

THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE

P O L O N S K Y   S H A K E S P E A R E   C E N T E R

## 360° SERIES

VIEWFINDER: FACTS AND PERSPECTIVES  
ON THE PLAY, PLAYWRIGHT, AND PRODUCTION

THE YALE REPERTORY THEATRE PRODUCTION OF  
**HAPPY DAYS**

BY SAMUEL BECKETT

FEATURING DIANNE WIEST AND JARLATH CONROY  
DIRECTED BY JAMES BUNDY



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## The Plays

- 4 Stuck, Up: On the Arduous Art of Going Down Singing  
by Catherine Sheehy
- 6 Dialogues: An Impossible Romance  
by Kimberly Jannarone

## The Playwright

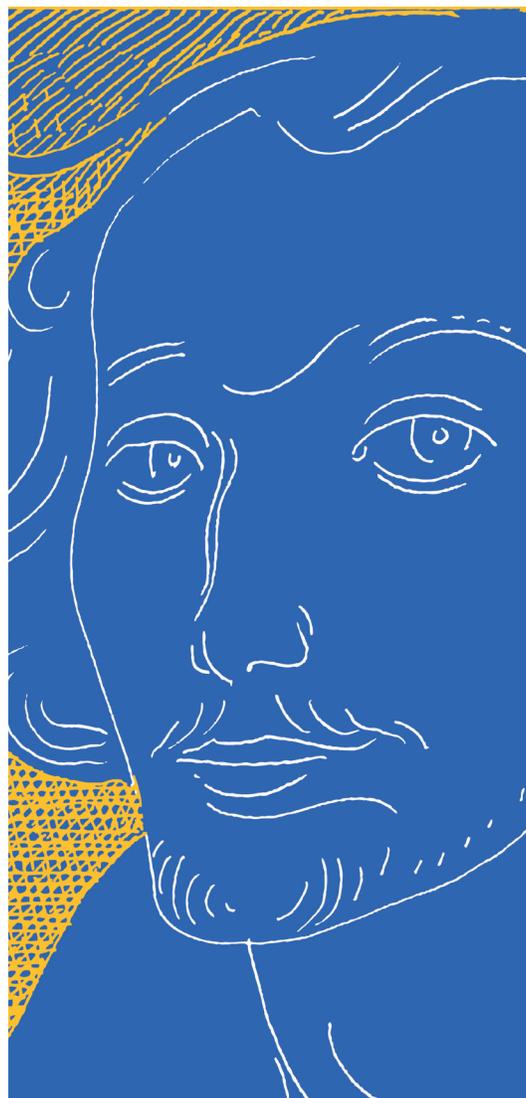
- 9 Biography: Samuel Beckett

## The Production

- 10 Interview: "Life Itself is Strange"  
Dianne Wiest in conversation with Jonathan Kalb
- 15 To the Power of 2  
by Catherine Sheehy
- 17 Cast and Creative Team

## About Theatre For a New Audience

- 20 Mission and Programs
- 21 Major Supporters



### Notes

Front Cover: Dianne Wiest in Yale Repertory Theatre's production of HAPPY DAYS, photo by Joan Marcus.

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360° VIEWFINDER *HAPPY DAYS*



Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of *HAPPY DAYS* by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy; photo by Gerry Goodstein.

# THE PLAY PERSPECTIVES

CATHERINE SHEEHY



Above and opposite: Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of *HAPPY DAYS* by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy. Photos by Gerry Goodstein.

## STUCK, UP: ON THE ARDUOUS ART OF GOING DOWN SINGING

Dame Peggy Ashcroft called the role of Winnie in *Happy Days*, “a summit part”—one that actresses will always aspire to undertake. Considering Samuel Beckett’s work in full, however, you could be forgiven for concluding that for Beckett a woman’s place was most often in the scenography: Nell in *Endgame* lives in a dustbin; *Rockaby*’s W is confined to a rocking chair; W1 and W2 are encased in urns on either side of the adulterous M in *Play*; and in *Not I*, Mouth has no body to offer the possibility of flight. Even the admittedly ambulatory May of *Footfalls* is allotted only a rectangle of light, one meter wide and the length of nine strides, which Beckett meticulously maps out in a diagram at the top of the play’s script. And *Happy Days* has its famous mound.

But Winnie is different from her captive sisters; by far the most voluble, she is also largely, well, happy—the triumph of temperament over topography. Here is a woman, set quick in the earth, who, with grace and genuine good humor, continually counts her “many mercies,” “abounding mercies,” “great mercies,” in the face of the most horrific circumstances her maker could devise for her. As Beckett himself confessed to Brenda Bruce, the first British Winnie, who pushed him for insight when she was feeling “trapped” in the part:

Well, I thought that the most dreadful thing that could happen to anybody would be not to be allowed to sleep so that just as you’re dropping off there’d be a “Dong” and you’d have to keep awake; you’re sinking into the ground alive and it’s full of ants; and the sun is shining endlessly day and night and there is not a tree ... there’d be no shade,

## THE PLAY PERSPECTIVES

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nothing, and that bell wakes you up all the time and all you've got is a little parcel of things to see you through life.... And I thought who would cope with that and go down singing, only a woman.

And so Winnie sings, and prays, and reminisces, and waxes sentimental and philosophical, for she alone among Beckett's women is an eternal—with all the sinister relentlessness of that word—optimist. The list of things that she “find[s] so wonderful” is as long as your arm. Maybe the playwright has stuck Winnie in a mound simply because the loft of her optimism, her even-to-her-creator-inexplicable buoyancy, might just cause her to float up, up, and out of the proscenium.

Winnie wonders at one point if Newton's old principle is still operative: “Is gravity what it was, Willie, I fancy not.” She feels that some days she must “cling on” or she'll be “sucked up” . . . “into



the blue, like gossamer.” It's as if gravity, for her, is “gone in the teeth,” as Ezra Pound said of the “old bitch” civilization in 1920. And when her mate can't confirm that, she concludes the difference between them is biological: “Ah well natural laws, natural laws, I suppose it's like everything else, it all depends on the creature you happen to be.”

Whether a matter of genetics or just good bourgeois breeding, Winnie bravely summons all her resources to keep sorrow from “breaking in.” It's not certain, however, that Beckett figures such positivity as entirely desirable. Winnie is all but forced to look on the bright side; she knows she “mustn't complain” and enjoins herself to “be a good girl, Winnie.” Dimly aware of a time “when [she] was not caught—in this way,” she is still so far from resenting her fate that as she directs Willie to back into his little niche in the rock so he doesn't get trapped “head foremost,” she exclaims to herself, “What a curse, mobility!”

Perhaps her fixity seems to Winnie her lot as wife. As Brenda Bruce put it, Beckett “was talking about a woman's life. Let's face it.” Or maybe Beckett, whose remarkable erudition was Winnie's dowry, recalled the image John Donne created in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” of woman as one sharp foot of a drafter's compass that “makes no show to move”:

And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam,  
It leans and hearkens after it  
And grows erect, as that comes home.

In any case, Winnie takes everything Beckett can think to throw at her and somehow retains a spark of hope that outshines “the blaze of hellish light” beating down on her. Cue the singing. •

CATHERINE SHEEHY is the resident dramaturg at Yale Rep and the chair of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at the Yale School of Drama, where she teaches dramaturgy, critical writing, and genres and theories of comedy on stage and screen from Aristophanes through *Archer*. She has been a freelance dramaturg across the United States and in Europe. It has been a great joy for her to reconnect with Beckett's work, which was a focal point of her studies at the School of Drama, where she received both her MFA and DFA degrees.

# DIALOGUES AN IMPOSSIBLE ROMANCE

KIMBERLY JANNARONE



Above: Jarlath Conroy and Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of *HAPPY DAYS* by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy. Opposite: Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of *HAPPY DAYS* by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy. Photos by Gerry Goodstein.

Samuel Beckett had a talent for putting both his characters and his actors in seemingly insupportable situations. In his twenty-minute play *Not I*, for example, a woman delivers a non-stop monologue with only her mouth visible. In practice, this means the actress must remain perfectly still so the light falls solely on her mouth; this usually involves strapping her into a chair and immobilizing her body for the duration of the piece. In Beckett's play entitled *Play*, three characters are encased in urns, the actors acting only from the neck up. It is fitting that in these plays, as in *Happy Days*, in which Winnie is buried up to her waist in Act 1 and up to her neck in Act 2, the characters express their fervent hope that they are being seen. To be immobile and unseen is one of the great fears of a Beckett character, and this theme—as many would name it, an existential one—is embodied, literally, in his staging.

“Something of this is being heard, I am not merely

talking to myself,” Winnie says, reassuring herself and informing Willie that his presence makes her existence bearable, “I am not merely talking to myself... a thing I could never bear to do.” Winnie's need to be seen, heard, perceived, mirrors that of other Beckett characters. In *Play*, one character repeatedly asks from his urn, “Am I as much as... being seen?” In *Endgame*, the imperious Hamm, bound in a wheelchair, and in *Waiting for Godot*, the domineering Pozzo, demand that everybody pay attention to them as they embark on speeches. “Is everybody looking at me?” demands Pozzo, “Is everyone listening?” They cannot continue unless they have watchers, listeners, observers—in short, audiences.

While Beckett might balk at the term (he was notorious for disliking critical interpretation of his plays, asserting, not unreasonably, that the works stand on their own), the characters' incessant calling attention to their need to be seen is metatheatrical. We are in a theater, a curtain rises,

## AN IMPOSSIBLE ROMANCE KIMBERLY JANNARONE

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a bell rings, a woman opens her eyes and begins to speak. She tells herself to "begin." This is both Winnie and the actress playing her: both are stuck for the duration, both must speak when the bell rings, both must be witnessed if their experience is to be complete. When the bell rings to set Act 2 in motion, Winnie finds reassurance in its watchfulness: "Someone is looking at me still.... Eyes on my eyes." The bell is hardly friendly—Winnie says "it hurts like a knife"—but the fact that someone, something, is paying attention to her still soothes. The bell is still watching, ensuring she wakes at the appointed time. The audience from Act 1 is still there. The audience member enables the actress's performance, as both the bell (friendly or not) and Willie (or the idea of Willie) enables Winnie to continue.

Witnesses, both fictional and actual, of Winnie's plight wonder: "What does it mean?" The remembered Mr. Shower (or Cooker) asks in Winnie's reminiscence: "What's the idea? .... Stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground... What's it meant to mean?" Beckett, in

including this pair of observers, Mr. Shower (or Cooker) and his partner (or wife), stages a pair of witnesses coming to view Winnie, and he puts in their mouths questions an audience member might have: "What's the idea?" He also stages the riposte. "And you?" the female character, retorts: "What's the idea of you? ... what are you meant to mean?" To this, there can be no answer.

It is simultaneously easy and unthinkable to fathom why the role of Winnie is considered by many to be the ultimate role for female actresses. Easy, because it is a nearly one-woman play whose existential profundity is matched by its psychological compassion; unthinkable because an actress must remain immobilized in a physically restrictive position, delivering a monologue that lacks the comforts of linear narrative, with no resources to call on for help in case of an emergency except her own. Over the years, several actresses have signed up for the role and then backed out due to its pressures (either physical or psychological). Actresses in other Beckett plays, including *Not I*, have spoken of



## AN IMPOSSIBLE ROMANCE KIMBERLY JANNARONE

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numbness, terror, and hallucination in their short time in the merciless spotlight. And yet, when director James Bundy asked Dianne Wiest what role she would most like to take on at the Yale Repertory Theater, Wiest replied: "*Happy Days*." It was, she said, the *Hamlet* for women.

*Happy Days* has served as a pinnacle role for many great actresses. Billie Whitelaw (one of Beckett's favorite interpreters of his work), Irene Worth, Juliet Stevenson, Fiona Shaw, and French star Madeleine Renaud have set themselves in the unforgiving mound, showcasing their facial expressiveness, ability to score a text like a piece of music, facility with language, comic gifts, endurance, and, not least, courage. The actresses, notably, tend to be around fifty years old when taking on this role (Beckett specifies in his stage directions "Winnie, a woman about fifty"), an age that is not generally known for bringing the most numerous roles to an actress. It is thus a star vehicle for women, and specifically for women over fifty who, themselves, are facing the cultural and challenge of "being seen."

What Wiest brings to the lineage of Winnies is surprisingly natural, something so innate in the play it's a wonder it's not more often thrown into relief: that is, the relationship between Winnie and Willie. With this play, so easily produced as a showcase for Winnie, a near-solo piece that only incidentally has a second actor, Wiest never lets the audience lose sight of her Willie. Winnie needs Willie, and Wiest shows that Winnie has him in her mind every second she's awake. He is her audience, his love (past or present) is her fuel, his witnessing is her necessity. "I used to think that I would learn to talk alone. ... But no. No, no .... Ergo you are there." Wiest's portrayal is less existential angst and more naked need, making it more touching, if more painful, than any other production of *Happy Days* I've seen. The relationship is less abstract and more—pardon me—grounded. In this production, Winnie simply cannot exist without Willie: there is no other possibility. Ergo, he is there. It is a triumph of Wiest's acting to show us that all too often invisible link.

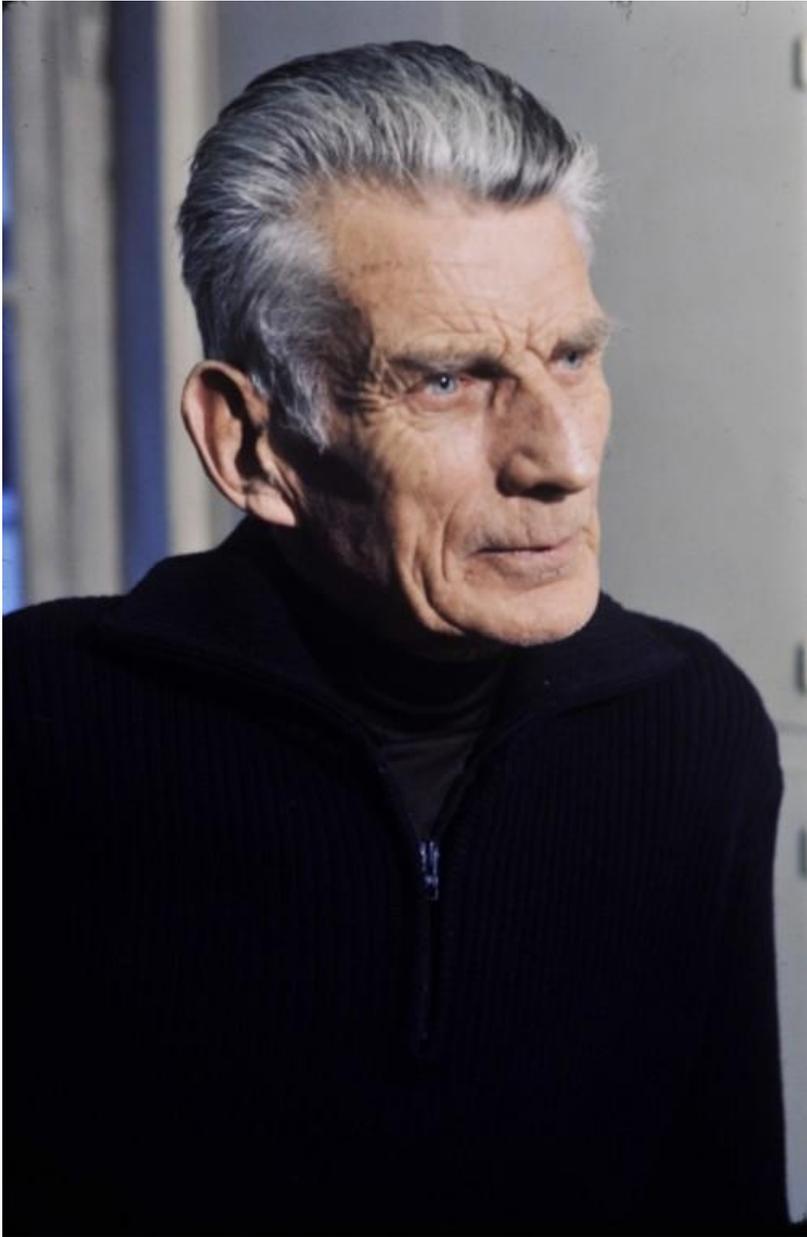
"No," Winnie says, "No, no." This gentle self-reprimand is one of Winnie's refrains, a compassionate correction she issues when she catches herself drifting toward negativity.

Wiest's delivery of it is unexpectedly moving. The warm but firm delivery of those lines, "No, no," carry with them Wiest's interpretation of Winnie's relationship to herself and to Willie. It is possible to sink into dark thoughts—Why doesn't he dig her out? Why doesn't she end it?—but when she finds herself even approaching the formulation of one of these ideas, she stops herself. "No, no." There is another way, an opportunity for sympathy, a path forward with optimism, fortitude, and understanding.

*Happy Days*, in this production, is—of all unlikely things!—a romance. It is a gentle portrait of a horrific situation: the need to be seen and the inability to ensure being seen. A woman's need for affirmation from the one she loves, one who "was never one to talk," a husband who enjoys silence as much as the wife craves speech. And yet, as in Beckett plays, the two stay together. Although signs often point, at the end of Beckett's plays, toward the possibility one of the characters might leave the other, we never see it. Clov stands in the door in the final moment of *Endgame*, threatening to leave but not moving. Didi and Gogo tell each other in *Waiting for Godot* that they will part—repeatedly—and they do not. The book closes in the final moment of the two-character *Ohio Impromptu*, the story apparently over, yet no one leaves. In *Happy Days*, Willie, "dressed to kill", climbs Winnie's mound, reaches out, falls back, gets up again, looks at her. Why is his look so upsetting? Is he coming for love? To use the gun? Has he lost his mind, as Winnie asks? All these are possible, but one fact is certain: he does not leave. And this fact, this presence of her Willie, her witness, her *raison d'être*, enables Winnie's last utterance of her refrain: "Oh this is a happy day, this will have been another happy day! After all." As we root for the happiness of Winnie, we cannot help, while watching Wiest's portrayal, to hope, for her sake, that Willie does not ever leave, and that her day remains happy. •

KIMBERLY JANNARONE is Professor of Theater Arts at UC Santa Cruz. In 2017-18, she will be a Fellow at the National Humanities Center to complete her book, *Mass Performance*. In 2015-16, she was Visiting Professor of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at the Yale School of Drama and a Beinecke Fellow at Yale Repertory Theater. She is the author of *Artaud and His Doubles* (winner of the Honorable Mention for the Joe Callaway Prize for best book in drama) and editor of *Vanguard Performance Beyond Left and Right* (both University of Michigan Press). She directs experimental performance and has co-translated, with Erik Butler, works by contemporary French playwrights.

# THE PLAYWRIGHT SAMUEL BECKETT



Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)

Author of *Happy Days*

Photograph by Roger Pic, 1977. Image in the public domain ([link](#)).

Source: National Library of France, Department of Performing Arts, DIA-PHO-1 (955).

Samuel Beckett was born in the Dublin suburb of Foxrock, to a middle-class Protestant family of comfortable means. He attended the prestigious Portora Royal School and Trinity College, where he excelled in French and Italian, then taught briefly at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris.

There he moved in the circle of artists and writers around James Joyce and began writing prose and poetry. He traveled widely in Europe in the 1930s, including Germany under the Nazis, and ultimately settled in Paris for the rest of his life. In 1946 he was awarded the Croix de Guerre for his work with the French Resistance.

Feeling that WWII had wasted his precious time and energies, Beckett withdrew into creative seclusion afterwards, producing a torrent of astonishingly powerful and original prose, including the introspective, formally challenging, darkly hilarious novel trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. These books—written in French, in which Beckett said it was easier to write “without style”—were ignored or dismissed when they appeared, then later hailed as paradigm-changing masterpieces and literary landmarks.

Beckett first turned to drama as a break from the novel-writing he considered his real work, but it soon became much more than a sideline. The international success of *Waiting for Godot*—his play about two tramp-like characters filling time while

waiting for someone who never comes, premiered in 1953—made him a public figure and ensured his continued involvement in theatre despite his shyness and distaste for publicity. He went on to refine his dramatic vision in *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and many other plays that featured similarly castoff, ambiguously fictional characters trapped in starkly desolate and symbolic situations. These works permanently altered the Western world's perception of the nature and purpose of dramatic art. Beckett received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969 and at his death two decades later was widely considered the 20th century's greatest dramatist. •

# INTERVIEW "LIFE ITSELF IS STRANGE"

JONATHAN KALB IN CONVERSATION WITH DIANNE WIEST



Above: Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of *HAPPY DAYS* by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy.  
Opposite: Jarlath Conroy and Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of *HAPPY DAYS* by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy.  
Photos by Gerry Goodstein.

*On a break from rehearsals, Theatre for a New Audience's Literary Adviser Jonathan Kalb sat down for a conversation with Dianne Wiest.*

**JONATHAN KALB** You've often talked publicly about your warm feelings about Beckett, and you performed Beckett as a young woman—*Footfalls* and *Play* in your late 20s and early 30s. Where did this feeling of connection to Beckett come from?

**DIANNE WIEST** I was first introduced to Beckett by Alan Schneider, who was then meeting and corresponding with Beckett. Alan directed his plays in America. I can't say I understood, really, what I was doing in *Play* or *Footfalls*, but there's something that happens when you read his work and then try and just put it together for yourself that's deeply familiar. At the same time it's very foreign. And I think that's because he's got his finger on the dilemma of the mind. That has stuck

with me. That's what he writes about: the dilemma of the mind. I guess even as a young woman I was fascinated by that.

**JONATHAN** Were you introduced to him by those projects?

**DIANNE** Yes, I'd never read a word by him before. I mean, I knew of him, but I'd never read anything. *Godot* was everywhere back then too. I've seen that more than once. How did I come upon *Happy Days*? I don't know how I did. It was a long time ago. I want to say 30 years ago. And I think I said to myself, "someday I'll do that." Then the decades flew by. About 20 years ago I started to try to memorize it and work on it seriously, and I couldn't memorize it. I didn't know how. I'd never seen it, and I didn't understand the interconnections.

**JONATHAN** How did that change?

## INTERVIEW WITH DIANNE WIEST JONATHAN KALB

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**DIANNE** That changed because I realized that if I waited any longer to do it, I wouldn't be able to do it. I would be too old. And about ten years ago, James Bundy and I met at Rosemary Tichler's book signing, and he asked me if there was anything I wanted to do, and I said, "Well, yes, but I'm terrified of it." And then nothing happened for a decade. And then one day out of the blue I called him up and said, "James, if you're still interested I'd like to talk about *Happy Days*." I gave him the commitment that I would do it in a year at Yale Rep, and I started to work while I was doing a sitcom in L.A.

**JONATHAN** You said that you couldn't memorize it before. How did that change?

**DIANNE** I asked people who'd done it: how did you memorize it? I remember asking Estelle Parsons. Estelle would say, "Well, you just do it. You just sit down and do it." I read something about Billie Whitelaw saying it took her three months locked in an attic. But nobody could answer: Do you

memorize the words first and then go back and do the actions? Do you memorize the actions without the words? Finally I realized, you have to memorize them together. Otherwise you don't have anything.

**JONATHAN** At what point did you start imagining the character?

**DIANNE** I don't know if I ever could imagine the character. I didn't imagine the character. I know that sounds strange, but every time I'd think about the character I would think about the photo of Billie in the mound. That's how I thought Winnie was. Not anything to do with me.

**JONATHAN** But your performance is so specific and so much your own creation. Did you spend time thinking about, say, Winnie's past experiences?

**DIANNE** Well, no, because she's been in the mound for, you know, really since she can remember. She has vestiges of memory of life before but the mound is her home. She brushes her teeth and files her nails



## INTERVIEW WITH DIANNE WIEST JONATHAN KALB

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and puts her hat on.

**JONATHAN** Was her home always like this, just a mound?

**DIANNE** No. I think at one time before this happened it was a regular house, in some little suburb somewhere. But now it is what it is.

**JONATHAN** Winnie is constantly quoting things that she has read. Did you ever consider where or under what circumstances she learned these things?

**DIANNE** She's well educated. She knew the classics. But that's in the past, like the Mildred story from her childhood. It's all past. It's out of time. You can't apply logic to it, as you well know.

**JONATHAN** One of the things I find myself talking about when I teach this play is what's missing from her quotations. She'll speak a line but forget part of it, and the forgotten part is invariably very illuminating. It'll have to do with suicide, for example, or madness, or consoling somebody about death. Did you talk about the complete quotes in rehearsal—taking into account what she's forgotten?

**DIANNE** Oh yes. Our brilliant dramaturg, Catherine Sheehy, came into rehearsal with a binder this thick. And it contained every quote from Beckett and then the whole poem or passage, including its context. That was a deep part of the work. But you can't really... you know, I thought first, well, I'll memorize all of these. But then I thought, don't do that because all you really have to have is an inkling of what they are. So I really don't remember them. I don't have to bother acting the forgetting.

**JONATHAN** I suppose the best thing would've been if you memorized them 20 years ago and then forgot them.

**DIANNE** That would've been the ticket.

**JONATHAN** Do you think Winnie's relationship with Willie was ever, shall we say, fuller? Did she ever get more than monosyllabic responses from him?

**DIANNE** Oh, I think Willie gave her a great deal, before they married, and she fell in love with him. After they married, he retreated. I think that they had a routine. She's been trying for years to get more from him, and now she realizes that really what he needs



Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of HAPPY DAYS by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy, photo by Gerry Goodstein.

## INTERVIEW WITH DIANNE WIEST JONATHAN KALB

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is peace. And as hard as she tries, and she does try, I believe, to just get some recognition that she exists in the wilderness, she knows that the way it is will have to do. As long as he's there, that will do. That's how many marriages and relationships are. One tries to accommodate, or relinquish in order not to be alone.

**JONATHAN** Your Winnie, especially in Act 1, is still very connected to her body, her sensual pleasure. How did you think about the sexuality of this couple?

**DIANNE** Well, it's there. That's what Beckett tells you. You know, Willie rubs in the lotion and she turns and says, "Oh this is going to be another happy day!" She looks at the postcard that Willie looks at. She's constantly making references to his infidelities, in the sadness-after-song section, for instance, saying, "You would concur with Aristotle there, Willie, I fancy." There are so many sexual references, and Willie is all sex. I mean, maybe that's the one thing they still did have when this happened: a strong sexual connection.

**JONATHAN** It's sometimes said that the biggest danger for a Beckett actor is vanity, showing too much

proWess, or pride in one's proWess. Do you have any thoughts about that?

**DIANNE** Well, how would you be vain in this play? How could Winnie be vain? She can't get Willie to look at her. What vanity? He won't even look at her.

**JONATHAN** Are you saying that punctured ego is written into the play?

**DIANNE** Absolutely. I mean, you could try. When you ask things like, does anything remain? Are there any remains?—I've thought about that. Is there any pride in her imagining that maybe she still is the woman who attracted him? But vanity? She has a lot of other stuff on her mind.

**JONATHAN** Winnie needs to be heard and not just seen. She tells Willie how important it is that he answers her on some days, so that "even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing," she can tell herself that "something of this is being heard."

**DIANNE** Yes, but it's not just being heard. She needs to know there's something in the world



Judith Conroy and Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of HAPPY DAYS by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.

## INTERVIEW WITH DIANNE WIEST JONATHAN KALB

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that acknowledges she lives. Without Willie, there's nothing.

**JONATHAN** Does Winnie always play just to Willie or does she also play to the audience?

**DIANNE** I'm terrified of doing that. I don't want to do that because the minute you involve the audience they become self-conscious and go out of the play. It has to stay internal. I look everywhere but straight out [at Theatre for a New Audience] because in this theater there are people in every direction. At Yale Rep when I looked straight out, I was above everybody so there was nothing to look at but the back wall. They closed off the balcony. Here, no matter where you look, you're trapped. So I've taken to trying to stay within the proscenium, which I've never done before. I'm trying somehow to still look out because Beckett says she looks out, but also to find some kind of eye movement so that people don't feel I'm involving them.

**JONATHAN** You do acknowledge them when, for instance, you wait for laughs.

**DIANNE** Well, that's acting technique. That's not Beckett. As an actor, you never ever want to be

unkind to your audience. If you were to speak when they're laughing they would miss part of what Beckett wrote. They wouldn't hear it through the laughter. So of course you wait.

**JONATHAN** It sounds like it's important to you that Winnie seem to be alone.

**DIANNE** It's not anything so strange. It's just how we all are. If we get up, for instance, and there's no one to talk to, or only someone very reticent, there are a limited number of things that we have to distract us, or to propel us. The situation isn't so strange, really, any more than life itself is strange.

**JONATHAN** In the second act it's been a long time since Willie has answered Winnie, and she wonders whether he has gone.

**DIANNE** She's terrified. Has he died? Has he just left? But not to know is the great mercy. It's a great blessing.

**JONATHAN** "No better, no worse, no change. No pain"?

**DIANNE** Yes, but not as a philosophy. It's just what is, for the moment.... •



Judith Conroy in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of HAPPY DAYS by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy. Photo by Henry Grossman

## DIALOGUES TO THE POWER OF 2



Jarlath Conroy and Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of *HAPPY DAYS* by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy.  
Photo by Gerry Goodstein.

*Remarks by Catherine Sheehy, Production Dramaturg, on the first day of rehearsals, April 3, 2017.*

**T**he thing about working on any Beckett play is that the further in you get, the more astonished and humbled you become in the face of what Samuel Beckett knew—what he knew and what he could so vividly summon in language that becomes, against all odds and instinct, increasingly evocative as he pares it down and—as he termed it—“vaguens” it. The frisson of confusion that can overwhelm you when you first dip your toes into the Beckettian stream led many of the artists who worked on his plays during his lifetime to ask him what it all meant. Often his answer would be a modest though truthful, “‘tis of no consequence.”

Because I have been asked not infrequently (though most often by people who can't imagine that there's an adaptation of the famous sitcom of the same name), “What is *Happy Days* about?” I've developed

two stock answers. 1) The triumph of temperament over topography. And 2) “Scenes from the Universal Marriage,” because, while *Happy Days* is specifically about a relationship between a man and a woman, no artist has ever known so completely how to render a twosome: Didi & Gogo, Pozzo & Lucky, Hamm & Clov, Nagg & Nell, Winnie & Willie. The tug and pull of the smallest unit of human interaction fascinated Beckett.

Indeed, the great Beckett scholar and the playwright's friend, Ruby Cohn, said “after his months of concentrated work for [a German] production of *Happy Days* [that he directed], Beckett took a dislike to the play, but for me, perhaps because I am a woman, it remains intensely stirring... *Happy Days* haunts me as the quintessential drama of modern humanity.”

In order to communicate to you how staggered I was when I discovered ‘what Beckett knew’ about that life, which is my life, I'm going to have to tell you a story that's actually not really mine to tell.

## TO THE POWER OF 2 CATHERINE SHEEHY

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More than 15 years ago, my wife Katherine and I were teaching in a summer theater program in Northern Ireland. When her parents came to visit us, we realized that her mother was probably showing signs of the onset of Alzheimer's. As Janet suffered her mercilessly slow but inexorable decline, Katherine would fly home to see her parents as often as she could, and she returned from one such trip with a post-it with one of the most heartbreaking messages on it I have ever read.

Katherine had picked up the note from her mother's place at the breakfast nook. And in Janet's now-deteriorating hand—from a hand that had once been strong enough to be a metal sculptor and a furniture re-upholsterer and dexterous enough to play the piano and knit beautiful sweaters, but now scrawled like a kid's just learning his letters—the note said, “Do not speak unless absolutely necessary.” Clearly her incessant chatter had been interfering with Wolfgang's ability to digest both his breakfast and the newspaper he habitually read at the table. And Janet, no longer capable of remembering a lifelong routine or the proclivities of her half-century's companion but a prisoner to involuntary chatter and repetition, in an act of extraordinary self-abnegation and love, “yes there is no other word for it,” was reminding herself

Below left: Dianne Wiest in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of HAPPY DAYS by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.

Below right: Jarlath Conroy in the Yale Repertory Theatre Production of HAPPY DAYS by Samuel Beckett, directed by James Bundy. Photo by Henry Grossman.



to keep quiet for her husband's sake, for his peace.

I have thought of that post-it note almost every time Dianne has come to the section of the play wherein Winnie has asked Willie to look at her:

Oh I can well imagine what is passing through your mind, it is not enough to have to listen to the woman, now I must look at her as well. PAUSE Well it is understandable. PAUSE Most understandable. PAUSE One does not appear to be asking a great deal, indeed at times it would seem hardly possible—to ask less—of a fellow creature—to put it mildly—whereas actually—when you think about it—look into your heart—see the other—what he needs—peace—to be left in peace—then perhaps the moon—all this time—asking for the moon.

What Winnie knows about Willie, Janet knew about Wolfgang, and Beckett knew about all of us, in pairs at least, to be sure. If you want to find out more about the universal marriage and if you want to hear that passage performed to the kind of perfection that will make you think more seriously and compassionately about all your own relationships, you're going to have to come to hear Dianne and Jarlath go through it all. That's the best way to find out what Beckett knew about a woman's life, and a man's life, and the quintessence of modern humanity.●



# THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

JARLATH CONROY (Willie) Broadway: *The Seagull*; *The Weir*; *The Iceman Cometh*; *On the Waterfront*; *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*; *The Visit*; *Ghetto*; *Macbeth*; *Comedians*. Off-Broadway: *Loot*, *The Coward*, *A Man of No Importance*, *Pigtown*, *A Life*, *Our Lady of Sligo*, *A Couple Blaguards*, *Gardenia*, the American premiere of *Translations*, and *The Matchmaker*. Regional: *Hamlet*; *Outside Mullingar*; *The Homecoming*; *Da*; *The Steward of Christendom* (Barrymore Award); *Juno and the Paycock* (Helen Hayes Award); *Henry V* (Helen Hayes nom.); *Faith Healer*; *Molly Sweeney*; *Twelfth Night*; *Ah, Wilderness!*; *The Plough and the Stars*; and *A Christmas Carol*. At the Royal Court: *Cromwell* and *Hamlet*. He has also directed productions of *True West* and *Human Resources*. Film/TV: *Putzel*, *True Grit* (2010), *The Art of Getting By*, *Across the Universe*, *Kinsey*, *Stay*, *Day of the Dead*, *Heaven's Gate*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *NYPD Blue*, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *The Beat*, *Summer*, and *A Marriage: O'Keefe and Stiegleitz*.

DIANNE WIEST (Winnie) New York theater credits include *Rasheeda Speaking* (The New Group), *The Cherry Orchard* (Classic Stage Company), Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* on Broadway, *The Seagull* (CSC), *Third*, *Memory House*, *Salome* and *Oedipus* with Al Pacino, *The Shawl*, *Hunting Cockroaches*, *After the Fall*, *Beyond Therapy*, and *The Art of Dining*. For Yale Rep, she previously appeared in *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll House*. Her film credits include *Five Nights in Maine*; *Sisters*; *The Humbling*; *Synecdoche, New York*; *A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints*; *Hannah and Her Sisters* (Academy Award); *The Purple Rose of Cairo*; *Radio Days*; *September*; *Bullets Over Broadway* (Academy Award); *Parenthood* (Academy Award nomination); *Rabbit Hole*; *Footloose*; *Edward Scissorhands*; and *The Birdcage*. She received Emmy Awards for her performances in *The Road to Avonlea* and the HBO series *In Treatment* and currently appears in the CBS series *Life In Pieces*.

JAMES BUNDY (Director) Dean of Yale School of Drama and Artistic Director of Yale Repertory Theatre since 2002, has director for Yale Rep; The Acting Company; Great Lakes Theater Festival; Alabama, California, and Oregon Shakespeare Festivals; and the Juilliard School, among others. He was the 2007 winner of the Connecticut Critics Circle's Tom Killen Award for extraordinary contributions to theatre in the state, and served on the board of directors of Theater Communications Group from 2007-2013. A graduate of Harvard College, he trained at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art and Yale School of Drama.

IZMIR ICKBAL (Scenic Designer) is thrilled and honored to be designing at TFANA for the first time. His design credits include *Twelfth Night* (Irondale Center, New School); *The Late Wedding* and *1001* (Teatro LATEA, Columbia Stages); *Deer and the Lovers* and *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (Yale School of Drama). Other credits include *Cloud Tectonics*, *Touch* (Yale Cabaret); *Dairyland* and *The Guadalupe* (Chautauqua Theater Company); *Nanyang: The Musical* (International Festival of Arts, Singapore); *Yusof*, *The Gunpowder Trail*, *Hearth* (The Esplanade Theatre Studio, Singapore); *Nadirah*, *Charged*, and *Not Counted* (Teater Ekamatra, Singapore). Izmir holds an MFA from Yale School of Drama and a BA from the National University of Singapore. More info: [izmirickbal.com](http://izmirickbal.com)

ALEXAE VISEL (Costume Designer) is delighted to join Theatre for a New Audience for the first time. Recent works include Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing!* at the Public Theater; *Happy Days* at Yale Repertory Theatre; *Othello* at the California Shakespeare Theatre; *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Richard III* at the Stratford Shakespeare Academy; *Women Beware Women* and *The Children* at the Yale School of Drama. Upcoming this summer will be *Bye Bye Birdie* at Playmakers Repertory Company. [www.alexaevisel.com](http://www.alexaevisel.com)

STEPHEN STRAWBRIDGE (Lighting Designer). Over 200 productions on and off Broadway and at most major regional theater and opera companies across the US. International: Bergen, Copenhagen, The Hague, Hong Kong, Linz, Lisbon, Munich, Naples, Sao Paulo, Stratford-upon-Avon (RSC), Stockholm, Vienna, and Wroclaw. Recent: Athol Fugard's *Master Harold and the Boys*, Signature Theatre; *Turn Me Loose* with

## THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

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Joe Morton, Westside Arts; *Pericles*, directed by Trevor Nunn, TFANA. Nominations and awards: American Theatre Wing, Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle, Connecticut Critics Circle, Dallas-Fort Worth Theater Critics Forum, Helen Hayes, Henry Hewes Design and Lucille Lortel. Co-chair of Design Department, Yale School of Drama; Resident Lighting Designer, Yale Repertory Theatre.

WALTON WILSON (Vocal Coach) serves as Head of Voice & Speech at Yale School of Drama and Resident Vocal Advisor for Yale Repertory Theatre. His credits include world premiere productions of plays and adaptations by David Adjmi, Jane Anderson, Christopher Bayes/Steven Epp, Eric Bogosian, Bill Camp/Robert Woodruff, Martha Clarke, David Henry Hwang, Len Jenkin, Moises Kaufman/Tectonic Theatre Project, Stacy Klein/Double Edge Theatre, Han Ong, Rosary O'Neil, Jihae Park, David Rabe, Bill Rauch/Tracy Young, Jose Rivera, and Mary Zimmerman.

JESSICA WOLF (Movement Coach) is an internationally recognized Alexander Technique teacher and an Associate Professor Adjunct of Acting at Yale School of Drama. She founded Jessica Wolf's Art of Breathing, and created the first three-dimensional animation of the respiratory system. She maintains a teaching practice in New York City, where she coaches performance artists who appear on and off-Broadway, and in films and television. She travels internationally, giving workshops to performers and healthcare providers.

CATHERINE SHEEHY (Dramaturg). Resident Dramaturg (Yale Rep), Professor, Chair of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism (Yale School of Drama). Dramaturgy at YRT includes: *Happy Days*; *These Paper Bullets*; *In a Year with 13 Moons*; *The Winter's Tale*; *The King Stag* (also co-adaptor). Other work includes: *Pride and Prejudice* (adaptor, Asolo Rep/Dallas Theater Center); Yale Institute of Music Theatre, RSC, Public Theater, Signature Theater, Center Stage, Shakespeare Santa Cruz. Former associate editor of American Theatre and Theater magazines.

NAHUEL TELLERIA (Dramaturg) is a doctoral candidate at Yale School of Drama researching contemporary Argentine theater. He previously co-dramaturged *Happy Days* at Yale Repertory Theatre, and his translation of *Blood Wedding* will premiere at the Wilma Theater next fall; he also works for the Dwight/Edgewood Project in New Haven. He has a BA in English and theater from Columbia University, and an MA in humanities from the University of Chicago.

KELLY MONTGOMERY (Production Stage Manager) makes her TFANA debut. Regional credits include *Happy Days*, *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Yale Repertory Theatre); *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Other Desert Cities*, *Measure for Measure*, *By the Way Meet Vera Stark*, *The Jungle Book* (Goodman Theatre). Additional work: Transcendence Theatre Company, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Maine State Music Theatre, Remy Bumppo Theatre Company, among others. She holds an MFA in Stage Management from Yale School of Drama.

HELEN IRENE MULLER (Assistant Stage Manager) is thrilled to be back with *Happy Days* after working on the production at Yale Repertory Theatre, where her credits also include *Seven Guitars*. Other credits: the Broadway Under the Stars series in Jack London State Park (Transcendence Theatre Company) and *The Oresteia* (Yale School of Drama). She is a third-year MFA candidate at the Yale School of Drama and holds a BA from St. Olaf College. Proud member, AEA.

TARA RUBIN CASTING (Casting Director). Selected Broadway: *Prince of Broadway* (upcoming), *Bandstand*, *Indecent*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Miss Saigon*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *A Bronx Tale*, *Cats*, *Falsettos*, *Disaster!*, *School of Rock*, *Gigi*, *Bullets Over Broadway*, *Aladdin*, *Les Misérables*, *The Heiress*, *How to Succeed...*, *Billy Elliot*, *Shrek*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Mary Poppins*, *Spamalot*, ... *Spelling Bee*, *The Producers*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Jersey Boys*, *The Phantom of the Opera*. Off-Broadway: *The Band's Visit*; *Here Lies Love*; *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*.

## THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

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JONATHAN KALB (Resident Literary Advisor/Dramaturg) is Literary Advisor and Resident Artist at Theatre for a New Audience and Professor of Theatre at Hunter College, CUNY. He has twice won the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism, which he received for his books *Beckett in Performance* (1991) and *Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theater* (2012). *Great Lengths* also won the Theater Library Association's George Freedley Award.

BLAKE ZIDELL & ASSOCIATES (Press Representative) is a Brooklyn-based public relations firm representing artists, companies and institutions spanning a variety of disciplines. Clients include St. Ann's Warehouse, Soho Rep, The Kitchen, Ars Nova, BRIC, P.S.122, Abrons Arts Center, Taylor Mac, LAByrinth Theater Company, StoryCorps, Irish Arts Center, Café Carlyle, Peak Performances, Batsheva Dance Company, The Playwrights Realm, Stephen Petronio Company, The Play Company, and FIAF's Crossing the Line Festival.

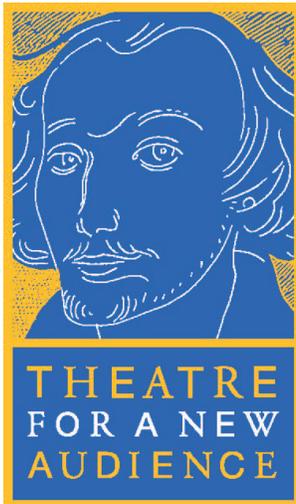
JEFFREY HOROWITZ (Founding Artistic Director) began his career in theatre as an actor and appeared on Broadway, Off Broadway, and in regional theatre. In 1979, he founded Theatre for a New Audience. Horowitz has served on the Panel of the New York State Council on the Arts and on the Board of Directors of Theatre Communications Group. He is currently on the Advisory Board of The Shakespeare Society and the Artistic Directorate of London's Globe Theatre. He received the John Houseman Award in 2003 and The Breukelein Institute's 2004 Gaudium Award.

DOROTHY RYAN (Managing Director) joined Theatre for a New Audience in 2003. She spent the previous ten years devoted to fundraising for the 92nd Street Y and the Brooklyn Museum. Ryan began her career in classical music artist management and has also served as company manager for Chautauqua Opera, managing director for the Opera Ensemble of New York, and general manager of Eugene Opera. She is a 2014 Brooklyn Women of Distinction honoree from Community Newspaper Group.

MICHAEL PAGE (General Manager) has been working in commercial and not-for-profit arts management for over ten years; this is his third season at TFANA. Prior credits include Nina Raine's award-winning *Tribes*, David Cromer's landmark production of *Our Town, Mistakes Were Made* by Craig Wright, and Fiasco Theater's *Cymbeline* (Barrow Street Theatre); Douglas McGrath's *Checkers*, Rajiv Joseph's *The North Pool*, Jenny Schwartz's *Somewhere Fun* (Vineyard Theatre), among others. MFA: Ohio University.

THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE founded in 1979 by Jeffrey Horowitz, is a modern classical theatre that produces Shakespeare alongside other major authors in a dialogue that spans centuries. The Theatre promotes the ongoing training of artists through the Actors and Directors Project, led by Cicely Berry, C.B.E., director of voice, Royal Shakespeare Company and Andrew Wade. The company's productions and affiliated artists have been honored with prestigious awards and nominations including Drama Desk, Lortel, Obie, and the Tony. The Theatre's production of *The Green Bird* by Carlo Gozzi directed by Julie Taymor opened Off-Broadway, toured to La Jolla Playhouse, and later moved to Broadway. In 2001, the Theatre became the first American company to be invited to bring a production of Shakespeare to the RSC. *Cymbeline* directed by Bartlett Sher opened at the RSC's Other Place, November 2001. In January 2006, the Theatre's production of *Souls of Naples* starring John Turturro toured to Naples, Italy, and in March 2007 we returned to the RSC with *The Merchant of Venice* starring F. Murray Abraham and directed by Darko Tresnjak. The Theatre created and runs the largest in-depth program for introducing Shakespeare in the NYC Public Schools. Over 127,000 young people ages 9–18 have been served since 1984. In partnership with The City of New York, which has provided leadership support through the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the Department of Cultural Affairs, and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, Theatre for a New Audience has opened its first home. The building is named Polonsky Shakespeare Center, in recognition of a naming gift from The Polonsky Foundation.

## ABOUT THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE



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### About Theatre for a New Audience

Founded in 1979 by Jeffrey Horowitz, the mission of Theatre for a New Audience is to develop and vitalize the performance and study of Shakespeare and classic drama. Theatre for a New Audience produces for audiences Off-Broadway and has also toured nationally, internationally and to Broadway. We are guided in our work by five core values: a reverence for language, a spirit of adventure, a commitment to diversity, a dedication to learning, and a spirit of service. These values inform what we do with artists, how we interact with audiences, and how we manage our organization.

### Theatre for a New Audience Education Programs

Theatre for a New Audience is an award-winning company recognized for artistic excellence. Our education programs introduce students to Shakespeare and other classics with the same artistic integrity that we apply to our productions. Through our unique and exciting methodology, students engage in hands-on learning that involves all aspects of literacy set in the context of theatre education. Our residencies are structured to address City and State Learning Standards both in English Language Arts and the Arts, the New York City DOE's Curriculum Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theater, and the Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts. Begun in 1984, our programs have served more than 126,000 students, ages 9 through 18, in New York City Public Schools city-wide.

### A New Home in Brooklyn: Polonsky Shakespeare Center

After 33 seasons of award-winning and internationally-acclaimed productions, Theatre for a New Audience's new home, Polonsky Shakespeare Center, is a centerpiece of the Brooklyn Cultural District.

Designed by celebrated architect Hugh Hardy, Polonsky Shakespeare Center is the first theatre in New York designed and built expressly for classic drama since Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont in the 1960s. The 27,500 square-foot facility is a unique performance space in New York. The 299-seat Samuel H. Scripps Mainstage, inspired by the Cottesloe at London's National Theatre, combines an Elizabethan courtyard theatre with modern theatre technology that allows the stage and seating to be arranged in seven configurations. The new facility also includes the Theodore C. Rogers Studio (a 50-seat rehearsal/performance studio), and theatrical support spaces. The City of New York-developed Arts Plaza, designed by landscape architect Ken Smith, creates a natural gathering place around the building. In addition, Polonsky Shakespeare Center is also one of the few sustainable (green) theatres in the country, with an anticipated LEED-NC Silver rating from the United States Green Building Council.

Now with a home of its own, Theatre for a New Audience is contributing to the continued renaissance of Downtown Brooklyn. In addition to its season of plays, the Theatre is expanding its education and humanities offerings to include lectures and activities for families, as well as seminars, workshops, and other activities for artists, scholars, and families. When not in use by the Theatre, its new facility is available for rental, bringing much needed affordable performing and rehearsal space to the community.

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*Even with capacity audiences, ticket sales account for a small portion of our operating costs. The Theatre expresses its deepest thanks to the following Foundations, Corporations Government Agencies and Individuals for their generous support of the Theatre's Humanities, Education, and Outreach programs.*

The 360° Series: Viewfinders has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the Human Endeavor. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this Viewfinder do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

A Challenge Grant from the NEH established a Humanities endowment fund at Theatre for a New Audience to support these programs in perpetuity. Leading matching gifts to the NEH grant were provided by Joan and Robert Arnow, Norman and Elaine Brodsky, The Durst Organization, Perry and Marty Granoff, Stephanie and Tim Ingrassia, John J. Kerr & Nora Wren Kerr, Litowitz Foundation, Inc., Robert and Wendy MacDonald, Sandy and Stephen Perlbin, The Prospect Hill Foundation, Inc., Theodore C. Rogers, and from purchasers in the Theatre's Seat for Shakespeare Campaign.

Theatre for a New Audience's Humanities, Education, and Outreach programs are supported, in part, by The Elayne P. Bernstein Education Fund. For more information on naming a seat or making a gift to the Humanities endowment, please contact James Lynes, Director of Institutional Advancement, at 212-229-2819 x29, or by email at [jlynes@tfana.org](mailto:jlynes@tfana.org).

Theatre for a New Audience's productions and education programs receive support from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; and from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



**Council on  
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