

I OWE IT ALL TO HAMLET or The Sword That Follows Me

by David Ceccarini

We've started working on Bill Cain's *THE LAST WHITE MAN*, and given that Shakespeare's *HAMLET* features prominently in the story, it's inevitable that theatre tales around that most venerable play will emerge in the rehearsal hall. There are the legendary performances, the sword fight mishaps, brilliant – or outlandish – interpretations, the films, the comparisons, the remembrances of those no longer with us, which text has the final say, costumes to remember or forget. A rich history, indeed.

My *HAMLET* experience yields, more or less, the shape of my theatre life's roadmap, at least from my college years onward. Having finally decided that my future was destined more toward the stage as actor rather than the skies as flyer, my significant theatre training was received at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. It was a terrific department, great profs, and a nice new facility called Rarig Center with four theatre spaces: proscenium, thrust, black box and in-the-round. With its gifted, dedicated faculty, Rarig was a perfect laboratory for young, would-be theatre professionals.

IN COMBAT

Among the required classes was stage combat and fencing. Now, this seemed right up my alley, having dabbled in improvised Pro Wrestling exhibitions with a few friends in our high school cafeteria during the waning minutes of lunch hour. I took to the swords very well and after two semesters, found myself filling in as the class instructor to cover for a grad student who had seized an off-campus, professional opportunity. Little did I know how much that fencing – these swords and daggers, retreats and advances, parries, thrusts and cuts – would influence my future.

Fast forward to graduating with a BA in Theatre Arts from the U of M, a very respectable and pretty much useless degree in terms of professional employment. After a discouraging Midwest audition tour, I returned to my day job as a residential fence builder at an Anchor Fence branch in Minneapolis. I'm hoping that a few of those fence installations are still standing straight and true to this day. But pounding posts and stretching wire was not my life's destiny. Drastic action was required. The answer? Grad school, of course!

NOW WHAT?

The U of M Theatre MFA program was affiliated with the Guthrie Theatre. One auditioned for the Big G folks because your second grad year would be spent carrying spears on Tyrone's unique and pioneering stage (incidentally,

Milwaukee was a finalist as a potential location for Mr. Guthrie's regional theatre movement). As an unvarnished 24 year-old, I could string enough words together, make myself heard and occasionally believed: the Guthrie said they had spears in need of carrying right then, so "no need for grad school, just come be a journeyman actor with us." Great.



Randall Duk Kim
as Hamlet, APT

HAMLET THE DANE

We were a company of actors, still a priority for many theatres in the late 70s. Among this seasoned group of pros was Randall Duk Kim, who would be playing Hamlet mid-season along with other roles in that year's repertoire. First off, Randy portrayed a forceful and Machiavellian Bishop Nicholas, running his corner of a turbulent world from his death bed in Henrik Ibsen's challenging epic, *THE PRETENDERS*. Incidentally, in my role as minor pretender Sigurd Ribbung, I spoke my first words from a professional stage; which was frightening. But I survived.

On into the season, as we began to rehearse *HAMLET*, I was involved in the sword fight rehearsals because my character,

Continued, next page

Inside This Issue

Roll with it!	3
Updating Our Safety Policies	3
Classroom and Community	4
Announcing Our 2022-23 Season!	5
The Fun is in The Details!	5
Next Up at Next Act	6
THREE TAKES on Landscapes	7

Barnardo, would be handling a weapon. The fight choreographer was a wonderful, old-school, Errol Flynn-era legend named Patrick (Paddy) Crean. My mental picture of him remains: red athletic training suit, white scarf at the neck, a vital shock of white hair and dashing mustache. A charmer. At 67 years young, he still had an eye for the ladies. And he believed in "ZA," his trademark word for the panache he asked actors to bring to their stage fencing work.

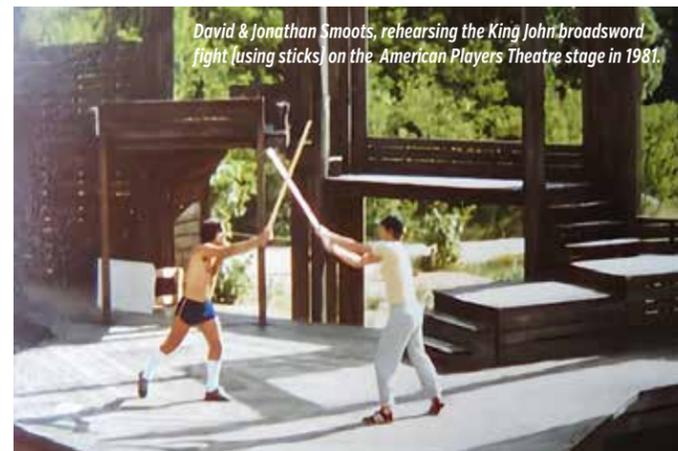
PUT ME IN, COACH

Though the rehearsal process spanned 4-5 weeks, Paddy had been booked for only the first 6 days. He taught the techniques, the choreography and the theatrical sense of the *HAMLET* duels, but then would not be returning until tech time. Learning this, I sensed a gap in the planning – a complex duel such as Hamlet/Laertes requires almost daily practice and refinement. My U of M training gave me the temerity to offer my services as fight captain, to work with the fighters throughout rehearsal and the performance run. This brought me into direct, collegial contact with Mr. Kim and with Guy Paul, our Laertes, and gave me an outlet for sharing my particular skills. The experience would prove itself invaluable, though not immediately.

SPECIAL PROVIDENCE

Flash forward to early 1980, when ADC Electronics provided my slim paycheck as a receiving clerk. One April day, a phone call for me was routed to our department. Anne Occhiogrosso, co-founder of American Players Theatre along with Randy Kim, was on the line.

Their inaugural season was soon to begin but they needed to replace an actor. They remembered me from our Guthrie year and invited me to join their bold and daring enterprise: Shakespeare in the middle of the driftless hills of Wisconsin.



David & Jonathan Smoots, rehearsing the King John broadsword fight (using sticks) on the American Players Theatre stage in 1981.

What I thought would be a great summer acting job turned into a seven-year relationship with passionate and talented theatre colleagues who opened my eyes to a world of classical plays and serious-minded pursuit of acting excellence. Those years, replete with pre-season training, post-season tours and glorious summers of rotating rep on the APT stage, forged my instrument and sensibilities into an artist with confidence and a realized purpose for the work at hand. True, there were some rocky times along the way, but I treasure those developing years – mosquitoes and all – as the opportunity of a lifetime.



David as Claudius, APT

HAMLET RETURNS

In 1986, APT season 7, Shakespeare's *HAMLET* was on the docket in which Randy Kim would reprise his Guthrie performance, this time in the un-cut First Folio version. Myself, clad in magnificent red and purple robes and a sharp-angled beard and mustache, would play the dastardly King Claudius. Once again, the fencing was infused with "ZA" under Paddy Crean's watchful eye. It was a four-hour show and under the right weather conditions, it was a theatre feast for our audience and playtime for us actors.

Mr. Kim suggested that in the next season, he and I would switch roles, and I would get my chance at those 7 brilliant arias and Hamlet's transformative journey. Alas, there were events that summer which led to changes of plan, and what was once to be became not to be. The great Dane had eluded me, and to this day – long past my time to play a college student looking for revenge – I occasionally brush up against the dramatic events at Elsinore. Bill Cain's play offers such an occasion, and we are joyfully preparing a new take on what many view as the western world's most brilliant play. The readiness is all.

See you at the theatre.

Roll with It!



Next Act is a proud member of the United Performing Arts Fund, from whom we receive support for our artistic and educational programming. Help them, help us!

Join in the fun as UPAF presents the annual Ride for the Arts, presented by Miller Light.

Bike the Hoan and support the arts on the new 12-mile Hoan Loop Course where bikes rule the road! Using Interstate 794 from downtown Milwaukee to Cudahy and back again, this exciting course takes riders across and beyond the iconic Hoan Bridge, offering scenic views for riders of all ages and abilities. Completely closed to car traffic in both directions and free of traffic lights, this ride is safe and smooth! Shorter routes are available, too.



2020 Next Act Theatre Riding Team

Sunday, June 5, 2022

Ride the new Hoan Loop Course! 2022 UPAF Ride for the Arts

Visit events.upaf.org/nextact to sign up for our team by May 16

Updating Our Safety Policies

Since the pandemic started, we have set COVID safety policy to keep our audiences, artists and staff safe based on local and national guidance. Since September 2021, we've made live theatre happen safely again at Next Act, and it's all thanks to our incredible patrons. You have stood by us through challenging times, returned when we called, followed protocols and shared in entertainment and conversation. Our success this season wouldn't be possible without you. Thank you.

We have continued listening to the CDC, the City of Milwaukee Health Department and our community over the past few weeks as COVID cases have declined to levels not seen since July 2021. Milwaukee County currently has the best possible LOW rating from the CDC and all key COVID-19 indicators that Milwaukee County tracks are currently in the best possible GREEN zone. For these reasons, we are joining other major Milwaukee arts and entertainment venues in a **phased roll-back of COVID-19 protocols.**

This phased roll-back will continue as long as pandemic conditions continue improving in Milwaukee and in our state.

What this means:

Effective April 14, 2022 (for the final production of the season), patrons will no longer be required to show proof of vaccination to enter Next Act Theatre. We still encourage all patrons to be fully vaccinated and boosted before joining us at the theatre! Survey data shows that our audience is at least 98 percent vaccinated, and

we thank everyone who has done their part to help us return safely.

Masks will still be required at Next Act Theatre through the run of *THE LAST WHITE MAN*. Effective May 9, 2022, masks will no longer be required at Next Act Theatre.

We are continuing to limit seating to two-thirds capacity for the run of *THE LAST WHITE MAN*.

We are confident in our ability to keep Next Act a safe place to visit. Our upgraded HVAC system and enhanced sanitation procedures continue to make our building a safe and clean environment. Help continue keeping everyone safe and stay home if you feel sick.

If it becomes necessary—and we certainly hope it does not—we will reinstate appropriate protocols depending on changing conditions.



My favorite part of this season happened on March 2, 2022. Each year, Next Act develops a student project that coincides with one of the season's plays. The overall goal is to provide a group of students the opportunity and means to create an artistic response to the Next Act production. This year, that show was *PIPELINE*, by Dominique Morisseau.



Photo: Lily Shea

Malaina Moore & Ibraheem Farmer in PIPELINE

PIPELINE's student matinee was full to capacity with students from four different schools: two classrooms from Oak Creek High School, a class from Milwaukee High School of the Arts, Audubon High School and Obama SCTE. The latter were in attendance through Story MKE, a grant partnership with UWM's Electa Quinney Institute for American Indian Education and Milwaukee Public Schools. My intern Ryleigh and I had been delivering workshops both virtually and in-person for about a month, diving into Dominique Morisseau's text and preparing them for the live performance. If a school couldn't make the workshops or the field trip work, we sent them asynchronous curriculum along with the script and free access to the virtual production.

A small but mighty directing class at Milwaukee High School of the Arts opted into the full *PIPELINE* Community Project residency. We talked about a few select scenes in the play, and the students were able to email questions to *PIPELINE* director Jamil A.C. Mangan, which he answered via video. I asked them to respond to the question "What would you tell your mom if you were in Omari [the student in the play]'s shoes?" The students wrote,



Photo: Lily Shea

Malaina Moore & Ibraheem Farmer in PIPELINE

directed and filmed their own creative response to the themes and ideas in the play. You can find their work, and Jamil's video, on Next Act's YouTube channel.

Story MKE is a project in which student leaders identify authors and texts they want to read, lead discussions and develop cultural connections. They had found *PIPELINE* before they knew we had it in our season and were ecstatic to be able to watch it live. I asked one of our young audience members after the show if it had met her expectations. "It was really emotional," she said. "I knew what it was about because we read it and studied it, and I knew it was an emotional piece, but you don't really know how much - you don't really get that, you're not feeling it, unless you see it live."



MHS students at PIPELINE

On the Friday after the student matinee, we reserved ten tickets for the Kellogg PEAK initiative, an after-school program held in a gorgeous building in Tiefenthaler Park. For the kids who weren't able to see the live performance, we held a watch party at PEAK, where actors Malaina Moore and Ibraheem Farmer (*PIPELINE*'s Jasmine and Omari, respectively) were able to visit and talk with students about the world of professional theater.

Due to COVID restrictions, some students hadn't had a field trip in years before coming to Next Act. "These poor kids have been begging for a field trip," one teacher told me after the show, "I'm so happy we could take them on one with so much substance. They loved meeting the actors [at the talkback]!"

Thank you to Werner Krause, Bader Philanthropies, Pieper Power PPC Foundation, Inc. and the Kohl's Hometown Giving Program whose generosity this season continues to keep all of our educational programming free of charge to schools and students.

Our production of *THE LAST WHITE MAN* draws Next Act's 2021-22 season to a close, and what a season it's been! We returned to live theatre and welcomed you back into our space. Things looked a little different, with masks and vaccine checks, but you stuck it out with us. We enjoyed laughing as well as thinking - these plays provided us with moments for enjoyment and reflection.

We're excited to keep all that going with our 2022-23 season. In it, you'll see plays about people dealing with change. The season will bring big change to Next Act too, as Producing Artistic Director David Ceasarini will step down after the 2022-23 season. More information will be coming soon, but we hope you'll join us to embrace this change and say "farewell" to David.

Renewal materials have gone out to all current subscribers and members, and we encourage you to renew your subscriptions by April 22 in order to keep your seats for the upcoming season!

Interested in buying new season tickets or memberships? Subscriptions go on sale April 25!

Please contact the Next Act Theatre ticket office at **(414) 278-0765** or boxoffice@nextact.org with any questions.

Help us celebrate our 33rd season by becoming a production sponsor!
Contact Development Director Jane Flieller at jane@nextact.org or (414) 278-7780 to learn more.

KILL MOVE PARADISE

By James Ijames
 Directed by Marti Gobel
 September 22 - October 16, 2022

THE TIN WOMAN

by Sean Grennan
 Directed by Edward Morgan
 November 23 - December 18, 2022

THERE IS A HAPPINESS THAT MORNING IS

by Mickle Mahler
 Directed by Mary MacDonald Kerr
 February 23 - March 19, 2023

GOD'S SPIES

by Bill Cain
 Directed by David Ceasarini
 April 27 - May 21, 2023

The Fun is in the Details!

by Jane Flieller

Bravo, Next Act 2022 is just around the corner: Saturday, June 11, 2022, from 5pm to 9pm, to be exact!

Our indoor/outdoor, carnival-themed fundraiser will be held at Next Act as we wrap up the 2021-22 season by saying, "Bravo" and "Brava" to everyone who made this year possible. Actors, designers, directors, crew, staff and of course, you! To what can you look forward? Take a peek:

- Purchase the winning key that unlocks the Grill Package!
- Dunk Producing Artistic Director, David Ceasarini, in the dunk tank!
- Putt a few balls and be entered to win one of two putting greens!
- Live auction! Silent auction!



Each guest receives ten complimentary tokens upon entry to use for games. Admission is \$65 and includes food, games, prizes and a special magic show by local favorite Tom Burgermeister!

Call today to get your tickets at 414-278-0765 or buy them online at www.nextact.org. Let's have some fun!!

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by Sarah Treem

JAN 20 - FEB 12
Cost of Living
by Martyna Majok

MAR 24 - APR 16
Tidy
by Kristin Iwaszak

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Saturday, June 11, 2022
Event begins at 5 p.m.

Join us for Games & Prizes ... Wheel-of-Fortune ...
Food & Drink ... Build-Your-Own Sundae Bar ...
Wine Pull ... Tarot Card Readings ...
Magic Show ... Live and Silent Auctions...
Grill Package... and ...

David Dunkin'
Try your hand at the dunk tank! Get Producing
Artistic Director David Ceccarini all wet!

CAN'T WAIT? GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!
Admission \$65
Admission includes 10 tokens to play games and win prizes!

More information at nextact.org/bravo
or call 414-278-7780 for tickets today

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Just as actors bring their personalities, experiences and varying skills to interpreting a role, as entertainingly depicted in Bill Cain's THE LAST WHITE MAN, visual artists bring the same set of variables to their interpretations of subject matter, with dramatically differing results.

Our featured lobby gallery artists demonstrate this in their approaches to landscape.

Eddee Daniel is a fine art photographer and writer, who specializes in urban ecologies. His work examines how we perceive and construct understandings of nature in the contexts of culture and the built environment. "My practice is conceptually framed by the paradoxical term "Urban Wilderness," which symbolizes the themes and tensions inherent in the concept."



MENOMONEE VALLEY WINTER
photographic triptych, 29" x 49", E. Daniel

Jeanne Bril is a painter with an affinity for the immediacy of plein air techniques. Her current goal is to abstract the scene, but provide enough information so the viewer knows they're looking at a natural environment. She injects interest through layering, creating texture with different tools and using a somewhat limited palette. "I want to share the wonder and intrigue in everyday scenes."

Barbara Manger is a printmaker who is intrigued by the rhythms and forces of growth and bloom, death, decay, and renewal as aspects of nature and landscape. "Small shreds and pieces—nests, bark, or roots; and features grander in scale such as a river or a gorge—and the stories they hold and tell—influence me." She gathers dried grasses, sticks and other natural materials and prints with them using oil based inks on paper and an etching press. With the tangles, overlaps, and apparent disorder, she attempts to convey something of the spirit of nature around us.



THE IN BETWEEN, Acrylic, 20" x 16", J. Bril, 2022



SWING, Monotype, oil based ink on paper, 38" x 50", B. Manger, 2022

For more information about our featured artists and images of their work, please visit their websites:

Eddee Daniel eddeedaniel.com
Jeanne Bril [instagram.com/Brilpainter](https://www.instagram.com/Brilpainter)
Barbara Manger barbaramanger.com



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APRIL 14 - MAY 8, 2022						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				14 Preview 7:30	15 Opening 7:30	16 4:30 8:00 P
17 2:00 T			20 1:30 7:30 P	21 7:30 T	22 7:30	23 4:30 8:00
24 2:00 PT			27 1:30 7:30	28 7:30 PT	29 7:30	30 4:30 8:00
1 2:00 PT S	2 7:30 S		4 7:30	5 7:30 T	6 7:30 P	7 4:30 8:00
8 2:00	P Personal Preview (Begins 30 minutes prior to curtain) T Talkback S Sunday Night Insights S Pay What You Can					

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