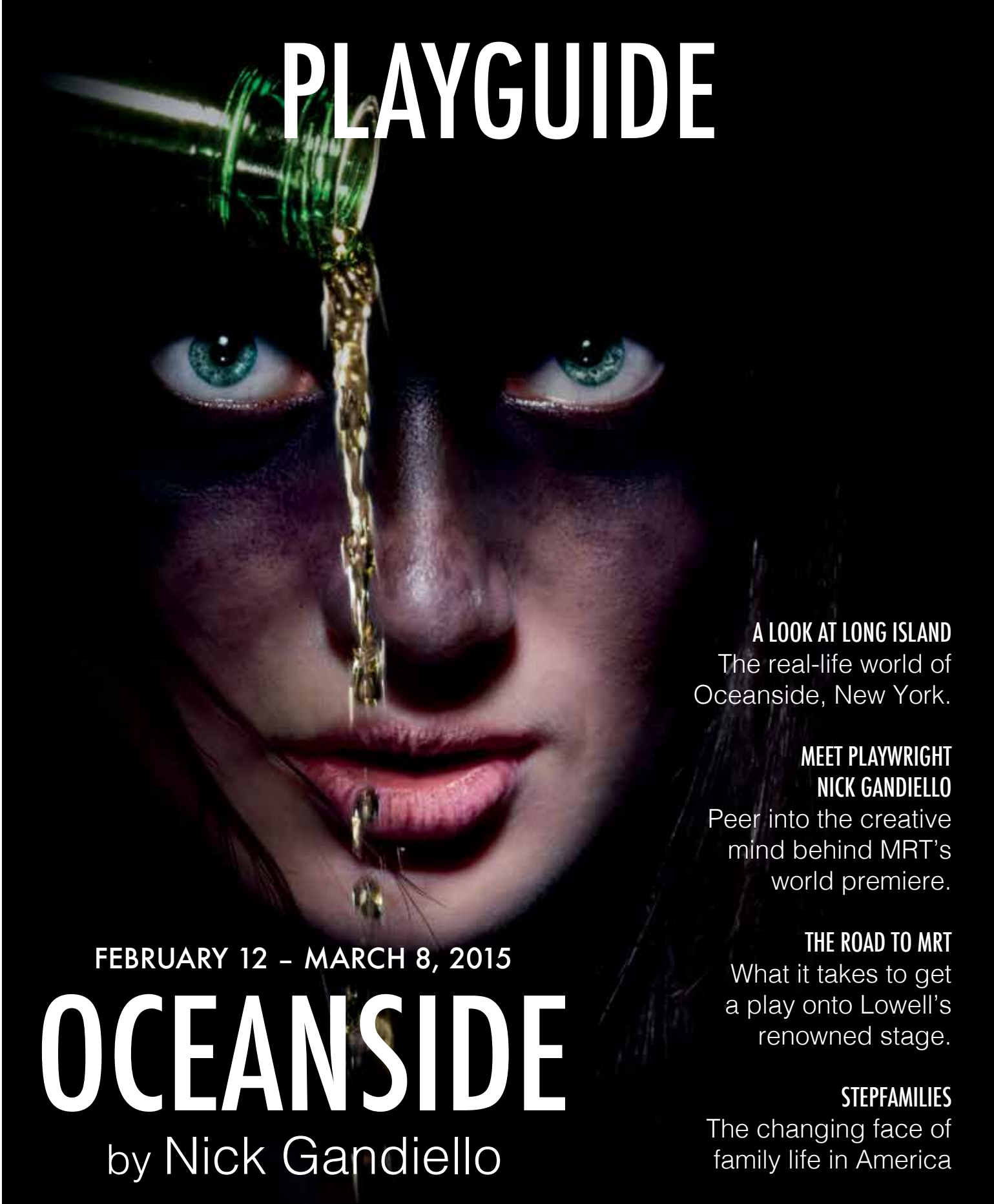


MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

2014-15 SEASON

PLAYGUIDE



A LOOK AT LONG ISLAND
The real-life world of
Oceanside, New York.

**MEET PLAYWRIGHT
NICK GANDIELLO**
Peer into the creative
mind behind MRT's
world premiere.

THE ROAD TO MRT
What it takes to get
a play onto Lowell's
renowned stage.

STEPFAMILIES
The changing face of
family life in America

FEBRUARY 12 – MARCH 8, 2015

OCEANSIDE

by Nick Gandiello

Charles Towers, Artistic Director



Elizabeth Kegley, Executive Director

FEBRUARY 12 - MARCH 8, 2015

OCEANSIDE

by Nick Gandiello

Featuring

CAROLYN BAEUMLER ALLYN BURROWS JOEY COLLINS
CAROLINE LAWTON ALLAN MAYO

Scenic Designer
JUDY GAILEN

Costume Designer
DEBORAH NEWHALL

Lighting Designer
JOHN MALINOWSKI

Sound Designer
DAVID REMEDIOS

Casting Director
HARRIET BASS

Stage Manager
CASEY LEIGH HAGWOOD

Assistant Stage Manager
PETER CREWE

Directed by

MELIA BENSUSSEN



OCEANSIDE is produced by special arrangement with Alexis Williams, BRET ADAMS, LTD., 448 West 44th St., New York, NY 10036. www.bretadamsltd.net



EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM SUPPORTERS

3M
Aubert J. Fay Charitable Fund
Trustees of the Ayer Home
Bobs Discount Furniture
Ted & Connie Lapre Fund

Lowell Polish Cultural Council
Linda Trudel Endowment Fund
Ronald M. Ansin Foundation
Nathaniel & Elizabeth P. Stevens Foundation
Top of the Hill Fund



This program is supported in parts by grants from the Lowell, Lawrence, Burlington, Chelmsford, and Dracut Cultural Councils, local agencies which are supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency. Supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Art Works.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAYGUIDE

A Note from the Director.....	4
The Cast of <i>Oceanside</i>	4
Meet the Playwright.....	5
Q&A with playwright Nick Gandiello	6
The Road to MRT	8
A Look at Long Island	9
Stepfamilies.....	10
Glossary	11
Discussion Questions	11

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

It is hard to be a parent. It is also very hard to be parented. Whether or not we have children, we know this to be true.

As Philip Larkin wrote in his poem, *This Be The Verse*, "They f*** you up your mum and dad / They may not mean to, but they do. / They fill you with the faults they had/And add some extra just for you."

We worry that we do not ever truly know our parents. We probably don't. And as Tommy says in *Oceanside*, "You ever worry you don't know your kids that much?"

Oceanside, this brand new play by Nick Gandiello, is written with a feverish honesty about our family dynamics and our relationships to our very selves. Later in the play we hear Kevin call out, "We're the adults", pointing out that responsible actions need to be taken; thoughtful, selfless decisions need to be enacted. And this too is not easy. So I would add to the list of challenges Nick articulates, among parenting and being parented, being an Adult. And while we are at it let us also add Marriage, and the struggle of being authentic in one's life while compromising to live with another person.

We all have family stories with less than perfect moments. Though the characters in this play may be facing situations that are more extreme than many of us confront, I feel recognized in their struggles.

Yes they mess us up our mum and dad, and we mess up in return, but unlike the bleak ending of Larkin's poem ("Man hands on misery to man /It deepens like a coastal shelf/Get out as early as you can/ And don't have any kids yourself"), in *Oceanside* there is a whiff of the possibility of change and hope in the air.

It has been so satisfying to work with Nick and this terrific creative team to bring this story to full dimensional life for the first time, and it has served for me as reminder of what theatre can be. A mirror that shows us our best and worst selves, and however painful aspects of the vision might be, allows us to leave the theatre more aware of ourselves, and in small ways more prepared to meet the challenges ahead.

In the ten years I have had the privilege of directing at MRT with Charles Towers, I have seen plays that wrestle with these questions be at the center of the work this theatre produces. I am grateful to Charles for the myriad opportunities to work here with all of you, and hope you will feel as I do that *Oceanside* exemplifies not only what is so great about being at MRT, but what theatre in general can bring to our lives.

Melia Bensussen, Director - *Oceanside*

THE CAST OF OCEANSIDE



CAROLYN BAEUMLER (*Gwen*)

MRT: *The Exceptionals*. **OFF-BROADWAY:** *Square Peg Round Hole*, Tectonic; *Alice Grace Anon*, *The Germ Project*, *Milk*, *Creature*, New Georges; *Mourning Becomes Electra*, New Group; Originated roles of Marcie, Lili, and Nina Spicer in *The Beebo Brinker Chronicles*, Fourth Street, 37 Arts; *Trouble in Paradise*, Mae West in *SEX*, *Hourglass*; *Speak Truth to Power*, Culture Poject; Hedda in *Heddatron*,

Les Freres Courbusier; Originated the role of Lydia in *Big Love*, BAM; *A Streetcar Named Desire*, New York Theatre Workshop; Courtney Love in *Love in the Void*, *Self Defense*, *In Between*. **REGIONAL:** *The Veri**n Play*, ATL Humana; *The Turn of the Screw*, Irish Classical-Buffalo; *Rag & Bone*, *Big Love*, Long Wharf; *Member of the Wedding*, *All My Sons*, Westport Country Playhouse; *King Lear*, Playmakers; *Love Song of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, Cincinnati Playhouse; Marilyn Monroe in *Miss Golden Dreams*, ACT Seattle; *Big Love*, ATL, *Goodman*, Berkeley Rep; *A Clockwork Orange*, Steppenwolf. **FILM/TV:** *Law & Order: SVU*, *Blue Bloods*, *Lights Out* (FX), *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *CopDoc*, *Focus Group*, *Gypsy 83*, *Diminished Capacity*, upcoming film *LIV* by Catherine Eaton.



ALLYN BURROWS (*Kevin*) **MRT:**

Allyn is delighted to return to MRT. Previous productions include *The Seafarer*, *Pursuit of Happiness*, *The Homecoming*, *Moon for the Misbegotten*, and *As You Like It*. **OFF-BROADWAY:** *Bug*, *Killer Joe*, Louis Slotin Sonata, *Closetland*, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*. **REGIONAL:** Roles in *Henry VIII*, *Twelfth Night*, *Henry the Fourth Parts 1 and 2*, *Timon of Athens*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *King Lear*,

Measure for Measure, *Richard III*, and Artistic Director of Actors' Shakespeare Project; Roles in *King John*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Henry V*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Love's Labors Lost*, and artistic associate at Shakespeare & Company; *Breaking the Code*, Underground Theatre (IRNE award); *Shipwrecked*, Lyric Stage; *Five by Ten*, Speakeasy Stage (Norton award); Actors' Theatre of Louisville; The American Conservatory Theatre; Long Wharf Theatre; The Denver Center; The Walnut St. Theatre. **TELEVISION:** *Law and Order*, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*. **FILM:** *The Company Men*, *Julie & Julia*.

continued on the next page...



JOEY COLLINS (*Tommy*) **MRT:** *Beasley's Christmas Party* (IRNE Nomination), Jack Kerouac's *Beat Generation*. **BROADWAY:** *The Glass Menagerie* with Jessica Lange, *Rock n Roll*, *The Lonesome West*. **OFF-BROADWAY:** *Square Peg Round Hole*, Tectonic; *Dead End, 1599 Project*, Irondale; *Vieux Carré* directed by Austin Pendleton, Pearl Theatre; *Bug* by Tracy Letts; *Beasley's Christmas Party*, *Gross Indecency:*

The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde, *Apartment 3A*, *The Antigone Project*. **REGIONAL:** Mark St. Germain's *Scott & Hem in the Garden of Allah*, Neil LaBute's *In A Forest Dark and Deep*, and Evan M. Weiner's *Captors*, Contemporary American Theater Festival; *The Pillowman*, *A Steady Rain*, *The Shape of Things*, *Sideman*, Rep. Theatre of St. Louis; *The Night of the Iguana*, *The Caretaker*, Triad Stage; *Suddenly Last Summer*, Berkeley Rep.; *Kingdom of Earth*, Yale Rep.; *Custody of the Eyes*, Cleveland Playhouse; *The Glass Menagerie*, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, A.C.T. (San Francisco) **FILM:** *Dottie's Thanksgiving Pickle* with Olympia Dukakis; *Bittersweet*. **TELEVISION:** *Law and Order*, *Kidnapped*, *All My Children*, *Guiding Light*, *As the World Turns*. **EDUCATION:** MFA: Alabama Shakespeare Festival, University of Alabama; BA: University of North Carolina at Wilmington. **OTHER:** www.joeycollins.net, @MrJoeyCollins



CAROLINE LAWTON (*Erin*) **MRT:** Debut. **OFF-BROADWAY:** *Mr. Sensitivity*, NY International Fringe Festival. **REGIONAL:** *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*, *Underpants*, Lyric Stage Company; *Reconsidering Hanna(h)*, Boston Playwright's Theatre; *An American Daughter*, Speakeasy Stage Company; *The Comedy of Errors*, *Arcadia*, Publick Theatre; *Shear Madness*, Charles Playhouse; *The Taming of the Shrew*, Commonwealth Shakespeare.

INTERNATIONAL: UK - *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, Chipping Norton Theatre; *Veronika Decides to Die*, Theatre Collection; *Private Thoughts/Public Spaces*, CASA Festival; *A Woman of No Importance*, Artifice Theatre; Bulwer Project Workshop, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. **FILM:** *One Night Only*, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, *My Brother Jack*, *A Totally Minor Motion Picture*. **TV:** *Guiding Light*, *Brotherhood*. **EDUCATION:** MA in Classical Acting – Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (London); BA in Theatre Arts Penn State University.



ALLAN MAYO (*John*) **MRT:** Debut. **REGIONAL:** *Operation Epsilon*, Nora Theatre; *These Shining Lives*, *Strangers on a Train*; *It's a Wonderful Life*, Stoneham Theatre; *Legacy of Light*, *Arms and the Man*, Lyric Stage; *Reflections of a Rock Lobster*, *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, Boston Children's Theatre; *The Crucible* (tour), New Repertory Theatre; *Oleanna*, Contemporary Theatre of Boston; *Inherit the Wind*, *Hobson's Choice*, *The*

Winter's Tale, *Little Women*; Peterborough Players. **OTHER:** Allan is pleased to be making his debut with Merrimack Repertory Theatre!

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



NICK GANDIELLO (*Playwright*) Mr. Gandiello's plays include *Sunrise Highway* (Ojai Playwrights Conference), *Black Fly Spring* (Xavier University), *Swept* (Williamstown Theatre Festival), *At the Finish* (Smith and Kraus's The Best 10 Minute Plays of 2014), and *Teeming Shore* (The Best 10 Minute Plays of 2015). He holds an MFA from The New School for Drama, where his play *Off the Realness* received a workshop

production. He is an alum of the Ars Nova Play Group. Twice a Finalist for the Page 73 Playwriting Fellowship, he attended the company's Summer Residency at Yale and was a member of the 2014 I-73 Writers Group. He has attended residencies at The Blue Mountain Center and SPACE on Ryder Farm. For the screen, Nick developed and shot a television pilot, "Substance," with Ready Set Go Productions. As a teaching artist, he led the Naked Angels 3 Thursdays Summer Style. Nick is currently the Literary Manager of Young Playwrights Inc., for which he has led playwriting workshops in Virginia, Miami, and NYC. His deepest thanks to Mom, Chris, Sue, and Ken for their support; Kellie for her love; Alexis, Melia, and Charles for believing in this play; the cast for their work; and you for coming to see this.



Playwright Nick Gandiello. Photo by Danny Rothschild.

Q&A WITH PLAYWRIGHT NICK GANDIELLO

Nick Gandiello is a New York-based playwright, screenwriter, and teaching artist. He is a Long Island-native and a graduate of Ithaca College and the New School for Drama. (See his full bio on page 5).

How did you begin writing plays?

As far back as I can remember I've been writing somehow. When I was a kid I used to hand out original horror stories, chapter by chapter, on the playground—which I'm sure all the local parents appreciated. In high school, I got really obsessed with hip hop, so I was writing rap albums out of my basement.

And then a really great English teacher convinced me to audition for the school play, and I haven't stopped doing theatre since.

The most direct influence on my commitment to writing plays was a bad accident that happened in my family, really traumatic, my sophomore year of college. I just holed up in my dorm room, and a few months later there was a two-act play on my screen. My friends and I staged it in my hometown at the local library. A stranger came up to me after the play: she was crying, and she hugged me and she said "How did you know?" And I was like, "Oh! This is it forever. I'm writing plays."

What do you find rewarding about writing plays, specifically?

Playwriting, for me at least, is storytelling solely through human behavior. You're watching characters behave in the present moment. You're watching them make decisions in moments of turmoil, and that's all you've got. So in doing that, I think it's really fascinating to see a big, profound idea, or even an entire social context, only through the way that characters are living their lives. That's all you can see.

And then when you get the other artists involved—the collaborative part of playwriting—I could just sit and talk through things with the director forever. And I could watch actors live through the moments of a play forever. I could be in rehearsals seven days a week. It's really my favorite work environment.

Then when the audience comes in, responding to a piece of art in the present moment, they're affecting the art that you're watching, right there.

In *OCEANSIDE*, there's a blended family, where two people are coming to a new marriage with children from previous marriages. Does that pose challenges for them?

I think every family goes through the same existential problems: Can you truly know a loved one? How much change can a family endure before it isn't the same family anymore? Who's in the family, and who isn't? I think that happens in any family, blended or not.

What I'll say about the characters in this particular play, is that the ones who are exhibiting the most struggle are, I think, the ones who have the most trouble tethering an identity to this particular family situation. They're the ones who have to negotiate themselves the most in order to blend.

There's also a missing person investigation that figures prominently throughout the play. How does that impact the family?

I don't want to give too much away. But what I will say is that the more responsible a character feels for the disappearance, rationally or irrationally, the less they can see that anyone's missing.

And once the disappearance is unavoidable... the further away the missing person is, the closer they have to get to each other. And all at once, that stirs up hostility and suspicion, but also a lot of affection and tenderness.

Oceanside seems to dwell on the difference between what's on the surface, and what's hidden: You might think you know something about a person, even in your own family—but there's so much more there, that could even be very dark.

I'm preoccupied with notions of discovery and recognition. How much of yourself can you discover and recognize, and still get through your workday routine? How much of a loved one can you discover and recognize, without losing your grasp of them? And do you need to see all of a person to be able to love them?

That's definitely an engine in the play, because we can't and shouldn't show all of ourselves all of the time, and I think unfortunately, the dilemma of the play forces characters to expose things they've been trying to hide.

You grew up on Long Island. Do you see differences, or similarities, between the real-life Long Island that you experienced, and this theatrical Long Island of the play?

Certainly. One thing that is more evocative in the play than in real life is the geography. The play is called *Oceanside*, it's about being next to the ocean... I think the play has more of a poetic feel, than actually living on Long Island and driving around and getting to work. But in my memory, beaches were a prominent thing: they were this place of being with my family, moments of joy. And then the beaches turn into something else, from a factual, geographical kind of thing, into a more poetic aspect of the play.

There is also a class undercurrent in this play: Tommy and Gwen come from a different class than Kevin. Long Island is really porous that way: One of the poorest neighborhoods in the United States is in Nassau County, and also one of the richest neighborhoods. It's not that hard for people to physically travel from one to the other, they're right next to each other, connected by the same highways.

Did you have a favorite character to write?

I experienced them all differently. Ginnie and Gwen have my heart; I wrote this play because of those two characters.

In a devilish way, Tommy was the most fun to write. I've always described him as the life of the party who can really soon turn into the ruin of the party. He's someone you can go out and party with, but he's someone you'd be really scared to be alone in a room with. And underneath all that, he's this deeply affectionate man. So it was fun just to write that roller coaster of a person that he is.

What was it like workshopping and revising *OCEANSIDE* before it landed at MRT?

This is the first play that I wrote right out of grad school. I'd just gotten done at the New School for Drama, so it was really the first full-length play that I wrote entirely on my own.

At first it was this sprawling idea, with many scenes and many locations. I mean it was on the train platform, it was on the beach, it was in hotel rooms, there were many more characters in it. And then something just happened where the "known versus the unknown" became the thrust of the structure, and it became much more spare and much more simple.

Once I had that, the play came out relatively quickly, within a few months—but I'd been thinking about it for over a year.

I also had really great opportunities to just pace around the theatre at MRT with the script in my hand and just read it to myself.

You literally walked around the stage reading through the script to visualize it?

Not on stage, because I didn't want to disrupt the set of the play that was up. But I was pacing through the seats, and pacing down right in front of the stage, and looking up at the stage and imagining it and finding a lot more love, and a lot more humor and a lot more brightness in the play than I had when I set out. The rewrite process has been one of accepting that the drama of the play is not diluted by adding more lightness. There can be more lightness in this tragic situation, even if it doesn't remedy the tragedy.

What are you working on now? Is there anything you learned from doing *OCEANSIDE* that you will carry with you in the future?

Right now I'm working on a play called *The Wedge Horse*. A theatre company called Wide Eyed Productions did a staged reading of it last fall. It's a pretty explicitly political play, but I hope it's more of a philosophically political play, rather than just a current events play. It's about two siblings, Bobby and

Maddy, who have to decide if they want to give the memory of a loved one over to a mounting war effort.

In terms of what *Oceanside* taught me, I learned a lot about theatrical language. Specifically that language can be naturalistic and fragmented and elliptical, as well as theatrical at the same time.

Also, that a playwright's choice to withhold can be as powerful, if not more powerful, than to provide—whether it be information, or event—sometimes withholding can be even more engaging than just giving forth.

And again, that people can be in a very terrible situation, and also be lively and funny. Being in a dark situation doesn't necessarily make people 24/7 dark people.

THE ROAD TO MRT

It takes time—often years—for a new play to arrive at a professional stage like **Merrimack Repertory Theatre**. Here's where the road led *Oceanside's* playwright Nick Gandiello.



The New School University Center at 14th Street and Fifth Avenue, New York City.
Photo by MusikAnimal.

2011: The New School for Drama

Oceanside was the first play Nick wrote after finishing his Master's degree at the New School for Drama. Having met Nick while the young playwright was a student, Obie-winning Playwright Christopher Shinn said:

"...from the beginning he was writing with absolute authenticity about the places he grew up and the people he knew. His craft has developed over the years, but that deep sense of truth remains the same."



The Ars Nova Building, in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of Manhattan.
Photo by Jeffrey O. Gustafson.

2012-13: Ars Nova Play Group

A resident writers' group in New York City, the Ars Nova Play Group was the first place Nick heard *Oceanside* read out loud. Associate Artistic Director Emily Shooltz noted:

"Nick's writing stood out in an especially competitive application year for its sinewy language, sharp point of view and offbeat humor."



2012 & 2013: MCC Theatre & Page 73 Productions

Two successive roundtable readings let *Oceanside* come to life with professional actors, but still behind closed doors.



November 2013: Speranza Theatre Company

The New Jersey theatre company held another reading, where *Oceanside* got its first public audience.

February 2015: Merrimack Repertory Theatre

Nick's agent Alexis Williams brought the play to director Melia Bensussen, who brought it to MRT Artistic Director Charles Towers. Melia found that:

"Nick writes with a voice of experience and wisdom beyond his chronological age. He has captured in OCEANSIDE the tensions in growing up - and I do not mean growing up from childhood - but rather the challenges in being an adult and a parent... I am a big believer in art holding up the mirror to our natures, and I am thrilled to have discovered Nick's writing for he does this in a fresh, honest and intelligent way."

Robert Egan, at the Ojai Playwrights conference, said of Nick that he is:

"...one of the most exciting young voices in American Theatre today. He is tremendously skilled in his craft, but what sets him apart is his searing, compelling subject matter."

MRT now presents the fully-staged world premiere of *Oceanside*.



Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area. Barely a mile from the Atlantic Ocean, Oceanside's natural landscape is characterized by winding estuaries and tall marsh grass. Photo by Neil R.

A LOOK AT LONG ISLAND

Oceanside takes place on Long Island in the hamlet of Oceanside, New York. Take a look at the real-life location that inspired the play.



Long Island is the largest island in the contiguous United States, in both end-to-end distance and total land area. Photo courtesy of NASA

LONG ISLAND

Long Island is the largest island in the contiguous United States. With a land area of 1,401 square miles it stretches 118 miles into the Atlantic Ocean and is connected to the mainland by nine bridges and 13 tunnels.

Brooklyn and Queens, boroughs of New York City, are technically part of the island, though the name "Long Island" is typically used for the other two counties, Nassau and Suffolk. Altogether, the island holds nearly 40% of the New York State population.

Nassau and Suffolk serve largely as suburbs of New York City: about 20% of residents commute in by road or on the Long Island Railroad (LIRR), the busiest rail system in North America (and the oldest operating under the same name). Though the island is diverse economically and racially, it remains largely segregated by community. In Nassau County, affluent neighborhoods (such as Oceanside) are juxtaposed against poor ones just blocks away—a UCLA study branded the Island "one of the most segregated and fragmented suburban rings in the country."

Long Island is well-known for its fishing and duck farming industries (the island produces 2 million ducks every year), its vineyards, the New York Islanders NFL hockey team, an annual pizza festival and bake-off, and Firematic Racing, a series of firefighting competitions.



Oceanside Station on the Long Island Railroad, which connects Long Island to New York City. Photo by Jim Henderson.

OCEANSIDE, NY

Oceanside is a hamlet in the south part of the town of Hempstead, Nassau County. Hempstead is home to the NY Cosmos, an MLS professional soccer club, as well as Hofstra and Adelphi Universities.

About 13 miles from Brooklyn and 20 from Manhattan, and with the LIRR running through, it's an easy trip to and from New York City.

True to its name, Oceanside is a coastal community, situated on a bay of Long Island's south-facing shoreline.

Source: Wikipedia



Long Beach, not far from Oceanside, Long Island. Photo by Dr. Wendy Longo.



One in four adults living together in a relationship bring with them children from a prior relationship. Photo by Eric Ward; http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Family_Portrait.jpg

STEPFAMILIES IN AMERICA

The Darbys are the family of focus in *Oceanside*. With each spouse bringing children from a previous marriage, they are increasingly representative of a “typical” American family.

Every family is different. We all know the joys and challenges of taking life’s journey with those closest to us, but the specific nature of those joys and challenges are as different as the people who face them.

Stepfamilies (sometimes called “blended families”)—those in which at least one parent brings a child from a prior relationship into the new family—face those joys and challenges, as all families do. But growing awareness of stepfamilies in America has cast light on specific patterns in the challenges they tend to face.

PREVALENCE IN THE U.S.

- **One in four** adults living together in a relationship brings with them children from a prior relationship.
- **One in three** children will be part of a stepfamily by age 18.
- **One in two** people will be part of a stepfamily at some point in their lives.

THE FIVE MAJOR CHALLENGES OF STEPFAMILY ARCHITECTURE

In her book *Surviving and Thriving in Stepfamily Relationships*, renowned couples therapist and stepfamily scholar **Patricia L. Papernow** identifies five major challenges of stepfamily architecture:

1. Insider/Outsider positions are intense and stuck.

Parents and stepparents may find themselves on opposite sides of the family experience: one is seen as a favorite, while the other is seen as an outsider or intruder.

2. Children struggle with losses, loyalty binds, and too much change.

Some children will experience a “cascade of loss and change” with the formation of a new family structure. As Papernow says, “For children, the entry into a stepfamily brings a dramatic shift in tastes, idea about what’s funny, what’s a loud noise, and what’s OK to do with a wet towel.”

- Adolescents tend to have more difficulty than children under nine.
- Girls tend to have more difficulty than boys.
- Conflict within the family is a strong predictor of outcomes for the children.

3. Parenting tasks polarize the adults

In a newly formed stepfamily, stepparents trend toward becoming more authoritarian, while parents trend toward becoming more permissive.

4. Stepfamilies must create a new family culture while navigating a sea of differences.

It can be tough to create one new family culture out of two.

5. Ex-spouses are part of the family.

The most powerful predictor of a child’s wellbeing is not whether they live in a first-time family, a stepfamily, or a single-parent family; it is the *level of conflict* within that family.

Be it an ex-spouse (after a divorce) or a late spouse, that parent remains present in a child’s emotional life as they adjust to a new family reality. “For good or for ill,” says Papernow, “the pathways by which ex-spouses respond to each other become firmly entrenched.”

Source: Surviving and Thriving in Stepfamily Relationships, by Patricia L. Papernow

GLOSSARY

BODEGA: Usually Hispanic-owned convenience store or corner store. In Spanish, literally “grocery store.”

BQE: Interstate 278, or the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. It has been described as “the worst excuse for an interstate highway in the whole country” (Ty Rogers, Misc.transport.road).

CRAIGSLIST: Classified ad site started by Craig Newmark in 1996. Newmark launched the site as a way for community members to post local events, in response to feeling isolated as a newcomer to San Francisco.

DIFFUSE WHITE LIGHT: Light that is reflected at many angles, rather than in a single direction.

GREY GOOSE: High-end vodka produced north and east of Paris, France.

LINCOLN TUNNEL: 1.5-mile long tunnel connecting midtown Manhattan to Weehawken, New Jersey. It first opened in 1937.

MANGIA: In Italian, “eat.”

MECCA: City in western Saudi Arabia off the Red Sea coast. The birthplace of Muhammad, it is the site of the annual Muslim pilgrimage (the Hajj), during which time the city’s population of 2,000 more than triples.

PROPRIETOR: The owner of a business establishment.

SVA (SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS): Art school in Manhattan. Founded in 1947 as a school just for cartoonists and illustrators, it now offers programs across visual artistic disciplines.

THE VILLAGE: Greenwich Village, a neighborhood in Lower Manhattan. Long known as an artists’ neighborhood, it was also the East Coast birthplace of a number of countercultural movements.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Early in the play, Gwen suggests that Tommy is jealous of his own kid (Ginnie). Do you think she’s right?
2. At several points in the play, Tommy discusses or adjusts the lights on the porch. Why do you think he’s so interested in them?
3. Why is Erin so quiet? And what about her makes Gwen react the way she does?
4. How do you react to the painting of Ginnie we see on stage?
5. Late in the play, Kevin extends an offer to Tommy, to have him stay at a nearby hotel or use a local train pass to visit more often. Tommy has one idea of what Kevin’s motives are; what do you think?
6. Which characters do you think are the most – or least – in touch with the reality of the situation being dealt with?
7. Do you agree with the choice Kevin makes at the end of the play?