

Stage Center Theatre

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 2

OCTOBER 2009

2009-2010 Stage Center Theatre

An Inspector Calls by J.B. Priestley

Director's Notes

"Am I my brother's keeper?" So asks Cain in the Bible story of Cain and Abel (Genesis, 4:9.) How responsible are any of us for the welfare of others? Are you responsible for your fellow human beings? Priestley's play asks us to examine our level of responsibility. The play takes the position that society as a whole benefits when its individual members are cared for. The current debate on health care is a good example of this. Should we all have a hand in a healthcare system that cares for all of us, or should it be each person for him or herself? As a trekkie might put it:

Spock: The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.

Kirk: Or the one. (*Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*)

Although Priestley wrote the play in 1946 (near the end of WWII) he chose to set it in 1912. The Birlings and Gerald Croft live in a rose colored world, a golden time of prosperity. Many people felt that they were as unsinkable as the great new British ship the Titanic. The Titanic provides the audience with a terrific symbol of the hubris of thinking that anything made by man is perfect, flawless, and incapable of error. A few short years after the catastrophic demise of that ship, the world was plunged into a war the likes of which mankind had never seen. The family members deny the consequences of what is happening in the world and they deny the consequences of the choices they make in their lives.

The rich and the privileged are shown to forget that their successes are built on the labor of the people who work for them. The Patriarch, Mr. Birling, has been dependent on the people he has perpetually ignored. In the film *Citizen Kane* (1941) the character Jed Leland says to Kane, "You used to write an awful lot about the workingman... He's turning into something called organized labor. You're not going to like that one little bit when you find out it means that your workingman expects something is his right, not as your gift! Charlie, when your precious underprivileged really get together, oh boy! That's going to add up to something bigger than your privileges! Then I don't know what you'll do! Sail away to a desert island probably and lord it over the monkeys!" As with Charles Foster Kane, Birling's denial and self-deceit contribute to a kind of hubris that has trapped him in a very small world he is desperate to control.

The older generation is seen as being more set in their ways and the younger generation is seen as more moveable and flexible. The Inspector tells Mrs. Birling that his work makes more of an impact on the young. We go on to see how Sheila and Eric are conscience-struck by their actions while Mr. and Mrs. Birling try to absolve themselves of blame. The young are flexible enough to change, the old aren't. This gives the audience hope that future generations will learn from the mistakes of the past. Priestley sees the hope for the future is with the young. There were many messages in the most recent Presidential campaign that echoed this idea.

The play also shows that prejudice against the less fortunate is not something to be proud of. Mrs. Birling is infuriated when Eva Smith doesn't seem to know her "place." She punishes Eva by denying her request for aid. Priestley shows us the unfair and disconfirming nature of such a class system.

So what is to be gained from Priestley's cautionary tale? Perhaps we can be encouraged to look more kindly on the less fortunate. Perhaps we can donate our time in the service of helping others. Perhaps it does take a village. Perhaps you will become your brother's and sister's keeper.

Their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all (are) intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other.

- Inspector Poole in *An Inspector Calls*

Dan Wirth, Director

2009—2010

UPCOMING SHOWS

MAIN STAGE *7:30 P.M.

An Inspector Calls

by J.B. Priestley

October 8-10, 15-17, 22-24

Lucky Stiff

Book and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens,
Music by Stephen Flaherty

November 19-21, December 3-5,
10-12

Vaudeville America!

February 18-20, 25-27, March 4-6

A Tale of Two Cities

adapted by Mark Fitzgibbons

April 15-17, 22-24, 29-May 1

STUDIO SERIES *7:30 P.M.

F-109

Living Out

by Lisa Loomer

October 12-14, 19-21

Wine in the Wilderness

by Alice Childress

February 22-24, March 1-3

CHILDREN'S THEATRE WORKSHOP*10:30 A.M.

Monday, Wednesday, Friday

Senora Tortuga

by Roxanne Schroeder-Arce

November 9—December 9

Totally Red

by Dinah Touns and Barbara
Walker

March 29—April 30

Call the Stage
Center Theatre
box office for
reservations
and ticket sales
at 773.442.4274
Tickets are free
for all NEIU
faculty, staff,
and students
with NEIU ID



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Living Out by Lisa Loomer

* Director's Notes *

Known best for her award winning plays, Lisa Loomer has an extensive resume that includes a myriad of credentials: screenwriter, actress, standup comic, TV sitcom writer, and Pulitzer Prize nominee. The recipient of several artistic grants, Loomer won acclaim for her play *Living Out* and was presented with the *Back Stage West Garland Award for Playwriting*.

Born and raised in New York, the Spanish-Romanian playwright and her family moved to Mexico when she was in her late teens. According to Loomer, it was during this period that she underwent several 'major life experiences' which inevitably altered her perceptions and ultimately shaped her writing:

"Maybe part of the reason I'm not as linear, logical, or naturalistic as some is that I did spend a lot of time in a culture that was not driven by linear expectations, where the boundaries between life and death, between the literal and the fanciful, are a lot looser."

This unique perspective is evident in *Living Out*, a play which explores the contemporary issues of race, class, and illegal immigration, as well as the challenges and

ramifications that women inevitably face in becoming liberated.

The story revolves around the character of Ana, an illegal immigrant who has fled her devastated homeland of El Salvador. Restricted by her illegal status she seeks employment as a nanny, but finds difficulty getting hired due to her own motherhood issues. After several unsuccessful interviews she encounters Nancy, a liberal new mother who is anxious to resume her career as a lawyer. Desperate for employment, Ana tells Nancy an innocent lie—a lie that spirals into a series of misunderstandings—which ultimately results in tragedy.

While often comic, yet poignant and thought-provoking, there lies a deeper, psychological significance to the play which is not immediately apparent: the subtle manipulation of 'living out' roles dictated by society and government. Loomer cleverly weaves these complexities into the storyline through intricate parallel scenes, thereby forcing us to take a closer look at ourselves and the roles we play.

Joanne Cartalino, Director

~THEATRE QUIZ TIME~

This Month's Theme: Superstition and Mystery

Many theatre enthusiasts are very superstitious—especially when it comes to the mysterious theatre genre.

Find out how much you know about theatre superstitions and famous shows that deal with mystery.*

- Most people know it's bad luck to say "MacBeth" in a theatre. How do most people refer to it if they need to?
 - The Curse
 - The Shakespearean Play
 - The Scottish Play
 - The Play
- Instead of wishing an actor good luck, what should you say instead? (Hint—three words...)
- What is it considered bad luck to do in the green room?
 - Whisper
 - Cry
 - Memorize lines
 - Whistle
- When is it considered bad luck to have a conversation with another actor?
 - Just before making an entrance
 - While looking at them through the mirror
 - While applying make-up
 - While washing your hands
- Most theatres seem to have a "ghost story" behind them? True or False?
- Shakespeare's "Macbeth" was described as "The Macbeth Murder Mystery" in a famous essay by this writer.
 - Ogden Nash
 - James Thurber
 - Will Rogers
 - Al Capp
- "Ten Little Indians" was a classic whodunit. By what other titles is it known?
 - And Then There were None
 - In the Zone
 - Night of January 16
 - Foxfire

~Technical Theatre: September Newsletter Quiz Answers~

- 1) B (Stage manager); 2) D (Above the stage near the ceiling); 3) C (Installing the set on stage); 4) C (Master Electrician); 5) C (Assists the actor with quick costume changes); 6) B (Props); 7) A (Battens); 8) B (Dark); 9) D (Flats); 10) D (Changing from one show to a different show) * Quiz answers will be revealed in next month's issue! This quiz is property of Funtrivia.com.