

Burn This, by Lanford Wilson

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IC Students Observe Readers' Theatre's process for *BURN THIS*

In honor of the recent passing of Lanford Wilson, one of the most distinguished American playwrights of the late 20th century, The Readers' Theatre of Ithaca brings audiences his play, *Burn This*, the final weekend of performance readings of their inaugural season. The staged readings will be performed on the first floor of the Community School of Music and Arts (CSMA) on Friday, May 13 and Saturday, May 14 at 8:30pm, and Sunday, May 15 at 6:30pm. Reservations can be made by calling The Readers' Theatre's new line: 607.217.6272. This production is sponsored in part by Ithaca Bakery, providing discount coupons to those who attend the play.

The cast includes local and professional theatre actors and directors: Anne Marie Cummings, Ross Haarstad, Tim Perry, and Tony Simone. Don Slatoff, who recently returned to Ithaca from New York City where he's played tenor saxophone and bass clarinet professionally for 30 years, will help set the mood and enhance the performance readings of *Burn This*.

During the rehearsal process for *Burn This*, The Readers' Theatre is collaborating with Ithaca College's Advanced Cinema Production Directing class in the Cinema, Photography and Media Arts Department. Karen Rodriguez, who teaches the class, said, "Anne Marie and the cast of *Burn This* agreed to open their rehearsal process to observation by the Advanced Cinema Production Directing class. The directing students are able to observe the play's development from initial readings to final performance. Rehearsals usually happen in private so this is a terrific opportunity for my students and me to be able to sit in on the process." Michael Reyes, one of the directing and acting students from Rodriguez's class, will be reading the stage directions during the performance readings. "I am extremely excited to be working with an up-and-coming theatre company. It's such a pleasure contributing to the Arts culture of Ithaca," says Reyes.

Burn This begins shortly after the funeral of Robbie, a young gay dancer who drowned in a boating accident. In attendance are his roommates, choreographer Anna (Cummings) and ad man Larry (Haarstad). Soon joining them in Robbie's lower-Manhattan loft are screenwriter Burton (Simione), Anna's longtime lover, and Pale (Perry), Robbie's coke-snorting, hyperactive restaurant-manager brother from Montclair, New Jersey. In the face of their shared tragedy, the quartet attempts to make sense of their lives and reconsider their own identities and relationships.

Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* reviewed the Off-Broadway production of *Burn This* starring Edward Norton and Catherine Keener in 2002. Brantley wrote, "*Burn This* emerges as an exquisitely arranged chamber piece for four self-distancing people who have misplaced their deepest feelings...Mr. Wilson's brooding sense of people defensively estranged from one another and their own emotions still rings hauntingly true, even within the collective grief and fear inspired by the epochal events of Sept. 11."

"As a director and lover of theater, I fell under Lanford Wilson's spell a long time ago," said Haarstad. "My first "out there" production was a rollicking ride through his great early piece, 'Balm in Gilead' up at Risley Theatre. He's one of my favorites of the Off-Off-Broadway, Cafe Cino crowd, right up there with Sam Shepard. It's a privilege for me to play the role of Larry. I dedicate my work on this show to decades of great writing."

Cummings, who is directing *Burn This* and playing the role of Anna, explained, "There isn't anyone, who's truly lived their life, who won't identify with the polarized emotions that these characters feel, particularly Anna and Pale. *Burn This* is a love story, but an unusual one. It beautifully intertwines the worlds of four characters, and the fifth, who, even though he has died, is always present in the dialogue of the play and subconsciously motivating their actions."

Burn This is the last performance reading of The Readers' Theatre's inaugural season. The Readers' Theatre will open its 2011-2012 season with *Frozen*, by Bryony Lavery.

All tickets for *Burn This* are \$10. Performances will be May 13th and 14th at 8:30 p.m., and May 15th at 6:30 p.m. at CSMA. Seating is limited, so reservations are highly recommended and can be made by calling **607.217.6272**. For more information about *Burn This* go to www.thereaderstheatre.blogspot.com.

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