

Oldcastle Theatre Company

Theatre Guide for *THIRD*
by Wendy Wasserstein
October 2 – October 11

Judge or Prejudge

One of the goals of education is to learn to judge things on their merits. Prejudging, on the other hand, is making decisions based on little or no knowledge. In its extreme form, prejudgment becomes prejudice where ideas and actions are based on stereotypes, clichés or ignorance.

In *THIRD*, Laurie, the protagonist, is well educated. A product of elite schools, she is a literature teacher at a small, elite college in New England. She worked hard to achieve her position. The academic world, until recently, was inhospitable to strong, independent women like Laurie. She has taken outspoken feminist positions on the material that she teaches as she seeks to rectify the errors of a past that discriminated against women.

Laurie consider herself an educated, non-judgmental person who espouses liberal positions. She is sensitive to the needs of racial, gender, and ethnic minorities as well as to the long ignored needs of women. She also opposes the actions of President George W. Bush as he leads the nation into a war she thinks is unnecessary.

Achieving what she has achieved has been difficult and it has taken

its toll. Her liberal open-mindedness is tested when she encounters a person who appears to embody values she considers illiberal – reactionary. Has her struggle to achieve what she has achieved made her once liberal positions so rigid that she is prejudging?

This is a question for all of us. How truly open are we to ideas that do not fit our preconceptions? Like Laurie, we lead complex lives and as we work to sustain them, do we diminish our openness?

The Playwright



Wendy Wasserstein

After F.Scott Fitzgerald left Princeton, he wrote stories and novels that chronicled and helped define the Jazz Age. Similarly, while Wendy

Wasserstein was at college and after she left, she wrote plays that chronicled and helped define the generation of women who came to maturity in a world that had been changed by the feminist revolution. Women's history was being freshly examined and women's roles in the professional and the private world were being redefined. For the participants it has been an exciting, sometimes frightening journey into the unknown. Ms. Wasserstein's plays focus on liberated women who seek to balance new opportunities for professional success with the traditional desire for love and family.

Wendy Wasserstein was born in Brooklyn in 1950 and grew up in comfortable circumstances. Her father was a successful textile executive, her maternal grandfather a well known Polish Jewish playwright. She received a B.A. from Mount Holyoke College and her first successful play, *UNCOMMON WOMEN AND OTHERS* which was written as her M.A. Thesis at Yale, was set in Mount Holyoke. Before attending Yale, Wasserstein earned an MA in Creative Writing from the City College of New York. Ms. Wasserstein never married and at age 48 became a single mother.

During her almost forty year career, she wrote eleven plays and won a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony award for *THE HEIDI CHRONICLES*. Her other plays include *THE SISTERS ROSENZWEIG*, *ISN'T IT ROMANTIC?* and *AN AMERICAN DAUGHTER* which was produced by Oldcastle in 1998.

Ms. Wasserstein was ill and in a wheelchair during rehearsals for the original production of *THIRD* at New York's Lincoln Center, but she continued working on the script through previews. In December 2005, she was hospitalized with lymphoma and died January 30, 2006 at the age of 55. She was a frequent visitor to this area as her sister, Georgette Wasserstein Levis, operates the Wilburton Inn in Manchester, Vermont.

Director's Note



Eric Peterson

The relationship between teacher and student is one of the most important in society. The very future of civilization, after all, depends upon good teachers and eager students. In her final play, Wendy Wasserstein writes compellingly about a dedicated teacher and a bright student who unfortunately mirror the polarized political positions that are a nightly feature of cable TV slugfests. The body politic is bruised and battered because the right doesn't trust the left and blue states can't abide red states.

Ms. Wasserstein, with her patented humanity and humor, places these political opposites in a classroom in a small New England college. Laurie, the professor, is as smart as a whip, dedicated teacher. Woodson Bull III (Called "Third" by his friends) is a conservative, student-wrestler who is thoughtful and engaging. They clash.

Neither is perfect. Neither is right all the time. Both are misunderstood at times. Ms. Wasserstein, a Manhattan liberal, doesn't stack the deck in favor of Laurie. In fact, most sympathies will lie with Third. He is a victim of stereotyping. She makes false assumptions based on her own bias. Liberals may well feel more uncomfortable during the play than conservatives, but both, independents too, will be given a great deal to contemplate. Wendy Wasserstein was an immensely gifted writer. Her death deprived us of one of the finest American playwrights of the last several decades. But her work lives on. This is a play that every teacher and every student and everyone who has ever had a teacher or been a student should see and think about and talk about and think about some more.

The Cast



Christine Decker

Christine Decker (Laurie Jameson) joined Oldcastle in 1973. Most recently she was Martha in WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF? and has the distinction of having played both Laura and Amanda in Oldcastle productions of THE GLASS MENAGERIE. Other appearances here include DANCING AT LUGHNASA, LATER LIFE, LEND ME A TENOR and WONDERFUL TENNESSEE. A native of Cambridge, NY, Christine now lives in Florida where she is a member of the Orlando Theatre Project and appeared with it in BODY OF WATER, COYOTE ON A FENCE, SHIRLEY VALENTINE and played Sister Aloysius Beauvier in DOUBT and reprised the role at American Stage in St. Petersburg.



Loren Dunn

Loren Dunn (Woodson Bull III "Third") makes his first appearance with Oldcastle in THIRD although he has been seen in the area at the Dorset Theatre Festival five times. His roles there included Timmy in THE SUBJECT WAS ROSES and Jack in THE IMPORTANT OF BEING EARNEST. He recently appeared at the Arkansas Repertory Theatre in THE FOREIGNER. Before he knew anything about THIRD, Loren did wrestle.



Carleton Carpenter

Carleton Carpenter (Jack Jameson) This year Carleton celebrated the 65th anniversary of his Broadway debut. He has appeared in scores of New York plays and musicals including DYLAN, 3 TO GET READY, HOTEL PARADISO, HELLO DOLLY, ALMANAC, 70 GIRLS 70, and CRAZY FOR YOU. He has been seen in many films, mostly MGM. During his fifteen years with Oldcastle, he has played in SPINNING INTO BUTTER, MORNINGS AT SEVEN, ON GOLDEN POND and LOVE LETTERS opposite Betsy Palmer.



Jenny Strassberg

Jenny Strassberg (Emily Imbrie) made her Oldcastle debut earlier this

season in ONE, TWO, THREE. She appeared at the Dorset Theatre Festival with Loren Dunn in THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST - she was Gwendolyn. They are now married. She also played in Dorset's TOM JONES. She was in PRIDE AND PREJUDICE at the Pioneer Theatre and in HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY at the Depot Theatre. She has been on ALL MY CHILDREN and GUIDING LIGHT on TV where she has also appeared in commercials.



Paula Mann

Paula Mann (Nancy Gordon) Paula joined Oldcastle in 2007 for A BODY OF WATER. Last season she appeared in, and co-produced, OUR TOWN, Oldcastle's joint production with Green Mountain College where Paula teaches theatre. She was co-Artistic Director of the Dorset Theatre Festival, and acted in more than 20 productions and earned four Best Actress Awards there. She has acted with Playwrights Horizons in New York, the Barter Theatre, the Delaware Theatre and in films including AN UNMARRIED WOMAN and LIVE FREE OR DIE.