discount on purchase.

ZEN PALATE
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Vegetarian
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ZUNI
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Contemporary American
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DRAMA BOOK SHOP
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10% discount
(some items excluded)

HOUSING WORKS THRIFT STORE
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housingworks.org
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Subscribers and donors are entitled to a special \$12 flat rate on weeknights after 5pm and anytime on weekends. Rate is \$19 after 5 hours (up to 12 hours). Please present your ticket stub to a parking manager at the garage to redeem discount.

**In addition to offering discounts, these establishments have made generous contributions to Playwrights Horizons. List complete as of Dec. 9, 2011*

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

PLAYWRIGHT'S PERSPECTIVE LESLYE HEADLAND

LESLYE HEADLAND is a Los Angeles-based playwright and screenwriter. She is the writer/director of the Seven Deadly Plays series produced and premiered by the IAMA Theatre Company in L.A. The series includes *Cinephilia* (lust), *Bachelorette* (gluttony), *Assistance* (greed), *Surfer Girl* (sloth), *Reverb* (wrath), and *The Accidental Blonde* (envy). *Bachelorette* also enjoyed a sold-out, extended run at Second Stage Theatre Uptown in July 2010, which the *NY Times* called “vivid, entertaining and witheringly funny.” Other NY credits include *Cinephilia* at Theatre Row. Leslye is currently working on her final play for the series (pride), as well as commissions for Second Stage Theatre and South Coast Repertory.

Leslye's 2008 Blacklist screenplay of *Bachelorette* is currently under option to Gary Sanchez Productions. In television, she served as a writer on “Terriers” on FX created by Ted Griffin and produced by Shawn Ryan. She is currently developing two projects with HBO – a pilot based on Julie Klausner's memoir *I Don't Care About Your Band*, produced by Adam McKay and Will Ferrell, and a web series, *Thin But Poor*, produced by Leverage.

She holds a B.F.A. in Drama from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and studied at Playwrights Horizons Theater School where she was awarded the Robert Moss Prize. □

IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR TRIP CULLMAN

TRIP CULLMAN has directed Playwrights Horizons' productions of Adam Bock's *A Small Fire* and *The Drunken City*, and Sarah Schulman's *Manic Flight Reaction*. Other New York credits include Adam Rapp's *Nursing*, Leslye Headland's *Bachelorette*, Eli Clark's *Edgewise*, Lloyd Suh's *American Hwangap*, Terrence McNally's *Some Men*, Robert Farquhar's *Bad Jazz*, Gina Gionfriddo's *US Drag*, Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's *Dark Matters*, Roland Schimmelpfennig's *Arabian Night*, Bert V. Royal's *Dog Sees God*, Glen Berger's *The Wooden Breeks*, Adam Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows*, Paul Weitz's *Roulette*, Brooke Berman's *Smashing and Sam and Lucy*, Rinne Groff's *Of a White Christmas*, Ken Urban's *The Happy Sad*, Gary Sunshine's *Sweetness*, and Jonathan Tolins's *The Last Sunday In June*. Artistic Associate, The Play Company. Training: Yale School of Drama. □

PHOTO BY AARON EPSTEIN

You've heard the old adage that “Hell is other people.” Of course you have. Yawn. It's been so oft-repeated that I suppose Hell has lost some of its gravitas, much to the delight of whoever may be in charge down there. I recently heard Tim Keller, one of my favorite Christian writers, sum up Hell in a refreshingly terrifying way. In discussing Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*, Keller defined Hell as: “having to execute a pointless act from which nothing ever comes except the need to do it again.”

Camus makes the point that our human lives are meaningless and insignificant. Nothing new to anyone who's been a freshman in college. Like just about every other eighteen-year-old fueled by alcohol and boredom, I fell in desperate love with Camus' *The Plague*, with Ionesco's *The Lesson* and with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which I directed as my senior thesis at Playwrights Horizons Theater School at NYU. I was tickled by the way these great men of words narratively imagined the tragic comedy of a meaningless existence. But ultimately I found I didn't quite agree with them that life is completely without meaning. If it were, where does that “need to do it again” that Keller specifies come from? Wouldn't we all just give up? If your actions mean nothing, why get up in the morning? If your job is mind-numbing, why do you keep showing up?

Assistance is about that “need to do it again.” But, like absurdist playwrights, I crafted it as a comedy. A decidedly 21st century comedy. I've tried my hand at the witty repartee that accompanies screwball comedies. It's got that popular trope, The Boss From Hell, from so many films and *roman a clefs*. It's even got a bit of a love story. But the elephant in the room for all the characters is the looming question of “Why do I keep coming back?”

I posed that question to myself several years ago, when I, in tears, ran from my desk, into the elevator, down the street, as far away as I could from the building I'd worked in for six years. The myriad excuses I'd been telling myself for six years all boiled down to one response: “Because that's what you do.” It terrified me. It wasn't a good answer. But no matter how I dressed it up, it was the only answer. I was in Hell. And it wasn't my Boss's fault.

My own obsession with being “good enough,” with being “successful” and with executing completely pointless acts day in and out had, at some point, shifted from a healthy post-collegiate ambition to an empty routine that was the sole validation for myself. It gave my life meaning.

A lot of people make their jobs their life. A lot of those people probably feel like they have to. Maybe money cushions or reinforces that choice. Maybe the dependence of a family necessitates it. But, for me, when my job became both my prison and my salvation, it was a devastating realization that spurred me toward a new life. When I look back at my frustration, I have to laugh. If you're in Hell but you think you're in Heaven, that's funny to everyone but you.

The characters I love writing the most are very busy doing nothing at all. They chatter on and on about freedom when their actions dictate that they have none. I like to watch them build prisons around themselves. I enjoy seeing them grasp for what they believe will save them and watch it melt away in their hot greedy fists. Because to me, that's funny. Because that's what I do.

My greatest aim is that the audience and I laugh at the same painful joke together. That we all enter the sacred space of a theater, become enshrouded in that ancient darkness and laugh at the absurdity of self. □

PHOTO BY JEFF PROUT

STREET SAVVY

A TETE-A-TETE WITH STEVE & JEAN-CLAUDE

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

EVA ROSA

There are numerous reasons to venture to our end of 42nd Street, but two of the most compelling are Chez Josephine and the West Bank Café. The restaurants are as much fixtures in this neighborhood as the companies of Theatre Row, with owners as colorful as the establishments themselves. Recently, Director of Marketing Eric Winick posed a few questions to the irrepressible restaurateurs.

EW: When did your restaurant open, and what was your expectation for it?

JCB: I opened Chez Josephine on October 2, 1986. Not knowing the business, my expectations were to be able to pay the bills each and every week. After 25 years, it is the same song...

SO: I opened West Bank Café on June 29, 1978. I expected the restaurant to be successful, but in the beginning, the street traffic consisted mostly of hookers and drug dealers. The local Hell's Kitchen gang The Westies were our only customers.

What was 42nd Street like when you started?

JCB: Back then, 42nd Street was exciting and definitely dangerous. Theatre Row was a courageous beginning with great hope, talent and new friends.

Do you have any items that have been on your menu since you opened?

SO: I often hear the restaurant referred to as a "burger joint" in the old days, but the truth is, we've always had a burger on the menu as well as contemporary cuisine. The \$4 burger is now \$14.

JCB: Our Belgian Endives with Roquefort Societe and Roasted Walnuts has been a must on the menu since we opened. It is now \$10, was \$4.25 then.

Considering what this block was like when you started, do you consider yourself a pioneer or a survivor?

JCB: All of us mad enough to become involved in this section of 42nd Street were definitely

pioneers, and had to become survivors; there was no other choice.

SO: Let someone else be the pioneer. I consider myself a survivor.

Okay, dish: what's your top celebrity-meal story?

JCB: Joan Rivers, a regular, once held a party for 15 friends. A delicious menu, champagne pouring like water, but Joan had a white bread plate in front of her. In it were some 20 white pills, and while her guests enjoyed the multi-course meal, she from time to time would pick up a pill with two fingers, put it in her mouth, and wash it down with champagne. This was her only food during the whole evening. I was puzzled, but never asked her the recipe.

What is your favorite (non-show) PH memory?

JCB: Elizabeth Ashley, while starring in Edward Albee's *Me, Myself & I*, chose to be interviewed on Chez Josephine's terrace. Dear Elizabeth, always concerned about my financial well-being, ordered a full dinner for herself as well as a full dinner (appetizer, filet mignon and dessert) for her beloved pug, Che Guevara.

SO: I was in Las Vegas in September 1983 walking past Caesar's Palace where there was a huge marquee that said "Bernadette Peters Next Week" and I laughed, because at that very moment, Bernadette Peters and co. were rehearsing *Sunday in the Park With George* with Stephen Sondheim in my own downstairs theater.

How has Playwrights Horizons figured into your restaurant's history?

SO: The reason I took the location was because Playwrights Horizons was there and Theatre Row was getting ready to open.

JCB: Playwrights Horizons is the twin soul of Chez Josephine, and I will always credit your loyal subscribers to be a major part of Chez Josephine's longevity and success. □

We wanted to take this opportunity, at one of our busiest moments during the season, to thank the Development Department's very own assistant, Eva Rosa, an enormously valuable member of the Playwrights Horizons team, for all that she does. Unlike Nick, Nora, Justin and Heather in *Assistance*, Eva loves her position. Since she started working here in September of 2008, Eva has become the face, as well as the voice of Playwrights Horizons to a lot of our Patrons – answering the dedicated ticket hotline to book (and frequently re-book) tickets, making reminder calls so that none of our Patrons forget that they're scheduled to see a performance, and greeting donors on opening nights. We are deeply grateful for her dedication, and Patrons love Eva for her consistently upbeat manner, both on the telephone and at special events. Among her many responsibilities, Eva is the leading force in refining the Development Department's administrative and financial systems. Her ongoing work to capitalize on our database's potential and collaborate with other departments has resulted in many new ways to best serve our valued Patrons and donors.

According to Eva, "Speaking with our Patrons on the phone is my favorite part of my job. It's like catching up with old friends. Yes, we talk about shows and share our ideas and opinions, but it goes beyond that. We also share personal things, like family weddings and our favorite brand of sneakers. The members of our Patron program can really put a smile on my face and brighten up my day."

Asked how she feels about the depiction of assistants in Leslye Headland's play and the challenges that they face in the workplace, Eva replied, "I can relate to the characters. Being an assistant can be hectic. But, it's also a lot of fun. What Leslye did capture about the life of an assistant is our team spirit – the way we jump in and help each other out when things get crazy. I may not work with other assistants, but the Development team here at PH is amazing to work with, always with a can-do attitude and always willing to help out a colleague. They are a fun bunch. I also have to say... I am so glad that I've never worked for a Daniel type!"

Please make sure to say a special hello to Eva next time you call in to book tickets. And we here in Development promise never to treat Eva like the boss treats the characters in *Assistance*. □



THE AMERICAN VOICE GETTING MEDIEVAL ON YOUR ASS

I don't think I'm going out too far on a limb to suggest that, since long before records of such things were kept, human civilization – while producing moments of intense beauty, etc. – has largely been populated by a bunch of jerks. Immoral, lazy, beady-eyed, good-for-nothing jerks who cut corners, skim a little off the top and don't call their mothers. (Present company excluded, of course.) So much has this problem plagued us that we've been preoccupied over the millennia with the struggle to classify our shortcomings, rank them in order of their insidiousness, and conceive of systems to cultivate in ourselves an adequate sense of fear and guilt. Enter "The Cardinal Sins," a notion made popular by the 4th Century A.D., when Evagrius Ponticus, a hotshot Christian Monk, developed a categorized list of the temptations from which sinful behavior springs: Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Sorrow, Lust, Anger, Vainglory, and Pride. This list was intended to help us quit acting like such jerks, lest we gain an unwanted invitation to the Hell-Mouth (see figures 1, 2, 3).

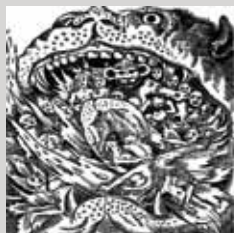


FIG. 1: WOODCUT



FIG. 2: ETCHING



FIG. 3: MINI-GOLF

The sin of "sorrow" was ultimately dropped from the list as theologians determined over the next several centuries (perhaps in response to the plague?) that sadness is inextricably human and doesn't necessarily pave the road to hell. The revised list became known more commonly as "The Seven Deadly Sins," a catchier moniker that captured the imagination of countless artists, from Dante to Hieronymus Bosch; from Christopher Marlowe to Kurt Weill to indie group Panic! at the Disco.

It has also captured the imagination of playwright Leslye Headland, who in just four remarkably prolific years has created six plays of an ambitious, seven-play play cycle of dark comedies, each installment centered around one of mankind's damnable vices. "Awful people deserve good stories too," Headland told *The New York Times* last summer: a sentence that could very well serve as a slogan for this series of "Seven Deadly Plays," each more savage, more unforgiving, more stiletto-sharp than the last. *Cinephilia* (2007) takes on the sin of Lust, focusing on a pair of cinema-geek twenty-something Brooklynites who struggle to keep sex from meaning anything. Her brutal, unsparing play *Bachelorette*

(2008) is the champagne- and drug-soaked story of a bachelorette party from hell. As a trio of nihilistic, terrifically awful single girls almost destroy their hotel room, their best friend's wedding, and themselves, they demonstrate the numbing, destructive impact of Gluttony. In *Surfer Girl* (2008), an unsettling confessional monologue, a professional couch-surfer takes stock of her own Sloth, reliving in intimate detail her years of surviving off the hospitality of others. Heading west, Headland set *Reverb* (2009), her explosive view of Wrath, in L.A.'s indie rock scene. Fueled by the abuse and violence of their childhoods, an Echo Park

hipster couple can only find love in the pain – both verbal and physical – that they inflict upon one another. And *The Accidental Blonde* (2010) examines the Envy between two deeply estranged friends, one a rising reality TV star and the other a struggling comics illustrator, who find that the long-held antipathy they share binds them together more strongly than love ever would.

Informed by the pop-culture-saturated landscape of today's over-educated, underemployed internet generation, The Seven Deadly Plays place these infamous vices at the core of twenty-somethings' struggles. Taken individually, each play is a sexy, savvy and unexpectedly funny picture of characters hell-bent on self-destruction; but as a cycle, these plays create a panoramic portrait of a generation in search of a moral compass. It's tempting, particularly for literary dept. dorks like me, to think of Leslye's anthology to date as a kind of latter-day morality drama. Reaching their popularity in the 14th and 15th centuries, "morality plays" evolved from the desire to teach the principles of Christian living in a more direct fashion than the early tradition of merely re-enacting stories from the Bible. These strident and (by today's standards) extraordinarily ham-fisted allegories portray an everyman-type protagonist who is confronted by personifications of various vices or virtues (characters might literally be named, simply, "Lust" or "Justice") who either aid or obstruct his struggle to lead a godly life. In Headland's playworld, characters seem to have a distant sense that there is, out there somewhere, a godly life (or at least one where they aren't such jerks), but they aren't wired to find it. Which is what distinguishes her writing from morality drama. The twenty-somethings who populate her plays have little hope of finding a moral compass; they would need a second compass just to locate the first. Redemption, a promise at the heart of any morality play, is in Leslye's work often quite literally a pipe dream.

And yet, that's not to say – at all, actually – that her work is nihilistic, or that any one of Headland's characters is simply reveling in some pig-slop of depravity. It's not that they are simply loathsome (which would make boring drama), it's that they are lost. What Leslye shares in common with the theater-moralists is that which is at the heart of all great drama: the struggle of mankind against his or her own soul, the struggle of the individual to understand in some way, however small, how to live. I was surprised to learn recently, in light of her plays, that one of her largest sources of inspiration over the years has been C.S. Lewis (novelist, medievalist, Christian apologist). But, in going back and revisiting her work to date, the echo of his voice became suddenly apparent: "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust," Lewis wrote in his essay "Mere Christianity" (1942-1944). "But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" Leslye Headland's work – degenerate, decadent, and electric-funny – isn't morality drama. Nor is it immorality drama. Rather, I imagine it's best described as an exploration of the crooked line, created in search of the elusive straight one. *Assistance* might take us into the hell-mouth of a Tribeca office, where an ensemble of greedy bottom-rung assistants suffers daily humiliations just to be in the orbit of one man's power, but between each line it asks us to find a way not to stay there. □

– Adam Greenfield, Director of New Play Development

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