American Conservatory Theater

Lanford Wilson — With a Difference
by Dennis Powers

Lanford Wilson, the author of Burn This, has sometimes been labeled "the natural successor to Tennesse 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 brouhaha of the tough-talking rebel to find the longing of the inarticulate poet hidden beneath, Wilson sometimes evokes Williams' beautiful losers. But if his sensibility stems 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, bums, plages, 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.

Wilson's new large 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 crass Americanism. Over the gentle romantic comedy-drama of Tally's Folly, (1980), for instance, falls the shadow of anti-Semitism. And in 5th of July (1979), 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 pandalitic Vietnam vet and his botanic lover. Wilson makes no apologies 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 dialogues, in fact, they often overlap: city people are bemused by the rituals of their rural counterparts, and young people from the heartland are uncertain 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, car-clogging 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 audience 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 hide 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. repertoire in the 1970s and early '80s. 5th of July (1979) was the second, followed by Angel City (1984). Edward Hastings directed both productions.

The Cast
Anna — Lauren Lane
Burton — Rick Hamilton
Larry — Wesley Mann
Pete — Richard Butterfield

There will be one intermission.

Stage Management — Karen Van Zandt and Alice Elliott Smith

Understudies
Anna — Mary Beth Smith
Burton, Larry, Pete — Andrew Dolan

Continued on page 6

American Conservatory Theater

BURN THIS
(1987)
by Lanford Wilson

Directed by Albert Takanascheff
Scenery by Ralph Funicello
Costumes by Sandra Woodall
Lighting by Derek Duarte
Sounded by Stephen LeGrand
Fight Choreography by Larry Henderson

The Cast
Anna — Lauren Lane
Burton — Rick Hamilton
Larry — Wesley Mann
Pete — Richard Butterfield

There will be one intermission.

Stage Management — Karen Van Zandt and Alice Elliott Smith

Understudies
Anna — Mary Beth Smith
Burton, Larry, Pete — Andrew Dolan

This production is made possible in part by American Express.
American Conservatory Theater

Lanford Wilson — With a Difference
by Dennis Powers

Lanford Wilson, the author of Bums, 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 prescribe 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 bezoar of the tough-taking rebel to find the longing of the inarticulate poet hidden beneath, Wilson sometimes evokes Williams's beautiful losers. But not if his sensitivity stokes 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, bums, 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 small-town Americanism. Over the gentle, romantic comedy-drama of Thalys' Holiday (1986), for instance, falls the shadow of anti-Semitism. And in Off-Broadway ventures, Wilson has often shared the stage with political activism. He knows that the civic theater and the arts are inextricably linked to the political, and his plays reflect that.

But in the end, Wilson's work is about the American dream that will not die. Even in his most pessimistic works, there is hope. And that is what makes his work so timeless. The American Conservatory Theater presents Bums (1987) by Lanford Wilson. Directed by Albert Takanawas, Scenery by Ralph Funicello, Costumes by Sandra Woodall, Lighting by Derek Druce, Sound by Stephen LeGrand, Fight Choreography by Larry Henderson.

The Cast

Anna — Lauren Lane
Bud — Rick Hamilton
Larry — Wesley Mann
Pete — Richard Butterfield

There will be one intermission.

Stage Management — Karen Van Zandt and Alice Elliott Smith

Understudies
Anna — Mary Beth Smith, Bud — Larry, Pete — Andrew Danis

This production is made possible in part by American Express.
About the Playwright

Lanford Wilson received the 1960 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-six resident playwrights.


His other plays include Tulip Fever (1982), The Graham Wog specializing in sci-fi spoofs that depend more on high-tech special effects than clever dialogue.

Who's Who

Richard Butterfield, who is now in his fourth season with the company, has appeared as Criticism 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 Segmore in A Christmas Carol, Miles Gloriosus in A Painful Case Happened on the Way to the Forum, Bluebeard in Saint Joan, and in Side by Side by Sondheim, Pushkin, and Peninsa in Niel. He has also worked with the San Jose Repertory Company, Berkeley Shakespeare Festival, and Berkeley Eastside Theatre. Last summer he acted in two productions in Connecticut: A.C.T.'s Saint John at the American Fireside 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 its two artist members.

Lauren Lane recently graduated from the Conservatory’s Advanced Training Program, where she has played Achaia in The Suppliant, Isidora and Charlotte (the wrestler) in As You Like It, and Latitia in Another Part of the Forest. This season she also appeared in The Imaginaries and Judicati, and played Lula in Our Town and the title role in Clara in the A.C.T. Saratoga/Handy reunion production of 2 Acts of Passion. Last season she appeared in Marcella in the story. Her regional theater credits include the Dallas Theater Center and Stage West in Fort Worth, Texas. She has spent two seasons with Encore Theatre 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 in Pinter’s Twelfth Night. He has also directed various productions including: The Trojan Women, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, and The Caucasian Chalk Circle at the A.C.T. Play-in-Progress Festival. He has also directed and acted in productions of A Midsummer Night’s Dream in which he also had a successful run at the Woodstock.
About the Playwright

Lanford Wilson received the 1967 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Bailey's Folly. He is a founder and member of Circle Repertory Company in New York, and one of that company's resident playwrights. Most of his work premiered at Circle Rep. The Family Constitution (1972), The Hot L Baltimore (1971), The Mound Builders (1975), Sentencing Louis (1976), Sights of July (1979), and Antony and Cleopatra (1982) — all directed by Marshall Mason — and the one-act plays Brown (1977) and Phases (1978) have all been produced. His other plays also include Bailey's Folly (1982), The Giovanni Boy specializing in his field of writing. His work often deals with the conventional themes of love, marriage, and the search for identity, often through the lens of Southern culture. His plays have been produced both in the United States and internationally, and he has received numerous awards and nominations for his work.

Richard Rutterm, who is now in his fourth season with the company, has appeared in Juanita/Do the Imaginary, The Imaginary Portrait, and The Imaginary Woman. He has also appeared in In the Imaginary Portrait, and in his recent production of The Imaginary Portrait, he portrayed the character of Tolstoy, a man who has lost his identity in the modern world. His performance was praised for its depth and complexity, and he has been nominated for several awards for his work.

Lauren Lane recently graduated from the Conservatory's Advanced Training Program, where she has played Achini in The Seagull, Andrey (the soldier) in Another Man, and Levka in Buddha. Her regional theater credits include the Dallas Theatre Center and Stage West in Fort Worth, Texas. She has spent two seasons with Noyo Theatre Company, appearing in Coming Attractions and No End of Blame. Ms. Lane is a graduate of the University of Texas at Arlington.
For Your Information

Box Office Information
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: Tuesday-Saturday, 8 p.m. Wednesday, Saturday & Sunday, 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) 546-7900 for special group prices.
Discounts: Half-price tickets can be purchased at SFRS 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 sizes 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.
Reps: If you carry a beeper, watch, or cellular phone with alarm, please make sure it is set to the "OFF" position while you are in the theater to avoid disturbing the concentration of performers and audience.
Educators: Call 749-2228 for information about 8th Grade Matinee Program tickets; teachers' handbook; backstage tours. Call 749-2228 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 749-2228 for a free brochure.

Stage Door Theater

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