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A Conversation from the Kitchen with Artistic Director Rachel Lampert

FINAL PRODUCTION ON 2014-15 SEASON:
THIN WALLS BY ALICE EVE COHEN



Alice Eve Cohen

We began the season with a play about making and finding a home—*The House* by Brian Parks—and we are ending the season with another play about making and finding a home. Two very different takes on the need to nest. *Thin Walls* by Alice Eve Cohen will be a remarkable closing event. Alice is a prolific maker of many things. She is a memoirist whose most recent book, *The Year My Mother Came Back*, was published this spring by Algonquin Books and has been getting wonderful reviews. Her other book, *What I Thought I Knew*, was chosen by Oprah Winfrey as a Best Summer Read in 2012. Kitchen Theatre Company patrons will remember her staged version of *What I Thought I Knew*, the closing production of our season in 2013. Alice is also the author of many plays for younger audiences. Her *Hannah and the Hallow Challah*, *The Parrot*, and *The Frog Prince* were performed in our old space at the Clinton House on our Family Fare Series.

Alice and I met in 1981 at the Lincoln Center Institute, where we were two of a three-part teaching team working with NYC school teachers in an intensive three-week workshop. At that time Alice was focusing on both music and theater, creating music on found instruments and writing solo performance pieces. Over the past 35 years, we have come in and out of each other's lives and always enjoyed our work together.

Thin Walls is a wonderfully structured play that has Alice playing 13 characters who all live in the same NYC residential hotel. I first saw this play in NYC and was taken by Alice's choice to have all the characters talk to each other, or to Alice, but never to have "Alice" speak. Working with Alice now on this piece, so many years later, I continue to be struck by her ability to bring nuances to each of the real-life people she inhabits. Her ear for dialect and her uncanny way of finding just the right gesture to show us an entire character are remarkable. I have also always admired the efficiency of her writing: just enough to tell the story, just enough to make us laugh, or cry. I cherish the opportunity to work with a writer and performer like Alice, and I want everyone to come and see my dear friend's *Thin Walls*.

KITCHEN THEATRE COMPANY'S 24TH SEASON:
A REVIEW IN PROGRESS

With one more production about to open, I can't fully address the entire 24th season, but with a much-anticipated summer break coming in July, I am seizing the day and doing the wrap-up now.

The House by Brian Parks, directed by Margaret Perry, got us off to a wild start. Not only was this a world premiere, it was also a laugh-riot with a stellar cast. My favorite scene was just after the knock-down, pillow bursting, teddy bear exploding four-hander battle, when each character tries to outdo the others by playing it cool, which somehow morphs into over-the-top demonstrations of each couple's passion. With no dialogue, this sequence was an invention of writer, director, and actors that reached exquisitely fabulous theatrical high jinks.

Second was *Lonely Planet* by Steven Dietz. It was my honor to work with Karl Gregory and Nat DeWolf on this beautifully written drama about friendship and loss. I have two favorite moments in the play: the first was when Jody and Carl shared a moment while eating Reese's cups, and the other was the final scene in which Jody receives a phone call from Carl, now in another dimension.

Every season we get meet new actors and see old friends return. *Sunset Baby* by Dominique Morisseau, directed by Margaret Perry, brought two powerhouse young actors to the Kitchen: Gillian Glasco and Carl Hendrick Louis, who won our hearts with their extraordinary performances. Having veteran KTC company member Alexander Thomas back again completed the superb cast. My favorite scene is when Carl Hendrick Louis and Gillian Glasco's characters are talking about what the future might bring them.

Life and art have often collided in my life. *Count Me In*, directed by Emily Jackson, was a serendipitous confluence of real-life and art-life. Favorite moments for me were dancing with Tucker Davis, "seeing" Toby again after 25 years, and reminiscing with my real-life friend and former dance company member, Lydia Gaston, with Steve Nunley stand-in Keith Pillow generously jumping in with both feet. I loved how my real-life husband stepped up and joined in the cast and played himself. After 27 years of marriage, he still surprises me.

Lee Blessing's *A Body of Water*, a curious, evocative, and moving play directed by Michele Minnick, had a marvelous cast who navigated the murky waters with grace and depth.

I loved how the atmosphere on stage and in the audience shifted as more was revealed, disputed, discarded, and added to the puzzle as the play progressed. This play prompted so many questions and conversations not only in Ithaca, but in the lobby at Geva Theatre in Rochester as well.

Our four **Solo Play Festival** performers took us on such varying journeys. This was an experiment in programming, and I will say I was disappointed that everyone could not see all three evenings to see and hear the unique performances our guest artists were giving. Many thanks to Darian Dauchan, Lorraine Rodriguez-Reyes, Ryan Hope Travis, and Michelle Courtney Berry as well as directors Susan Reid and Nicole Watson.

I really gave myself a treat by assigning myself the director position for *Swimming in the Shallows*. It felt like an extravagance to have a cast of six, especially a group of such big personalities and talent to match. Putting the dream sequences aside, my favorite moments were Donna (Lena Kaminsky) and Nick's (Karl Gregory) scene sequence "How to Stop Smoking", Barb (Karina Arroyave) and Bob (Dean Robinson) arguing about the car, and the character-of-few-words, The Shark (Peterson Townsend), doing anything!

We had a terrific design team this season with Kent Goetz, David Arsenault, Tyler M. Perry, Lisa Boquist, Scott O'Brien, Lesley Greene, Hunter Kaczorowski, Amanda Aiken, and Ryan Mutton. And I was thrilled that our all-women directing roster included Margaret Perry, Michele Minnick, Nicole Watson, Susan Reid and yours truly. Every performance, all 128 of them, was stage managed by Jen Schilansky and supported backstage by intern Jessica Goldade, technical director Brendan Komala, scenic artist Tim Borden, and props interns Danielle Bulajewski and Meagan Chaudoin.



Moments from our 2014-15 Main Stage Season

What are your favorite moments from this season? Please share them with me via email: rachel@kitchentheatre.org



2014-15 Holiday Party and Dance the Night Away

2014-15 SEASON AT A GLANCE

How many performances did we offer?

- 128 Main Stage performances
- 16 Kitchen Sink performances
- 5 community events

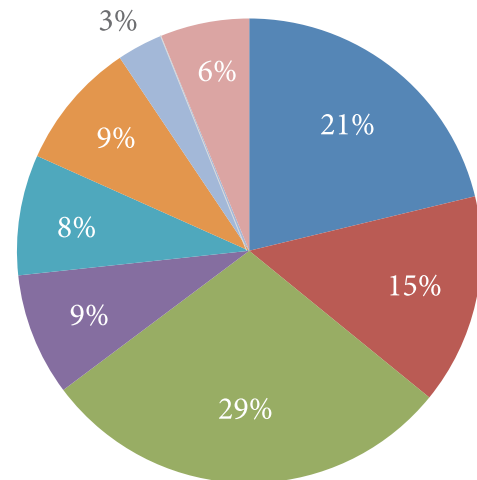
Who works at Kitchen Theatre Company?

In 2014-15, we employed:

- 4 full-time employees
- 3 part-time employees
- 6 full-time interns
- 29 actors (26 members of Actors' Equity Association; 3 non-Equity, local actors)
- 6 directors, 13 designers, 8 technicians, 3 artisans

Where do our funds come from?

Fiscal Year 14-15 Income as of June 1, 2015



- Tickets: subscribers (21%)
- Tickets: non-subscribers (15%)
- Individual donors (29%)
- Business Sponsors (9%)
- Grants (8%)
- Fundraising Events (9%)
- Advertising (3%)
- Other (6%)

Who comes to Kitchen Theatre Company?

- 673 subscribers
- 8210 tickets sold to-date (not including *Thin Walls*)
- Patrons from outside Tompkins County: 20%

CHANGES FOR THE 2015-16 SEASON

We were excited to announce our 2015-16 in April and we are thrilled with the response to all the plays we will produce. Producing theater for 25 years is something to celebrate. Kitchen Theatre Company has come a long way from its early days to where we are today. To create provocative and challenging work in an intimate space has been the foundational vision of the theater. To do that in a city and county with a relatively small population is our challenge. We have faced it by staying lean, no-frills, and diligent about how we stretch our resources, while always keeping our sights set on excellence. Over the past 25 years, we have learned to be resourceful, look for solutions, brainstorm with colleagues, work as a team, and stay flexible and open to change.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

We take a long, hard, almost ruthless look at ourselves toward the end of each season, evaluating what worked for us and what didn't. One of the challenges we have had is filling every seat. All of you, our subscribers, received a letter about the change in schedule for next season. We are compressing four of our productions into 13-performance runs over a two-week period rather than a three-week period. We are doing this to fill our houses and strengthen the experience for both actors and audiences. This is a change that will require flexibility on all our parts.

We know that keeping the same seats is important to you. I enjoy looking out during the curtain speech and thinking, "There's so-and-so who sits in that seat." I was never great at math (although I am good with budgets), but it is not difficult to compare the number of subscribers with, say, the number of Row B tickets available for a single performance. There will be some nights we will have to assign you different seats. We know this is a compromise, but the alternative—to keep the status quo—would jeopardize the theater's ability to survive. It may sound dramatic, but it is a fact. The ecosystem of a small not-for-profit arts organization is fragile. It needs constant nurturing and meticulous care.

We have tasked Emily Jackson with the job of Solomon. She will be handling all the subscriptions and working to make every subscriber happy. But, as they say, "You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time." We will continue to give you the best customer service possible. And we will also keep encouraging you to bring new friends to Kitchen Theatre Company throughout the season, because once you get them through the doors, they usually come back on their own. Together, let's make the 2015-16 25th Anniversary Season a year of great theater and full houses.

KTC INTERNS – THANK YOU!

Every season we have a group of young theater professionals join us assisting with the artistic, administrative and production work we do. This year's group was particularly

strong. Five of the six have been with us since last summer and are now making their way to their next positions. During the year they focused on their particular field of interest, but they also participated in all aspects of the theater's work. They have become skilled and important members of the KTC family, and we will miss them. All of us on the staff and the board thank them for their contribution to Kitchen Theatre Company this season. We also thank Jerry Dietz at CSP Management for long-time support of the Resident Professional Internship Program and the Lane Family Fund at Community Foundation of Tompkins County for support for this and last year's seasons. The interns interviewed one another, about their experiences at Kitchen Theatre Company:

What has been the most rewarding part of this internship?

Jenni (Artistic): Learning exactly what I want to do in theater. I came here not really knowing. I want to be a dramaturg and I want to be a literary manager. That's my place in theater.

Zoe (Artistic): Most of my background is in stage management, and it's been great being somewhere that trusts me to do more than that and see that I have developed skills from stage management that I can utilize in other areas—in the office, but also as an assistant director in rehearsals. I never knew being in rehearsals as a stage manager that you could absorb so much knowledge unwittingly, and then use it in the directorial process.

Laura (Graphic Design & Marketing): The opportunity to implement my work for the success of a business. Seeing my work around town and seeing its direct impact, whether it was getting a bunch of ticket sales right after a social media post or having people say, "Oh, I saw that poster downtown! It looked really cool, so I bought tickets." Very rewarding.

Liz (Arts Administration): Since it's such a small company, I've been able to get experience in things that aren't strictly within my job description. I'm really interested in casting. The fact that I've gotten to go and help with the EPAs [Equity Principal Auditions] and be in the room for the *Swimming in the Shallows* casting was really rewarding. I'm hoping I can take that into other jobs that are more in that artistic area.

Jessica (Stage Management): Being able to assistant stage manage all of the productions, I've been able to learn how different productions work, especially when it comes to Equity rules [the actors' and stage managers' union] and being able to experience how different actors and directors work.

What's your favorite show this season and why?

Jenni: Lonely Planet, hands down, because I connected to it instantly when I first read it. It's about friendship. Seeing Karl Gregory for the first time in that show was a really great experience. And I just love that show; it's a perfectly written play. Perfect, that show is perfect!

Zoe: Either Sunset Baby or Black Sheep. I feel like they both tell very timely stories. They're important, I think, for this community and for other communities. Important things

to voice and get out there.

Laura: Probably *The House*, because I actually laughed so hard that I cried during the asbestos scene. I still lose it when I think about that scene. A very close second would be *Lonely Planet*, because it is very touching and holds a lot of deep metaphors that only got deeper the more I think about them. That still resonates with me and I continue to use those metaphors to help me think about life problems.

Liz: *Swimming in the Shallows*. Originally I liked the script so much because I identified with Barb, the fact that she felt something off in her life and was able to make this really radical change even when her friends weren't being that supportive. I'm in a new chapter of my life and a lot of things are changing—maybe I can also try only owning eight things! But the script is lovely the way it tells the story of these six people. I really like the way it's written and the style of it.

Jessica: *Swimming in the Shallows*. The cast is so much fun, and I had a lot to do backstage. Second to that would be *Lonely Planet*.



Our 2014-15 interns (left to right): Zoe Benditt, Jenni Kuhn, Laura Hoelzl, Jessica Goldade, and Liz Baker

What did you learn at the Kitchen that you didn't expect to learn?

Jenni: I didn't expect to learn how to run a theater. I didn't understand how small this theater was before I got here. I feel like I can confidently start a very small theater company now because I've worked here. The internship I was at before this, Shakespeare Theater of New Jersey, didn't give me any of the tools to know how to run a theater—it was too big. I was too far removed from the artistic staff. But I'm a part of the company here.

Zoe: I learned a lot of development skills that I wasn't really expecting. Same with Jenni, I would feel confident starting a small theater company from this experience. And like I said earlier, I definitely learned that a lot of the skills I already had could be utilized elsewhere. Most importantly, I learned the power of believing in yourself. Being able to present yourself in a way that shows the confidence you possess inside.

Laura: I didn't come in with any theater experience, so I figured I would learn *something* about theater, but I learned a lot more than I ever expected, namely how theater works and how much of a group effort it is. In a small theater, everyone wears so many hats and contributes an incredible amount. And they do it entirely for the love of art; especially in a nonprofit theater. It's not about necessarily what's going to be commercially successful, it's what the people of the theater want to produce and think should be produced. The intense dedication to theater really moved me.

Liz: When I accepted the arts administration internship, I didn't know if it was what I wanted to do ultimately, in terms of a career path, but I wanted to try something off my path, getting that experience and owning that knowledge. I've discovered that this isn't what I want to do for the rest of my life. I might want to do something similar, but I want to be more creative in what I do in the future.

Jessica: I did not expect to learn so much about lighting, hanging lights, and working the light board. I've gotten a lot of experience in that area.

What will you miss about Ithaca?

Jenni: The Chapter House. I already miss it.

Zoe: The gorges. I've never lived somewhere where nature is so close to you. Walking right outside our house, you can go on all these trails, which is pretty amazing having come from cities.

Laura: Definitely all the people here. People ask me what it's like working at the Kitchen, and I tell them it's like working from home. When I come to the office, not only am I literally working with people that I live with, but we're this great dysfunctional family: we yell to each other from other rooms, sometimes there is tension, but then we'll let it all out and have a good time.

Liz: Being here with my friends!

Jessica: All the other interns. They've become my good friends. Going out with them, staying in with them. Having people who understand the stress you're going through, but it's also nice when you're able to not talk about work and just hang out.

SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER!

The new season is in the planning stages now, but by mid-August we will be back in rehearsal and preparing for the 25th Anniversary Season. We are looking forward to the return of directors Margaret Perry, Sara Lampert Hoover, Emily Jackson, and Nicole Watson. We won't be able to announce casting for a while, but we know some of our and your favorite actors will be returning. Keep enjoying live theater all summer with the Hangar Theatre, Ithaca Shakespeare Company, Civic Ensemble, Kitchen Theatre Company—where you can see *Running To Places* and *Homecoming Players*—and all of our other wonderful theatre groups. Have a great summer!