

the
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theatre co



Book of Leaves

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Book of Leaves

Written by
Will Cooper

Directed by
Kim Strassburger

CAST

Walter	Tom Stephenson
Beth	Leigh Akin
Prince	Justin Lang
Sylvie	Maybelle Shimizu
Jack	Durwood Murray
Alice	Kandace Crystal
Stage Directions	Rebecca Crigler

PRODUCTION STAFF

Videographer/Editor	Michael Brueggemeyer
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Time: Current Day | Place: Exurbs of New York City

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The American Family. What does that mean anymore after the beating that and other national, traditional ideas have taken in the last few years? We've come a long way from 'Father Knows Best.' What remains? What lives on?

In TRTC's new reading/film, Will Cooper's play 'Book of Leaves' shows us a family with a lot of secrets, and they come fast and furious. The roles they took when they were younger get blown up and looked at intensely here. After the trauma and unrest and uncertainty of the last year and a half, how can we keep on when we don't know what the truth is about our oldest human system? What's to become of us, and our country?

What would you do when faced with these decisions? Take a look for yourself and think it over.

Phil Johnson

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

People often ask me about a play of mine, "How did you come up with it?" That's a difficult question to answer, because it's never one thing. There isn't a play-making cookie cutter, or even a kitchen drawer crammed full of a hodgepodge of them. Each play is different, and writing it involves a novel voyage of discovery in uncharted waters. Many a time I've glimpsed my destination, a climactic scene or resolution. Then finding a dramatic and engaging route to it becomes the challenge: *gUnTOPIA*.

On other occasions a character pops up in my imagination and starts talking. I listen, and from that eavesdropping a story might reveal itself: *Shadows of Athens*. Or I might be absorbed by a particular social or political issue and decide I want to tell a story that illustrates my ideas. The work then boils down to inventing a narrative and characters that put them across without the play sounding rather like a street corner preacher: *Margin of Error*.

Now the play you're about to watch, *Book of Leaves*, was inspired, very loosely and tangentially, by events and persons drawn from my own life. As I wrote it, the story grew organically, appropriately enough given the title. I simply fed it and watered it and watched while ring after ring of action and conflict wrapped around the characters' lives until, finally, it reached what I felt was an inevitable ending. As for how I or any writer comes up with his or her ideas in the first place, well, your guess is as good as mine.

Will Cooper

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The joy of development of new work for the theatre is the spirit of camaraderie that accompanies collaboration with talented playwrights, actors, and production teams. Such was my experience in working with Will Cooper, a crackerjack team of San Diego actors, and the inimitable Roustabouts Theatre Co. team on Will's new play, *Book of Leaves*. The delight of this "play-in-development" has been the process of conversing about, shaping, and performing this new play.

Book of Leaves is the poignant and humorous story of Walter and his family who, near the end of Walter's life, are wrestling with the question of legacy. It is a universal story in that Walter, approaching death, wonders what his life has meant. Is a life's meaning determined by family, a home, and possessions passed onward? Meaning near the end of life is the question at the core of *Book of Leaves*.

We hope that you are moved as we have been.

Kim Strassburger

PROFILES



WILL COOPER (Playwright/TRTC Co-Founder) a founding partner in the award-winning The Roustabouts Theatre Co., is a playwright based in San Diego. A proud member of the Dramatists Guild and a former Network Playwright at the nationally renowned Playwrights Development Center Chicago Dramatists. His first play, *Book of Leaves*, was a finalist at the prestigious Ashland News Plays Festival. His play *Jade Heart* premiered in Chicago where it garnered enthusiastic critical and audience acclaim; it had its highly successful west coast premiere at MOXIE Theatre in San Diego. His other plays include *Shadows of Athens*, *Movement Man*, and *Margin of Error*, which kicked off the inaugural season of The Roustabouts Theatre

Co. It was nominated by the San Diego Critics Circle for its Craig Noel "Outstanding New Play" award. His play *gUnTOPIA* premiered on March 13, 2020, presented by TRTC at the MOXIE Theatre in San Diego, but was forced to close after opening night due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Among his works-in-progress is *Bark*, an adaptation of a real-life story from the autobiographical works of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of *The Little Prince*. willcooperplaywright.com



KIM STRASSBURGER (Director) Kim is excited to be returning to The Roustabouts. Directing credits include *Romeo, Romeo and Juliet* (The Roustabouts Theatre Co.); *Handbagged* (MOXIE Theatre); *Bull in a China Shop*, *A Civil War Christmas*, and *A New Brain* (Diversionsary Theatre); *8 Songs for a Mad King* (San Diego Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Special Event and 2017 Best of Festival-San Diego International Fringe Festival-Bodhi Tree Productions); *Sunday in the Park with George* (San Diego Critics Circle Award-Outstanding Direction of a Musical), *Master Class*, *Passion* (San Diego Critics Circle Award Nomination-Outstanding Direction of a Musical), *Grey Gardens*, *Gypsy* (San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Nomination-

Outstanding Direction of a Musical) and *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* (Ion Theatre); *Gutenberg the Musical!* (Backyard Renaissance); *Seascape* and a concert staging of *Little Women: The Musical* (New Village Arts) and *The Woman In Black* with Jason Heil (CSU San Marcos). Acting credits include *The Normal Heart* at Ion Theatre (San Diego Critics Circle Award-Outstanding Featured Actress in a Play), *The Moors* at Diversionsary Theatre and *Simpatico* at New Village Arts Theatre. Kim is a graduate of Catholic University of America and UCSD and is a member of the 2014 Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab. Kim has also served as an Artistic Trustee for Diversionsary Theatre.



TOM STEPHENSON (Walter) Tom is a 40-year veteran of the stage. He trained in Great Britain at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and at the Interlochen Center for the Arts, in Michigan. As a Resident Artist at Cygnet, he has been seen in over 16 productions notably as Hector in *The History Boys* and Joe Ryan in *When the Rain Stops Falling*. Annually, Tom performs the role of Scrooge in Cygnet's production of *A Christmas Carol*. Among his seven credits with Intrepid Theatre Company are Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Bill in *The Quality of Life*, and an award-winning performance as the Colonel in the critically acclaimed *Father Comes Home from the Wars*. At New Village Arts he performed the

roles of James in *Circle Mirror Transformation* and Finbar in *The Weir*. Most recently he made his debut at Diversionary Theatre in *The Hour of Great Mercy*. Tom was awarded Actor of the Year in 2014 by the San Diego Theatre Critics Circle.



LEIGH AKIN (Beth) Leigh is a singer, actor, comedian and visual artist. In a non-quarantine world, she has performed in theaters across the United States including Gotham Comedy Club, Soho Rep, Bronx Opera, Florentine Opera, Milwaukee Opera Theater, Broadway Comedy Club, Skylight Music Theater and North Coast Rep. By day she is the creativity manager and graphic designer for Westminster Presbyterian Church, and in COVID-19 has been creating a series of cooking show cabarets from her apartment called "Leigh Sings Songs and Makes Waffles." Find out more and see her work at LeighEllenAkin.com



JUSTIN LANG (Prince) Justin is grateful to The Roustabouts for this opportunity. Justin is a San Diego based actor. Notable credits: Critics Circle Award-nominated Outstanding Dramatic Productions: *Of Mice and Men* as George Milton, *Trouble In Mind* as Eddie Fenton. He was a company member with San Diego's premier Shakespeare group, Poor Players Theatre Company. He was a founding member and the Production Manager with New Fortune Theatre Company. He has performed with Backyard Renaissance, Common Ground, Diversionary, Intrepid, Ion, Lamb's, MOXIE, New Fortune, New Village Arts, North Coast Rep, Oceanside Theater, Sierra Rep, The Eastern, Playwrights Project, Poor Players.



MAYBELLE SHIMIZU (Sylvie) Maybelle is excited to make their debut with The Roustabouts in *Book of Leaves*. Their favorite acting credits include *Bull in a China Shop* (Diversionary Theatre), *As Bees in Honey Drown* (OnStage Playhouse), *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (USD), *Tartuffe* (USD MFA), *Fault of Falling* (SD Fringe 2017). Maybelle earned their BA in Theatre Arts and Performance Studies and Psychology and is represented by Shamon-Freitas Talent.



DURWOOD MURRAY (Jack) Durwood is so happy to be performing again, previously appearing in *Handbagged* and *Our Lady of Kibeho* at MOXIE Theatre. He's also appeared in *The Servant of 2 Masters* and *To Kill A Mockingbird* (New Village Arts); *Well and A Civil War Christmas* (Diversions Theatre); and *Father Comes Home from the Wars Parts I, II, and III* (Intrepid Theatre Company). Durwood like to thank The Usual Suspects, Wondrous Strange, and all The Partners for their love and support.



KANDACE CRYSTAL (Alice) Kandace is an Actor, Director, & Florida State alum from Miami, FL. As Artistic Director of American History Theater and Associate Artistic Director of Trinity Theatre Company, Kandace implemented an online discussion series examining historical American events on the mental health of marginalized communities. Additionally, in response to the disproportionate murder of black and brown people at the hands of police, Kandace developed a Podcast/Oral Documentary with Cloudcast Media entitled 8:46-The Catalyst for Change. She hopes to continue using her art to tell the stories of people whose stories need to be told. Keep up with her journey on social media, @KandaceCrystal on all platforms.



REBECCA CRIGLER (Stage Directions/TRTC General Manager) has been called many different things by many different people in a few different places. Sometimes she's called a "producer" (with and without a prefix): *Mike Birbiglia's The New One* (Lortel Award nomination) and *Thank God For Jokes; Chris Gethard: Career Suicide* (Lynn Redgrave Theatre - NYC); *The American Tradition* (New Light Theater Project - NYC); *Lucie Pohl: Hi, Hitler; I Lost You There; Pass Over; The Surgeon and Her Daughters* (Cherry Lane Theatre - NYC); *Whirlwind* (New York Innovative Theatre Award nomination, The Wild Project - NYC); and *A Sunnyside Mixtape* (Queens, NY). Sometimes she is called a "company manager": *Downtown Race Riot, Jerry Springer – The Opera, Good for Otto, Peace for Mary Frances* (The New Group - NYC); *3 Mics* (Lynn Redgrave Theatre - NYC). Sometimes a "general manager": *A Jewish Joke, gUnTOPIA* (The Roustabouts - NYC and San Diego); *Nick Kroll: One Night Only* (Cherry Lane Theatre - NYC); *The King's Speech* (The National Theatre - DC); ADH Theatricals; Lucille Lortel Theatre Foundation. She's been called a "Production Consultant" for *Jacqueline Novak: Get On Your Knees*, the "Producing Director" for The Misfits Theatre Company, and a "Resident Artist" at New Light Theater Project. Sometimes people call her a friend.



MICHAEL BRUEGGEMEYER (Director of Photography/Editor) is a seven-time EMMY recipient in the Pacific Southwest region. He's an accomplished Director. His films have won Best Film in 48 Hour Film Project events in six out of twelve attempts, including three films which were selected in the top 20 worldwide, out of over 3000 films. He makes his living doing corporate projects, usually working as a one-man band, doing lighting, sound, camera, and sometimes makeup. Both his writing and editing have won awards. A former Director of Photography in IATSE Local 600, Mike has taught seminars on AfterEffects compositing, lighting for green screen, acting for the camera, and the business of the film business.



PHIL JOHNSON (Artistic Director/TRTC Co-Founder) is a proud founding partner in The Roustabouts Theatre Co. As an actor/writer, his solo show, *A Jewish Joke* (co-written with Marni Freedman, directed by David Ellenstein) had an Off-Broadway run at Theatre Row in NYC in March 2019, after a successful San Diego run for The Roustabouts, as well as touring regionally. Other original shows: *Roosevelt: Charge the Bear* (co-written with Marni Freedman), *Withering Heights*, written and performed with Omri Schein and directed by Ellenstein, for TRTC; *She-Rantulas from Outer Space in3D!*, co-written with Ruff Yeager, for Diversionary Theatre and the NY Fringe Festival; and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, as a San Diego Foundation Creative Catalyst Grantee, at North Coast Rep in 2012. Phil played in *Les Misérables* on Broadway and on tour; the Canadian production of *Sunset Boulevard*; and the 1st National Co. of *Miss Saigon*. He is a two-time winner of the San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Craig Noel Award for acting. So. California theatres include North Coast Rep (*Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, *Spelling Bee*), Backyard Renaissance Theatre (*The Zoo Story*), Intrepid Theatre (*Midsummer Night's Dream*), Old Globe (*How the Grinch...*), and Cygnet Theatre (*Mistakes Were Made*, *Pageant*). Local directing credits include SD Playwrights Project and Scripps Ranch Theatre. He teaches and produces a Solo Show Workshop for writer/performers that is part of The Roustabouts season. He recently helped form the new San Diego countywide Theatre Alliance. philjohnson.net



SHER KRIEGER (Operations/Marketing) is a San Diego-based producer, presenter, and consultant. She is well-known for productions presented by SMGO Productions, Schroeder's Club and Cabaret, and Martinis Above Fourth Table + Stage. In addition to working with The Roustabouts and other clients, Sher manages/books *A Jewish Joke* and *Roosevelt: Charge the Bear*, both by playwrights Phil Johnson and Marni Freedman.

ABOUT THE ROUSTABOUTS THEATRE CO.

The Roustabouts Theatre Co. is a San Diego theatre company dedicated to entertaining, educating, and inspiring audiences in Southern California by producing fresh visions of classics, well-known contemporary plays, and new works, bringing together notable local actors, directors, and playwrights. A company of writers, we celebrate the artist and the creative impulse by drawing from the rich, diverse talents of actors, directors, designers, and playwrights who live in our region. The best plays for our audiences matched up with the best local artists.

We believe the new works we produce will have an important impact, give our audiences something to take home into their own lives and deserve a prominent place on the American stage. Our founders bring passion, excitement, and dedication to making great theatre and sharing with the young and old residents of So. Cal and beyond. The company also produces a Solo Show Workshop for writer/performers that encourages new local writers from Southern California. In 2017, TRTC's first year, the company was named Best New Theatre Company by *San Diego Magazine*. Last year TRTC was honored to receive the Don Braunagel Award for Outstanding Achievement by a Small Theater at the San Diego Theatre Critics Circle 2018 Craig Noel Awards.

THE ROUSTABOUTS TEAM

Phil Johnson, *Artistic Director*

Will Cooper, *Co-Founder*

Rebecca Crigler, *General Manager*

Sher Krieger, *Operations/Marketing Consultant*

Devon Neubauer, *Web & Graphic Design*

Daren Scott, *Photography*

Ali Terrill, *Accountant*

Deborah Pantoni, *Volunteer Coordinator*

Julie Ustin, *Volunteer Coordinator*

ADVISORY COUNCIL OFFICERS

Vishal Bansal, MD Chief of Trauma Surgery Scripps Mercy San Diego

Tom Haine, *Lawyer*

Jill G. Hall, *Author*

Dea Hurston, *Philanthropist and Retired San Diego County Arts Commissioner*

Marjory Kaplan, *Consultant and Retired Foundation President*

Michael McCarron, *TRTC Board Member/President & CEO MHM Glass Etching*

Sheryl Rowling MBA, CPA/PFS, *Rowling & Associates Wealth Management*

Jeff Silberman, *Real Estate Developer*

Karen Silberman, *Philanthropist*

Dr. Lynne Thrope, *Reading Therapist & Education Consultant/Founder of The Reading Room*

