

THE ROAD TO MECCA

UPSTAGE

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UPSTAGE Callboard

Tony Award®, Emmy Award® and Golden Globe Award® winner Rosemary Harris returns to Roundabout alongside the remarkable Carla Gugino and Tony winner Jim Dale in this celebrated work from preeminent South African playwright, Tony winner Athol Fugard.

The Road to Mecca tells the story of an eccentric elderly artist facing mounting pressure to abandon her independent life for a church retirement home. Out of desperation, she calls upon her only confidant, a fiery young teacher from Cape Town. When the village minister arrives to coax out her decision, the three enter a blazing showdown that pits conformity against free expression...faith in community against faith in oneself.

Set against the charged backdrop of South African Apartheid, *The Road to Mecca* is a beautifully crafted tribute to the artist's indomitable spirit. Gordon Edelstein directs.

WHEN

1974

WHERE

Nieu Bethesda,
South Africa

WHO

ELSA BARLOW

A teacher from Cape Town who is Miss Helen's closest friend.

MISS HELEN

An elderly South African woman whose artistic lifestyle and eccentric sculptures make her an outcast to her community.

REVEREND

MARIUS BYLEVELD

A pastor in the village of Nieu Bethesda who wants Miss Helen to move from her own house to a retirement home.

Cape Town

Nieu Bethesda

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The Road to Creation

Helen Martins and the Owl House

The Road to Mecca is inspired by the true life story of Helen Elizabeth Martins, the youngest of six children, born and raised in the small South African village of Nieu Bethesda in December 1897. Martins obtained her teacher's diploma in nearby Graaff-Reinet and moved to the Transvaal region to become a teacher. In 1920 she married Johannes Pienaar, a teacher, playwright, and politician. The marriage was troubled, and it ended in 1926. Little is known about Martins in the years during or immediately following her marriage.

In the 1930s, Martins returned to Nieu Bethesda to take care of her elderly parents. Her invalid mother died in 1941, and her father died in 1945, leaving Martins isolated in the remote village with few prospects of her own. One night, as she lay ill in bed, depressed about her dull and gray existence, she resolved to find a way to

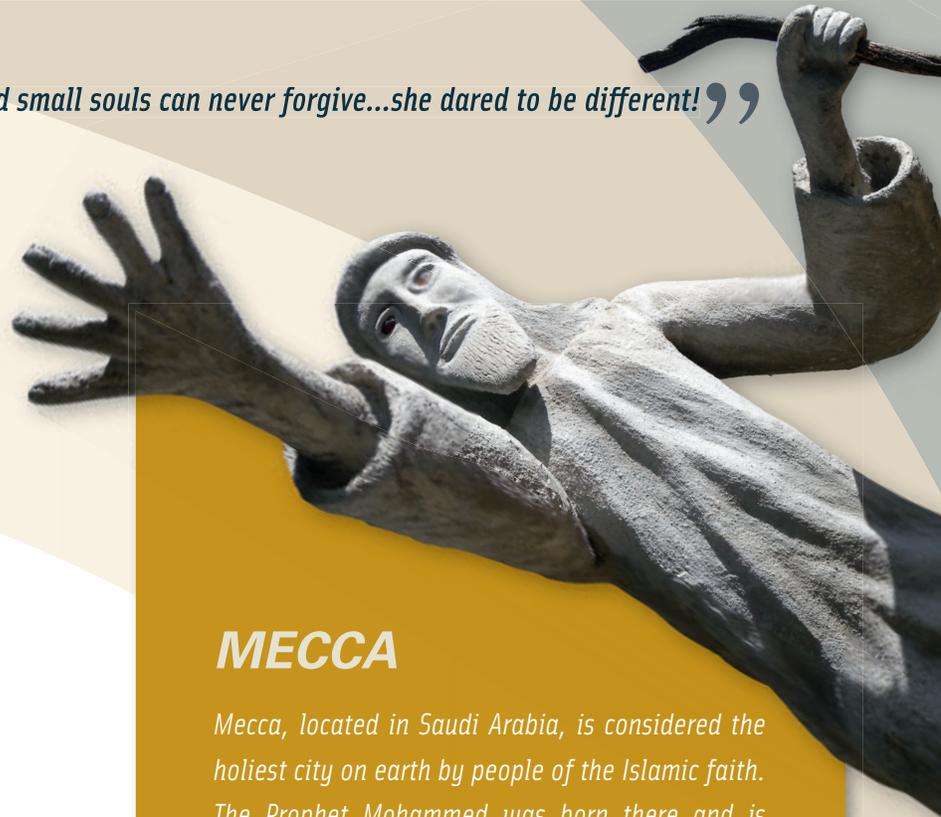
bring light and color into her life. This decision led to a lifelong artistic quest to transform her environment.

In her late 40s, with no overall plan and no formal artistic training, Martin began decorating the interior of her house. Fascinated by the reflection of light and different hues of colors, she covered her walls with crushed glass, set in elaborate patterns on layers of colored paint. She created a visual language with motifs of sun-faces and owls. Around 1964, after completing the interior of the house, Martins extended her vision outside; for the next 12 years she worked with Koos Malgas, a local sheepshearer and builder, to create the sculptures and relief figures that would fill the "Camel Yard" and cover the walls of the house. Inspired by the Bible and world poets, the sculptures represent Christian as well as Eastern religious icons: shepherds, sheep, camels, and other real and imaginary beings. All the figures in the Camel Yard face east – the direction of Mecca. An arched entryway at the front of the house is watched over by a double-faced owl.



“Instead she did something which small minds and small souls can never forgive...she dared to be different!”
—Elsa about Miss Helen

Over time Martins, known as “Miss Helen” by her neighboring villagers, was regarded with suspicion and derision. The physical demands of her artwork, arthritis, and old age all took a toll on her appearance and health; it was known that she did not take care of herself. She became increasingly reclusive and even avoided seeing people on the street. Her remaining friends claimed that she was intensely passionate – especially about her ideas for her creations. Her work continued but cost her physical and emotional hardship, until she lost her eyesight. In 1976, at the age of 78, Helen Martins took her own life by swallowing caustic soda. After her death, the Owl House fell into disrepair and some articles were removed.



MECCA

Mecca, located in Saudi Arabia, is considered the holiest city on earth by people of the Islamic faith. The Prophet Mohammed was born there and is believed to have received God's message there. Every day, Muslims around the world turn and face Mecca to pray. At some point in their lives, all Muslims are expected to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In 1991, a group of individuals formed an organization, Friends of the Owl House, to restore and preserve the property. They brought Koos Malgas back to Nieu Bethesda to restore the Camel Yard, and he maintained the property until 1996. The Owl House Foundation then formed to manage the site. The Owl House is now a popular tourist attraction, and as a result, Nieu Bethesda has guesthouses, restaurants, coffee shops, and art galleries. Miss Helen's creation – once an object of derision and embarrassment – is now the destination for over 13,000 visitors each year. ●

OWL HOUSE TOUR:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOUSr9B_8-s&feature=related

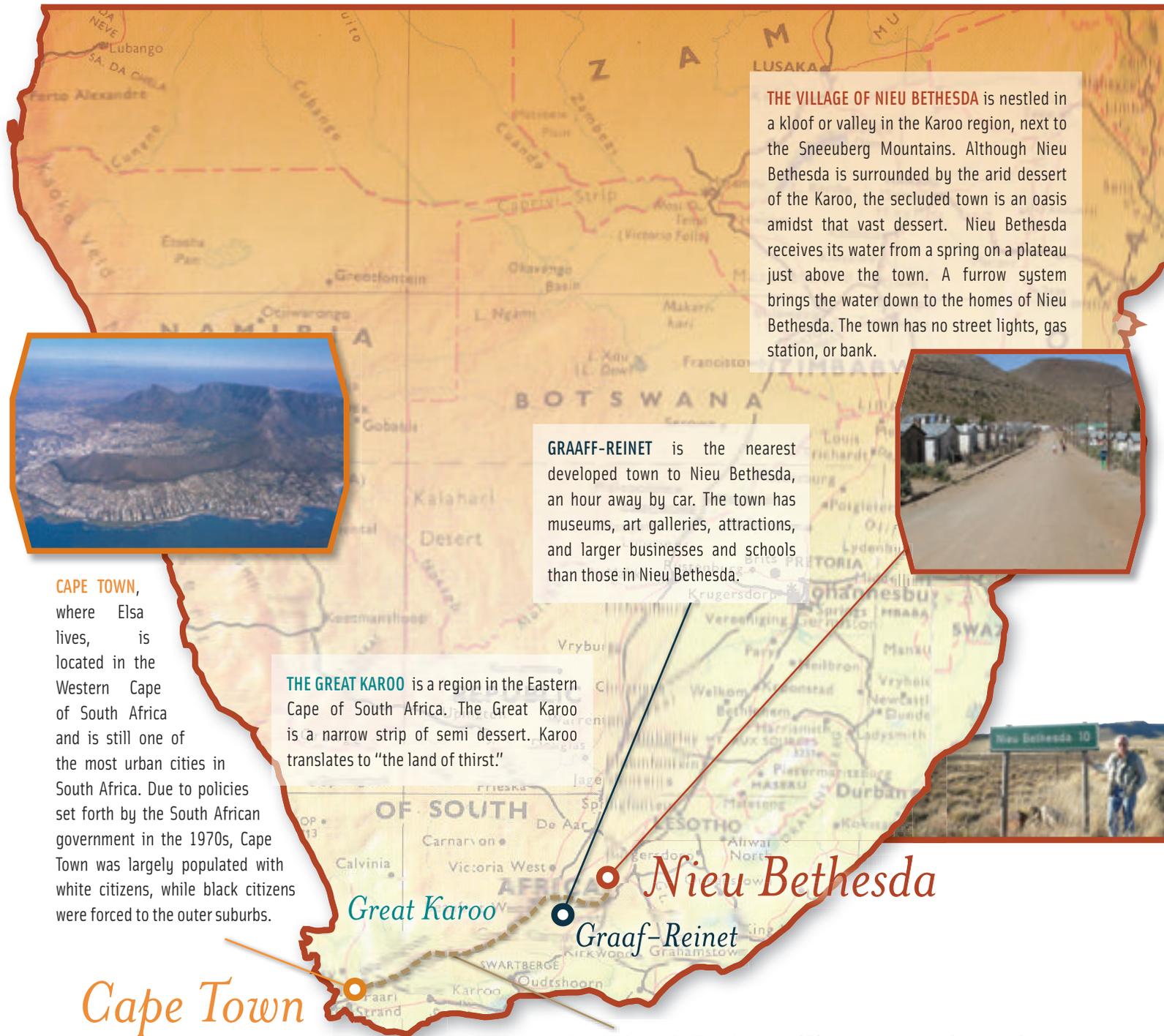
MECCA AND THE HAJJ:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jM81wroj_MQ

The Road to Nieu Bethesda

Geography of South Africa

“God, this Karoo dust gets right into your pores. I can even taste it. That first mouthful of tea will be mud.” –Elsa



THE VILLAGE OF NIEU BETHESDA is nestled in a kloof or valley in the Karoo region, next to the Sneeu Berg Mountains. Although Nieu Bethesda is surrounded by the arid desert of the Karoo, the secluded town is an oasis amidst that vast desert. Nieu Bethesda receives its water from a spring on a plateau just above the town. A furrow system brings the water down to the homes of Nieu Bethesda. The town has no street lights, gas station, or bank.

GRAAFF-REINET is the nearest developed town to Nieu Bethesda, an hour away by car. The town has museums, art galleries, attractions, and larger businesses and schools than those in Nieu Bethesda.

THE GREAT KAROO is a region in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The Great Karoo is a narrow strip of semi desert. Karoo translates to “the land of thirst.”

CAPE TOWN, where Elsa lives, is located in the Western Cape of South Africa and is still one of the most urban cities in South Africa. Due to policies set forth by the South African government in the 1970s, Cape Town was largely populated with white citizens, while black citizens were forced to the outer suburbs.

Cape Town

Nieu Bethesda

THE NATIONAL ROUTE, built in the 1970s as a route to and from Nieu Bethesda, is the road Elsa would have taken for the 12-hour car ride from Cape Town.

Political and Social Climate of South Africa

In the beginning of *The Road to Mecca*, Elsa Barlow makes a 12-hour trip to visit her good friend Helen Martins. Elsa's drive takes her from the urbanized, English-speaking world of Cape Town to the small, Afrikaner town of Nieu Bethesda.

Elsa lives in Cape Town and has access to universities, international news, and the opportunity to witness and participate in the fight against Apartheid. Miss Helen and the Dominee (Reverend) Marius Byleveld are longtime residents of Nieu Bethesda, a village in a rural farming community. Helen and Marius are physically and culturally cut off from the outside world.

The Karoo region, where Nieu Bethesda lies, was originally home to the Khoikhoi and San, indigenous African groups that raised livestock and lived as hunter-gatherers, respectively. White descendants of 17th century Dutch colonists, known as Afrikaners, first arrived in the Karoo in the late 18th century. Miss Helen, Marius, and all other white residents of Nieu Bethesda are Afrikaners.

Many early Afrikaners viewed native Africans, with their unfamiliar traditions, as heathens. Africans became low-class servants or indentured laborers. At the same time, slaves from Madagascar and Indonesia were brought to the colony. A complex racial caste system of "whites," "coloureds" (of mixed and/or Asian ancestry), and "blacks" resulted.

By 1974, when *The Road to Mecca* takes place, a formal system of discriminatory laws known as Apartheid ("separation" in Afrikaans) was in effect. Though white South Africans made up only 10% of the population, they owned almost all the land and were the only racial group with full voting rights. A small town like Nieu Bethesda would have an all-white neighborhood in the town center surrounded by poor black townships.

...If anybody were to cut me open, if you could do a sort of x-ray job on my psyche, you'd find something that looks like the Karoo.

—Athol Fugard

Religion plays an enormous role in the life of Nieu Bethesda. Afrikaners are members of the Dutch Reformed Church, a Protestant form of Christianity. Society revolved around the strict rules of the church. Indeed, Nieu Bethesda was founded in 1875 by a group of local farmers who wanted a church closer than Graaff-Reinet. For many years, the Dutch Reformed Church owned the land on which Nieu Bethesda was built. ●



Jim Dale and Rosemary Harris. Photo by Joan Marcus.

The Road to Language

Interview with Barbara Rubin

Ted Sod, Roundabout's Education Dramaturg, sat down with dialect coach Barbara Rubin to discuss her work on *The Road to Mecca*.

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. How did you become a dialect coach?

Barbara Rubin: I didn't set out to become a dialect coach. So it feels quite accidental and, since it's relatively new for me, quite delightful! I trained as an actor and a director in my native South Africa and worked as both before I moved to the U.S., 12 years ago.

As a young director, I would assist actors with their dialect work. We didn't have the luxury of working with coaches on those productions. But I think my fascination with dialects predates that. I was very conscious of speech sounds growing up in South Africa with immigrant grandparents (from Latvia and Lithuania), in a country with 11 official languages and surrounded by so many varied dialects. I have early memories of trying to dialect coach my grandmother who couldn't pronounce her "TH's." I think I annoyed her endlessly for a time. But she was quite happy with the way she sounded, and eventually I gave up.

When I moved to the U.S., one of my first jobs was as assistant director to Athol Fugard on *Sorrows and Rejoicings*. We had a wonderful dialect coach on that production, Stephen Gabis, and I was intrigued by his way of working and by the actors' process of becoming comfortable in the dialect. I remember thinking, "now that's a cool job!"



I started teaching at the American Academy of Dramatic Art about seven years ago, where I was initially hired as a voice and speech teacher. (Now I direct and teach Shakespeare there, too.) That's when I really began to hone my skills. We have students from all over the country and all over the globe who are required to have good non-regional American speech. I also dialect coached many productions at AADA where I was able to experiment and devise ways of working. I love actors, and working with them in this highly detail-oriented and yet, I hope, truly creative way is very fulfilling.

TS: What do you think Fugard's play *The Road to Mecca* is about?

BR: For me, it's about how we respond to oppression and repression, how we ward off or combat darkness, whether it's personal or political, and how we create a vision for an alternate reality from the one we face.

TS: What kind of research did you do in order to coach the actors cast in *The Road to Mecca*?

BR: I collected dialect samples and listened to different voices so as to have some options for the actors to select from. I compiled a list of movies, audio books and YouTube clips where the actors could hear authentic South Africans for the sounds and the rhythms of the dialect. I also watched the archived original production to hear what Fugard and Yvonne Bryceland did dialect-wise when the play was first performed in New York. But truthfully I am very fortunate that these dialects are in my DNA. I grew up listening to these voices, so the research is mostly collecting material for the actors and also serves to jog my memory.

TS: Can you tell us about your process? How often will you rehearse with the actors? Do you work with recordings? What is the best way to give dialect notes?

BR: It is always a highly individualized experience, tailor-made to the actor I'm coaching. Usually we start with recordings and selecting a sound sample on which we may base the character's dialect. And then we start to put the sound changes in, and we drill them. We come up with phrases and sentences to perfect the sound substitutions. Giving dialect notes depends on the circumstance and where the actor is in his/her process. The goal is that the actor feels comfortable enough to play in the dialect, to

inhabit it so fully that he or she is not thinking about the sounds at all.

TS: How do you collaborate with the director, Gordon Edelstein?

BR: I haven't worked with Gordon before, so it's a new collaboration and I'm very excited about it. Every collaboration for me starts with an initial conversation with the director about his/her vision for the play, about the characters, about what he/she is hearing and, of course, about how much time I'll spend in the rehearsal room. On this production I'm delighted that Gordon would like me in rehearsal as much as possible and looking forward to it.

TS: Where did you get your training? Any great teachers who influenced you?

BR: I owe a huge thank you to Jim DeMonic, head of the voice and Speech department at AADA, who exposed me to Edith Skinner, a method I use constantly. He welcomed me into his classes to observe; I lapped up every moment and was astounded by the breadth of his knowledge. I am also extremely fortunate to have connected with the great Tim Monich, undoubtedly the top dialect coach in the country, if not the world. His wisdom, guidance, and generosity inspire me. ●

For me, it's about how we respond to oppression and repression, how we ward off or combat darkness, whether it's personal or political, and how we create a vision for an alternate reality from the one we face.

—Barbara Rubin

The Road to Freedom

Apartheid in South Africa

A TIMELINE OVERVIEW

○ 1652	Dutch arrival in South Africa
○ 1833	End of Slavery in South Africa
○ 1899 –1902	Anglo-Boer War, ending in Peace Treaty at Vereniging
○ 1910s	Prime Minister Louis Botha passes racist legislations
○ 1912	Formation of South African Native National Congress
○ 1923	SANNC renamed African National Congress; they declare that they believe it was intention of government to enslave all black South Africans
○ 1944	ANC Youth League formed with Nelson Mandela as secretary
○ 1948	Election of Extreme National Party to control government; D.F. Malan, who formed the party, becomes Prime Minister
○ 1952 –1955	Defiance Campaigns of the ANC
○ 1955	ANC's Freedom Charter signed at the Congress of the People in Soweto
○ 1960	Sharpeville Massacre; 69 black demonstrators killed by police
○ 1963	Leaders of ANC's military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (Speak of the Nation) arrested
○ 1964	Rivonia Trial, eight ANC leaders (including Nelson Mandela) arrested
○ 1970s	A wave of strikes and revolts
○ 1974	The year in which <i>The Road to Mecca</i> is set
○ 1983	Church Street bombing by Umkhonto we Sizwe in the capital city of Pretoria
○ 1989	Cape Town peace march; release of all political prisoners
○ 1991	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
○ 1993	New constitution and formation of Government of National Unity
○ 1994	First free elections of South Africa; Nelson Mandela voted in to presidency and the first multiracial parliament

WHAT IS APARTHEID?

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Apartheid is: racial segregation; specifically, a former policy of segregation and political and economic discrimination against non-European groups in the Republic of South Africa.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF APARTHEID

From the very first day the Europeans arrived in South Africa in the 17th century, they began to dominate and control the native Khoi and San peoples. Even after the outlaw of slavery, during the 20th century the South African government created legalized mistreatment through a class system based on race, with the native black people at the very bottom. Services for the blacks were not only separate but also radically inferior to those of the whites, and, to a lesser extent, to those of the other races (labeled as "Coloured," Indian, and Asian). The government created this divide to encourage the blacks to move back to their homelands and out of white South Africa.

Over the first half of the 20th century, Prime Ministers enacted laws further removing the rights of the black citizens. In retaliation, the black people formed the African National Congress. After World War II, an extreme right-wing government introduced the Homeland Policy, dividing the black ethnic groups into several reserves. Each Homeland was designed to be an independent state where black groups could have citizenship, thus eliminating their claims to South African citizenship. In the 1980s, the outside world became more and more aware of the injustice. The 1990s finally saw an official end to Apartheid. In 1994, South Africa had its first free elections and its first black president, Nelson Mandela. It is only over the last 17 years that South Africa has become a country with a free, racially-integrated democracy. ●

Athol Fugard in South Africa

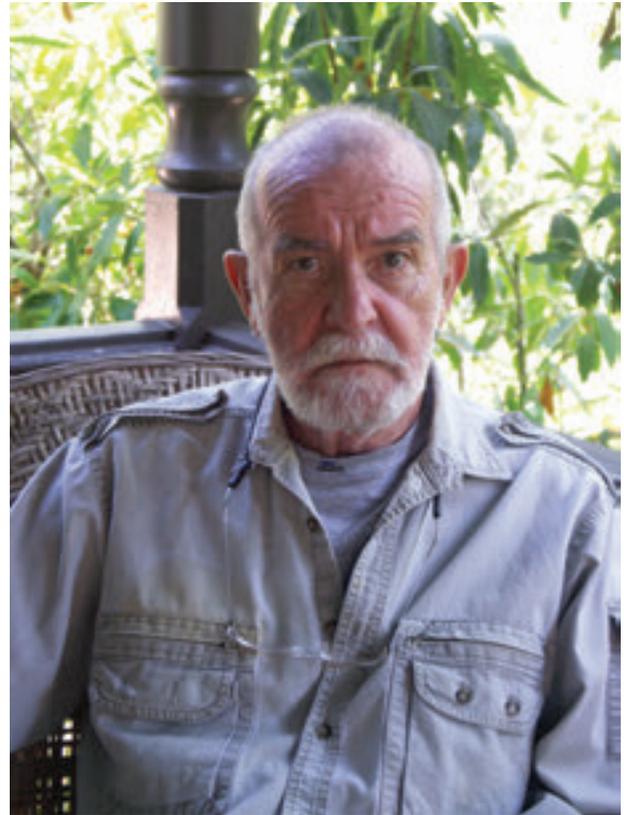
Athol Fugard will celebrate his 80th birthday in 2012, and his is certainly a life worthy of the festivities to come. There are good playwrights, there are great playwrights, and then there are playwrights who change the world. Fugard falls into this last category, and more than 40 years into his writing career, he shows no inclination of holding back or slowing down.

What separates Fugard from his peers begins with his South African upbringing. The son of Harold Fugard, a European jazz pianist, and Elizabeth Magdalena Potgieter, an Afrikaner, Fugard grew up mainly in Port Elizabeth, later attending the University of Cape Town. He left the school only a few months before he would have graduated, deciding to hitchhike to North Africa and then spending two years working on a steamer ship in east Asia, which is when he first began writing. In 1956, he married Shelia Meiring, a drama student who became a novelist and poet. The two had a daughter, Lisa, who has also become a novelist.

Moving to Johannesburg with his family in 1958, Fugard started working in a Native Commissioner's Court, a job that brought him face to face with the injustices of the Apartheid system. His whole life was lived against the backdrop of Apartheid, but perhaps it took this up-close view to spur Fugard to action. He was ashamed of what he saw as "Kafka-esque" policies. "I'm telling you, it was a nightmare," he said. He began not only to write plays, but to direct and perform, to produce, and to provoke. His work had an undeniable political bent, often feeling like a call to action. And most importantly, Fugard's plays have never been merely didactic, using the stage as pulpit; they are truly stunning works of theater that are also fearless in what they have to say, which is exactly what Fugard felt his countrymen needed to see. He explained that before his work, "If you didn't look like George Bernard Shaw or didn't make you laugh like Oscar Wilde, it wasn't set for the South African stage. And other playwrights of that time were writing plays like that, that had nothing, nothing to do with the urgent and terrifying reality of the millions of black people alive in that country at the same time. But they weren't interested."

Fugard himself persisted at forcing politics onto the stage. His productions were the first in the country to feature actors of different races together on stage. Tackling racial bias, the AIDS epidemic, and other controversial subjects, Fugard soon found that the government was keeping an eye on him. In 1967, after Fugard spoke out in support of a boycott against segregated theater audiences, the government of South Africa revoked his passport. Knowing that leaving the country meant that he may never be allowed to return, Fugard made the difficult decision to stay there, in his home. He stayed for four years, until his passport was finally reinstated. It was certainly the more complicated choice, but he saw no other as a possibility – being kept out of his homeland was simply unacceptable, even to a man who fought against so much of what was being done there. "You can't explain it, you can only say it," he said. "It's where you finally belong and where you have to go back to. It's where you are owed. Home is a very deep transaction."

The Road to Mecca is by no means Fugard's most political play. Compared to works like *Master Harold...and the boys* (produced in revival by Roundabout in 2003), his recent *Coming Home*, and the acclaimed *Blood Knot*, the world of Apartheid takes a backseat in this piece. But it is, of course, always present, affecting the world from which these characters and their different points of view emerge. Yet this play takes on a different theme, one that happens to come out of South Africa here but is about as universal as it gets. As Fugard put it, "At the core of the play is the word 'freedom.' And that is the most political word of all." ●



Rosemary Harris and Carla Gugino. Photo by Joan Marcus.

The Road to Elsa

Interview with Carla Gugino

Ted Sod, Education Dramaturg, interviewed actress Carla Gugino about her thoughts on *The Road to Mecca* and her character, Elsa Barlow.

Ted Sod: Why did you choose to do this play and this role?

Carla Gugino: I made my Broadway debut doing Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* at Roundabout's American Airlines Theatre. It was a truly extraordinary experience. From that moment on, I knew that acting in the theater would be an intrinsic part of my life and work. I also had another wonderfully creative experience at the Roundabout playing Catherine in Tennessee Williams' *Suddenly Last Summer* with Blythe Danner. All of this is to say that Todd Haines and the Roundabout have been a warm and exciting artistic home for me. So when I received a call from Todd about the possibility of doing *The Road to Mecca*, I was intrigued immediately. I find Athol Fugard's observations about humanity to be very astute while being executed in such an organic manner. He has the power to transport you to a time and place very quickly and in a seemingly effortless manner. Additionally, the role of Elsa is different from any skin I've been in on stage, and that presents truly exciting challenges. And to be able to delve into an electric, character-driven piece alongside Rosemary Harris and Jim Dale makes for the kind of collaboration I am always looking for: artists that you know you can jump off the cliff with in an attempt to reveal the complexities of the human condition.

TS: What kind of preparation or research do you have to do in order to play Elsa?

CG: I have been familiarizing myself with what the climate, in all senses of the word – emotional, political, literal – was in 1974 in South Africa. And working with the dialect as well. I find that accents are always a gateway into much more than the way someone speaks. Rhythms, gestures, a whole outlook



can be revealed through finding out how one speaks, and therefore thinks, and where that comes from. Also, for me, so much is revealed in the rehearsal process. It is one of the great gifts of theater (unlike film); the time to process and experience as opposed to going straight for a result. To live in the question for a bit as opposed to looking for the answer. This allows many discoveries you may not otherwise make.

TS: How is this character relevant to you? I realize the rehearsal process hasn't begun, but can you share some of your thoughts about Elsa with us? What do you find most challenging and exciting about this role?

CG: Elsa is a complex woman indeed, and I have really only scratched the surface of who she is at this point. But certain things feel clear to me. She is headstrong, fiercely intelligent, has a strong passion for equality, and is willing to fight for it. She is completely lost within herself as a woman in this particular moment in her life. She is having a crisis of conscience when we find her in *The Road to Mecca*. She is grappling with who she is, who Helen is, and what she's invested in who she wants Helen to be. What she does know is that she wants to fight for freedom: hers, Helen's, and that of the black people of South Africa.

TS: What do you think the play is about?

CG: This play seems to me to be an exploration of personal and spiritual freedom, the challenges that come with that, and the courage required to continue on that path. And how terrifying a person who truly commits to that path can be to those who have been taught there is one way to know God.

TS: Can you talk about the relationship between Elsa and Miss Helen?

CG: I'm still exploring this, but Elsa and Miss Helen seem to have unleashed something in each other that hadn't been touched prior to their meeting. Helen is perhaps the mother that Elsa wishes she had, or the person she hopes to become. The free woman who turns her back on the expectations of others and lives her life, whatever that may mean. And to Helen, Elsa is the first person to actually walk into her Mecca and love it; to celebrate it and be in awe of its magic, as opposed to being afraid of it. This is why, when Helen is willing to throw herself under the bus and go to the old age home, Elsa is infuriated. Because, as human beings tend to do, she has attached such meaning to Helen's freedom. And if Helen isn't truly free, how can Elsa be? I think Elsa has also owned the role of protector to Helen, as she believes no one else truly has Helen's best interests in mind.

TS: How do you collaborate with a director?

CG: Working with different directors makes for vastly different experiences each time, which I love. Gordon and I have worked on another play together, and I know that Athol feels that

Gordon is so akin to his vision, that I am thrilled to begin this process.

TS: Where did you get your training? Did you have any great teachers who influenced you?

CG: I began acting professionally when I was 13 years old. I've studied with many different teachers along the way, all of whom I have learned many skills from, but I would have to say I have learned the most from actually working. I am constantly learning new things as I see the world through the lens of each character I play and collaborate with my fellow actors, writers, and directors.

TS: Public school students will read this interview and will want to know what it takes to be a very successful actress -- what advice can you give young people who want to act?

CG: First and foremost, as the business can be pretty brutal, you must be truly compelled to do it. No matter how successful an actor is, and I know many very successful actors, you will probably hear "no" more than "yes." To live a long and successful life as an actor, not only do you have to be patient but remain supremely focused on what lights your creative fire and not what people think of you: "you're this type, that type...etc." And, on a practical note, if it is what you love, just start doing it, however you can. In your living room, classroom, local theater—wherever you can. Focus on honing your skills and stretching your limits so you will be at the ready when an opportunity arises. There has been no time in history that has been as conducive to creating your own projects, filming them, and getting your work out there. ●

This play seems to me to be an exploration of personal and spiritual freedom, the challenges that come with that, and the courage required to continue on that path.
—Carla Gugino

The Road to Illumination

Interview with Peter Kaczorowski

Ted Sod, Education Dramaturg, talked with lighting designer Peter Kaczorowski about his design for *The Road to Mecca*.

Ted Sod: What are the challenges of designing lights for *The Road to Mecca*?

Peter Kaczorowski: Well there are several, and Fugard is rather specific about them. First of all, the play begins at the very end of the day with just the low-angled rays of the setting sun invading the house. Then, just a few pages into the play, he describes how "the light is fading" in the room...and then a few pages after that he says "the light is now faded." So there's no more sunlight. The final 70% of the play takes place in dark night. Additionally, the house in which the play takes place has no electricity. So it's a pitch dark night in the South African desert...no moonlight (at least for a while) and no other ambient light sources outside (because she lives in the middle of nowhere). Inside, there are only a few kerosene style lanterns and then of course all the famous candles. So it's with just these lanterns and all the candles that the actors will be illuminated.

TS: How true will you be to the stage directions?

PK: I think we all mean to be generally true to the author's stage directions. After all, we are not doing a high concept rendering of this play. Michael Yeargan has designed a real house as requested by Fugard. And I intend to make the play happen in the time frame he suggests, i.e., "last bit of sunset into evening." And we all will do our best to do justice to Fugard's specific directions about the candles and the ambience they give to the room when all are lit.

TS: What kind of research did you do in order to design *The Road to Mecca*?

PK: Well, I did not know much about the actual woman the role is based on or her art work. So I looked at her house (a real place in Karoo), and I researched her art a bit mostly to understand how her brain worked. And I also got a sense of

Rosemary Harris. Photo by Joan Marcus.



NEVER LIGHT A CANDLE CARELESSLY, AND BE SURE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING WHEN YOU BLOW ONE OUT.

—ELSA, QUOTING HELEN

what the weather is like in that part of the world and what the natural environment is around the house. I also spoke with the director Gordon Edelstein and Susan Hilferty, the costume designer, who have both been to the place. And they described a very long drive to the middle of nowhere and the kind of solitude the place evokes. That in-person description of the remoteness of the location was helpful.

TS: What do you think Fugard's play is about?

PK: I think it's largely about exploring the theme of the artist as outcast; how the artist survives and continues to pursue his or her work in the face of isolation and pressure from outside forces to stop doing that work. I think it's also about aging and the fear at an advanced age of an imminent, all-enveloping darkness. And it's about commitment to your own principles even as society is urging you to relinquish your principles.

TS: What do you look for from the director before you start designing?

PK: Mostly I just want to feel secure that we are starting our work from the same jumping-off point. So I want to know broad-stroke information from a director: are we doing real or abstract? Are we setting the play as suggested in the text or are we re-imagining where the action takes place? I don't need to discuss the play moment by moment. That usually doesn't get sorted out anyway until the cast gets well into rehearsal and by then, my advance information has already been drawn and delivered for preparation.

TS: How do you collaborate with the rest of the design team?

PK: That's a mixed bag. It's always different on different shows. It really depends on a lot of factors. Quite often designers are very busy and not all that available for long intensive sessions on a developing design. On this show, we've had two or three sessions with all the designers and Gordon, and they were mostly about atmosphere and ambience and sensibility. More specifically, Michael has designed a set that tries to embrace and support the "magic" Fugard talks about when all the candles are lit, and this involved inserting some light fixtures within the walls of his set, walls that turn out to be translucent. So we met last week at the shop in Connecticut and did a little experimenting with some light sources and some mocked-up painted walls. Susan and I talked a bit about the colors she's planning for each of the character's costumes.

TS: What factors go into designing lights for a musical as opposed to a straight play?

PK: That's a somewhat complicated question. There are some plays that have a lot of lighting requirements. There are some

IN THE CENTER OF MECCA THERE IS A TEMPLE, MARIUS, AND IN THE CENTER OF THE TEMPLE IS A VAST ROOM WITH HUNDREDS OF MIRRORS ON THE WALLS AND HANGING LAMPS AND THAT IS WHERE THE WISE MEN OF THE EAST STUDY THE CELESTIAL GEOMETRY OF LIGHT AND COLOR. I BECAME AN APPRENTICE THAT NIGHT. LIGHT THEM ALL, ELSA, SO THAT I CAN SHOW MARIUS WHAT I'VE LEARNT.

—HELEN

musicals that have few. There are not many hard truths about designing a play versus a musical. But very generally speaking, for musicals you are more likely to need to have a great deal of variety in the light at your disposal to keep things looking new and fresh and surprising throughout the evening. In a play, you are more likely to have a narrower range of needs.

TS: Where did you get your training? Any great teachers who influenced you?

PK: I have an undergraduate degree in Drama/English from SUNY Geneseo. I didn't go to grad school. I had a terrific teacher at Geneseo who came to New York ahead of me and blazed a trail that I eventually followed. I graduated in May and moved to the city in August. Once I got to New York, I did a lot of assisting for some of the most revered designers of that period: Tom Skelton, Craig Miller, Bev Emmons, Neil Jampolis, John Bury. I really learned how to do this by watching them do it.

TS: Any advice for a young person who wants to become a lighting designer?

PK: Get a law degree. ●

Pre-Show Activities

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY #1: *How does an artist use color to express moods and feelings?*

Helen Martins, the real woman who inspired The Road to Mecca, strived to fill her life with color and light. She used glass and paint to escape her gray existence by creating a colorful environment around her.

Activate: Create a color collage that expresses emotion and mood, using:

- Magazines (fashion, interior design, travel); construction paper and/or tissue paper
- Poster board or cardboard or cardstock for "canvas"
- Scissors
- Glue and/or scotch tape

Find as many colors or hues (shades of the same color) that evoke a strong feeling or mood for you. Cut or tear the papers into shapes. Arrange the shapes on your "canvas." Think about how these colors make you feel as you create your collage.

Write: Write a paragraph discussing the color choices you made and the feelings you associate with your collage.

- Reflect:**
- Why did you choose these colors?
 - What associations do we make with different colors? (cool vs. warm colors; light vs. dark; pastels, vs. bold.)
 - Why does a color create different feelings for different people?
 - How is color an important tool for an artist?

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY #2: *How does a playwright explore conflict between an elder and younger character?*

Central to The Road to Mecca is the concern of how Miss Helen will live on her own as she grows older. This is a problem faced by many families, everywhere.

Imagine an elderly person who is unable to take care of him/herself, but who still wants to live alone. A younger relative (son/daughter, grandchild, niece/nephew) wants this person to move into an assisted living situation. How will they handle this conflict?

- Write:**
- 1) For each character, identify their objective (or goal), and make a list of the reasons why s/he wants this.
 - 2) Write a dialogue (a conversation between two characters) in which the elder and younger person meet and discuss the conflict. Allow BOTH characters to explain their wishes and state why their views are important. You decide whether the conflict is resolved or not.

Activate: Work with a scene partner and perform your written dialogue. Make a few acting choices to distinguish the elder character from the younger character.

- Reflect:**
- How did each character express their objective and reasons?
 - Why is this a difficult problem to solve?
 - What are some ways you might help an elder relative?

Post-Show Activities

POSTSHOW ACTIVITY #1: *How does a playwright explore the effect of physical location on a character?*

Playwright Athol Fugard has said, "If anybody were to cut me open, if you could do a sort of x-ray job on my psyche, you'd find something that looks like the Karoo." (The word "psyche" here refers both to his mind and to his emotional spirit.)

In Fugard's play *The Road to Mecca*, the geography of South Africa, particularly the Karoo region, has a great impact on the psyches – the minds and emotions – of Miss Helen and Elsa Barlow.

Activate: Use a blank line drawing of a figure and colored pencils or markers to create an "x-ray of your psyche." What geographic locations have influenced you? Focus on three parts of yourself: What geographic location influences your heart, head and feet?

Sketch or create word-collages in each area of the figure, connecting yourself to three important geographic locations in your life.

Write: Write a short paragraph describing the impact of each geographic location on you, and how this place relates to your heart, head, and feet on which you've drawn.

Reflect:

- Does one location stand out as the most important to you? Why?
- What customs or beliefs did you learn in each location?
- Have the customs or beliefs of one location in your life ever conflicted with what you learned in another location?
- How did you change as a result of experiencing different geographical locations?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY #2: *How does an artist express her or his vision in words?*

In *The Road to Mecca*, Miss Helen—like the real Helen Martins, on whom the character is based—struggles to express her artistic vision to others in Nieu Bethesda. Helen Martins eventually found an artistic collaborator, a black man named Koos Malgas.

Imagine the first meeting between Miss Helen and Koos Malgas. Koos has been at Miss Helen's house doing some repair work. Miss Helen needs help creating her sculptures. She begins the conversation by describing one of her sculptures.

Write: Write at least four sentences for Miss Helen to speak to Koos, describing one sculpture in her yard. Be specific. Describe what this sculpture looks like.

- Why did you (Helen) want to create this sculpture?
- What do you like about it?
- Write one sentence asking Koos for help creating more artwork.

Activate: Work in pairs. Select one person to read Miss Helen's monologue. The other person will improvise the character of Koos. After listening to Miss Helen's description of her sculpture, ask Miss Helen one question about the sculpture she's just described, something you were curious about or didn't understand from her description. Switch and repeat.

Reflect:

- When you were listening to Miss Helen talk about her art, could you "see" what she was describing?
- What words did your partner use that helped you "see" the sculpture?
- If you were Koos, would you have helped Miss Helen create? Why or why not?

Glossary

AASVOELKRANS	A mountain in the Western Cape of South Africa. <i>Marius says that this mountain made him in awe of South Africa.</i>
ALBERT CAMUS	French author, journalist, and important philosopher of the 20th century. <i>Elsa quotes Albert Camus to Miss Helen when she is trying to get a point across that Miss Helen needs to find the strength to say "no."</i>
BAAS	Master; a term of address used in South Africa for a white man. <i>The woman that Elsa helps by giving her a lift was thrown out of her town by the Baas.</i>
BALZAC	French journalist and writer, he is one of the creators of realism in literature. <i>Elsa uses one of Balzac's quotes to describe the Karoo: "God without Mankind."</i>
BIGOT	A person obstinately or intolerantly devoted to his or her own opinions and prejudices; especially one who treats the members of a group with hatred and intolerance. <i>Elsa refers to the people of Nieu Bethesda as bigots because of their beliefs and the way they treat black people.</i>
BLUE-STOCKING	An intellectual or literary woman. <i>Elsa refers to herself as a blue-stocking because she believes everyone sees her as a "serious young woman."</i>
BUDDHA	Indian mystic and founder of Buddhism. He began teaching after achieving supreme enlightenment at the age of 35. <i>One of the statues Miss Helen is particularly proud of is of Buddha.</i>
CRADOCK	A town just east of Nieu Bethesda. <i>Elsa says that gave a ride to a black woman headed to Cradock.</i>
DOEK	A head scarf worn to protect a woman's hair. <i>Elsa describes the woman she gave a ride to as wearing a doek as part of her everyday dress.</i>
EASTER ISLAND HEAD	Massive human figures carved from rock on the Chilean Polynesian island of Easter Island between the years 1250 and 1500. <i>Miss Helen recreates an Easter Island head to go in her Mecca.</i>
GAMTOOS VALLEY	South of Nieu Bethesda, located on the coast: a fertile valley rich with plant and animal life. <i>Marius talks about a farmer who visited Nieu Bethesda from the Gamtoos Valley.</i>
MINARET	A distinctive architectural feature of Islamic mosques, generally a tall spire with an onion shaped or conical crown, usually either free standing or taller than any associated support structure. <i>Helen says that in the Mecca she dreams of there are "glittering minarets" in the city.</i>
MOSQUE	A building used for public worship by Muslims. <i>Included in Miss Helen's Mecca is a mosque among the statues of owls and camels.</i>
POPLARS	A tall, fast-growing tree (genus <i>Populus</i>) of the willow family, widely grown for timber and pulp. <i>Marius likens the colors of the poplar trees to the candle burning in the room with him and Miss Helen.</i>
REGMAKER	A South African drink taken to relieve the symptoms of a hangover; a pick-me-up. <i>Elsa tells Miss Helen that when they go into the town of Graaff-Reinet they will make sure to pick up a regmaker to help Miss Helen with her depression.</i>
RENEGADE	One who rejects a religion, cause, allegiance, or group for another. <i>Elsa calls Miss Helen a renegade because she no longer attends church while everyone else in her town is very strict about going every Sunday.</i>
SPITSKOP	A town located in the Drakensberg mountains, a few hours away from Nieu Bethesda. <i>A part of South Africa that Marius likes and gives as a reason for his love for Nieu Bethesda.</i>
STAGNATE	To cease flow or movement; to stop developing or progressing. <i>Elsa feels that Nieu Bethesda will stagnate because its people will not grow out of 19th century beliefs and customs.</i>

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When you get to the theatre...

BELOW ARE SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR THEATRE-GOING EXPERIENCE MORE ENJOYABLE.

TICKET POLICY

As a student participant in Producing Partners, Page To Stage or Theatre Access, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone, beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



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