DIRECTED BY KASI CAMPBELL

FEBRUARY 15 - MARCH 5, 2017

BY JANE MARTIN

DIRECTED BY KASI CAMPBELL

FEBRUARY 15 - MARCH 5, 2017
From the Dramaturg

What is the purpose of theater? Escapist entertainment or activism? This past fall, a public discussion erupted on this question, in which conservatives said that theater must always be “a safe place” separate from contemporary politics. Of course, the basis of the dramatic moment is conflict and the most engaging theater never offers easy platitudes or lessons but encourages democratic engagement and diverse perspectives. It employs the Socratic method of the dialectic—a conversation. Shakespeare understood this. Even when one character is speaking alone, either to him or herself or to the audience (based on directorial choices) in the convention of soliloquies, the character is engaging in a debate. And never more so than in the soliloquies of Hamlet of which the “To be or not to be” speech is the most obvious example.

Jane Martin’s H2O ostensibly revolves around a contemporary Broadway production of Hamlet but uses that composition to examine “structures of meaning” and how we find significance in our contemporary universe where religion and other societal edifices have lost power in the face of the cult of the individual, leaving an existential abyss. Set on opposite sides of this question, the two characters, Jake and Deborah, debate the implications of religious faith and empirical skepticism, and of the nature of theater within those enigmas.

Shakespeare’s Hamlet serves as producer, playwright, director, actor, clown, and even stage manager in both his machinations of court life and in his work with the visiting players to produce The Mousetrap, the performance on which the court conspiracies hinge. Deborah, hired to play Ophelia, becomes an innocent participant in the climactic moments of Jake’s drama both onstage and in his personal life. The theatrical contract of the willing suspension of disbelief and the safety it implies is cracked open leaving us to examine our own contradictions.

—Lisa A. Wilde
H2O

The Play

About the Playwright

BIOGRAPHY

A Kentuckian, Jane Martin first came to national attention for Talking With, a collection of monologues premiering in Actors Theatre of Louisville’s 1982 Humana Festival of New American Plays. Since its New York premiere at Manhattan Theatre Club in 1982, Talking With has been performed around the world, winning the Best Foreign Play of the Year Award in Germany from Theatre Heute magazine. Her other work includes: Vital Signs, Cementville, Keely And Du (Pulitzer Prize nominee; 1994 American Theatre Critics Association Best New Play Award), Jack And Jill (1997 American Theatre Critics Association Best New Play Award); Anton In Show Business (2001 American Theatre Critics/Steinberg Principal Citation), Mr. Bundy, and Flaming Guns Of The Purple Sage.

H2O’s playwright Jane Martin is notoriously private and mysterious and we were unable to interview her for the audience guide. Here, instead is an article about the inception of the play from The Contemporary American Theater Festival website originally published on March 14, 2014.

FROM IDEA TO HONOR: JANE MARTIN’S H2O

by Ed Herendeen

It was December 2011, at a local holiday party, that Peggy and I ran into Lisa Welch. Lisa and her husband Paul have long attended CATF and are two of our most ardent supporters. Over the previous fall, Ed had been receiving pitches from agents and playwrights for a new CATF commission, which was possible due to a gift from Shepherd University in honor of our 20th anniversary season in 2010. Ed was committed to an idea from Mark St. Germain, who wanted to write a play about the complicated friendship between F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. That play would go on to be last summer’s Scott and Hem in the Garden of Allah.

But then something else exciting occurred. We received a written pitch from the highly secretive Jane Martin. It read:

In H2O (in this case, meaning Hamlet to Ophelia), a young man who aimlessly arrives in LA becomes a giant movie star with little acting background. Because of his sudden eminence he is invited to do a Hamlet on Broadway. He has no internal structure to deal with or understand his success and takes the Hamlet in the hopes it will make him understand his relationship to acting and thus provide his scattershot life with a meaning. He has complete casting approval and holds the Ophelia auditions in a sublet arranged through a construction worker he grew up with. A young woman who has not yet succeeded in NYC has a callback. When she arrives she finds him in bed with another auditioner and while she sleeps he has cut his wrists (yes, it’s also a comedy). Our heroine gets him to the hospital and gets the part. Turns out she’s an evangelical Christian. And the play concerns structures of meaning and lack of meaning and how meaning is achieved. It’s a dramaticedylovestory.

We had the chance to commission a new Jane Martin play, to be directed by theater legend Jon Jory (who founded the Humana Festival of New American Plays while Artistic Director at Actors Theatre of Louisville). Plus, it sounded great. But what to do? Commissioning is not only a leap of faith on the part of a theater company to believe in a playwright’s ability to produce a quality piece of art based squarely on a seed of an idea, but it also has financial considerations. In addition to the regular royalty payments CATF authors receive, there would be an upfront commission fee.

We were already on board with Mark St. Germain and excited about that project. How could we afford another? And then we ran into Lisa and Paul, explained what had landed in our laps, and asked if they had any interest in bringing a new play to life, from scratch, 18 months from then. Not only did they say yes, they even sought out another local couple—Larry Dean and Mina Goodrich—to partner with them in the endeavor.
The Play

So, we had the ability to have two commissions, both set to premiere during the 2013 season—the year we marked our 100th play produced.

Not quite a year after the initial pitch, in November 2012, we received the first draft of the play from Jane’s agent, Bruce Ostler at Bret Adams, Ltd. A few weeks later it was read for the first time with Mr. Jory in St. Louis and then we did a private reading, with its eventual cast, in New York City in April 2013 at the home of Doug Moss (the architect behind the Center for Contemporary Arts) with many special guests in attendance. The show went into rehearsals in June.

The end result was the world premiere of “H2O” last summer, with Mr. Jory at the helm, and two extraordinary actors (Diane Mair and Alex Podulke) tearing up our intimate 90 seat theater, with a 10-person crew seamlessly shifting from scene to scene to (countless) scene.

Here is Jon Jory speaking about the play: https://vimeo.com/69377923

Structure and Themes

METADRAMA or META THEATRE

Scholar Richard Hornby writes that, “Briefly, metadrama can be defined as drama about drama; it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense drama itself.” Many of Shakespeare’s plays are metadramatic constructions whose central concern is the operation of the theatre itself. His great tragedy Hamlet uses several conceits and moments to make comments on the art of making theater and to keep the audience aware of their role in the performance and the play’s essential artifice.

A company of actors visits the court in Hamlet's Denmark and Hamlet conspires to use a play (the aptly named “Mousetrap”) as a device to detect King Claudius’ guilt in King Hamlet’s death. As Prince Hamlet says: “The play’s the thing/ Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.” The play within a play—always a distinctive sign of metadrama—occurs within the center of Shakespeare’s play and provides the turning point for the play’s action.

Jane Martin’s play H2O, follows two actors—an action movie star who is playing Hamlet and the religious struggling actress auditioning for Ophelia—in the process of putting on a production of Shakespeare’s play on Broadway and grappling with both the themes of the play and questions about the role of theater and the significance of live performance in contemporary culture, again calling attention to the nature of drama.

Some other examples of theatrical adaptations or metatheatrical versions of Shakespeare’s Hamlet (which itself was probably an adaptation of an earlier Thomas Kyd play) Include I Hate Hamlet by Paul Rudnick and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead by Tom Stoppard and even Disney’s The Lion King.

Scenic parallels

In Act I of Shakespeare’s play, Prince Hamlet returns home to Denmark from Wittenberg University on the occasion of
his father’s unexpected death and his mother’s hasty remarriage to his uncle who has taken over the throne. In the first
two acts, Hamlet has several soliloquies reflecting on the possibilities of suicide

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on ’t, ah fie! ’Tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely.

He also re-connects with his childhood love Ophelia who returns his gifts to her.

In scenes 1-6 of H2O, Deborah comes to Jake's apartment to audition for Ophelia who finds that he has attempted suicide. Her audition scene is the moment when Ophelia sees Hamlet for the first time on his return. In Act II of Hamlet, the acting company arrives and Hamlet considers the nature of drama which he says is, “as ’twere to hold a mirror up to nature.” Jake and Deborah also discuss the purpose of theater during the picnic in scene nine. Jake says acting “is senseless…one of a hundred distractions that gets us through a meaningless landscape” but concedes that Shakespeare “knows something and out of this mysterious knowledge he makes poetry that kills. So I thought I would attach my meaningless self to his meaningful self and see if it worked like a transfusion.” Earlier, Deborah has argued that the existence of Shakespeare is proof of the existence of God as he “transcends man while showing what man could be.”

In Act IV of Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet is absent from the action of the play, having been put on a boat to England by Claudius with a note demanding Hamlet’s execution. Ophelia and Gertrude have an intense scene together when Ophelia appears at court, having gone mad. Later in the act, Ophelia’s death by drowning is reported. In H2O’s scenes, 9 and 10, Jake announces that he will need to leave rehearsals to go to Los Angeles for an awards ceremony. He takes Deborah with him and she spends time there with his mother. Deborah seeks advice from her father who gives her the same advice Polonius gives Ophelia—to not let the man take her virginity.

In scene 10, Jake complains about Shakespeare’s shoddy playwriting in Acts IV and V of Hamlet: “he leaves out all the key scenes from ‘can’t kill Claudius’ to ‘must kill Claudius’ and what the hell kind of playwriting is that? This is the greatest play ever written?”

Towards the end of the play, Jake becomes sexually rough towards Deborah, echoing Hamlet’s rude and very public abuse of Ophelia in Act III when he tells her “get thee to a nunnery,” perhaps to make her hostile towards him or to try to convince everyone that he is mad. Similarly Jake asks Deborah “what makes your virginity …so valuable in this whorehouse?” and then goes on to publicly humiliate her.

WATER

The title of the play may be understood to mean Hamlet to Ophelia or as the chemical formula for water. Baptism is a Christian rite of admission and commitment to a church almost invariably with the use of water. The canonical Gospels report that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in a deep river. The usual form of baptism among early Christians was
by immersion either totally (submerged completely under the water) or partially (standing or kneeling in water while water was poured on him or her). Adult baptisms in several Protestant sects include full immersion. Water, then, is considered a form of purification.

In Shakespeare’s play, Ophelia dies by drowning in a river. It is unclear whether it was accidental or intentional but her death is treated as a suicide. Queen Gertrude describes her death:

There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

Laertes says of her:
Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears.

**RELIGIOUS FAITH VS. EXISTENTIAL HUMANISM**

At the time that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* in 1600, Europe was in the midst of the Renaissance. Access to texts from the Greek and Roman classical period as well as the invention of the printing press allowed more individuals to learn from the pre-Christian writings of philosophers and artists. At the same time, the Catholic Church was losing its control and power due to awareness of its corruption at many levels and the challenging option of Protestantism which, among other differences, emphasized the individual’s personal experience of God rather than a relationship mediated by a priest. The Enlightenment with its emphasis on logic and empiricism accompanied this new focus on the individual and led to a questioning of both Christian practices and the existence of God. By the end of the nineteenth century, the philosopher Nietzsche declared “God is dead.” For some, the release from a controlling and judgmental church was freeing but for others, this lack of structure for one’s life created a huge void. If there was no God watching, comforting and creating rules for us, how do we live our lives? If there is no life after death, how our lives more than what Hobbes called “nasty, brutish and short”? The twentieth century existentialists characterized this belief as existence preceding meaning—our lives have only the meaning and ethical values that we, not some outside force, create for them, giving us tremendous freedom but also complete responsibility. Even Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the sixteenth century, found himself at the crossroads between Christian values forbidding revenge murders and suicide and the new humanism which made him question the purpose of existence in his soliloquies.

6. **H2O AUDIENCE GUIDE**
DEBORAH means “bee” in Hebrew. In the Old Testament Book of Judges, Deborah is a judge and prophetess who leads the Israelites when they are threatened by the Canaanites. She forms an army under the command of Barak, and together they destroy the army of the Canaanite commander Sisera. Long a common Jewish name, Deborah was first used by English Christians after the Protestant Reformation, and it was popular among the Puritans.

JACOB is from the Latin Iacobus, which was from the Greek Ιακωβος (Iakobos), which was from the Hebrew name וּבֹקֲעַי (Ya’aqov). In the Old Testament Jacob (later called Israel) is the son of Isaac and Rebecca and the father of the twelve founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. He was born holding his twin brother Esau’s heel, and his name is explained as meaning “holder of the heel” or “supplanter”, because he twice deprived his brother of his rights as the firstborn son (see Genesis 27:36). Other theories claim that it is in fact derived from a hypothetical name like לֵאְבֹקֲעַי (Ya’aqov’el) meaning “may God protect”. The English names Jacob and James derive from the same source, with James coming from Latin Iacomus, a later variant of Iacobus.

—(behindthename.com)

JACOB AND THE ANGEL
“The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” The sun rose upon
him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip on the sinew of the thigh.”

—Genesis 32:22-32

Here is one exegesis on the story: http://www.preparingforeternity.com/sr/sr13.htm

ABADJIAN is an Armenian name like Kardashian. Armenians experienced a terrible genocide of 1.5 million Armenians at the hands of the Ottoman Turks during World War I. The starting date is conventionally held to be 24 April 1915, the day that Ottoman authorities rounded up, arrested, and deported 235 to 270 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders from Constantinople to Ankara, the majority of whom were eventually murdered. The genocide was carried out during and after World War I and implemented in two phases: the wholesale killing of the able-bodied male population through massacre and subjection of army conscripts to forced labor, followed by the deportation of women, children, the elderly, and the infirm on death marches leading to the Syrian desert.

Notable Armenian settlements in Pakistan can be found in the cities of Karachi, Lajore and in the capital Islamabad although Pakistan does not recognize Armenia. The Republic of Armenia declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.
BUDDHA is the founder of the philosophy of Buddhism which emphasizes nonviolence, non-attachment, loving-kindness and meditation. He is believed to have lived and taught mostly in the eastern part of Ancient India sometime between the sixth and fourth centuries.

VISHNU is the second god in the Hindu triumvirate. He is the preserver and protector of the universe. His role is to return to the earth in troubled times and restore the balance of good and evil. So far, he has been incarnated nine times, but Hindus believe that he will be reincarnated one last time close to the end of this world.
**MASOCHIST** is a person who derives sexual gratification from their own pain or humiliation. In general use a person who enjoys an activity that appears to be painful or tedious.

Pronunciation /ˈmæskɪst/

**NARCISSISTIC** personality disorder is a mental disorder in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for admiration and a lack of empathy for others. But behind this mask of ultraconfidence lies a fragile self-esteem that's vulnerable to the slightest criticism. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria for narcissistic personality disorder include these features:

- Having an exaggerated sense of self-importance
- Expecting to be recognized as superior even without achievements that warrant it
- Exaggerating your achievements and talents
- Being preoccupied with fantasies about success, power, brilliance, beauty or the perfect mate
- Believing that you are superior and can only be understood by or associate with equally special people
- Requiring constant admiration
- Taking advantage of others to get what you want
- Having an inability or unwillingness to recognize the needs and feelings of others
- Being envious of others and believing others envy you
- Behaving in an arrogant or haughty manner
- Having secret feelings of insecurity, shame, vulnerability and humiliation. To feel better, you may react with rage or contempt and try to belittle the other person to make yourself appear superior

―(DSM 5)

**RENEWALIST CHRISTIAN** is an umbrella term for Pentecostals, Charismatics, Third Wave Christians and Global South churches. Classic Pentecostalism is the first of three waves that observers classify as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in latter days. The Azusa Street Revival, led by William Seymour from 1906 to 1915, propelled this movement and included speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy.

Mainline Protestant denominations, independent charismatic churches, and parts of the Roman Catholic Church comprise this Charismatic movement that emerged in the 1960’s, considered the Second Wave. The Third Wave, sometimes referred to as the signs and wonders movement, is a movement that gained ground in the 1980’s. The third wave constituents are evangelicals who believe that the miraculous or sign gifts portrayed in the Gospels and Book of Acts continue to the present. They are distinguished from other evangelicals by their belief in the continuation of the spiritual gifts, including healing, tongues, miracles, prophecy, and word of knowledge. Renewalist practices—such as receiving divine healing or direct revelations, witnessing the devil or evil spirits being driven out of a person, or speaking or praying in tongues—are particularly common among Pentecostal Protestants.

―www.christianitytoday.com
MULE MINISTRIES
Literally, contemporary people who proselytize by harnessing a mule to a cart in emulation of Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem on a mule, and, allegedly, the method the first apostles used to bring members to their services.

—http://www.sjnewsonline.com/article/20101027/NEWS/310279875

DESCARTES AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: Rene Descartes (1596-1650) was a French Age of Enlightenment philosopher whose “Cartesian” belief system emerged from empirical evidence (“Cogito ergo sum” or “I think therefore I am”). While belief in a Christian God is an act of faith and not a logical conclusion, Descartes attempted to prove the existence of God using a logical argument. Descartes’ ontological (nature of being) argument goes as follows: (1) Our idea of God is of a perfect being, (2) it is more perfect to exist than not to exist, (3) therefore, God must exist. He goes on to make the controversial claim that we all have an idea of God as an infinite being. Because our idea of God is of an infinite being, it must have infinite objective reality. He goes on to use an innate logical principle: something cannot come from nothing thus an infinite being must exist.

The teleological (earth-based) or intelligent design argument, often connected with William Paley in the eighteenth century, is an argument for the existence of God or, more generally, for an intelligent creator “based on perceived evidence of deliberate design in the natural or physical world. Since the world exhibits such order and intricacy, there must be a creative mind responsible for it, and that is God.

—(Principles of Philosophy)

JONAH 2:2
“and Jonah said, “I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice.” (Jonah 2.2)

Out of the belly of hell—Among the Hebrews שֶׁאֹלֶל sheol means the grave, any deep pit, the place of separate spirits, etc. Here the prophet represents himself as in the bottom of the sea; for so sheol must be understood in this place.

JOHN 12:46
Jesus said: “And whoever sees Me sees the One who sent Me. I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in Me should remain in darkness. As for anyone who hears My words and does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world.”

MATTHEW 18:21
Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times!…
HEIRLOOM APPLES include Braeburn, Winesap, Arkansas Black, Ashmead’s Kernel, Cortland, Granny Smith, and Cox Orange Pippin, all of which are at least 100 years old.

SINGLE WIDE 1970s TRAILER
The circa-1970 mobile home has a squared exterior, with “house type” windows and exterior doors. On the inside, a width of 12 feet and length of 65 feet provide more living space than ever before. Prices for newly-built rigs begin around $5,000 and end at $18,000.

—http://portablelevittown.blogspot.com/2012_04_01_archive.html
**Krupp Bagger 288** is a bucket-wheel excavator or mobile strip mining machine built by the German company Krupp.

When its construction was completed in 1978, Bagger 288 superseded Big Muskie as the heaviest land vehicle in the world, at 13,500 tons.

**Carcanet**

- **noun** *car·ca·net (ˈkär-kə-nət)*
- archaic an ornamental necklace, chain, collar, or headband
- **Origin and Etymology:** Middle French *carcan*
- **First Known Use:** circa 1530; mentioned in *Lord of the Rings*
Questions for Discussion

1. In a play that concerns a production of *Hamlet*, how important is it for the audience to know the plot and themes of the original? How common is knowledge of Hamlet?

2. Jake says he would rather believe in “true chaos than false order.” What does he mean by this? What are the benefits and losses of following either of these systems?

3. Read one of Hamlet’s soliloquies and identify moments where he discusses religious values and where he emphasizes individual reason and choice.

4. Setting aside your personal beliefs, what are the purposes and benefits of organized religion? Of theater? Is there any overlap? Theater was for centuries a religious ritual. What conclusions can you make from your observations?
From the Director

The mythical Silenus, tutor and companion to Dionysus, the Greek God of wine, theatre and religious ecstasy, whispered this dark philosophy in the ear old King Midas, “That the best thing for a man is not to be born, and if already born, to die as soon as possible.” Philosophers and scholars have debated this nihilistic wisdom to explain Hamlet’s eternal hold our imagination. Nietzsche offers up Hamlet’s horror at the absurdity of existence as a reason for his inaction, while Harold Bloom writes, “If we remain in a harsh world where, with Horatio, we will draw out our breath in pain, it is because we are not yet ready to accept Hamlet’s judgment that the obliteration of consciousness is an absolute felicity.” Hamlet gazes deeply into the abyss, yet leaves his story as a hero to us, because his dazzling monologues exploring consciousness are forever etched in our minds and on our souls.

And so we arrive at H2O where ultimate Hollywood navel-gazer meets literature’s eternal gazer of the abyss….accompanied by an Ophelia that wafts of fire and brimstone more than columbine, fennel and rue. NO PRESSURE —What could possibly go wrong?

— Kasi Campbell
Design

SET DESIGN, By Daniel Ettinger
COSTUME DESIGN, By Ben Kress

Deborah

Jake
H2O Cast

Robbie Gay

Krenée A. Tolson

◇ Denotes Member of Actors’ Equity Association
◇◇ Equity Membership Candidate
Theater Etiquette

Attending the theater will be a positive experience for everyone if you observe a few simple courtesies:

- Turn off and put away all electronic devices prior to entering the theater.
- Taking photographs and video recording in the theater is prohibited.
- Do not place your feet on the seat in front of you.
- The actors onstage can see and hear the audience just as well as the audience can see and hear them. Please refrain from talking or moving around during the performance as it can be distracting to the actors, as well as to other audience members.
- Feel free to respond to the action of the play through appropriate laughter and applause. The actors enjoy this type of communication from the audience!
- Have fun! Attending theater should be an enjoyable experience.