



The Prompter

THE NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF HOVEY PLAYERS

From the Inside: An Actor's Perspective on Looking for Normal by John Tierney

Like many of us involved in community theater, I regularly receive audition notices from many different groups onto whose mailing lists my name has made its way. Most of the notices that reach me fail to grab my attention or move me, but when I received the Hovey Players' notice in mid-March, announcing its auditions for *Looking for Normal*, I knew I wanted to try to be a part of the production. I had great respect for Hovey and for Michelle Aguillon, who would be directing this show. Moreover, last year I had seen the film HBO made of Jane Anderson's play and found the story exceptionally compelling.

I was thrilled a week or two later when Michelle called me with the news that she had cast me as Roy, the middle-aged man who reveals to his wife of 25 years that he has always felt his true self to be female and that he wants to have a sex-change operation. And when rehearsals began, it was clear to me that Michelle had assembled a really fine cast whose acting abilities would leave me struggling to keep up.

Understanding and conveying the feelings of the character is, of course, always a central task of acting, but this role presented me with more than the usual challenge. I read as much as I could about the transsexual experience, including *Trans-sister Radio*, Chris Bohjalian's fine novel, and *She's Not There*, Jennifer Finney Boylan's excellent memoir. Michelle Aguillon also helped all of us to get a better grip on the various characters' emotions by her sensitive direction and her skillful references to situations that might evoke similar reactions. Moreover, Michelle helpfully arranged for the entire cast to spend an evening in conversation with a local couple whose own personal experience was quite similar to that of our play's Roy and Irma. All of us were deeply moved and enlightened by that evening's talk.

As opening night neared, my own personal transformation picked up pace. Not only was I doing my best to internalize my character's emotional changes, but I had the new experience of shaving my legs, getting my toenails painted (courtesy of my indulgent, real-life wife), wearing women's clothes (including a bra with sand-filled inserts), and coping with uncut hair that was by then longer than it had been at any time since the early 1970s.

But the best part of the whole experience for me was working with Michelle and the excellent ensemble of

actors she had pulled together. Kate Tonner brought her truly exceptional talents to the emotionally demanding part of Irma, Roy's shaken wife. I learned a lot about good acting from working with her. Steve Traverso and Daria da Silveira played the couple's children with uncommon intensity and resonance. John Greiner-Ferris succeeded in the difficult task of breathing life into Reverend Muncie, making him credible and keeping him from becoming a caricature. Renée Tyzbir dazzled our audiences with monologues that an actor friend of mine later described admiringly as "kick-ass". Expertly rounding out this ensemble production were Bill Doscher and Sandi McNeal as Roy's aging parents and Jere Babst as Roy's romantically challenged boss.

Heléne Andersson produced the show and also did the costuming. Set design and construction were the work of John MacKenzie and Michael Tonner. Michael also designed the sound, with a wonderful mix of music by Mary Chapin Carpenter, Grace Potter, Jesse Cook and Lucinda Williams. Jeremy Medicus designed the lights. Karen Dervin, our stage manger, headed a very handy crew.

For me, the great satisfactions of this production came from hearing audience members say that what impressed them most was how uniformly good the cast was – that the acting and characterizations were of consistently high quality. This was a gratifying testament both to Michelle's skills as a director and to the ensemble cast's efforts. It may be a sign of Hovey's impact on the greater community that for the first time in the years I've been involved in local theater, I've had a few people come up to me in the weeks following the show and say they had seen and enjoyed our production of *Looking for Normal*. One such encounter came in the Borders bookstore at the Atrium Mall on Route 9 where I heard flattering comments about the whole cast from a longtime Hovey subscriber. The other encounter, at a restaurant in Winchester, involved an elderly couple who slowly made their way over to my table. They talked animatedly for a while about the production and then the woman went to get their car. The man lingered for a few minutes. He said that he and his wife had seen many productions at Hovey and they enjoyed this one more than any others they could think of in recent years. But he had a concession – and then another compliment: "I frankly hadn't wanted to go see this one, given the subject matter. But she talked me into it. I'm glad she did, 'cuz I loved it. You all just swept me up in the story." I couldn't think of a nicer tribute to the Hovey Players than that.

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Where To Find Us

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9 Spring Street at Joel's Way, Waltham, MA

Reservations: (781) 893-9171
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www.hoveyplayers.com/theater@hoveyplayers.com

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DuMar, Shefton: Local Playwrights Featured in Summer Festival

Hovey Players takes pride in the fact that we foster and feature the works of local playwrights. With this July's 9th Annual Hovey Summer Arts Festival we are especially pleased to feature two one-act plays, one written by a woman and the other by an African-American man. Two of the six plays are *Hothouse* by Kelly DuMar and Frank Shefton's *The Father Hat*. Nancy Curran Willis, a distinguished, established director on the Boston theater scene, will direct *Hothouse*, and Vincent E. Siders, the artistic director of the New African Theatre Company of Boston, will direct *The Father Hat*.

Hothouse is about a widow with a green thumb and a love of Shakespeare, who hoped to sell his beloved nursery so his kids wouldn't fight over the business after he died. His plan fails, and after his death, the nursery becomes a hothouse of sibling rivalry, where one kid's hell is another kid's heaven. His daughter, an ambitious entrepreneur, takes over the floundering business to turn it around, sell it, and create capital for her next venture. But, his son, who inherited his father's passion for plants, is wedded to his father's poetic dreams. Hurt and betrayed, he resists his sister's plan to sell their father's legacy. They struggle over loyalty to their father's memory, to themselves, and to each other, and make a surprising peace in the end.

Shefton tell us that "*The Father Hat* is somewhat autobiographical, though not everything, which occurs in the play, happen in real life, much of it did. For instance some of the lines spoken by the father character are direct quotes from my father. It is about an adult son who visits his elderly father after the two had not seen or spoken to each other in 23 years. The father is a retired firefighter, the son a former firesetter." He adds, "It took me eight years to complete this work and a lifetime to come to terms with it. At first I never wanted to do just another play about family turmoil, after all we all have dysfunctional families to some degree or another. When I discussed this with a friend last year she pointed out that, *that* is what links us all together. This is how we relate to one another. When put into that perspective it made sense, and became more important for to complete the work. It is my most personal piece to date. I think when we artists do anything - act, dance, read poetry, paint, sing, write, whatever, we are putting a piece of our souls out there for the world to see, so here's mine."

"I've been a passionate diarist since the age of thirteen," said DuMar, explaining how she started writing plays. Initially she thought she would eventually be a writer, since in her undergraduate years she wrote poetry, fiction, and journalism. But instead, she chose to study counseling and became a psychotherapist. But for DuMar, writing was never far away. "Writing always has been an expressive and creative outlet for me to explore my personality, emotions, and spirit," she said. As a certified psychodramatist, she found her passion for drama. Psychodrama is group therapy that incorporates improvisational drama for healing. When DuMar turned 40 she said to herself, if she was meant to be a writer, now was the time to act. She published a nonfiction parenting book, *Before You Forget—The Wisdom of Writing Diaries for Your Children*, then decided to attend to the voices of the characters speaking to her and write their stories in the form of plays.

Hothouse, a finalist in two national play competitions, is DuMar's most recent play and the one that she is most proud. She knew it had promise as a script even though it had had only one staged reading before being selected by Hovey. "I spent some time thinking why it was a finalist, rather than a winner, and that led me to another revision of the play and the Hovey selection," she said. "It was a lot of fun to write, and I look forward to seeing the magical energy of the play enliven the stage. Seeing her plays on stage fascinate her. "I learn so much," she said. "I totally trust the collaborative nature of this medium probably as a result of my psychodrama training—director, protagonists, auxiliaries, and audience collaborate to bring the therapeutic process to fruition. All voices count, all voices matter. An open mind is a gift and a necessity. Creativity is an energy that has to flow to thrive. Control is stagnation. Of course, these are ideals!"

She currently is working on a new one-act play about the conflict over abortion choices, *What We Save*, that soon will be ready for a staged reading. "It sounds heavy, but it's comic drama with wonderful theatrical elements," she explained. She also would like a recently revised full-length play she's written, *Weekend at the Dreaming Cloud*, to have a developmental workshop reading that would ultimately lead to a production.

Shefton wrote his first play at "the golden age of 30," he said. When he was little he used to make up ghost stories, which he told to his friends, but he never wrote them down until he went to engineering school at Northeastern and took a writing course for extra credit. A few years later he was reviewing plays while writing for a community newspaper, and got hooked. Shefton is most inspired by the works of Ed Bullins, Alice Childress, and August Wilson. The most recent play Shefton wrote was *The Place We Met*, which was produced by the African American Theatre Festival, and the Boston Theatre Marathon, directed by *The Father Hat's* director, Vincent E Siders. *You* is his play of which he is most proud. *You* is about a woman who arrives home early from a business trip to find her man wearing her perfume, earrings, and sexiest dress. The character's job is to then convince her that he means exactly what he said. Shefton currently is working on a full-length play called *Don't Let the Joneses Get You Down*. He says he tends to give directors and actors space to create and make choices. "Often I see them do things I wish I had thought of, but if I see them make choices I do not care for I will not hesitate to tell them," he said. And actors beware: to vary from the script is "a definite no-no" for Shefton.

Plays by, directed, or acted by women and minorities are being produced with great effort by some New England area festivals. We asked Kelly DuMar and Frank Shefton to comment on whether they feel most festivals could incorporate them more if, at all, and also what motivated them to submit their plays to our festival.

DuMar's response:

I'm pleased to say that Playwright's Platform, of which I am a board member, fosters diversity in its selections of plays and casting. Seven out of the 15 selected plays—virtually half—were written by women, and one was co-written with a male. I would like to see more women directors in our festival, however, because male directors definitely dominate the line-up this year. I'm directing my own for the first time; and there are only one or two other female directors. My long respect for the Hovey Summer Festival, for the talent of the producers, and a desire to see my play produced locally for the first time so that I have the opportunity to fulfill my desire to collaborate with incredibly talented actors and director to bring the play to life were the reasons I submitted to Hovey.

Shefton's response:

One reason why minorities may not be well-represented in festivals may be that they are unaware these festivals are taking place. As for other reasons, you might want to ask the producers, artistic directors and organizers of these festivals. I submitted work to a couple of festivals last year and never heard from them. Not a peep. Not even a rejection letter. Needless to say I will not send them anything of mine again. And sometimes I see festivals listed on the Playwrights Noticeboard that appear quite intimidating in their wording, and I'll say to myself, why waste the postage? Hovey's process seemed fair, plus it's always an exciting festival, and it's always great to see how your work is accepted outside your immediate community.

The Summer Arts Festival gets underway, opening Friday, July 15, 2005 and performs July 16, 22, and 23 at 8:00 pm. For reservations, please call (781) 893-9171. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$13 for seniors and students.

Join us for our opening night party and meet the actors, directors, and playwrights at In Blossom, directly across the street from Hovey Players. Wine, cheese, and refreshments will be served, with additional catering by Baan Thai Restaurant.

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 Directed by Ronni Marshak

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 Directed by Kristen Hughes

March 2006
Buried Child by Sam Shepard
 Directed by Bill Doscher

May 2006
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 Directed by Renee Tyzbit

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Hovey at EMACT by Gordon Ellis

Now that the EMACT Festival has finally come and gone, I wanted to take the opportunity to send along my deepest appreciation to the members of the Hovey Board, for allowing me the amazing opportunity to direct *Five Women Wearing The Same Dress* this past season, as well as for the privilege of representing Hovey Players at this year's Festival. The show was a great success and a huge hit with the Festival audience. We were proud to receive five award nominations, including Best Ensemble, Best Actress (Melissa Sine), Best Costume Design (Kimmerie Jones), and Best Make-Up (The Cast), as well as Best Supporting Actress (Sara Jones), who took home the award.

I would like to take a moment to thank a few people for their valuable contributions: David Fisher, Karen Dervin, Michael Corbett, Michelle Aguilion, Michelle Gillis and Paul Zak for serving as our run crew during festival. Also to John Grenier-Ferris for the use of his truck to get us there, and the Burlington Players for sharing some of the space on their truck. Dave Sheppard for preparing the sound for our initial run and for his countless contributions in helping us prepare the show for festival. Ronni Marshak for her work as assistant producer. Without Ronni we never would have had Kimmerie, without whom we never would have had those wonderful dresses. She also was kind enough to loan us the covers right off her bed, so truly there is no limit to her generosity. Thanks, Ronni! John Mackenzie for painting a beautiful bedroom floor and for his overall technical assistance. Jonathan Kemble for his tremendous job of lighting the show during its initial run, and Kathy Campbell for stepping in at Festival after John had scurried off to Texas. Kimmerie Jones for her amazing dresses. The costumes absolutely made the show, including this past weekend when the crowd burst into laughter the moment the lights came up revealing the girls in all their glory. Ben Aldrich, not only for constructing such an incredible set at Hovey, but for making the modifications that allowed us to take it to Festival. Jeremy Medicus, for doing yeoman's work as my producer. I know that working with me this past year could not have been easy, and I fear at times that I never adequately expressed my appreciation to him. Whatever I asked for he got me, and the show would not have been the unquestioned success it was without him. Matt Silverstein, who stepped in at the last minute to fill the role of stage manager and proceeded to blow my doors off with his efficiency and skill. Matt is an incredibly valuable resource that Hovey is lucky to have among their midst. His work in preparing the show for festival made what could have been a nightmare experience into a dream. I cannot express how deeply grateful I am to him for his hard work, his patience, and his companionship throughout this experience.

Finally, to my cast: Gail, Mary Kate, Melissa, Rachel, Sara & Ted, for their unquestioned dedication to this project from day one. I took a chance in casting from outside the usual Hovey family, using people who in some instances had little-to-no experience, yet they never let me down. In return, they gave us a wonderful show and hopefully have added some new faces to the Hovey mix. I have been involved in theater for over ten years now, and while I have certainly made many lasting friendships and formed special bonds with any number of casts, working with the cast of *Five Women* is without question the most rewarding experience of all. I have no doubt that as we each move forward, no matter what we do, we will all remain in contact in one form or another. It has truly been a special experience.

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Hovey Players, Inc.
P.O. Box 540101
Waltham, MA 02454-0101

NOW APPEARING...*The 9th Annual Hovey Summer Arts Festival.* Produced by Leigh Berry.

Summer is here once again, and it's time to gear up for the *9th Annual Hovey Summer Arts Festival* at Hovey Players – the festival formerly known as Hovey Summer Shorts! This year, we are excited to introduce short films and replace our 10-minute play format with one-act plays!

PERFORMANCE DATES: July 15, 16, 22 and 23 at 8:00 pm

TRACK A PERFORMANCES: 7/15, 7/23 @ 8pm

Hothouse by Kelly DuMar directed by Nancy Curran Willis
Team Colors by William Campbell directed by Michelle M. Aguilon
The Angel of Brooklyn by Dwayne Yancey directed by Mark Baumhardt

TRACK B PERFORMANCES: 7/16, 7/22 @ 8pm

Tree Man by Steven Schutzman directed by Michael Tonner
The Father Hat by Frank A. Shefton directed by Vincent E. Siders
Looking Down by Glenn English directed by Gordon Ellis

The film shorts will be announced at a later date. Paintings by Seana Antaya will be displayed upstairs in the Act II Lounge.

The festival is back at Hovey Players, Abbott Memorial Theater, 9 Spring Street, Waltham, MA. For ticket reservations...please call (781) 893-9171, or visit www.hoveyplayers.com. You may also order tickets online at www.hoveyplayers.com. Tickets are \$15.00 for adults, \$13.00 for seniors and students.

You are cordially invited the Festival Opening Night Party! Join the playwrights, directors, filmmakers, and actors on opening night, Friday, July 15th, for a wine and cheese reception after the show, sponsored by In Blossom, just across the street from the theater with additional catering by Baan Thai Restaurant.