THE BIG SLAM

written by
Bill Corbett

directed by **Howard Shalwitz**

A CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

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A Contemporary Theatre

THE BIG SLAM

by Bill Corbett

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October 16 - November 16, 1997

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Meet Gordon Edelstein, Artistic Director

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And I hope that it is not too presumptuous to call you my friend. If you are here in the theatre today we must have something in common. I, too, love the theatre, and love what the theatre can do — what no other art form can.

We are all so different; our days are complex and sometimes troubling. But after we have rushed to our seats and the lights go down, theatre is a unifying force with extraordinary power to lure the odd lots of humanity — people of such different backgrounds, psychological make-ups, intellects, economic strata — into one room to laugh and weep together. It has the potential to be the most humanizing of experiences. For a moment, we experience our sister- and brotherhood. For a moment, we are friends.

I am thrilled to be joining this thriving arts community as ACT's artistic director. This extraordinary facility was meant to brim with life and I intend to fulfill that birthright. In addition to presenting work from the very best of our national and international theatre artists, I am looking forward to making a place for Seattle's prodigiously gifted home-grown talent.

Although I'm still very new in town, I can see that Seattle has the essential theatrical values of tolerance and humanity, that it welcomes emotional and intellectual courage, and appreciates curiosity, beauty and joy. ACT, through much of its history, has also reflected these values, and I am eager to present theatre that celebrates them.

I hope to see you again soon.

Sincerely,

Gordon Edelstein
Artistic Director

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About Kreielsheimer Place

Kreielsheimer Place was built in 1925 as the national headquarters, or Aerie #1, of the Fraternal Order of Eagles. Designed by local architect and engineer Henry Bittman, the Eagles Building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. One year later it was designated a Seattle Landmark to recognize its important role in local heritage. Decades of neglect took its toll on some of its cosmetic features, but by 1993 it was judged to be structurally sound and experts determined it could be restored as a public facility.

The renovation by ACT and its partner, Seattle Housing Resources Group (SHRG), received the approval of the National Park Service, the government agency that has jurisdiction over historic buildings. It saved the terra cotta exterior of the building and all but one of the interior historic landmark features. The building now holds a thrust theatre, an arena theatre and a cabaret space, as well as providing 44 units of much-needed downtown affordable housing. ACT opened Kreielsheimer Place in September, 1996.

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An Interview with PLAYWRIGHT

"SHIFT YOUR VOCABULARY, AND NO ONE CAN TOUCH YOU AGAIN.

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Think of us, in the room with you, right now.
We're about to go on a breathtaking journey.
We're all packed; we're excited.
And we want you to come with us.
Do you — right now —
want to come with us?"

STEPHANIE
THE BIG SLAM

Elizabeth: How did you get the idea for *The Big Slam*?

Bill: My idea for the play came from staying up late a lot and watching all those crummy infomercials. I was fascinated with this one power seminar led by this big, toothy, young guy who does these non-specific commercials about getting power and passion into your life. You never hear how it happens. People just testify to its results. And that was the spark for the play.

I was also interested in doing something about how the world of business self-help and new age books has developed a language that packages pure capitalism, pure corporate greed, money and success with self improvement and spiritual renewal. What interested me about it all was the way the info-mercial world and the world of these self-help business books toy with language until it is virtually meaningless and constitutes a new philosophy intended to help you through your life.

Elizabeth: Is that where the title came from?

Bill: *The Big Slam* seemed right when I began to write the characters as speaking in the high energy "slamming and jamming," "let's get into it" lingo of typical business self-improvement. "Slam" just kept standing up. I wasn't conscious of it at the time, but my agent pointed out shortly after I decided on it, that The Big Slam is also the name of a size of Pepsi you can get at your local 7-11. So he started calling it the "Pepsi Play." I was worried about that for a while but now I embrace it as another sign that these words are fairly meaningless after they have been trotted around so much.

There's also another sense to *The Big Slam* that fits within the context of what the main character, Orrin, talks about — rude life lessons that aren't necessarily invited. Even though I have a lot of sympathy for these characters, I do think that they are all assiduously avoiding hard lessons. They trowel on the language and relationship-speak at times just to make life easier for themselves.

I think there is a real tradition of developing a new morality with the English language. *The Big Slam* is a pretty light take on it. A definitive essay written by

BILL CORBETT

By Elizabeth Crane

George Orwell called "Politics of the English Language" was the first to point out that language can be used to soften things. He used examples of war-time terms that cropped up like "pistol whipped," etc. that make things seem more benign and less menacing than they are. Less descriptive and more sanitized. Today, you can hear a lot of what Orwell was talking about in politics when you hear a White House Aide say things like "mistakes were made." The passive voice implies that nobody actually made them. They just made themselves. There is a clinical, careful sub-language used by politics and politicians that is basically geared towards avoiding responsibility.

And it's not only politics — fields like advertising and grant writing all develop their own language. Evidence is everywhere, the gestures, jargon, all of which you see and hear in *The Big Slam.*

Elizabeth: Orrin's character takes us from the fast-paced present day all the way back to "the original dead white males — the Greeks," and historical figures like Solon. Can you talk about what interested you about connecting the modern day context of *The Big Slam* to history?

Bill: My interest in history goes back to the idea that the more insidious elements of politics, the degrading of the humanity of language and forgetting what it refers to, is an a-historical thing. This language doesn't acknowledge a history, it lives in an egocentric world. A lot of these platitudes that you hear in these self-help seminars don't acknowledge that there are much greater and substantive heartfelt versions of their philosophies that are already out there and have been there for thousands of years. These ancient philosophies have a greater human angle and more responsibility to them. Their message is not just about succeeding, it's about being a good person. And even if the self-help world distills them and waters them down, they still exist and still tower over these fairly trite and even mean-spirited versions of their philosophies.

Barbara Tuchman, a terrific history writer, wrote a book called *The March of Folly* that talked about how leaders have blown opportunity for greatness and for greater democracy throughout time, tracing back from ancient times through Vietnam. She mentions Solon and talks about how he was an ideal leader in a lot of ways whose example was never followed.

I think there is a lot of, and I wish I could think of a less pretentious way of saying it, a lot of a-historical thinking. Our society doesn't really want to look back. I certainly don't advocate living for the past or being too nostalgic but I believe there is a lot to be gleaned from what people have already learned.

Elizabeth: How does *The Big Slam* compare to other plays you have written?

Bill: I think I leaned back into making it more of a comedy. Most of my plays before this were still comedies, but quite a bit darker. This is also the first play I dared to write about non-working class people. I was a bit of a Marxist conscience for a while, or just a bogus young man's version of that, which I suspect I was. I am from Brooklyn, New York, and a lower-middle-class background, and felt I owed it to that background to extol it and see what the system was doing to people like that. I am not sure that's something I need to take into adulthood.

Now I am mostly writing for television, working on a show called "Mystery Science Theatre 3000." My theatre writing has slowed down which is fine for me for a while. After *The Big Slam* I also wrote a play called *Hate Mail* which is a meaner, different generation's version of *Love Letters* by A.R. Gurney. It played in New York last spring and will probably open in Chicago this fall. I plan to stay with "Mystery Science Theatre" for as long as it continues to do well but I have some notes and ideas for some theatre projects that I am looking forward to starting soon. ■

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Director's Notes

We late 20th-century Americans are bombarded by so much stimulation and so many options on a daily basis, it should come as no surprise that our best-seller lists are dominated by titles like *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health*, and *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*. In our search for a pathway through the minefield of daily living, titles like these hold out the promise of self-direction, success, longevity, and fulfillment based on a few tidy principles. Late-night infomercials extend this promise even further, offering an astonishing range of home video seminars (requiring no reading at all!) guaranteed to transform one's life overnight to a paradise of prosperity and ease.

In an earlier time, we might have turned to the great works of philosophy, religion, or history. But these yield their wisdom slowly, demanding that we pore over pages and pages of background, data, logic, and argumentation. Think of the dialogues of Plato, with their laborious dialectical questions and answers, each adding one tiny incremental point to the overall world view. How much easier to settle for pre-digested guidance from the masters of self-help — "put first things first," "think win/win," "seek first to understand, then to be understood."

Bill Corbett's *The Big Slam* rests on this contrast between the hard-won wisdom of the ages and the quick fix. It asks (albeit in a light-hearted way) what we mean by true success, and whether there is any short-cut to achieving it. It skewers the current American entrepreneurial craze by poking fun at the behavior and the very language it inspires.

At its core, however, *The Big Slam* is an old-fashioned romantic comedy about young people seeking connection and love. It has a time-tested two-couple structure, classic first-banana and second-banana character types, and a generous complement of twists and entanglements. The play may masquerade as a hip, hard-edged, very 90's experience, but don't believe it for a second. Bill Corbett is a softie at heart.

—*Howard Shalwitz*

Gordon Edelstein
Artistic Director

Susan Baird Trapnell
Managing Director

Gregory A. Falls
Founding Director

THE BIG SLAM

by Bill Corbett
directed by Howard Shalwitz

Set Designer	Jeff Frkonja
Costume Designer	David Zinn
Lighting Designer	Rick Paulsen
Sound Designer	David Pascal
Assistant Director	Elizabeth Crane
Stage Manager	Jeffrey K. Hanson

Cast
(in order of appearance)

Orrin	**Willie Weir**
Russell	**Mark Deklin Schwötzer**
Stephanie	**Shelley Reynolds**
Gail	**Julie Gustafson**

There will be one intermission.

Commissioned and initially produced by EYE OF THE STORM.
Casey Stangl, Artistic Director
John Spokes, Managing Partner

This production is sponsored by Coopers & Lybrand — Coopers & Lybrand L.L.P. a professional services firm

BOEING is a 1997 season underwriter. ACT's preview series is sponsored by PONCHO.

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A Contemporary Theatre dedicates its 1997 season to the memory of Gregory A. Falls, Founding Director, and Phil Schermer, Producing Director.

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The Actors

Julie Gustafson
Gail

Julie recently moved from Minnesota. *The Big Slam* will mark her debut at ACT. She was last seen as Ado Annie in the University of Washington's production of *Oklahoma!* in May. Other local credits include Duckling in *Our Country's Good* and Bette in *The Marriage of Bette and Boo.* Other roles include Beggar Woman in *Sweeney Todd*, Val in *A Chorus Line*, Alaura in *City of Angels*, Babe in *Crimes of the Heart*, and Lady Anne in *Richard III.* She will complete her BA in Drama at the UW in March. Julie is the 1997 School of Drama scholarship recipient.

Shelley Reynolds*
Stephanie

Shelley played Masha in *The Notebook of Trigorin* earlier this season and is delighted to be back at ACT. She has appeared as Hannah Snell in *Warrior* at Intiman, Katy Jume in *Mr. Universe* at the Empty Space, and as Hedda Gabler for Triad Ensemble. Other favorite roles include St. Joan for Greek Active and Pozzo for One World Theatre's touring production of *Waiting for Godot.* Shelley played Angel in *That Night*, which won Best Short at the 1996 Seattle International Film Festival. Television credits include *New Mowed Grass*, *Medicine Ball* and *Sex, Slugs, and Rock and Roll.* Shelley is a company member of Swine Palace Theatre in Louisiana, where she has appeared as Columbia in *The Rocky Horror Show.*

Mark Deklin Schwötzer*
Russell

Mark is delighted to be making his debut at ACT. His recent local credits include *The Taming of the Shrew* at Intiman Theatre, *Freewill and Wanton Lust* with Printer's Devil Theatre and *Love! Valour! Compassion!* in a co-production between Intiman and Berkeley Repertory Theatre; recent television credits include CBS' "Nash Bridges" and NBC's "Pandora's Clock." This spring, Mark received his MFA from the University of Washington Professional Actor Training Program, where his work included roles in *The Lower Depths*, *A Winter's Tale*, *An Ideal Husband*, *Heart of a Dog*, *Stevedore*, *1918*, *Tartuffe* and *Coriolanus*, as well as his one-man show, *Running from Cù Chulainn.* Many thanks to friends and family for their continued love and support.

Willie Weir*
Orrin

Willie last appeared at ACT as Seymour in the 1986 production of *Little Shop of Horrors.* Other credits include Iggy in *Little Lulu* at Seattle Children's Theatre; Leon/Davey in *The Voice of the Prairie* at Madison Repertory Theatre; and Tom Snout in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Sacramento Theatre Company. An adventure travel writer and photographer, Willie has spent a good part of the last seven years bicycling around the world. Commentaries from his journeys in India, South Africa and the Balkans aired on public radio station KUOW and are compiled in the recently released book, *Spokesongs: Bicycle Adventures on Three Continents.*

The Director and Production Staff

Gordon Edelstein
Artistic Director

Gordon was associate artistic director of Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, CT from 1989 until spring of this year, and assumed his title at ACT on September 8. As a director, he mounted the acclaimed revival of Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* on Broadway at Roundabout Theatre Company and Michael Henry Brown's *The Day the Bronx Died* first Off-Broadway and then at Tricycle Theatre in London. Also Off-Broadway, he has directed works by established writers such as Arthur Miller, Samuel Beckett, Constance Congdon, Stephen Wylie and Paula Vogel. While at Long Wharf he received two Connecticut Critics Directing Awards and directed such work as *The Philanthropist* by Christopher Hampton, *Anna Christie* by Eugene O'Neill, *All in the Timing* by David Ives, *Voir Dire* by Joe Sutton and *How Do You Like Your Meat* by Joyce Carol Oates. His other directing work has been seen around the country from Alaska to Washington D.C. Long committed to the development of contemporary artists, he has either directed or produced new work in production or workshop of such diverse writers as James Baldwin, Scholem Asch, Robbie Baitz, Darrah Cloud, Paula Vogel, Donald Margulies, Pearl Cleage, Silas Jones, Philip Hayes Dean, Peter Sagal, Christopher Durang, Paul Zaloom, Mac Wellman, Michael Henry Brown, Russell Davis and Jonathan Reynolds. While serving as associate artistic director of the Berkshire Theatre Festival for three and a half years, he commissioned the premieres of Paul Zaloom's *House of Horrors* and Mac Wellman's *Sincerity Forever*, both of which won Village Voice OBIE Awards after they

moved to New York. During his tenure in the Berkshires he also directed acclaimed productions of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, *The Prince*, by Arthur Miller, Alan Ayckbourn's *Woman in Mind* and Simon Gray's *Quartermaine's Terms.* Gordon was also nominated for an Emmy Award for his direction of "Abby My Love" for CBS, and directed "Brotherly Love" for HBO and "Notes for My Daughter" for ABC. He is married to gynecologist Joan Berman and has two children, Marlena and Noah.

SUSAN B. TRAPNELL
Managing Director

Susan joined ACT in 1982 as Administrative manager and became managing director in 1989. Susan holds a B.A. in French from the University of North Carolina and attended the University of Lyons in France. She also did graduate work in dance education at George Washington University. Prior to coming to ACT, Susan spent four years with Bill Evans Dance Company/Dance Theatre Seattle as Educational Director and then General Manager. She served as a UNESCO bilingual aide in Paris and held writing and editing positions in the Washington, DC, area. Other experience includes work with the National Urban League and a teaching position in Algeria. She is the president and past member of the Washington State Arts Alliance, a past member of the King County Arts Commission, a member of the Leadership Tomorrow class of 1992, and a board member of the Downtown Seattle Association. Susan is a native of Arlington, Virginia.

LESLIE SWACKHAMER
Associate Artistic Director

This season, in addition to serving as interim artistic director, Leslie co-directed *The Nina Variations* and directed *Going to St. Ives* and *Old Wicked Songs.* She previously directed the last two productions of *A Christmas Carol,* as well as *Avenue X* and *Later Life,* and produced ACT's new play development project, FirstACT. As artistic associate for four years at The Cleveland Play House, she developed, directed and dramaturged for the CPH new plays series, DiscoveREADS, the mainstage and the CPH Lab Company. Her productions of Paula Vogel's *The Baltimore Waltz* and the premiere of KC Davis' *LOVE & SCIENCE: an AIDS Diatribe* toured theatres throughout Ohio, and her premiere of David Eliet's *Japanese Ghost Stories* in Bratislava, Slovakia. Leslie has also directed new work for the Intiman Theatre, the Seattle Playwrights Alliance, the Playwright's Center (Minneapolis) and the Cleveland Public Theatre. Numerous world premieres include Paul Monette's *A Country Beyond Tears* (Northern Ohio Live Award of Excellence), Wendy Kesselman's *The Butcher's Daughter* (AT&T Onstage Award) and Anne Harris' *Scenes from the Penitentiary* (Mark Klein Award). Leslie directed the American premiere of Nicholas Wright's *Mrs. Klein.* She produced the U.S. debuts of the National Theatres of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, and an Eastern European Tour by the Cleveland Play House. She has directed as a guest artist at Case Western Reserve University, the University of Washington, and the University of Southern California. She is the Vice President of Theatre Puget Sound, representing the community of theatres and theatre artists in this region. Once upon a time, she practiced law, representing many entertainment clients. The recipient of a 1996 TCG Observership in new play development, Leslie holds an M.F.A. in directing from the University of Washington and is a member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers. She is married to Ten Eyck Swackhamer, and they reside happily on the non-sliding part of Magnolia.

BILL CORBETT
Playwright

Bill Corbett's plays have been produced at theatres all over the United States. *The Big Slam* was produced at Woolly Mammoth Theatre in Washington D.C., New Repertory Theatre in Boston and at Eye of the Storm Theatre in Minneapolis. *Hate Mail,* a collaboration with playwright Kira Obolensky, was produced by Eye of the Storm, and Primary Stages Theatre in N.Y. Three short plays of his were produced by the HBO Writers Project in Los Angeles. Other productions include *Cash Karma* at the Organic Theatre in Chicago; *Motorcade* at the Cricket Theatre in Minneapolis, Carleton College and in Tokyo, Japan; an adaptation of Heinrich Boll's novel *The Clown,* commissioned by the Guthrie Theatre and titled *This Ridiculous Dreaming,* produced at Theatre de la Lune in Minneapolis; and *Down the Pike,* which won the Actor's Theatre of Louisville National One-Act Play Contest in 1990. Corbett is a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., and a 1989 M.F.A. graduate of the Yale School of Drama. He is a core member of the Playwright's Center in Minneapolis, where he has also been the recipient of Jerome Playwriting Fellowships and a McKnight Advancement Grant. He is currently a writer and performer for the cable television show "Mystery Science Theatre 3000," and provides the voice of "Crow" for the program.

HOWARD SHALWITZ
Director

Howard is co-founder and artistic director of the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington D.C., which over 17 seasons has established a reputation as one of the nation's leading producers of innovative new plays. He recently directed Doug Wright's *Quills* both at Woolly Mammoth and in its premiere at the New York Theatre Workshop. This season he will serve as dramaturg for the premiere of Christi Stewart-Brown's *The Gene Pool,* and direct the premiere of Regina Porter's *Man, Woman, Dinosaur.* Other directing credits at Woolly Mammoth include *Raised in Captivity, Birth and After Birth, The Psychic Life of Savages, Goodnight Desdemona, Kvetch, Fat Men in Skirts, Strindberg in Hollywood, The Day Room, Aunt Dan and Lemon,* and many other plays. Howard has led Woolly Mammoth to 74 Helen Hayes nominations and 15 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding New Play five times — and has personally received nominations both as director and actor. He has also directed for Milwaukee Rep, The John F. Kennedy Center and The Bay Street Theatre Festival, and performed with Buffalo's Studio

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Arena, the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival, Soho Rep, and many other regional and New York companies. A recipient of the D.C. Mayor's Arts Award for Excellence, Howard is a graduate of Wesleyan and Brown Universities.

ELIZABETH CRANE
Assistant Director
Elizabeth has directed for the Seattle Playwrights Alliance and was an assistant director for *The Notebook of Trigorin* earlier this season. As assistant to the artistic director at ACT, she is currently working on a partnership project between ACT and Hedgebrook, a retreat for women writers on Whidbey Island, the Woman's Playwright Festival scheduled for May of 1998. Other projects include "FirstACT" and ACT's education and outreach program, "Playwrights in the Schools." She graduated from Wellesley College where she worked on numerous Shakespeare productions including *Macbeth, Troilus and Cressida, Henry IV part 1* and *King Lear.*

JEFF FRKONJA
Set Designer
Jeff is thrilled to be returning to ACT after spending four years on the East Coast teaching design and designing professionally for the Hilton Head Playhouse, the Charleston Ballet Theatre and the Piccolo Spoleto Festival. His last ACT scene design was for *The Falcon.* His settings have appeared locally at the Seattle Rep, Intiman, Tacoma Actors Guild, The Bathhouse, The Group and the Village Theatre. His setting for the critically acclaimed Charleston Ballet Theatre production of *The Rite of Spring* is now appearing with the Atlanta Ballet Company's production of that piece. Other favorite settings of his include *Romeo and Juliet* at The Bathhouse and most recently *Born Yesterday* at the Village. He also designs educational software and world wide web sites for the University of Washington.

JEFFREY K. HANSON*
Stage Manager
Since 1990, Jeff has stage managed 21 productions for ACT, among them *Blues for an Alabama Sky, Room Service, Laughter on the 23rd Floor, Tea, Later Life, The Gospel at Colonus, The Revengers' Comedies, Sunsets and Glories, Halycon Days, The Illusion,* and *Lloyd's Prayer.* Last season at the Seattle Repertory Theatre Jeff stage managed *True West* and *The Cider House Rules, Parts I and II.* Jeff also stage managed productions at Intiman Theatre Company and The Bathhouse Theatre. Other regional credits include productions at the Arizona Theatre Company and New Mexico Repertory Theatre. While living in Los Angeles, Jeff stage managed a dance company, coordinated a research laboratory in the UCLA Department of Psychology, and earned a graduate degree in theatre history. In addition, Jeff is a graduate of St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN.

DAVID PASCAL
Sound Designer
David's work as a composer, sound designer, synthesizer programmer and music director has been heard at most local professional theatres including Seattle Repertory Theatre, Intiman, Seattle Children's Theatre and ACT; at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival; and at the Club at La MaMa E.T.C. in New York. He has recorded music and sound effects for Emmy-winning KOMO-TV videos, produced albums for musical groups and created music and sound effects for an award-winning educational CD-ROM, as well as CD-ROM titles for the Discovery Channel and PC Gamer. He has worked since 1975 as a bassist in show and club bands, recording studios, theatre orchestras, and as backing for national acts. David holds a musical engineering degree from the University of Washington.

RICK PAULSEN
Lighting Designer
Rick is pleased to be designing his 37th show for ACT. Over the past 13 years, his lighting has been seen in such shows as *Tales From Hollywood, Voice of the Prairie, Halcyon Days, Red Noses, Lonely Planet, Diary of a Scoundrel, The Gospel at Colonus, Handing Down the Names, Hapgood, Eleemosynary* and from this season, *The Nina Variations, Room Service and Old Wicked Songs.* Rick's work has been seen extensively in Seattle's major theatres and across the country. Some recent work includes *True West* at the Seattle Rep, *The Illusion* at Arizona Theatre Company, *We Are Family* for the Seattle Men's Chorus, Steven Dietz' *Dracula* at the Empty Space and *Miss Julie* at the Portland Center Stage for which he won a Portland Drama Critics Circle award. Rick is the devoted father of five-year-old Paige.

DAVID ZINN
Costume Designer
David has recently completed *Hamlet*, directed by Barry Kyle at the Singapore Repertory Theatre, *Clean*, directed by Neil Pepe and *The Joy of Going Somewhere Definite*, directed by William Macy both at the Atlantic Theatre in New York, *The Cider House Rules, Parts One and Two* directed by Tom Hulce and Jane Jones at the Seattle Repertory Theatre; and three new works at the 1996 Humana Festival, including Steven Dietz' *Private Eyes* and *Gunshy*, directed by Gloria Muzio; as well as the recent West Coast premiere of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (Intiman Theatre/Berkeley Repertory Theatre). In New York, David is the resident costume designer for Target Margin Theatre and director David Herskovits, (including *Strictly Dishonorable, South, Mother Courage, Young Goodman Brown, Egypt*, and *Titus Andronicus*).

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Directors and choreographers at ACT are members of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreo-graphers, an independent national labor union.

Understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance.

Please check the castboard in the lobby for program changes.

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