

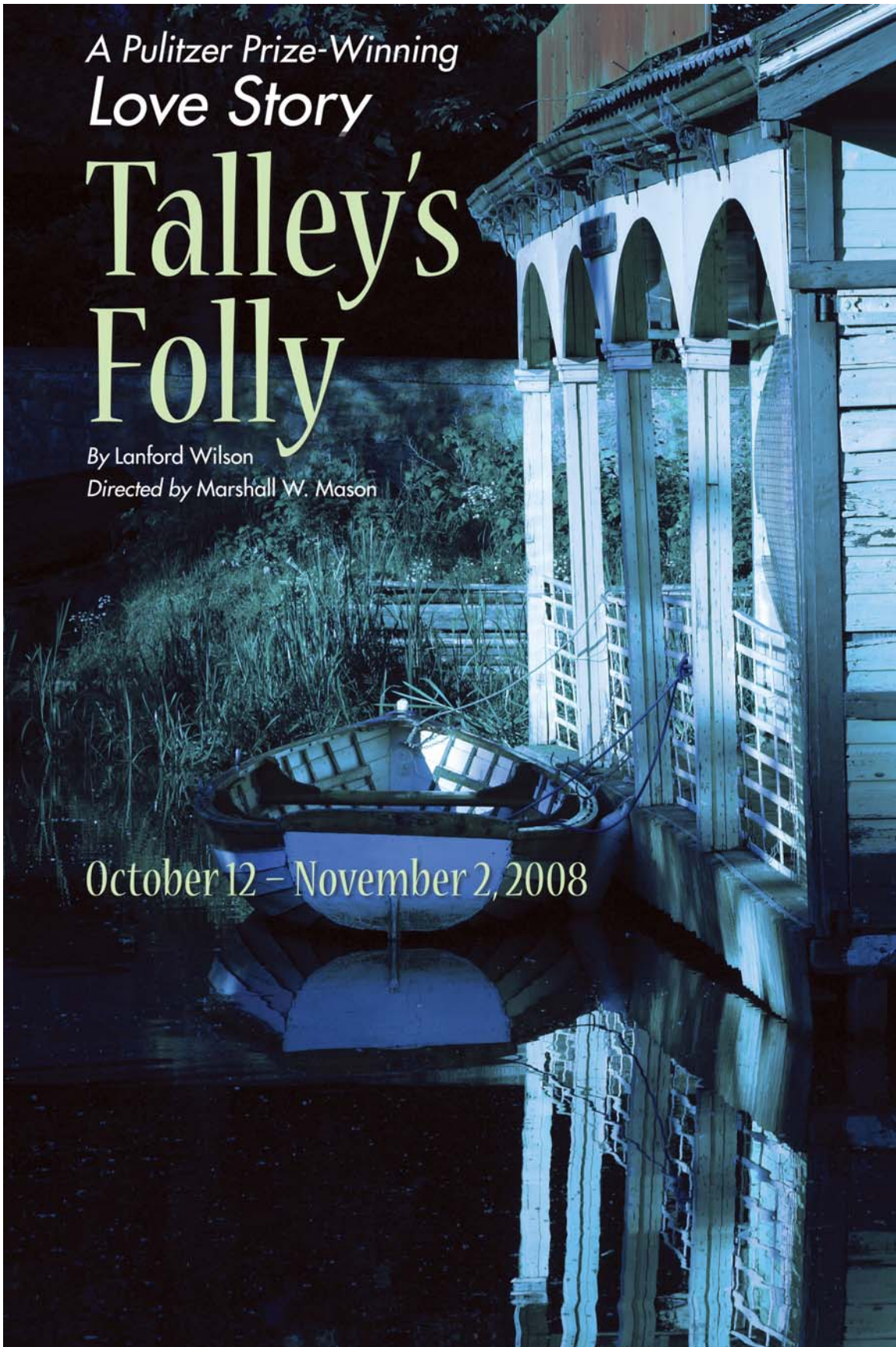
*A Pulitzer Prize-Winning
Love Story*

Talley's Folly

By Lanford Wilson

Directed by Marshall W. Mason

October 12 – November 2, 2008



Emily Mann on *Talley's Folly*



Dear Patrons,

Today, you have the good fortune of seeing one of the great theater teams of the second half of the last century—Marshall W. Mason and Lanford Wilson—come back together to reinvestigate one of their triumphant successes, *Talley's Folly*. I am delighted to share this modern classic with you and your families, and thrilled to host a great American playwright and the premier interpreter of his works at McCarter Theatre.

McCarter audiences haven't heard playwright Lanford Wilson's words on our stage since his wonderful adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* in 1992. Since then, he has continued to write beautiful, poetic, and quintessentially American plays that have delighted audiences across the country. *Talley's Folly* is a play that I have always loved and that has long lingered in my memory. Like Tennessee Williams, Lanford has an extraordinary ability to capture a romantic story with exquisite beauty, devoid of sentimentality. The lovers of the play, Sally Talley and Matt Friedman, discover the humor, awkwardness, and vulnerability of true intimacy. At the same time, the play marvelously intertwines two inherently American stories: Matt's immigrant experience and Sally's political awakening in the American heartland. Set in 1944, the play asks us to examine what it is to be on the homefront of a nation at war. In the midst of this election season, I can't think of a more pertinent question.

The production you are seeing today is the first major revival of *Talley's Folly* in thirty years. Six-time Obie Award winner and five-time Tony Award nominee Marshall Mason is at the helm, joined by the incomparable design team of John Lee Beatty (set), Jennifer Von Mayrhauser (for her twentieth McCarter costume design!), Phil Monat (lighting) and Chuck London (sound). We are blessed with two exquisite actors—the delightful Margot White (of Broadway's *The Farnsworth Invention*) and the superb Richard Schiff (Emmy Award-winner for *The West Wing*). I'm exceedingly proud that at McCarter, we are able to bring the nation's top theater-makers to our stages to challenge themselves and to do their best work. I hope you will enjoy their exploration of this beautiful play as much as I!

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Emily Mann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "E".

CHARACTER PROFILES

MATT FRIEDMAN

Forty-two year-old accountant who lives and works in St. Louis. His slight German-Jewish accent indicates his European roots and brands him as an outsider in the town of Lebanon, Missouri, where he has opted to spend a second July 4th vacation. Although Matt is an unlikely “romantic type,” he has decided to take romantic action by formally attempting to court Sally, much to her family’s and her distress.

MATT

Because you asked me. Why have you not married? Where were you born? How did you get to this stupid country? Because I am a crazy person. Your nurse friends all say something is wacky with Matt that he has never made a fool of himself over some woman; I said, Matt, go down, tell Sally who you are. Once in your life risk something. At least you will know that you did what you could. What do you think she is going to do, bite you?

SALLY TALLEY

Thirty-one year-old nurse’s aide and resident of Lebanon, MO. By Ozark standards, conventional wisdom circa 1944, and her family’s yardstick, Sally is a spinster, yet her attractiveness, straightforward Midwestern vivacity, and nearly-suppressed yearnings belie the stereotype. She, too, is an outsider of sorts.

SALLY

Everyone is always saying what a crazy old-maid Emma Goldman I’m becoming, I wanted to show them how conservative and ignorant I really am.

MATT

You are not conservative, you are not ignorant, and Emma Goldman, believe me, was no old maid.

THE OLD BOATHOUSE

As much a character as a setting, the old Victorian boathouse was built in 1870 by Sally’s Uncle Whistler, whom Sally remembers as a man who was happy, “got pleasure out of making things for people,” and who did “exactly what he wanted to do.” Everyone in Lebanon thought he was crazy, but Sally considers him to have been the “healthiest member” of the Talley family. The highly ornamental boathouse, now dilapidated, is one of the many architectural follies he built around town. It is special to Sally.

SALLY

I used to think that he made the place for me. I was little when he died, but I thought he knew I'd come along, so he built it just the way it is—falling down—the way people used to build Roman ruins for their gardens. That way nobody else would come here and discover the magic of the place except me.

Glossary

Aperture: An opening.

Sally

Buddy said he run you off with a shotgun.

Matt

He had a large two-barreled weapon, yes, with apertures about like so.

Emma Goldman: Goldman immigrated to the United States from Russia in the early twentieth-century and was subsequently (and frequently) incarcerated for her anarchist and feminist politics. Her crimes included distributing information concerning birth control and “inducing persons not to register for the draft.” A prominent speaker at political rallies, Goldman also wrote prolifically on topics such as atheism, capitalism, and sexuality. She co-founded the anarchist journal *Mother Earth*, which circulated from 1906-1917.

Sally

Everyone is always saying what a crazy old-maid Emma Goldman I'm becoming, I wanted to show them how conservative and ignorant I really am.

Matt

You are not conservative, you are not ignorant, and Emma Goldman, believe me, was no old maid.

Fibber McGee: The brainchild of married vaudeville performers Jim and Marian Jordon, *Fibber McGee and Molly* is an example of classic American radio programming. Enjoying an impressive run from 1935-59, the wildly popular and emphatically patriotic *Fibber* frequently referenced World War II and dedicated entire segments to encouraging their listeners to purchase war bonds.

Matt

Hey, come on, you'll drown out Fibber McGee.

Folly: A decorative, often extravagant, building constructed without a functional purpose.

Matt

We have a genuine Victorian folly here. A boathouse. Constructed of louvers, and lattice and geegaws.

Funicular: A type of railway that facilitates trains' progress up and down severe inclines with a cable; ascending and descending trains balance one another's weight.

Matt

The Kaiser sent the Prussian and the Uke and the Lat and the Probable Lit to study engineering wonders: many months in the Swiss mountains to watch the building of a funicular, yes?

Geegaw: A trinket.

Matt

We have a genuine Victorian folly here. A boathouse. Constructed of louvers, and lattice and geegaws.

Goyim: Although the translation from Hebrew literally means "nation" or "people," goyim is most commonly employed as a synonym for Gentiles. Can be used perjoratively.

Matt

My hand is bleeding. Where did you hide the alcohol? [He goes to the gin bottle, keeping an eye on her.] I called my uncle and my aunt. Seventy years old. They say, Matt, don't get mixed up with the goyim. They have my cousins call me; old neighbors I haven't heard from in years. I say I must live my own life. I come down here protected from tetanus; I am getting rabies from an alte moid.

Gregarious: Desiring the company of others.

Matt

The irony turned out to be that the German government reasoned that this gregarious Prussian engineer knew something vital to the interest of the Kaiser--

Jack Sprat: The title character of an English nursery rhyme who "could eat no fat" and whose "wife could eat no lean."

Matt

So now I read like a madman, and I retain nothing at all. But I read like lightning.

Sally

I read very slowly and practically memorize every word.

Matt

Jack Sprat. Am I okay?

Lambent: Gently gliding over a surface.

Stage Directions

Lighting and sound should be very romantic: the sunset at the opening, later the moonlight slants through gaps in the ceiling and walls reflecting the river in lambent ripples across the inside of the room.

Louvers: Slotted frames which admit light and air into buildings while preventing the entrance of rain and noise.

Stage Directions

A Victorian boathouse constructed of louvers, lattice in decorative panels, and a good deal of Gothic Revival gingerbread.

Miss Fanny Brice: A Jewish entertainer whose over-the-top, highly ethnicized performances of Jewish femininity propelled her to stardom in Broadway revues such as *The Zigfield Follies*. On the radio, she starred as "Baby Snooks". Brice enjoyed radio fame until her death in 1951. Contemporary audiences are perhaps most familiar with Brice through Barbara Streisand's performance in the film adaptation of the 1964 Broadway musical, *Funny Girl*.

Sally

They're all listening to the radio.

Matt

Saved by Miss Fanny Brice.

Prussian: Prussians are a group of Europeans closely related to Lithuanians and Latvians who populate what is now Northern Germany. Under the leadership of Frederick the Great, Prussia was a major European power throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the end of World War I (and the Hohenzollern monarchy), Prussia joined the Weimar Republic as a free state in 1919. The Nazi regime revoked Prussia's practical claim to statehood in 1934 before the Allied Powers of World War II abolished its independence in 1947.

Matt

I know, I know. [Pause. Finally decides.] Very well, Miss Sally Talley. There was a Prussian and a Uke (Ukrainian, yes?). A Prussian and a Uke and a Lat and a Probable Lit, who all traveled over Europe.

Ratiocination: The process of thinking methodically, logically.

Matt

Puzzles don't waste my time, Sally. I'm very good at puzzles. I have great powers of ratiocination. I'm a regular Sherlock.

Rationing: During World War II, items such as sugar, milk, meat, and gasoline were high in demand and short in supply. In response, the government "rationed" these supplies: families were only allowed to purchase them in small quantities, regardless of how much they could afford. While various types of rationing existed—from the uniform rationing of sugar to the rationing of typewriters, for which one needed to show a certificate demonstrating need—all rationed items were purchased with "ration coupons" or "ration coins," rather than conventional money.

Sen-Sen: A brand of licorice-scented breath freshener.

Matt

You have Sen-Sen for your breath? [She opens her purse.] No, no. [He takes a cigarette, offers her one. She sighs, takes it. He gets a lighter from his pocket. It doesn't work. She opens her purse, produces a lighter, and lights his and hers. Looking around.]

Thorstein Veblen

An early twentieth-century economist who helped found "institutional economics," a movement now referred to as "evolutionary economics." His book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) is one of the first polemical critiques of consumerism.

Matt

I like it better the way she told me. The preacher told you you were supposed to be teaching from the Methodist reader, not from Thorstein Veblen.

Sally

They were having problems with union organizers at the garment factory.

Matt

Some of the kids' mothers work there.

Sally

They asked me what was happening.

Matt

I like that. So you read to them from ... ?

Sally

The Theory of the Leisure Class.

Una furtive Lagrima: In Donizetti's Italian opera *L'elisir d'amour* (*The Elixir of Love*), Nemorino sings "Una furtive Lagrima" ("A Furtive Tear") when he realizes that his love potion has successfully seduced Adina, the woman he desires.

Matt

Poor Whistler. He should see what is happening to his boathouse. He'd sing "Una furtiva Lagrima."

USO: The United Services Organization is a non-profit dedicated to fostering the morale of US military troops and their families. During World War II, there existed more than 3,000 USO Clubs where troops could dance, witness legendary performances by famed entertainers, and attend other social events.

Matt

So the future is pug dogs and apartments and USO get-togethers and drinking with the girls.

Whirligig: A spinning toy.

Sally

Why does everything have to be cynical? He was not in the least frustrated. He was a happily married man with seven kids. He made toys. Tap-dancing babies and whirligigs. He got pleasure out of making things for people.

Timeline of 1944

However inappropriate it may be to weigh the significance of one era over another, from a contemporary vantage point, the first half of the twentieth century appears particularly dense with events of historical and lasting importance. In 1920, after campaigns for women's suffrage had succeeded in other western nations, the US Congress finally ratified the Nineteenth Amendment and granted women the right to vote. In Eastern Europe, the rise of the Bolsheviks to power after the Russian Revolution resulted in the creation of the Soviet Union, a project which augmented the role communism would play in global politics. These early decades also bore witness to the rise of staunch nationalism amongst world superpowers and resulted in World War I, which in turn radically reorganized the boundaries of Eastern Europe with the creation of many new countries. Following close on the heels of World War I was the Great Depression of the 1930s, which created an atmosphere that fostered fascism and Nazism. Hitler's 1939 invasion of Poland led France and Great Britain to declare war, beginning World War II. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, in December 1941 the US entered the war. Talley's Folly takes place in July 1944. Here are some notable events of that year:

Mar 27	Thousands of Jews are murdered in Kaunas, Lithuania.
April 3	"Smith vs. Allwright" US Supreme Court decision ruled, "white primaries" are declared unconstitutional, thus declaring that black citizens are eligible to vote in all elections.
May 20	US Communist Party dissolves.
May 21	Nearly 1.5 Million People gather in Central Park to celebrate "I Am An American Day."
June 6	(D-Day)The Battle of Normandy begins.
June 29	Jackie Robinson is arrested, court-martialed, and finally acquitted after refusing to move to the back of a segregated military bus.
August 4	Anne Frank and her family are discovered in an Amsterdam warehouse.
August 25	Liberation of Paris.
October 8	Premier of the radio show <i>The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet</i> .
October 9	Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin begin a conference in Moscow to discuss the future of Europe.
November 7	Franklin Delano Roosevelt becomes the only US President elected to a fourth term.
December 26	Tennessee Williams' <i>The Glass Menagerie</i> premieres at Chicago's Civic Theatre.

Profile of Lebanon, Missouri

In 1889, a worker digging a new well in the rural Missouri town of Lebanon, was shocked to discover that his tools could pick up nails. Rumors of the magnetic water's supposed healing properties quickly spread and the small town, nestled amongst the Ozarks in southwestern Missouri, became a popular tourist destination. For playwright Lanford Wilson, a Lebanon native, it wasn't the pull of magnetic well water that attracted him back to his hometown, it was: "the sound of Missouri—I know that better than I know anything" ("I Hear America Talking," *Rolling Stone*, 1982).

Lebanon was first settled in the 1820s, long before it became home to the fictional Talley family. Originally perched on a hill, Lebanon provided its residents with picturesque views of the surrounding Ozarks. When town leaders refused to donate land for the construction of a train depot in 1869, the railroad company responded by erecting a depot a mile away, inspiring the development of a "New Lebanon" around this locale, while "Old Town" remained up on the hill. Although robbing its residents of the view "Old Lebanon" provided, the new location incorporates a diverse topography: beautiful streams, green pastures, wooded forests, and arid farmland frame this rural community.

Historically, a variety of manufacturing plants have called Lebanon home, but in the latter half of the twentieth century, local industry shifted to boating and fishing supplies, including the boats which populate the nearby Niangua River. In a preface to the published text of *Talley's Folly*, Wilson recalls being mistaken about how close he lived to the river growing up: "I remembered swimming there. What I didn't remember was the twenty minute car ride getting there." This combination of remembering and forgetting has been instrumental in imagining the Lebanon of the *Talley Trilogy*; Wilson writes "Nostalgia...soften[s] the play, giving it the scent of honeysuckle and sound of a distant band playing across that imagined river."

Jewish Immigration and Culture in Missouri

"No Jew is ever the first Jew anywhere. There has always been at least one there before him," wrote famed Jewish historian Jacob Rader in *The Colonial American Jew*. That might be true anywhere in the world—anywhere, that is, except Lebanon, Missouri. When Matt Friedman ventures to the small town in *Talley's Folly*, he may well have been the first Jew to set foot in the rural terrain. According to the 2000 census, not much has changed since Lanford Wilson's imagined 1944: Lebanon remains without a single Jewish-identified resident. In stark contrast, Matt's home, St. Louis, is one of the top dozen centers of Jewish culture in the United States. When Matt emigrated, he joined St. Louis' century-old, rich cultural tapestry of Jewish immigrant experience.

The earliest documented example of a Jew residing in St. Louis is Joseph Philipson, who moved to the city in 1807. It wasn't until the 1830s, however, that a visible Jewish community emerged—a development facilitated by an increase in German immigrants, a substantial portion of whom were Jewish. This German population was soon complemented by Eastern European Jews, who first immigrated to the United States in the 1860s and continued well into the early twentieth century.

Lanford Wilson: America's Lyrical Realist By Carrie Hughes

"Lanford Wilson has his ear cocked to the voice of the American people," wrote journalist and critic Don Shewey in *Rolling Stone* in 1982. The same year, *New York Times* theater critic Frank Rich called him "one of the few artists of our theater who can truly make America sing." *Talley's Folly*, Wilson's 1979 love story about a free-thinking small-town Missouri girl and an Eastern European Jewish immigrant, is set in the Ozark town of Lebanon, Missouri, where Wilson was born in 1937. The play captures an American story in Wilson's unique lyrical voice, challenging and reflecting the quintessentially American community in which Wilson was raised.

Wilson's parents divorced when he was five, and he moved with his mother to Springfield, Missouri, where she was employed in a garment factory. As a teenager in nearby Ozark, he was captivated by plays like *Death of Salesman* on field trips to nearby Southwest Missouri State College. After some college in Missouri and San Diego, and a stint in Chicago working in advertising and writing short stories, Wilson turned to playwriting. An adult-education course in playwriting at the University of Chicago in 1959 was his formal theatrical education, and his playwriting career began.

In 1962, Wilson made his way to New York, and by 1963 his short plays *So Long at the Fair* and *Home Free* were produced at the Caffe Cino, the downtown coffee house and performance space. At Caffe Cino, Wilson also met the director Marshall Mason, who would be his artistic collaborator for years to come and who directs this production of *Talley's Folly*. Fascinated by the characters that surrounded him in New York, Wilson wrote *Balm in Gilead*, his first full-length play, a 32-actor-extravaganza in which he depicted the late-night Upper West Side of New York in the 1960s. Directed by Mason at La Mama in 1965, it was a huge success.

Balm in Gilead also planted the seed of the idea for an institution that would become important to both Wilson's career and the shape of off-Broadway theater in the latter part of the twentieth century. "When we did *Balm in Gilead*, which has a huge cast, Lanford was just so thrilled with the production, while the production was still running he said to me, we really ought to keep these people together and start a theater company," explains Mason. "So, in fact, the idea of creating a theater really does go back to Lanford." While it didn't happen right away, in 1969, Mason and Wilson, along with actress Tanya Berezin and director Rob Thirkield, established the off-Broadway Circle Repertory Company, which would produce and develop Wilson's work, including productions of *The Great Nebula in Orion* (1972); *The HOT L BALTIMORE* (1973, with a record breaking off-Broadway transfer that ran for over three years); *The Mound Builders* (1975); *Serenading Louie* (1976); and *Burn This* (1987), until it closed in 1996.

After *Balm*, Wilson realized he wanted to work with the rhythms of the language he grew up with, very different from the frenetic energy of New York speech. As he explained to Shewey: "After a while I thought, here I am, this hillbilly person writing all these New York plays. What am I doing? The sound of Missouri—I know that better than I know anything." His plays *This is the Rill Speaking* (1965) and *The Rimers of Eldritch* (1966) were set in the Missouri of his youth and reflect this language.

But it was his 1978 play *Fifth of July* that put Wilson's Lebanon on the theatrical map. Wilson set out to write a play in response to his frustration and distress about the state of America at the end of the Vietnam era. At first, he thought he would set it on Long Island, where he was renovating a house himself. But he changed his mind. "The play would be one of restoration and commitment. Something the country sorely needed. I was almost surprised when I realized that the play had to be set in my hometown of Lebanon, Missouri. This had to be about the heartland," writes Wilson in his introduction.

Fifth of July, the play that inspired *Talley's Folly*, is set on the Fourth of July, 1977. Sally, now a widow of 64, carries around a candy box filled with the ashes of her husband, the late Matt Friedman. The actress Helen Stenborg, who

was playing Sally in the premiere, demanded that Wilson help her find a model for Matt, to help her imagine who this man had been. Wilson first suggested Stenborg's husband, but this idea was promptly rejected. His next suggestion, the actor Judd Hirsch, who had appeared with Stenborg in *HOT L BALTIMORE*, clicked. As Mason explains, that conversation was also an inspiration: "Lanford was intrigued, because a lot about Matt and Sally's first meeting is talked about in *Fifth of July*—she talks about their first night together...the events that happen at the boathouse, but from a very different point of view." Wilson conceived a second play, about the younger Sally and Matt, that became *Talley's Folly*. In his introduction to the published version of *Talley's Folly*, Wilson writes: "That was the genesis of *Talley's Folly*. Imagining Matt and Sally on a date—this big, sexy, clumsy Jew coming from St. Louis down to Lebanon, Missouri where nobody had ever seen a Jew before—was very exciting. I knew immediately that I wanted this to be unlike anything I had written. It would be much lighter, with a gloriously happy ending." *Talley's Folly* won the 1980 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and transferred to Broadway where it was nominated for five Tony awards. Although Wilson played with the idea of writing a larger series of plays, each representing a war that had touched the family in the style of the period, in 1981 he finished the *Talley Trilogy* with *A Tale Told* (later revised and renamed *Talley & Son*), the story of the rest of the Talley family on July 4, 1944, the night Wilson describes as "the night America started locking her doors. And on the night Sally made her getaway with Matt."

Wilson has been compared to Anton Chekhov (whom he has translated) and another Missouri playwright, Tennessee Williams. Wilson's unique style—a combination of realism and slightly elevated language, often called lyrical realism—is best explained by Mason: "Lanford writes everyday speech and yet it has the rhythm and elevation of poetry, without being 'poetic.' It's lyrical, just raised somehow from reality, and yet very, very believable. People really do talk the way Lanford writes, or at least you have the illusion that they do."

Who's Who

Cast



Matt Friedman
Richard Schiff



Sally Talley
Margot White

Artistic Staff

*Artistic
Director/Resident
Playwright*

Emily Mann

*Interim Managing
Director*

Kathleen Nolan

Written By

Lanford Wilson

Directed By

Marshall W. Mason

Set Design

John Lee Beatty

Costume Design

Jennifer von Mayrhauser

Lighting Design

Phil Monat

Sound Design

Chuck London

Producing Director

Mara Isaacs

Director of Production

David York

*Production Stage
Manager*

Alison Cote

Casting Director

Laura Stanczyk, CSA

Marshall Mason on Lanford Wilson and *Talley's Folly*

"What draws me to plays is the depth and dimensions of characters. Lanford Wilson is a master at that," *Talley's Folly* director and longtime Wilson collaborator Marshall Mason explained in a recent interview. "*Talley's Folly* is a perfect example of complex characters who have interesting, complex, three-dimensional lives. We grow to know them slowly, and once you know them you'll never forget them."

The way Marshall Mason tells it, his first meeting with playwright Lanford Wilson sounds a little awkward. A one-act play of Wilson's was being produced after a significant revision, and Wilson, intrigued that Mason was already familiar with his work, was eager to know what he thought. Mason told Wilson that by revising he'd ruined the play. That was in 1964, and the conversation launched a collaboration that would continue for over forty years. "Lanford learned right upfront that I was going to be very honest with him," Mason notes.

When Wilson first brought the script of *Talley's Folly* to his colleagues at Circle Rep for the group's usual Friday new play readings they were enchanted—except for Mason, who objected to a major storytelling point. "Lanford was really annoyed at me," Mason admits, "because he felt he'd written a perfect play and now I was saying there was something wrong with it."

SPOILER ALERT!

In Lanford Wilson's own words, from his introduction to *Talley's Folly* in *The Talley Trilogy*: "Don't read this if you haven't read the play, as I'm going to give away the whole shebang....In the first draft Matt came to Lebanon already knowing that Sally couldn't have children.... Everyone loved it, that is, except Marshall W. Mason, who was to direct.... [Marshall] said something like, 'So the story, essentially, is Matt comes down to Lebanon and browbeats this girl into a hysterical admission that she's barren.'"

In his published introduction Wilson concedes that "Marshall must have been very convincing because the chip fell off my shoulder and very soon I was taking notes." As Mason remembers it, "Lanford begrudgingly went back to work on it...and since that revision he hasn't touched it. Normally when we go in to rehearsal, there are rewrites that come about as actors ask questions and he'll change a line or whatever. To the best of my memory after he rewrote *Talley's Folly* to provide the structure that was missing in the first draft, not a word was changed. We felt we had a little perfect play in which it all works out exactly on time, just like clockwork. It's delightful when you get to the end of the play and Matt looks at his watch and says, ah, right on the button."

Talley's Folly premiered in 1979, starring Judd Hirsch and Trish Hawkins. Productions followed quickly — Los Angeles, a Broadway transfer, Chicago, London—and the play has firmly established itself in repertoire of the American theater. Mason himself has directed six productions (McCarter will be his seventh). Each production, of course, is unique, but for Mason the timing of McCarter's production makes it particularly resonant:

"I think it's a good time to be doing *Talley's Folly* because in 1944 the Second World War was winding down, but our boys were still in danger. The third play of the Talley trilogy, *Talley & Son* takes place the same night as *Talley's Folly*, and in that play, Sally's brother Timmy is killed. Although we don't learn about it in *Talley's Folly*, that makes the play to me, very, very current. Here we are again at war, and we're being, as Matt says, led by the nose. And so the play offers a human viewpoint of war and what it does to people and what our obligations are on the home front during a time of war. It's a beautiful love story, but it has wonderful social implications. It reverberates beautifully in terms of today."

Educators Introduction

Welcome to the McCarter Audience Resource Guide Educator Edition for our production of Lanford Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Talley's Folly*. This guide has been assembled to complement both your students' theater-going experience as well as your class curriculum by offering a variety of interesting and engaging activities for both pre-show and post-performance instruction and enjoyment.

This production of *Talley's Folly* offers enrichment opportunities in language arts, historical and socio-cultural studies, theater and media/visual arts. Students can analyze the themes central to Lanford Wilson's play and reflect upon them in relation to their own personal experience; make investigations into the life, career, and theatrical works of this great American playwright and into the historical context of the world of *Talley's Folly*; learn about the principles of action and conflict in preparation for their own dramatic analysis of Wilson's play; as well as creatively contemplate *Talley's Folly* and its performance in imaginative, artistic activities. Teachers can also link their classroom directly to McCarter Theatre via the McCarter Theatre Blog (www.mccarter.org/blog), which can be used to read about the production as it moves from pre-production into rehearsal and performance.

Our student audiences are often our favorite audiences at McCarter, and we encourage you and your students to join us for a live and lively conversation with members of the cast after the performance. Our visiting artists are always impressed with the preparation and thoughtfulness of McCarter's young audiences, and the post-performance discussion offers a unique opportunity for students to engage intellectually with professional theater practitioners. We look forward to seeing all of you for a wonderful discussion about *Talley's Folly*.

CORE CURRICULUM STANDARDS

According to the NJ Department of Education, “experience with and knowledge of the arts is a vital part of a complete education.” Our production of *Talley’s Folly* and the activities outlined in this guide are designed to enrich your students’ education by addressing the following specific Core Curriculum Standards for Visual and Performing Arts:

- 1.1 All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater and visual arts.
- 1.2 All students will refine perceptual, intellectual, physical and technical skills through creating dance, music, theater and/or visual arts.
- 1.3 All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dance, music, theater, and visual arts.
- 1.4 All students will demonstrate knowledge of the process of critique.
- 1.6 All students will develop design skills for planning the form and function of space, structures, objects, sounds and events.

Viewing *Talley’s Folly* and then participating in the pre- and post-show discussions suggested in this audience guide will also address the following Core Curriculum Standards in Language Arts Literacy:

- 3.2 All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
- 3.3 All students will speak in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
- 3.4 All students will listen actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations.
- 3.5 All students will access, view, evaluate and respond to print, non-print and electronic texts and resources.

In addition, the production of *Talley’s Folly* as well as the audience guide activities will help to fulfill the following Social Studies Core Curriculum Standards:

- 6.1 All students will utilize historical thinking, problem solving and research skills to maximize their understanding of civics, history, geography and economics.
- 6.6 All students will apply knowledge of spatial relationships and geographic skills to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and cultural environment.

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION, QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION, AND ACTIVITIES

Note to Educators: Use the following assignments, questions, and activities to introduce your students to Talley's Folly and its intellectual and artistic origins, context, and themes, as well as to engage their imaginations and creativity before they see the production.

1. **EXPLORING AND PERSONALIZING THE THEMES OF *TALLEY'S FOLLY*, BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE.** Although playwright Lanford Wilson has described his play *Talley's Folly* as "one simple romance," the play, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1980, is filled with complex, yet relatable, themes that make it much more than simply a story about romantic love and courtship.

The questions for discussion immediately below are designed for both teachers able to incorporate the reading of *Talley's Folly* into their pre-performance curriculum (read Section A, then proceed to C), as well as for those whose students will not have the opportunity to read the play in advance of their experience of the performance (begin with Section B).

- A. After reading *Talley's Folly* either aloud as a class or individually, ask your students to brainstorm a list of themes central to the play. [See section B for a list of themes.]
- B. Set in Wilson's hometown of Lebanon, Missouri in 1944, *Talley's Folly* illuminates the extraordinary evening in the lives of Matt Friedman and Sally Talley (see "Character Profiles" in this audience guide) when Matt drives four hours to Sally's home to confront her about his feelings. Associated with the main action of the play are the issues that color, complicate, and conflict the simple story, including: Sally and Matt's disparate backgrounds; ethnic and cultural prejudice and intolerance; social expectations regarding love, marriage, family, and procreation versus the interests, wants, and goals of the individual; the position, status, and experience of the outcast or misfit; the yearning for belonging; the repressive and isolating nature of secrets; and the healing power of confession. Share these themes with your students.
- C. Ask your students if they find a personal connection (either in relationship to their own experience or to someone that they know) to any of the themes of *Talley's Folly*. Have them write/journal about one theme with which they personally

connect. If appropriate, students may volunteer to share their thematic connection with the rest of the class for purposes of discussion.

- D. Ask your students to recall and make connections to other plays or works of literature they have read or studied with themes similar to those of *Talley's Folly*.
2. **ENVISIONING *TALLEY'S FOLLY*: SET DESIGN PROJECT.** It has been said by drama scholars and theater critics alike that the old boathouse, which is the sole setting for *Talley's Folly*, is the third character in Lanford Wilson's two-character play. Wilson takes great care in describing the boathouse in his opening stage directions for the play:

A Victorian boathouse constructed of louvers, lattice in decorative panels, and a good deal of Gothic Revival gingerbread. The riverside is open to the audience. The interior and exterior walls have faded to a pale gray. The boathouse is covered by a heavy canopy of maple and surrounded by almost waist-high weeds and the slender, perfectly vertical limbs of a weeping willow. Lighting and sound should be very romantic; the sunset at the opening, later the moonlight, slant through gaps in the ceiling and walls reflecting the river in lambent ripples across the inside of the room.

The boathouse contains two boats, one turned upside down, buckets, boxes, no conventional seating. Overhead is a latticework attic in which are stored creels, bamboo poles, nets, seines, minnow buckets, traps, floats, etc. all along past use.

Have your students bring to life their personal design conception of the setting for *Talley's Folly* by creating a three-dimensional set model in miniature or a design rendering (full color illustration) in whatever medium they might feel is appropriate.

- Students should begin by researching the definition of an "architectural folly" and any other words or terms in the above description with which they are unfamiliar. Although no one should be required to create a literal design based upon Wilson's description—indeed, some might envision an abstract setting for the play—many may want to conduct some image research of boathouses, Victorian architecture, fishing accoutrements, etc.
- If theatrical set design models are something with which students are unfamiliar, they can access the McCarter Theatre

Youtube page to view a video of professional scenic designer Eugene Lee (who has designed seven McCarter sets in the past four seasons) and his set design model for Emily Mann's *A Seagull in the Hamptons*. The Eugene Lee Video Interviews are accessible at the following link

<http://www.mccarter.org/blog/?p=278>; an up-close tour of the model can be easily accessed in the fifth of five segments, entitled "Eugene Lee Discusses His Model for *A Seagull in the Hamptons*."

- Models may be constructed out of any arts and crafts materiel/supplies available to teacher and students (e.g., cardboard, paper, clay/Sculpey, wood, etc.) Although the size of each model may be left up to its individual designer, every completed model should include a cut-out or silhouette of a human figure to clarify its scale.
 - Renderings may be created in whatever medium the students feel is appropriate to create the tone of the play. Popular mediums include acrylics, color pencil, collage, markers and computer art programs.
 - Students should be given time to show their finished *Talley's Folly* models and/or renderings to the class, and they should explain their design choices and process.
3. **IN CONTEXT: LANFORD WILSON AND *TALLEY'S FOLLY*.** To prepare your students for *Talley's Folly* and to deepen their level of understanding of and appreciation for the life and work of great American playwright Lanford Wilson, have your students research, either in groups or individually, the following topics:

- Lanford Wilson:
 - Biography
 - Early one-acts (*Ludlow Fair*, *Home Free*, *The Madness of Lady Bright*)
- Caffè Cino
- Major works:
 - *Balm in Gilead*
 - *The Rimers of Eldrich*
 - *Lemon Sky*
 - *The HOT L BALTIMORE*
 - *Burn This*
- Marshall W. Mason
- Circle Repertory Company
- The Other Talley Plays
 - *Fifth of July*
 - *Talley & Son*
- *Talley's Folly* related:
 - Lebanon, Missouri
 - Architectural follies
 - Anti-Semitism in America, 1930's-1940's
 - America, c. 1944
 - Politics
 - Family
 - Popular culture
 - Life at home during WWII

Have your students teach one another about their individual or group topics via oral and illustrated (i.e., posters or PowerPoint) reports. Following the presentations ask your students to reflect upon their research process and discoveries.

4. **PREPARING TO OBSERVE *TALLEY'S FOLLY* THROUGH THE PLAYWRIGHT'S LENS.** At the heart of any great play, such as Lanford Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Talley's Folly*, are playwriting's two essential dramatic elements: action and conflict. Before coming to McCarter to see the play, sharpen your students' dramaturgical knowledge and understanding by providing them with the following terms/concepts:

Action: *What a character wants*; also often referred to as a character's objective. Characters have both immediate actions (in any given scene) and overarching actions (in the entire course of a play).

Conflict: *That which stands in the way of what a character wants*; also referred to as an obstacle. Conflicts come in two varieties:

External: A conflict which comes from outside the character, either in the form of an inanimate object or another character.

Internal: A conflict which comes from within the character, in that she or he wants more than one thing and therefore is blocked from both.

To reinforce your students' command of the above terms, utilize any plays that they have read in common and ask them to identify the actions and conflicts of each play's major characters. Then ask them, as they experience *Talley's Folly*, to keep track of the actions and conflicts of characters Matt and Sally. Points to consider:

- What are Matt's and Sally's individual actions/wants when the play begins?
- What conflicts arise to face each want? What keeps Matt or Sally from getting what they want?
- Do either Matt or Sally suffer from an internal conflict?
- Who gets what they want by the play's end?
- Does either Matt's or Sally's action/want change in the course of the play? If so, then why?
- How and why do Matt and/or Sally change, if at all, during the course of the play?

Following your *Talley's Folly* attendance, utilize the above questions for a discussion of the dramatic content of the play.

5. **A THEATER REVIEWER PREPARES.** A theater critic or reviewer is essentially a "professional audience member," whose job is to report the news, in detail, of a play's production and performance through active and descriptive language for a target audience of readers (e.g., their peers, their community, or those interested in the Arts). To prepare your students to write an accurate, insightful and compelling theater review following their attendance at McCarter Theatre's production of Lanford Wilson's *Talley's Folly*, prime them for the task by discussing the three basic elements of a theatrical review: reportage, analysis and judgment.

- Reportage is concerned with the basic information of the production, or the journalist's "four w's" (i.e., who, what, where, when), as well as the elements of production, which include the text, setting, costumes, lighting, sound, acting and directing (see the [Theater Reviewer's Checklist](#)). When reporting upon these observable phenomena of production, the reviewer's approach should be factual, descriptive and objective;

any reference to quality or effectiveness should be reserved for the analysis section of the review.

- With analysis the theater reviewer segues into the realm of the subjective and attempts to interpret the artistic choices made by the director and designers and the effectiveness of these choices; specific moments, ideas and images from the production are considered in the analysis.
- Judgment involves the reviewer's opinion as to whether the director's and designers' intentions were realized, and if their collaborative, artistic endeavor was ultimately a worthwhile one. Theater reviewers always back up their opinions with reasons, evidence and details.

Remind your students that the goal of a theater reviewer is "to see accurately, **describe** fully, **think** clearly, and then (and only then) to **judge** fairly the merits of the work" (Thaiss and Davis, *Writing for the Theatre*, 1999). Proper analytical preparation before the show and active listening and viewing during will result in the effective writing and crafting of their reviews.

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

*Note to Educators: Use the following assignments, questions, and activities to have students evaluate their experience of the performance of *Talley's Folly*, as well as to encourage their own imaginative and artistic projects through further exploration of the play in production. Consider also that some of the pre-show activities might enhance your students' experience following the performance.*

1. **TALLEY'S FOLLY: A DISCUSSION.** Following their attendance at the performance of *Talley's Folly*, ask your students to reflect on the questions below. You might choose to have them answer each individually or you may divide students into groups for round-table discussions. Have them consider each question, record their answers and then share their responses with the rest of the class.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT THE PLAY IN PRODUCTION

- a. What was your overall reaction to *Talley's Folly*? Did you find the production compelling? Stimulating? Intriguing? Challenging? Memorable? Confusing? Evocative? Unique? Delightful? Meaningful? Explain your reactions.
- b. Did experiencing the play heighten your awareness or understanding of the play's themes? [e.g., romantic love and courtship; the clash of people with disparate backgrounds; ethnic and cultural prejudice and intolerance; social expectations regarding love, marriage, family, and procreation versus the interests, wants, and goals of the individual; the position, status, and experience of the outcast or misfit; the yearning for belonging; the repressive and isolating nature of secrets; and the healing power of confession] What themes were made even more apparent in performance? Explain your responses.
- c. Do you think that the pace and tempo of the production were effective and appropriate? Explain your opinion.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

- a. Did you personally identify with either of the characters in *Talley's Folly*? Who? Why? If no, why not?
- b. What qualities were revealed by the action and speech of the characters? Explain your ideas.
- c. Did either character develop or undergo a transformation during the course of the play? Who? How? Why?

- d. In what ways did the characters reveal the themes of the play? Explain your responses.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT THE STYLE AND DESIGN OF THE PRODUCTION

- a. Was there a moment in *Talley's Folly* that was so compelling or intriguing that it remains with you in your mind's eye? Write a vivid description of that moment. As you write your description, pretend that you are writing about the moment for someone who was unable to experience the performance.
- b. Did the style and design elements of the production enhance the performance? Did anything specifically stand out to you? Explain your reactions.
- c. How did the production style and design reflect the themes of the play?
- d. What mood or atmosphere did the lighting design establish or achieve? Explain your experience.
- e. How did the sound design enhance your overall experience?
- f. Did the design of the costumes and makeup serve to illuminate the characters, themes, and style of the play? How?

2. ADDITIONAL POST-SHOW QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS FOR *TALLEY'S FOLLY*.

- Ask students to brainstorm a list of themes explored in Lanford Wilson's *Talley's Folly*. [See list of themes above in "Questions to Ask Your Students About the Play in Production, section b.] Ask students to identify moments from the play in which each theme was explored. Ask them if they can personally identify with any of these themes or with anything relating to the characters of Matt and Sally. Have them explain their responses.
- Ask students to consider why Wilson begins the play by having Matt Friedman directly address the audience. What is the purpose of the opening monologue? What effect did it have upon them? Ask them to consider how the play and its effect would be altered if Matt's monologue was eliminated and the scene opened with Sally's entrance onstage.
- *Talley's Folly* is a two-character play; ask your students to consider the characters of Matt and Sally. Are they dual (or dueling) protagonists or does one of them stand at the center of the play and dominate? Is there an antagonist?
- Lanford Wilson says that all of his plays center on a character with "a beef or a goal." Ask your students to analyze *Talley's*

Folly with this thought in mind.

- In *Talley's Folly*, as well as in his other plays, Lanford Wilson sensitively and insightfully creates outcast or misfit characters who are neglected or abandoned by their families, who fight through or against prejudice and intolerance, who harbor personal secrets, and who look for (and often find) belonging. Ask your students to consider how Wilson's identity as a gay American coming of age in the 1950's may have influenced his special level of understanding the situation and perspective of the outsider. How does knowing that Wilson is a gay American inform your students' perspective of *Talley's Folly* and its characters and their journeys?
3. **MONOLOGUE ASSIGNMENT: "BOOKENDING" TALLEY'S FOLLY.** *Talley's Folly* opens with a monologue. What if it also closed with one? Have your students write an epilogue to *Talley's Folly* in monologue form.
- To prepare your students to write the play's closing monologue, review Matt's opening monologue at the beginning of *Talley's Folly*. Ask your students to consider the overall significance, purpose and nature of the monologue. [Considerations may include: Matt's monologue establishes his character as a joking and witty person; it creates a close relationship between Matt and the audience; it establishes the overall tone or mood as casual, friendly, humorous, romantic, etc.; it introduces the main action of the play.] Sidebar Discussion: You might also ask your students to consider what *Talley's Folly* would be like if Matt's monologue was eliminated from the beginning of the play and the scene opened with Sally's entrance onstage.
 - Next ask students to decide for themselves which character, either Matt or Sally, should speak the closing monologue and what the monologue's significance, purpose and nature should be. What does the character want to convey to the audience in this final moment of the play?
 - Students should then write their monologues. Once they have completed their monologues, ask them to draft a few paragraphs explaining their artistic intentions.
 - Students' monologues may be read aloud for the class and discussed. Ask students to consider what they find interesting, compelling, unique, meaningful, etc., about each monologue. Also ask students to elaborate on their intentions and process.

4. **TALLEY'S FOLLY: THE REVIEW.** Have your students take on the role of theater critic by writing a review of McCarter Theatre's production of *Talley's Folly*. A theater critic or reviewer is essentially a "professional audience member," whose job is to provide reportage of a play's production and performance through active and descriptive language for a target audience of readers (e.g., their peers, their community or those interested in the arts). Critics/reviewers analyze the theatrical event to provide a clearer understanding of the artistic ambitions and intentions of a play and its production; reviewers often ask themselves, "What is the playwright and this production attempting to do?" Finally, the critic offers personal judgment as to whether the artistic intentions of a production were achieved, effective and worthwhile. Things to consider before writing:
- Theater critics/reviewers should always back up their opinions with reasons, evidence and details.
 - The elements of production that can be discussed in a theatrical review are the play text or script (and its themes, plot, characters, etc.), scenic elements, costumes, lighting, sound, music, acting and direction (i.e., how all of these elements are put together). [See the "Theater Reviewer's Checklist" .]
 - Educators may want to provide their students with sample theater reviews from a variety of newspapers.
 - Encourage your students to submit their reviews to the school newspaper for publication.
 - Students may also post their reviews on McCarter's web site by visiting www.mccarter.org/blog and selecting "Citizen Responses."
5. **BLOG ALL ABOUT IT!: TALLEY'S FOLLY AFTER THE SHOW.** McCarter is very interested in carrying on the conversation about *Talley's Folly* with you and your students after you've left the theater. Have them post a post-show comment on their experience of the play in performance on the McCarter Theatre Blog. To access the blog go to <http://www.mccarter.org/blog/>, select "Citizen Responses" under "Categories" on the left side of the web page, and then scroll the *Talley's Folly* entry to find a place to post an inquiry or comment. See you on the blog!

Additional Resources

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