

Why HOW TO WRITE A NEW BOOK FOR THE BIBLE?

by David Ceccarini

In this space I have written before that I am not an adherent of any general, or particular, religious following, practice, philosophy or creed. My beautiful, caring and loving mother tried, God bless her, but it just didn't take. So it may seem out of place that I've chosen a play that refers to a new book for the Bible in its title. As you might expect, there's more to this story.

THE WRITER

First of all, there's the playwright, Bill Cain. Since reading his fascinating, mind-blowing *EQUIVOCATION* a few years back [seen at Next Act last season], I have been a fan of this man's way with words. Mr. Cain has a flair for drama, for finding what's engaging, for hooking his audience. And he seems to understand what is highly interesting, or even essential, about the mystery of what makes us human beings.

Also, as you will soon see, this play is not so much about the Bible, per se, but about family. Specifically, Bill's.

In an interview about his autobiographical play, Cain states, "Most plays about families are

about families that have gone wrong, at some point. And whether it's Greek drama where people are killing one another, or *THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN* where the father dies, it's about dysfunctional families."



T. Stacy Hicks, Josh Krause, David Ceccarini in last season's production of *EQUIVOCATION*; Photo: Ross Zentner

DRAMA IN LOVING

With a wry smile, Cain continues: "I come from a functional family. My father and my mother and brother are exquisite human beings. And when I decided to write about them, I thought it's because they, in fact, represent more of our families than we usually claim. Usually we go to theatre to see George and Martha, in *VIRGINIA WOOLF*, tearing at one another. But I think there's great drama in a family in which people are really trying to love one another."

I would tend to agree with Mr. Cain. *HOW TO WRITE A NEW BOOK FOR THE BIBLE* is an exceptional piece of theatre, woven from the very personal strands of Bill's memories and musings, while caring for his mother during her last nine months on this earth.

Cain has kept a diary every day, from a very young age, and the final months with his mom were no exception. As days and weeks slid by, Cain was reminded of his family history, pivotal events, and the over-arching "rules of engagement" which kept his father, mother, brother and himself together. This play, in one respect, is Cain's way of working out the meaning of their time together and the mystery of how they loved. As the Bill character says, "I want a second chance at the Book of Cain. The first time, I was just trying to get through."

Cain's premise for the title is that the Bible is not a rule book as some would have it, but the story of a family. With a Jesuit priest's training, Bill explains, "I am expected to find the presence of God everywhere. If you want to see God – says the book – look at your family story." And as he examines the Cain family lore, Bill writes a new book to add to the collection, which will include all the "specific, unrepeatable details." It is a love story, told with earnest and deep respect for his family.

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SHE HAD HER MOMENTS

Not that everything was rosy in the Cain household. Mother Mary could be critical, even hurtful, to husband and sons. She bore a high standard of expectation, first, for herself, and then for everyone else. She believed you could accomplish anything if only you tried hard enough. Her demands inevitably led to conflict. However, the Cain family also had specific rules for fair fighting, which kept arguments civilized, constructive and honest. That's one important part of their family functionality.

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

It's often a rolling eyes cliché when we might say we come from a dysfunctional family – after all, surviving intact could be ironically construed as a noble badge of honor. But, alternatively, it might be that a family – any family, yours, theirs or mine – grows up in its own unique way. Habits, interactions and rules evolve which help that family get on with the business of survival, of rearing the kids, of achieving fulfillment, of finding – or even defining - love. Perhaps most families aren't exactly dysfunctional; maybe, just unusual, as compared with neighbors to the right or left. Or across the world. Rather than dysfunctional, families are often just...funny. That's one aspect which Bill has definitely emphasized in the new book of the Family Cain.



Bill Cain – playwright, director & Jesuit priest

After Bill's play had received its first fully rehearsed, fully realized production, it continued with the same cast for another full run at the Seattle Rep. Cain commented about the upcoming re-mount. "I think family's the most important thing in all of our lives. Getting a chance to celebrate it with people who really understand it has been remarkable."

As we prepare to bring our fully-realized production to you, I find my thoughts are in complete agreement with Bill's. Let the remarkable celebration begin!

See you at the theatre.

UPAF Ride for the Arts

The UPAF Ride for the Arts, sponsored by Miller Lite, on Sunday, June 2, is Wisconsin's largest, one-day recreational bike ride – and it's right here in Milwaukee!

This family-friendly, two-wheeled adventure raises money to support the region's vibrant performing arts scene. From theatre to music to dance, the ride supports UPAF Member Groups like us!

As always, we invite you join the Next Act Team by visiting UPAF.org/UPAF-events/ride.

Would you rather sleep in on a Sunday morning? Make an impact through pledging!



- Make a pledge to the Next Act team and 40% of your support comes straight back to Next Act.
- **Take the Team Cecsarini Challenge!** David, Deborah and the girls will ride a total of 120 miles this year. You can cheer them on! Pledge a penny, a dime, a quarter or a buck per mile pedaled. The amount is up to you, and we'll provide the leg-power. Call 414-278-7780 to set up your pledge today!
- Or visit UPAF.org/UPAF-events/ride and click Donate to the Ride. From there you can designate your pledge to Next Act Theatre's team.



A Good Fit: Meet Next Act Newcomer, Jack Dwyer

by David Cecsarini



"Ever since I was a kid, I have loved words and language. I knew early on that I wanted to be a writer and a poet."

Pretty good preparation for ending up in the theatre.

Appearing in our next production, *HOW TO WRITE A NEW BOOK FOR THE BIBLE*, Next Act newcomer Jack

Dwyer hails from Wheaton, Illinois, about 30 miles west of Chicago. We recently enjoyed a wide-ranging and very interesting conversation; here is a bit of our chat.

"Also while still young, I developed the ambition to become a priest." Perhaps Jack was feeling the vibes of one of Wheaton's best known institutions, Wheaton College, "The Harvard of Evangelical schools." But the flirtation with getting closer to the Divine was brief.

Jack tells me that in high school, he did do a bit of theatre, but he wasn't satisfied with the work. "I adopted a pretty snooty attitude about it all. They just wanted to do silly plays. I wanted to be a serious artist; a writer."

So he headed out east, all the way to Gambier, Ohio, to earn his Bachelor's degree at Kenyon College. There, he let down his guard and regularly acted in plays with other, more experienced theatre students. "This was all new. I had not known anyone who had been an actor before." The world of theatre was making more sense, and by working on the language classics like Chekhov and Shakespeare, Jack's love of words found a new home.

"Then ... I graduated, and thought, 'now what?'"

Kevin Rich, one of his Kenyon professors and a theatre professional, recommended that he try for an acting internship at the American Players Theatre in Spring Green, WI. Jack landed the job and after a jam-packed summer of classics, he was convinced. "OK, I love this. Let's go."

So Jack set out on his young acting career, snagging a few educational theatre tours, one of which was ALADDIN, which provoked his enigmatic comment: "Oh god, help me." I didn't inquire further, figuring the memory had been unsettling enough for the moment. Jack also worked a summer season at Illinois Shakespeare, where he worked alongside some of Milwaukee's finest: Norman Moses, Jon Daly and Deborah Staples. At the end of that season, Illinois Shakes' artistic director – the aforementioned Kevin Rich – deemed Jack ready for grad school.

As Next Act's 30 years have unfolded, time seems to have moved at all kinds of differing speeds. The first two years (just after the June, 1990 merger) were a somewhat constant blur of rehearsal, production, cash flow challenges and growing pains. We had taken a really big bite of "new arts organization sandwich," and it was all we could do to chew and not choke, let alone savor the taste. Then, thanks to some generous believers and my cohort Jonathan Smoots, we stabilized the company and defined the Next Act mission with better understanding and precision. The rhythm of those years wasn't exactly smooth, but, with the magnificent managing of Charles D. Kakuk, the balance between emergency vs. success began to favor the latter. In 2000, we hit our stride, having created the Off-Broadway Theatre, our home space. It was there that we solidified our reputation for intimate, powerful theatre; audiences thrilled at the proximity and were engaged by the resulting conversations.

This coming season we turn 30 and start the ninth year in our South Water Street location. And though it's a three-decade milestone on paper, next season's plays will not veer away from the mission we have established and that you have embraced. I invite you to celebrate this birthday party with us by enjoying another season of terrific plays many patrons say "can only be found at Next Act."

THE REVOLUTIONISTS by Lauren Gunderson
September 26 - October 20, 2019

Four beautiful, badass women lose their heads in this irreverent, female-powered comedy set during the French Revolution. Playwright Olympe de Gouges, assassin Charlotte Corday, former queen (and fan of ribbons) Marie Antoinette, and Haitian rebel Marianne Angelle hang out, murder Marat, and try to beat back the extremist insanity in 1793 Paris. This grand and dream-tweaked comedy is about art and activism, feminism and terrorism, patriots and chosen sisters, and how we actually go about changing the world.

"It's simply a brilliant script..." -CityBeat (Cincinnati).
"...in this sparkling work, politics is very, very funny. ... socially driven art...These are hilarious and lovable women trapped in a history with a somber final act."
-Houston Chronicle.

I am an unapologetic Lauren Gunderson fan. The deal was sealed when I attended a speech she gave in Madison two years ago. As she spoke, the voice I was hearing - cadence, wit, charm, smarts and a hint of loopy - was recognizable from her plays I'd read. Lauren can lure an audience in with a funny, snappy veneer, but manages to raise questions, make points, challenge assumptions, generate thought and move hearts, without warning. And by the time we realize it's happened, she's on to the next delightful episode, preparing to surprise us again. Genius.

Cez says

LAUGHTER ON THE 23rd FLOOR by Neil Simon
November 21 - December 15, 2019

Wide-eyed Lucas Brickman is a fledgling comedy writer working with some of the funniest - and craziest - writers in 1950s television. While his colleagues try to top each other with gags, head madman Max Prince contends with the NBC brass who are threatening to pull his show off the air. This hit Broadway comedy is an homage to Neil Simon's early days in show biz when he started as a junior jokesmith for Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*.

"One of Simon's funniest...Comedy, comedy all the way." - Newsweek
A smash hit for Next Act back in 2000.

For our 30th anniversary, we thought it would be great fun to revisit the hilarious world of the comedy writers' room. Truly, whenever I read this play, I can't help but say the jokes out loud and look for someone to tell them to. Many of the greats were in that room: Larry Gelbart, Mel Tolkin, Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks - perhaps the funniest human being who ever told a joke. Neil Simon's genius was to harness the tremendous comic mayhem which surrounded him and create a story about a crazy family who laughed and loved, simply because they wanted the world to smile.

Cez says

LAUGHTER ON THE 23RD FLOOR 2000 Production- David Ceasarini, Drew Brhel, John Phillips, Brian Faracy

A SMALL FIRE by Adam Bock
January 30 - February 23, 2020

John and Emily Bridges' happy, middle-class lives are upended when Emily falls victim to a mysterious disease. At the height of her powers as a construction company CEO, her senses are slowly stripped away - smell, then taste, then sight. Emily is determined to remain engaged with her company and community, and experience her daughter Jenny's wedding. But she reaches a breaking point when her hearing is taken, leaving only touch to communicate with the world. Suddenly, she is completely dependent on the husband whose loyal devotion has always been taken for granted.

"...a frank demonstration of how much of life, of love and of happiness remain within reach even when so much appears to be lost." - The New York Times

This is a gentle, but fierce, depiction of what love and redemption can look like. It's also a stirring reminder that life - its events, mysteries, surprises - can be unreliable. Adam Bock's play urges us to embrace life in the here and now, and it also advocates for love as the conduit through which life is embraced. Bock's voice is quiet, and yet, so powerful.

Cez says



Sara Zientek, Marti Gobel, Bree Beelow in THE TAMING by Lauren Gunderson, 2016; Photo: Ross Zentner

9 CIRCLES by Bill Cain
April 2 - 26, 2020

Honorably discharged but later accused of an unspeakable war crime in Iraq, American soldier Daniel Reeves navigates a labyrinth of commanding officers, public defenders, lawyers, preachers and psychiatrists who seek answers, excuses or blame. Based on actual events, Bill Cain's psychological thriller is by turns shocking, mesmerizing and bitingly funny. Ultimately, it is the soldier who must discover his own path to truth, where he finds duty, war and justice are on a collision course with the indomitable human spirit.

"The power and punch of 9 CIRCLES is undeniable. Cain's script zeroes in on one soldier's story and leaves us feeling the inescapable historic and emotional weight of the entire war. This is theater that shakes your foundation and leaves you breathless."
- Bay Area Backstage

Bill Cain is just amazing. This play pulled me in and did not let go until the words ran out. And then, there were the thoughts. Wow. Cain has certainly chosen a tough subject to examine: an atrocity committed in wartime. But the soldier's journey, layer by layer (or circle by circle, à la Danté) is one of self-discovery, revelation, acceptance, and ultimately, a deep understanding of the illumination which can come from within. Is it soul-searching? Perhaps; but Cain includes the audience in the journey, and that makes for incredibly powerful theatre.

Cez says



T. Stacy Hicks, Jonathan Smoots, Mark Ulrich and Josh Krause in EQUIVOCATION by Bill Cain, 2018; Photo: Ross Zentner



As part of our community mission, Next Act offers the theatre space for rent. Each producer is solely responsible for the content and quality of their performances. Here's what they have to say about their upcoming productions.

Human Rights Campaign presents
HERLARIOUS: COMEDY FOR A CAUSE



Join Human Rights Campaign and Lady Laughs Comedy for a HERlarious night of comedy featuring a fantastic lineup of comedians! Enjoy cocktails, laughs, and company while we "Stand-Up" for Equality. Featured performers include Dana Goldberg, Dina Nina Martinez and Brittany Tilander. **Friday, March 22, 7:30PM. \$15 Gen. Admission/\$30 VIP at hrc.im/herlariousmilwaukee.**

Lemonade Theatre Productions presents
THE ODD COUPLE (FEMALE VERSION)



Unger and Madison are at it again! Florence Unger and Olive Madison, that is, in Neil Simon's hilarious contemporary comic classic: the female version of *THE ODD COUPLE*. **May 3 - 12. \$25 • On sale now.**

All In Productions presents
THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE



Winner of the Tony and the Drama Desk Awards for Best Book, *THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE* has charmed audiences across the country with its effortless wit and humor. An eclectic group of six mid-pubescent vie for the spelling championship of a lifetime. While candidly disclosing hilarious and touching stories from their home lives, the tweens spell their way through a series of (potentially made-up) words, hoping never to hear the soul-crushing, pout-inducing, life un-affirming "ding" of the bell that signals a spelling mistake. Six spellers enter; one speller leaves! At least the losers get a juice box.

May 16 - 25. \$15 - \$25. On sale now.

For more information on these events and other upcoming rentals, visit www.nextact.org. Purchase tickets online at www.nextact.org, by phone at 414-278-0765 or in person at 255 S. Water St. (unless otherwise stated).

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Images from the series "Tracing the Tain" by Coree Coppinger

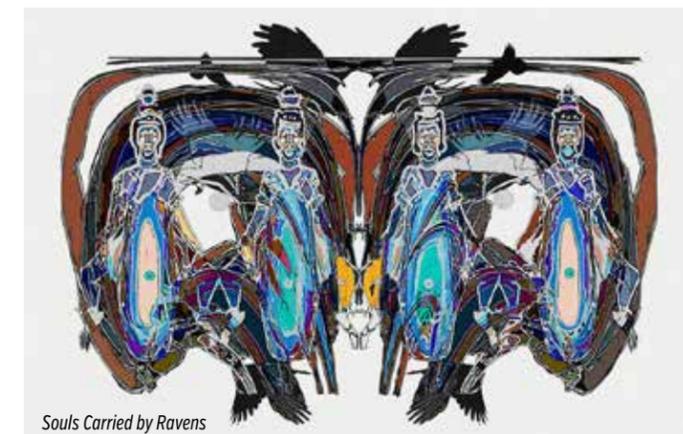


"The big question is whether you are going to be able to say a hearty yes to your adventure." - Joseph Campbell

Stories from the Bible and other myths serve to teach, to inspire, to provide guidance about good and evil, right and wrong. Myths survive because they tap into the human experience in ways that transcend our small, individual, limited lives. They connect us to a larger, more heroic world to which we can aspire; to embrace our own "adventures."

And so it is in the art of Coree Coppinger, our featured artist for *HOW TO WRITE A NEW BOOK FOR THE BIBLE*. Her series of mixed media images, "Tracing the Tain," explores the ancient Irish myth Tain Bo Cuailnge (The Cattle Raid of Cuailnge) in which the hero Cuchulainn must overcome many challenges to rally and save his people, yet ultimately face death with courage, strength and honor.

Coree is an award-winning, internationally-recognized, Milwaukee-based artist known primarily for her photography. Her current use of digital technologies mixed with traditional media in creative and innovative ways is also garnering positive attention. Her recent focus on the themes of death and dealing with death has led her to find inspiration in myths, in literature and in conversations with other mortals. We are fortunate to have her share her artistic visions with us.



Jim Toth is a retired art educator in his fifth season as Next Act's volunteer gallery curator.

Jack Dwyer, continued

Though Kevin's recommendation was Yale, Jack got very good vibes from his tour of the classes and campus of Brown-Trinity in Providence, Rhode Island. At the end of his Brown tour, Jack was wrestling with a tough decision, when something caught his eye.

"There on a wall was the first line of my favorite novel by Marcel Proust. That pretty much told me that Brown was the place."

"It was a great experience. We were all dedicated, passionate theatre students getting together as a group and making art. There was a strong foundation in classics, as well as good opportunities to explore contemporary work, which I hadn't had before. I had no idea there was so much to learn about myself, and about life. I am still close friends with many of my classmates; we're all facing similar challenges with equal parts optimism and determination."

In the spring of 2018, about 2 weeks after Jack had completed his MFA, he auditioned for Next Act. He was a strong candidate for the role but had his eye on New York so we agreed to get back in touch toward the end of the year. It is our good fortune that

he's happy to venture out to Milwaukee to work on Bill Cain's beautiful play about family, love and mystery.

I asked this smart, articulate and passionate young actor to envision his future.

"I think I'll live closer to regional theatre; Chicago maybe. Eventually, I might be teaching. And, well, one role that I would love to play, and will when I'm older, is *Cyrano*." That is, the famed romantic, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, celebrated in literature by Edmond Rostand. *Cyrano* loves words, wields them as weapons, sharp and quick as his deadly rapier; or as love poems, delivered in the dark to woo the lovely Roxane for his lumpen but handsome friend Christian.

"I read the book when I was twelve years old, and it kind of stayed with me."

For Jack, a self-professed lover of words, *Cyrano* seems a perfect match somewhere down the line. But first, a chance to play with Bill Cain's words in *HOW TO WRITE A NEW BOOK FOR THE BIBLE*.

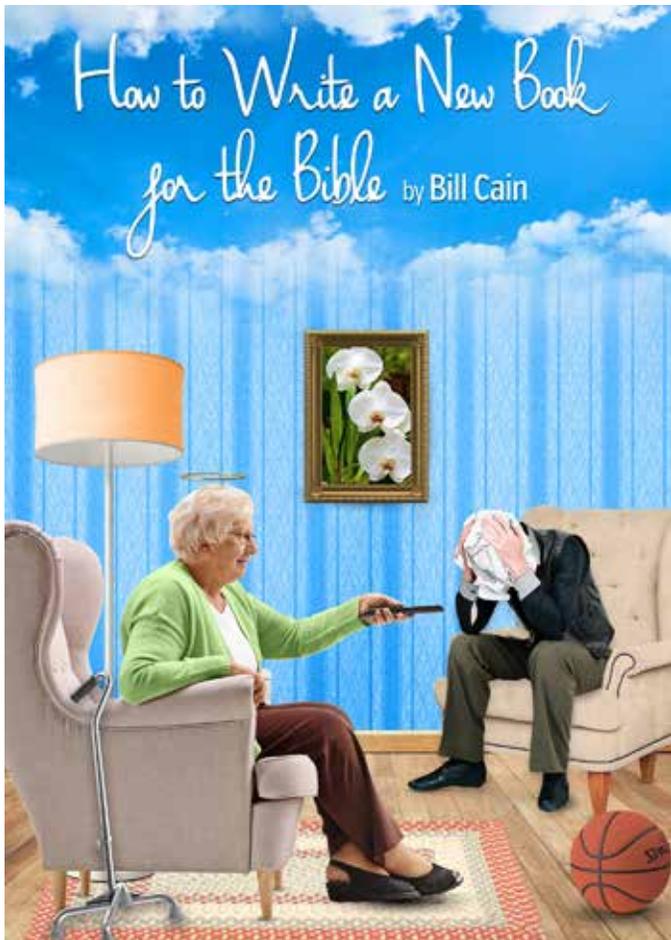
We're glad you're here, Jack.



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Sometimes those we are closest to are the biggest mysteries of all. From the writer of *EQUIVOCATION* comes a very personal story taken from Cain's experiences of caring for his ailing – but oh-so-feisty – mother. Through flashbacks, time jumps, quirky humor and poignant realism, we meet Dad, Mom, Brother and Bill – four smart, passionate people, acutely aware of their everlasting connection. Cain asks the questions that speak to the heart of every family: What will never change...and what has to...so we can love?

"...a funny, poignant tribute to the quirks ... that make each family unique." - Washingtonian

APRIL 4 - 28, 2019						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				Preview 7:30	4 Opening 7:30	5 6 4:30 8:00
7 2:00			10 1:30 7:30	11 7:30	12 7:30	13 4:30 8:00
14 2:00			17 1:30 7:30	18 7:30	19 7:30	20 4:30 8:00
21 2:00	22 7:30		24 7:30	25 7:30	26 7:30	27 4:30 8:00
28 2:00	Personal Preview (Begins 30 minutes prior to curtain)					
	Talkback		Pay What You Can			

Directed by David Ceasarini
Featuring Carrie Hitchcock, Jack Dwyer, Jonathan Wainwright and Norman Moses