

A publication for our valued theatre patrons

Volume 4, No. 3



Homeland Drama

During World War II, while our men were off fighting, the women of America fought their own kind of battles. Like those of us today who currently have or have had our loved ones in harm's way, *The Cover of Life* tells the story of how 4 women, a mother and the three wives of her sons, try to deal with the absents of their men.

Theatre USA is proud to present to our audience this poignant, sometimes funny, sometimes sad play about the struggles so many of us are experiencing today with our loved ones so far away fighting for our country.

Directed by Jean Galloway, *The Cover of Life* will be performed February 17, 18, 19 and 21 at 7:30 pm and Sunday February 20 at 2:00 pm in the Laidlaw Performing Arts Center Theatre. You will not want to miss this exciting play and see how four women from rural Louisiana make the cover of LIFE.



R.T. Robinson The Cover of LIFE

In 1943, three brothers have gone off to war and their brides have moved in with their mother-in-law. Life magazine picks up the down-home story and sends a snappy New York writer on assignment. North meets South and career meets home in this deeply affecting story about the struggles of women to achieve a sense of self-worth.

The Cover of Life rings true to life for playwright Robinson and his hometown of Bastrop, Louisiana. In World War II, three Bastrop brothers, one of them the playwright's father, had their wives move in with their mother for the war's duration. LIFE Magazine did send a reporter to do a cover story on small town America coping with war. Fifty years later, Robinson honored his father and his town in his play. The play has bite, humor and heart with rich scenes for the three young brides, which goes to illustrate varying degrees of anger, frustration, harbored dreams and shattered illusions.

Set in rural Louisiana during World War II, Robinson's play follows the lives of six women thrown together by the war. Three young wives are living with their husbands' mother in her home, waiting for the men to return. The family's situation is chronicled in the local press by reporter Addie May and is picked up by Life magazine, whose reporter is struggling to compete for good assignments in a male-dominated world. She is frustrated at being made to cover yet another "women's story," but trudges out to give it her best shot.

She finds the three young wives, Tood, Sybil, and Weetsie, and their mother-in-law Ola surprisingly interesting. Romantic, yet smart and practical Tood, who is pregnant, dreams of escaping the small town when the war ends. Earthy, hedonistic Sybil longs for the sexual pleasures she enjoyed with her husband. Rigid, religious Weetsie is the only one who sees the hard reality of what her life will be when her womanizing husband returns.

Filled with charm and fun, *The Cover of Life* is a deeply affecting story about the struggle for self worth. "The kind of roles actresses dream of. Robinson's writing has a warm, rural flavor and [the] conflicts are laced with a poignant urgency." VARIETY. "Vivid." NEWARK STAR LEDGER. "Stirring and funny." TEANECK DAILY RECORD.

JULY 12, 1943

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CENTS

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$4.50

Artist Spotlight Lighting Designer Robert Wakeman

Robert E. Wakeman is a big fan of lighting. Our student Lighting Designer for *The Cover of Life* has been fascinated by anything electrical since he could walk. “I guess I’m an original. My favorite toys as a kid were D Cell batteries and the bulbs from flashlights. I was always hooking them up to see how they worked.” Rett (as he is known) was strongly influenced by his father. “My Dad is a skilled amateur general technician. When I was ten I helped him build the workshop we were going to use to work on our boat. One of the many things we did was wire the building. That was probably the first real electrical project I accomplished.”

A transfer student from Springhill, he has worn many hats since coming to South as a B.F.A. candidate with an emphasis in Theatre Design and Technology. “I’ve worked in the Scene Shop on just about every technical aspect you can think of. The very first thing I remember working on was the sound for *Waiting for Godot* two years ago. I’ve also worked building scenery on every show since I have been here. But my favorite thing is still Lighting.” When asked which he enjoys best, being a Designer or an Electrician, his answer is quick. “I like both equally. As a Theatre electrician at least most of the wiring is already done. It’s all about keeping the instruments working and making sure they are hung in the right place and focused correctly.” What about design? He grins sheepishly before answering. “My first design, a summer student production of *We Have Always Lived In The Castle*, was an absolute disaster. That was when I realized there was a lot more to design than just hanging up lights and plugging them in. I knew what I wanted it to look like, but I couldn’t quite get it there. Thanks to Mr. Miller, it became a workable design. Fortunately I’ve gotten better since then.”

A love of Theatre runs in his family. His Dad is also a singer and actor, as is his sister, a student at Birmingham Southern. His mom has also performed “more than a time or two.” This past Fall he finally took his turn in the spotlight in Theatre USA’s production of *The Illusion*. “It was a lot of fun. I learned a lot about how an actor finds his light. I could see what the gel colors did to the color of my costume and yeah, it was kinda hot some of the time.” He was much happier to step back into the role of Lighting Designer for The Performance Art Class Showcase at the end of the Semester. And to date that project he is most proud.

What’s next? “I’m heading for the Southeastern Theatre Conference in March to interview for a Professional Summer Internship. After that, I will finish my degree. I’m not sure what would be next. Work professionally. Maybe a cruise ship. Now, that would be cool!”

From the Director Jean Galloway

When I was given the script *The Cover of Life* to read, I was transported to my childhood and our family stories of the “war years.” There was no hesitation – this was a play I had to direct. My mother and her two sisters were young married women during WWII and had to move with their husbands to Mobile. They looked so much alike everyone thought they were triplets. While the men in the family were in the service, the “Greene triplets” were constantly together providing each other emotional support. One aunt would not drive but maintained a driver’s license to ensure her ration of gasoline for the others. My uncle served in the Pacific but was not allowed to divulge his specific location, so he would write in code and the “triplets” would get together to study a map of the Pacific Islands, decipher the code, and learn where he was stationed - and they were pretty darn good at it. Although my two aunts kept the home fires burning, my mother joined the work force and never looked back. Juggling marriage, children, and work seemed to suit her temperament. She loved the career that wartime had afforded her and continued to work far beyond retirement age.

So, while the Greene girls were very different from the Cliffert girls in the play, in a sense all of the women left behind during WWII shared a unique sisterhood. By directing *The Cover of Life* I am able to share vicariously in that fascinating period of our history.



MOTHER takes a big war contract!

Steps to success are found in *Mother* for women, always before... and here a line of service "jobs" beyond any set or normal frontier. Mother gladly accepts the working day to build for new ideas. But every mother has to a better job if she knows that woman who says "the family's future is guaranteed by adequate life insurance."

Underwriting wife and children against life, death and disability is "man" the father-in-law and his insurance. In the year 1942, Mutual Life representatives explain how it can, professional plan. When designed through a large amount of insurance insurance protection, and will have with the War Savings Bonds and Thrift.

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Rosie the Riveter

“Rosie the Riveter” is the image that resonates with us as Americans regarding the role that women played in the war effort in the 1940s. As the characters in *The Cover of Life* can attest, however, not every woman raced to the factory assembly line to replace the men who had been called up. Indeed, only a small percentage of women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four actually joined the manufacturing workforce. In 1942, the federal government issued a directive encouraging women who had children to take care of to remain in the home even if the home was divested of its primary breadwinner. Many women took this advice. In fact, their task, keeping the homefires burning, also known as continuing to run a household with a dearth of resources, was just as difficult.

In addition to the pressures of separation from their loved ones, wartime housewives faced a number of challenges that would be almost impossible for the modern day homemaker to grasp. In this era of microwaveable and frozen foods and huge megalomarts loaded with groceries in bulk, the idea that one would only be able to get small supplies of common household food stuffs like sugar, butter, and coffee is mind boggling. All of these items were rationed by the government as they were prioritized for the use of the Armed Forces. Homemakers were sometimes forced to drive to several different markets to find the supplies they needed, which was doubly problematic due to gas rationing.

Steel was also in short supply for civilians, who were only allotted fifteen percent of all American steel production. Again, in a time when rural areas like the one in *The Cover of Life*'s Louisiana town might not have real refrigeration, this steel shortage meant that canned and frozen fruits and vegetables were among the scarcities, as were juices and soups. City dwellers had it worse than their country counterparts, who at least could grow their own goods or raise their own animals. Thus came the creation of the “victory garden,” promoted by Washington, a small backyard plot where urban civilians could fill the gap between what they needed and what was available.

The greatest stress on the homefronters, however, is no different than that of their twenty-first century contemporaries. As the characters in Robinson's play make evident, the uncertainty of what will happen to their spouses, of not knowing what the fate of their loved ones and their lives together dominated the daily life of many of the women left behind. Whether they stayed at home or joined the workforce, just what the eventual end of the war would mean to them and their lives must have dominated the thoughts of these women. Women in the work force must necessarily have wondered about making the transition back to home life when the men returned. Homemakers had to wonder what condition, physical and mental, their family members would be in when they returned.

The story of Rosie the Riveter has been told many times, and the famous poster image of the kerchiefed character with her sleeves rolled up, ready to take on a “man’s job” is perhaps the single most memorable iconography of World War Two. Certainly that holds true with regard to the role of women in the war effort. Lesser known, but equally important, is how the lives of those women who stayed at home were affected by the United States’ involvement in World War Two. *The Cover of Life* sheds some light on these lives, and lets us learn a little bit about the trials and tribulations that homefronters had to face.



Cover of Life Cast

Tood Holly Ladnier
 Sybil Wendy Wynne
 Weetsie Crystal Williams
 Aunt Ola Cinda Freeman
 Kate Leah de Butts
 Addie Mae Lori Jean Chavers
 Tommy Jason Peregoy

TICKET & BOX OFFICE INFORMATION PHONE (251) 460-6306

Tickets for Theatre USA's Production of
The Cover of Life

General Admission	\$12.00
Faculty/ Staff	\$10.00
Students *	\$8.00

Tickets may be reserved and held at the box office using your Mastercard or Visa.

The Box Office will be open weekdays Monday, February 7 through February 21 from 2:00 pm till 5:00 pm and starting one hour before each performance.

The Box Office is located in the lobby of the Laidlaw Performing Arts Center on the main campus of The University of South Alabama. **All seats reserved. All sales final. No refund or exchange.**

*Students tickets available for all students with valid ID. One ticket per ID.



We'll walk barefooted in America if necessary
 TO SAVE RUBBER TO WIN THIS WAR



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The Cover of

February 17-19 & 21
@ 7:30 pm

February 20 @ 2:00 pm

Laidlaw Performing Arts Center

Ticket Information (251) 460-6306

