



American Conservatory Theater

BURN 'THIS' LANFORD WILSON





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American Conservatory Theater

Edward Hastings
Artistic Director

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The American Conservatory Theater was
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BURN THIS

by Lanford Wilson

May 2 through June 24
Stage Door Theater

Tickets and Information: (415) 749-2ACT



Lanford Wilson — With a Difference

by Dennis Powers



A.C.T.'s cast of *5th of July* with playwright Lanford Wilson (seated center), director Edward Hastings (seated left), Isiah Whitlock (seated right), Danette Pachtner, Daniel Kern, Mark Murphy, Barbara Dirickson (left to right, second row), and Peter Davies (upper right).

Lanford Wilson, the author of *Burn This*, has sometimes been labeled "the natural successor to Tennessee Williams." As critic Ruby Cohn puts it, "In the tradition of Williams, Wilson is tender to deviants, valuing them more highly than those who preserve the norms."

In his deep compassion for the lonely, the lost and the outsider who doesn't belong anywhere and can't figure out why; and in his ability to look beyond the bravado of the tough-talking rebel to find the longing of the inarticulate poet hidden beneath, Wilson sometimes evokes Williams's beautiful losers. But if his sensibility stamps him as part of a recognizable American literary tradition, Wilson brings that sensibility to bear on distinctive contemporary characters whose unconventional attitudes and behavior would have automatically excluded him from the theatrical mainstream only a generation ago.

Wilson's plays have introduced us to prostitutes, hustlers, pimps, transvestites, drug dealers and their clients — not as freaks on display, but as fixtures of the

American urban scene whose humanity is as rich and full as that of the more conventional characters with whom they often share the stage in Wilson's world.

He asks us to set aside our conventional values here in the darkness of the theater and to acknowledge, when all the externals have been stripped away, how much of ourselves we recognize in them — and vice versa.

Wilson's other great gallery of characters is the one on view in his plays about small-town America, including those set in and around Lebanon, Missouri, where he was born in 1937 and spent his early years. But even in these works — and they are some of his most successful — he doesn't settle for the cozy sentimentality of ersatz Americana. Over the gentle romantic comedy-drama of *Talley's Folly* (1980), for instance, falls the shadow of anti-Semitism. And in *5th of July* (1978), produced by A.C.T. in 1979 (prior to its Broadway opening the following season), the couple at the center of the play are two men, a paraplegic Vietnam vet and his botanist lover. Wilson makes no apol-

ogies for their love and, indeed, strongly suggests that their relationship has a lot more going for it than the one shared by the play's heterosexual lovers.

The urban and rural settings of Wilson's plays are far from separate worlds. Like his dialogue, in fact, they often overlap: city people are bemused by the folkways of their small-town counterparts, and young people from the heartland are aghast at what they discover as they struggle to make their way through the urban jungle of the Eastern United States. Wilson tends to avoid labeling his characters as either "good" or "bad." He doesn't give us villains, only people at the mercy of fear or shame or foolish dreams, doing what they have to do, surviving as best they can in a world that offers them little access to truth — even if they were equipped to recognize it. As the great French director Jean Renoir liked to say when he talked about the characters in his films, "Everyone has his reasons."

In Wilson's plays, character takes precedence over plot or social "relevance," yet several of the plays deal with topical issues — urban decay, growing alienation, drug abuse, the threat of nuclear disaster, carcinogens in the workplace — usually in an indirect manner. Thematic material becomes an aspect of characterization rather than a subject for soap-box oratory.

When A.C.T. introduced its audiences to Wilson's work in 1973 with Allen Fletcher's production of *The Hot l Baltimore*, the playwright had already been a mainstay of New York's off-off-Broadway scene for a decade or so. Set in a crumbling inner-city hotel where the motley assortment of residents bide their time until the scheduled demolition of the building, the play won a New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. It was also the first of three Wilson plays to join the A.C.T. repertory in the 1970s and early '80s. *5th of July* (1979) was the second, followed by *Angels Fall* (1984). Edward Hastings directed both productions.

Continued on page 6

American Conservatory Theater

presents

BURN THIS

(1987)

by Lanford Wilson

Directed by Albert Takazauckas

Scenery by Ralph Funicello

Costumes by Sandra Woodall

Lighting by Derek Duarte

Sound by Stephen LeGrand

Fight Choreography by Larry Henderson

The Cast

Anna Lauren Lane

Burton Rick Hamilton

Larry Wesley Mann

Pale Richard Butterfield

There will be one intermission.

Stage Management Karen Van Zandt and Alice Elliott Smith

Understudies

Anna — Mary Beth Smith; *Burton, Larry, Pale* — Andrew Dolan

This production is made possible in part by American Express.



LANFORD WILSON
continued from page 4

Talley's Folly, which the playwright once called "a waltz and a valentine," was the first of Wilson's plays to find wide popular acceptance on Broadway, winning both the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award in the process. Next to make the move uptown from the off-Broadway Circle Repertory Company, Wilson's longtime artistic home in the heart of Greenwich Village, were *5th of July* and *Angels Fall*. Like their predecessor, they were honored with "best play" Tony nominations and directed by Marshall Mason, who has staged the original productions of most Wilson plays. Their artistic relationship has spanned more than two decades and is generally regarded as one of the most enduring and productive in American theater history.

The enthusiastic notices for *Burn This*, which opened on Broadway October 14, 1987, pointed out that the new work had its share of Wilson trademarks but at the same time marked something of a stylistic departure for the playwright. In addition to concentrating on only four characters instead of fifteen (*The Hot I Baltimore*) or twenty-five (*Balm in Gilead*), its tone struck several critics as different from the one they had come to expect from Wilson.

Over the years, some critics had characterized his gentle, often deceptively casual style as "Chekhovian": characters start talking about what seems like nothing in particular and before you realize it, you've learned a lot about them and you're engrossed in their problems. *Burn This* takes a somewhat different approach. "In the sense that it deals with lonely and displaced characters," Mel Gussow wrote in the *New York Times*, "*Burn This* is in the Wilson tradition. Where it breaks dramatic ground for the author is in its passion. . . . Mr. Wilson exposes deep uncauterized emotional wounds and offers no salve." In *Newsweek*, Jack Kroll called it "a mainline shot of theatrical adrenaline for an audience that hasn't seen or heard anything to match [its] sheer theatricality in years. . . . The play has a voracious vitality and an almost manic determination to drive right into the highest voltage that life can register."

Once again, *Burn This* snagged a Tony nomination as the season's best new drama, as well as six others for its direc-

tion, performances and design.

In writing *Burn This*, Wilson set himself a formidable challenge: to create a romantic drama that doesn't pull any emotional punches, yet is plausible in the context of contemporary life in Manhattan's Soho district — not the fantasy lifestyles of the rich and famous, but the lives of New Yorkers who grit their teeth and face the subway every morning, and try not to worry about muggers every night.

Anna is a gifted soloist with a small but well established dance company. Now in her early thirties, she's hoping to make the transition to choreographer when her dancing days are over. She shares the Soho loft that doubles as her studio with Larry, a gay man who earns his living as an advertising copywriter. Professionally, the most successful of the characters is Burton, Anna's boyfriend, a screenwriter

specializing in sci-fi epics that depend more on high-tech special effects than probing characterizations.

As *Burn This* opens, Anna and Larry are mourning the death of Robbie, their dear friend and roommate and Anna's frequent dancing partner, recently killed with his lover Dominic in a freak boating accident. A few weeks after the funeral, Anna is roused at five in the morning by the unexpected and unwelcome noise of Robbie's brother Pale pounding relentlessly on her door and bellowing her name up and down the hallway.

It's an unlikely beginning for one of the most powerful and honest portrayals of a relationship between a man and a woman in recent American drama — a gripping, vividly entertaining play by an outstanding American playwright at the peak of his powers.

About the Playwright



DIANE GURUNTZKI

Lanford Wilson received the 1980 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for *Talley's Folly*. He is a founding member of Circle Repertory Company in New York, and is one of that company's twenty-one resident playwrights.

Most of his work premiered at Circle Rep: *The Family Continues* (1972), *The Hot I Baltimore* (1973), *The Mound Builders* (1975), *Serenading Louie* (1976), *5th of July* (1978), *Talley's Folly* (1980), *A Tale Told* (1981), and *Angels Fall* (1982) — all directed by Marshall Mason — and the one-act plays *Brontosaurus* (1977) and *Thymus Vulgaris* (1982).

His other plays include *Balm in Gilead* (1965), *The Gingham Dog*

(1966), *The Rimers of Eldritch* (1967), *Lemon Sky* (1969), *Talley and Son* (the third play in the Talley Trilogy; 1985), and some twenty produced one-acts. He has also written the libretto for Lee Hoiby's opera of Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke* and two television plays, *Taxi!* and *The Migrants* (based on a short story by Tennessee Williams). His translation of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* was commissioned and produced by the Hartford Stage Company.

Mr. Wilson's other awards include the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Outer Critics' Circle Award, Obies for *The Hot I Baltimore* and *The Mound Builders*, a Drama-Logue Award for *5th of July* and *Talley's Folly*, the Vernon Rice Award for *The Rimers of Eldritch*, and Tony nominations for *Talley's Folly*, *5th of July*, and *Angels Fall*. He has received the Brandeis University Creative Arts Award in Theatre Arts and the Institute of Arts and Letters Award.

Burn This opened at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in 1987 and later played on Broadway. He is currently writing the screenplay for the film version.

Lanford Wilson makes his home in Sag Harbor, New York.

Who's Who



RICHARD BUTTERFIELD, who is now in his fourth season with the company, has appeared as Cléante in *The Imaginary Invalid*, Charley Darnay in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Edgar in *King Lear*, the Soldier in *Sunday in the Park with George*, Tony in *Woman in Mind*, Captain Cummings in *Diamond Lil*, Billy in *The Real Thing*, Young Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, Miles Gloriosus in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Bluebeard in *Saint Joan*, and in *Side by Side by Sondheim*, *Feathers*, and *Faustus in Hell*. He has also worked with the San Jose Repertory Company, Berkeley Shakespeare Festival, and Berkeley Jewish Theatre. Last summer he acted in two productions in Connecticut: A.C.T.'s *Saint Joan* at the American Festival Theatre in Stratford and *Woman in Mind* at the Westport Playhouse. Mr. Butterfield is a graduate of Stanford University (with honors in international relations) and A.C.T.'s Advanced Training Program. He now teaches and directs in the A.T.P., teaches in the Young Conservatory, and serves on the Board of Trustees as one of two artist members.



ANDREW DOLAN recently graduated from A.C.T.'s Advanced Training Program.

His studio roles include Clarence and Richmond in *Richard III*, Ben in *The Little Foxes*, Austin in *True West*, Sparkish in *The Country Wife*, and Tiger Brown in *The Threepenny Opera*. He has played Hal Carter in *Picnic* and Carl in *Getting Out* at City College of San Francisco. Last summer Mr. Dolan appeared in *Coming Attractions* for Encore Theater Company. He appeared as Keith Rienzi in A.C.T.'s Plays-in-Progress production *Pick Up Ax*, and in *Hapgood*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *Marco Millions*.



Since his return to A.C.T. in 1986 **RICK HAMILTON** has appeared as Barsad in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the Bailiff in *Nothing Sacred*, Bill in *Woman in Mind* (which he also played last summer at the Westport Playhouse with Sally Kirkland), Oswald in *King Lear*, Paul Cowan and Jim in *End of the World . . .*, Max in *The Real Thing*, and Elyot in *Private Lives*. He was a member of the company from 1973 through 1976, during which time he appeared in *Desire Under the Elms* (which toured the Soviet Union), *General Gorgious*, *The Threepenny Opera*, and as Tranio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, which was televised for the PBS series "Theatre in America." During his ten seasons with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival he played such roles as Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, Hotspur in *Henry IV, Part I*, Marc Antony in *Julius Caesar*, and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. He has also spent seasons with the Alley Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Dallas Shakespeare Festival, and the Los Angeles Theatre Center. Mr. Hamilton was a member of the original cast of *Amadeus*, and played Jack Harkley in the film *The Principal*. This season he recently co-

directed and appeared in the Plays-in-Progress production *Inside Technocult*.



LAUREN LANE recently graduated from the Conservatory's Advanced Training Program, where she has played Arkadina in *The Seagull*, Audrey and Charles (the wrestler) in *As You Like It*, and Lavinia in *Another Part of the Forest*. This season she appeared in *The Imaginary Invalid* and *Judevine*, and played Lula in *Dutchman* and the title role in *Clara* in the A.C.T./Lorraine Hansberry co-production *2 Acts of Passion*. Last season she appeared in *Marco Millions* at the Geary. Her regional theater credits include the Dallas Theatre Center and Stage West in Fort Worth, Texas. She has spent two seasons with Encore Theater Company, appearing in *Coming Attractions* and *No End of Blame*. Ms. Lane is a graduate of the University of Texas at Arlington.



WESLEY MANN made his A.C.T. debut this season as Feste in *Twelfth Night*. He has acted extensively at P.C.P.A., appearing in *The Foreigner*, *Our Town*, *Cinderella*, *Crucifer of Blood*, *Greater Tuna*, and John C. Fletcher's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (which also had a successful run at the Westwood



American Conservatory Theater

Playhouse in Los Angeles). Mr. Mann has been seen in such other plays as *Damn Yankees*, *Charley's Aunt*, and *Robin Hood*, and in the feature films *Who's Harry Crumb?*, *My Stepmother Is an Alien*, *Chattahoochee*, and *Back to the Future II*, and the television shows "Living Dolls," "Night Court," "A Normal Life," "Nutt House," and "Golden Girls."



MARY BETH SMITH last appeared with the company in *Feathers*. At Shakespeare Santa Cruz she has played Katharine in *Love's Labours Lost* and Susan Walker in *Once in a Lifetime*, and she recently toured with the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She has also performed with Encore Theater Company, TheatreWorks, and the Pacific Jewish Theater. Ms. Smith received her B.A. in theater and English from the University of the South in Seawee, Tennessee, and then trained at A.C.T. in the Conservatory's Advanced Training Program, where her studio roles included Sasha in *Ivanov*, Roxie Hart in *Chicago*, Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, and Eylie in *Ladyhouse Blues*.

This theater operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

A.C.T. is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the nonprofit professional theatre. A.C.T. is a member of the League of Resident Theatres, American Arts Alliance, California Theatre Council, Theatre Bay Area, Performing Arts Services, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, and San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Champagne by Ariel Vineyards is used in *Burn This*.

Our thanks to Macy's California for Pale's suit and Larry's sportcoat.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

BOX OFFICE INFORMATION

A.C.T. Box Office: In the lobby of the Geary Theater, Geary and Mason Streets. Mail: 450 Geary Street, San Francisco, California 94102.

Ticket Information: (415) 749-2228
Charge to Visa, American Express, MasterCard.

Box Office Hours: Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m.-8:30 p.m.

Performance Times: Tue.-Sat. Eves., 8 p.m.; Wed., Sat., & Sun. Mat. 2 p.m. Other performance times as announced.

Mailing List: Call 749-2228 to request advance notice of shows, events, and subscription information.

Gift Certificates: Give A.C.T. to a friend, relative, co-worker, or client. Gift Certificates are perfect for every celebration.

Theater Parties: For groups of 15 or more, call Linda Graham at (415) 346-7805 for special group prices.

Discounts: Half-price tickets can be purchased at STBS on Union Square in San Francisco. Student and Senior Rush tickets at half price are available beginning at 5 p.m. for evening performances.

Senior Rush tickets for matinees only are just \$5.

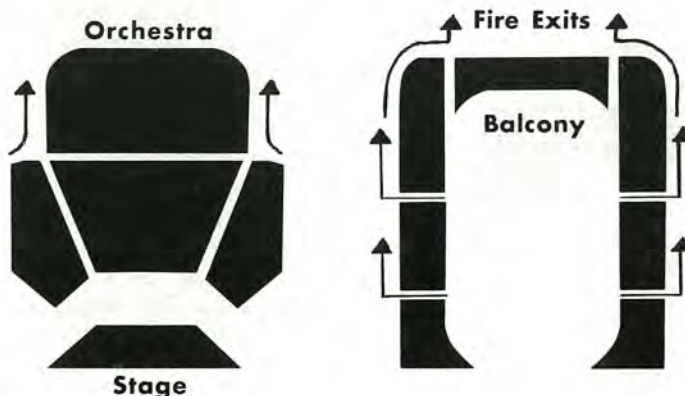
Ticket Policy: All sales are final, and there are no refunds. Only current subscribers enjoy ticket exchange privileges or lost ticket insurance. If at the last minute you are unable to attend, you may make a worthwhile contribution by donating your tickets to A.C.T. The value of donated tickets is tax-deductible and will be acknowledged by mail. Tickets for performances already past cannot be considered as a donation.

Photographs and Recordings of A.C.T. performances are strictly forbidden. Flash cameras can dangerously distract the actors. **Beeps:** If you carry a beeper, watch, or cellular phone with alarm, please make sure that it is set to the "OFF" position while you are in the theater to avoid disturbing the concentration of performers and audience.

Educators: Call 749-2230 for information about \$7 Student Matinee Program tickets; teachers' handbooks; backstage tours. Call 749-2253 for information about A.C.T.'s Speakers Bureau.

Conservatory: A.C.T. offers community classes, training, and advanced theater study. Its Young Conservatory program offers training for students between the ages of 8 and 18. Call 749-2350 for a free brochure.

Stage Door Theater



Please note the nearest exit.
In an emergency, WALK, do not run, to the nearest exit.