

UPSTAGE GUIDE

ROUNDAABOUT
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A publication of
**EDUCATION AT
ROUNDAABOUT**



THE UNAVOIDABLE DISAPPEARANCE OF **TOM** **DURNIN**

UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin

Tom Durnin did the time for his white-collar crime. Now, he's determined to win back the respect he believes he deserves—even if that means ripping apart the new life his family has so carefully put together in his absence. Tom's son warily allows his father to camp out on his couch, hoping the man who let everyone down has finally turned a new page. After a lifetime of empty promises, can Tom find a place in a family that has worked so hard to move on without him?

a note from Artistic Director Todd Haimes

The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin is blessed with a complicated title and a simple theme: what are we owed in life? The play poses that question on several levels, ranging from the familial to the global. At its core is the query of what a son owes to his father. If a man has loved you and raised you, are you obligated to forgive him for even the most egregious mistakes he has made? Is it fair for him to assume that you will?

when

June 2009

A gray and endless rain-soaked month.

where

The American exburbs.

Sam's Clubs and SUVs and Caribou Coffee and the eerie, shuttered windows of foreclosed strip malls.

who

Tom Durnin *Father and former lawyer returning to reclaim his professional and personal life.*

James Durnin *Tom's son. Current stethoscope salesman and aspiring writer.*

Chris Wyatt *Tom's son-in-law. A lawyer.*

Katie Nicholson *James's classmate.*

Karen Brown-Canedy *Tom's ex-wife. James's mother.*

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INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT STEVEN LEVENSON

Before rehearsals began, playwright Steven Levenson spoke with Education Dramaturg Ted Sod about his play, *The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? When did you decide to become a playwright?

Steven Levenson: I was born in Washington, DC, and I grew up in Bethesda, Maryland. I went to Brown for undergrad, which is where I started writing plays. I'd been involved in theatre as an actor up until that point. My senior year, I took a playwriting course with Paula Vogel, which really changed everything for me. Paula was the first person to say to me, "If you want to do this, this is something you can actually do." And that was huge for me.

TS: Did you come immediately to New York after you graduated from Brown?

SL: Yes. I lucked into a job as the literary assistant at Playwrights Horizons, which was where a major part of my theatre education happened. I read plays and wrote script coverage and I got to see up close the process of how new play development worked. It also gave me the opportunity to see a tremendous variety of theater in New York, which was invaluable. Getting exposed to all kinds of different work allowed me to really examine what kind of theater I was drawn to and where I could see my own work eventually fitting into that larger landscape.

TS: Did you do that for a number of years?

SL: I worked there for two years. I left when my play, *The Language of Trees*, was produced at Roundabout Underground.

TS: I want to discuss writing a commissioned play because *The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin* was commissioned by Roundabout.

SL: It's strange. Every experience I've had so far with writing a commissioned play, including this one, I've proposed an idea to the organization commissioning me and then ended up writing something completely different. I feel that might be part of my process. I think there's an unconscious part of me that thinks that if I say I'm going to do something, I have to rebel against that and do something else. What's so great about a commission is that you know that you're not writing in a vacuum. There's someone who's waiting to read your play and give you feedback and really work with you on it.

TS: Did they say you had to complete it in a year?

SL: I was so fortunate with this commission at Roundabout. After *The Language of Trees*, I put this weird pressure on myself to write something else very soon and very quickly. So I wrote this play that was really, really bad. I gave it to Robyn Goodman, Jill Rafson, and Josh Fiedler, who produce shows for the Underground, to read. We met to talk about it and I confessed to them that I'd written it in a hurry and that I didn't really love it. Not surprisingly, they didn't really love it either. Robyn's advice was to take my time,



figure out what I wanted to write and come back to them whenever I was ready, which was a huge gift. I turned in *Tom Durnin* about a year later.

TS: How did you decide this was a subject that was important to you to write about?

SL: The germ of the idea came from a personal experience. A friend of mine in high school, her father was a prominent DC lawyer. The family led what seemed at the time to be a fairly charmed life. I didn't really keep in touch with her after school. Years later, her father went to prison for a white-collar crime, which everyone who knew this family, this sort of perfect family, found just completely shocking, not at all something anyone would have guessed. Finally, six or seven years after I'd last seen her, I sat down with her and I just found her story – what had happened in those intervening years – completely heartbreaking. It made me wonder what it must be like for her father, who had recently been released from prison, how impossible a task to try to rebuild all that you've lost, to start over.

TS: Can you talk about the father-son dynamic between Tom and James?

SL: As I developed the play, it became increasingly important to me that Tom not really seek forgiveness. He got caught with his hands in the cookie jar, but from his perspective everybody else was doing the same thing. He doesn't come back seeking redemption.

He comes back with one mission, which is trying to remake things into the way they were five years ago. For James, there's so much of him that's still the child looking up to his father, wanting his father's love and approval. But at the same time there's so much rage, all of the hurt and lost time between them. In a way, too, it's a role reversal. It's the father moving in with the son. It's not the kid moving back in with his parents. So it's a fraught status relationship between the two of them. It's a constant battle for who is in charge.

TS: It makes you wonder what the family was like before the prison sentence.

SL: I think that there is just so much unresolved pain, so much trauma. Tom Durnin was a con man in some ways. Or it seems like he was. His family isn't sure if he was putting on an act all along, if he was never actually the person they thought he was.

TS: The idea of living a double life, was that important to you?

SL: Definitely. Tom throughout the play is constantly trying to remember the past and dredge up these memories and construct this past that was amazing and perfect. I think for James, it is a bit of "I don't actually know who you are," which is just devastating for his father.

TS: I want to talk about the relationship between James and Katie because they're each bruised and damaged in their own way.

SL: These are two people who are broken in different ways and trying to put the pieces together for themselves. When I started the play, it was primarily Tom's story. Now it's a shared story, and Katie really helped unlock that for me. The relationship between James and Katie asks the same questions that the relationship between Tom and James asks: can people change? Can people heal?

TS: Stylistically the play feels very different from *The Language of Trees*.

SL: *The Language of Trees* relied on a certain kind of magical realism to convey the world from the perspective of a seven-year-old boy. *Tom Durnin* is obviously a different kind of story. It was the first play of mine that I made a "no magic" rule for myself. This play had to be in the here and now and it had to follow certain laws of physics, because the story needs to be grounded in these concrete people and the intricacies of their relationships. That's what's most interesting to me, at least.

TS: Was not allowing yourself to go to that magical place the biggest challenge in writing this?

SL: I think the biggest challenge was figuring out the dynamic between father and son, to keep that moving forward and also to find the hope and the lightness within the story.

"I THINK THAT THERE IS JUST SO MUCH UNRESOLVED PAIN, SO MUCH TRAUMA. TOM DURNIN WAS A CON MAN IN SOME WAYS."

TS: How did the collaboration with director Scott Ellis happen?

SL: I thought Scott was the perfect choice. At a certain point in developing the play, we got to where we felt like we wanted to hear it and we started bringing in actors and a director. I immediately said, "Scott is someone I would love to work with." I'm obviously a big fan of his work. Among his many talents, he's a fantastic director with actors in terms of crafting performances and I really felt this play needed to be focused on the performances and the dynamics between these characters.

TS: What were you looking for from the actors?

SL: Tom and James were both tricky to cast, because we were looking for so many different things from each of them. For Tom, what you really want is someone with the strength and the ferocity of that character, but also someone whom the audience can really fall in love with. We want the audience to be as much under his spell as the other characters in the play are. He's a broken person

but he wasn't always like that. He has a certain craftiness and intelligence about him and a powerful charisma. David Morse is an actor who can switch on a dime from being compassionate and sensitive in one instant and then be utterly terrifying in the next. For James, we were really looking for vulnerability, somebody who could capture

the damage that this young man has gone through and who can also convey that with a sense of humor and self-deprecation. We wanted both of these characters to be guys that you root for. Whether or not you continue to root for them, that's another question. But we certainly lucked out with these two actors.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired?

SL: I see as much as I can. I read as much as I can. I try to keep in touch with art and film. I try not to become cynical. It sounds cheesy, perhaps, but I'm constantly trying to just approach things with a sense of wonder. I never want to become complacent. •



Sarah Goldberg

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR CHRISTOPHER DENHAM

Before rehearsals began, actor Christopher Denham spoke with Education Dramaturg Ted Sod about his role as James in *The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin*.

Ted Sod: Please tell us a bit about yourself.

Christopher Denham: I was born on the southside of Chicago. Educated down at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. A great theater training program under Henson Keys and Daniel Sullivan. Amazing teachers and an amazing theater complex in the middle of the cornfields. Spent my formative years worshipping at the Steppenwolf altar. Steppenwolf represented a certain kind of acting from a certain kind of city. A little rough around the edges. A little unpolished. Blue collar actors without perfect diction or posture. But a vital sense of authenticity. All my heroes are from Chicago: Terry Kinney, Tracy Letts, Amy Morton, Denis O'Hare. That was the kind of actor I wanted (and want) to be. When I finally was able to work at Steppenwolf, it was the ultimate stamp of approval.

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

CD: I had been working primarily in film and television for the past three years. I was dying to dive back into theater. I was reading lots of plays, but Steven's writing made a lasting impression on me. He managed somehow to craft characters you care about, despite their glaring flaws. The story he was telling wasn't just topical. It's about something bigger than derivatives trading. It's about redemption. Who gets to decide who gets a second chance? Steven's writing is deeply human and, incidentally, deeply funny. Also, David Morse was on board and I knew I could learn a lot from him. Every actor I've ever met has nothing but the highest respect for David's work. He brings a profound sense of reality to every role. I've also been a big fan of Scott Ellis for a long time. He has directed so many of my favorite productions. I knew he could somehow get something good out of me.

TS: I realize the rehearsal process hasn't started yet, but can you share some of your preliminary thoughts about James with us?

CD: Steven has written a complicated, conflicted young man. In many ways, James has had the wind knocked out of him. Ten years ago, he had a very clear idea of what his life would be. And then his life was derailed. He lost his confidence. The trajectory of the play, I think, is James crawling out of this black hole. Learning how to walk again. How to stop this cycle of self-victimization and self-pity and kickstart his life.

TS: What do you think the play is about?

CD: A bad play, written by a bad writer, would be about James forgiving Tom. That would be obvious. This play isn't about that. It's about something more complicated, more insidious. In my opinion, Steven is essentially telling us that no one really knows anyone. We think we know our loved ones, our family members. We don't. Everyone has hidden depths. Things they don't reveal. Things they lie about, either to you or to themselves. When they arrest a serial killer, the neighbors never say: "Yeah, he was a psychopath." The



neighbors always say: "He was the nicest man. I had no idea he was capable of this crime." That's what this play is about.

TS: Can you talk about the relationship between James and his father, Tom?

CD: Like any father/son relationship, there are several iterations of the relationship. At one time, for a long time, they were very close. That's what makes the fall from grace so tragic. They had so far to fall. For James, it is almost inconceivable that his Dad committed these crimes. In many scenes, he almost has to remind himself that Tom is a master manipulator. He is, as James says, "incapable of telling the truth." Tom has to be seen through the prism of his misdeeds.

TS: What do you feel is happening between James and Katie?

CD: When it comes to Katie, James has found an intelligent, funny person who has rekindled something inside him. James has kind of thrown in the towel in many regards. He's taken himself out of the game. Katie has been through a difficult relationship. They have that vulnerability as a common denominator. Damaged goods.

TS: How do you collaborate with a director?

CD: Every director is different. You don't want a puppet master telling you where to stand. You don't want a ventriloquist telling you how to speak. You ideally want an audience advocate who can see things you can't see. The director tells us if the story is being told. We haven't started rehearsals yet, but from everything I've seen of Scott's work, he directs with great specificity and originality. Scott has a great, great sense of timing.

TS: Public school kids will read this interview and will want to know what it takes to be a successful actor—what advice can you give young people who want to act?

CD: The question is do you want to be famous? Or do you want to be an actor? If you want to be an actor, go ahead and act. Don't ask permission. Don't be afraid of rejection. Acting is like playing poker. The name of the game is to just stay at the table. •

THE ENDURING DRAMATIC RELATIONSHIP: FATHER & SON

In **THE UNAVOIDABLE DISAPPEARANCE OF TOM DURNIN**, we are given a window into a fraught father-son dynamic, that of Tom and James, whose relationship is at the heart of this play. Of course, they are far from the first paternal pairing to be at the center of a drama.

We can go all the way back to the Greek tragedy **ANTIGONE** by Sophocles and find a father-son relationship at the center of the play. Creon and son Haemon are at a crossroads. Creon has sentenced his son's fiancé, Antigone, to death for disobeying his law. Haemon pleads with his father to reverse his sentence. When Creon refuses, Haemon takes his own life. While their relationship is not the main plot, it highlights the major theme of the play: conflict with authority. By presenting these big themes within a small, familiar relationship, the playwright gives his audience a way into the story. Like most Greek tragedies, this is an epic tale of high emotions, but what makes it an enduring story are the relationships that generations of people have connected to.

Moving many years forward, we can find a similar example of the father-son relationship enlightening larger themes in Shakespeare's **HAMLET**. While Hamlet is traditionally considered to be a play about revenge and loyalty, at the core of the play is Hamlet's turmoil over losing his father and his subsequent spiral into questioning his identity. When his father dies, Hamlet's whole world is turned upside down. He feels obligated to seek revenge on his own uncle for the death of his father, but that responsibility causes him inner chaos. The audience in Shakespeare's time might not have understood what it was like to have a conniving uncle plotting against them for the throne of Denmark, but they would certainly understand the loss of a parent and the emotional turmoil that would cause.

ALL MY SONS by Arthur Miller is a classic American story about a son discovering the imperfections of his father. Joe Keller, the father in *All My Sons*, is the "everyman." He is the most likable character in the story, until we discover he was responsible for sending out faulty airplane parts that cost twenty-one American soldiers their lives in WWII. When son Chris discovers his father's crime, neither father nor son can bear it. Joe knows his son will never see him as a hero again, and Chris's entire identity and belief system are turned upside down. Joe and Chris's relationship is a commentary on the disillusionment felt by the American people towards their country after WWII. The American Dream lost its purity in the eyes of Miller, and this play was his commentary on that loss. In this piece, like in *Antigone*, we see a larger theme of the play simplified within the father-son relationship.

Terence Rattigan's **MAN AND BOY** is about the crumbling empire of Gregor Antonescu, a shady Romanian businessman who spends his final days in his illegitimate son's Greenwich Village apartment. Unaware that he is a pawn in his father's game, Basil idolizes the legendary tycoon. Even when his father tries to use him for his own gain, Basil is forgiving. Again we find father and son at the center of an intense story. Gregor's dysfunctional relationship with his son allows us to truly understand how deeply Gregor's self-loathing lies.

While there are vast differences between Greek tragedies and modern family dramas, we still find the same dynamics at the heart of the plays. The relationship between father and son is not a problem to be solved. It's a dynamic all its own that will continue to be explored anew in each generation through their own lens. •

Christopher Denham
and David Morse



INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR DAVID MORSE

Before rehearsals began for *The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin*, Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with actor David Morse about his title role.

Ted Sod: Will you tell us a bit about yourself?

David Morse: I was born in Massachusetts in a town called Beverly. We lived in a few towns north of Boston: Essex, Hamilton, Danvers. I, like a lot of fortunate kids, had two teachers who were particularly keen about whatever was inside of me that was drawn to acting. They encouraged and nourished it. In the eighth grade there was a teacher named Mrs. Baker. We would read stories aloud in class. I was terrified that I would get picked to read something but still hoped like crazy that I would be. I just loved it. I loved reading different characters. Then when I got to high school there was Mrs. Ferrini who had a great influence on me.

TS: Did you go on to further studies like college or graduate school?

DM: I went right from high school into Boston Repertory Theatre. I hadn't even graduated from high school and I was asked to be a member of the company. It was kind of intimidating at first. They were all older and out of college. I became one of the founding members. I was there for six years before I went to New York. In New York, I studied with Bill Esper. He was one of Sandy Meisner's protégés and a great teacher.

TS: You got involved with Circle Repertory Company in New York, so it would seem that you are drawn to ensemble work. Is that true?

DM: I would say it's true of theatre. It's true of television. And it's true of film.

TS: Can you tell me about your decision to take on this role. Has it been a while since you've been onstage?

DM: *The Seafarer* [in 2008] was the last show I did on Broadway.

TS: Was there something about the role of Tom that appealed to you? And why this particular play?

DM: Before *The Seafarer*, the last play I did was *How I Learned to Drive*. It was really so hard on my family because I was away from them in New York for so long. I just really did not feel comfortable doing another play until the kids were older. After I did *The Seafarer*, I was asked to do other things in New York but it was still too soon. Now my kids have gone to college. And I'd been acting in "Treme" for HBO so it'd been hard to do any plays. We had just finished the last season of "Treme" and this play was given to me to read. I just love the way Steven Levenson has written the play. It is an appealing read. It's deceptively simple. It's filled with what makes a good play: humor and drama. And it has a character that, for me personally and I think everybody, is going to be a challenge to live with onstage.



TS: I, too, think the play is beautifully structured and your character is fascinating. How do you approach a role like this? Do you have to do research?

DM: I've done a number of roles where I've had to do research for characters who spent time in prison. And I volunteered for quite a few years in a prison. I didn't really feel like I needed to research that aspect of Tom's character. And the world that he was part of as a lawyer is fairly familiar. I certainly have friends who are lawyers, not just about Tom, but so many people in our society right now, is how they go down the road of making choices that are illegal and that hurt other people but that they believe are okay. They believe it's legitimate and they have a right to make those decisions. I personally don't get it. I don't get how people with so much money and so much power can choose to do things that are going to hurt people on such a big scale when they already have so much. Why do people who have so much have to try and get more at the expense of other people? That's part of my interest in playing this role; finding that out for myself. The play is about finding the answers to that paradox. It's a challenge on a very human and relatable level.

TS: I am intrigued by the relationship between Tom and James. Father-son relationships have taken center stage quite a bit. What do you make of it?

DM: It's close to home, which is another reason that I'm interested in playing Tom. Over the course of my career, my relationship with

my father has come up a lot. And in this play, it very much does. I don't need to go into that, but I'll say it really pulls on my personal experiences.

TS: That must be both exciting and frightening at the same time. What about the relationship with Karen, his ex-wife? She seems so done with him.

DM: Tom talks a little bit about what their relationship was early on. It seems to me that they both loved it. She must have been in love with him. They were together for quite a while before all of that stuff happened. They did eventually get a divorce but something was going on to keep them together. There had to be love and affection. I'm also thinking about the daughter who won't talk to me. She isn't in the play, but it will be fun to get to know what that relationship is all about.

TS: Do you think this is a play about betrayal? Or do you see it as being about something else?

DM: Clearly what Tom did was a betrayal. It was a betrayal on so many levels. He betrayed himself or whatever ideals he might have had at one time. It was certainly a betrayal of all he represented, especially to his family. Lying was a huge part of his life. Lies are a betrayal of trust.

TS: How do you like to collaborate with a director?

DM: It's not just the directors. It's the actors. It's everybody. What I love is collaboration. I love what happens between people when you work well together. That includes the technical people. It includes everybody. Everybody has a place. It's really the discovery together. I enjoy that open questioning and that vulnerable place that we all have to go to in order for it to work. The directors who I have had a hard time with tend to be the directors who really need to be controlling. They're afraid of the unexpected. They're afraid of things getting out of their control. A lot of times the most inspiring ideas are the ones that happen because you're not trying to control things. That's why I appreciate directors who are really open to those kinds of moments. Also, you really do need a director who has a strong vision of the world of the play.

TS: Do you appreciate having the playwright available to you? Is that an exciting aspect of doing a new play like this?

DM: Yes, it is for sure. I've been lucky to do a number of new plays with living playwrights. It's such a difference from the world of television and film. A lot of times in film, the writers are not on the set. Or there are a number of writers; you're not even sure who the creative mind behind it is. So it can be uncomfortable. In theatre, the writer tends to be a part of the process and is hugely important to discovering the play. I loved being able to interact with Lanford Wilson for *Redwood Curtain*

and with Paula Vogel for *How I Learned to Drive*.

TS: Do you have any advice for a young person who might be interested in a career in acting?

DM: I'm assuming that this is a young person who already has a fire or love for it. You can't make that up. You either have it or you don't. And if you do have it, what I would say is: Work as much as you can but don't think you have to be a movie star. Don't think: Is this going to make me famous? Is this going to make me money? That will cover itself. It will come. Just work with really good people who you care about and become the most you can possibly be. Learn and experience as much as you can about the world. Become as full a human being as you can, because then you have the most to bring to whatever it is you do. •

“CLEARLY WHAT TOM DID WAS A BETRAYAL. IT WAS A BETRAYAL ON SO MANY LEVELS. HE BETRAYED HIMSELF OR WHATEVER IDEALS HE MIGHT HAVE HAD AT ONE TIME. ”



David Morse

HOUSING BOOM AND BANKING BUST

“THE PRICES HAVE PRETTY MUCH TANKED... MOST OF THE OTHER HOUSES ARE EMPTY. IT’S LIKE A GHOST TOWN, THE WHOLE SUBDIVISION.” —JAMES DURNIN.

The setting of the play—the unfinished, uninhabited exurbs—resulted from the housing bubble that began in the 1990s and burst in 2008. For nearly a century, owning a home has been an essential part of the American dream. Home ownership reached an all-time high between 1994 and 2006, because banks allowed borrowers with low credit ratings to take on “subprime” adjustable-rate mortgages (ARMs). These loans offered borrowers an initial period of low payments, after which the payments would become much higher. The lending banks then unloaded these subprime mortgages by selling them to Wall Street investors. The increase of easy credit spurred a boom in home building, but the entire economy—consumer spending, jobs, and the securities market—depended on the rise of home prices.

Boom turned into bust after 2006, when home values declined due to a surplus in supply. As ARMs reset at higher interest rates, many consumers could not make the higher monthly payments. Large investment firms were hurt as the mortgage-backed securities fell in value. By 2008, the subprime mortgage crisis caused the collapse of several major financial institutions, a disruption of credit to businesses and consumers, and a severe global recession. Across the country, foreclosed or unfinished homes stood empty. Many Americans had their dream rudely awakened, losing their homes, jobs, and hope for the future.

GLOSSARY

BAILOUT	Financial assistance given, often by the government, to failing businesses or economies to save them from collapse.
CREDIT SCORE	Based on a person’s past credit history, a credit score is a numerical expression of a person’s creditworthiness that is used by lenders to assess the likelihood that a person will repay his or her debts.
INSIDER TRADING	Buying or selling stocks with insider knowledge of nonpublic information about a company. Corporate officers or employees who trade their own corporation’s securities after learning of confidential developments are committing illegal insider trading.
SECURITY	A financial instrument that has monetary value; most commonly a stock (an ownership position in a publicly-traded corporation) or a bond (a creditor relationship with governmental body or a corporation).
S.E.C.	The Securities and Exchange Commission of the United States was created in 1934 after the Great Depression of 1929 in order to help restore America’s faith in the stock market.
SECURITIES FRAUD	A wide range of illegal activities, all of which involve deceiving investors or the manipulation of financial markets. One type is persuading investors to buy stocks based on inaccurate facts.
WIRE FRAUD	A scheme to defraud money based on false representations or promises, using electronic communications (such as email) or an interstate communications facility (such as the post office).

MEET THE MADOFF FAMILY

Bernie Madoff is often the first to come to mind when thinking of white collar crime and securities fraud. The untold story behind many white-collar criminals is the impact on family members, who often learn the truth after the fact. The case of Bernard Madoff, convicted of committing one of the largest frauds in American history, is surrounded by complex family involvement. In 2009, Madoff admitted to losing \$50 billion of his investors’ money and pled guilty to 11 felony counts including fraud, perjury, false statements, and theft. He is now serving a sentence of 150 years in prison—the maximum possible prison sentence.

Bernard Madoff was born in New York City in 1938 during the Great Depression. In 1959 he married his childhood sweetheart, Ruth, who worked on the stock market, and one year later they founded their own firm. As it grew, Madoff hired members of his family. His sons Mark and Andrew, his brother Peter, and his niece Shana all held senior positions in the firm. Madoff maintained a reputation of high ethical standards in the financial services field, but in fact, his integrity was an enormous lie. Madoff was running a pyramid scheme, taking money from new investors to pay returns to existing investors. In the 2008 financial crisis, Madoff could no longer bring in the funds he needed to keep the scheme afloat. In December 2008, he revealed the truth to his sons and admitted he was “finished.”

Madoff’s sons claimed they had no idea of their father’s fraudulence and reported their father to federal authorities. Andrew and Mark cut off all contact from their parents. Still, they found themselves unemployable in the financial field. Two years after their father’s fall, Mark hung himself in his apartment. Ruth Madoff later also cut off all relations with her husband.

Madoff’s family, including Ruth, Andrew, and three daughters-in-law, were served with a \$255 million lawsuit claiming that, because members of the family shared in Madoff’s wealth, they should return the money to his victims. Many investors and charities were destroyed by Madoff’s crimes; the family also continues to cope with the consequences.

FINANCIAL CRISIS 2008: A TIMELINE

“PEOPLE ARE ANGRY, I GUESS, THE WHOLE COUNTRY IS ANGRY, WITH THE BAILOUTS, BONUSES. THESE PEOPLE IN THE GOVERNMENT, YOU KNOW, THEY’RE TERRIFIED THEY’RE GOING TO GET BLAMED, LOSE THEIR PENSIONS.” –TOM DURNIN

1. BUILD UP

2003-2007: Mortgage rates reach 40-year lows, so banks look for new instruments to attract customers. Subprime mortgages increase 292% as the private sector enters the mortgage bond market.

February 27, 2007: The Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac) announces it will no longer buy risky subprime mortgages and mortgage-related securities.

June-July 2007: Standard and Poor’s downgrades over 100 bonds backed by subprime mortgages and puts a credit watch on 612 securities backed by subprime mortgages.

January 24, 2008: Analysts announce the largest single-year drop in US home sales in a quarter of a century.

3. THE FALLOUT AND THE REPAIR

October 2008: 240,000 Americans lose their jobs.

October 3, 2008: President Bush signs \$700 billion economic bailout package. The Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) calls for the purchase of toxic subprime mortgage securities from the major banks.

November 12, 2008: US government announces drastic changes to TARP, cancelling acquisition of toxic assets and instead giving cash injections to banks.

January 28, 2009: Congress passes President Obama’s \$800 billion stimulus package of tax cuts and spending to revive the economy.

February 10-17, 2009: Senate passes stimulus package. Stock market drops the lowest since Obama has been president. Obama signs \$797 billion stimulus bill.

2. THE CRISIS

September 7, 2008: The US government bails out Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, two large firms that had guaranteed thousands of subprime mortgages.

September 15, 2008: American bank Lehman Brothers, heavily exposed to subprime mortgages, files for bankruptcy. This causes a global financial panic.

September 21, 2008: Stock market values for US investment banks plummet.

September 25-28, 2008: Washington Mutual and Wachovia banks collapse.

February 28, 2009: Obama proposes plan to help millions of homeowners save their homes by offering incentives and subsidies to mortgage companies.

March 19, 2009: US Treasury announces a program to give up to \$5 billion to rescue the failing automotive industry.

April 4, 2009: Group of 20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (G20) Summit. Global leaders propose new reforms for the global banks, tighter credit regulations, additional injection of \$1 trillion into the global economy.

May 20, 2009: Obama signs the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act, designed to prevent mortgage foreclosures and increase the availability of credit.

July 21, 2010: Dodd-Frank bill signed by Obama, bringing tighter regulations to the financial industry and banks, addressing the conditions that created the 2008 crisis.

INTERVIEW WITH LITERARY MANAGER JILL RAFSON

Before rehearsals began for *The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin*, Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Jill Rafson, Roundabout Theatre Company's Literary Manager, about the commissioning process for new plays.

Ted Sod: Given that Roundabout started as a theatre whose mission was to do revivals of classic plays and then musicals, how did the new play commissions come about?

Jill Rafson: Noah Haidle's *Mr. Marmalade* was actually a jumping off point for us, when we produced it in the Laura Pels Theatre at the Steinberg Center in 2005. Todd Haimes, our Artistic Director, felt that it wasn't the right venue and right audience for that play, even though this was a young writer with a voice he really believed in. The creation of Roundabout Underground came out of that experience. We decided that the answer was to start a new theatre space dedicated entirely to supporting and producing those early-career writers and putting their work in front of a young, diverse audience that would have access to the productions thanks to the inexpensive tickets. Since the beginning, commissions have been a huge part of that whole Underground experience. You get your first professional production in New York with us, and then you're automatically given a commission to write another play for Roundabout, with the goal that you'll graduate upstairs to the Laura Pels Theatre with that second play. But the Underground writers aren't the only ones being asked to write new plays. We also have commissioned plays from writers who have never been produced at Roundabout: Matthew Lopez, whose play *The Whipping Man* is being done all over the country now; Julie Marie Myatt, who's done incredibly well regionally, but hasn't been done in New York yet; and Lydia Diamond, who we commissioned a few years before her play *Stick Fly* made it to Broadway.

TS: Julia Cho's play *The Language Archive* was a commission, and she won the Blackburn Prize for it. How did that come about, just as an example?

JR: We had one year when we were just getting things rolling with the Underground and we got a wonderful grant from the Educational Foundation of America that allowed us to commission three new plays all at once, which was amazing. Julia's play was one of those. Her play *Durango* had recently been done at The Public, and that's a play that I absolutely loved. So we asked her to come and write us a play.

TS: Steven Levenson's play *The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin* is the second of the Underground commissions, the first being Stephen Karam's *Sons of the Prophet*. Can you talk about how the artistic staff is involved with the development of these plays?

JR: Every commission develops differently. We don't really give restrictions to the writers. We say write us whatever you want but keep in mind that the goal is the Laura Pels Theatre. Sometimes the writers will come to us and pitch a couple of different ideas and say, "Which one of these do you think is the best one for me to pursue?" That happens a lot of the time. Stephen Karam just said



he wanted to write a play about pain and dealing with his own Lebanese-American background, so we had no idea what we were going to get. Steven Levenson was even more interesting because he didn't know what he was going to write when we first spoke to him about the commission. He ended up writing very quickly, turning in a first draft less than six months after *The Language of Trees* had finished its run in the Underground, which is really fast. Robyn Goodman, Josh Fiedler, and I read the script and weren't sure what to make of it. We had a meeting with Steven and asked, "What made you want to write this play?" He kind of paused and said, "I have no idea. I don't think I like it." We asked if he wanted to keep working on it. He said, "Not really." So we said, "All right, this play is not your commission. We're giving you a do-over." And he said, "Great. I'm going to go take more time." Basically, he had that thing that so many young writers have after their first big production. He was scared of what was going to happen next. So his response to that was writing another play quickly so he could get another production up. It's great that Steven was able to realize that it wasn't the right choice for him. When he came back to us again, it was with *The Unavoidable Disappearance of Tom Durnin*, and immediately it was clear that this was the play that he should be writing. It's exactly what we want to be seeing in these next steps that the Underground writers take. In every case, when they've turned in these scripts, we've seen real growth in them. It shows a new maturity. It shows them taking different chances. *The Language of Trees* was a play that dealt in magical realism, and that was very much of its time and of a young writer

experimenting. *Tom Durnin* is a well-made play, but it's not a safe play by any means because I think it asks us to sympathize with really unsympathetic people and to not be sure whose side you're on. It's really a play of growth for Steven.

TS: Do you feel comfortable talking about what's coming down the pipeline with the rest of the Underground commissions?

JR: Yes! Adam Gwon (*Ordinary Days*) decided that he would work with a collaborator, rather than writing his commission solo. So he will be writing a new musical with Michael Mitnick, a really wonderful playwright. I can't talk too much about the project yet because it's an adaptation and we're still working on getting the rights. But it's something that I am very excited about. We are expecting to get a first draft this fall from Joshua Harmon, who wrote *Bad Jews*. Andrew Hinderaker (*Suicide, Incorporated*) is working on his commission, but we've also been developing other plays with him. He's got a couple of great scripts that we've been talking about, so we may actually look at them before we even get to his commission. Kim Rosenstock (*Tigers Be Still*) is very busy writing for television so I'm not sure when we'll see a play from her. One of the things I've learned about commissions is that every writer needs their own amount of time. They're all completely different. They'll write what they want to write when they're ready to. There may be dates in their contract of when they're supposed to turn in a draft, but most of the time it's just about building the personal relationships and knowing what they need from us.

TS: You mentioned having a grant. If someone's reading this and they want to support a writer under these circumstances, what should they do?

JR: Tell us that you want to support a commission at Roundabout. We're going to keep commissioning the playwrights from the Underground every year, no matter what, because we think it's the right way to run that program. However, it's hard for us to go out of our way to commission anyone else unless we have somebody supporting it. Some great work, including *The Language Archive*, has come from people supporting these commissions. I have a list of writers I would love to go to and say, "Come and write a play for Roundabout" and be able to work with them on developing that play in-house with all the support we can offer. But you can't do that if you don't have the funds.

TS: I purposely avoided talking about themes of *Tom Durnin* or the dynamics of it because

I thought the audience should experience it themselves. But it was a very compelling read for me. I was really involved with the characters and the collateral damage that is caused when someone's life has been completely changed. How did you respond to the play?

JR: I love the universality of it. I love that it's a play that forces you to think about consequences and to rethink who the bad guy is. How aware are we of our mistakes as we're making them? Do we think about the ricochet effect? Actually, we were developing this play around the time we produced Terence Rattigan's *Man and Boy*. The way these two plays speak to each other shows how timeless these themes are. I think Steven's play has a lot to

say about men, masculinity, money, fathers, and sons. These are issues that will always be relevant but will manifest themselves differently in different eras. Every character in *Tom Durnin* has a specific point of view and feels like a very real person. One of the big questions the play asks is: what's the value in looking forward versus the value in looking back? I love that concept. I think everybody deals with that. •

"WE WERE DEVELOPING THIS PLAY AROUND THE TIME WE PRODUCED TERENCE RATTIGAN'S MAN AND BOY. THE WAY THESE TWO PLAYS SPEAK TO EACH OTHER SHOWS HOW TIMELESS THESE THEMES ARE."

Christopher Denham and
Lisa Emery



A LOOK AT THE DESIGN PROCESS

"Tom Durnin requires several locations, and Scott felt that the more realistically we could represent the two homes, the better. In a small space like the Laura Pels, this is a challenge. But after going through several options, we settled on a turntable to move us from James's house to his mother's condo, and back again.

We set this in a surrounding that conjures up the neglected half-abandoned suburbs of the 00's housing boom and bust. A sense of decrepit advertising and a neglected suburban lawn hopefully set the emotional tone for the play."

-BEOWULF BORITT, SCENIC DESIGNER



"For a setting like the empty landscape of Tom Durnin, I thought it was important to keep the tone of the music flat and reserved, with the same kind of poker-faced coldness that an unpeopled big-box suburb might have. This is not to say that there will be no emotion, but a spare hand with it will hopefully better highlight what little sentiment there is. The instrumentation will likely be simple and sparse, with a sense of empty space.

The soundscape is still in development, but currently I think we may need quiet ambiances for the outdoor locations. These sounds should be equally spare, perhaps only passing cars or distant highways, but with very little life: no insects or birds, for instance. I expect the interior sounds to be mostly defined by the presence or absence of background television described in the script."

-OBADIAH EAVES, SOUND DESIGNER

"My background is fashion, so my process is to read through the script a few times. I make notes and rough sketches. The next step usually involves a meeting with the director and the set designer — in this case, Scott Ellis and Beowulf Boritt. The set always serves as a huge source of inspiration. After viewing the model, I will speak with the director and listen to his thoughts. Sometimes a stylized set requires stylized costumes. Other times, the opposite is true where realistic costumes are required to ground the actors in the stylized space.

The style of this production is what I refer to as "minimal realism," a signature term which was first used to describe my work by the set designer Derek McLane. I never try to create a specific color palette unless requested by the director. I prefer the color story to evolve naturally, especially in a production like this, because it speaks to the way people really dress. I go back and search the script for context which helps give me insight to the characters. For example, James speaks of summering in Montauk and a family home in Cape Cod as well as attending Yale in contrast to his current job and suburban status. Essential information also comes from the actors' insight into their own characters. Working with an amazing design team and director always helps!"

-JEFF MAHSHIE, COSTUME DESIGNER



"The light for Tom Durnin will reveal a bleak, gray landscape, a part of the world that has fallen into hard and desolate times after the 2007 housing crash. The sun is rarely seen over the course of the play: much of it takes place at night or under overcast skies. It will feature a muted, monochromatic palette and low angled light to evoke a sense of loss and emptiness. The light will also play an important storytelling role: each of Tom Durnin's six locations will have a distinct lighting vocabulary, so it's always clear to the audience where we are. For example, some interior scenes will be filled with a light that appears to be produced by the lamps and sconces in the room, others will feel like they're lit only by the gray light of day. The intensity of the light will also modulate throughout: you'll feel a subliminal sense of kinetic ebb and flow, corresponding to the shifting emotional temperature within each scene. In summary, Tom Durnin is a play where the light will be rarely noticed, but always felt."

-DON HOLDER, LIGHTING DESIGNER

GLOSSARY

LANGUAGE OF THE TIME AND PLACE:

COBRA	The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 is a law passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Ronald Reagan that mandates employees have the ability to continue health insurance coverage after leaving employment. <i>Katie explains that she will soon be without her COBRA medical insurance from her previous job.</i>
DISBARMENT	Disbarment is banning a lawyer from practicing law and revoking his or her law license. <i>Chris wonders how Tom plans to find a job in law if he has been disbarred and had his law license revoked.</i>
DISTRICT ATTORNEY	A district attorney is an elected or appointed public official of a county or designated district who is responsible for prosecuting people accused of crimes within his or her district/county. <i>Tom says the district attorney is trying to reach him to offer him a deal.</i>
FARCICAL	Farcical refers to extravagant or absurd humor and is derived from the word farce. <i>Tom finds it farcical that he allowed his son James to stay in his home for 18 years but now James will not allow his own father to stay in his home for a week.</i>
HISTRIONICS	A deliberate display of emotion for effect. <i>Tom asks Karen stop the histrionics and forgive him.</i>
INDICTMENT	An indictment is a formal charge or accusation of a serious crime. <i>Tom speculates that he might be able to get a few of his former colleagues and friends indicted for their crimes.</i>
NOVELLA	A novella is a story with a compact and pointed plot. Novellas are longer than a short story but too brief to be recognized as a novel. <i>James explains to Katie that he is writing a novella rather than a novel.</i>
STALACTITE	A structure hanging like an icicle from the roof of a cave formed of calcium salts deposited by dripping water. <i>Katie compares a man's muscles to boulders or smooth stalactites carved in the earth.</i>

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WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR
EDUCATORS

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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