

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

2015-16 SEASON

PLAYGUIDE

HOME OF THE BRAVE

APRIL 20 - MAY 15

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT:

Lila Rose Kaplan on why
comedy is awesome

HOW TO FIGHT (SAFELY):

Stage Combat secrets,
from *Home of the Brave's*
movement specialist

POLITICS AS USUAL:

Our national history of
ridiculous campaign antics

WRITTEN BY

Lila Rose Kaplan

DIRECTED BY

Sean Daniels

PICTURED: KAREN MACDONALD



SEAN DANIELS
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



ELIZABETH KEGLEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PRESENTS

HOME OF THE BRAVE

WRITTEN BY
LILA ROSE KAPLAN†

FEATURING

JORDAN BRODESS
KAREN MACDONALD†

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SEAN DANIELS

APRIL 20 – MAY 15, 2016

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PLAYGUIDE

THE CAST OF *HOME OF THE BRAVE*



JORDAN BRODESS
(Val)

MRT: Debut **REGIONAL:** *Never the Sinner*, Victory Gardens Theater; *Feathers and Teeth*, Goodman Theatre; *Red*, Dallas Theater Center; *Eat Your Heart Out*, (Humana Festival of New American Plays) Actors Theatre of Louisville; *American Myth*, American Blues Theater; *Black Tie*, Water Tower Theatre; *A Christmas*

Carol, Actors Theatre of Louisville. **FILM/TV:** *Crisis*, NBC; *The Killer Inside Me*, Revolution/IFC; *The Art of Kissing*, NewSchool Productions. **EDUCATION:** Apprenticeships at The Shaw Festival in Ontario and Actors Theatre of Louisville. BFA from the University of Oklahoma.



VERONIKA DUERR
(Marianne)

MRT: *It's A Wonderful Life* (Lana Sherwood). **REGIONAL:** *Tall Girls* (World Premiere), *Spoon Lake Blues* (World Premiere), Alliance Theatre; *Bob: A Life in Five Acts*, Geva Theatre; *Romeo and Juliet* (Juliet), *As You Like It* (Rosalind), *Twelfth Night* (Viola), Atlanta Shakespeare Company.

EDUCATION: BFA, Savannah College of Art and Design. **OTHER:** 2015 Alliance Theatre Artistic Fellow; co-founder of The Weird Sisters Theatre Project, a collective of female artists in Atlanta.



JOHN GREGORIO
(Adrian)

MRT: Debut **OFF-BROADWAY:** *Around the World in 80 Days* (Passepartout), The New Theatre @ 45th St; *Silent Laughter* (Lionel Drippinwithit), The Lamb's Theatre; *The Nuclear Family* (founder/performer), The Belt Theatre; *Clinton the Musical* (Dick Morris), NY Music Theatre Festival. **REGIONAL:** *Little Shop*

of Horrors (Orin the Dentist), *The 39 Steps* (Richard Hannay), Geva Theatre Center; *A Christmas Carol* (Fred/Fezziwig), Actors Theatre of Louisville; *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (Hysterium), North Shore Music Theatre; *The Legend of Pecos Bill* (Ace High), Alliance Theatre; *The Mystery of Irma Vep* (Edgar/Jane/Irma), Dad's Garage Theatre Company.

TELEVISION: *The Extended Family*, Sundance Channel; *Good Eats*, Food Network; *Smoking Gun T.V.*, Court TV.

OTHER: John is a founding member of Dad's Garage Theatre Company (Atlanta) and the Nuclear Family (New York) with whom he teaches and performs improvisation around the country.



Veronika Duerr, Karen MacDonald, and Joel Van Liew.
Photo by Meghan Moore.

THE CAST OF *HOME OF THE BRAVE*



KAREN MACDONALD

(Bernadette)

MRT: *The Blonde, The Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead, Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, A Moon for the Misbegotten and Blithe Spirit.* **BROADWAY:** understudied and performed the role of Amanda Wingfield in John Tiffany's revival of *The Glass Menagerie.* **REGIONAL:** *Sorry, That Hopey Changey Thing, Doubt, Stoneham Theatre; Sweet and Sad, Gloucester Stage; Ulysses on Bottles (with Israeli Stage), Red Hot Patriot: The Kick Ass Wit of Molly Ivins, Lyric Stage; Mendelssohn's A Midsummer Night's Dream, Boston Symphony Orchestra; A Soldier's Carol, with the Boston Pops; Huntington Theatre Co.; Speakeasy Stage; Commonwealth Shakespeare Company; New Repertory Theatre; Lyric Stage; ArtsEmerson; Boston Playwrights' Theatre; Portland Stage, Hartford Stage, Berkshire Theatre Festival, and the Vineyard Playhouse. A founding company member of the American Repertory Theatre, she appeared in 73 productions, including *Endgame, The Sea Gull, Mother Courage, Island of Slaves.* **OTHER:** Her directing credits include *Gidion's Knot, Bridge Rep; An Ideal Husband, Woman in Black, Gloucester Stage; Dressed Up! Wiggled Out!!, Boston Playwrights Theatre.* Recipient of several Elliot Norton and IRNE Awards for her performances. In 2010, Ms. MacDonald received both the Robert Brustein Award for Sustained Achievement in the Theatre and the Norton Prize for Sustained Excellence.*



CHERYL MCMAHON

(Dora)

MRT: Debut **REGIONAL:** *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (Big Mama), My Fair Lady (Mrs. Pearce), Boston's Lyric Stage; Steel Magnolias (Clairee), New London Barn Playhouse; Christmas Carol, Annie, Grease, North Shore Music Theatre; Marty, The Rose Tattoo, Prelude to a Kiss, Hun-*

tington Theatre; appearances at Stoneham Theatre, Speakeasy Theatre, Goodspeed Opera House, Gateway Playhouse, Wheelock Family Theatre, Next Door Theatre, Boston Playwrights. **FILM:** *Russian Doll, The Box, RIPD, Brilliant Mistakes, Clue I & II, The a Plate.* **OTHER:** Cheryl is a three-time IRNE award recipient. She originated her role in Bill Doncaster's *Two Boys Lost (Ma)*, Gail Phaneuf's and Ernie Lijoi's *Monsters, The Musical (Mother).*



JOEL VAN LIEW

(Owen)

MRT: Debut **NEW YORK:** *Well, Public; From Up Here, MTC; The Rock Garden, Drama League Directorfest; Permanent Visitor, New Georges; A Beautiful Child, NY Fringe; Born of Conviction, White Bird Prods.* **REGIONAL:** *The 39 Steps, Geva; The Ver**on Play, Pride and Prejudice, ATL; Seven Homeless Mammoths Wander New England, Two River; Well, ACT; The Pavilion, City Theatre.* **FILM:** *The Girl in the Book, Untitled Colin Warner Project, A Birder's Guide to Everything.* **TV:** *Limitless, Girls, Boardwalk Empire, Nurse Jackie, Law & Order, White Collar.* **OTHER:** Member of the Actors Center.



Left to right: Jordan Brodess, Veronika Duerr, Karen MacDonald, Joel Van Liew, John Gregorio, and Cheryl McMahon. Photo by Meghan Moore.

PLAYWRIGHT'S WARNING

Discretion for Viewers Advised. While this is a New Play, it is also an Old Fashioned Comedy. You may not be Familiar with this Form as it is Almost Totally Extinct. If you have Misplaced your Sense of Humor or Replaced it with your Cell Phone, I suggest you Watch this Play as a way to Remember it. Remember Lucille Ball, Remember the Marx Brothers, Remember when you were a Kid and Your Brother made you Laugh so hard that Milk Came Out of Your Nose. If none of this Rings a Bell, I Advise you to Watch this Play Immediately as you are in Grave Danger. Also, you may notice Certain Structural Similarities to an Old Play named *Tartuffe* by an Even Older Man named Molière.

I wouldn't call this a True Adaptation, by any means, but I would call it a Distant Cousin. And it's always nice to meet a Distant Cousin, Don't You Think?

-Lila Rose Kaplan, Playwright

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Here is what I love about Lila Rose Kaplan.

So often we hear about how female playwrights aren't getting the same opportunities as their male counterparts. It's a real systemic issue in our field.

In addition, we also hear about how female playwrights are expected to only write about "female-centric" story lines.

And we often hear the whispers that "women aren't funny, or at least they don't write funny."

Standing in the middle of that maelstrom of misogyny and laziness is Lila Rose Kaplan – writing farce – which is really the most dangerous comedy there is.

Because when you write a farcical joke, and the actors perform it – whether it works or not is known INSTANTLY by the whole audience AND the performers. There's no explaining it to them afterwards, there's no "if only you were smarter," there is just the moment the joke is delivered, and then the audience involuntarily responding and telling you if it worked or not.

And regardless of how it went, you have to then go tell them your second joke.

If that one doesn't work? Rarely do you find a movie or play "not funny" and then 30 minutes later find it funny again – usually, once you're out, you're out. In fact, most people grow angry once they realize they're watching a comedy that they don't find funny.

"Dying is easy, but comedy is hard." Right?

I think this is why there are so few comedies for the theatre – why we cling to the tried and true (even when they're not actually funny – just "theatre funny"), because a new play risks failure at every turn – a new play that's also a comedy takes that risk and doubles down on it.

So to write comedy – you have to be the most generous artist there is – you have to love your audience, you have to want to delight your audience – you have to be wicked smart to be a step ahead of them – and you have to be unafraid.

You have to do the most dangerous thing in live performance – tell the audience the next thing you are going to say is funny.

And to be a female writer in the middle of an industry that hasn't been giving you the signals it's got your back... comedy or not... in the face of all that, to still go for it? Why, you'd really have to be Lila Rose Kaplan, or a close version of her.

Lucky for us, we have the real thing – and we get to see her world premiere tonight.

Here's to funny lady writers, and for us being lucky enough to bask in their bravery.

Sean

Q&A: LILA ROSE KAPLAN

Lila Rose Kaplan is a Cambridge-based playwright, whose works include The Light Princess, 1 2 3, When Jesus Girls Come Out, and Wildflower.

She lives with her marine biologist, her opinionated cats, and her brand new daughter.

What do you love about comedy?

To stop and laugh at something is such a great and simple moment in an otherwise complex universe. It's such a joy to work on something that brings people joy.

I grew up loving Lucille Ball, the Marx Brothers. I remember listening to records with my mom, like Mel Brooks' *The 2000-Year-Old Man*. So I grew up with a lot of kind of big comedy around. And I found that I love creating it too.

What do you love about farce specifically?

I think what I love about it is that it's big, and it's physical. It's surprising. One of the things I loved about writing this piece is that every scene has to have another big physical thing happening in it. I love clown, and I love slapstick... sort of "Big Comedy." I had a real desire to put that on stage.

Any specific examples that influenced Home of the Brave?

As a kid, whenever I was home sick, I would just watch *I Love Lucy* all day. And then I saw *One Man, Two Guvnors* in London a few years ago, with a friend, and we laughed so hard we cried.

And we turned to each other and said, "why aren't we doing this in the US?"



Do you think of it as a political comedy?

I think it's a comedy about politics, and family. I think it's about truth in family, and truth in politics. And for me, it's about the fact that truth in family wins at the end of the day, over fabricated truth.

That family aspect kind of sneaks up on you... the story turns out a bit sweeter than you might expect at first.

It really speaks to me when we hear things about politicians being actual people. I remember reading something about Bill and Hillary Clinton when Chelsea was getting married. And I thought, "Right – they're politicians, but they're also just, like, parents, whose daughter is getting married."

It's always interesting to me when the public and private collide, because peoples' lives are so publicized.

Who do you love most in the play?

That's not a fair question! I love everybody differently.

There's something very dear to my heart about Val. I think Val is a character that we see often. And having gone to a liberal arts school, and taught at liberal arts schools, you just see that there are Vals in the world.

I love Owen, and his pure and simple path through a complex family and play.

I love Marianne, and how she's got that wonderful, young adult turn-on-a-dime energy.

It was really fun to write Adrian. There was a point in the writing process where I realized that Adrian was just a classic villain, this sort of charming British rascal.

I love that Bernadette genuinely wants to do the right thing. And I love that Dora is just always right.

I love the family. I love that it's an ensemble piece, and that you really need all six characters to tell the story.

Are you personally interested in politics, or do you just like writing about them?

I'm very interested. I'm often heartbroken. I grew up with this idealism about America, and the American Revolution, and I think that hitting my twenties and getting involved as an activist was a bit of a rude awakening – realizing, "Oh! That was a really lovely fairy tale, but it isn't exactly the country where we live."

While this play is very heartfelt and charming, I think some of that is there too. Why is it that no one actually talks about what's going on? Why is it that the only way for Bernadette to be successful is to pretend to be all these things she's not?

Now that you're a local, how do you like being a Boston playwright?

I love being a Boston playwright.

I arrived in Boston after seven years of writing in Southern California, and I feel like Boston audiences are game. They're different ages and shapes and sizes. I did a free outdoor show with the Outside the Box festival at A.R.T., and I saw so many people – we had two performances that were both free, and there were just hundreds of people there. It was just amazing to me, to see how Boston is really hungry for good, accessible theatre.

There's so many different vibrant places here, and they're all strong. They all know what they're doing.

What have been your favorite parts of the process?

Getting to work with such a fabulous and dedicated team. Everybody – all the actors, Sean, the designers – are so game, and so funny, and so wholehearted. It's a playwright's dream, to have such a vibrant team coming together to bring a play to life. It's been a total joy.

Why do you write for the stage?

I think the theatre is one of the last communal storytelling spaces we have.

Especially with comedy, there's something so special about laughing with other people. Sure, you could be on your couch watching a funny movie, and laughing by yourself. But there's something about the person next to you starting to laugh, and it being infectious. I think sharing something joyful with other people is really good for us, and theatre gives us a chance to practice empathy together – to practice taking on different peoples' points of view. And with comedy, there's just a lot of room for joy.

Learn more about Lila Rose Kaplan at www.lilarose.org

EXTREME ACTING

By Ted Hewlett, Movement Specialist

The art of Stage Combat could also be called “**extreme acting**,” since it has much more in common with dance or magic than martial arts. Like a dance number in a musical, a fight is learned and rehearsed, with specific spatial awareness and body shapes. And like magic, stage combat often relies on misdirection to hide its cooperative nature and to instead create the illusion of conflict.

You can think of the moves as physical lines of dialogue, linked together in musical phrases just as sentences build paragraphs. Every move or series of techniques needs to combine the elements of **safety, story-telling, and repeatability**. Safety is obviously paramount, not only for the actors, but for crew members and the audience as well. However, theatrical violence should also drive the story forward and reveal character, not merely be spectacle. And finally, it needs to be accomplishable eight shows a week by the actual performers with real velocity and visible intention – no stunt doubles, and no re-takes!

The following pictures demonstrate a principle commonly used in theatrical violence:

1 Veronika cues John with an exaggerated wind-up of the punch: in essence, **she goes away from her partner first** in order to give him time to react, but disguises it by making it look like she’s trying to generate more power.

2 John begins his avoidance, **moving his body away from the line of attack**. This tells Veronika that she’s now safe to begin to throw the agreed-upon punch. She doesn’t need to let him fully complete his dodge before launching the punch, or it would be too visible to the audience – but she does need to see him start his half of the equation, giving her permission to attack.

3 Veronika completes her punch, having passed her fist through the space that John’s body once occupied. **This means that the ostensible reason that John moved at all happens last**, at the end of the physical line of dialogue.

The actors are now set up for the next moment, whether that be another strike, or a return to text.

1. Cue



2. Avoidance



3. Completion



Ted Hewlett (back) rehearses with Veronika Duerr and John Gregorio.

WHAT THEY'RE WEARING

The characters in *Home of the Brave* may be descending into mayhem onstage. But at least they look great doing it!

Check out these costume renderings from our stellar designer **Jessica Ford**:



Three of Bernadette's Costumes

Two of Owen's costumes, including his animal pants



Marriane

Val

Adrian

Dora

FARCE

farce (färs) *n.* – a light dramatic composition marked by broadly satirical comedy and improbable plot

Farces can be extremely diverse, but will usually include:

- **Highly improbable situations**
- **Stereotyped characters**
- **Extravagant exaggeration**
- **Violent horseplay**
- **A general mocking of human behavior and society**

They've been around a long time – you can find elements of Farce in ancient Greek and Roman comedies (by the likes of Aristophanes and Plautus), even though the actual word “Farce” didn't show up until the 1400's.

It's an Old French word meaning “stuffing,” a nod to the clowning, acrobatics, buffoonery, and other displays of indecency once used in interludes between scenes of more serious entertainment. Eventually, people realized that the stuffing was far more entertaining than what it was being stuffed into, and Farce took off as a genre all its own.



Molière, playwright of Tartuffe (Portrait by Pierre Mignard).

Among its master writers was Molière, widely considered the greatest French comedy writer to ever live. *Tartuffe*, written by Molière in 1664, tells the story of Orgon, a wealthy man being conned by Tartuffe, a scoundrel attempting to steal his fortune and seduce his wife. Orgon invites Tartuffe into his home, interrupting not only the daily lives of the entire family, but the marriage of Orgon's daughter Mariane and her suitor Valère.

ANYTHING FOR A VOTE

America has a long, sometimes glorious, sometimes hideous history of candidates doing just about anything for a vote.

Here's our Nine Favorite Political Campaign Facts:



George Washington.

1 **George Washington** had run for the Virginia State Legislature twice, and lost. When he ran a third time in 1758, he gave out 160 gallons of free alcohol as part of his campaign, and won.

2 When **John Adams** came up for reelection during his presidency, newspaperman James Callender published accusations that Adams was **planning to declare himself king and go to war with France.**

As it turned out, presidential hopeful Thomas Jefferson had paid Callender to write them.



John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

3 In a heated senate race debate, Stephen A. Douglas accused **Abraham Lincoln** of being two-faced – to which Lincoln responded, **“If I had another face, do you think I’d wear this one?”**



Teddy Roosevelt's Distinctive Smile.

4 **Teddy Roosevelt** suffered a lot of teasing about his distinctive smile; but he turned the insults around, and had **“teddy’s teeth” whistles** made for his supporters.



5 Three-time failed presidential candidate **William Jennings Bryan** was known to make as many as **30 speeches a day.** His aides dumped cold water on him between speeches to freshen him up .

6 Unable to match Bryan's breakneck pace, **William McKinley** decided instead to give speeches almost exclusively **from his own front porch in Canton, Ohio.**



William McKinley famously campaigned from his own front porch.

7 In 1920, during the **Warren Harding/James Cox** race, a third party candidate – the socialist **Eugene V. Debs** – **ran his campaign from prison,** where he was serving time for his opposition to World War I. He came out with 3% of the popular vote.

8 The Democrats hold the record for both **the shortest and the longest party** nominating conventions – six hours in 1872, and 17 days in 1924.

9 Perhaps nothing changed the face of campaigning more than **live television.** In the first live presidential debate in 1960 featured **John F. Kennedy** facing **Richard Nixon.** JFK understood how to work the new medium – he wore makeup to polish his appearance, and spoke directly to the camera. It made the difference; while the studio audience agreed that Nixon had won the debate, **home viewers thought the opposite.**



The JFK/Nixon debates were the first broadcast on live television.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS IN *HOME OF THE BRAVE*

Buddhism: A system of religious belief in which there is no creator, but rather karma. It holds that existence is suffering, and we can only be freed through moral and mental purification.



The Charleston

Charleston: A popular dance of the 1920's, using quick twisting steps and rapid leg movement.

Indentured Servants: Indentured servitude was a common practice in the eighteenth century, in which individuals agreed to work for a certain number of years – usually four to seven – in exchange for payment of their voyage to the New World.

Miracle on 34th Street: Classic family Christmas movie, about a department store Santa who claims to be the real Santa Claus. Associated with nostalgia and good tidings.

Oberlin: Liberal arts college in Oberlin, Ohio. Known for its history of political activism, progressive LGBT attitudes, and left-leaning student population.

Om: A sacred sound, spiritual icon, and mantra in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Often used to represent the totality of existence or knowledge.



Sanskrit lettering of Om

Patriarchy: A societal system in which men hold the power.

Pagan: One who follows a religious tradition outside of mainstream monotheism. Originally a derogatory term from early Christian Europe, it has since been reclaimed by adherents to several folkloric and pre-Christian religions.

Princess Diana: Born the Princess of Wales, Diana married Prince Charles, heir to the British throne. She was beloved by the public, (even after her divorce), for her strong devotion to her sons and work in charity. She was killed in a car crash in 1997.

Scoundrel: A dishonest person; a rogue.



The Turducken: A chicken in a duck in a turkey.

Turducken: A (decidedly non-vegan dish) in which a chicken is stuffed inside a duck which is then stuffed inside of a turkey.

Vegan: Someone who does not consume any animal products, whether part of an animal (meat) or a product coming from an animal (dairy, eggs, etc.)

THANK YOU

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