

THE OLD SETTLER



Virginia Stage Company's artistic director, Charlie Hensley, selects the plays that will be produced during a season. He reads dozens of scripts and travels to other theatres to watch their productions before he makes his decisions. By March, he has selected a group of plays which will be presented in the following season.

~ Like other theatres in the 1940s, the Wells Theatre had a separate box office and entrance for African-Americans. They sat in the upper balcony, while all other patrons viewed performances and movies from the mezzanine and orchestra seating. With desegregation in the 1950s and 60s, this practice was finally abandoned. The upper balcony is now where the stage manager, light board operator, and sound board operator sit to run the shows.

~ The arts commissions of various cities in Hampton Roads assist Virginia Stage Company in producing mainstage presentations as well as touring children's productions, student matinees, infrared listening devices for the hearing-impaired, one sign-language interpreted performance per production, and discounted tickets for military, students, teachers, and senior citizens. These funds also support the pay-what-you-can performance for each production.

~ The creative team for each production (set designer,

costume designer, lighting designer, sound designer, and director) meet for a "concept meeting" several months before rehearsal begins. During this meeting, they decide what the play will look like and what message the playwright is trying to present.

~ "Drops" are huge paintings done on canvas and hung at the back of the set. Because they take so much space to create, Virginia Stage Company usually uses drops only for the first production, since it can be painted on stage.

~ During a performance, the sound board operator will use up to three mini-disk players and two reel-to-reel players to insert sounds into the action. The sounds are projected from ten speaker positions.

Ken Bolden and Don Carter in this season's hilarious production of Larry Shue's The Foreigner Photo: Kenton Yeager



Few things are more exciting to us than introducing you to a new voice of the American Theatre, especially one like John Henry Redwood, who tells us our own stories in such a powerful and emotionally engaging way. His writing is no doubt influenced by his long, successful career as an actor, and we're grateful to have a top-flight creative team interpreting Redwood's wonderful play for you today. Add the magnetic Leslie Uggams and an extraordinary acting company, and you know you're in for an exceptional and inspiring experience in the theatre.

Enjoy!

Charlie Steve

Charlie & Steve

VSC PLAYBILL

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Jack Conley appeared as Noah Curry in *The Rainmaker* during Virginia Stage Company's twelfth season. Most recently, he can be seen in the critically acclaimed major motion picture, *L.A. Confidential*.

English actor Patrick Ryecart was last seen in an episode of *Poirot*. He appeared as Cornelius Christian in *Fairy Tales of New York* at Virginia Stage Company in 1990.

The Old Settler
in order of appearance

Elizabeth Borny	Leslie Uggams
Quilly McGrath	Lynda Gravatt
Husband Witherspoon	Gary DeWitt Marshall
Lou Bessie Preston	Rosalyn Coleman

The Setting

Elizabeth Borny's tenement apartment, Harlem, New York City. Early spring, 1943.

ACT I	Scene 1	Thursday, late afternoon
	Scene 2	2:25 AM, the next morning
	Scene 3	8:20 AM, Friday morning
	Scene 4	The same day, late afternoon
ACT II	Scene 1	Saturday, two weeks later, mid afternoon
	Scene 2	9:30 AM, Sunday, the next day
	Scene 3	Twelve days later
	Scene 4	The same day, Friday, early evening

There will be one 15-minute intermission.

Production Assistant	Shelly Payne
Assistant Scenic Designer	Kathleen L. Martin

SPOTLIGHT ON JODI BIEDRZYCKI, MASTER ELECTRICIAN



What does a master electrician do? I am in charge of anything that plugs in, which primarily includes lighting and special effects equipment. We have over 250 lighting units with hundreds of feet of cable, fog and haze machines, and a wide variety of lamps,

flashpots, and other specialized instruments. I assist the lighting designer in implementing her idea of how the stage should be lit based on the overall production concept. Together, my assistant and I hang the lights from pipes located both in the house and above the stage; then we focus them on specific areas as determined by the designer and color the light with "gels," which are colored squares of acetate that vary in hue and saturation level.

How do you make patterns appear on the stage? We use a variety of templates, which are

called "gobos," inserted in the lighting instruments to create certain effects, such as light through a window, or in a forest.

Are you in the booth during the performance? When I work as the light board operator, yes. As the stage manager calls the lighting cues to me (which have been determined by the director and designer), I press the "go" button to change the cue onstage. We have a computerized lighting system, so most of the hard work is accomplished during technical rehearsals, when the operator programs the cues into the board.

What's the hardest part of your job? Your favorite part? The hardest part, for me, is the physical labor. I am always carrying around 20-pound lighting instruments and coils of cable, and in order to focus the lights, we have to maneuver carefully around the set and nearly swing from the ceiling to position the beam of light in the exact location. My favorite part of being M.E. is getting the chance to build and play with special effects; I also love it when the lights come up on a dark stage and the audience goes "oooh..." Then I know we've done a good job.

In the 1940s, Harlem was a happenin' place. Located in the north end of Manhattan, the neighborhood was as much a culture as a geographical area. Unlike anywhere else in America, Blacks ruled Harlem. "White Flight" at the turn of the century had virtually eradicated Euro-Americans from this area of New York City. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's put it firmly on the map. By World War II, the neighborhood was well established as a hotbed of activity for the African-American community.

On an average night, the Savoy Ballroom was filled with couples of all shades who danced the night away to the hot music of Duke Ellington, Chick Webb, Count Basie, and Ella Fitzgerald. Harlem was open all night for this crowd. In Harlem, young Blacks dreamed of a rich future and of leaving the tenement buildings for the grander homes of Strivers Row and Sugar Hill. Anything



HARLEM. A HAPPENIN' PLACE.

was possible in Harlem.

But Harlem was not solely for this fast crowd. Another generation had deep roots in the neighborhood. Like the younger generation, these people moved to New York City to escape the oppression of the South. While most of them weren't famous, they created a Harlem where they worked, raised their families, and went to church. They were the backbone of the community, and the daylight hours were theirs.

The echos of jazz clarinet and Ella's sweet voice still linger in the streets of Harlem, as do the shouts of young kids playing in spurting fire hydrants. Although the neighborhood experienced a sad decline, Harlem is happenin' again, and young professionals are now returning to the area to reclaim it for future generations. The legend lives on.

THE LANGUAGE OF HARLEM IN THE 1940S WAS AS COLORFUL AS ITS CITIZENS.

Apple: The big town, the main stem, Harlem
Dillinger: A killer-diller, too hot to handle
Dime note: Ten-dollar bill
Fine dinner: A good-looking girl
Kill me: Show me a good time
Kitchen mechanics: Domestic servants
Lead sheet: Top coat

Off the cob: Corny, out of date
Old settler: A woman who has never married
Togged to the bricks: Dressed to kill
Twister to the slammer: The key to the door
Zoot suit: A large man's suit worn with pointed shoes and a long watch chain hitched to the waist of the trousers and looping down to the ankles.