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A Conversation from the Kitchen with Artistic Director Rachel Lampert

We are all excited to be re-visiting Adam Bock's quirky comedy *Swimming in the Shallows*. It remains a delightfully frothy examination of relationships with surprising insights bubbling up all the time. The worlds of the three couples in the play are shifting, and everyone is looking for steady ground. Change is rarely as easy and rarely as hilarious as it is in *Swimming in the Shallows*. There are so many aspects of the play that I love. The dialogue is snappy and efficient; there is not one extra word. The scenes flow seamlessly from one to another with the characters dancing around the issues of their lives. There's fantasy, movement, and a thoughtful—I might go so far as to say a happy—ending.

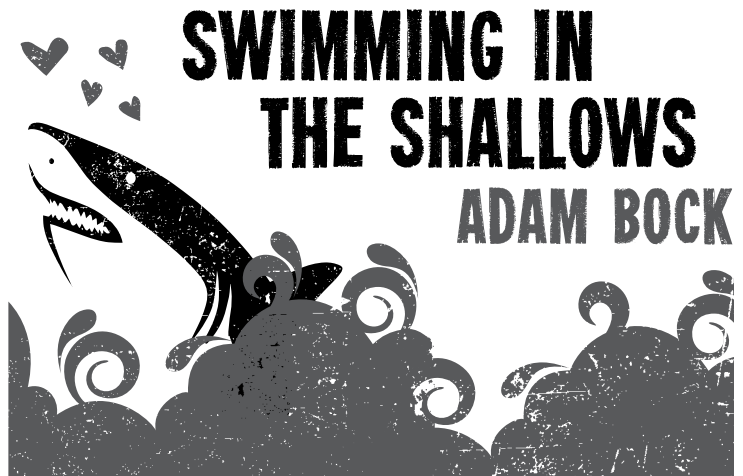
We are having a blast working together! By Kitchen Theatre Company standards, it's a large-cast event. **Karl Gregory** returns to play Nick, a man who changes boyfriends as often as he does his shirt but longs to find “Mr. Right.” **Dean Robinson** is re-creating the hapless Bob, desperate to deal with his wife's mid-life crisis that starts with extreme downsizing and moves towards enlightenment. Playing Barb is **Karina Arroyave** who last appeared at KTC in *The Motherf**ker with the Hat*. **Lesley Gurule**, whose recently played Wren, the daughter (or was she?) in *A Body of Water*, plays Carla Carla, who is almost... maybe... possibly ready to marry her girlfriend Donna—if only Donna can make one change. **Lena Kaminsky** makes her KTC debut as Donna, who wants to get married but is struggling to make that one change. The final character in the play is a shark played by KTC newcomer **Peterson Townsend**. You'll just have to see the play to find out how a menace of the sea fits into this mix of contemporary coupling.



Clockwise from top left: Karina Arroyave*, Karl Gregory*, Lesley Gurule*, Peterson Townsend*, Dean Robinson*, Lena Kaminsky*

(*AEA Member)

One interesting discovery we made is that *Swimming in the Shallows* is a period piece. We did the play in our 2002-03 season, and a lot has changed in twelve years. These hip young people were not glued to their cell phones or driven by social media. Of course cell phones were around, but they weren't the smart electronics we have today that addict us to a constant compulsion to connect. And most stunning and wonderful is the change in marriage equality since 2003; Donna and Carla Carla are having a commitment ceremony. I will resist voicing any opinion on whether the omnipresent cell phone is an improvement to our lives, but how wonderful it is that gay and lesbian folks can now marry in many states!



SWIMMING IN THE SHALLOWS runs April 29 - May 17.

This production will certainly be different from the last. A new design team includes the amazingly imaginative **David L. Arsenault** as the scenic and lighting designer, **Lisa Boquist** as the costume designer, and **Scott O'Brien** as the composer and sound designer. I had a quick conversation with **Karl Gregory** (Nick) and **Lesley Gurule** (Carla Carla) about the show.

RACHEL: So, Karl, I know how happy I am to be doing *Swimming in the Shallows* with you again—what's your take on it?

KARL: I hate it! (*pause for comic effect*) Actually, I love this show! It's fun to come back to it with different people with different takes on the characters.

RACHEL: What are the challenges and fun parts of working on a comedy?

KARL: The ability to try whatever comes into your head is really fun in comedy. Who knows if it will work? Let me try this. Ok, that was funny. What else can we come up with?

RACHEL: What have you been up to since you were here for *Lonely Planet* in the fall?

KARL: I've been doing some more TV work, and hopefully that will lead to other projects in the field. But it's always good to be back in Ithaca!

RACHEL: Thanks, Karl. I know there are all sorts of folks happy to have you back! Lesley, you are also back! Karl has played so many different roles here, and I think people are going to see another side of you in this play. Are there any similarities between Wren and Carla Carla?

LESLEY: Yes! I hope that doesn't freak anyone out. I know Wren has something of a reputation. But both characters are assertive, smart women who are trying to figure out how to cope with a situation they didn't ask to be in. Both characters have kind of a wry sense of humor, which can rub people the wrong way, but they are trying their best to operate out of love.

RACHEL: How did the Rochester run go?

LESLEY: The Rochester run was fantastic. Re-staging the show for a proscenium configuration was surprisingly easy. In having more time with the show, we learned a lot more about the characters and the world of the play. There ended up being a lot of small differences between the two productions. It would have been interesting to bring the show back to the Kitchen to show the Kitchen audience.

RACHEL: Steve and I got to see the show at Geva and it had grown and changed. Wonderful work by all! I think between the two plays you are doing for us, you will have been in this neck of the woods for practically three months. Is that a long time for you? Not everyone knows the life of an actor is as much of a vagabond existence. Can you talk about that?

LESLEY: I've done time like this before, but I've never done two shows back to back like this. I closed *A Body of Water* at Geva on Easter Sunday and was on a bus back to Ithaca the next day to start *Swimming in the Shallows*. That's a best-case scenario for me, because saying goodbye to a show is always hard, especially when it's one that you've worked on for so long. This time I had something to work on right away, for which I feel extremely grateful. I think what's funny about working away from home for this long is that you start to miss all the things you do to create a full life when you're *not* lucky enough to be acting in a show. For example, I spend a lot of time cooking and dancing tango, among other things. I go away to do a show and realize that I don't have my good knives or my microplane or those specific rice cakes that I get from Chinatown. I don't have a ridiculously huge tango community like I have in New York City, so I can't go to milongas and practicas every night like I do in New York City. And that sucks. But there's this idea that you can't be upset about anything because you are a *working actor*. That's what you went to school for and went into debt for, that's what you spent hundreds and hundreds of dollars on headshots and classes for, why you sacrificed spending holidays with family, birthdays, and weddings with friends—hell, I know actors who have missed funerals because they were in a show. You would do anything to be a working actor. So how is it even possible that I'm bummed that I don't have those stupid rice cakes? Why in the world am I pissed that I couldn't go to the Yale Tango Festival? I think that I—and probably a lot of other actors—get caught up in the idea of being a working actor and forget that we're, you know, people. We forget that there are a lot of things that make us happy, not just being in a show. Being away from home is a good reminder to be more conscious and to be more grateful, as cheesy as that sounds. Wren and Carla Carla would make so much fun of me for saying that.

RACHEL: Yes, they would have some choice teasing opportunities!

LESLEY: I do love that being an actor allows me to see places I probably wouldn't go to otherwise. Ithaca had never really been on my radar before, and now I'm completely in love with it. Everyone kept saying "You should be here in the spring!" and I'm so glad that I am. It's a really special place. Thank you Kitchen Theatre Company for bringing me here!

RACHEL: Thank you, Lesley. *Swimming in the Shallows* celebrates our humanity with a combination of gentle sweetness and dangerous sexiness. I am excited to be in conversations with all of you after the show.

RECENT EVENTS & HAPPENINGS

A lot has happened at KTC since our last newsletter. Last month *A Body of Water* moved to Geva Theatre's second stage and enjoyed a very successful run. It was a lot of fun to hear the post-show conversation up there: "What's real?" "Is she really the daughter?" "What a mystery!"

Dance the Night Away exceeded its fundraising goal, and everyone in attendance had a great time. Thank you to all of you who were there and to the many, many of you who supported the dancers by becoming sponsors. Many congratulations to **Denny Grout**, who was the winning fundraiser of our great dancing group. If you weren't there, check out videos of the dances on YouTube.



Winning fundraiser Denny Grout and Mark Kenjerska perform at the 5th annual Dance the Night Away

We also enjoyed a whirlwind Solo Play Festival featuring Lorraine Rodriguez-Reyes in *Mami Confessions*, Darian Dauchan in *Black Sheep*, Ryan Hope Travis in *June 16*, and Michelle Courtney Berry in *Mother Land*. It was exciting to see the work of these four artists.

2015-16 SEASON ANNOUNCEMENT COMING SOON

We are dotting the "i's" and crossing the "t's" on next season's play choices. There will be a hilarious comedy, an inspiring story of a great American, a play set against the background of a revolution, a magnificently inventive fantasy story-theater musical piece, a play that brings two unlikely people together with unpredictable results, a soup kitchen where much more than food is served, and an old-time KTC favorite back to mark our 25th season! Titles will be announced soon. Subscribers will be the first to know! We will be sending you an email in advance of our press release.

ANNUAL FUND SPRING APPEAL

It is great to report that the **Annual Fund Fall Appeal** and the **Year-End Appeal** met their goals. We are all so grateful to everyone who made a gift to Kitchen Theatre Company. This season has had its challenges. Like most live performance across the country, ticket sales are impossible to predict. From the Metropolitan Opera to the Guthrie Theatre to our Kitchen Theatre Company here in Ithaca, all are reporting fluctuations in tickets sales that are affecting the bottom line. Having a successful Spring Appeal and raising the final \$14,000 to complete the Annual Fund is critical this season. We hope you will join us in this effort to keep KTC quality high and continue to bring you the brand of theater that starts all those important conversations.

OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN

Emily Jackson, KTC Artistic Associate and all-around go-to girl is directing *Stage Kiss* by Sarah Ruhl at Cidermill Playhouse. I hope you will consider the short drive to Endicott to see her show with Ithaca favorite **Erica Steinhagen** in the leading role. The show runs April 16–May 3. For more information and tickets, visit www.cidermillplayhouse.com.

LOOKING AHEAD

When we produced Alice Eve Cohen's *What I Thought I Knew* two seasons ago, I was thrilled when our subscribers embraced her amazing stories and her unique way of telling them. This June, she returns to the Kitchen with another play, *Thin Walls*, about the year she moved into a very sketchy NYC apartment building with her husband and young child. This is a story of the mixing of cultures, economics, and all the diversity that makes urban living the exciting experience that it is. **Alice Eve Cohen** is known not only as a playwright, but also as a memoirist. Her most recent book, *The Year My Mother Came Back*, has recently been published by Algonquin Books. I recommend it highly. I am eager to have my dear old friend and colleague back in Ithaca soon. *Thin Walls* runs June 10-28.