

November 23, 2015

**Lewis Center for the Arts presents *Cloud Nine***

***Era-spanning issues of gender, sexuality, and power are confronted in Caryl Churchill’s classic postmodern satire***

What: *Cloud Nine* by Caryl Churchill, one of the classic comedic satires of the British stage featuring gender-bending characters and a time-warping exploration of political and sexual oppression.

Who: Presented by Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater, a senior thesis production directed by faculty member R.N. Sandberg and featuring seniors Victoria Gruenberg as Edward/Betty, Tyler Lawrence as Clive/Cathy and Will Plunkett as Betty/Edward.

When: December 4, 5, 11 and 13 at 8:00 p.m. and December 12 at 2:00 p.m.

Where: Marie and Edward Matthews ’53 Acting Studio at 185 Nassau St. in Princeton

Tickets: In advance of show date -$12 general admission/$11 students and seniors; box office on days of performances -$17 general admission/$15 students and seniors, available at [arts.princeton.edu/cloudnine](http://arts.princeton.edu/events/cloud-nine/)

(Princeton, NJ) The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater at Princeton University will present the acclaimed postmodern comedic satire *Cloud Nine* by Caryl Churchill on December 4, 5, 11 and 13 at 8:00 p.m. and December 12 at 2:00 p.m. The production will be directed by faculty member R.N. Sandberg and features seniors Victoria Gruenberg as Edward/Betty, Tyler Lawrence as Clive/Cathy and Will Plunkett as Betty/Edward. Performances will take place in the Marie and Edward Matthews ’53 Acting Studio located at 185 Nassau Street.

*Cloud Nine* is recognized as one of the classic, contemporary, comedic satires of the British stage and features gender-bending characters and a time-warping exploration of political and sexual oppression. The first act of the play is set in 1879 British colonial Africa in the Victorian era, and the second act in London in 1979, though only 25 years have passed for the characters. The actors play different roles in the first and second acts and in many cases play characters of genders and races different from their own. This surrealism is mixed with humor, strong language, and displays of sexuality to satirize the sexual and racial oppression of 19th century, 20th century, and contemporary society; the play therefore may not be appropriate for all audiences.

Caryl Churchill has been one of the most important playwrights in the English language theater of the past fifty years and is considered by some to be the foremost female playwright in the world. She is known for her use of non-naturalistic and Brechtian “epic theater” techniques to dramatize issues of sexual politics and feminism. Born in late 1930s London, Churchill began producing plays in the 1970s. Her first play to receive wide notice was *Cloud Nine*, published in 1979, which became famous in Britain and the United States and won an Obie Award for Best Play in 1982.

“*Cloud Nine* is a political play that explores sexual and gender difference, authoritarian social norms, colonial power, freedom and acceptance with humor and humanity,” notes Sandberg. “It’s as resonant today as it was in 1979.”

The three seniors featured in the production were drawn to the play for their senior thesis project in the Program in Theater for a number of reasons. One of these reasons is the challenge presented by playing two different lead characters that are polar opposites. They also share a common interest, as actors, in gender issues on stage. They cite a course in world drama with Sandberg and courses with English professor Tamsen Wolff as among their collective influences.

Victoria Gruenberg, an English major from Winter Park, Florida, pursuing certificates in theater and urban studies, takes on the role of Edward in act one and the older Betty in act two. “I am fascinated by family dynamics as portrayed on stage,” she notes, “and how they do or don’t relate to what people know from their own experience.” Gruenberg has an interest in race and gender politics in theater; she wrote her junior paper on political playwright Athol Fugard’s use of both in his anti-Apartheid work. She is writing her senior thesis on political theater with Wolff as her adviser and did an international theater internship in South Africa. Gruenberg has been an active member of the campus theater community performing and directing with the Program in Theater and a number of student theater groups, most recently directing the play *Gidion’s Knot* with Theatre Intime. In the spring she will originate the role of a female Dorian Gray in a new musical being written by senior Sonya Hayden based on the Oscar Wilde novel.

Tyler Lawrence, who will play Clive and Cathy, is from Franklin, Tennessee and majoring in politics with certificates in theater and Near Eastern studies. *Cloud Nine* was assigned as reading in three different courses he has taken, including a playwriting course with Sandberg, and he cites a course in international political theater with Wolff as an important influence. He has also performed in numerous Theater Program and student theater group productions, is the publicity co-chair of Princeton University Players, and a member of L’Avant Scene, a student troupe that performs classical and contemporary plays in French.

Will Plunkett, an English major from Minneapolis pursuing certificates in theater and linguistics, will perform the roles of Betty in act one and the older Edward in act two. In addition to scholarly courses in theater he also notes that Lewis Center courses in acting have provided valuable preparation for these roles. Also active in the Theater Program and undergraduate performance groups, Plunkett is a member of the a cappella group the Princeton Footnotes and performed with the group on season four of NBC’s *The Sing-Off*.

The complexity of the play and the characters led the seniors to seek a professional director like Sandberg to helm the production. “The layers and challenges will push us further than any other project we’ve undertaken,” notes Lawrence. “It is so easy to do this play wrong,” adds Plunkett, “It is terrifying for an actor.”

Both a director and a playwright, Sandberg directed recent Lewis Center productions including *Madman Robertson, Uncle Vanya*, *A Steady Rain, A Broad Abroad,* and *How I Learned to Drive*, as well as Princeton Summer Theater productions of *Pygmalion* and *The Heidi Chronicles.* His play, *Roundelay,* premiered at Passage Theater in 2013. His plays have been seen in Australia, Canada, England, Japan, Panama, and South Korea, as well as at theaters throughout the U.S. including the Barter, Dallas Children’s Theater, Providence Black Rep, Stages Repertory Theatre and Yale Cabaret. He has been commissioned by, among others, George Street Playhouse, McCarter Theatre, Metro Theater Company, and Seattle Children’s Theatre. Sandberg is a Princeton alumnus and in 2014 received the University’s President's Distinguished Teaching Award.

The cast also features Patrick Boroughs ’18, Alex Vogelsang ’18, Robby Keown ’17, and Deirdre Ricaurte ’16. Student technicians and designers include Magda Stankowska ’18 as stage manager, Wesley Cornwell ’16 as set designer, Erin Valentine ’16 as costume designer, Sydney Becker ’17 as lighting designer, Hillel Friedman ’17 as sound designer, and Alex Daniels ’17, Eric Yang ’17 and Zara Jayant ’19 on run crew. Vince Di Mura, the Lewis Center’s resident musical director and composer, serves as composer and music director for the production.

The play was originally workshopped with the Joint Stock Theatre in London in late 1978 and premiered at Dartington College of Arts, Devon, in February 1979. The first American production was directed by Broadway legend Tommy Tune in 1981. The Atlantic Theater Company in New York City presented *Cloud Nine* earlier this fall, and the Princeton production’s cast struggled with whether they should see it. They did and note that they learned from the choices made by that production’s artistic team.

While the three featured seniors share a passion for theater, they plan different career paths after Princeton. Gruenberg intends to pursue a career as a professional director and actor and will be applying for fellowships and apprenticeships. Lawrence plans to work in political and economic development in the Middle East, having spent last summer in Egypt and Morocco, although he hopes to keep theater as a part of his life. Plunkett hopes to spend a year abroad through Princeton’s Alumni Corps before applying to law school.

Tickets for *Cloud Nine* are $12 general admission and $11 for students and seniors when purchased in advance, and $17 general admission and $15 for students and seniors purchased the day of performances at the box office. Tickets are available through the University’s new ticketing system, which offers greater flexibility for online ordering and print-at-home tickets. To purchase tickets online visit arts.princeton.edu/cloudnine, call Princeton University Ticketing at 609.258.9220, or stop by the Frist Campus Center Ticket Office. Tickets will also be available at the door prior to performances.

The Lewis Center’s Program in Theater annually presents a major, professionally produced play in the fall, as well as a number of student senior thesis productions throughout the year, which will include Sophocles’ *Elektra*, *Disco Pigs* by Enda Walsh, a new take on the musical classic *Singin’ in the Rain*, a new dance-theater work exploring the racial concept of dual consciousness, a new musical based on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and a concert performance of two Golden Age musicals that explores issues of womanhood.

To learn more about this event and the more than 100 events offered each year by the Lewis Center for the Arts visit [arts.princeton.edu](http://www.princeton.edu/arts).

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