MAP OF HEAVEN

THE CATCH

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM

ALSO PLAYING...
NEXT TO NORMAL | SPRING AWAKENING

PHOTOS BY ERIC L. LAURITZ
But does that answer the question for audiences? Should they be expected to take a chance on new plays? The answer is: why not? Audiences should see new plays just as they see new movies, visit the gallery show of an up-and-coming artist or read a new novel—with a sense of adventure.

If they like something fresh and unpredictable now and then, they should see new plays for the same reason. They may discover an unexpected view of the world. They may find themselves stimulated, challenged, inspired, shaken up or even angered. We never produce a play—new or old—purely to outrage an audience, but that’s always a possibility with new work. Unless we take the risk of saying something unexpected and perhaps controversial, we’re only playing it safe. And playing it safe rarely makes for exciting theatre.

So we venture into tricky territory knowing that, in the long run, history will have to be the judge. Finding that rare play that changes the way we see ourselves is a dream worth pursuing.

Be bold. Join us for our sixth annual Colorado New Play Summit February 10-12.

Kent Thompson, Artistic Director
Denver Center Theatre Company

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM

This comedy remains Shakespeare’s most enchanting, even in a body of work that includes others that are nearly as spectacular.

by Dan Sullivan

SPRING AWAKENING

When composer Duncan Sheik and lyricist Steven Sater collided with Frank Wedekind’s 110-year-old play, the sparks forged it into a stunning pop-rock musical.

by Sylvie Drake

MAP OF HEAVEN

A playwright’s pursuit of authenticity shapes her characters and, in this play, finds lives altered in unexpected ways.

by Michele Lowry
COMING ATTRACTIONS

Next to Normal
Now – Jan 16
Ellie Caulkins Opera House
On Sale Now

Map of Heaven
Jan 14 – Feb 26
Ricketson Theatre
On Sale Now

The Catch
Jan 21 – Feb 26
Space Theatre
On Sale Now

A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Jan 28 – Feb 26
Stage Theatre
On Sale Now

Spring Awakening
Feb 15 – 16
Buell Theatre
On Sale Now

Five Course Love
Feb 19 – June 19
Garner Galleria Theatre
On Sale Now

The Aluminum Show
Feb 26 – 27
Buell Theatre
On Sale Now

Traces
March 11 – May 14
Stage Theatre
On Sale Now

Avenue Q
March 11 – 13
Ellie Caulkins Opera House
On Sale Now

Ruined
March 18 – April 30
Ricketson Theatre
On Sale Now

Superior Donuts
April 1 – May 7
Space Theatre
On Sale Now

NTC Rep
Ah, Wilderness!
and
As You Like It
April 6 – 23
Conservatory Theatre
On Sale Feb.1

9 to 5
April 26 – May 8
Buell Theatre
On Sale Now

Billy Elliot
May 11 – June 5
Buell Theatre
On Sale Now

Rock of Ages
June 14 – 26
Buell Theatre
On Sale Now

Les Misérables
Aug 31 – Sept 4
Buell Theatre
On Sale Now

Hair
Oct 4 – 16
Buell Theatre
On Sale Now

The Lion King
Nov 2 – Dec 4
Buell Theatre
On Sale Now

West Side Story
Dec 13 – Jan 1, 2012
Buell Theatre
On Sale Now

Judi Wolf’s Costume Collection

K
own for its stunning costumes and exacting detail, the Denver Center Theatre Company designers and craftspeople endeavor to evoke the whimsical nature of William Shakespeare’s classic comedy, A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Draper Carolyn Plemitischer has been with the Company since 1984 and worked on hundreds of productions.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Original designs by Bill Black.

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Denver Center Theatre Company 2010/11 Season Sponsors

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Making It Possible.
In the past two years I’ve interviewed a murderer, an exiled Iraqi museum curator, a world-class cellist, a former head of the New York State Parole Board, a commercial airline pilot, a jazz critic and two retired cops. I’m a playwright. I don’t usually come into contact with people like these. Some of them I found by accident. A few found me. I was looking for details about their lives, specifics I couldn’t get from reading a story in The Washington Post or an article pulled off the Internet. I always get much more detailed information talking to people face to face. I don’t have to cajole them too hard. Most people like talking about themselves.

Map of Heaven takes us into the lives of a young up-and-coming couple in New York. Lena is an artist who is about to open her first show...
I love each of them, particularly the ones who are treacherous or terribly misguided. I love the ones who lie, who’ve lost hope, who chronically make the wrong choice. They’re the characters I want most to succeed. They’re also the hardest ones to write; they’re the most complicated.

—Michele Lowe

Last February I brought Map of Heaven to the Colorado New Play Summit. I worked on the play for a week before we did two readings here in The Ricketson Theatre. My dramaturg, Doug Langworthy, and I drafted some questions and we asked the audiences to fill out response cards. Doug tucked copies of them in my bag before I left.

I read dozens of them on the plane home and was relieved to find that none of the responses was out of the ordinary; people were taking away what I’d hoped. But one response gave me something I wasn’t expecting.

During my week in Denver I’d written a scene that included the name Michael Kimmelman, an art critic for The New York Times. An audience member wrote me a note that said my reference was wrong, that I should have referred to a colleague of Kimmelman’s: Roberta Smith. The show I had Kimmelman reviewing was in Manhattan. The truth, this patron stated, is that Kimmelman reviews shows abroad. Smith reviews shows in New York.

I confess that I was dead certain that I was right. But when I arrived home I immediately checked—and I was wrong. So Kimmelman went the way of LaGuardia. He was out and Smith was in.

I still don’t know who gave me the correction. We never ask respondents to sign their names. If you’re sitting out there tonight, you have my thanks.

Several years ago during a talkback with another audience a dark-haired woman asked me if I liked a particular character I’d created. What I got her to admit is that it was she who didn’t like one of my characters. I told her that I love each of them, particularly the ones who are treacherous or terribly misguided. I love the ones who lie, who’ve lost hope, who chronically make the wrong choice. They’re the characters I want most to succeed. They’re also the hardest ones to write; they’re the most complicated. To make them human I make them the most detailed. It’s those details that give a character its grace and power; no matter what choices he or she makes, they come by them honestly.

And as rehearsals of Map of Heaven begin, the actors will use those details and expand upon them; and I’ll be refining and adding new information until they take my computer away.

After Map of Heaven opens I’ll return home and begin work on my next play. If there’s someone you know who’s competed in the Olympics please let me know. I have some questions for them.

Michele Lowe is the author of Map of Heaven, Inana and many other plays. She is the winner of the 2010 Francesca Primus Prize for Emerging Women Artists in the Theatre.

There’s a moment in Map of Heaven when Lena draws a map for another character, Gail, who needs to get from Point A to Point B. Over the years I’ve written down the route with several variations. Each time I did it from memory. But recently, as rehearsals got closer, I realized I wasn’t comfortable with what I’d written. I wasn’t sure that the route was 100% accurate. So two weeks ago, on a bright and bitter cold Friday morning I walked it. Then I went home and wrote my path into the script.

You’re sitting in Denver; unless you know Manhattan like the back of your hand, how would you know if I got it wrong?

Doesn’t matter. It has to be right. That’s the unspoken agreement we have.

A few months ago I was having a routine mammogram when I told my radiologist about Map of Heaven. I asked if she could read parts of the script and check it for accuracy. She graciously agreed and before she even finished examining me I gave her the pages.

I don’t mind being corrected and it doesn’t matter who gives me the information. If it’s right, I’ll take it and be damn grateful.
If you think about it, it’s surprising that more plays have not been written about sports. The late Jason Miller’s *That Championship Season* comes to mind—and by coincidence it is receiving a Broadway revival this Spring. Theatre and sports would seem to be such natural play-mates. They have much in common. Both are spectator events, both offer public performances, both deal in celebrities, both pay outsized salaries to their stars (often repaid in scandals), both rely on that thrilling symbiotic audience-performer relationship, even when it can turn on a dime.

Ken Weitzman’s *The Catch* is about all that, but also more. It’s a comedy that delves into what we’ll call the metaphysics of sports—and theatre. Inspired by a true incident, this play goes well beyond it.

The incident was this: In the fall of 2001, Barry Bonds broke the single season home run record. The previous record-breaking home run ball that Mark Maguire hit in 1998 had sold at auction for three million dollars. When Bonds came along three years later and was clearly going to break that record, lots of people had that ball on their minds. Two men had it in their sights. They went to the ballpark with the specific purpose of catching it and both ended up at the right place at the right time. But the resulting scuffle produced totally unintended consequences.

“What the play depicts is pretty close to what happened,” Weitzman explained on the phone from his home in Bloomington, Indiana. “The ball hit the glove of one of the men, and he was engulfed by the crowd. It was unclear whether he caught it and then was mugged by the mob or whether he dropped it. At any rate, the ball came loose and the other guy picked it up. From there the first man said he had caught it and it should belong to him and the man who picked it up said it should belong to him. So it was this sort of fair play versus winner-take-all conflict, which is an interesting conflict to look at in relation to our country and our national character.”

Weitzman’s play tells the story of Gary Zipnik and his father Sid, and Michael Nomura and his mother Ruth. Gary and Michael are the guys who went for the ball. The rest is fact greatly embellished by fiction.

“The play is inspired by the event, it is not meant to depict it,” Weitzman cautioned. “I read some articles about it, I followed the court case. I wanted to write a play at the time, but felt too close to the event to find my way to what my fictionalized version would be. Eventually, when I focused just on the character of Gary and his story, it opened up for me.”

Where did Gary spring from?

“Um, what happened with him is actually based on the character he’s inspired by, but as a character in general who has a fervent belief in optimism and a belief that his will can
overcome all, he seemed to me a good representation in a lot of ways of our national character. He’s kind of a Horatio Alger on steroids. A Willy Loman for the ethological age."

There is, of course, also the vivid portrait of Gary’s father, a gruff and independent old coot who watches his son’s improbable gyrations with plenty of diffidence and more than a little contempt. At first.

“The notion of fathers and sons becomes significant in dealing with baseball,” Weitzman said. “History is important in the play—the history of San Francisco and the pursuit of a version of the American Dream when you consider the Gold Rush and the dotcom bubble and instant wealth.

“These men misuse it. History becomes a tool for them, which I find interesting and true. A lot of the quotes, the metaphors and the language we use to describe our national character—optimism, the myth of the individual—are almost mythology. These men have almost mythologized their own family history as well.”

Gary gets it from his father, who escaped from Europe and built a life from the ground up. But Gary doesn’t take those tools to heart. He turns them into aphorisms, sound-byte slogans that takes the wind out of their sails. It cheapens them. Michael, the second guy, was in fact Japanese and there was some background in the World War II internment camps that Weitzman chose to not incorporate into the play. “History informs the actions of these men,” he said, “but it doesn’t inform their growth or wisdom.” As for Michael’s in-your-face baseball fan mother, Ruth, she’s pure fiction and pure fun.

Contrast is what Weitzman was aiming for. Contrast adds spice. The relationship between the unstoppable Gary and his pragmatic Dad Sid is completely different from the one between the lively Ruth and the reticent Michael.

As for the outcome of the conflict, it too was based on the real outcome of the lawsuit. “A judge did make a Solomon-esque ruling: sell the ball and split the proceeds. I’ve condensed the timeline,” Weitzman acknowledged, “but before the auction could take place, the Barry Bonds steroid scandal broke which greatly affected the outcome of the sale.”

We won’t give the rest of the play away, but a little imagination will help you fill in the blanks. Or simply let the plot surprise you.

So where exactly do sports and theatre intersect?

“Theatre deals best in metaphor and sports are so rich in metaphors and language and who we are,” said Weitzman. “There’s a lot of talk from linguists that thought doesn’t determine language but that language determines thought. With that, sports becomes particularly interesting because so many sports metaphors are woven into the fabric of our language. If we’re talking about examining the way we live, what our social arrangement is, this becomes fertile ground to tease apart.

Several of my other plays have sports or sports themes or sports metaphors in them. In The As If Body Loop, which was at the Humana Festival in 2007, one of the main characters works for NFL Films. It deals with ideas of the frontier mentality and the myth of the individual and how sports is entwined with that.”

Weitzman comes by his fascination with sports thanks to a life that has included them. Growing up in Great Neck, Long Island, he mostly played baseball. He did his undergraduate work at Ann Arbor and his grad work at UC San Diego and was, appropriately, an American Culture major.

“It’s one way of saying American studies,” he adds. His first job out of college was making sports documentaries and narratives for television. He worked for the National Basketball Association. All of that influenced his work. He found himself doing a bit of acting, which became the gateway to becoming a playwright.

During those salad years Weitzman came under the spell of those one-man stage wizards, Spaulding Gray and Eric Bogosian. He emulated some of their self-directed work, eventually outgrowing that and settling more comfortably into the writing of multi-character plays. He and his wife now teach at Indiana University. She’s a theatre scholar while he teaches playwriting. What a surprise.

“Sports and theatre have always been dominant forces in my work and in that sense they’ve always been intertwined. Because I’m in theatre, I’ve always had that meta approach even when I was playing sports or creating sports documentaries, I was looking at it in a more meta sort of way. I’ve always looked for ways to combine the two.”

As for the special demands of writing comedy, Weitzman chalks them up to timing and rhythm. “You have to listen to rhythm as much as content,” he cautioned. “The script becomes a kind of musical score. Rhythm is so much a part of comedy. So much of comedy comes from pain, it has to be real to be truly funny and not glib.”

Which brings us to the serious undercurrent in The Catch. One does feel pain for Gary.

“I feel for Gary too,” Weitzman agreed. “He’s extreme in his way. I see him as a tragic character whose tragic flaw is his optimism. But it keeps him going. Those are the ironies that I’m interested in. They match our national dynamics, which are all about keeping going. But,” he adds wistfully, “American optimism is also what caused the present downturn…”

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**The Catch**

Jan. 21 – Feb. 26 • Space Theatre

Producers: Margot & Allan Frank, Judi & Robert Newman and Bob & Carole Slosky

Recipient of an Edgerton Foundation for New American Plays Award

Perspective on the Play • Jan. 21, 6pm • Jones Theatre

American Sign Language interpreted and audio described performance • Feb. 19, 1:30pm


If only we knew more about Shakespeare! Given the bare facts of his life—we’re not even sure about his birthday—his biographers have had to fill in the blanks by themselves, asking us to imagine the trepidation that the young Shakespeare “surely must have felt” as he first set out for London in 1588 (or thereabouts) and selecting their candidate for the Dark Lady of his sonnets more or less by the blindfold test.

It’s all so conjectural that one is tempted to buy into the conspiracy theory: the notion that “William Shakespeare” was a front for an eminent Elizabethan who didn’t care to go public—Bacon, Raleigh, Southampton, maybe the Queen herself.

But let’s be realistic. Neither Elizabeth’s court nor the Globe Theatre crowd could have kept this a secret for more than five minutes. In addition, Shakespeare’s career isn’t totally undocumented. There’s just enough evidence to establish that he was indeed the Globe’s master dramatist for more than 20 years and that he did write all those plays—more than 35 of them.

And that’s what we care about. What does it matter that the scholars can’t nail down the exact opening date of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as long as the story still enchants us? Nor do we need to know what Shakespeare was really like in order to feel his spirit when Puck closes the play with “Give me your hands, if we be friends.”

Gladly!

Facts and figures, names and dates, aren’t theatre. Still, when the facts are available, they can illuminate obscure passages that Shakespeare’s audience would have picked up on as easily as we
Dream remains an amazingly fresh play, a remix of classical legend, down home superstition and backstage foolery, braided into a tall tale that keeps us laughing and leaves us reflecting.

We’ve also had Dreams that went too far in the opposite direction. I remember an off-Broadway production that was positively baleful. It started with Theseus dragging Hippolyta onstage in a rough wooden cage, seriously cracking his whip. It ended with his palace guard jabbing Bottom’s poor little acting troupe offstage with bayonets, perhaps in the direction of a slave labor camp. This also featured a Puck with a red neon codpiece that flashed off and on at selected intervals. Well, it was the sixties.

In our day, Dream remains an amazingly fresh play, a remix of classical legend, down home superstition and backstage foolery, braided into a tall tale that keeps us laughing and leaves us reflecting. Something important’s being said here about love and the rest of it, something that, like Bottom, we can’t quite get our heads around.

“...What fools these mortals be?”

Maybe that’s what saves us.

As a global business leader, Jeppesen, a Boeing company, recognizes its corporate responsibility for helping individuals and communities by enhancing lives and providing opportunities that were not previously thought possible. The company’s efforts to contribute to the larger community are manifested in employee volunteerism, strategic philanthropic funding and partnerships with not-for-profit organizations that support, develop and implement initiatives focused on awareness and assistance for the underserved. By giving generously of their time, knowledge and money, Jeppesen employees apply the same core values to their communities that have led to the company’s success for more than 75 years—customer focus, quality, product excellence, integrity, accountability and innovation.

Applying the collective expertise, resources and commitment of its people through local programs, Jeppesen helps generate growth and economic value across the neighborhoods, nations and industries it serves.

Each year, Jeppesen conducts a community needs assessment to determine where its grant dollars will have the greatest impact. The company looks for organizations that promote innovation and introduce new voices and perspectives to the community.

Public schools face difficult budget cuts each year. The first budget cuts are usually in the arts programs. However, it has been documented that kids who participate in cultural activities attain greater academic achievement. Jeppesen’s collaboration with The Denver Center for the Performing Arts gives students access to the premier theatre company in the state.

The Denver Center for the Performing Arts gives students access to the premier theatre company in the state. Performances are made available to teachers, students and their parents at reduced ticket prices. Theatre art creates the kind of learning environment conducive to teacher and student success by fostering innovation and community engagement. For today’s students to succeed in life, they need a well-rounded educational experience.

Jeppesen formed another community partnership when Challenge Air for Kids and Friends contacted them about participating in a fly day event for special needs children in the Denver area this past summer. Challenge Air, based in Dallas, Texas, is a not-for-profit organization that offers motivational, inspirational and life-changing experiences to physically challenged children and youth through aviation.

This type of partnership is well suited to Jeppesen. The employee pilots were able to do what they enjoy most—fly. But this time, they shared the experience with members of the community who had never before felt the freedom of flight. For the volunteers on the ground, the smiles on the participants’ faces were all the reward they needed for the countless hours spent coordinating the event. And for Jeppesen at large, supporting such an event reinforced its commitment to the Denver community.

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A world-class performing arts organization goes beyond staging amazing performances. It contributes to a region’s quality of life. That’s why Wells Fargo is a long-time supporter of The Denver Center for the Performing Arts (DCPA).

From its innovative local productions to Broadway touring shows, DCPA is a vibrant organization that inspires Coloradans and brings energy and vitality to our region’s downtown hub. It’s an honor for me to serve on its board of trustees.

At Wells Fargo, we support DCPA to help advance the performing arts in our state. We believe an investment in the arts yields great dividends for all Coloradans. The arts stretch our imagination and challenge us to explore thought-provoking issues. They educate, entertain and enrich our lives in so many ways.

One reason that The Denver Center stands out is its focus on lifelong learning. From theatre classes for young students to presentation training for business professionals, the DCPA is a great educational resource.

What’s more, the DCPA and Wells Fargo share a commitment to diversity and inclusion. In the same way that Wells Fargo values and learns from the diversity of its team members, customers and communities, The Denver Center’s shows and programs embrace the diversity of our state.

Giving to the DCPA is part of Wells Fargo’s broader community efforts in Denver and Colorado. In an economic downturn, the needs of our communities only grow. To support our region in 2009, Wells Fargo contributed $4.3 million to 1,000 Colorado schools and not-for-profits. Our team members in the state also recorded more than 20,000 volunteer hours during the year.

Community involvement is important to Wells Fargo because we are community-based. Colorado is my home and home to 6,700 Wells Fargo team members. Our customers are our neighbors and friends. Our vision is to satisfy all their financial needs and help them succeed financially. We do this by helping them save for their future goals, secure home loans, finance businesses, and much more. By staying true to its vision, values and conservative financial discipline, Wells Fargo has the strength and stability to help its customers and communities in every economic cycle—as it has for nearly 160 years.

Over the last two years, many financial services providers retrenched; Wells Fargo did not. We continued to extend credit to creditworthy customers. By working hard to find solutions for businesses during a tough economy, Wells Fargo is Colorado’s leading small business lender for loans under $100,000 (according to Community Reinvestment Act data for 2008) and it is the state’s No. 1 Small Business Administration (SBA) lender.

We build relationships with our customers. We’ve joined Wachovia with Wells Fargo in Colorado, and today we serve 1.8 million customers at 267 ATMs and 170 banking stores across the state—more stores than any bank in the state.

Colorado has always been a forward-looking state. As we all continue ahead on the road to economic recovery, you can count on Wells Fargo and its team members—6,700 statewide and 278,000 nationwide—to provide the financial guidance and community support that will help our state prosper and build for the future. And, we will all continue to enjoy the fine performances provided by The Denver Center.