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The winner of Southern Theatre magazine’s cover contest is Flight of the Lawnchair Man, a musical comedy which had its Southeastern premiere at Cumberland County Playhouse in Crossville, TN, in May 2008, directed by Bari Newport. In the cover photo, Nicole Bégué appears as Amelia Earhart. The play, which had its full-length world premiere at Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, CT, in 2005, is licensed through Theatrical Rights Worldwide (www.TheatricalRights.com). It is based on the true story of Larry Walters, who disrupted aviation when he tried to fly his lawnchair with weather balloons. Book by Peter Ullian; music and lyrics by Robert Lindsey-Nassif; based on a concept by Robert Lindsey-Nassif. (Cover design by Deanna Thompson; photo by Sandra “Sam” Hahn)
Those Who Can, Do! A Teacher’s Quest to Remain an Artist

When I became a full-time theatre teacher in 1997, it seemed that all of my passion and creativity was channeled into guiding students. Coming to the job from a professional background, I found that I acquired a new work ethic, a wealth of skills and a diverse perspective. Yet, when compared to the work of theatre professionals, my job wasn’t seen as important. Even in the school setting, where I put major effort into achieving goals, appraisals had a subtext of, “Yes, quite charming, but you’re in education working with kids. Not a real artist.” Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach.

Somewhat irritated, I seized on the quest of proving myself worthy on a yearly basis as both an artist and a teacher. Those who can, do!

And so I did. And did. And did. I directed, acted and designed for professional theatres when I wasn’t teaching – and often found opportunities for my students in these projects as well. I enjoyed success and respect. Then, in the last four years on this treadmill, I experienced burnout.

So, as many artists do throughout their careers, I set out to reinvent myself. Surprisingly, I found the tools of reinvention right where I was – in the classroom. Why not feed my artistic side by performing in schools? For years, I had been teaching an annual curriculum project in rhyming verse and doing touring outreach performances with students in other schools. I decided to put the essence of those two projects together.

Thus, A Box of Rhymes was born. This solo 30-minute touring show showcases the lost art of performing poetry (to semi-quote my publicity), featuring works by writers ranging from Shel Silverstein to Shakespeare.

Those who can, do! And so I do. About twice a month during my planning period, I take A Box of Rhymes to schools in the Charleston area to put myself on the spot and introduce kids to the joy of language, imagination, acting and theatre.

After one show, a fourth grader (who obviously saw me as a fellow thespian) walked up with an excitement so uncontrollable that all he could blurt out was, “You like to act, don’t you?” On the drive back to my last period, I thought, “Yes. I do. I like to act.” I was inspired and satisfied and … it was time to go back to teaching again.

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-William Ivey Long
Tony Award-Winning Costume Designer

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Act 1: Opening Scene: Sunlight shining from overhead creating morning “shadows.”

An individual crosses from a “front door” to a mailbox, removing the most recent edition of Southern Theatre magazine. (Enjoy.)

We spotlight the playwright in this issue, which includes the entire text of Nobody, the 2008 winner of SETC’s Charles M. Getchell Award, given annually to recognize a promising new play by a Southeastern playwright. In an accompanying story, Steve Burch interviews playwright Richard Aellen about his work and the development of Nobody, which tells the story of Bert Williams, an African-American actor who achieved great success performing in blackface in the late 1800s and had difficulty breaking free of that stereotype. The play title, Nobody, was the name of Williams’ signature song. Aellen also discusses briefly the challenges of writing this play as a non-African-American.

The difficulties many producers face in finding new plays by minority playwrights are addressed in another story, in which Daniel Banks, a keynoter at the 2008 SETC Convention, shares his list of 40 groundbreaking playwrights you may not know but should.

A new play developed at Birmingham-Southern College made its way from Alabama to the world-famous Festival Fringe in Edinburgh, Scotland, in summer 2008, providing a learning experience for students and professors alike. Alan Litsey and others involved in the project share tips on taking a play to the Fringe, including how to choose a venue, how to market your show and where to stay.

You’ll also find helpful tips in our “Outside the Box” column, which focuses this issue on simple strategies that The Lost Colony uses to extend the life of its costumes. Also be sure to check out Scott Secore’s review of Stewart F. Lane’s new work in the “Words, Words, Words…” book column.

Finally, in our “400 Words” opinion column, George Younts of Charleston County (SC) School of the Arts discusses how a new work he developed is helping him keep his creative energy flowing – both as an artist and as a teacher.

Act 2: (Continue reading and enjoy.)

Glen Gourley, SETC President
Each theatre has its own peculiar challenges, and Waterside Theatre, the 70-year home of *The Lost Colony* symphonic outdoor drama, is no exception. The theatre is located at the north end of Roanoke Island, which is nestled within the Outer Banks of North Carolina. The combination of sand, humidity, rain and salt air not only affects the working conditions for the company of *The Lost Colony* but also creates special challenges for the costumers.

The costumes in the production, many of which were designed by five-time Tony Award-winning costume designer William Ivey Long, are made of rich velvets and brocades with beading and ornate metallic trims. They are not the sort of costumes you would normally want to have exposed to the elements. They range from the authentic leather costumes of the Native Americans, to the practical materials of the colonist families, to the rich and delicate fabrics of the Elizabethan-era court, including two striking gowns worn by Queen Elizabeth I.

To keep these costumes exquisite (at an inexpensive price), here are some of the tricks we use:

**Tap the Sun**

One of our oldest “traditions” is the practice of wheeling the costumes out of the dressing rooms and into the sun. The costumes are hung inside out, and the sun’s natural properties are used to disinfect and dry out the costumes from the prior evening’s performance perspiration. Hanging the costumes inside out exposes the dampest parts of the costume while protecting the outside from being bleached by the sun. The costumes are left in the sun for three to four hours before being returned to the dressing rooms.

**Paint, Instead of Replacing**

The salt air and humidity in our coastal setting can cause accelerated wear on the costumes. The metallic trims used in many of the costumes of Queen Elizabeth’s court tarnish in this environment. Rather than replace the trim, which could take hours of labor, we use metallic enamel paint to brighten the dulled finish.

**Save Money by Retrofitting Contemporary Clothes**

Making costume pieces from scratch can be mind-boggling when you have a cast of more than 100. Our costumers have found a solution. They purchase shirts from period-style vendors, such as Deva Lifewear and Museum Replicas. Once the costume shop receives these ready-wear shirts, the costumers retrofit the items with accurate closures and remove any contemporary features or labels.

**Create ‘Built-in’ Solutions to Accommodate Different Sizes**

Ease of alteration is a necessary consideration when constructing new costume pieces for the production. Fitting a cast of more than 100 performers with only a few weeks of preparation would be impossible if this were not the case. Extra seam allowance is given in most garments to accommodate a wide range of sizes. Many supporting roles have costumes with laces to facilitate a “sew-free” adjustment.

**Build Petticoats in Layers**

Petticoats are a particular item where time-saving construction techniques are
employed. In order to expedite adjusting the length of a hemline, they are cut with extra length, tucked in several layers and stitched at varying depths. This allows the costumer several length options to choose from in the fitting. Costumers can quickly determine the needed additional length and remove the tuck that will give the needed length. Use of this technique allows petticoats to be lengthened or shortened without requiring the removal of trims, ruffles, or other detailing that may be stitched onto the hem.

**Take Advantage of Natural Wear and Tear**

English colonists in the first scenes of *The Lost Colony* appear in practical well-kept costumes of the period. Once they arrive on Roanoke Island, where life is a hardship, the costumes become progressively worn until ultimately the colonists appear in tattered clothes and rags. We use this progression to our advantage, adapting the production’s costumes to have a similar life cycle. When a new colonist costume is constructed, a worn costume is assigned to a colonist for the later scenes on Roanoke Island. Costumes beyond patching and repairing are reassigned to colonists in the final scenes of the production. Likewise, costumes that are irreparable are torn into rags and bindings and used to complete the disheveled look in the final scenes. Thus, our costumes, in a sense, are recycled and used for several decades.

**Don't Forget to ‘Change the Light Bulbs’ All Year Long**

In addition to freshening and repairing the existing costumes used in *The Lost Colony* throughout the summer, the costume shop is continually working on repairs and new construction. Production Designer William Ivey Long compares the continual maintenance and replacement of costumes to “changing the light bulbs at the Vatican.” He remarks, “Once you have replaced the last bulb, it is time to begin all over again!”

Carl V. Curnutte III is executive director and producer and Melissa-Anne Blizzard Hall was the 2007 costumer at *The Lost Colony*. If you have questions about these techniques, e-mail Curnutte at carl@thelostcolony.org.

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**UPDATE**

On September 11, 2007, a fire swept through the costume shop at *The Lost Colony* in Manteo, NC. Although most of the costumes were destroyed, the outdoor drama staff’s spirit remained strong — and the techniques described here are already being used on a new generation of costumes developed for the 2008 season. *The Lost Colony* received support from people and organizations around the globe in rebuilding its shop and its collection. For more information on the fire and the recovery effort, visit www.thelostcolony.org.

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Peticoats can be built with tucks that make shortening and lengthening easy. To add extra length, costumers simply remove the tuck that will give the needed length.

Recycle costumes as they become worn. At *The Lost Colony*, costumes that become threadbare are assigned to later scenes, when the colonists have fallen on hard times.

**HAVE AN OUTSIDE THE BOX IDEA?**

E-mail your story idea to “Outside the Box” Editor Doug Brown at brownd@ncarts.edu.

**WANT MORE IDEAS?**

Visit the SETC website (www.setc.org) to order SETC’s “Outside the Box” book.
How to Take a Show to the Fringe

by the Miss Julie Project Company

So you’re thinking of taking a show to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, commonly called the Fringe? You’re not alone. This international arts festival is billed as the largest in the world – and is famous for the networking and performing opportunities it provides. Actors who have made appearances on Fringe stages include such well-known stars as Emma Thompson, Hugh Grant, David Schwimmer and Jude Law.

But who can take a show there? How much will it cost? And will it be worth it?

These are questions we had to answer when a group of students, faculty and staff from Birmingham-Southern College (BSC) in Birmingham, AL, decided to take a new play to the Fringe. In August 2007, we presented BSC professor Alan Litsey’s modern adaptation of August Strindberg’s classic, Miss Julie, in Edinburgh. What follows are some lessons we learned, both about the Fringe in general and about producing a show there.

What is the Fringe?

Let’s start with the basics. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is part of a month-long performing arts celebration held mostly in Edinburgh, Scotland, each August. In 2007, it included 31,000 performances of 2,050 shows in 250 venues. Held first in 1947, the festival floods the streets of Edinburgh with theatre, music and dance performers. It is a celebration of tried-and-true productions, as well as new works and world premieres. Productions are presented by groups of all types, from high school students to professional troupes, who hail from around the world. In 2007, theatre represented 31 percent of the productions and comedy another 30.5 percent, with music, children’s shows, musicals, opera, physical theatre, dance, and exhibitions or events making up the remainder.
Far North
in Edinburgh

Who can take a show to the Fringe?
Anyone can take a show there! There is no approval process that you must go through to participate in the Fringe. However, that makes it sound more simple than it is. To take a show to the Fringe, you have to locate and be approved for performance at a venue. Venues require you to make application and may ask to read your script. (More on venues, Pages 10-11.)

High school students who take a show to the Fringe often go through the American High School Theatre Festival (www.ahstf.com), which selects 35-40 schools annually to perform at the Fringe.

How much will it cost?
It won’t be cheap. It cost us a little over $36,000 (including $14,265 in stipends) to take six students and four faculty and staff members on a 15-day trip to the festival in 2007. (See expense tally, Page 11.)

Where can you find money to go?
Look for grant opportunities. Our production, Miss Julie, was funded for the most part by an Undergraduate Collaborative Research and Engagement Grant that was provided by the Associated Colleges of the South (ACS), a consortium of 16 colleges and universities in 12 states in the Southeast, and funded by the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation. This grant covered $28,000 of our expenses. (Our college also chipped in $3,500, and the remainder of our $36,000-plus budget came from our department’s production budget.)

We found our grant in an e-mail update sent by ACS. If you are affiliated with a college or university, stay in constant contact with the grants officer in your institution. Your state and regional arts councils also can be excellent sources for funding.

A good place to look for available grants is Illinois Researcher Information Service (IRIS) (www.library.uiuc.edu/iris), which has a searchable database available to colleges and universities for a nominal subscription fee (and free for the first month). Another source of information on grants available is www.grantstation.com – available for an annual subscription rate of $89.
Where will you perform?
Once you’ve made the decision to participate in the Fringe, you need to register on the Fringe website at www.edfringe.com to receive a guidebook and detailed information on the process. The Fringe provides a specific timeline that you need to follow. We started the process in November and began applying for venues in January.

In Fringe-speak, a venue is a place of performance. It might be in a classroom, a warehouse or the attic of an old office building. It is almost certainly not in a purpose-built theatre. These odd spaces are converted into theatres and other performance spaces by an army of student volunteers. Floors are laid, light pipes hung, risers and seats brought in and lights circuited.

To make application to venues, go to the Fringe website, where you will find venue contacts listed. Click on various venues and locate those that meet your requirements for size, kind of programming offered and other details.

You will actually be making application to the venue company that acts as a producer in a particular location. Be sure that you apply to a number of venues. We applied to seven – and were accepted by one.

Venues vary in size, facilities and requirements. A larger venue company, such as C-Venues, might have five performance locations, with three to five individual theatres in each location and house sizes ranging from 30 to 350 seats.

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What should you look for in a venue?

There are several factors to keep in mind in applying for a venue.

One key is to secure a venue that is as centrally located as possible, because many theatre patrons are overwhelmed by the opportunities in the most central venues and don’t leave these areas.

“The major venues – e.g., Assembly Rooms, Pleasance, C-Venues – eat up so many first-time Fringe visiting audiences,” notes Gordon Parsons, a drama lecturer in the United Kingdom who has directed, performed and reviewed at the Fringe for many years.

Nancy Lipschultz, associate professor of theatre at Indiana University Bloomington, who has taken a number of shows to the Fringe, also recommends a central location as close to the Fringe box office as possible.

“The more central you are, the better your ticket sales,” she notes. “For example, a larger venue that has many offerings brings people in the door and, after they see one show, they may just stay to see another, and that one might be yours.”

She recommends the Festival Club (located on the street directly behind the Royal Mile, Edinburgh’s major tourist destination, where many troupes market their shows) or the Bedlam (just off George IV Bridge).

“These places are both an easy walk from the main box office,” says Lipschultz.

For our production, Designer/Technical Director Matthew Mielke submitted applications to seven venue production companies that were appropriate to our play. Some asked to read the script, while others did not. Eventually, we were selected by the C-Venues Company (www.cvenues.com/venues/home.html) for its Soco location. C-Venues is the second largest venue group on the Fringe, with over 150 events taking place every day. The C-Venues Soco site had a 58-seat, black-box thrust space that was very suitable for our show because of its similarities to our own black-box theatre at BSC. Because it was similar in size and layout, we had to do only a minimum of reblocking/restaging when the show was transferred from BSC to Edinburgh.

Several factors made C-Venues attractive to us:

• **Size of the company**
  Because we were interested in attending as many other shows as we possibly could while we were in Edinburgh, a large venue such as C-Venues was a good choice for us. The C-Venues offer free tickets to other C-Venue company members, so we were able to see many other shows free of charge.

• **Opportunity to meet other company members**
  The C-Venues sponsor meet-and-greet parties that suited our mostly college-student company.
How to Send Scenery to Scotland

If you decide to ship items, you’ll need to build a shipping crate for them. The British shipping rules require a crate made of pressure-treated wood.

To find an international shipper, check the Yellow Pages under “shipping.” Call around to find a shipper that will deal with inexperienced people and that has agents in Scotland. We chose the Jensen Shipping Company, Inc. (P.O. Box 11146, Birmingham, AL 35202), one of the few listed in the Yellow Pages that were not copy centers or mailbox locations. Jensen provided excellent support. They understood our utter lack of prior experience and explained the process and asked the right questions so we could make the best decisions. We asked them for a single “no surprises” price. They made arrangements with each of the companies/governmental bodies that handled a portion of the shipping process: trucking to Atlanta, air freight to Manchester, customs and import duties and then trucking to Edinburgh.

Two cautions:

• Some shipping companies will quote a lower fee and not mention additional costs such as customs charges, storage costs and cartage fees. Find a shipper that can offer an all-inclusive “door-to-door” fee – picking up at your door and delivering to the door of your Fringe venue.

• As you make plans, allow for the shipped items to be “lost in customs” for a couple of days. This was our experience and also that of organizations that we contacted for advice.

When is the best time to perform?

Steer away from the key 7:30 p.m. slot, because there’s too much competition then, recommends Gordon Parsons.

“Mornings (with breakfast!) and between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. are a good time as increasingly groups have left those times free,” he says.

How much are tickets? And do you get to keep the gate?

The price of tickets varies. Ours ranged from 6.50 pounds to 8.50 pounds. We also released half-price tickets daily for sale at the Half-Price Hut and gave away complimentary tickets.

You will get some money from ticket sales, but don’t plan on making a killing at the box office. Each venue takes a percentage of the box office revenue – C-Venues typically takes 40 percent – on top of the charge for the performance space. After C-Venues deducted its charges, we took home $444.32 from ticket sales.

What’s required on the technical end?

Technical equipment provided by venues varies greatly. Because of this, it is important to connect in advance and keep up a strong dialogue with the venue company.

In our theatre, there was a tiny booth in the house that accommodated the light board operator, the sound operator and the stage manager. There were no headsets for calling cues.

What about props and scenery?

Keep them simple! Use as few props as possible to cut shipping costs – or consider buying furniture and other props there.

Many productions at the Fringe use little scenery or props. Storage is very limited, and you may not be allowed much time to set up or to strike your show. Venue storage spaces are often very small and set-up time between shows was limited to five minutes.

We shipped three pieces of furniture from Birmingham for our set. These were collapsible and easy to set up and store. Our shipping crate and contents weighed 289 pounds and cost $1,335 to ship to Edinburgh. This covered all fees and other costs. (See sidebar at left for shipping details.)

Due to the vagaries of customs regulations, return costs may be higher than out-bound costs. We chose to leave our furniture in Edinburgh for that reason. Because of the shipping costs, some theatre companies purchase any furniture items they need in Edinburgh and leave them there after the production. There are a number of furniture shops and department stores accessible by taxi in the city.

We also brought a few hand props from Birmingham. We stored most of our hand props at our flat and transported them to the theatre each day.

How do we handle lights and sound?

Plan ahead for sound and lighting before traveling to the Fringe. Because venues range so widely, our experience may not be what you would find at your venue. Here are the issues we faced and how we handled them.

• Lighting

Like many venues at the Fringe, the C-Venues had a very specific light plot pre-set when we arrived. Knowing this, we arranged our theatre’s light plot at home to match the one at the C-Venues exactly. When we arrived, we just had to program the lights at C to match our previously planned light level set from school. We were allowed to hang three specials, but we were not permitted to change any colors or positions of the other lighting instruments. Be sure to copy your light plot onto a backup thumb drive.

• Location

The C-Venues has many venues, most of which are centrally located in the heart of the primary Fringe district.

Location

The C-Venues has many venues, most of which are centrally located in the heart of the primary Fringe district.
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and bring it with you, just in case the cues are lost in the pressure of the venue having many shows in one performing space.

- **Sound**
  Sound levels were set at the technical rehearsal and written down by the sound operator. During our five-minute set-up time, the sound operator had to re-set the board levels as well as complete the sound check. We transported all of our sound cues on a compact disc. Also, we made copies and gave them to the stage manager and director in case of any problems with the original compact disc.

**How should we handle costumes?**

Try to minimize your costume needs because secure storage space probably won’t be provided, dressing rooms are typically limited and, of course, you have to get the costumes there!

- **Getting costumes to Scotland**
  If you can, pack them in your luggage to ensure they arrive safely.

- **Getting costumes to the Fringe**
  Plan to bring your costumes to the theatre daily and take them back to your lodging after performances. This can be a bit challenging if the weather is bad. On rainy and windy days, we rode the frequent buses down the street to the venue. One actress used a small rolling suitcase to transport small items and emergency supplies to the theatre.

- **Changing costumes/applying makeup**
  Plan ahead for limited resources. At C-Venues, there was little dressing room space – and it was located in the basement of the building and not even available until a few days into our run. We had our actors arrive at the theatre in full hair and makeup, so that we had to use the dressing rooms or restrooms only to change into our costumes.

- **Cleaning costumes**
  Depending on where you stay, washing machines may or may not be available, so be sure that you have supplies for hand-washing costumes. Although we had washers and dryers at our flat for larger loads, we typically spot-cleaned or rinsed costumes and hung them in our kitchen to dry. We were able to borrow an iron from our host.

**What publicity/marketing is needed?**

Because there are so many productions at the Fringe, you need to develop a strong marketing strategy for your show.
• Bring flyers and posters
  This is a staple that you will need. Just about every company brings flyers and posters to advertise its show. We printed 500 posters and 5,000 flyers. Although we did not use all of these, it was smart to have them available. The C-Venues required us to include particular venue information on each flyer, so make sure that you check with your venue for their stipulations. We had all of our paper advertisements printed in Edinburgh at Dupliquick (www.dupliquick.com), which saved money and effort. Our venue hung our posters in prominent locations within the venue and in the city to encourage ticket sales.

• Utilize T-shirts or sweatshirts
  Print your production information on them!

• Sell your play in the official Fringe Programme
  Be professional, and don’t emphasize the student angle if you are from a school or university.
  “You can always credit your college ... in your free programs,” says Parsons, a Fringe veteran. “Be as useful as you can in the Fringe Programme description. Silliness on the whole doesn’t pull audiences.”

• Do publicity on the streets
  Hand out flyers everywhere you go. We kept several in our pockets at all times, which we handed out as we met people throughout the city. We also offered them to strangers — anyone who would take them! We also accepted flyers from other productions, which we looked through each day in order to help us decide which shows to attend.

• Perform excerpts
  If appropriate to the style of your piece, perform short excerpts on the street.

• Offer treats
  Some popular shows offered chocolate, breakfast or drinks during their productions. Who wouldn’t want to enjoy hot chocolate while watching a great show?

• Give away free tickets
  This is one of the most effective ways to attract audiences to your show. C-Venues gave us several comp tickets for each show (but we had to ask for...
them). We then stood on the street corner of our venue about 30 minutes before show time and offered them to potential audience members.

- Invite other companies from your venue

This was also a very effective way to draw audiences. Our company members hung out around our venue and talked to other performers. We then went to see their shows and invited them to see ours. It allowed us to have personal contact with potential audience members, as well as support other performers in our venue.

What about lodging?

Contact the staff at the Fringe and at your venue for help with lodging choices, but also network with colleagues. We found our lodging – at Edinburgh First (www.edinburghfirst.com), which is affiliated with the University of Edinburgh – through a Clemson University professor, Mark Charney, who stayed there when his school took a play to the Fringe in 2006. The location is central, everyone had his/her own bedroom, and each suite had a communal kitchen. We were just a 15-minute walk from our venue, and the rooms were clean and comfortable.

What should we know about food?

One key note: It was hard to find a place to eat after 8 p.m. With our performance at 5:15 p.m. every day, that was an issue. We found that many restaurants transitioned to bars that would not permit children after 8 p.m., and some of us had children along on the trip. It also took some time to figure out how the restaurants operated. It seemed unusual for them to seat large parties, and they would not split the tickets. We found it easiest to have one person pay with a credit card and then have everyone else reimburse him or her with cash.

Do we need special clothing?

Be sure to take rain gear, galoshes and a heavy, winter jacket. We were informed that it was usually rainy and cold. We lucked out, though, because it only rained two days during our two weeks there.

What should we do before leaving home?

Allow your company enough time to prepare. Taking a show overseas, especially a new production, is challenging. You can eliminate unnecessary stress when you feel confident that each team member clearly understands his job and is able to perform it even in his sleep.

Our Miss Julie rehearsal process began in early May. The company met to discuss the details of our trip, including our production schedule. That afternoon, the entire company sat for the first read-through. The script was almost complete. The playwright received additional notes from the company, completing the final draft in mid-June. The company began a three-week rehearsal process on July 9, 2007, meeting each weekday from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Many companies choose to run performances of their shows before they take them to the Fringe. However, if you choose, as we did, to give your show its first run at the Fringe, we suggest holding a preview performance for a select audience before you leave.

Six days before we left for Scotland, we presented our work-in-progress to a small invited audience. This was our first opportunity to receive audience feedback as well as our last chance to rehearse with our props and furniture before shipping our crate.

Was the experience worth all the effort?

The Fringe journey was invaluable to us on many levels. Our entire team learned the true meaning of collaboration as we worked closely on every aspect of the production process at home and at the Fringe.

“We toss around the word ‘collaborative’ a lot in the theatre, but I learned a great deal about collaboration through this close exploration of a new play with such a talented group of students,” says Michael Flowers, professor of theatre at BSC. “We were a real team (faculty, staff and students) who not only put together the play, but worked in unison as we executed all aspects of the entire experience.”

We also were challenged to respond to the unexpected on an almost daily basis.

On top of all that, we were inspired by diverse productions from around the world – people reinventing what the theatre can be – and meeting fascinating people. As student performers Amanda Kramer and Kate Jenkins wrote on our blog, “Scotland Rocks!”

The Miss Julie Project Company included the following Birmingham-Southern College faculty, staff and students: Alex Brouwer, senior theatre major; Nikki Craft, senior theatre major; Michael Flowers, professor of theatre; Kate Jenkins, 2007 theatre graduate; Amanda Kramer, junior theatre major; Alan Litsey, professor of theatre; Patti Manning, costume designer in residence; Matthew Mielke, professor of theatre; Mac Smith, sophomore theatre major; and Laura Spurgeon, sophomore theatre major.
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After his keynote session, “Reflecting US/U.S.” at the SETC Convention in Chattanooga, Daniel Banks was asked by a high school teacher for a list of diverse playwrights who have written excellent plays, but still remain off the radar screen for many directors and producers. Banks, a theatre professor in the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, shared the list at right via e-mail after the session.

“Some of these authors’ plays may not be suitable for high school,” he says. “But they are all amazing writers who are changing the U.S. theatre.”

The playwrights on the list, Banks says, have won major awards or commissions, have had moving and powerful productions of their work, and/or have proved useful to him in the classroom, especially with regard to conversations about identity and society. Their plays represent the complexity of contemporary society and the challenges young people face in self-defining across lines of culture, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality, he says. Some are from the South, and others live elsewhere in the U.S.

Banks notes that many of the plays by these writers can be obtained through New Dramatists in New York (www.newdramatists.org), the Playwright’s Center in Minneapolis (www.pwcenter.org), the Bay Area Playwrights Foundation in San Francisco (www.playwrightsfoundation.org) and the new, independent No Passport Press (e-mail: NoPassportPress@aol.com), as well as in his upcoming anthology, Across All Lines: A Critical Anthology of Hip Hop Theatre Plays (due spring 2009, University of Michigan Press). More information on writers and their agents can be found on the Internet. A copy of a play often can be requested through an agent, Banks says.

- Deanna Thompson

**The List: How Many Do You Know?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zakiyyah Alexander</th>
<th>Cherylene Lee</th>
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<tr>
<td>Christina Anderson</td>
<td>Victor Lodato</td>
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<td>John Belluso</td>
<td>Irma Mayorga</td>
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<td>Chadwick Boseman</td>
<td>Zell Miller, Ill</td>
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<td>Ricardo Bracho</td>
<td>Chiori Miyagawa</td>
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<td>Sharon Bridgforth</td>
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<td>Julia Cho</td>
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<td>Vicki Grise</td>
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<td>Caridad Sivich</td>
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<td>Rickerby Hinds</td>
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<td>Quiara Alegria Hudes</td>
<td>Candido Tirado</td>
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<td>Naomi Iizuka</td>
<td>Enrique Urueta</td>
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<td>Daniel Alexander Jones</td>
<td>William Yellow Robe</td>
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<td>Oni Faida Lampley</td>
<td>Chay Yew</td>
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Life of ‘Blackface’ African-American Actor Explored in Nobody

Following are excerpts from an e-mail interview of Richard Aellen, winner of the 2008 Charles M. Getchell Award, by Steve Burch, chair of SETC’s Playwriting Committee. Aellen, who lives in Tampa, FL, is the author of five international thrillers (No Sanctuary, Redeye, Crux, Flashpoint and The Cain Conversion), a young adult novel (Ozzy on the Outside) and five produced plays (Square One, Right to Remain Silent, Forgotten Verdict, Water Quench Fire and Surprise Visit). His Getchell-winning play, Nobody, explores the life of acclaimed African-American actor Bert Williams, who became a prisoner of his own success playing blackface roles in minstrel shows in the late 1800s. Students from the University of Alabama, where Burch is an assistant professor, performed a staged reading of Nobody at the 2008 SETC Convention under Burch’s direction with a response from Gary Garrison, playwright and executive director for creative affairs for the Dramatists Guild.

Interview by Steve Burch

STEVE BURCH: You’ve been writing for a while and in various genres and formats (novelist, screenwriter and playwright). How did you begin writing? Was it satisfying to you?

RICHARD AELLEN: I have always enjoyed words, reading and writing. When I was young, I envisioned myself as a writer, first in the Hemingway mold, later as a screenwriter and playwright. I’ve managed to do all three and each has its particular pleasures and discomforts.

BURCH: And you started how?

AELLEN: I wrote a number of scripts for industrial films and commercials in San Francisco, as well as some dramatic shorts that fell under the heading “independent,” which meant I paid for them myself. I went to Africa, hoping to turn into Hemingway, and wrote an adventure novel based on experiences in Zimbabwe. Nobody wanted it. I moved to L.A., and wrote spec screenplays. Nobody wanted them. I discovered a war crimes trial of a Japanese general in 1946. My agent said it was a poor idea for a movie so I wrote it as a play. The play won an award and production at Northern Michigan University. I was hooked on playwriting. I moved to New York, began writing plays and had a couple of one-acts produced, at which point the adventure novel sold and the publisher wanted a three-book contract. Three more thrillers and a young adult novel later, the Cold War ended, my agent died and then my publisher died. I returned to playwriting.

BURCH: That’s quite a story in itself. Let me ask you, what is the greatest difference between writing a novel and writing a play? Do you feel a loss of ownership with a play as opposed to a novel? And does the collaborative nature of playwriting aid you or does it throw various monkey wrenches in your way?

AELLEN: A novel is a permanent and finished version of my work. I like that. Writing the novel can be isolating and lonely if you enjoy working with people. The collaborative nature of the theatre makes it more stimulating and exciting, unless the director has an opposing vision of the play, in which case it’s like pushing a Hummer with a flat tire. Fortunately, that’s happened only once. A novel is complete in itself and can sit quietly on a bookshelf for years, its world as fresh and complete as it was the day it left the publisher. A play is transformed, reinterpreted and reborn with every production. It’s never just a play but always a particular performance. A play has the capacity to surprise the playwright with each new outing. In that sense they’re quite opposite – one fixed in form forever, the other always a new birth.

BURCH: How did you come upon the story of Bert Williams, the subject of Nobody?

AELLEN: I was researching a project at the New York Library of the Performing Arts and saw a title that intrigued me. The title was Nobody, a biography of Bert Williams. Glancing through the book, I was surprised that I hadn’t heard of Williams, given how successful and influential he and George Walker were. The photograph of Bert in blackface shocked me. At that time, I was unaware of the history of African-American minstrel shows. I saw the burnt cork with contemporary eyes as a degrading and contemptible caricature. Yet clearly Bert Williams was an artist of the first rank, an

Are You a Future Getchell Award Winner?

SETC’s Charles M. Getchell New Play Award recognizes worthy new scripts written by individuals who live or go to school in the SETC region or by SETC members who live in or outside the region. More information: www.setc.org/scholarship/newplay.asp.

Do You Know a Talented High School Playwright?

The SETC Playwriting Committee has created a playwriting contest just for high school students. The winner of the High School Play Contest receives a $250 prize and an invitation to attend the SETC Convention. Submissions are accepted from October 1 to December 1. More information: www.setc.org/scholarship/secondary.asp.
intelligent, sensitive, well-read man. Why would he choose to perform in blackface? In the answer to that question lay the genesis of the play.

**Burch:** When you wrote your first draft, was it in the structure that we have today? Did you change it much?

**Aellen:** In writing any historical/biographical play, one of two approaches suggests itself. Pick a critical moment, a compressed time period, a particular place, and orchestrate the themes, conflicts and crises accordingly. The other approach is the episodic, ranging freely in time and place. This is the approach I chose for *Nobody*. The image of a bare stage presented itself: an audition scene and Bert’s early aversion to blacking up. Tambo and Bones [two black-faced comic end men in the minstrel shows] appeared as a natural way to link scenes, illuminate themes, and dramatize one aspect of minstrel show humor. That structure has not changed much since the initial draft but the scenes themselves have changed. The original end of the first act saw Williams and Walker in London. Subsequent rewrites and revisions brought into high relief the jealousies and resentments that threatened the partnership, ultimately resulting in a moment of unexpected violence that replaced London and now ends the first act.

**Burch:** When writing about real people and real events, how conscientious are you regarding the “facts” of their story? Do you feel a responsibility to get the facts straight, to present truthfully your subject’s tale?

**Aellen:** Any playwright basing his play on historical people or events has to first face that question: How much fidelity do I owe the facts? In general, I think as much as possible. At a certain point I make a distinction between the facts and the truth of the play. The truth of the play is established by the playwright. Facts and devilish accuracy are the province of PBS documentaries and biographies, such as the recently published *Introducing Bert Williams*, by Camille Forbes. Ultimately, I had to decide who Bert Williams was for me: my version of the man and the themes I found compelling in his life. In pursuing that vision for any historical character, I feel free to alter the facts with one important caveat: I won’t invent scenes or alter facts in a way that depicts a man in a less favorable light than would the historical record. I’m not sure whether this compunction stems from an obligation I feel to the man or to factual truth, but each is important.

**Burch:** Was Bert Williams himself a reliable narrator of his own life, and, if not, is your duty to that narrative or the historical record?

**Aellen:** I don’t know if I feel so much an obligation to tell Bert’s story the way he would tell it. There is some evidence he toyed with the truth himself, although whether it was done tongue-in-cheek or deliberately or is only apocryphal is difficult to tell. For instance, Williams once said he studied mime in Europe with the “great Pietro.” There is no evidence of any such Pietro. Williams variously reported his birthplace as the Bahamas or Antigua. He once maintained that Bert Williams was not his real name. Why, how and whether he made any of these claims is difficult to know given the distant and dubious nature of such accounts. He was a complex man and how he would tell “his story” probably varied depending on circumstance and audience, as it does for all of us.

**Burch:** As a non-African-American, did you feel like you were invading culturally someone else’s space and story? Did you feel a greater need to justify your telling the story?

**Aellen:** That most sensitive of all questions: Does a white person have the right to tell the story of a black person, or is this cultural appropriation? For years, I made sporadic forays into the historical record, collecting information and making notes. But I repeatedly set aside the project, feeling that at some fundamental level I was not, and never would be, qualified to dramatize the story of such a significant figure in African-American history. I can marshal a dozen arguments, many of them advanced more forcefully and fully by people and playwrights of color, men like August Wilson in his essay, “The Ground On Which I Stand.” There are also compelling arguments to the contrary, that art is independent of its creator, that if L. Frank Baum were a wife-beater, *The Wizard of Oz* would still charm and delight. I think an essential quality of any artist is empathy. Without it, art becomes craft. A writer need not be Jewish to give voice to Shylock or African-American to pen the Emperor Jones. I had an experience that underscores the sensitivity of the issue. At one point *Nobody* was chosen as part of a reading series in New York. The sponsoring theatre hired an African-American of some renown to direct it. We had never met but we spoke on the phone and he invited me to his home in Brooklyn to discuss the script. We met and chatted for about 15 minutes before he told me he was going to take a “hiatus” on the project. At first I didn’t realize what he meant was that he was opting out. He said that he assumed I was African-American. He had worked on race-based plays with white playwrights and found that he couldn’t communicate with them as well as he wanted. He generously posited this as his problem, not mine, but as I walked back to the subway station, I was aware of something that I hadn’t noticed a half an hour earlier: I was a minority in a mixed but predominantly black neighborhood. The obliviousness to race— or, rather, the inconsequentiality of it—that characterizes life in New York City was temporarily lost.

**Burch:** Was the reading of *Nobody* at SETC a different experience for you, or was it fairly standard in the process and response?

**Aellen:** The reading at SETC was similar to others, but having a respondent of Gary Garrison’s stature and sophistication made it particularly worthwhile…. Based on his responses and audience feedback, the play now has a revised ending to the second act that leaves Tambo and Bones less amusing and more disturbing. It also eliminates a fantasy scene of Bert appearing on an empty stage in modern times, which intrigued the playwright but confused the audience.
The Play

NOBODY

by Richard Aellen

CAST:

Four men: 2 black, 2 white
Three women: 2 black, 1 white
Note: Black actors each play a single character; white actors many. Bert and George will range in age from early 20s to mid-40s

CHARACTERS:

BERT WILLIAMS – a large man of deliberate demeanor. He is intelligent, sensitive, ambitious but in some ways a perpetual outsider. Bert is a private man who dislikes conflict and avoids confrontation.

GEORGE WALKER – outgoing, a savvy businessman with drive and ambition. His stage portrayal of the high-living, fast-talking schemer-dreamer is not far removed from the man himself. George is catnip to women and knows it.

TAMBO and BONES – two white actors in blackface. They are symbols rather than real people. They facilitate scene changes, offer indirect commentary on the changing fortunes of Williams and Walker, and dramatize the waning popularity of blackface entertainment. The two actors double in other roles including Florenz Ziegfeld, Eugene O’Neill, Lew Dockstader, Jules Hurtig, Harry Seamon and others.

LOTTIE WILLIAMS – Bert’s wife, an uncomplicated, sensible woman three years older than Bert who admires her husband’s intellectual appetite, supports his goal of transcending the minstrel stereotype. Also plays Ada’s mother, DOREEN in a scene prior to Lottie’s appearance.

ADA OVERTON WALKER – George’s wife, a young and talented actress, a superb dancer, bright and vivacious. As she matures artistically, Ada’s idealism is replaced by a pragmatic professionalism that becomes a key feature of both career and marriage. Eva is a white singer known as the “I Don’t Care” girl, who lives up to her reputation. Doubles as other characters.

FEMALE ROLES:

EVA TANGUAY – about 30. Eva is a white singer known of both career and marriage. Actress playing EVA TANGUAY also plays:

Chief Bugaboo – seen only in silhouette
Fabrizio – Italian immigrant tailor.
Mike and Jimmy – cops.
Danny – Flo Ziegfeld’s assistant.

MAMMY’S NAME – WUZ LIZA SO BETWEEN THE TWO OF THEM THEY CALLED ME FERTILIZA.

MAMMY’S NAME WAS – WUZ – FERDINAND MY DADDY’S SHE WUZ LIZA SO BETWEEN THE TWO OF THEM THEY CALLED ME FERTILIZA.


MALE ROLES:

Actors playing TAMBO and BONES in blackface also play the following roles:

Florenz Ziegfeld – in his early fifties, brash, confident.
Clyde Haftner – a rough and tumble impresario from San Francisco.
Lew Dockstader – a renowned blackface performer.

Hurtig & Seamon – two more impresarios, much more savvy, from New York.
Eugene O’Neill – in his early thirties, having just written The Emperor Jones.
Danny – Flo Ziegfeld’s assistant.
Mike and Jimmy – cops.
Fabrizio – Italian immigrant tailor.
Chief Bugaboo – seen only in silhouette

FEMALE ROLES:

Actress playing EVA TANGUAY also plays:

Sandy – Eugene O’Neill’s assistant.
Betty – a Ziegfeld chorus girl of dubious intelligence.

FOR PRODUCTION:

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Act I

Lights up. A bare stage with a couple of chairs, a rehearsal piano, a banjo. The place is San Francisco, the year 1895. A twenty-year-old BERT WILLIAMS enters and looks around hesitantly. HE crosses to the piano and touches a key. CLYDE HAFHTNER enters.

HAFHTNER: You there. What are you doing?
BERT: Are you Mr. Haftner?
HAFHTNER: Not taking a pee in my theatre are you?
BERT: No, sir. I came for the auditions.
HAFHTNER: You’re late. Auditions are over.
BERT: The sign outside –.
HAFHTNER: Should have been taken down already. Go home.
BERT: Are you satisfied with the bill?
HAFHTNER: Why? You got something special to show me?
BERT: I sing, I play banjo. I can dance.
HAFHTNER: Play the bones?
BERT: I’ve had some success.
HAFHTNER: Had some success. That’s rich. What’s your name, son?
BERT: Bert Williams.
HAFHTNER: Been on stage before?
BERT: Here and there.
HAFHTNER: Where’s here and where’s there?
BERT: The Plaisance. Cafe Royale, the Blue Shades.
HAFHTNER: Taverns and bars. Any stage work here in San Francisco?
BERT: Some friends and I put on a show at Stanford.
HAFHTNER: Stanford College? You a college boy?
BERT: I’m an actor.
HAFHTNER: You do a coon act?
BERT: I prefer other forms of entertainment.
HAFHTNER: You want to do Shakespeare go to the Alcazar. Me, I’m looking for a coon act. (HE starts to leave.)
BERT: Mr. Haftner? Is the show going to Chicago?
HAFHTNER: What about it?
BERT: (Deliberately at first, then with increasing disjointed fervor; BERT does the dance.)

FIRST ON DE HEEL TAP / DEN ON DE TOE / EBRY TIME I WHEEL ABOUT / I JUMPS JIM CROW / WHEEL ABOUT AN’ TURN ABOUT / EN DO JESS SO/ AND EBRY TIME I WHEEL ABOUT / I JUMPS JIM CROW.

HAFHTNER: You dance lousy, but at least it’s funny. Seven dollars a week. See Snyder in the office. He’ll work out the details. (HAFHTNER exits. BERT is alone on stage. HE picks up the banjo, strums a few chords, begins to practice the requisite uneducated accent for a coon song. HE does not see GEORGE WALKER enter.)


GEORGE: “Dey calls me. Dey calls me fertiliza.” It’s

Doubled Roles Cast List:

Note:
1) Ages are largely irrelevant and when given are as a rough guide.
2) When linked together, characters are in the same scene at the same time.
3) Roles listed in order of decreasing importance; significant to walk-ons.

MALE ROLES:

Hurtig & Seamon – two more impresarios, much more savvy, from New York.
Eugene O’Neill – in his early thirties, having just written The Emperor Jones.
Danny – Flo Ziegfeld’s assistant.
Mike and Jimmy – cops.
Fabrizio – Italian immigrant tailor.
Chief Bugaboo – seen only in silhouette

FEMALE ROLES:

Actress playing EVA TANGUAY also plays:
Sandy – Eugene O’Neill’s assistant.
Betty – a Ziegfeld chorus girl of dubious intelligence.
WOULDN’T GO AHEAD; NOR HE

WHERE’D you get them fancy clothes, nigger? —

(BERT and GEORGE exit as TAMBO and BONES continue

HAY. TURKEY IN THE STRAW; WHAT DO YOU

A little more of.

A little fancy for a working man in the middle of

I don’t know. It looks a little dainty.

What kinda act?

(HE moves forward for a closer look. GEORGE covers

What the hell! Get out of here. (BERT picks up the banjo and improves lyrics to the tune of Turkey in the Straw.)

BERT: MET A MAN WHO; WAS SO FULL OF BRAG

As no bank.

He’s put in there what happened in Browns-

(THEY exit, revealing GEORGE and BERT sleeping in a

A limp dick.

(TAMBO and BONES:)

De two new boys dey got in the Haftner show –

TAMBO: Say der, Mr. Bones. Is you heard the latest

BONEs: What is dat, Mr. Tambo?

They didn’t hear it.

Okay, see what you can do. The hens is out

GEORGE: I am I is I are. George Walker from Lawrence,

In their mouth. I was born ....”

BERT: The unluckiest man alive.” I like that.

GEORGE: A diamond.

BERT: A little fancy for a working man in the middle of

GEORGE: What is fancy, it’s style. Something you could use

BERT: I don’t know. It looks a little dainty.

BERT: I put the journal away and prepares to sleep.

BERT: He puts the journal away and prepares to sleep.

BERT: He picks up a leather-bound book from a bedside table

GEORGE: I am I is I are. George Walker from Lawrence,

They heard it.

BERT: I take your point, George.

BERT: It’s a diamond.

GEORGE: It’s my book.

BERT: He begins to write in

BERT: What are you doing?

(HE picks up a leather-bound book from a bedside table and starts to smack the bedbugs.)

GOOD: What? What’s the matter with …

BERT: I was a little worried the way you’re dressed.

BERT: It’s too easy. Unless it’s a simpleton saying it.

GEORGE: I am I is I are. George Walker from Lawrence,

BAD: A limp dick.

GEORGE: I don’t know. It looks a little dainty.

BAD: A limp dick.

GEORGE: I am I is I are. George Walker from Lawrence,

(BERT and GEORGE exit as TAMBO and BONES continue

(BERT and GEORGE exit as TAMBO and BONES continue

BERT: It’s an island in –

GEORGE: I know where it is, I’m looking for the joke:

GEORGE: I am I is I are. George Walker from Lawrence,

GEORGE: I don’t know. It looks a little dainty.

GEORGE: I am I is I are. George Walker from Lawrence,

BERT: It’s a diamond.

BERT: It’s too easy. Unless it’s a simpleton saying it.

BERT: I am I is I are. George Walker from Lawrence,

BERT: I see what you mean. You didn’t write that down.

BERT: I don’t think.

BERT: I was a little worried the way you’re dressed.

BERT: I was a little worried the way you’re dressed.

BERT: I am I is I are. George Walker from Lawrence,

BAD: A limp dick.

BAD: A limp dick.

BAD: A limp dick.

BAD: A limp dick.

BAD: A limp dick.

BAD: A limp dick.

BAD: A limp dick.

BAD: A limp dick.
HAFTNER: Don’t get greedy.
GEORGE: Otherwise we’ll just take the show to New York.
HAFTNER: New York is for actors. You boys are entertainers.
GEORGE: I guess we’ll find out.
HAFTNER: Wait a minute, don’t be hasty. All right. Show you how much confidence I have: triple the salary. And all you can eat.
GEORGE: And a costume allowance with a tonsorial subsidy.
HAFTNER: With what?
GEORGE: Shave and a haircut. (GEORGE turns to BERT whose entrance signals a scene change. HAFTNER exits as BERT, now in normal clothes, joins GEORGE. We are in a bar.)
GEORGE: “I’m in offering you a contract.” He kept saying it, over and over. The man could not believe that we were turning him down. “No.” It felt good. Bert. Tell him, “no” and watch his face. Makes me want to learn a bunch of foreign languages, just to say “no” in all of them. You should try it sometime. Cheer you up.
BERT: How old were you, George, when you saw your first minstrel show?
GEORGE: What’s that got to do with the price of potatoes in Pittsburgh?
BERT: I was twelve when the Comstock Eureka Minstrels played Riverside. It was about a year after we came to America. Seven men in blackface sitting in a semi-circle, Tambourine on one end, Walkin’ Bones at the other, Interlocutor in his top hat and tails running the show. I’d seen clowns in white makeup and black lips. I thought this was the same thing, clowns in black makeup and red lips. I didn’t know they were “coons.” My father had to tell me. After the show he told me, “They’re supposed to be us.”
GEORGE: It was your idea, corking up.
BERT: Did you read the review? (BERT holds up a newspaper. GEORGE grubs it.)
GEORGE: “Walker and Williams blew through Chicago like a breath of fresh air in their inaugural appearance at the Trimble Theatre. The dude member of the team does various funny walks –” Funny walks?
BERT: Keep reading.
GEORGE: “… does various funny walks while the common everyday nigger has only to open his mouth to bring laughs.”
BERT: He’s not a common everyday nigger.
GEORGE: Who?
BERT: The man I’m playing. He’s more than that.
GEORGE: Look, I got you something. A Conklin Crescent. For when you sign autographs. Even got it engraved, see? Got a little W and W with a dollar sign between. Cute, huh? (Dance hall music begins. GEORGE turns his attention to offstage dancing girls.)
GEORGE: Oooh, look at those legs, wouldn’t you love to hang those ankles around your ears.
BERT: We need to change the billing.
GEORGE: How’d you like to tickle your nose with that bouquet?
BERT: Williams and Walker.
GEORGE: Say what?
BERT: I’m the one blacking up. Playing the coon. The burden is on me. George. I’m carrying the act, my name should come first. Williams and Walker. That’s only fair. That’s how it should be: Williams and Walker.
GEORGE: Okay. (Turning his attention offstage) Hey, baby, bring us another drink. (An explosion of sight, sound, projected images that evoke turn-of-the-century New York. BERT and GEORGE exit as TAMBO and BONES enter carrying bags, staring around as if gawking at huge buildings.)
TAMBO: Oh my.
BONES: Oh my.
TAMBO: Oh my oh my.
BONES: Oh my oh my oh my.
TAMBO: Look at dem buildin’s.
BONES: Stack like firewood.
TAMBO: Dis ain’t in de southland no more, Mr. Bones.
BERT: Your show needs more energy.

GEORGE: It would be better if you didn’t.

BERT: They come off I’ll never get them back on.

GEORGE: I already made my excuses to Ada. That headache must be contagious.

BERT: I’m not a crowd-loving person, Lottie. George knows that. If they’d had a small, private ceremony I’d be happy to attend. But you know George, if it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing with a marching band, fireworks, and a sixteen-gun salute. Shall we walk this way, do you mind?

LOTTIE: Through the park?

BERT: Such a beautiful afternoon I thought it would be the perfect setting for an apology.

LOTTIE: Do I owe you an apology, Bert?

BERT: I’ve been feeling guilty about taking you to dinner and asking you not to tell anyone. It makes our time together seem surreptitious, as if I’m ashamed of being seen with you. You understand that’s not the case, don’t you?

LOTTIE: The thought never occurred to me.

BERT: I don’t want you to be the target of the same kind of resentment and envy that Ada ran into with George. I don’t want to put you under the same ouos.

LOTTIE: (Lotti holds up her hand, as if in a classroom; this is a routine between them.)

BERT: (taps with the paper.)

LOTTIE: No, no, you go ahead.

BERT: I already made my excuses to George. That headache must be contagious.

LOTTIE: Bert …

BERT: I’m not a crowd-loving person, Lottie. George knows that. If they’d had a small, private ceremony I’d be happy to attend. But you know George, if it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing with a marching band, fireworks, and a sixteen-gun salute. Shall we walk this way, do you mind?

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LOTTIE: The thought never occurred to me.

BERT: I don’t want you to be the target of the same kind of resentment and envy that Ada ran into with George. I don’t want to put you under the same ouos.
Because they didn’t cost sixteen thousand dollars. Okay, Bert, you’re right. We’ll give it to you.

(LIGHTS UP ON A JUKE BOX. A RECORD OF ENRICO CARUSO SINGING “EMMA”) (Blackout. A scene of George and Ada.)

ADA: (Tongue in cheek) Some day that is not today.
BERT: Unless you – you did want to go today? I’m sorry. I’m not doing a very good job of this.

ADA: Keep going, you’re getting there.
BERT: I should have asked George for advice.
ADA: No, don’t. Don’t ask George. Or tell him anything.
BERT: Why?
ADA: He’s not a better man than you, Bert.
BERT: I know who George is. I know him better than you. We played the mining camps, we played the Tenderloin, we shared the same room in cheap hotels and slept under the same stars when no hotel would have us. I know George better than anyone.

(LOTTIE starts to go. GEORGE enters holding a newspaper.)

GEORGE: (Reads.) Lights up on the office of JULES HURTI and HARRY SEAMON, theatrical producers.
BERT: Their last three shows, Harry. The last three shows didn’t cost sixteen thousand dollars combined.
SEAMON: But they made money.
BERT: Because they didn’t cost sixteen thousand dollars.
SEAMON: Okay.
BERT: They want to hear it from you. Harry!
BERT: Don’t talk to them alone.
SEAMON: Did you read the script?
SEAMON: It’s a country in Africa.
BERT: Why?
SEAMON: It’s the first show to delineate the Negro race in a natural cultural environment. We’re throwing out the dark stereotypes, getting the plantation South. Africa is real. Africa is wild. Men fight lions to survive. Pythons squeeze girls in grass skirts.
SEAMON: Girls in grass skirts?
BERT: He’s exaggerating.
SEAMON: About the girls?
BERT: The pythons.
SEAMON: The girls – George.
BERT: The girls are wild, natural, filled with a lust for life. They have these dances, these rituals –
BERT: Fertility.
SEAMON: Marriage.
BERT: War.
GEORGE: We’re bringing Africa to Broadway. Volcanos. Waterfalls. Quicksand.
BERT: No, no, it’s too much, you gotta pull back.
SEAMON: Not the girls, Jules.
BERT: The girls are wild, the other stuff. Volcanos. Quicksand. The lion.
SEAMON: Doesn’t have to be a real lion.
BERT: Pretend Bert’s not here.
SEAMON: We’re talking business. Williams and Walker’s made more money than any of your other shows. You’ve seen the budget. Give me sixteen thousand dollars and I’ll double your money in six months.
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SEAMON: The girls – George.
BERT: The girls are wild, natural, filled with a lust for life. They have these dances, these rituals –
BERT: Fertility.
SEAMON: Marriage.
BERT: War.
GEORGE: \( \text{(BERT and GEORGE turn DS, signaling a scene shift.}\) They face the audience but speak as if addressing ADA and LOTTIE, who enter as SEAMON and HURTI. ADA carries champagne.)
BERT: “With or without the lion.”
GEORGE: That’s what he said.
BERT: That’s when we knew we had them.
GEORGE: It was the performance of a lifetime, Bert kept saying, “No. No we can’t have a lion.”
BERT: And George insisted, “We must have that lion.”
GEORGE: So while they were thinking about this great king of the jungle …
BERT: And arguing about it.
GEORGE: They lost track of the sixteen thousand dollars!
BERT: By the time George got done with them they gave us twenty thousand.
ADA: George!
LOTTIE: Poor Hurting and Seamom.
BERT: \( \text{(Exaggerated dialect)} \) Which is rotund one, Mr. Walker? Is dat de Hurting or is dat de Seamom?
GEORGE: Damn if I know, Mr. Williams. All dem white people looks alike to me.
LOTTIE: What about us? Ada and me. You better have two good parts for women.
BERT: I’m sure we have two good parts for women, don’t we George?
GEORGE: Of course we do, Bert. You ladies just have to figure out which one is of your front is the lion and which is the tail.
(ADA and LOTTIE slap him playfully. The champagne cork bursts, foam leaps from the bottle, the LADIES back off, shrieking, laughing. THEY exit as HURTI and SEAMON enter. HURTI reads the review, SEAMON looks over HIS shoulder.)
HURTI: “The first all Negro musical opened last night at the New York Theatre on Fifty-ninth Street. Williams and Walker’s In Dahomey proved popular with audience and critic alike.”
SEAMON: That’s good, that’s good!
HURTI: While the show’s light-as-a-feather plot breaks no new ground, the two comedians are in perfect pitch.
SEAMON: That’s our boys!
(\( \text{(GEORGE enters reading the newspaper in separate playing area.)} \))
HURTI: “Bert Williams delineates his character with such subtlety and to such fine effect that he has become a vastly funnier man than any white comedian now on the American stage.”
GEORGE: Bert Williams, the star of the show.
HURTI: “In the role of Maysee, Ada Overton Walker added a depth to the character that hints of talents far beyond those exhibited in her renowned cakewalk.”
GEORGE: Thanks to what I taught her.
LOTTIE: “Lottie Williams turned in a solid performance in the role of the mother.”
GEORGE: Hack.
HURTI: “George Walker in his familiar Jim Dandy role is the perfect foil for Bert Williams.”
GEORGE: That’s it?
HURTI: The production itself is of the first quality, particularly the final scene set in Africa where the exotic locale was replete with a waterfall, bonfire, and even a lion who proved a singular sensaion. \( \text{(HURTI and SEAMON shake hands.)} \)
GEORGE: The lion? He couldn’t even hit his marks!
(HURTI. \( \text{(Blackout. An early recorded version of Enrico Caruso singing Pagliacci. Lights up. BERT’s dressing room. HE sits in front of the Victrola, eyes closed, listening. GEORGE enters holding a newspaper.)} \))
GEORGE: What is the hell is this, Bert? It’s all about you now? I don’t count. I don’t want to listen to this.
(BERT turns off the Victrola roughly.)
BERT: Careful.
GEORGE: You stole my interview.
BERT: What are you talking about?
GEORGE: You talked to the Brooklyn Eagle without me.
That’s not fair, Bert.
BERT: You didn’t show up.
Act II

Fade out. BONES on stage dressed for performance. BONES: MY HARD LUCK STARTED WHEN I WAS BORN. LEAS SO DE OLD FOLKS SAY. DAT HARD LUCK’S BEEN MY BEST FRIEND, TO DIS VERY DAY.

(TAMBO enters.)

TAMBO: Mr. Bones, Mr. Bones. BONES: What is it, Mr. Tambo?

TAMBO: Is you heard de rumor?

BONES: What rumor is dat?

TAMBO: Williams and Walker.

BONES: Walker and Williams.

TAMBO: You read all these?

BONES: Don’t touch dees needer.

TAMBO: You’re confussin’ de issue, Mr. Bones.

BONES: Won’t be no issue widout de confusion. TAMBO: Won’t be no confusion widout no talkin’.

BONES: Den don’t talk to me.

TAMBO: I won’t.

BONES: Den don’t.

(THEY stand. THEY become uncomfortable. THEY exit. Blackout. In darkness: Exterior of Williams home. GEORGE and ADA enter. GEORGE has champagne. ADA holds a large bouquet of flowers.)

GEORGE: This is it.

ADA: It’s big.

GEORGE: Not that big. (Lights up to reveal two playing areas, exterior and interior of the Williams home. Inside the home BERT sits in a chair. Outside the house GEORGE takes out a flask and drinks.)

GEORGE: (Continued) Fifteen minutes. That’s it. If I say leave, we leave. I ain’t going to stand around and be insulted.

ADA: Nobody’s going to insult anybody. (AS SHE adjusts the bouquet a rose pricks ADA. SHE drops the bouquet.)

ADA: Ouch!

GEORGE: Told you not to get roses.

ADA: Did not.

GEORGE: Here, take the champagne. (He hands HER the bottle and picks up the flowers, then reacts with disgust.)

GEORGE: Damn it. You dropped them in horse shit.

ADA: Ugh.

GEORGE: You take ‘em. (He gives HER the roses and takes the champagne as we crossfade to interior of house. BERT leaps up at the sound of the doorbell. LOTTIE opens the door. GEORGE and ADA enter.)

ADA: Surprise! Surprise.

LOTTIE: Come in.

ADA: Here’s a little house-warming.

LOTTIE: Oh Ada, you didn’t need to do that.

BERT: Geor –

GEORGE: Bert.

BERT: Sorry we’re late but George …

LOTTIE: You’re not late.

ADA: … he had to go to three different liquor stores to find just what he wanted.

GEORGE: Bert has high standards so I got Chandon White Star.

BERT: Anything would have been fine.

GEORGE: This is Chandon White Star.

LOTTIE: Mmmm, roses. I love the smell of – (She reacts to a whiff of something that does not smell of roses.)

LOTTIE: Let me find a vase.

(SHE exits.)

ADA: Look George. The chandelier. It’s electric.

GEORGE: Everything’s electric nowadays.

ADA: Such tiny little bulbs, little babies. Do they get hot, Bert?

BERT: I’m sure they do.

ADA: This is beautiful, what a beautiful house.

BERT: You won’t recognize it a year from now. Lottie has all kinds of plans.

ADA: When Lottie said she was retiring from the stage, I said, no, she’ll miss the footlights, miss the applause. Now I had a rough night!

BERT: Doesn’t matter. We’re partners. If one of us has business to discuss.

ADA: Neither is Ada.

BERT: Lottie comes on. Ada. I know George isn’t interested in the kitchen.

GEORGE: Neither is Ada.

ADA: I am so.

(LOTTIE AND ADA exit. GEORGE follows BERT to the “library” with its desk and chair. Effects lighting creates horizontal shadows suggestive of shelves. Among the items on the desk are a script and a model sailboat.)

GEORGE: You read all these?

BERT: Uh huh.

GEORGE: A lot of hooks. (Silence) Nice boat.

BERT: It’s a sloop. Has the two sails, the main and a jib and a –

GEORGE: I’ve got a new song. Bon Bon Buddy. Will Cook and Alex Rogers wrote it for me.

BERT: Oh.

GEORGE: BON BON BUDDY THE CHOCOLATE DROP DAT’S ME. BON BON --

BERT: Sounds good.

GEORGE: They know how to write for me. Bon Bon Buddy, it’s a good song for the next show. I was talking to Harry about it yesterday …

BERT: I had an idea –

GEORGE: We want to do another Daloney. Bigger this time. Set in Africa, the whole thing. You and me are Americans, we lose our money to an Arab who’s gonna cut off our heads if we don’t pay him back in twenty-four hours. We pretend to be tour guides for a safari only we don’t know shit from shinola. How’s that sound?

BERT: Familiar.

GEORGE: How’s that?

BERT: It’s another blackface role.

GEORGE: Doesn’t have to be.

BERT: I wouldn’t know how to play it any other way.

GEORGE: Just take off the burnt cork.

BERT: I want to move into more serious work. I’d like you to read this. (He hands GEORGE a script.)

GEORGE: Enemy of the People?

BERT: I saw it in London. It gave me some ideas.

GEORGE: That’s the problem going to England. Look at all this – everything’s got a royal crest. Dinner menus, theatre programs. And this thing: “First degree Mason of the Waverly Lodge 597.” I told Ada, you watch, Bert’s a Mason now he’ll want to play Shakespeare or Ibsen.

BERT: I’m not suggesting Shakespeare or –

GEORGE: Good. Let’s talk about the Africa show. I figure we’ve got six weeks to –

BERT: I’d rather wait until after you read Enemy of the People.

GEORGE: What else?

BERT: What do you mean what else?

GEORGE: Was there some other reason you wanted me to come over?

BERT: I didn’t want you to come over.

GEORGE: No?

BERT: No. (Beat) Lottie.

GEORGE: Ada.

(BERT PEERS OVER HER shoulder. GEORGENOTES GEORGE.)

GEORGE: Ada. (Spotlight on EVA TANGUY in performance signals a scene change. BERT exits but GEORGE is captivated by EVA. HE approaches HER during the song.)

EVA: THEY SAY I’M CRAZY GOT NO SENSE BUT I DON’T CARE THEY MAY OR MAY NOT MEAN OFFENCE BUT I DON’T CARE YOU SEE I’M SORT OF INDEPENDENT OF A CLEVER RACE DESCENDENT MY STAR IS ON THE ASCENDANT.

GEORGE: Ooh! I know you. Do you know me?

GEORGE: You’re Eva Tanguay. I saw your show.

EVA: They call me the “I don’t care” girl.” Did you know that?

GEORGE: As soon as I saw you. (EVA peels a garter off HER leg as SHE plays to a captivated GEORGE.)

EVA: I DON’T CARE I DON’T CARE WHAT THEY MAY THINK OF ME I’M HAPPY GO LUCKY MEN SAY I AM PLUCKY SO JOLLY AND CAREFREE ‘COS I DON’T CARE. (EVA tosses the garter to GEORGE as FABRIZIO enters. FABRIZIO is an Italian tailor. HE carries a jacket fitted for George.)

FABRIZIO: Alora, Signor Walker.

GEORGE: Not now.

FABRIZIO: Si si. Is ready now. Perfavore. (FABRIZIO takes HIS arm and physically puts the jacket on a distracted GEORGE as EVA exits. GEORGE begins to measure first the jacket, then the pants. HE does not hear EVA’S amplified whispered voice but GEORGE does.)

EVA’S VOICE: I DON’T CARE I DON’T CARE IF I DO GET THE MEAN AND STONY STARE IF I’M NEVER SUCCESSFUL IT WON’T BE DISTRESSFUL ‘COS I JUST DON’T CARE.

(FABRIZIO is on his knees taking a measure of George’s inseam. Judging by HIS reaction, Eva’s song has had an effect on GEORGE. HE jumps to his feet.)

FABRIZIO: Ah, Signor! No, no I’m for the woman, la bella donna. Me capiche? Only the woman. (BERT enters.)

BERT: Am I interrupting?

GEORGE: Bert, come on in. We were just –
FABRIZIO: Fix a jacket. That’s all.
GEORGE: You haven’t met Fabrizio, he’s my tailor.
Bert: How do you do.
FABRIZIO: Signore.
GEORGE: He’s from Italy, somewhere around Florence.
Bert: Where have you been.
FABRIZIO: (Modelling the jacket) What do you think, Bert?
FABRIZIO: (To Bert) He wants too long in the sleeves.
GEORGE: Too short it feels like a scarecrow when I raise my arms.
FABRIZIO: No raise your arms.
GEORGE: Everybody’s a costume, all the world’s a stage, Bert knows. What do you think? You ever seen a jacket this color?
FABRIZIO: Caramel.
GEORGE: Fawn! This is a fawn jacket! No white man can wear this color, see Bert? Fawn jacket I look like a black god.
FABRIZIO: Caramel.
FABRIZIO: Tomorrow is good.
GEORGE: Tomorrow is always good. Better than today.
FABRIZIO: Tomorrow.
(FABRIZIO exits.)
GEORGE: He smells like garlic but he’s got magic fingers. Cheap too. You ought to get one, we could walz down Fifth Avenue. Fawn gods. Drum up business for the new show.
Bert: Did you read Enemy of the People?
GEORGE: No.
Bert: I need to know what you think.
Bert: Do what?
GEORGE: Abyssinia. That’s what we’re calling the new Africa show.
Bert: What about Enemy of the People?
GEORGE: Tell it to me. Just tell it, Bert. What’s it about?
Bert: It’s about a man out of step with his culture. He’s a doctor. He discovers the local tammy is polluting the town’s mineral baths. He thinks –
GEORGE: No, no, no. That’s too serious.
Bert: Would you allow me to finish? There comes a point in the show where Fabrizio’s denounced by the town. He has a line, “The strongest man in the world is the man who stands alone.” Now that’s the kind of line I would like to deliver from a Broadway stage.
GEORGE: And what’s my line? Who am I? What am I doing while you’re delivering your “stand alone on Broadway” line?
Bert: You’ll have a part.
GEORGE: Is there a spot for Bon Bon Buddy?
Bert: In this show?
GEORGE: The one you’re talking about, I don’t see it. I don’t see what fits Bon Bon Buddy, that’s a good song, Bert. It fits a show like Abyssinia. That’s a show we can get financed. Got the backing, got the booking, even got a Broadway theatre.
Bert: What Broadway theatre?
GEORGE: I didn’t tell you that part. It was good, Bert. Made it part of the deal. “You want Abyssinia, we want a first class Broadway theatre.”
Bert: What theatre?
GEORGE: Puts a different light on it, doesn’t it.
Bert: George!
GEORGE: The Majestic.
Bert: (Dismissive) Columbus Circle.
GEORGE: I’M BON BON BUDDY, THE CHOCOLATE DROP, THE CHOCOLATE DROP THAT’S ME! (Blackout. TAMBO and BONES enter, each reading a newspaper)
TAMBO: Mr. Bones, what dat you readin’?
BONES: De review of de new Williams an’ Walker.
TAMBO: Is dat de same review I’se got?
BONES: Is dat de same paper?
TAMBO: One way to find out. (THE) exchange newspapers and read aloud.)
BONES: Maybe it kin deny dat de Negro be one of the most amusing persons possible as long as he remain a Negro.
TAMBO: He de most natural dancer in de worl’ and kin rattle a pair of bones, pick de banjo, and sing de simple melody to perfection.
BONES: It’s when he become a mimic and try to act and look like a white man dat he fall down.
TAMBO: Which am de reason de new Williams and Walker show, Abys – Abys –
BONES: Sinia!
TAMBO: – prove so successful.
BONES: De show is set in Africa where de Negro brook no unhappy comparison wid’ de white worl’ around him.
TAMBO: De song Bon Bon Buddy wuz received wid such enthusiasm dat George Walker was obliged to sing it twice.
(TAMBO and BONES exit. Lights up on BERT’s dressing room. BERT in blackface enter, barrieus to the makeup table and begins removing the burnt cork. HE does not see EVA TANGUAY until SHE stirs. HE lets out a yell and turns so rapidly he knocks over a jar.)
EVA: Shhhhh! I’m not supposed to be here. (BERT starts to pick up the jar but draws back as EVA approaches.)
BERT: I’ll get it.
(EVA makes picking up the jar a sultry act.)
EVA: Where do you want it?
Bert: On the table. And then I’ll have to ask you to leave, Miss Tanguay.
EVA: You call me Eva and I’ll call you Bert.
BERT: You’re in the wrong dressing room. George is down the hall.
EVA: I’m not here to see George, I’m here to talk to you.
BERT: We have nothing to talk about. Now if you’ll excuse me I’d like to clean up.
EVA: I won’t look. (SHE puts her hands over her eyes. BERT hesitates, then starts to exit.)
EVA: If you leave I’ll scream so loud they’ll hear me in City Hall. I’ll say you invited me into your dressing room, you pled me with liquor, and then you …
BERT: That’s enough.
EVA: Please don’t be unfriendly. I only want to talk.
BERT: We’re not putting you in the show. George should have told you that. I believe he did.
EVA: You’re a two-headed goat, Miss Tanguay. That’s why George wants you in the show. You’ll sell tickets. Now please. Let me get this face off me.
EVA: Let me help you.
BERT: I don’t need your –
EVA: Here!
BERT: No! Don’t touch me. Please. Leave.
EVA: Oh come on … (SHE reaches toward HIM.)
BERT: Get out of here! Now! Get out! (EVA rushes out as GEORGE enters.)
GEORGE: What happened?
BERT: What that woman …
GEORGE: Did you hit her?
BERT: Why’d you send her in here? Why?
GEORGE: I didn’t send her –
BERT: You didn’t tell her to talk to me?
GEORGE: She showed up out of nowhere. I told her to wait at the stage door. I can’t let Ada see her. She’s crazy, Bert. You know how she is.
BERT: She said you want to put her in the show.
GEORGE: You know, help break down those race barriers. Get Jim Crow off our backs.
BERT: That’s how you’re getting Jim Crow off our backs? By putting Eva on here?
GEORGE: All right, you’re in a bad mood. (HE starts toward the door, then turns back.)
BERT: Your problem, Bert? It’s all you and your high art and “serious drama.” You moan and groan about the intensity of how he’s embarrassing you, suffocating your talent and choking your dreams but you like him. You like the Jonah Man, just don’t paw him off on me. I enjoy my life and I don’t need burnt cork to do it. (GEORGE exits. Fade out. Spot on ADA in whiteface and a blond wig. SHE sings in high-pitched garish exaggeration.)
ADA: I DON’T CARE. I DON’T CARE IF I GET THE WILD AND STONY STARE I’M HAPPY GO LUCKY MEN SAY I’M PLUCKY SO JOLLY AND CAREFREE ’COS I DON’T CARE.
(Bert reads the song. GEORGE enters.)
GEORGE: Ada! What the hell.
ADA: This what you want, George? Little white girl with a squeaky voice and wide open legs? What that heats your blood?
GEORGE: Get that crap off your face. You know how you look?
ADA: Oh I know how I look. Do you know how you look? Shaggy dog, tongue hanging out, nosing every bitch in heat.
GEORGE: You’re drunk.
ADA: Why? Why are you doing this?
GEORGE: Doing what?
ADA: Eva Tanguay?
GEORGE: Don’t.
ADA: Why?
GEORGE: Not about you.
ADA: It’s killing me inside, knowing you’re out there rubbing my face in it.
GEORGE: Didn’t mean it to happen.
ADA: What does that mean, you didn’t mean –
GEORGE: A man goes where the juice flows. (SHE slaps HIM.)
ADA: You think you’re the only one, George. I feel it. I feel the heat. I know what it’s like, see a man and know it’s there for me, too.
GEORGE: Go ahead. Go on. Do it! Do it! (Silence.) You’re not that kind. Come on, Ada … (HE reaches for HER. ADA holds up a fancy garther.)
GEORGE: Where’d you get that?
ADA: Where you left it. The pocket of that new fawn jacket. Did you peel it down her leg with your teeth like you did with me?
GEORGE: So that’s what started all this.
ADA: No George. You did it. (ADA tosses the garther at HIM and exisits. Blackout. Lights up on the Williams home. LOTTIE sits at a table on which sit two empty milk bottles. SHE is writing a note. BERT enters wearing a baseball uniform.)
BERT: What’s all this?
LOTTIE: That new milkman. He’s got the brains of a grasshopper. Keeps giving us the Anderson’s order.
BERT: I’m worried about George.
LOTTIE: He left us two bottles of cream, don’t ask me why.
BERT: Never mind the milkman, Lottie. Something’s wrong with George. You know he’s had trouble with his hands. The trembling.
LOTTIE: Drinking too much.
BERT: This afternoon he hit a fly ball, took off running and tripped. Fell flat on his face.
LOTTIE: Got that tailor-made look-at-me uniform all dirty? I hope you had your Kodak.
BERT: It wasn’t like that. He was confused. Just sat there, staring at his feet like he didn’t know what happened. I thought he was hurt but when I went to help him he jumped and walked away. Left the game without a word.
LOTTIE: He’s got moody, that’s what ADA says. Mad as a wet hen one minute, then full of apology the next. Probably feeling guilty running around with that Tanguay trash.
BERT: Is that what ADA said?
LOTTIE: She didn’t mention it but everybody knows he
BON BON BUDDY THE CHOCOLATE DROP DAT’S ME BON BON BUDDY IS ALL THAT I WANT TO BE I’VE GAINED NO FAME BUT I AIN’T SHAME I’M SATISFIED WITH MY NICKNAME I’M BON BON BUDDY THE CHOCOLATE DROP THE CHOCOLATE DROP DAT’S ME (Applause. Fade out. Lights up on Walker home. GEORGE sits in a chair with a lap robe. HIS head moves as ifwatching a fly. Whether the fly is a figment of his imagination or real is hard to say. HE grubs for it and sits with his fist clenched.)

GEORGE: Ada! Ada! (ADA enters with a silk tie. HER attitude resembles that of a professional care-giver and reflects the differences that have grown between them.)

ADA: What is it?

GEORGE: Get the swatter.

GEORGE: Ada, don’t.

GEORGE: I got him, Ada. Now get the swatter. Please! (ADA gets a fly swatter and stands near GEORGE, poised to swat the fly. HE opens his hand. But no fly emerges. HE is obviously disappointed. ADA puts down the swatter.)

ADA: Lift your chin.

GEORGE: Get the swatter.

GEORGE: I’m healthy as a horse, Mr. Bones. She’s doing a great job. You should be proud.

ADA: She’s doing a great job. You should be proud. (GEORGE attempts to put them on but finds it difficult.)

ADA: I’ll find some apple juice.

GEORGE: It’s this damn syphilis, I can’t – or is it just Williams and Williams and – (Beat) Sorry, Bert. It’s this damn syphilis, I can’t.

BERT: She’s not going with me. BERT: Ada’s in the show. Remember?

ADA: She took my place. The Bon Bon Buddy.

BERT: She’s doing a great job. You should be proud.

GEORGE: Lift her, Bert. She’s got bruises here. (Silence) (ADA holds up a hand mirror.)

ADA: Get the swatter.

ADA: Ada’s installing the tie.)

GEORGE: Remember when I caught you that pigeon in Central Park?

ADA: Get the swatter.

ADA: Please! (ADA puts down the swatter.)

GEORGE: I’se healthy as a horse, Mr. Bones.

BERT: Get the swatter.

BERT: She’s not going with me.

BER: You’re going to the Mayo Clinic to get yourself cured.

GEORGE: She’s not going with me.

BERT: Ada’s in the show. Remember?

ADA: She took my place. The Bon Bon Buddy.

BERT: She’s doing a great job. You should be proud.

BERT: She said she’d get them for you.

ADA: She’s in the show. Remember?

BERT: She didn’t make it but she sent these. Knitted them herself.

GEORGE: Mittens?

BERT: Rather special mittens. Take a look.

ADA: Got no fingertips.

GEORGE: For indoor use. They’ll keep your hands warm but you can still turn a page and pick up a pencil.

GEORGE: It cheapens the song.

ADA: For the Victor Company. We talked about it.

GEORGE: No we didn’t.

ADA: You said it was a bad idea.

GEORGE: It cheapens the song.

ADA: If they can buy a cylinder they won’t come to the show.

ADA: That’s right.

BERT: And the voices sound like cats in a cave.

GEORGE: Did I say all that?

BERT: You did.

GEORGE: I’m right. It’s not like an orchestra, Bert. Songs, they need to be put over. A cylinder, you get the words but not the voice. You can’t put it over. Nobody does B-Bon Buddy like I do.

BERT: I’m not recording your songs, George.

GEORGE: Not the Bon Bon Buddy.

BERT: Only my songs.

GEORGE: I’ll kick your ass.

BERT: I’d welcome that.

ADA: WHEN I WAS A LITTLE PICK SAY JUST ‘BOUT FOUR YEARS OLD THE FOLKS NICKNAMED ME BUDDY THAT IS SO I HAVE BEEN TOLD I SPENT MOST OF MY YOUNGER DAYS WITH GRANDMA AND GRAN’POP AND GRANDMA USED TO ALWAYS CALL ME GRANNY’S CHOCOLATE DROP NOW CHOCOLATE DROP AND BUDDY SEEMED TO STICK TO ME SOMEHOW THEN SOMEONE ADDED BON

BERT: Are they numb? Your fingers?

GEORGE: MORE the left hand than the right. But it’s going to change, did Ada tell you? They’ve got me on this new drug. Salvars – Salvars – (His lisp makes it hard to pronounce.)

ADA: Salvarsan.

BERT: Let me tell you, “Cinderella.” Now get us some apple juice. Can you do that? Apple juice?

BERT: That’s all right, I’m not thirsty.

GEORGE: What if I am? What if George Walker is thirsty? Or is it just Williams and Williams and – (Beat) Sorry, Bert. It’s this damn syphilis, I can’t.
BART: It touches HIM and GEORGE turns to HIM for comfort. ADA and others, takes in the scene, and exits. Fade out. Lights up on FLORENZ ZIEGFELD. Although HE faces the audience we understand he is in fact watching a musical number depicted in silhouette on a scrim behind him. The silhouette is of CHIEF BUGABOO, an Indian stereotype wearing breechcloth and feathers who wield a tomahawk as he dances. (BART spins his tomahawk)
SINGER: UM-UUGH! UM-UUGH! UM-UUGH! ME HEAR THE GREAT BIG CANNONS ROAR; ME WANT TO HELP YANK MAN WIN WAR; ME LIKE TO FIGHT AND TO HEAP MUCH KILL; SCOUTS GONNA TOMAHAWK KASER BILL!
ZIEGFELD: Hair! Hair! On your last line, Irving – the tomahawk line – tomahawk in one hand, hair in the other. A wig. Get a wig. Not now. Not yet. Good work, good energy, thank you, Irving. (Calling) Danny, I need to eat. I do not live on air, Danny.
ZIEGFELD: I can see that. Welcome, Bert, thank you for coming. Have you had lunch? Danny is getting me a pastrami sandwich. What would you like?
BART: Nothing. I'm just auditioning for a play.
ZIEGFELD: One pastrami sandwich, Danny, and hold the horse radish. As in “no horse radish.” (To Bert) Sometimes they forget. (After Danny) And a seltzer, ice on the side. (To Bert) You’re sure you don’t want anything?
BART: I had a late breakfast, Mr. Ziegfeld.
ZIEGFELD: Call Me Flo and I’ll call you Bert. I never stand on ceremony with first class talent. Did you see the redskin number? Chief Bugaboo? (DANNY exits.)
BART: Part of it.
ZIEGFELD: What did you think?
BART: (Carefully) I don’t know where it fits in the bill.
ZIEGFELD: You’re a diplomat, Bert. It’s hokum. You know it and I know it, but it’s good, clean American hokum.
Now that we’re sending soldiers to France it’s time to put every great comedian wants to play Hamlet, every great actor wants to play the role of Brutus. Brutus begins as a stereotype, full of flipflam and arrogance. Even his language – the “dey’s” and “dems” – it all seems familiar. What an audience expects of a black man on stage. It’s a new play by an American playwright. GENE: It's a powerful piece of work.
BART: Yes, he is.
GENE: How do you see him? What’s your sense of the man?
BART: You mean his psychology?
GENE: Just … how you see him. What’s your gut reaction?
BART: I think it’s clever the way you constructed the play. Brutus begins as a stereotype, full of flipflam and arrogance. Even his language – the “dey’s” and “dems” – it all seems familiar. What an audience expects of a black man on stage. Then he enters the forest and his color falls away. fades away. He becomes universal. An emperor without clothes – emotionally.
GENE: (Exchanges a glance with Sandy) “Yes, he gets it.”
GENE: Why don’t you read for us, Bert. Top of scene four. Give him the side.
BART: It’s all right, I know the scene.
GENE: Scene four.
BART: “I’m melting with the heat.”
GENE: You memorized it?
BART: It’s a short play.
GENE: You memorized the entire play?
BART: He’s a rich character. It’s a compelling role. GENE: Whenever you’re ready.
BART: I’m melting with the heat! Running and running and –
(HE stops, composes himself and begins again.)
BART: I’m melting ‘wid heat. Runnin’ an’ runnin’ an’ runnin’. Damn dis heah coat. Like a straightjacket. Dere. Dat’s better. Now I kin breathe. And to hell wid dese high-fangled spurs. Dey’s what’s been a-trippin’ me up and breakin’ my neck. (The reading isn’t good.)
BART: I’m sorry. May I get a glass of water?
SANDY: I’ll get it.
(SHE exits.)
GENE: I’ll be right back. Bert. Gotta take a pee.
GENE: I'm momentarily alone. LOTTIE’s entrance signals a scene change to the library in the Williams home. It is night. SHE brings a cup of tea to an obviously distraught BART.
LOTTIE: I’m sure it wasn’t that bad.
BART: Lottie! LOTTIE: Drink this.
BART: They were dead. The words, the lines, as if they were amputated, do you understand?
LOTTIE: Then it wasn’t the right part for you.
BART: Brutus Jones. I had him here – in the palm of my hand. And then…
LOTTIE: You said you didn’t like the nigger dialogue.
BART: It goes beyond that. The stereotype, I go beyond it. That’s what I do, Lottie.
LOTTIE: All right.
BART: Did you think the Jonah Man was just another run-of-the-mill minstrel coin?
LOTTIE: Please don’t yell, Bert.
BART: Do you? Is that what you married?
LOTTIE: Your tea is getting cold.
BART: The tea?
(BERT grabs his coat and hat and exits.)
LOTTIE: Bert, don’t go. We can sit quietly. We don’t have to talk. Bert?
LOTTIE goes to the window US, stare down at street. SHE moves the cup of tea to her cheek, seeking its warmth. (FADE out. Lights up on Williams home later that night. BART stands at a window, his back to us in silhouette. HE speaks with vigor and precision.)
BART: I’m melting ‘wid heat. Runnin’ an’ runnin’ an’ runnin’. Damn dis heah coat. Like a straightjacket. Dere. Dat’s better. Now I kin breathe. And to hell wid dese high-fangled spurs. Dey’s what’s been a-trippin’ me up and breakin’ my neck. Dere! Gits rid o’ dem frippety Emperor trappin’s an’ I travels lighter. Lawd! I’ve tried …
(At some point during the speech LOTTIE enters awakened from sleep. SHE calls Bert’s name, turns on the light. BERT is momentarily alone. LOTTIE: ME HEAR THE GREAT BIG CANNONS ROAR; ME WANT TO HELP YANK MAN WIN WAR; ME LIKE TO FIGHT AND TO HEAP MUCH KILL; SCOUTS GONNA TOMAHAWK KASER BILL!)
LOTTIE: Bert, Oh. Bert. (FADE out. Lights up on Williams home. LOTTIE answers the door. ADA enters.)
LOTTIE: Ada.
ADA: Hello, Lottie.
LOTTIE: What a sight for sore eyes. Come in. (ADA: I just stopped by to drop off some things that belong to Bert. LOTTIE: He’s not here. Sit down, Ada. It’s so nice to see you. I feel so out of touch. Ever since Bert joined the Follies we don’t see much of the old crowd. ADA: Does he like it? LOTTIE: I think he does. But it’s not the same. ADA: No. LOTTIE: Some people fault him for going to the white stage but … ADA: That’s where the money is. LOTTIE: Mr. Ziegfeld came after Bert, Ada. ADA: I didn’t mean it like that. And I’m thrilled he’s doing so well. George would have been thrilled.
LOTTIE: Bert was a little lost after George passed. He had to find himself. ADA: And now he’s making more money than the President of the United States.
LOTTIE: You wouldn’t believe the number of long lost friends who showed up after they read that article. ADA: I can imagine.
BERT: Let me make you a cup of tea. Please. Bert will be back any minute and I know he’s going to want to see you.

(Fade out. Lights up on BERT lifting his model sailboat from the pond in Central Park. As he walks away a cop, MIKE, approaches.)

MIKE: Give me that. (MIKE yanks the boat from BERT’s hand. Instinctively BERT moves to take it back. MIKE puts his hand on his nightstick.)

MIKE: Yeah? You got something to say?

BERT: My name is Bert Williams. I live at 146 West 99th Street. I am an actor with the Ziegfeld Follies and that is my property.

MIKE: Empty your pockets.

BERT: Why?

MIKE: Empty your pockets. (Another cop, JIMMY, enters.)

JIMMY: Problem, Mike?

MIKE: He stole some kid’s boat.

BERT: I did not.

MIKE: Shut up. (To Jimmy) He’s got a smart mouth, this one. Says he’s in the Ziegfeld Follies.

JIMMY: What’s his name?

BERT: I’m Bert Williams.

MIKE: You just don’t listen, do you, boy?

BERT: He stole a kid’s boat.

MIKE: I’m Bert Williams. Mike. You live in a cave?

BERT: He stole a kid’s boat.

MIKE: His legs.

BERT: You got something to say?

MIKE: He stole a kid’s boat.

BERT: He stole a kid’s boat.

MIKE: Empty your pockets.

BERT: Why?

MIKE: He stole a kid’s boat.

BERT: He’s got a piece of paper?

MIKE: Give me an autograph?

BERT: He stole a kid’s boat.

MIKE: I’ll give you something.

BERT: He stole a kid’s boat.

MIKE: I’m Bert Williams.

BERT: He stole a kid’s boat.

MIKE: One. Says he’s in the Ziegfeld Follies.

BERT: You just don’t listen, do you, boy?

MIKE: I’m Bert Williams.

BERT: He stole a kid’s boat.

MIKE: I’m Bert Williams.

BERT: He stole a kid’s boat.

MIKE: He stole a kid’s boat.

BERT: You just don’t listen, do you, boy?

MIKE: I’m Bert Williams.

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BERT: He stole a kid’s boat.

MIKE: One. Says he’s in the Ziegfeld Follies.
Kenita Miller is on Broadway in the new musical XANADU in the role of Erato.

Ward Billeisen is in the role of Brick Hawvermale on Broadway in CURTAINS starring David Hyde Pierce and Debra Monk.

Gretchen Mol is in the new movie 3:10 TO YUMA in the role of Alice Evans. The movie stars Russell Crowe, Christian Bale and Peter Fonda.

Tiffany Engen plays Noreen in the new film HAIRSPRAY with John Travolta.

Shannon Durig is currently starring in the leading role of Tracy Turnblad in the Broadway hit HAIRSPRAY.

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Stewart F. Lane, a Tony Award-winning producer known for such plays as *Thoroughly Modern Millie, La Cage aux Folles* and *The Will Rogers Follies*, has written a new book that shares his expertise. *Let’s Put On a Show!* *Theatre Production for Novices* could be considered both an “informational text” for beginners and a “how-to guide” for amateurs aspiring to put on a successful event.

Throughout this work, Lane does an exceptional job of introducing the reader to the fundamentals of launching a production, as well as defining the finer points along the way. Lane explores topics such as raising and saving money, as well as selecting the right show and venue. He stresses the importance of time and organization, explains the roles of those on the creative team, discusses how the “process” works, and offers tips on how to market a production.

Each chapter begins with a humorous and/or inspirational anecdote, while the chapter itself provides a brief, yet informative overview of what the novice theatrical event planner may need to consider when taking on such an endeavor.

Lane’s casual writing style and “straight-to-the-point” focus make *Let’s Put On a Show!* a quick and easy read. While the beginner will find within the pages a wealth of helpful information, those who are more “seasoned” may find the information to be common sense, or common knowledge. Then again, being told to KISS (keep it simple, stupid) is always a welcome reminder.

On the down side, the book and Lane both exhibit a hint of self-importance in tone (excessive name-dropping comes to mind), and the text meanders slightly off course at times. However, it never strays far from its intent.

The biggest culprit of diversion is the chapter on playwriting. While the notion behind the chapter is important, it feels out of place amidst the flow and subject matter of the rest of the piece. This probably explains why Lane describes the chapter as “a slight detour from the production end of theatre,” as well as why it is the last chapter in the book. Lane, who is also a playwright (*In the Wings* and *If It Were Easy*), appears to find great joy in the writing process and with the nuances of making a work come to life. Although it seems out of place in this text, the chapter could easily serve as the outline for a future book by Lane on this subject.

*Let’s Put On a Show!* is marketed toward first-time producers and those interested in improving existing programs (i.e., community theatres, small regional theatres, schools and churches). However, this book might also function as an introductory text for students at the middle school and high school levels. It also could serve as essential reading for an introductory undergraduate course in theatre management and/or production, before students graduate to more in-depth and sophisticated texts (such as Stephen Langley’s *Theatre Management and Production in America*) later in their academic careers.

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Words, words, words... [Hamlet II,ii] reviews books on theatre that have a connection to the Southeast or may be of special interest to SETC members. Scott Phillips, an associate professor at Auburn University, edits this regular column. If you have a book for review, please send to: SETC, Book Editor, P.O. Box 9868, Greensboro, NC 27429-0868.
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