

Why Jeffrey Hatcher's THREE VIEWINGS

by David Ceccarini

In my early, developing days as a young actor at American Players Theatre, we were led by a charismatic artistic team whose underlying mission – besides bringing compelling Shakespeare to Wisconsin's countryside – was to return to the very basic fundamentals of theatre itself: the art of storytelling.

We entered into intense study of language, history, psychology and literature. We attempted to form a crystal-clear understanding of text, character, motivation, structure and intent. And we sought inspiration from the words of some of the great theatre practitioners who had blazed an early trail toward the modern, realistic, passionate and fully-engaging theatrical experience.

ANCESTORS

We learned the truth about Stanislavsky's "method" approach (no, you don't think about your cat that died when you need tears). We read accounts of actors from previous centuries: the quixotic Edmund Kean (like reading Shakespeare by lightning), luminous Ellen Terry, who brought most of Shakespeare's heroines to brilliant life, or the Booth fam-



Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth

ily dynasty: father Junius Brutus Booth, with sons Edwin – intense and innovative – and his infamous brother John Wilkes, whose final stage appearance at Ford's Theatre stunned a nation still divided by civil strife.

I was particularly taken with one brief but transformative volume written by Robert Edmond Jones, an American theatre designer in the early 20th century. Jones brought a tremendous personal adoration for theatre to his work, along with an integrated vision of design which fit seamlessly with what the play and, most importantly, the actors needed

to do onstage. He did it all: scenery, costumes and lights, for an entirely coordinated approach. Jones' reputation among peers was, simply: genius.

ORIGINS

Toward the beginning of his evocative book, *The Dramatic Imagination*, Jones describes the theatre as it once was, cleverly describing what he contends may have been the world's first show! It's the story of Stone Age cavemen, of a close gathering in darkness around the safety of fire, and of a leader who tells his little band of the lion he had killed earlier that day.

Jones writes:

The lion's skin lies close by, near the fire. Suddenly the leader jumps to his feet. "I killed the lion! I did it! He sprang at me! I struck at him with my spear! He fell down! He lay still!"

He is telling us. We listen. But all at once an idea comes to his dim brain. "I know a better way to tell you. See! It was like this! Let me show you!"

In that instant drama is born.

"Sit around me in a circle – you, and you, and you – right here where I can reach out and touch you all." With one inclusive gesture, he makes – a theatre!

The leader continues: "You, Ook, over there – you stand up and be the lion. You put on the lion's skin, and I'll kill you and we'll show them how it was."

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The two freshly-minted actors depict the hunt: Ook, growling terribly, the leader stalking his prey. As the drama plays out, the audience sees their friend Ook in a different light: he is Ook alright, but he is a lion too. Jones continues:

The drama is finished.

Now Ook takes off his lion's skin and sits beside us and is himself again. Just like you. Just like me. Good old Ook. No, not quite like you or me. Ook will be, for as long as he lives, the man who can be a lion when he wants. The lion's spirit gets into him. And we shall always look up to him and admire him and perhaps be secretly a little afraid of him. Ook is an actor. He will always be different from the rest of us, a little apart from us. For he can summon spirits.

BACK TO BASICS

In his fanciful Stone Age tale, Jones describes the essence of theatre; that of summoning spirits. And there are three essential elements in this act which come together in mutual agreement: the actor, the author and the audience. The actor enters into the bargain to join with an author's character in spiritual communion, and the audience comes with willing

and open imagination, ready to invest belief. The story is not only told, it is experienced. This powerful, triple alliance transports human souls to rare and exotic places, where adventure abounds and empathy breathes.

With Jeffrey Hatcher's *THREE VIEWINGS*, we look forward to hosting your return as you take your rightful place in a Next Act seat. Despite the necessary paraphernalia-of-pandemic, we hope to inspire you with unusual stories, well-told, in the simplest and oldest of theatre traditions: an author, an actor and you, the audience.

Welcome back.

-quoted from *The Dramatic Imagination* by Robert Edmond Jones
Copyright 1941 Theatre Arts Books, New York

Meet Jasmine Brown



Last summer's social unrest awakened the need for arts organizations nationwide to examine their processes for inclusion and diversity to determine if what they offer to artists, patrons and students of color is enough. While confident that voices from diverse communities are heard in many of the plays we do, we realized that we needed to develop opportunities to expand diversity within our technical and administrative staff.

Next Act met with local artists of color and through continued discussions, a new opportunity for diversity was created. Students of color now have the option to work with Next Act through the new Inclusion, Equity and Opportunity (IEO) paid internship program. Students receive first-hand experience in production [directing, stage management, design] or administrative areas of theatre. To assist with the program's inaugural year, the United Performing Arts Fund's Kasey's Fund provided funding for the IEO program. During the 2020-21 season, two people took on directing internships and

this season the first administrative intern, Jasmine Brown, joined the team.

In high school, Jasmine was a regular participant of the Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Teens program. After recently earning a degree in Arts Management from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Jasmine returned to Next Actors as an Assistant Teacher. In August of the 2021-22 season, Jasmine joined the administrative staff as its first administrative IEO intern.

"Working at Next Act has always been a dream of mine and I'm excited to apply my schooling to the theater. The biggest thing that I love about the program is learning how to network. I am not just an intern here in the moment; I am also seizing opportunities for the future."

The objective of the IEO internship is to create a place that artists of color can call their artistic home. Through this initiative, Next Act Theatre provides practical and professional experience to Jasmine and others like her. The IEO program also creates networking opportunities for these young artists and future administrators. It is Next Act's hope that this will lead to more artists of color remaining in or coming to the area, making Milwaukee their home base.

I Love A Parade!

On Tuesday, August 31, supporters of Next Act Theatre and Renaissance Theaterworks gathered at the Broadway Theater Center for a very special purpose: to march Renaissance Theaterworks across the bridge to its new artistic home at Next Act Theatre. A crowd of excited patrons and fans waved signs, carried banners, cheered, whooped and waved as the procession made its way to 255 S. Water Street.

Once there, guests enjoyed picnic food and socialized outside to the soundtrack of DJ DRiPSweat before heading into the theatre for a preview of both companies' seasons. April Paul and Tara Mallen read a scene from Renaissance Theaterworks' upcoming production of *THE CAKE*, while Mary MacDonald Kerr and Dylan Bolin offered a preview of Next Act's holiday production of *RED HERRING*. Both companies then held a town hall with great discussion on reopening, safety protocols and returning for the upcoming season.

Thanks to everyone who joined us and welcome, RTW, to your new artistic home!



Photo: Mark Frohna



Photo: Mark Frohna

OCTOBER 22 - NOVEMBER 14

the Cake

By Bekah Brunstetter

Renaissance
THEATERWORKS

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www.r-t-w.com

It's like rain on your wedding day
 It's a free ride when you've already paid
 It's the good advice that you just didn't take
 And who would've thought, it figures
 -Alanis Morissette, *Ironic*

THREE VIEWINGS is one of the liveliest plays you'll ever see set in a funeral home. And isn't that ironic? Jeffrey Hatcher mingles the complicated relationship between living and dying into a play full of humor and heart, suffused with both ample joy and sorrow. In *THREE VIEWINGS*, the biggest truths lie in the contradictions, in the places where happiness and sadness intertwine.

In the back of the script, Hatcher writes:

"In general, I'm convinced that productions of *THREE VIEWINGS* should avoid any attempt to overlay the themes of death, loss, and despair, which can lead to a lugubrious and humorless evening. True, each of the three pieces contains passages that must be played with raw emotion and without humor, but audiences bring their own experience of death and loss to the theatre, and we don't need to hit them over the head with what they already know."

The past year has been an unparalleled challenge, and as we return to live theatre, in person for the first time in a year-and-a-half, we all, as Hatcher says, bring our own experiences with us: experiences of loss or grief, of concern, anxiety and hardship. We come back to Next Act changed from the people we were before – older, certainly; perhaps wiser, but doubtlessly different.

Jeffrey Hatcher invites us, with our personal experiences and challenges, to lean into the contradictions and irony. In his small, Midwestern funeral parlor, we find scenes of great life, of people living full and complex experiences even in the face of loss.



In staging *THREE VIEWINGS*, we hope you'll join us for an embracing of life in all its contradictions: sometimes hilarious, sometimes devastating and ever-changing—never the same for long. It's been said that "may you live in interesting times" can be both a blessing and a curse. Isn't it ironic?

Welcome back to live theatre. With all its challenges, contradictions and conversations, we can't wait to have you.

THREE VIEWINGS by Jeffrey Hatcher

A small Midwestern funeral parlor is the setting for three darkly funny and touching stories, woven together into an evening of extraordinary storytelling.

Directed by: Edward Morgan

Featuring: Cassandra Bissell, David Ceccarini & Carrie Hitchcock

September 23 - October 17

At Next Act Theatre • 255 S. Water Street

Sponsored by The Einhorn Family Foundation, a Donor Advised Fund of the Bradley Impact Fund & Friends of Next Act Theatre

SEPTEMBER 23 - OCTOBER 17, 2021						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				23 Preview 7:30	24 Opening 7:30	25 4:30 8:00
26 2:00			29 1:30 7:30	30 7:30	1 7:30	2 4:30 8:00
3 2:00			6 1:30 7:30	7 7:30	8 7:30	9 4:30 8:00
10 2:00	11 7:30		13 7:30	14 7:30	15 7:30	16 4:30 8:00
17 2:00	P Personal Preview (Begins 30 minutes prior to curtain) T Talkback S Sunday Night Insights \$ Pay What You Can					

Single tickets on sale through the Ticket Office (414) 278-0765 or online at nextact.org
 Virtual viewing option available through Broadway on Demand. Call or visit our website for more information or tickets.

As Next Act Theatre reopens for its 2021-22 season, we want to make sure our staff, artists and audiences are as safe as possible. The return to live theatre should be a celebration, not a source of worry! We have worked hard to get our space ready for you, and now we need your help: only if we all work together can we maintain a safe environment for live theatre. Please note that we are closely monitoring local conditions, updating our protocols as needed and informing patrons of any changes of any changes we make.

It's a team effort to keep Next Act safe this season, and here's what we'll be doing together:

WHAT WE'RE DOING



FULLY-VACCINATED WORKFORCE

Everyone working at Next Act Theatre is fully vaccinated!



IMPROVED AIR FILTRATION

We've upgraded our HVAC system for improved air circulation and particle filtration.



ENHANCED SANITATION

From increased cleaning of bathrooms and other surfaces to hand sanitizing stations, our building is cleaner than ever.



LIMITED CAPACITY

Until further notice, all shows will be held at 50% capacity.



CONTACT-FREE TICKETING

Admission to our theatre is contact-free with our new scanning system.



VIRTUAL OPTIONS

We will release information about online viewing on a show-by-show basis.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

GET THE VACCINE

Surveys show that 95 percent of our audience is already vaccinated against COVID-19! Count yourself among them and get the shot before attending any performances at Next Act.



Save time by pre-verifying your vaccination with Next Act before attending a performance:

- Take a photograph of your **CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card** together with a copy of your valid Driver's License or State ID and email them to info@nextact.org with VACCINATION VERIFICATION in the subject line of your email; **or,**
- Bring your documents to the Next Act ticket office any day between noon and 5 PM; **or,**
- Fax copies to (414) 278-5930; **or,**
- Mail copies to: Next Act Theatre, PO Box 394, Milwaukee, WI 53201, allowing enough time for us to receive them before you come to the theatre

Any patron not pre-verified will be required to present a CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card and valid Driver's License or State ID at the door for entry.



MASK UP

Masks are required at all times, everywhere within the Next Act building.



STAY SAFE - PROTECT OTHERS

Feeling sick? Stay home! We'll gladly work out ticket rescheduling or virtual presentation options with you. Just give us a call at 414-278-0378.



Next Act is pleased to announce the creation of a planned giving program

Charles Kakuk was Next Act Theatre's Managing Director who, after 22 years with us, lost his battle with cancer in 2014. Charles left a generous gift to Next Act as an investment in the financial future of the organization. Combined with several other bequests, we were inspired to create the Charles D. Kakuk Legacy Society in his honor.

Those who remember Next Act Theatre through a will, trust or other planned gift, are invited to inform us of their intentions and join the Charles D. Kakuk Legacy Society. The Legacy Society provides a way to recognize and to thank donors during their lifetimes, and ensures that their wishes are properly documented. You may always choose to remain anonymous in your philanthropy. However, inclusion in The Legacy Society can be an inspirational experience and may encourage others to look toward the future and how they too may have an enduring impact on organizations about whom they care.

After November 1, 2021, you will find a Statement of Intent Form on our website (or you can request one by mail or email). After consultation with your financial and/or legal advisor(s), simply return your pledge and receive the benefits that come with membership to the Legacy Society, along with the knowledge that you have proclaimed your trust in our future. No documentation of gift amount or type is required. Legacy Society members can designate the intended use of their future gifts or leave the distribution to the discretion of our "Board of Directors and Executive Leadership.

Legacy giving offers us a way to contribute to the community through our artistic and educational programming far beyond the measure of one lifetime. Benefits of joining The Legacy Society include:

- A relationship with The Society and other donors.
- Satisfaction in knowing your legacy will make a difference in your community while encouraging others to do the same.
- Special recognition on our Legacy Wall, website, programs and annual reports, unless anonymity is desired.
- Invitations to special donor events.
- A copy of Next Act Theatre's Annual Report each year.

Gifts made through a bequest in a will or trust are not the only means of becoming a member of The Legacy Society. Other ways in which donors can apply personal resources toward the betterment of their community through support of Next Act include:

- Estates
- Gifts of life insurance
- Beneficiary designation of individual retirement accounts (IRA, 401K, 403B)

Legacy Society members share a dedication and commitment to Next Act Theatre – but every act of giving is personal and unique. If you've already included Next Act Theatre in your will or we are a named beneficiary of a retirement account or insurance plan, **we thank you** and encourage you to let us know so that we may send you a Statement of Intent Form. Otherwise, if you have questions or require more information about the Legacy Society, please **contact Jane Flieller, Development Director at 414-278-7780 or jane@nextact.org.**

Members of the Charles D. Kakuk Legacy Society

Charles D. Kakuk • Sally Marks • Jan Martin
Milan and Gordana Racic • Dick and Diane Wright • Bettie Zillman

As depicted in the play **THREE VIEWINGS**, reactions surrounding death can be quite varied, from dark to humorous, from callous to sentimental. The range of human behavior is vast to say the least and playwright Jeffery Hatcher has a decidedly irreverent perspective for us to enjoy. However, through his stories he also challenges us to take stock of our own relationship to death and our related traditions. It is a layered world of nuanced and shifting revelations which the art of Jean Dexter Sobon, our featured artist, embodies in her artwork as well.



“On the surface my artworks are narratives. They tell stories. Some tell multiple stories through my use of layered or juxtaposed images. Additionally, below the surface, each artwork is also a tool for self-questioning and understanding... Stories take on life, become active in time through their telling and hearing... But, as happens in dreams, the objects, colors, people, places, sounds and sensations used in stories and art can exist also as symbols; symbols that often carry multiple meanings... You, the viewer, are part of the narrative of every artwork you confront. The artist begins the work that you will finish.”



Jean holds BS and MS degrees in Art Education from UWM. She taught art in the public schools of Whitefish Bay and Germantown from 1976 to 2003 when she retired to focus on her artwork full-time. Her award-winning work is represented in numerous private and corporate collections nationwide. We are honored to be able to share her art with the Next Act community.



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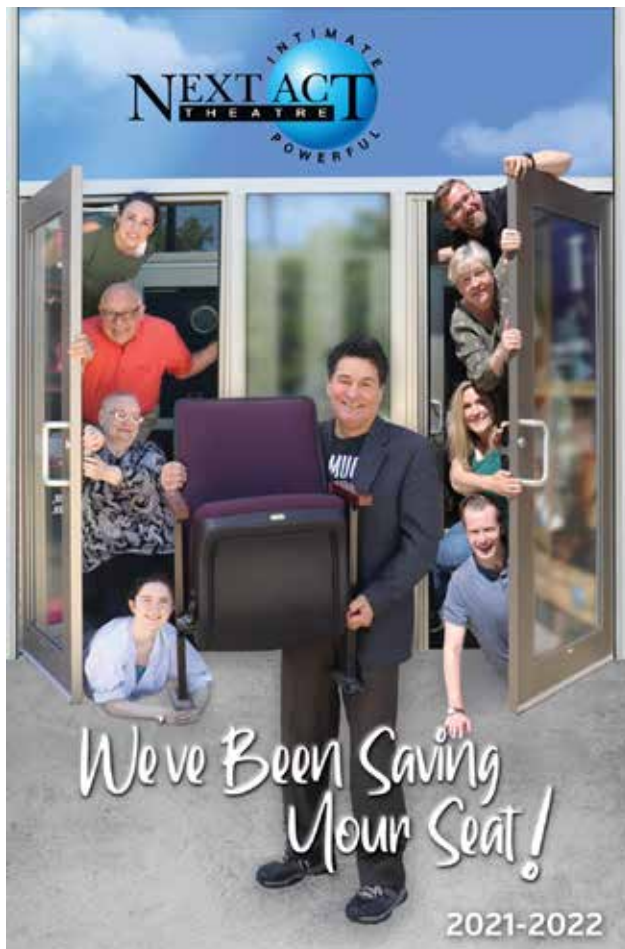
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THREE VIEWINGS by Jeffrey Hatcher
September 23 - October 17, 2021

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February 10 - March 6, 2022

THE LAST WHITE MAN by Bill Cain
April 14 - May 8, 2022

**All shows happening live at Next Act Theatre
255 S. Water St. | Milwaukee, WI 53204**

Season subscriptions and single tickets on sale through
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Virtual viewing options also available. Call or visit the
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