

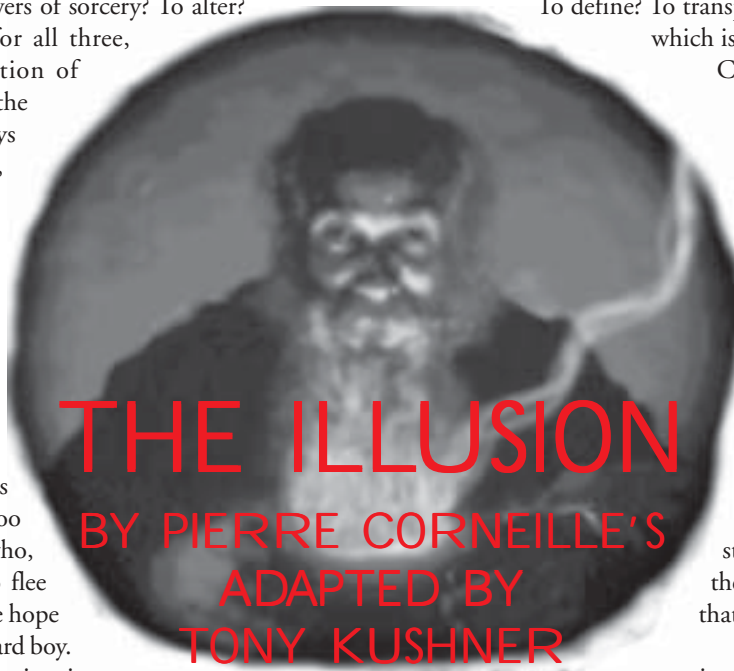
This much-produced adaptation by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Angels in America* blends magic and truth, obsession and caprice, and romance and murder into a persuasive argument for the power of theatrical imagination over reality.

“What are the real powers of sorcery? To alter? Corneille before him go for all three, Kushner’s fanciful adaptation of

Freely adapted it is, in the whose later, loftier verse plays of *Father of French Tragedy*, satirical precursor to all that was only 29. Yet even then, ponderous 17th-Century kept the word *comique* range. Kushner’s achieve- the circumlocution to sal- universal tale, stripping the tion and serving it up to us

There is some collo- rewritten language, but it is the joke, which never goes too a rigid father, Pridament, who, having provoked his son to flee the magician Alcandra in the hope what happened to the wayward boy.

Alcandra does, and the ironic false starts, passionate re-enactments, truth is revealed and Papa finds he doesn’t like it. The light-hearted ending is a cynical but honest lesson in selective affection”.
 Sylvie Drake, Los Angeles Times



To define? To transport? Tony Kushner and Pierre which is only part of the magic in Corneille’s *L’Ilsion Comique*.

best sense. For Corneille, earned him the stodgy title *The Illusion* was a mildly aglitch, written when he it was burdened by a neo-classical style that out of 20th-Century ment is digging under all vage an ageless and nugget of its ornamenta- lingly lucid and lean. quial indulgence in the mostly judicious. We’re in on far. Simply put, this the tale of stricken with remorse for the family home, searches out that he will help him find out

twist of the piece is that after several comic delusions and confusions, the

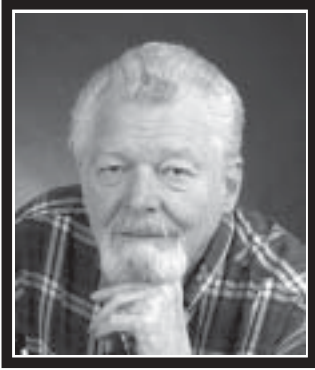
Notes From Director Ivan Davidson

Into the dark, mysterious cave of a sorceress enters a lonely, lost old man in search of some news of his long missing son. Thus begins *The Illusion*. A curious beginning for what is a rather fast paced, satiric comedy. Freely adapted from Pierre Corneille’s popular 17th century theatre piece, Tony Kushner’s version maintains the time period and the basic story line but adds characters, updates the language and adds wonderful, sometimes biting satire on the nature of love, both romantic and paternal.

The story is simple. An elderly father comes, somewhat reluctantly, to a sorceress well known for her ability to conjure images, illusions, if you will, of past events. The father wants to know what has become of his son in the fifteen years since he ran away. The father’s relationship with the son was “mixed” at best. “I loved him so much I wanted to strangle him.” The play is filled with just that kind of humorous twist of language. The sorceress proceeds to show the father three “illusions” of his son’s past, which variously amuse, startle, confuse and frighten the old man. The illusions abound with wonderful, rich language, twisting plots, exotic characters and intrigues within intrigues. There is the son, a romantic to the core who can never quite limit his love to just one object. “I love you. Allow me this betrayal.” There is the young heroine who is both the seductress and the seduced. “Since we last met you’ve become as irreplaceable as the blood in my veins, as the air I breathe...” And as the characters themselves say of the love situation, “There is always a rival. And a father who forbids love.” Add a saucy maid who adds to the complications and an aging, braggart warrior who claims, “It is natural to flee me; I am so great, at times I want to flee myself,” and the world of the sorceress’s illusions is complete. That world is

Continued on page 3

New Evening Curtian Time! Evening Performances will begin at 7:30 pm.



Artist Spotlight Director Ivan Davidson

Ivan Davidson will tell you he is a “deliberately trained Theatre generalist.” What does that mean? That means that during his career as a theatre professional and educator he has worked in and taught almost every aspect of theatre you can think of. But if you ask him what is his favorite thing to do in theatre, he will quickly tell you, “Directing! I’m an OK actor, but I quickly found I could get out of people what I couldn’t do myself. I really enjoy seeing people discover

what they can do. I’m a pusher. My casts tend to surprise themselves with what they accomplish.”

That love of directing has already translated itself to the cast of Theatre USA’s season opener, Tony Kushner’s adaptation of the Pierre Corneille play *The Illusion*.

Originally from Texas, Dr. Davidson’s B.A. degree in Theatre and Speech is from Hardin-Siddons University in Abilene, Texas. He followed that with an M.A. from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in Dramatic Theory from Iowa University. He has worked as an actor and director throughout the Midwest, specifically in Michigan and Ohio. He comes to Theatre U.S.A. after a 35-year career at Knox College where he recently retired as a full Professor and the Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance. At the 2004 graduation ceremony he was presented the Caterpillar Faculty Achievement Award where he was described as “. . . the quintessential liberal arts theatre professor.” While he enjoys all theatre, he most enjoys “. . . contemporary serious Realism, whatever that is. The plays of Albee, O’Neill is a true favorite, also Miller. I like opera, some musicals. I would do Sondheim in a heartbeat.” What does he like best about *The Illusion*? “The language. Kushner’s play on words is great fun to work with.”

He also brings a little bit of international flavor with him. He taught master classes in acting at the Nikolaiev School of Acting in St. Petersburg, Russia and at the Moscow Art Theatre School of Theatre Arts, where he also presented a series of lectures. He directed P. W. Turner’s *Christ in the Concrete City*, with the Hampstead Players in London, England. To show his diversity his resume also includes designing costumes and make-up for three productions at The American School in London.

So how did he end up in Mobile, AL? Would you believe the Internet? “I have Arthritis and the Midwest winters are not so good for that. I wanted to be south, near the water. So I went on-line and when I came to Mobile, I found two universities and a college all with theatre programs, four community theatres, the symphony, the opera and the ballet. All things that interest me. So I took a sabbatical last fall, found a place to rent and came to visit. I decided this was it. I came back and bought a house.” The only problem he has encountered so far is the distance from his other favorite things, his grandsons, Casey Patrick, age 4, and Sean Edmund, age 2. That being said, he smiles and goes back to business, a discussion of *The Illusion* and how rehearsal is going and a question about rehearsal props and rehearsal skirts.

Background to the Play:

In 1637, Corneille stunned the French theatre with his first masterpiece: *Le Cid* (1637), based on the life of an 11th century Spanish hero. *Le Cid* opened at the Hôtel de Bourgogne and became the smash hit of that season. “Beautiful as *Le Cid*” became a proverbial expression--the equivalent of today’s saying, “better than *Cats*.” In our play that succeeded *Le Cid*, written for the 1635/1636 season, it has been suggested that *The Illusion* may have been drawn from the famous Platonic dialogue which is translated, below: “Allegory of the Cave” From *The Republic* By Plato, circa 360 b.c., Translated by Benjamin Jowett

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall?

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave? To them the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

That is certain.”

To but complete this picture, or to rather to bring the play to its present form, we need only point out that Tony Kushner says that his friend and colleague Brian Kulick brought the Corneille play to his attention and asked him to adapt it from the translated source which had not garnered much attention since the celebrated Louis Jouvet production of 1937. *The Illusion* has proved to be a fine example of Kushner’s skilled crafting of language and imagination. Jeremy Gerard of the *Daily Variety* declares “*The Illusion*” is exactly the kind of reinvention that keeps classic theatre alive.”

All the fun, however, is in getting there. *THE ILLUSION* takes us into territory on which theater thrives: fantasy, witchcraft, transcended place and time....” Sylvie Drake, Los Angeles Times

About Playwright Tony Kushner

Playwright Tony Kushner, best known for his Pulitzer and Tony Award-winning epic *Angels In America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, is the translator and adapter of our first offering here at Theatre USA this year: Pierre Corneille's *The Illusion*. Kushner, whose other works include, *A Bright Room Called Day*, *Slavs!* and the recent musical *Caroline, or Change*, may be the perfect person to rework and convert to English this drama about the creative imagination by one of the great French Classicists. Kushner's work has always been earmarked by a quality of "magical realism," a richly textured mixture of the real and the otherworldly, the seemingly impossible. Indeed, he has been quoted as saying "I love stage illusions." Corneille's piece, then, which is at least very much about the blurred line between reality and illusion, would seem the ideal material for Kushner.

Born in Manhattan in 1956 but raised as a Southerner in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Kushner burst on to the American theater scene with *Angels*, a seven-hour, two-part monster of a show, in the early 1990s. The show won two Antoinette Perry (Tony) Awards,

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Sylvie Drake, Los Angeles Times

Broadway's highest honor, as well as two Outer Critic's Circle Drama Desk awards and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. *Angels*, which followed several different storylines and used both fictional and "real" characters (such as closeted homosexual and former J. Edgar Hoover lawyer Roy Cohn) established Kushner as an important and innovative new voice in the American theater not only because of its scope, but because of its constant mixture of the upliftingly fantastic and the painfully real.

The Illusion is not the only work that the learned Kushner, who did his postgraduate work at NYU, has adapted to the English speaking stage. He has also translated Brecht's *The Good Person of Setzuan* and S. Ansky's *The Dybbuk*. Certainly, *Setzuan's* themes of morality, of how to live as a good person in a basically bad world, of how social mores act upon our behavior and upon our spiritual lives, would lend themselves easily to Kushner's interpretive hand. As well, Ansky's folk tale of a lover turned demon, with all its

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

Tickets for Theatre USA's Production of *The Illusion*
General Admission \$12.00
Faculty/Staff/Seniors \$10.00
Students * \$8.00

The Box Office will open Monday Sept. 20 and remain open Weekdays 10:00 am to 5:00 pm through Monday Oct. 4 and 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. Tickets are sold on a first come first served basis. All seats reserved. All sales final. No refund or exchange.

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



COSTUME DESIGNER REBECCA BRITTON, (LEFT) & DIRECTOR IVAN DAVIDSON (RIGHT) OVERSEES LORI CHAVERS (BACK) AS SHE ADJUSTS JOY WARD'S (CENTER) COSTUME.

themes of the supernatural acting upon the natural, is equally in the wheelhouse of the fantastical Kushner.

Kushner's plays have been performed in over thirty countries. He has been awarded a variety of Playwriting and Directing grants and fellowships, including one from the National Endowment for the Arts, and currently serves as adjunct faculty in NYU's Dramatic Writing program.

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amusing, surprising, sometimes slightly disturbing. The course of true love ne'er did run smooth.

The two worlds, that of the illusions and that of the father and the sorceress, are lush in their language, rich in their battles of wit, insightful in their interrelationships, and complete with a surprise ending that may leave you to decide for yourself just what it all means. All of this takes place in a wonderful and geometrically elaborate set that keeps the eye constantly moving as the rapid comings and goings unfold, and the worlds are brought to life by vividly colorful and rich costumes of the period.

The Illusion is a charmingly unique play, unique in plot, unique in language, unique in characters. Please come join us for our "illusion" of *The Illusion*.

A Limited number of Season Membership
are still Available, Get yours today!

The Cast for *The Illusion*

Zebulon Brown Calisto/Clindor/Theogenes
Nichole Drew Melibea/Isabelle/Hippolyta
Margarette Joyner Alcandree
Jason Peregoy Pleribo/Adraste/Prince Florilame
Robert Wakeman Pridamant
Michael Waldron Matamore
Joy Ward Elicia/Lyse/Clarina
Robert Wells Amenuensis/Geronte



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September 30 -
October 1, 2 & 4 @ 7:30 pm

October 3 @ 2:00 pm

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Performing Arts Center

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