

Marian Zielinski (Lighting Designer), Professor of Theatre/Scenographer, first came to Mercer University in 1982. She has designed scenery, costumes, and/or lighting for more than 60 Mercer productions and nearly 30 for the professional stage. Earlier this semester, Marian directed *All In The Timing* and presented a paper to the Semiotics Society of America in Toronto titled *Picturing the Stranger: A Photographic Journey*. Marian is a painter and fiber artist and is married to Dr. Frank Macke. She dedicates this design to Paul Oppy, her friend and colleague of twenty years whose excellent work and perseverance has been inspirational.

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Stage Manager Jonathan Miles
 Assistant Stage Manager Cari O'Neal
 Technical Director Sean Johnson
 Set Crew Jason Greene, Rachael Harris, Shenequa Johnson,
 Ashleigh McDaniel, Jonathan Miles, Matt Roberts,
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 Costume Shop Crew Candace Flatt, Lauren Hauser,
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 Lighting Crew Jason Greene, Rachael Harris, Shenequa Johnson,
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Mercer University Theatre

Combustible

BURN

Directed by
PAUL OPPY

Written by
ANDREW SILVER

Next on the Boards

Stephen Sondheim's Musical Fable

Into The Woods

April 11 - 13, 2002

At The Grand Opera House: 301-5470

\$10 general/\$7 with Mercer ID

November 9-17, 2001

The Backdoor
Theatre

MERCER UNIVERSITY THEATRE

Presents

Combustible/Burn

by Andrew Silver

Directed by Paul Oppy

Set Design by Sean Johnson

Costume Design by Shelley Kuhn

Lighting Design by Marian Zielinski

Sound Design by Jonathan Miles

Media Design by Zach Broome

CAST

Emily Barringer Cara Gibson Lauren Hauser

Julie Jones Kim Kight Pamela Patterson

Patrick Sinclair Jim Sisson Tim Smith

Charles Trovontia Thomas

(Each actor plays multiple characters)

Setting: Recollections of the 1950's and 1960's
at Mercer and other locales.

Please turn off all phones and beepers.

No photography during the performance.

Author's Notes

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, at the height of the cold war, a small group of energized Mercer students stood against fellow students, parents, community, and denomination in order to take a stand against church discrimination and American racism. What they offered in its place was an alternative vision of an inclusive, all-loving and active Christianity that reverses social injustice, empowers the poor, and embraces the hated. The work of this small group of students eventually resulted in Mercer becoming the first private university in Georgia to desegregate. This is the story of these students and the very first generation of courageous African and African American students at Mercer.

In June, I decided to call this play "Combustible/Burn," after the title of an underground Christian newspaper distributed at Mercer in the early fifties which took strong stands against segregation, the accumulation of wealth, and an authoritarian denominationalism based on exclusion rather than inclusion. Then came September 11. I have since had serious misgivings about keeping the title while deeply traumatic scenes of burning buildings and planes are yet fresh in our memories. I decided, finally, that the name is especially appropriate in light of the recent terror and its origins. On September 11, we witnessed one sort of religious fire--a fire of holy hatred and violence--a fire found in every religion, every nation. There is another kind of religious fire, however, also found in all religions: an inclusive, welcoming fire that warms the freezing, sheds light on injustice, comforts the weak--a fire of unconditional love at all costs, even at the cost of one's own life. This play concerns both fires. As a nation, we must decide which fire we will now embrace as a means to heal our world.

I'd like to dedicate this play to Mercer faculty, staff and students, but especially the "remnant" in every generation of students that, in the face of opposition from family and friends, fights against discrimination in the church and in the state, and against all forms of violence, with undying love and compassion. You represent the prophetic calling of Mercer yet burning. You are this century's heroes.

One more note: I have realized in the making of this play that there are many different kinds of heroism. There is a public heroism of the sort that we see in the Bryanite movement, but then there are moments of soundless, personal heroism against less external threats, no less dire. Almost a year ago, the Mercer community was shaken by the news that our beloved colleague and professor, Paul Oppy, was in intensive care after a near-fatal auto-accident. Very slowly and with much pain, Paul has worked at his recovery even in the face of difficult setbacks. Though his doctor had advised that he take a year off from teaching, and though this would have been best for his physical needs, Paul needed theater more, returning to take on this immensely difficult project--the first play he has directed since his accident eleven months ago. Watching him work through pain, creating beauty from utter chaos in a matter of weeks, has

made me feel at times as if I were watching two tales of heroism unfold before me: one on stage under the lights and the other silent, just offstage in the director's chair. Paul called our rehearsals his "pain-killers," helping him for a moment forget about personal pain as he was moved by these stories of others' pain. My best hope for this play is that it creates a similarly meaningful site of healing for a community not fully recovered from its own past hurts.

A NOTE ON THE MAKING OF COMBUSTIBLE/BURN

The seeds of this project were planted by Anna Devere Smith, a playwright whose plays about communities in conflict--fashioned from interview excerpts with people in those communities-- helped shape what is now called "documentary theater." Unlike "realism," documentary theater is constructed by weaving together the actual voices of living people and historical documents, focusing not on a traditional plot (e.g. "who gets the girl?"), but on a specific theme (e.g. what does it mean to be a girl in Georgia?). Action and even character are less important in these plays than voices and perspectives; watching is less important than listening and responding.

From the first, this has been a project defined in collaboration with community, colleagues and students. Last June, with the support of the Lilly Endowment, I assembled a group of four talented students--Eme Crawford, Stephanie Shelton, Jessica Smith and Angela Parris--to help interview a total of 120 people active in the early civil rights movement and then transcribe nearly three hundred hours worth of interviews for this project. Almost every word of this play comes directly from roughly fifty of these interviews and the research conducted in Jack Tarver's special collections. Our group met throughout the summer with Professor Paul Oppy, the director, to share our transcripts, to shape a vision of what this play ought to be about, and experiment with broad sections of what is now the text of *Combustible/Burn*. After we finished interviewing, we began assembling groups to read very, very rough drafts of the play--essentially various patterns of the transcripts--sometime in August and early September. The script has changed along the way in significant ways due to astute critiques offered by, among others, Amanda Voss, Jessica Smith, Jennifer Baldwin, Natalie Moss, Pamela Patterson, Nathan Poling, Emily Barringer, Lauren Hauser, Paul Oppy, and especially Eme Crawford, whose arduous work and input on this project during the summer was invaluable. The final play emerged after five months of research and revision, sometime in mid October. Mid-way through the summer, I realized that it would be impossible to tell the full story of Mercer's desegregation in one play. I decided to split up the enormous twenty five year narrative into two plays: the one before you deals with an earlier generation of students at Mercer from 1948-1966 who helped stimulate desegregation; the second will, if the first proves of interest, deal with the second and third generation of students and Maconites who helped shape the reality of integration at Mercer and in Macon in the far more turbulent period from 1966-1974.

Dr. Anya Silver, my wife and colleague in the English Department, deserves special thanks not only for helping shape the play and reading countless revisions, but also for her sustaining support and humor over the last five months. Special thanks too to Tom Glennon, Tom Huber, Dee Bratcher, Matt Thompson, and Kim Steele, all of whom offered unstinting encouragement, desperately needed help in planning special events, and the resources of the Lilly Endowment, assistance which helped bring *Combustible/Burn* to fruition. Thanks to Penni Hartley, Zack Broome, Marian Zelinski, Jonathan Miles, Shelley Kuhlen, Cari O'Neill, and Sean Johnson, who along with Paul Oppy, turned this script into a living performance. Thanks finally to President Kirby Godsey, whose progressive leadership helped inspire this play and whose protection of our freedom of inquiry made the play possible.

Of course, this play would not have been possible in the first place had it not been for the voices of people who shared their stories and their often painful memories with me and the project over the summer. It took courage to break the silence then and it takes courage to once again break the silence and relive painful memories today. Listening to these beautiful, generous people--none of whom have forgotten their callings--was a joy and a humbling, learning experience for me. I hope against hope that I have done some justice to their stories.

Who's Who

Emily Barringer (Actor 4) is a freshman at Mercer and is honored to be involved in this production. She would like to thank God, her parents, and her classmates for putting up with her recent, overly- emotional state due to this play. Listen, learn, and change.

Zach Broome (Media Designer) is in his second year at Mercer. This is his second production with Mercer Theatre making debut on the Mercer stage as Milton in the recent production of *All In The Timing*. Zach has also served as Technical Director for the Georgia Children's Museum's summer production, *Nothing Gets Better Unless . . .*, and Central High School's production of *The Illusion*. When Zach is not in classes or performing his various functions in the theatre, he is probably sleeping.

Cara N. Gibson (Actor 10) is a senior who hails from the Bahamas. She is completing a major in English (poetry) and a minor in Education. This is Cara's first time EVER in a theatrical performance. She says performing adds to her confidence in reading poetry as well as in becoming involved in the public sphere.

Lauren Hauser (Actor 6) a "typical Southern Baptist girl" from Savannah, GA is honored to be involved in this eye-opening project. A sophomore, music and CTA double major, she was last seen in the backdoor theater as Tillie in *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-In-The-Moon Marigolds*. She thanks God for this continu-

ous blessings and for entrusting her with a passion for performing and her family for all the "you can do its".

Sean Johnson (Set Designer/Technical Director) received his B.A. in Theatre Arts from Marian College in Indianapolis where he studied acting and scenic design. This is Sean's 5th year as Technical Director at Mercer. Other credits in scenic design at Mercer include *Sweeney Todd*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Androcles and the Lion*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *A Doll's House* and Mercer Opera's *The Mad World of Menotti*.

Julie Jones (Actor 5) is a senior from Woodbury, GA majoring in English and minoring in Photography. She would like to thank the Lord for her desire to perform and her parents and boyfriend, Perry, for their encouragement. She is proud to be a part of this ensemble and would like to commend Dr. Silver on his ground-breaking play.

Kim Knight (Actor 8) is a junior Communication and Theatre Arts major from Atlanta, GA. This is Kim's 1st on-stage performance and says "It's been quite an experience!" Kim is very excited about working with everyone in the ensemble! She would like to thank Paul for the opportunity to be a part of such an important part of Mercer's history and Dr. Silver for creating and sharing this piece. "I love You All!! Look Mom and Dad!! I've finally taken my act to the stage!!"

Shelley Kuhnen (Costume Designer) designed costumes for Mercer Theatre's recent productions of *All In the Timing*, *An Inspector Calls*, *Androcles and the Lion*, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, and Mercer Opera's *The Mad World of Menotti*. She also designed the costumes for Macon State College's recent production of *Angel's in America*. This is Shelley's sixth year at Mercer as Costume Director.

Jonathan Miles (Stage Manager/Sound Designer) is a sophomore CTA and Philosophy double major from Columbus, GA. Previous Mercer Theatre credits include *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and stage-managing *Poolside* and *Links*, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-In-The-Moon Marigolds*, and the recent production of *All in the Timing*, as well as the Mercer Opera productions of *The Magic of Mozart* and the upcoming *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Jonathan plans to either pursue graduate studies in directing and stage-management, or enter the seminary for the Catholic priesthood. "My heartfelt thanks to a talented cast, fantastic crew, gifted playwright, and a phenomenal director, mentor, and friend-it was truly a pleasure!"

Cari O'Neal (Assistant Stage Manager) is a freshman at Mercer University. This is her first time working with the Backdoor Theatre, and also her first time working in the capacity of assistant stage manager. She is honored to be involved in a play of this magnitude. She is undecided about her major.

Paul Oppy (Director) is the Davenport Professor of Communication and Theatre Arts. He has been teaching and directing at Mercer for thirty years. *Combustible/Burn* is the 82nd production he has directed for Mercer University Theatre. He was Artistic Director of the Georgia International Festival for Young Audiences for three years, and has been actively promoting the development of former and current Mercer student playwrights through Mercer Theatre's annual new play project.

Pamela Patterson (Actor 7) is a 19 year old sophomore at Mercer University. She is a psychology/pre-law major and plans to become a corporate lawyer or United States marshal. *Combustible/Burn* will be her debut play in which she plays several characters.

Dr. Andrew Silver (Playwright) would like to thank Anya for her love, friendship and constant support. He'd also like to thank Paul Oppy for his love and friendship and beautiful direction, and the cast for their dedication, talent and endless energy; thanks to Eme Crawford, Jessica Smith, Angela Parris, Nathan Poling and so many others for their help with the project; thanks especially to all of his new friends who spent so much time talking to him in interviews this summer; thanks, finally, to his father. A natural-born actor himself, he taught his son to love all things theatrical. He dedicates these performances to the memory of his mother, Linda.

Patrick Sinclair (Actor 3) This is Patrick's ninth production at Mercer. He is a senior majoring in English, Theatre, and Education. Hopefully, the world will become his playground after graduation where he will teach English to non-speakers. "Love to family, friends, and to Tara."

Jim Sisson (Actor 1) graduated from Mercer/CLA in 1998 but has never left Mercer University . . . and never will. He is working on his Masters of Divinity at Mercer School of Theology in Atlanta in addition to graduate studies in English Literature at Emory. He wishes to dedicate this performance to the memory of his mother and Jeff Mauro.

Tim Smith (Actor 2) is a first-year student at Mercer who plans to major in Communication and Theatre Arts. He is surprised and honored to have received a role in this powerful, exciting play which will be his second Mercer production.

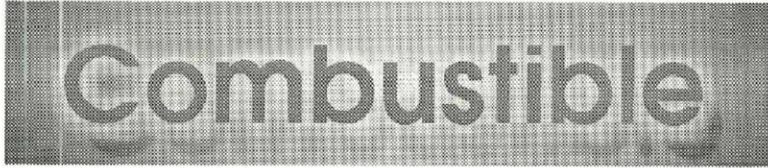
Charles Trovontia Thomas (Actor 9) is a freshman who is planning to major in Creative Writing and Theater. This is his second show this year--he appeared in *All in The Timing* -- and he is excited to play these varied roles. Thanks to Sam Oni, Gary Johnson, Richard Scott and others for letting him share these experiences. "You all--those acting, those portrayed and all those involved - you all are my heroes for life!" Special thanks to his own "Papa Joe" and his fave ASM! Love ya!

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