

A publication for our valued theatre patrons

Volume 5, No. 2

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg

Bri and Sheila used to be a perfectly content little English couple... that is, until their daughter Josephine was born, essentially brain-dead and frequently suffering from seizures. Ten years later, when the play begins, it soon becomes clear that the strain of having to take care of a completely helpless, horrendously crippled child has taken its toll on both Mum and Dad. Sheila constantly holds out for the hope that little Joe (dubbed "Joe Egg" by her parents) will someday be healed, but the hope is little more than a band-aid over her growing nervous breakdown. Bri, on the other hand, has given up hope long before, and instead uses sarcastic jokes and play scenes to manage the pain, but he too soon realizes that he cannot keep the facade up forever. And with the arrival of a pair of Sheila's friends, as well as Bri's interfering mother, the play veers toward its tragic, inevitable ending, showing the destructive power of self delusion and the possible limits of maternal affection during a crisis. Frequently braving the fourth wall by having the actors address the audience, *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* is regarded as one of the finest British comedies of the last century, and is still one of the most bittersweetly poignant and biting comedic pieces of the modern theatre.

COSTUME RENDERINGS BY LORI CHAVERS



PAM, FREDDIE & JOSEPHINE

Playwright Peter Nichols

Born 31 July 1927, Nichols is a British writer of stage plays, film and television.

Born in Bristol, England, he was educated at Bristol Grammar School, and then joined the RAF for three years, going on to study acting at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. He began to write television plays, but wrote *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* as his first stage play because he thought it would be unacceptable for television.

Nichols' plays are hard to categorize. He is quoted as saying 'Do any damn thing you have to do to keep the heart and soul alive'.

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg is a one-set drama in Music Hall style. *The National Health* is a fantasy farce, also interrupted by Vaudeville. *Privates On Parade* is a musical comedy. *Poppy* takes the form of a Christmas Pantomime.

Despite the comic style, Nichols' plays deal with the most serious of themes. In *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* the burden of raising a hopelessly handicapped child shatters a couple's marriage. The patients of *The National Health* suffer and die, as do the singing soldiers of *Privates On Parade*. In *Poppy* Dick Whittington's sister becomes a drug addict. *Passion Play* focusses on adultery and betrayal.

Joe Egg is based on Nichols' own experiences of raising a handicapped child. *The National Health* draws on a hospital stay of his own, and *Privates* draws on his own military experiences.

His plays include

- * *So Long Life*
- * *Born in the Garden*
- * *A Piece of My Mind*
- * *Privates on Parade* (1977)
- * *The Freeway*
- * *The Hooded Terror*
- * *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* (1967)
- * *The National Health* (1969)
- * *Forget-Me-Not-Lane* (1971)
- * *Nicholodeon*
- * *Blue Murder*
- * *Poppy* (1982)
- * *Harding's Luck*
- * *Chez Nous* (1974)
- * *Passion Play* (1981)

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg won two Tony Awards. Best Revival 1985 & Stockard Channing -Best Actress.

**Artist
Spotlight
Costume
Designer
Lori Chavers**

The Costume Designer for *Joe Egg* is Graduating Senior Lori Chavers from Talladega, AL. She started her College career as a Fashion Merchandising Major at Jacksonville State University. Then there came the move to USA. "I wanted to move further away from home and do something different. There wasn't a Fashion Merchandising major here so I looked for something else. I always wanted to try acting. So I went for it." Then she took her first costume class and found her niche. "I have always been interested in what people wore. And in Theatre Costume Design and Technology I get to recreate it."

She's worked in the costume shop for the past two years. During that time she's built lots of costumes for such shows as *Big River*, *The Illusion*, *Cover of Life*, and *Raisin in the Sun*. But ask her what her favorites are and it brings a quick response. "I liked the Tweedledee and Tweedledum costumes from *Alice In Wonderland*. They are high on the list. But I really liked the Dr. Pinch costume from *Comedy of Errors*. I loved the fabric, the Asian look with the brocade. Yeah that was it."

Now she's taking a stab at designing. Being the one making all the choices. Is it challenging? "Challenging? Well I'm struggling a little bit with painting my renderings but seeing everything come together from our talks in production meetings is worth it. That really keeps me going. It's cool seeing how all the choices are truly based on the script. I love the fabric and the shopping. The challenge is finding the right fabric for the right dress, the right 1960's man's suit without having to make it, the right period shoes that will actually fit and that the actors can walk in, Oh and then there's staying on budget. And making sure the stitchers have what they need in order to do their job and being there when they need me to answer questions. Actually I think I'm getting more tired as we talk." She laughs. "But I love working in the Costume Shop and I'm really going to miss it when I graduate this December."

Lori has a very busy life balancing not only designing *Joe Egg*, but a normal routine of a home with husband Shane, an outside job at the newly reopened Original Oyster House, an assistantship in the Costume Shop and a full class load for which she maintains a 3.5 G.P.A. In recognition of her success in balancing all of that she received the department's Gerrell's Jackson Award for an Outstanding Student this last Spring.

What's next for this bubbly blonde. "I just want to work. Maybe as somebody's personal dresser like Denise Graves who I was personal dresser for when she did the Benefit for Mobile Opera last year. I thought about moving to Atlanta. There's a lot going on in theatre there. Or maybe L.A. And I'm also looking into Graduate schools. I kind of like both Costume Design and Costume Technology, so I want to explore the worlds of both. I like the creating part but I like to make the choices too. I like putting the fabrics together and getting the final look. Or maybe I can...." There's no telling where we'll see her next but whatever it is we have no doubt she'll succeed.

COSTUME RENDERINGS BY LORI CHAVERS



BRI, SHEILA & GRACE



**The Cast for
Joe Egg**

- Bri Zebulon Brown
- Sheila Holly Ladnier
- Freddie... Patrick McNereny
- Pam Camille Perillo
- Grace Joy Ward
- Josephine..... Kristi Firmin

**Special After
Show Talks**

Dr. Catherine O'Keefe, of U.S.A.'s Health and Leisure Studies Department along with other community educators and counselors who work in hospice care and the end of life arena will facilitate community conversations following several of the evening performances. Though the play is funny in an almost necessary way, the serious issues of life and death are very much a part of the evening.

Notes From the Director

There's a time-tested oft-repeated pun about approaching *Hamlet* which suggests that, "first you've got to be willing to break some eggs if you're going to make an omlette (Hamlet)" It can be similarly said that "you can't be afraid of the yokes (jokes), if you're going to serve up a *Joe Egg*." When approaching this play the obvious factor to consider is that the play's title comes from the British colloquial expression, "don't just sit there like Joe Egg." We'd probably say, "like a bump on a log (or pickle)." The saying implies a conundrum for the play's title character, because she has no recourse to sitting at home in this manner. She has a damaged cerebral cortex, and is multiplegic as well as epileptic. Such a child is an enormous burden for her parents. In fact to care for her at home, seems to create the "sitting at home like Joe Egg" condition for both of them. Where else could they be? What else could they be doing? How else can they survive, but by finding humor in their plight? In a very clear attempt to make their lives not descend into despair, the couple create imaginary responses, and funny reactions to their lot in life. Jokes about Joe serve to ward off heading down towards total depression.

One way to approach this play is to consider that in spite of its conception and initial production falling as early as 1967 the play has all of the contemporary relevance of the Terry Shialvo case. It is concerned with the issue of one person's "right to life." Joe's life is entirely dependent upon her parents, and their lives are both in turn inextricably connected to hers. How are such lives measured? How do they become capable of being sustained? Thus the play affords us the opportunity to view realistic characters caught in the vortex of one of the important ethical debates of our time. This debate transcends time. It is a privilege to be able to investigate the issues that are brought to mind.

The element which pushed *Joe Egg* as well as other Peter Nichols plays such as *The National Health* and *Forget-me-not Lane* into prominence or theatrical significance, and which has them commonly mentioned as being among the best of modern British dramas is their sheer theatricality. Nichols allows his characters to break through the imaginary distance of audience members by addressing his audience direct. The characters explain themselves, justify their actions, and compete for our approval. As they do this, the theatrical technique serves to involve the audience in the character's lives. This open, direct, courageous theatricality serves to characterize much of Nichols' work and measures some of its greatness in the tradition of Shakespeare's famous soliloquies. We watch their lives, and then they come right out to talk to us about themselves. Leon J. Van Dyke

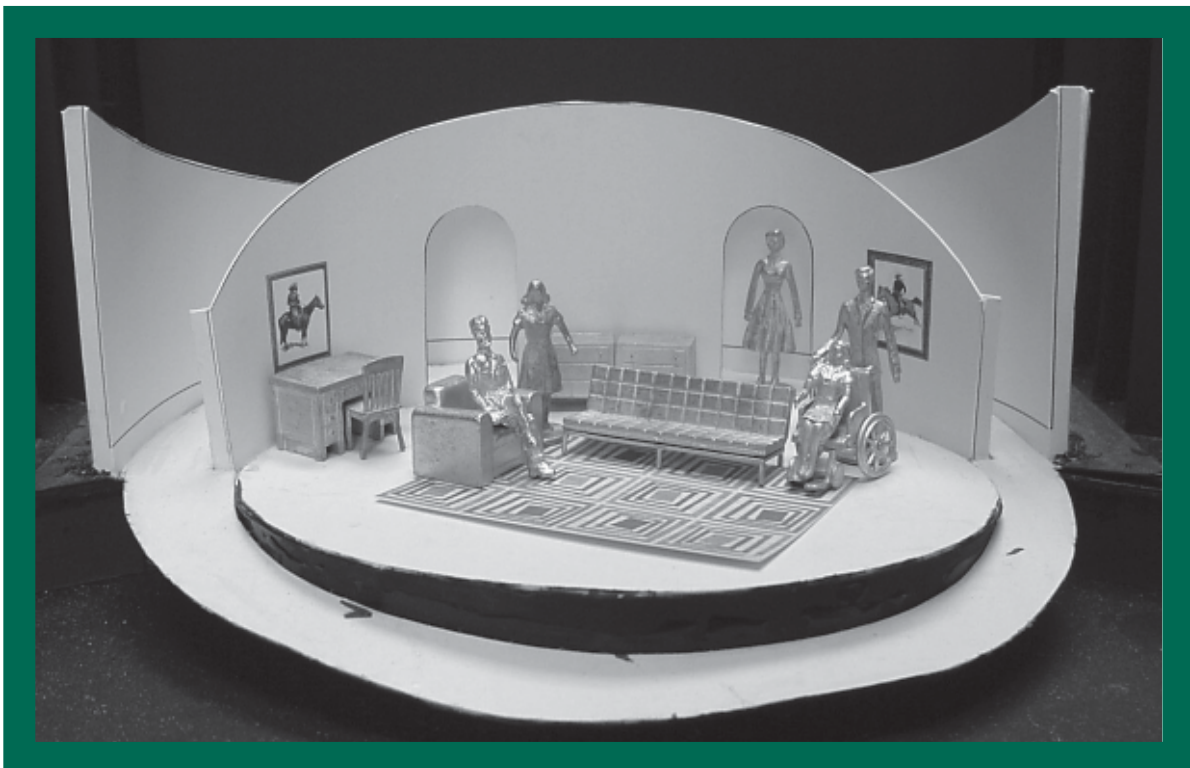
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Tickets for Theatre USA's Production of (show Title)
General Admission \$12.00 Faculty/ Staff \$10.00
Students * \$8.00

The Box Office will be open Monday Nov. 21 - 23 & 28 - Dec. 10 from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm & 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 first come first served. All seats reserved. All sales final. No refund or exchange.

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



MODEL OF THE SET DESIGN BY LYLE B. MILLER



The Department of Dramatic Arts
University of South Alabama
PAC 1052
309 North University Blvd.,
Mobile, Alabama 36688-0002

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December 2, 3, & 8, 9, 10
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December 4
at 2:00 pm

THEATRE USA
Presents

A Day in
the Death of
Joe Egg
By Peter Nichols