



FRIENDS OF MONOMOY THEATRE, INC.

POST OFFICE BOX 169, CHATHAM, MASSACHUSETTS, 02633

THE MAGPIE

FALL/WINTER EDITION

November, 2017

2017 - A VINTAGE SEASON

By Bernard Cornwell

It began with *A Little Night Music*, Stephen Sondheim's elegant musical about a weekend in the country in which star-crossed lovers reignite old flames and are dazzled by new ones. The Cape Cod Times said of it, 'the talented ensemble delivers a mix of sophisticated humor, poignancy, and not a small dash of wisdom in this excellent production.'

Alan Rust directed and was beautifully served by Holly Holcomb and Ricky Oliver, both returning to Monomoy, while Mary O'Brady reminded us of just what a wonderful



actress she is. The rest of the cast was from the student company and they gave us, in the words of the Cape Cod Chronicle, 'a brilliant opening production'.

The treadmill had started turning. Every year I'm astonished by the workload that the company undertakes and even more astonished by the quality of the productions. *A Little Night Music* had just two weeks of rehearsal, as do all the



plays, and even before *A Little Night Music* opened, the rehearsals for Ken Ludwig's comedy *The Game's Afoot* had started.

Bill Kux, playing the great American actor William Gillette, starred along with Marsha Korb and

Nora Chester. Monomoy audiences always enjoy a good whodun'it, and this whodun'it had the great merit of having Ken Ludwig's humour, too - 'immensely enjoyable!' said the *Cape Cod Times*, and so it was.

And then a change of pace when we visited Golden Pond, and what a delight *On Golden Pond* proved. Terry Layman and Ellen Fiske were remarkable, Ricky Oliver directed, and the Cape Cod Times reviewer said of the production that it was 'the best play I've seen this year.'

The set was designed by a student, Braden Hooter, and was splendid, as were all the sets last year. Behind the theatre is a shed, as ramshackle



a shed as any to be found in Cape Cod, and it is in that unprepossessing building that a crew of young carpenters work a miracle on the stage eight times a year.

Farce arrived next in the classic French comedy *A Flea in Her Ear* by Georges Feydeau which largely takes place in the Frisky Puss Hotel in Paris. The play is a century old, there have been many great farces written since, yet still *La Puce d'Oreille* holds its place as one of theatre's greatest laugh machines.

John Barrack was brilliant as the Spaniard, while Gavin McNicholl and Laura Axelrod were wonderful as the married couple around whom the disasters occur. One night



a very sophisticated Parisian lady, a writer and an avid theatre-goer, was in the audience, and I had the pleasure



of meeting her after the show. ‘I was at the Comedie Francaise six weeks ago,’ she told me, ‘watching a play by Feydeau. This was better.’ I can’t think of higher praise.

And so it was time for the second musical, *110 In the Shade*, and Sarah Killough returned to Monomoy’s stage. That was reason enough to see the show, but Sarah, playing the ‘left-on-the-shelf’ Lizzie Curry, was wonderfully supported by Gregory Rodriguez playing the mysterious stranger, Bill Starbuck, who appears in the drought-cursed western town and promises to use his strange powers to bring rain. Lizzie’s father was memorably played by Alan Rust, the choreography was by Ralph Perkins, the music was directed by Phil Rittner, and Director Francesca James brought it all together. ‘If there’s one show to catch at Monomoy Theatre this season,’



Michael & Suz Karchmer

the Barnstable Patriot enthused, ‘this is it!’

From a dry western town we moved to London and the story of *Candida*, George Bernard Shaw’s sly late 19th century comedy about womens’ rights. Mary O’Brady directed and Arlene Bozich, returning to Monomoy for her third season, made

a wondrous *Candida* caught between her worthy husband and the dazzling poet Marchbanks, played by Gavin McNicholl. Laura Axelrod almost stole the show with a drunken stagger



downstage and Terry Caza anchored it as *Candida*’s father. As ever Shaw proved thought-provoking as well as funny.

We stayed in the 19th century for the next show, Neil Simon’s reworking of short stories by Anton Chekhov, *The Good Doctor*. I confess that some of us who were in the play were not at all sure how our audience would react to what was an evening of short plays, loosely linked by a narrator, but our worry was misplaced. ‘A fine evening of laughter and poignancy,’ the *Cape Cod Times* said, and so it proved. Gavin McNicholl excelled as Peter Semyonich, ‘the greatest seducer of other men’s wives’, and

Olivia Fenton, who had charmed us all season, was touchingly wonderful in ‘The Audition’. The evening was memorably ended with Alan Rust and MichaelJohn McGann duelling about the perfect lunch.



Alan and MichaelJohn returned in our last play, Moss Hart and George Kaufman’s great comedy *Once in a Lifetime*, which, as well as being outrageously funny, is a bitter satire on the nonsenses of Hollywood. Gavin McNicholl played George Lewis, the naive, dumb-as-a-stump vaudeville player who becomes a power-player in Tinseltown while Laura Axelrod was beguiling as Susan Walker, the brain-challenged starlet whose lack of acting skills prove no bar to stardom. There were over 30 cast members and the whole delicious



confection was put together by Terry Layman.

With the exception of *Once in a Lifetime* the final plays of the season shared a curious and unintentional theme; that of a woman making a choice and, in every case, choosing the safest man. All three rejected the exciting suitor, preferring the duller. In *110 in the Shade* Lizzie chooses dependable Sheriff File instead of the scintillating Bill Starbuck, in *Candida* the eponymous heroine stays with her long-winded husband instead of running away with the beguiling poet, while in *The Good Doctor* the wife rejects the dashing lover, Peter Semyonich, for her unromantic and undemonstrative husband. Yet in making the choices those heroines, along with the rest of the company, gave us a summer of scintillating, beguiling and dashing drama. It was a vintage year for Monomoy!



MEET THE NEW DEAN

Elizabeth “Betsy” Cooper was named dean of the University of Hartford’s The Hartt School in August of last year. Prior to coming to The Hartt School, Cooper was Director of the Dance Program at Hunter College in New York City. Previously, she served as the Divisional Dean of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington, where she earned her MFA in Dance. Before her career in higher education, Cooper performed with classical and contemporary companies nationally and abroad, including National Theater Mannheim, Makarova & Company, and Connecticut Ballet. She also holds a BA in Archaeological studies from Yale University.



Dear Friends of Monomoy Theatre,

As Dean of The Hartt School, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your unwavering support of the Monomoy Theatre. The Monomoy Theatre has become an integral part of the student experience at The Hartt School, enriching students’ artistic training and career preparation beyond measure.

I invite you to visit The University of Hartford campus for a very special evening on Saturday, February 17, 2018. Celebrate Hartt is a special, reimagined fundraising event that showcases and supports our community of inspiring students, scholars and educators. Many of your favorite Hartt students that you’ve come to know from the Monomoy stage will be featured at this great event.

Celebrate Hartt will feature fine food and drinks, a performance by Hartt’s talented students, and will close with an afterglow party with more singing and dancing. For more information about Celebrate Hartt, please contact Liz Reynolds at HRTEvents@hartford.edu.

If you are not able to join us at Celebrate Hartt but would like to visit the campus and see a performance, please let me know. You can view our upcoming performances at www.hartford.edu/hartt.

Thank you.

Betsy Cooper, Dean, The Hartt School

Monomoy Theatre company members in recent productions at the Hartt School



August Osage County with recent Monomoy company members Dan Owens (2017), Laura Axelrod (2017), Dan Macke (2015) and Daniella Sinder 2015 &16)



Evita - Tyler Pisani (2016) as Che Guevara



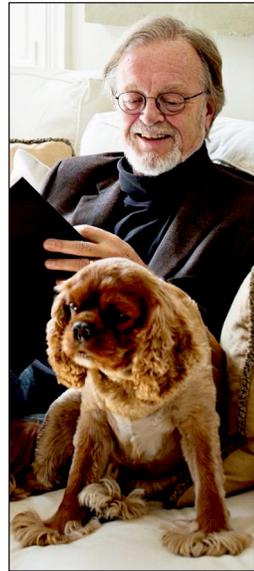
Evita - Nicholas Dana Rylands (2016 &17) as Juan Peron with Justin Haupt (2016) and Gregory Rodriguez (2017)

Photos by Michael McMath

Monomoy and Me

By Bernard Cornwell

In January Bernard Cornwell, who has appeared more than thirty times on Monomoy's stage, published a novel - *Fools and Mortals* - which tells a fictional story of the first production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1595. The novel is dedicated 'with affection to all the actors, actresses, directors, musicians and technicians of the Monomoy Theatre.' Some of the characters in the novel, which was a best-seller in Britain, are names familiar to all Monomoy theatregoers! In this article, which was originally published in Britain, Bernard tells the story of his involvement with the Monomoy Theatre.



Ten years ago I was standing backstage at the Monomoy Theatre in Chatham, Massachusetts. The theatre was full and all I could hear was laughter. Loud laughter, yet the jokes that the audience was laughing at had been written over 400 years before. The play was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and I remember being struck by the thought that a play as old as the hills was proving to be as fresh as a daisy. I must have been terrified that evening because I was about to go on stage as Peter Quince, and I knew that Julie Harris, famously known as the Queen of Broadway and the winner of more Tony Awards than any other actor, was in the front row of the audience.

I am not an actor! Not an historian either. I'm a storyteller, and the experience of playing Peter Quince interested me in Shakespeare's story, and so I began to read all I could about the plays, the players and the playwright. I had some knowledge, but no more than the average person's memories of school lessons. I do remember playing one of the pathetic recruits, either Mouldy or Wart, in a school production of *Henry IV, Part Two*, but that was the glorious extent of my Shakespearean acting career for some 47 years. I saw a handful of his plays in those

years, most memorably seeing Sir Laurence Olivier play Othello, but in truth I was not an avid theatre-goer.

That changed when I married Judy, an American and a devotee of the theatre or, as she would spell it, the theater. In fact everything changed because of Judy. Circumstances dictated a move to America, I abandoned my career in television and, in desperation because I had been denied a Green Card, took to writing novels in the hope that they would provide us with a living. Which, in time, they did. I also began to go to the theatre in London, in New York, in Boston and wherever there was a stage and actors to populate it. Or almost everywhere.

We had settled in Chatham, a seaside town on Cape Cod in Massachusetts, and on Main Street there is a small theatre. Yes, theatre. That's how they spell it. It is called the Monomoy Theatre. Monomoy is the name the native Americans gave to the land where the town now sits, and is still the name of the barren island which runs south from the town towards Nantucket. The Monomoy Theatre is almost as barren as the island because it is open for just three months of the year. For the other nine months it stands dark, forlorn and gaunt, locked up, with an almost bare stage. Superstition demands that a stool and a broom occupy the stage during those nine months because, when the theatre was purchased by its present owners, they discovered nothing inside except the stool and the broom, and we religiously replace them after the summer season's closing night and ceremoniously remove them from the stage when, in spring, the company arrives to begin rehearsals.

I went to the Monomoy Theatre very early in my time on Cape Cod. There was no air-conditioning then, it was a blisteringly hot night with humidity in the unbearable range, and the production was *South Pacific*, a musical I have never liked. The production was well done, but despite the evening's heat, it left me cold. For the next dozen years or so Judy would go to the Monomoy Theatre alone. She often tried to persuade me to accompany her, but one too many exposures to Bloody Mary, the memory of mosquitoes on the patio and the sweat of a humid night kept me away. Even when the theatre installed air-conditioning I remained stubborn. I remember more than once dismissing the Monomoy Theatre as merely 'a student theatre.'

Which it is. Each year a company of student actors is assembled. Many come from the Hartt School of Music and Drama which is a part of the University of



Hartford, but others come from universities across the whole United States and from even further afield. All of them are studying the theatre; their ambitions are to become actors or directors or stage managers or technical directors. They have to audition to become a part of the company, and their reward is to be housed in ancient and decrepit buildings and to be worked like mules. Our season runs a brief ten weeks (to fit inside the university summer vacation), and in those ten weeks we produce two musicals, which each run for a fortnight, and six plays that run a week each. The students act, make the costumes, sell the tickets, build the sets, rig the lights, park the patrons' cars, clean the buildings, help out in the kitchen, in fact just about everything. And they perform eight shows in ten weeks. It is truly a boot-camp for the theatre. In three short months they cram more experience than most will gain from three years in university. It is gruelling, relentless and thoroughly enjoyable. The company has an enthusiasm undimmed by the cruel rejections of the professional theatre; they have energy, joy, burgeoning skills and boundless hopes.

Last year we produced *The Tempest*. Most years a Shakespeare play is included in the season because



Shakespeare is a necessary part of any theatre training, and Monomoy is, above all, a teaching theatre and the students, who often have a lurking fear of

Shakespeare, need to experience him. Now *The Tempest*, like most productions at Monomoy, presents a problem. A 22 year old, or even a post-grad student of 27 or 28, will not make a convincing Prospero. A student actor will be equally unconvincing as Firs in *The Cherry Orchard*, or even as Lyuba Ranyeskaya in the same play, and so professional actors are hired to fill the 'grown-up' parts. Those actors are Equity professionals, as are the plays' directors, who come from Broadway, from university theatre departments and even from Britain's National Theatre. The musicians who compose the orchestra for the musicals are also professionals, and so the students are

not only worked hard, they are exposed to people who know the harsh environment to which they all aspire. And it was among those 'grown up' guest artists where I came in.

A dozen years ago the Shakespeare production was *Henry V* and the director was coming from Britain. His flight was delayed so that he could not be present for the first rehearsal which was a Monday morning read-through of the text. Alan Rust, the theatre's artistic director, had the dubious idea of asking me to give a talk to the actors on the background to Henry V. I had not yet written the novel *Azincourt*, but I had a fair knowledge of Henry and his campaign of 1415, and so I gave the talk. After that Alan said to me, 'you should be on stage.' This might or might not have been a compliment, but the following year I played the tiny part of Duncan in *Macbeth*, and at that point the hook sank into me. I liked it! Would I do more, Alan asked, and the answer was an enthusiastic yes.

And so, for the past dozen years, I have appeared each summer on Monomoy's small stage. I've played in every Shakespeare production in those years. Among other roles I've been Henry IV, Egeon in *A Comedy of Errors*, the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*, Sir Toby Belch, Peter Quince (twice) and, most memorably, Prospero in last year's *The Tempest*. And not just Shakespeare. A Broadway choreographer drilled me to dance as Sextimus the Silent in *Once Upon a Mattress*, I had a solo to open the second act of *Man of La Mancha* (I still cringe at the memory), I've danced and sung in *The Fiddler on the Roof*, *1776*, *Anything Goes*, *The King and I* and a half dozen other musicals. I've acted in wonderful plays by Arthur Miller, Anton Chekhov, Neil Simon and Ken Ludwig. Last week, as I write this, I had the lead in Neil Simon's *The Good Doctor* and tonight we open in George Kaufman and Moss Hart's *Once in a Lifetime*. The theatre will be full and afterwards there will be a party on the patio and it will be the last opening night party of the season because *Once in a Lifetime* is our final production of 2017, and next Sunday the stool and broom will go back to the empty stage. Yet I'm already looking forward to the 2018 season in which I'll play Jaques in *As You Like It*.



*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts*

As I have indeed! A dozen years ago I had an average knowledge of Shakespeare and no particular interest in him, but playing his words on stage fascinated me. There is, I think, no better way to discover his plays than to be a part of them, and you would have to be very dull not to realise his lasting genius as you stand in the lights listening to an audience gasp, laugh or break into applause. And no better way to experience his power! I remember being astonished on the opening night of *Romeo and Juliet* as I spoke the words Friar Laurence says over the corpses of the young lovers:

*Romeo, there dead, was husband to that Juliet;
And she, there dead, that Romeo's faithful wife.*

I married them

I was astonished because the tears on my face were real. I cried every night over the tomb where the lovers lay, and that was not because I am an actor, but because Shakespeare retains the power to move us with language, and the simplicity of the repeated 'there dead' is heart-breaking. And, as I experienced Shakespeare, as I learned Egeon's interminable opening speech in *A Comedy of Errors*, as I said over and over the lyrical magic of Prospero, I became fascinated by his skill and wisdom. I remember playing Doctor Caius in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and having the thought that this small part, which was such a joy to play, had been cunningly gift-wrapped by Shakespeare and handed down over the centuries. And, being an historical novelist, the more I read and the more I experienced being in his plays the more I became seduced by the idea of writing a story about Will Shakespeare and his company of players. *Fools and Mortals* is the result. It is intended as a tribute to Shakespeare, as an attempt to sketch his genius even while recognising that he was, to his contemporaries,

a hard-working journeyman writer, actor and impresario. Tradition holds that he played the part of Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and I suspect he found amusement in writing the mechanical's rehearsal scenes and in describing the dreadful performance they give in *Pyramus and Thisbe*. That was Shakespeare's world, the living theatre, and if he could glimpse the rehearsals at Monomoy he would see that little has changed in four hundred years. We still come together as a company, we rehearse, we get nervous, we bond and we perform.

The Monomoy Theatre has given Judy and me innumerable friends. One of them, a young man who had just graduated from the Hartt School, played Puck in Monomoy's 2015 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He played it brilliantly, and this year Juwan Crawley is on Broadway playing the Genie in *Aladdin*. Many others, like Juwan, have gone on to Broadway or to the West End, to television or to Hollywood. Monomoy works! I, like Juwan, owe a great deal to that little theatre in its little town beside the sea. Monomoy has given me friends, inspiration, terror, laughter, joy, and an unbounded admiration for all those who work in the professional theatre. Now it has also given me *Fools and Mortals*, a tribute not just to William Shakespeare, but to the Monomoy Theatre.

FOMT BOARD OF DIRECTORS - 2017-2018

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Board Members: Jean Axline, Jay Stahl, Elsa Bastone, Carolan Whittle, Marie Williams, Jenny Wood, Linda Simonitsch.

Welcome to two new board members: Erica Strzepek and Karen Murdoch.

A special thank you to outgoing Co-president Jean Axline for all her hard work and to other outgoing board members Terry Layman, Mary O'Brady, Cecile Maranhans, Kay Bryce, and Marsha Predovic. Thank you for all your hard work and devotion to the FOMT.



2017 Alan Rust Award Winners - A Dynamic Duo

The Alan Rust Scholarship sponsored by FOMT is presented every summer to a student chosen by fellow Company members as having made exceptional contributions to the summer.

This year the vote was a tie! The two winners were **Olivia Fuentes**, a sophomore pursuing her BFA in technical theatre and scenic design at University of Texas, El Paso and **Audrey Wilson**, a sophomore BFA candidate in Music Theatre from the Hartt School.

Audrey's impressive vocal skills were on display as one of the Liebeslieder Singers in *A Little Night Music* and in the Ensemble of *110 in the Shade* followed by her delightful comic turn as Phyllis Fontaine, the baritone voiced starlet in

Once in a Lifetime. As an Assistant Stage Manager on four productions, Audrey was thrilled to work with the variety of directors and guest artists during the Monomoy Season.



Olivia Fuentes and Audrey Wilson

Olivia, who spent the summer building the sets for all eight plays, said the challenge of working at that pace offered a "unique and amazing opportunity to grow and learn from some wonderful and talented people." A native of El Paso, who had never been North of Los Angeles, Olivia also appreciated the opportunity to spend the summer in such a beautiful place she might

never have visited. Congratulations to both winners on their contributions to a great season!

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Our 2018 season will be announced early next year.
Season Tickets (8 shows) \$210 - Evenings; \$190 - Thurs. matinees
Individual shows: Evenings - \$31; Matinees - \$29

Visit our website: www.monomoytheatre.org 2018 season coming this spring.
