An Historic Season at the Monomoy

by Bernard Cornwell

The season began with our nation’s beginning, and this was apt because the Monomoy Theatre’s 55th season coincided with Chatham’s tricentenary and Alan Rust wanted the theatre’s summer to follow an historical theme. He had long wanted to stage 1776 and so the year’s curtain was raised on the room in Philadelphia where the Continental Congress wrangled over the Declaration of Independence. The production was a triumph, enlivened by Ricky Oliver as John Adams, Alan himself as Benjamin Franklin, Jay Stratton as Thomas Jefferson and Terry Caza as John Dickinson, the Pennsylvanian who led the opposition to independence. All four are fine professional actors, so it was wonderful to see a 19 year old student, Jason Long, bring down the house with his flamboyant rendition of Molasses to Rum!

The birth of the USA was difficult but triumphant. There was no sense of triumph in the second production, a magnificent playing of Arthur Miller’s The Crucible, directed by Shelley Delaney, and again featuring Jay Stratton, this time as the honest and all too human John Proctor. 1776 had been a vehicle for male actors, but in The Crucible it was the turn of the girls, and they were wonderful. Marissa Wolf was poignant as Proctor’s wife, Emily Williams was chilling as his rejected lover and Caitlin Wilayto splendid as the servant girl torn between truth and fear.

And the girls came back magnificently in Neil Simon’s The Last of the Red Hot Lovers, set in the ‘swinging’ sixties - and director Mary O’Brady points out that the sixties are now a part of history (does that make you feel old?). It was the era of the moon landing, of Vietnam, and of the summer of love, and it was that summer of love which tormented Barney Cashman, played finely by Matt Reddick, as he tries and fails to join the sexual revolution. He was complemented by Meredith Swanson, Caitlin and Marissa, all three turning in terrific performances as his hoped-for lovers.

Comedy stayed on the bill with Harvey, a classic piece from the Second World War. Mary Chase, the author, tells how she looked out of her window late in the war and saw a woman weeping, presumably because she had just lost a loved one, and she wondered...
what she could write that would cheer that woman’s life. Well, *Harvey* has been cheering lives ever since, and we were fortunate to have Alan Rust play Elwood P. Dowd, the eccentric who is accompanied everywhere by Harvey, a giant rabbit, and Nora Chester who played Elwood’s exasperated sister.

The clock was turned back a week later, this time to the Weimar Republic and the decadence of pre-war Berlin. *Cabaret* was another triumph, and director Michael Montel chose to use the original script which gave prominence to two magnificent performances from Meredith Swanson and Joel Stigliano as the doomed middle-aged lovers. Caitlyn entranced us as Sally Bowles, while the production was lit up by Monomoy favorite Kyle Brand who not only choreographed the musical, but played the crucial role of Master of Ceremonies with zest, skill and sly brilliance. The friends of Monomoy Theatre provided the orchestra (thank you!), led wonderfully, as ever, by Phil Rittner who looked utterly beguiling in his blonde wig.

From the Weimar Republic we travelled back in history to the late 14th Century and the troubled reign of England’s Henry IV. Terry Layman condensed both parts of Shakespeare’s two plays into one, then took on the massive part of Falstaff. The plays might be called *Henry IV Part One*, and *Henry IV Part Two*, but Falstaff dominates the action in some of the finest comic scenes Shakespeare wrote. Terry was superb, and ably supported by Nora Chester as the much put-upon Mistress Quickly and by Christopher Young as Prince Hal whose
troubled relationship with his father runs as a dark undercurrent beneath the comedy.

From rebellion, treason and dynastic quarrels we moved to suspense in Frederick Knott’s *Wait Until Dark*, a production that had the audience gasping in shock as the villains (splendidly led by James Jelkin) closed in on the blind heroine, magnificently played by Marissa Wolf. The terror was palpable and those of us who saw the play might never look at a refrigerator light in quite the same way again.

The season seemed to rush by. Every year I am astonished by the amount of work that is poured into a twelve week season. The student-actors are often rehearsing two plays, performing in another, and learning lines for still more, all at the same time. It is an incredibly demanding schedule, yet this year’s company stayed cheerful, willing and enthusiastic to the very end, which was a production of *George Washington Slept Here* by Moss Hart and George Kaufman. It was a romp, a wondrously silly comedy to end a remarkably successful season. After the curtain went down on the last performance the set was struck, the lights taken down, and the stage was emptied, all but for the traditional stool and broom that will stay there through the winter and spring, only to be taken away when the theatre is lit again for the 56th season.

We look forward to seeing you all there!

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**NOTES TO THE FRIENDS**

**FIRST NIGHT CHATHAM – New Year’s Eve**

*ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE*

Help us blow out the candles on Chatham’s 300th birthday cake as The Monomoy Theatre presents songs and scenes from 55 years of repertoire. Featuring Alan Rust, Michaeljohn McGann, Holly Holcomb, Kyle Brand and many more! 8:00 PM at the Community Center.

**Our Website**

This issue of the Magpie is also available on our website. Send the link to a friend and encourage them to become to join the **FRIENDS OF MONOMOY THEATRE**. Stay tuned tuned for updates on the 2013 season.

[www.monomoytheatre.com](http://www.monomoytheatre.com)

**Upcoming Friends of the Monomoy Theatre London Theatre Tour**

Every other year the Friends head “across the pond” for a fabulous London Theatre Tour. The next jaunt to merry old England will be January 10-17, 2013.

Tour director, Sidney Harvey is assembling a great list of theatre options. One of the highlights is sure to be the new hit musical *Matilda*. Originally produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, this production is now a smash in the West End. For those who can’t make this trip, *Matilda* is coming to Broadway in March featuring Monomoy Theatre alumna, and original London cast member, Lauren Ward.
Two by Two at the Monomoy Theatre

Marissa Wolf and Joel Stigliano graduated from Ohio University in 2012 with their Master of Fine Arts degrees. They were members of the acting company at the Monomoy Theatre for both the 2011 and 2012 seasons. This fall they moved to New York where they sat down with Monomoy alums Mary O’Brady and Terry Caza to talk about their experience at Monomoy.

Terry: This past season was the second for both of you at The Monomoy Theater. What was it like coming back for a second season? What was different?

Joel: Well, just the company. One of the great things about Monomoy is the company of actors Alan brings together, becomes its own sort of surrogate family. The entire vibe was different because there were different people.

Marissa: We were looked at as leaders the second time around. People hopefully looked to us, because we were about 10 years older than the majority of the company. And it was kind of refreshing I guess… the younger group.

Terry: You were older but you also knew the way the Monomoy runs. Did that make coming back the 2nd year easier than the 1st year?

Marissa: Yeah, because I did know the drill. There were no surprises. We pulled up into the driveway and it was “Oh, this is exactly how it’s gonna be.”

Terry: It’s like you never left?

Marissa: Yeah, it’s like I never left. I thought, “Oh yeah, I can do this. I understand this.”

Joel: It’s comforting because as an actor the one thing that is not a prime commodity is knowing what you’re doing in the future. You have no idea. But at the Monomoy I know that tomorrow I’m gonna be doing this and the next day I’m gonna do this. The fact that we were familiar with that schedule was helpful.

Marissa: And where you are in the rehearsal process doesn’t freak you out as much … It’s like what Mary told us, “In Monomoy time, we have 2 weeks left!” When really it’s 2 days until we open but what normally takes two weeks really can happen in 2 days at Monomoy. Since you’ve been there before it feels like “Hey, I’ve done this before. I’m older and more experienced now so I’ll be fine.”

Terry: You both just finished your MFAs from OU. Did you find it helpful to do a diverse season of shows right after graduation and before moving to New York?

Marissa: Definitely. Because after graduation, if you were to move right to NY you’re not going to get to play any of those roles right away. You’re just not. Whereas with a season of plays at Monomoy, you have everything you’ve learned and an opportunity to use it. An opportunity to use all your training before moving to NY and starting your life.

Mary: You get to play roles that you’re right for but may not have a chance to compete for yet in New York.

Marissa: Right. Like Elizabeth Proctor in “The Crucible.” I was never going to move to NY and play Elizabeth Proctor. It just wasn’t going to happen.

Joel: Yeah, there’s so much real world application of what we study. It’s great training at Ohio University and what they have done is prepared me for a life on stage and film and TV but after graduating if you were to move straight to NY you wouldn’t get to apply that training. To go to Monomoy and get a chance to apply the tools that you’ve been given in a conservatory training program is kind of a great last lesson.

Marissa: And to feel like you’re still in an educational setting. You’ve already completed your degree so you get a chance to see what you’ve got. To sort of throw it up against the wall and see how it goes.

Terry: Yeah, when we were in drama school in Washington, we were hired at Monomoy after our first year and our movement teacher called us aside before we left and said “Monomoy is great. You come here to Washington to learn how to act and hone your skills, now go to Monomoy to learn how to do plays.” And I think that’s a great description of what happens because you’re doing a new play every week. So you’re learning how to create character, make a choice, and crank it out. Then if it’s going wrong you get to make one last choice because suddenly it’s dress rehearsal.

Joel: That’s a fantastic point because one of the most valuable lessons is that you go to any training program and they give you a sort of basket of tools. You can do it this way, or this way, or this way. And that’s fantastic, you can find numerous ways to make a character but they’re not always the most direct. And at Monomoy, more than anywhere else you have to find the most economical way to create a character.

Terry: Why do you think that’s true?

Joel: It’s just the nature of the beast. You have 40 hrs of rehearsal before there’s an audience. I mean sometimes it’s great to explore
every facet of a character but it can also become sort of a handicap. It can become a sort of self-gratifying mush of stuff that you don’t want. Sometimes the shortest distance from A to B is the best. You have to be ready for an audience in 40 hours. Come hell or high water.

Terry: Doing a season of Monomoy has been described by many former members as being like “boot camp”. Do you agree with that? It’s a challenging experience working at the Monomoy doing 8 plays in 12 weeks.

Marissa: It’s an endurance test for sure.

Joel: It is an endurance test. Our first year, our entire graduate class at OU came to Monomoy. Marissa and I did seven shows and went straight through, had 4 days off and then went back to school and started rehearsal for the next show there, which was “Holiday” and it was a 6 week rehearsal process. By the time the 2nd week rolled around we were like “Great! When do we open?” The machine was so well oiled, that we felt like we were ready in 2 weeks. But it is boot camp in as much as being an actor is comparable to being an athlete. You need to train like an athlete to prepare yourself for a life in the theater or film and TV.

Mary: Do you think that kind of endurance is practical preparation for the real world?

Marissa: Yeah, I mean, before graduate school I did some films that shot until 5am but I’m not sure if I realized that that was the norm. Until it started happening in professional settings and then I realized that’s just how it goes. This is what we do.

Joel: It also tricks you into thinking, whatever comes your way, it won’t be as difficult as Monomoy. And that’s a great lesson.

Terry: It must be empowering. You say “I’ve done Monomoy. I can do anything”

Joel: Yeah, I can learn a role in 40 hours if I have to. It’s a great confidence builder.

Terry: So what’s it like working at the Monomoy as a couple? Is it beneficial? Is it straining?

Marissa: It’s so much better, because we’re living together, which we would be anyway, as opposed to with 3 other girls, or 3 other guys in one room, which is fine, but in your 30s it’s . . .

Mary: Does it make it feel a little more normal?

Marissa: Yeah. We’d go back to our room and put on a movie and act like normal people.

Terry: Like you were coming home from work?

Marissa: Yeah, exactly.

Joel: And that was the best part of it really. I mean, how often do you get to go to work with your loved one?

Marissa: It’ll probably never happen again!

Joel: To be cast in the same show.

Terry: That almost never happens.

Mary: Was it easier to live through it together than to try to explain what you were doing to somebody else?

Marissa: Yeah, if you were in a relationship with somebody who wasn’t there, it would be difficult, because it envelops your entire life. You’re in a bubble.

Joel: Especially if you were dating someone who’s not in the profession. They wouldn’t understand at all. The best thing about working together is that you have the shared experiences. It’s like taking a very long, arduous working vacation together.

Terry: A lot of actors, director, designers and technicians have worked at Monomoy over the past 55 years. Does having the Monomoy credits on your resume, both the plays and people, provide a good networking opportunity?

Joel: Sure, I think in the theater, you learn something from every person you work with. In a way it’s all the same thing, you’re learning your lines, learning your blocking, learning your actions, delivering a performance to your audience, and you’re achieving something. That’s it, right? I mean there’s only so many different ways you can build a cabinet right? But how you build the cabinet, depending on who is giving you the instruction, is going to differ, depending on the directors and so you grow so much as a performer and as a person in seeing how every different director views theater.

And the same goes for the actors Alan brings in, people who are already working in the industry. I think it raises the stakes for the company, whether they realize it or not, to think that this is an experienced actor so I have to bring my A game. That I have to give 110% all the time in order to be at the same playing level as this other person. Ideally, for me the best thing is to be the weakest link in the room. If I’m the worst actor in the show I think that’s fantastic, then I have so much more room to grow.

Terry: You learn something from someone who is more experienced than you.

Joel: Right. Watching Terry Layman work in Henry IV was a great experience because you get to watch this consummate actor deliver this huge role of Falstaff, its like “Oh so that’s how he does it” It’s great to see that.

Mary: Marissa, tell us about doing a role that you’re not necessarily completely comfortable with, like your experience with comedy.
Marissa: I hadn’t done a lot of comedy, like the Neil Simon play, “Last of the Red Hot Lovers” we did last season. It was very different and I didn’t know how to do it and we had to put it up so fast. So, I just had to learn fast and I did learn fast. And I wonder if I had more time if I would have just mulled over it too much and it would have just gone to hell.

Mary: Do you feel like you learned to trust yourself?

Marissa: Yeah because I had to. It was so fast that it felt like ‘Well, I’m just going to do this and see if it works!’

Terry: And it worked?

Marissa: Yeah, I just had to go all out.

Mary: So it’s taking what you already know and doing what’s asked of you and then jumping off the cliff.

Joel: In a lot of ways the fear of failure is really powerful. I think, for me, that’s the greatest impetus to try harder because it’s so terrifying to do a show in two weeks that it makes you work harder than you’ve ever worked before and so you find things within yourself that you never really thought that you had.

I think it’s enormously helpful to have extraordinary deadlines and be forced to work extraordinarily hard to meet that deadline, whatever it is, being forced to test yourself to that limit.

Terry: When you go on an audition and they see you’ve done these plays, this incredible range of plays you’ve done at the Monomoy over the last 2 years, does that help you at auditions? Do you think that helps you with the people you’re auditioning for?

Marissa: Yeah, I think so. I always have people say, “Wow, you have an impressive resume.” A lot of other people don’t have these kinds of roles. A lot of people have a lot of MTV, VH1, commercial, kind of extra work but they don’t have the repertoire of roles that we’ve had the opportunity to play.

Joel: I don’t know any other place in the world where you’re going to do “1776” next to “The Crucible” next to “Last of The Red Hot Lovers,” next to “Cabaret” and “Henry IV” and to be able to tackle these roles. Even in academia sometimes they don’t have this attention to the classics. We study them but they don’t get produced that often because sometimes they’re looking at different criteria like scene design, lighting, casting. There’s so much to be learned from doing them and to be able to have them on your resume.

Terry: Tell me about the Monomoy audiences. What are these audiences like to work with?

Marissa: They’re supportive! They’re people who know the plays that we’re doing. They’ve often seen these plays many times. And it’s very flattering to hear them say “Wow! This is just as good as when I saw it on Broadway.”

Joel: They’re some of the most educated audiences that I know of. In Chatham, they’re seeing a full season of the most eclectic group of shows you could imagine. To go from drama, to comedy, to musical, to Shakespeare, to comedy of manners and have an audience live through that entire series… I wish I was an audience member.

Their praise or their criticism means so much more when they say, “You did a great job. That was fantastic. That was the best show that I’ve seen in years.” And to know they they’ve been seeing eight shows a year for the past 20 years or sometimes longer, that’s a huge compliment, but it’s also a huge responsibility. So adding to that fear factor, like I feel responsible to deliver eight really good performances to these great people because they care about the theater.

Marissa: It’s encouraging. It doesn’t feel like we’re doing it for people who don’t care, like it sometimes does at school. It’s not just students who are required to go to the shows. These are people who want to see these plays. They’re not seeing them because we’re their friends or they’re our moms. They come to see the plays.

Joel: And you see them throughout the season and they’ll say “Oh I loved it when you did that role.” And those two wonderful parties that we have at the beginning of the season and the end of the season. At the end you have the best group of fans that you could have.

Terry: Ok, sum up the experience of working at the Monomoy Theater and why it’s valuable to you.

Marissa: It was a place where I could trust my training and try things that were maybe way beyond the realm of what I thought I’d be able to do in “the real world”. I was surrounded by a really wonderful close company in a beautiful, respected theater, with a great audience.

Joel: I think that it’s hard to quantify how valuable it is but I can see myself 20 years down the road, looking back and saying “Man, I’m glad that I did Monomoy because that taught me how to do this”. And I think it’s invaluable to actors to learn in a supportive atmosphere with trained professionals and the experienced guidance of directors and other actors who have been doing this for a living. They didn’t read it out of a book; these are people who have worked, actually gaining employment from being an actor or director on the screen or the stage. I mean, what better world could you hope to live in.
2012 Alan D. Rust Award

Originally established by an anonymous benefactor, this award is now sponsored by the Friends. Each year members of the student company vote to select a colleague who has made an invaluable contribution to the summer.

This year, the company chose Casey Watkins, an MFA student at Southern Illinois University who made magic all summer long as a costume technician. “Casey will fix it” was heard continually throughout the summer and this photo expresses how the company felt about her.

Donate to FOMT:

By joining and supporting the Friends you are helping to bring the fabulous programs of Monomoy Theatre to the Cape. FOMT subsidizes the theatre by funding both of the musicals, providing stipends for over half of the resident company, giving scholarships for company members, and supporting theater projects such as the Eleanor Baker Steindler rehearsal tent, stage lighting and the theatre website. Join the fun, come to the parties and interact with the cast and crew!

BE A FRIEND: JOIN F.O.M.T

Make a tax-deductible contribution to the Friends of Monomoy Theatre*

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Enclosed is my check for $______________ payable to FOMT, Box 169, Chatham MA 02633

Name (please print)________________________________________

Winter Address____________________________________________

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*If your company has a matching program, please consider completing the necessary forms.

As a FRIEND, your name will be printed in the Monomoy Theatre program insert and you will be invited to all FOMT functions.
GIFT CERTIFICATES AVAILABLE!

If you are looking for a great gift for the holidays, upcoming birthdays, anniversaries or other celebrations, why not a gift certificate from The Monomoy Theatre! You can buy the full season or any number of individual shows. Below are our prices for tickets. Just send a check to the theatre address: PO Box 779, Chatham, MA 02633 with details of your purchase.

Sorry, at this time we can not accept credit cards. Any questions, or to order by phone, please call 508 945-1589.

Our 2013 season will be announced early next year.

Season Tickets (8 shows) $200 - Evenings; $165 - Thursday matinees
Individual shows: Evenings - $30; Matinees - $25

From the FOMT Board of Directors

This year’s annual meeting was held on August 5 at the theatre. There were many changes to the Board of Directors this year. Nancy Whelan and Diana Whitlock who have served for several years have stepped down from the board. Gay Murdoch who has been an invaluable President stepped down from that role but will remain on the board as a Director.

The nominating committee announced that Mary O’Brady will serve as President, and that Jean Axline and Scott Hamilton had been elected to three-year terms. Ms. Axline returns to the board after a brief absence and Mr. Hamilton is a first time board member. Welcome to both.

The new board for 2012- 2013 is as follows:

President – Mary O’Brady
Secretary – Cecile Maranhas
Treasurer – Terry Layman
Board Directors - Jean Axline, Bernard Cornwell, Scott Hamilton, Gay Murdoch, Carol Penfield, Mauny Plum, Marsha Predovic, Jan Rust and Catherine Steindler
Honorary Director – Julie Harris

Have a Wonderful Holiday!