

FEBRUARY 2, 2012

**BERKELEY REP'S NEW BOOK ENJOYS SUCCESS IN SEATTLE**

Hi, folks-

As new chapters get added to the local theatre season, Berkeley Rep pauses for a moment to congratulate Bill Cain, Kent Nicholson, and everyone who worked on our world premiere of *How to Write a New Book for the Bible*. Our co-production with Seattle Repertory Theatre kept the family together, and this gem of a play has delighted audiences in the Emerald City for weeks.

The Seattle critics have been generous with their praise – despite a snowstorm that delayed opening night. Here's a taste of what they've written:

- **Seattle Times:** "Profound... an intimate, moving study of the playwright's family... Cain's stage surrogate Bill (expertly played by Tyler Pierce, with sardonic naturalness and in eloquent voice), narrates the story of caring for his mother, as she succumbs to cancer in her 80s. And he exhorts us to join him in a quest to find the miraculous in the mundane, to give life meaning by elevating our family stories to the status of biblical tales – 'the stuff of revelations.' That Cain succeeds so well makes *How to Write a New Book for the Bible* compelling viewing... The Mary brought to vivid life in an incandescent performance by Linda Gehringer is sometimes in pain – and a pain in the keister. She is also loving, willful, exuberant, self-doubting, scared and humbled by adversity. And very good company. By the time Mary exits the play (and the world), she has touched, amused and heartened her loved ones (and her audience) with her 'ordinary' humanity."
- **Seattle Weekly:** "A miracle... Holds the audience rapt from start to finish... Arriving prepackaged from Berkeley Rep, where the play debuted last fall, the cast of four is so tight you'd think they had decades of history together... Scenes from the past weave through the later caretaking scenes as she succumbs to illness, all rendered with breathtaking specificity. From the smashed pumpkin that Mary's husband Pete (Leo Marks) pins together with toothpicks to the orchids that 'all the other ladies had' (an emblem of her deprived marriage), the play steps from the quotidian to the eternal. The dull business of dying and the daily rhythms of family life are transformed into something part myth, part religion... It's a humble, sweeping, and deeply personal processing of the universe to which Cain invites us. With only a few performances left, you'd better move fast and accept the invitation before this odd, unruly gem disappears."
- **City Arts:** "Cleverly written... This earnest meditation on family dynamics amid parental illness [is] a daring bit of scrutiny that few families could withstand, but Cain, while fiercely honest, is never cruel... Linda Gehringer's portrayal of Mary is absorbing, richly complete, and a spectacular performance... Never a caricature, Gehringer displays a woman of smart independence who bears the know-it-all arrogance of her adult children with wry dignity, even as her failing body and mind force her to rely on them. Director Kent Nicholson deftly keeps his cast maneuvering steadily through the familiar tensions between mother and adult son... There is, Cain observes, just as much that is holy in the mundane negotiation of family love as in the epic tales of the Old and New Testament. And watching Mary's decline to death, as well as Bill's emotional turmoil, is certainly moving."

(MORE)

- **Broadway World:** "Brilliant... Cain engages his audience with not only compelling characters and a rich and complex narrative, but also the simple and brutal honesty that comes across in his writing... Tyler Pierce portrays the author himself and manages to command the attention of the entire theater right from the start. Simply and at the same time powerfully he serves as both narrator of the play as well as subject with a sublime and honest voice. Aaron Blakey, in addition to his many supporting characters, portrays Cain's brother Paul with a stunning and quiet complexity. Leo Marks also turns in several characters but his main focus is on Cain's father, Pete. And with this character, as with all of them, he has a subtle grace to his acting. And Linda Gehringer as Cain's mother, Mary, turns in a singular performance as a strong yet ailing woman trying to do the best she can. She's all at once hilarious, heartbreaking, sturdy and frail and never once felt the need to 'act.' But then, that's the way of these four gifted performers as they effortlessly wandered in and out of characters, ages, locales and moods. Truly a stunning ensemble."
- **The Stranger:** "Elegant... Getting to the theater 10 minutes early to stare at Scott Bradley's set design is a great prelude to *How to Write a New Book for the Bible*. Virtually all the elements – save one door, a chair or two, and a box – are hanging from the ceiling, and most of them will glide down on wires to make their appearances then rise back up into the heavenly collection... When the ancient three-part canon *Dona Nobis Pacem* – 'grant us peace' – starts coming in and out of scenes about halfway through the show, it'll raise the hairs on your arms... And this mother, named Mary: Linda Gehringer plays her impeccably. Sometimes doddering, sometimes girlish, sometimes leaping from her rocking chair to cheer a beloved sports team, her embodiment of this woman in every stage of adulthood, and into death, is believable every second she's onstage... In the bathroom after the show, a line of women fixed their wept-off mascara."
- **Crosscut:** "Impressive... It faces some of life's tough stuff: aging, loss, and death and still manages to send you out the door more hopeful and grateful than you went in. Moreover, you may be chuckling over the play's many really funny moments and lines... While I found *New Book for the Bible* touching, it is not sentimental, and certainly never maudlin. It is honest and real, but not harsh. It is deeply insightful about the relationships between parents and children, relationships that are simultaneously, and often bewilderingly, both terribly close and oddly distant. It causes the viewer to nod in recognition and in that experience of recognition to feel both known and understood, despite one's foibles... Many people may think that their family is the very last place they'd look for the holy or the sacred or the redemptive. For many, family seems to be something to get away from and leave behind as quickly as possible. But Cain's story invites us to take another look and perhaps to find grace and revelation in what's right under our noses."

*How to Write a New Book for the Bible* continues its run at Seattle Rep through February 5. It was a great pleasure to work on this show during its debut here in Berkeley. We extend our sincere appreciation to everyone involved, and thank you for supporting our ongoing effort to develop new plays for the American theatre.

All the best,  
TK

For photos of this show, visit <http://www.berkeleyrep.org/press/photos-11bi.asp> .

###