

# ARTS

## LINE

A CONTEMPORARY THEATRE  
EDITION

Volume II, No. 2

June, 1984





# A Contemporary Theatre

**Gregory A. Falls**  
Producing Director

**Phil Schermer**  
Producing Manager

**Susan Trapnell Moritz**  
Administrative Manager

presents

## **Top Girls**

**by Caryl Churchill**

**June 7 - 30, 1984**

**Director** Sharon Ott  
**Set Designer** Robert Dahlstrom  
**Costume Designer** Alexandra B. Bonds  
**Lighting Designer** Jody Briggs  
**Sound Designer** David Hunter Koch  
**Stage Manager** Joan Kennedy

### **THE CAST**

<b>Marlene</b>	Megan Cole
<b>Isabella/Joyce/Mrs. Kidd</b>	Kathleen Chalfant
<b>Lady Nijo/Jeanine</b>	Mary Ewald
<b>Dull Gret/Angie</b>	Kathryn Mesney Hetler
<b>Pope Joan/Louise</b>	Jeanne Paulsen
<b>Patient Griselda/Nell</b>	Gayle Bellows
<b>Waitress/Win</b>	Liann Pattison
<b>Waitress/Kit/Shona</b>	Nina Wishengrad

### **ACT I**

Scene 1: Restaurant. Saturday night.  
Scene 2: 'Top Girls' Employment Agency. Monday morning.  
Scene 3: Joyce's back yard. Sunday afternoon.

*There will be one 15-minute intermission.*

### **ACT II**

Scene 1: Employment agency. Monday morning.  
Scene 2: Joyce's kitchen. Sunday evening, a year earlier.

*Top Girls* is presented by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc. It was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on August 28, 1982. This production is made possible, in part, by The Seattle Arts Commission, City of Seattle, and by the Washington State and King County Arts Commissions. ACT also gratefully acknowledges support from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., a Federal agency, and from the Corporate Council for the Arts (CCA).

## WHO'S WHO

**GAYLE BELLOW** (*Patient Griselda/Nell*) returns to ACT for the first time since her 1980 performance as Mrs. Dilber and the Niece in *A Christmas Carol*. She has been a member of The Oregon Shakespearean Festival Company since then, this past year appearing as Ophelia in *Hamlet* and receiving an award from the Los Angeles



*Dramalogue* for her portrayal of Violet in *Man and Superman* and, prior to that, as Rachel in *Inherit the Wind*, Emilia in *Othello*, and Daisy in *Spokesong*, among others. She also has worked with the Utah Shakespearean Festival. Gayle's work with The Seattle Rep includes *Taming of the Shrew* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. She played Mrs. Keller in *The Miracle Worker* with Seattle Children's Theatre and Ann in The Empty Space's *Heads and Tails*, and she played Barbie in The Space's new plays project presentation of *The Healer*.

**KATHLEEN CHALFANT** (*Isabella/Joyce/Mrs. Kidd*) is performing here for the first time in the Northwest. Her extensive stage credits include the Broadway production of *Dance With Me* and, Off-Broadway, the title role in *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* and Sarah Siddons in *The Actor's Nightmare* at Playwright's Horizons.



Kathleen played Lillie in Hugh Leonard's *Nice People* at The Open Space, Grace in Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* at the Vineyard Theatre, Alice James in *Signs of Life* and the Younger Woman in *Jules Feiffer's Hold Me!* at the American Place Theatre, and Emma Borden in The Hudson Guild Theatre's *Blood Relations*. She also was seen as Ella Dan in the Milwaukee Rep's premiere presentation of *The Splintered Wood* by William Stancil. On television Kathleen was seen in the running part of Louise in "The Edge of Night," while her film work includes *Garbo Talks* and *Wonderkind*, among others.

**MEGAN COLE** (*Marlene*) also makes her ACT debut in this production, although she is well known to Northwest audiences. She appeared in Intiman Theatre's productions of *Elektra*, *Medea*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, and *Hay Fever*, among others. At The Seattle Rep her work has included *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Bedroom Farce*. Megan



spent last season with The Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland, where she played Gertrude in *Hamlet* and Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III*, and she has just received a Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle Award for her performance as Widow Quin in *The Playboy of the Western World* at the South Coast Rep. Her work in theatres from coast to coast includes *Private Lives* at the Alaska Rep, *Summerfolk* at the Long Wharf, the McCarter Theatre's *All the Way Home*, and *Desire Under the Elms* at A.C.T. San Francisco. Megan also is the only American actor chosen to join the Royal Shakespeare Company in their tour of American universities.

**MARY EWALD** (*Lady Nijo/Jeanine*) most recently was seen in The Seattle Repertory



Theatre's production of *The Misanthrope*. At the New City Theatre she played Willie (The Space Freak) in *The Unseen Hand*, while her credits at The Empty Space include Elmire in *Tartuffe* and Julia in *Fefu & Her Friends*. Her performances at Intiman the past two seasons included such roles as Nina in *The Sea Gull*, Jane Larry in *In the Jungle of Cities*, and Indra's Daughter in *A Dream Play*. In the East, Mary worked Off-Off-Broadway and with several resident theatres, among them the Hartman, the Tennessee Williams Fine Arts Center, and the Williamstown Theatre Festival's Second Company. Mary is very glad to be doing her first show at ACT.

**KATHRYN MESNEY HETLER** (*Dull Gret/Angie*) has appeared on our mainstage several times, most recently as Clytemnestra and Thetis in *The Greeks* and before that as Marta in *Waiting for the Parade*, Gail in *Fridays*, and Mrs. Prynne in *Da*. Her work with The Seattle Rep included several roles in *The Adventures of Huck Finn*, Hilda in *An*



*Ounce of Prevention*, Rosalie Sorrells in *American Dreams*, *Lost & Found*, and Trainee in *Salvation Now!* Area audiences also have seen Kathryn in such productions as *Bonjour La, Bonjour!* and *The Workroom* at The Empty Space, *Ten Little Indians* at the Tacoma Actors Guild, and *Ladies in Waiting* with The Group. At the Oregon Contemporary Theatre she played several roles in *Don Juan Comes Back From the War*. Kathryn is head of the Voice and Speech area of the

Conservatory Acting Program at Cornish Institute and has also worked with several theatres, including ACT, as a dialect coach.

**LIANN PATTISON** (*Waitress/Win*) is making her first appearance at ACT. She was seen at Intiman as Irene in *The Crucifer of Blood* and in The Seattle Rep's staged reading of *Abingdon Square*. Her other stage work includes the title role in *Romeo and Juliet* and Celia in *As You Like It* with the Utah Shakespearean Festival, as well as several productions of the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts.



**JEANNE PAULSEN** (*Pope Joan/Louise*) appeared as Teresa Salieri in this season's opener, *Amadeus*. She played Ellen, Mrs. Saunders, and Lin in *Cloud 9* here last season and has performed with the San Jose Repertory Theatre and as Mrs. Cratchit in The Milwaukee Rep's *A Christmas Carol*. Jeanne was a member of The Oregon Shakespearean Festival Company for three years, playing Irene Molloy in *The Matchmaker*, Kitty Carberry in *Spokesong*, Amy in *Wings*, Margaret Morley in Joanna Glass's *Artichoke*, Julia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Maria in *Twelfth Night*, and Lady Percy in *Henry IV, Part 1*. She also appeared in *Wild Oats*, *Richard II*, *Juno and the Paycock*, *Coriolanus*, and *Inherit the Wind*. At the Denver Center Theatre Company she performed in *Waiting for Lefty*, and she has also worked with the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts in California.



**NINA WISHENGRAD** (*Waitress/Kit/Shona*) appeared as Edward and Victoria in *Cloud 9* here last season and performed previously in our productions of *The Water Engine*, *Wings*, *Buried Child*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and *A Christmas Carol*. Nina left New York for Seattle in 1978 to appear in *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Zorba* at the Cirque Dinner Theatre, and has been here ever since. At



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# About the Play

*Top Girls* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London in August of 1982. Its American premiere was staged as part of an exchange with New York's Public Theatre in December of that year, followed by a return to the Royal Court in February, 1983, a Canadian production this past October, and another in Australia this spring.

Among the thirty or more other plays written by Ms. Churchill are *Fen*, *Owners*, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Traps*, *Three More Sleepless Nights*, *Objections to Sex and Violence*, *Crimes*, *Vinegar Tom*, and *Cloud 9*, which was the last play of our 1983 season.

Michael Coveney, theatre writer for *The Financial Times* in London, wrote: "Like David Hare and Trevor Griffiths—both playwrights of her generation—Miss Churchill is a dramatist who addresses herself uncompromisingly to social questions in contemporary Britain. For her, such questions are often inextricable from sexual issues, and she addresses both in a stylish manner that tends to make mincemeat of theatrical conventions even as it comments on social and political mores."

Churchill herself said she wanted to write a play "about the unpleasantness of the sort of careers a capitalistic society offers to both men and women. Mrs. Thatcher, for instance, has succeeded because she has taken on male values and has not, by her success, done anything for the oppressed women of Britain. Women achieving things isn't success if it entails the exploitation of men and women.

"The ideas for *Top Girls* came from all kinds of things," she said. "There'd been the idea of a play about a lot of dead women having coffee with someone from the present. And an idea about women doing all kinds of jobs. It was also that Thatcher had just become prime minister; and also I had been to America and talking to women there who were saying things were going very well: they were getting far more women executives, women vice-presidents and so on. And that was such a different attitude from anything I'd ever met here, where feminism tends to be much more connected with socialism and not so much to do with women succeeding on the sort of capitalist ladder.

"All those ideas fed into *Top Girls*. I wanted it to set off, with all those historical women celebrating Marlene's achievement, to look as if it were going to be a celebration of women achieving things, and then to put the other perspective on it, to show that just to achieve the same things that men had achieved in capitalist society wouldn't be a good object."

Among the "top girls" who join in Marlene's celebration are Isabella Bird (1831-1904), who lived in Edinburgh and travelled extensively between the ages of 40 and 70; Lady Nijo (b. 1258), courtesan to the emperor of Japan and later a Buddhist nun who travelled on foot through Japan; Dull Gret, subject of the Brueghel painting *Dulle Griet*, in which a woman in an apron and armour leads a crowd of women charging through hell and fighting the devils; Pope Joan, who is thought to have disguised herself as a man and been pope between 854 and 856 A.D.; and Patient Griselda, the obedient wife whose story is told by Chaucer in *The Clerk's Tale* of *The Canterbury Tales*.

## WHO'S WHO

(continued from page 18)

The Seattle Repertory Theatre she was seen in *Strider* and *Major Barbara*, as well as in several of the "Sundays at Jake's" readings. Nina has built a career as a writer, producer and voice talent of broadcast commercials too. She holds a B.F.A. in directing from Carnegie-Mellon University.

**SHARON OTT** (Director) is our 1984 Seattle Trust Guest Artist and last year staged our production of *Educating Rita*. Since then she has been named artistic director of the Berkeley Repertory Theatre, following five years as resident director of The Milwaukee Rep, where she has directed more than twenty productions, from Gogol's



*Dead Souls* to Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and the world premiere of Amlin Gray's *How I Got That Story*. She staged *The Shadow of a Gunman* for Intiman in 1982. Among the other theatres for which she has directed are

the South Coast Rep, Oregon Contemporary Theatre, North Light Repertory in Chicago, the Actors' Theatre of St. Paul, Manhattan Theatre Club, the GeVa Theatre, and the Williamstown Theatre Festival. She was associate artistic director of Milwaukee's Theatre X for three years. Her work there included *A Fierce Longing*, which she directed and co-designed and which received an Obie Award for production design. Sharon also has worked with Herbert Blau's Kraken and Camera Obscura in Europe, and has developed a long-term relationship with Japan, where her production of *Buried Child* was toured under the sponsorship of our State Department.

**ROBERT DAHLSTROM** (Set Designer) designed our production of *Educating Rita* last season. He has been designing both scenery and lighting for The Seattle Rep and Intiman since 1973. His score of credits with The Rep include *As You Like It*, *Major Barbara*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Side By Side*, *By Sundheim*, and *Skin of Our Teeth*. At Intiman his work was seen in *Medea*, *The Wild Duck*, *The Way of the World*, *Heartbreak House*, *The Rose Tattoo*, and *The Ribadier*



*System*. He also designed *The Ballad of Baby Doe* for Seattle Opera. Robert has been an associate professor and designer for the University of Washington School of Drama since 1971, where he has designed more than 40 productions. He designed *Man and Superman* and *Knock* at A.C.T. in San Francisco as well.

**ALEXANDRA B. BONDS** (Costume Designer) is making her Seattle debut with this production. She has been costumer/designer and assistant professor at the University of Oregon in Eugene since 1979, while continuing her professional career. Her recent designs for *Merchant of Venice* were selected for the 1984 USITT Juried Exhibition. She also designed costumes for the Minnesota Opera Company and the Duluth Ballet, among others, and has worked with the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Theatre-by-the-Sea, and elsewhere. Among her other recent productions are *Little Foxes*, *Anything Goes*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Bent*, and *School For Scandal*. Alexandra holds a B.S. from Syracuse University and an M.A. from the University of Denver.



(continued on page 20)



# WHO'S WHO

(continued from page 19)

**JODY BRIGGS** (*Lighting Designer*) is the assistant technical director for ACT. Among his many design credits here are *The Persian Princess*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Da*, *The Dresser*, *Fridays*, *For Colored Girls...*, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*, *Holy Ghosts*, *Man and Superman*, *Henry IV Part 1*, *Absurd Person Singular*, *Your Own Thing*, *The Indian Experience*, and *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*. Jody holds a Master's degree from the University of Washington and a B.F.A. from Boston University. He has designed sets and lighting for more than 75 theatre productions, musicals, and dance performances in stock and resident theatres across the U.S. and Canada.

**DAVID HUNTER KOCH** (*Sound Designer*) is head of ACT's "Songworks" project to develop new music for the theatre. Since 1981 he has composed and arranged the music and sound used by The Young ACT Company. Among his design and composing credits are *The Persian Princess* and *Not Just Kidstuff* for the 1983/84 Young ACT Company, as well as mainstage productions of *The Greeks*, *Cloud 9*, and *Custer*. David moved to Seattle six years ago from Ashland and, as an actor and singer, has performed with The Seattle Rep, Skid Road Theatre, New City Theatre, The Group, The 5th Avenue, and here at ACT.

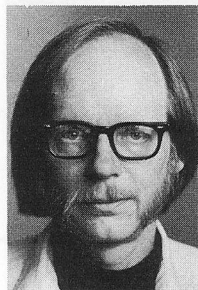
**JOAN KENNEDY** (*Stage Manager*) is marking her third season with ACT. Last season she stage managed *Educating Rita*, with director Sharon Ott, and *The Dining Room*. The previous year she was the production assistant for *Waiting for the Parade*, *Da*, and *The Greeks*. Joan also works in the stage management department of The Seattle Rep, where this year she worked on *The Ballad of Soapy Smith*, *The Misanthrope*, and *Master Harold... and the Boys*. Among the other theatres where she has stage managed are Skid Road Theatre and The Bathhouse here in Seattle and the Portland Stage Company in Maine. Joan holds a B.A. in theatre and now is pursuing her Master's degree in business.

**SUSAN TRAPNELL MORITZ** (*Administrative Manager*) came to ACT from Dance

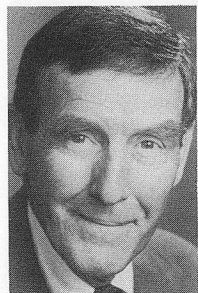


Theatre Seattle, where she was general manager for two years and prior to that educational director. Her work experience ranges from a stint in Paris as UNESCO bilingual aide to writing and editing positions in the Washington, D.C., area. She worked with the National Urban League and also taught English to youngsters in Algeria. Ms. Moritz holds a B.A. in French from the University of North Carolina and has completed her M.A. coursework in dance education at George Washington University. She also attended the University of Lyons in France.

**PHIL SCHERMER** (*Producing Manager*) has been with ACT for about 18 years, during which he designed lighting for a great many productions, including *Amadeus* this season and *Cloud 9* last season. Among his other lighting credits here are *The Greeks*, *Loose Ends*, *Custer*, *Catholics*, *Wings*, *Fanshen*, *The Club*, *The Water Engine*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Shadow Box*, and more. At The Empty Space he designed lighting for *American Buffalo*, *A Prayer For My Daughter*, *Heat*, and *Dusa*, *Fish*, *Stas* and *Vi*. He also has designed lighting for The Seattle Rep and its 2nd Stage and sets for ACT, the 2nd Stage, and The Empty Space.



**GREGORY A. FALLS** (*Producing Director*) is the founder of A Contemporary Theatre and The Young ACT Company. He has directed more than 50 productions here, including *The Greeks*, *Catholics*, *Getting Out*, *Fanshen*, *Henry IV Part 1*, and *Ballymurphy*. He also created five original children's theater revues and three Christmas shows, plus a scripted version of *The Odyssey* with playwright Kurt Beattie and original scripts of *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp*, *The Forgotten Door*, *A Wrinkle In Time*, *The Pushcart War*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, and *The Persian Princess*. For ten years Mr. Falls was Executive Director of the U.W. School of Drama. He is past president of the National Theatre Conference and the Washington Association of Theatre Artists, a founding board member of the United Arts Council of Puget Sound, and founder of the Champlain Shakespeare Festival.



**A Contemporary Theatre**  
P.O. Box 19400, Seattle, WA 98109  
Located at 1st Ave. W. & W. Roy St.  
Box Office: (206) 285-5110  
Administrative Offices: (206) 285-3220

**Gregory A. Falls**, Producing Director

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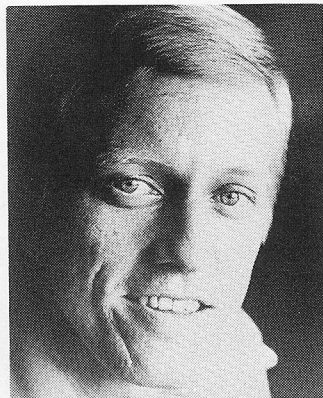
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Company Manager ..... Anne-Denise Ford  
Assistant Technical Director ..... Jody Briggs  
Music Coordinator ..... David Hunter Koch  
New Plays Manager ..... Barry Pritchard  
Stage Managers ..... Bonita M. Ernst,  
Joan Kennedy  
Production Carpenter (IATSE #15) .....  
Howard Neslen  
Carpenters (IATSE #15) ..... Justin Gelle,  
Al Nelson  
Scenic Painter ..... Mary Alyce White  
Shop Assistant ..... Renee D. Reilly  
Carpenter (IATSE #15) ..... Al Nelson  
Scenic Painter ..... Mary Alyce White  
Shop Assistant ..... Renee D. Reilly  
Costume Shop  
Manager ..... Constance Rinchiuso  
Cutter ..... Carolyn Keim  
Stitcher ..... Nancy Bayer  
Wardrobe ..... Dawn Douglas  
Production Assistants ..... Norbert Herriges,  
Sarah S. Mixson, Jim Patten  
Production Intern ..... Kate Dyer  
Assistant Lighting Designer ... Mary Schuster  
Properties ..... Kay Ray



# Next at ACT

**Angels Fall**  
by Lanford Wilson  
July 12 - August 4, 1984



*Guest Director Fred Chappell*

Six people are trapped in "a rehearsal for the end of the world." An accident at a nearby uranium mine has filled the air with radioactive dust and they find refuge in a sun-baked mission in New Mexico.

Lanford Wilson, author of over 30 plays, including *Hot I Baltimore*, seen at ACT in 1974, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Talley's Folly*, gives us a funny, touching, and highly satisfying evening of theatre. He fills the stage with six characters who become old and valued friends.

*Angels Fall* will be staged by guest director **Fred Chappell**, Artistic Director of the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta for over seven years. The design team includes Karen Gjelsteen (set), Josie Gardner (costumes), Rick Kennedy-Paulsen (lighting), and Robert Bulkley (sound). Bonita M. Ernst will stage manage.

## COMING SOON TO ACT!

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### MONEY

June 18 & 25  
8 p.m.

fashionable subject for those  
interested in mega-bucks, jobs,  
sports and genetic engineering

### SEX

July 9 & 16  
8 p.m.

voted by *People* magazine  
as number one hobby of men,  
women and others

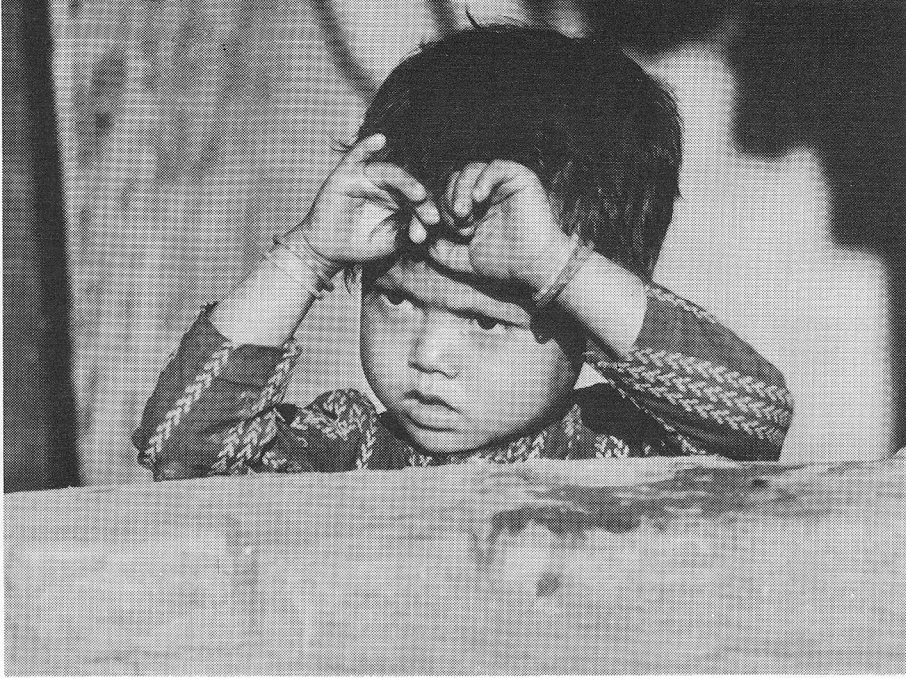
### TRAVEL

August 20 & 27  
8 p.m.

"You can't get there from here."







Photograph by Noreen R. Frink

## Art in the Lobby

In 1984 ACT once again is providing space in its upper lobby to individual Northwest artists. ACT feels this gives our audience a chance to view new works, enhances their theatre experience, and affords ACT the opportunity to be of service to the greater arts community. Sales of Art in the Lobby also benefit the theatre.

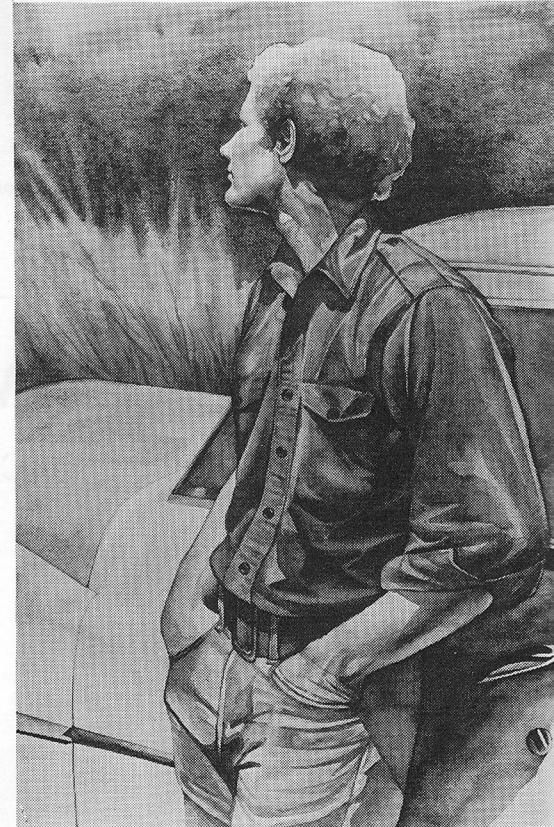
During the run of *Top Girls*, our Art in the Lobby curator, **Pamela Powers**, presents the works of Seattle photographer **Noreen R. Frink** and Bellingham watercolorist **Mary Gregg Byrne**. Both artists select people as their primary subjects.

**Noreen R. Frink** recently returned to Seattle from a photographic trek to Kashmir and Nepal, bringing back a delightful collection of impressions. "My belief in the warmth of a friendly smile," she said, "has, time after time, served as my passport to photographic happiness. The excitement of wandering through the crowded streets, rural coun-

trysides, and the mountains of Kashmir and Nepal has been the inspiration for many of my photographs."

**Mary Gregg Byrne** worked primarily in scrimshaw for many years and began working with watercolor in 1981. "Its transparency suits my interest in light," she said. "I like the purity of colors with no white except the paper shining through. The paint dries with patterns of moving water, which is universal in nature: the same as cloudy skies, the sea's bottom, or the paths of rivers."

If you have any questions about our Art in the Lobby or wish to purchase art work on display, contact the House Manager or call the ACT office at 285-3220.



Watercolor by Mary Gregg Byrne

## SNEAK PREVIEW

With the opening of our next mainstage production, *Angels Fall*, comes the opportunity for you to *be a winner!* ACT's **1984 Benefit Raffle** will begin in July, with the drawing to be held October 19 in the theatre. Tickets will be available in the theatre lobby at mainstage performances and also in the administrative office.

So, watch for some fabulous prizes and take a chance (or two, or ten...). You'll help support ACT's 20th Anniversary Season *and* it just may be your lucky day!



## A SPECIAL POST-PLAY DISCUSSION with SHARON OTT



ACT is proud to present Sharon Ott, director of *Top Girls*, as our 1984 **Seattle Trust Guest Artist**.

As part of the Guest Artists Program, there will be a free, public discussion of *Top Girls* in the theatre on **Sunday, June 17th**, following the matinee performance, beginning at approximately 5 p.m.

Ms. Ott will be joined by ACT's Ad-

ministrative Manager, Susan Trapnell Moritz, members of the cast, and special guests for this discussion. We would like **you** to join with us too.

The discussion is free and open to everyone interested in issues of theatre today. Bring your friends. And help spread the word about ACT and the remarkable Seattle Trust Guest Artists Program.

### THIRD SEASON

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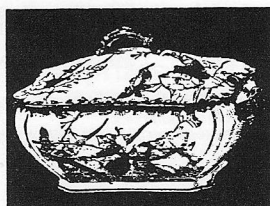
ACT wishes to thank the following for their assistance:

Greg Bruns  
Larae Hascall  
Steve Klein, audio engineer/editor  
Karyl Levinson  
Cameron G. McGill  
Delia Mulholland  
Mary Ellen Walter  
Mark Zappone

Sound actualities of contemporary women provided compliments of KLSY-FM and the CBS Radio Network.

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Copies of ACT Theatre's 1983 **Annual Report** are available to you free of charge in the ACT Administrative and Box Offices.



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\*ex officio



# The Costumes Make the Play

"...every time you select an article of clothing, you're making a statement about character development."

By Roger Downey  
Photos by John Stamets

"Fetes and fireworks, gentlemen!" trills the dapper little man to his companions: "Mozart is here!" And we all should be interested by his announcement. After all, the play (Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*) is about Mozart; he's been the main subject of conversation for six solid scenes.

But for the time being, our attention is riveted on the dapper little man. He is so obviously an ordinary sort of fellow; yet the clothes he is wearing turn him into a gigantic, gilded butterfly. We've only just got our first look at him, yet we know right away that he's amiable, rather stupid, kind, insensitive, and quite hopelessly absurd. And we also know that the people around him will go to a great deal of trouble to prevent him ever from realizing his absurdity. Because this is the Emperor Joseph the Second of Austria: in the words of another character, "Son of Maria Theresa. Brother of Marie Antoinette. Adorer of music—provided that it makes no demands upon the royal brain."

Something rather remarkable is happening here. Peter Silbert, the actor playing the role of the Emperor in Jeffrey Steitzer's production for A Contemporary Theatre, is a very good actor indeed; but he's only had time to utter seven words so far. Our understanding of his character is based almost entirely—and almost entirely unconsciously—on the costume he's wearing. And the costume, despite its look of "historical accuracy," is almost entirely the invention of its designer, Sarah Nash Gates.

Costumes are absolutely basic to the art of theater—according to some theorists, more basic than minor matters like plot and character. A play like Shaffer's *Amadeus*, encompassing dozens of figures scattered over decades of an era long past, needs brilliant costuming if the audience is to understand anything but the outlines of the story. Plot and dialogue provide the action of the play; but costumes create the social world within which that action alone makes sense.

Nevertheless, the modern art of costume design is less than a hundred years old. In the old days, every actor owned a "costume trunk," containing all the outfits he or she would be likely called upon to wear in the course of a season. It was Shakespeare, or rather our modern attitude to him, who more than anyone else gave birth to costume design as an independent career.

When "historical accuracy" became a factor in Shakespearean production, it was no longer possible for actors to have their own tailors run up a little something for Brutus or Calpurnia. On them the result might look good; but a stage full of different people's notions of looking good was guaranteed to be a visual chaos.

Today it's hard to conceive of producing a play, even a modern play in which everyone wears ordinary street clothes, without the services of a designer. We in the audience have come to expect a harmony of cut and texture, an emotional logic in the color palette of every production—though we may be-

come conscious of such things only in such an exuberantly showy production as Gates' *Amadeus*.

Theater shorthand divides plays into "period" and "modern"; costume designers use the shorthand, but they don't really work that way. Rather, there are two different polarities involved, and neither one has much to do with the date of a play's action. One might be called the Real-Unreal Axis, the other the Visible-Invisible Axis. Gates' *Amadeus* costumes are 'way over on the visible side of the scale; we're meant to notice them, savor them, see them as a kind of comment on the world of the play.

Kurt Wilhelm's costumes for the Rep's recent production of *As You Like It*, on the other hand, were as invisible as great skill and dedication could make them. Their "statement" was designed to be subliminal, leaving the whole foreground to the actors and to Shakespeare's language.

On the Reality axis, too, Wilhelm's and Gates' designs were in sharp contrast. Gates' clothes for *Amadeus* were fanciful, almost playful; she depicts an age of artificiality and elegance as seen and recalled through the mists of memory by one of the characters. They aren't intended to make us say, "Yes, that is exactly how things would have been then." Wilhelm's designs were on the contrary designed to create an air of real life, of weather and wear and work.

Paradoxically, it is Wilhelm's "real" designs that are the more fanciful. "The period is





Sarah Nash Gates (far left), of A Contemporary Theatre's "Amadeus," and Elizabeth Covey (near left), of Intiman's "Hobson's Choice": The art of the costume designer can make 'reality' artificial, or fantasy characters look like real people.

roughly second half of the 17th century English," he told me, "but basically all I've kept is the outline. And even then I took great liberties with the women's clothes, because the high waist of the period looks very unflattering when it's reduced to a silhouette, as I have done here.

"What interested Dan Sullivan, the director, was not an exact period but the look of real people. That doesn't mean that the well-to-do characters aren't very fashionably dressed. But the look is subdued, not 'costume-y.'"

In shows set in our own day, it's vitally important that the clothes not look "costume-y." Sometimes that means that the costume designer becomes a thrift-shopper, looking for garments with just the right amount of wear, the perfect degree of tackiness or touch of bad taste to express the character of their wearer. One of Seattle's most successful practitioners of this style of "invisible" costuming is Michael Murphy, whose clothes for The Empty Space's hyper-realist productions of Kroetz's *Mensch Meier* and *Through the Leaves* were the product of many hours spent among the racks at Goodwill and the Salvation Army.

But sometimes Murphy can't find what he needs in the real world. All the clothes for the Space's current show *Kitchen Church and Kids*—clothes for the most part worn by ordinary contemporary working-class Italian women—were built in his shop by Murphy and Guy Beuttler (a former cutter for Valentino) from the ground up. It's ironic that Murphy, the master of the ultra-real, should have started out designing clothes for Seattle notorious drag troupe the Whiz Kidz and the rock band Led Zeppelin, and gone on to the sequin glitter of Greg Thompson's *Follies*.

Whether a show is going to be shopped or built, showy or subdued, every design starts in conferences with the director; it is he or she

who must set the overall tone of the production. Often such conferences are hard to set up. Both directors and designers are gypsies, and design meetings may take place in hastily-booked hotel rooms between plane flights.

Sometimes they don't take place at all. Elizabeth Covey's designs for Intiman's *Hobson's Choice* were worked out with director James Moll entirely on the telephone. Gates also designed *Amadeus* at long distance, with lengthy phone calls to director Steitzer, who was working in St. Paul, Minnesota, and with literally hundreds of drawings flying back and forth via air mail.

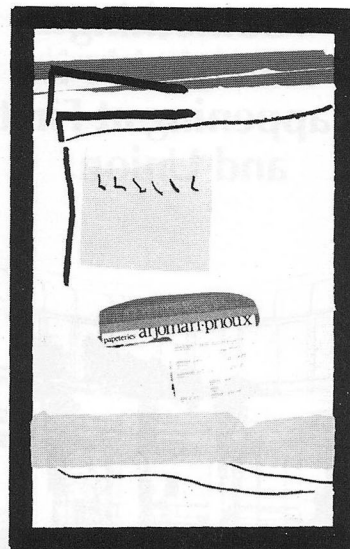
The director's ideas aren't the only constraint on a designer's imagination: sometimes a completely arbitrary fact will determine an aspect of the design. Shopgirls in the late-19th-century Lancashire of *Hobson's Choice* would have worn trim all-black outfits behind the counter. But at Intiman's 2nd Stage, there's too much black already in the way of walls and draperies; Hobson's daughters wear trim black aprons over brown dresses in Covey's design.

The biggest constraint on a designer is nearly always budget, and the bigger the show, the bigger the constraints. ACT's *Amadeus* is the most elaborate costume show the theater has ever produced: the 20 performers wear a total of 65 separate outfits in all, and even those aren't enough to convey all the subtleties director and designer want to put across. So Gates resorted to cunning.

Rather than build another costume or two for Mozart to convey the progressive deterioration of his health and fortunes, Gates mounted detachable padding in Brian Hargrove's second-act costume. Between entrances the pads are removed, making Mozart shrivel up before our eyes. His early flame Katherina Cavalieri undergoes an opposite

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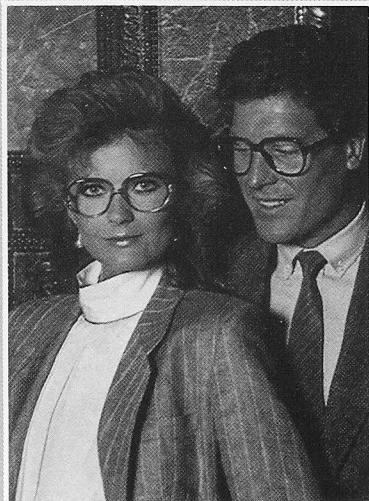
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Michael Murphy at The Empty Space: "One of Seattle's most successful practitioners of 'invisible' costuming."

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transformation: actress Helene McCardle is gradually transformed, through the progressive addition of pads, from a pretty young soubrette to a monstrously fat operatic diva.

The delicate choices a costume designer makes are made clear in Gates' designs for John Gilbert as the leading character of *Amadeus*, Mozart's arch-enemy Antonio Salieri. Shaffer portrays him at two different periods of his life: as the malevolent manipulator who brings about Mozart's ruin and death in the 1780s, and as a broken, dying old man in the 1820s.

Gilbert is a relatively slender man; Gates makes him seem positively frail as the aged Salieri by enveloping him in a cloak many sizes too large for him. For the younger man, a touch of padding at the shoulder (not at all an 18th-century touch in men's clothing) makes Salieri look indefinably more virile, more forceful than the men around him. And throughout, Salieri is dressed in shades of red, intense or muted, as befits his Mephistophelean role in the drama.

Gates has had a typically wide-ranging career as a costumer. Born in Boston, she became involved in theater early, and realized in the course of a show she both designed and acted in "that I was more interested in how people looked as they came on stage than in what they were saying to me. I knew I'd better be a designer."

Studies at Boston University and the University of California at Santa Barbara, professional credits as diverse as off-Broadway opera productions and the touring production of *The Gin Game* with Phyllis Thaxter have given her a wide perspective on her profession.

One of the happiest times in her career was the year she spent as designer for the circus at the Clown College in Venice, Florida. "Every clown student must create their own clown character, and that means their own clown costume, too. They design and build their own outfits. We were only there to give them advice, help them if need be. But there's something very satisfying about working with

clowns. In a way, they *are* their costumes, so they take costume very seriously; they love and appreciate their costumes in a way that most performers don't, and can't."

Gates got to design and build one circus number of her own: a clown ballet for the 108th edition of the Ringling Brothers' Circus, with inflated truck inner-tubes supporting the fluffy tutus of the clown ballerinas. But one year of the circus was enough. Still, something of the circus's fantasy has stayed with her work.

"I don't define myself as any particular kind of designer; but if I had to give a negative definition, I'd say I was *not* interested in shows that demand total historical accuracy. You have to stick to the basic elements of historical cut, the main seams, because they define the way the garment hangs; but beyond that it's great fun to find ways to express ideas and emotions through your own ideas about materials and color. I love to talk to my actors during fitting about what their costumes mean, how they ought to be worn, what they can do and can't do. It's a collaborative art form, as they say; it wouldn't be much fun if it weren't."

For Murphy, "the most enjoyable side of the business is doing invisible costumes. The challenge there is that every time you select an article of clothing, you're making a statement about character development. By the time you're finished, if you've done your job, you've done a full psychological study of the character.

"On one show I did, I spent an entire afternoon with an actress shopping for some particular severely British underclothing that her character had to wear. We not only found the right costume, but the time we spent together helped the actress get over a hangup about being undressed on stage—not just undressed, but looking poky and unattractive. I won't say that no director ever went shopping with an actress for lingerie—but a whole afternoon shopping for a girdle? There're some things we can do for a performer that no director can."

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