

## A Conversation from the Kitchen

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### OPENING! OPENING! OPENING!

The clock is ticking. The countdown to opening the new building is on. There are construction crews, designers, architects, volunteers and KTC staff working day and night to get the building ready for opening. It is a little breathless around the Kitchen Theatre Company these days, so if you meet us on the street and we have a wild look in our eyes, say kinds words.

There is such a rush of transformation. The glass is now in the front of the building. So there IS a front door. And it looks like “the beacon” we all imagined. The lobby has all the lighting, and the interiors are coming together. The theater lights are in the air and we’re feeling what it feels when you’re getting close to an opening night.

And, even though EVERYTHING is different, there are a few things that remain the same—we are in rehearsal for a play. So, even as the whirlwind circles around us, there is the steadying norm of the preparation for the next production. Like a port in a storm, it’s great to be doing what we love to do.

### PRIVATE LIVES

#### OPENS OUR 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SEASON

I am fairly confident that any subscriber to the Kitchen Theatre Company over the past few years knows the story of how I met Margaret Perry and Brian Dykstra. If there is “KTC folklore”, this apocryphal happenstance would be the central story of our oral history. (If you don’t know it, email me and I will share the serendipitous tale.) Anyway, as much as I have been looking forward to the opening of the new theater with all its stresses, I have also been banking on the fact that the first production is in Margaret’s creative hands with Brian doing what I like to see him do most—something new. The three of us have been talking a lot about PRIVATE LIVES, the new theater, our lives, and more. Here is a portion of those conversations.



**RACHEL:** Noël Coward wrote *Private Lives* in 1930, that’s 80 years ago! Why is this play so enduring?

**MARGARETT:** Where did the time go?! I was talking to the actors today (August 10th) about how it just doesn’t feel like a “period play.” Maybe that’s because I’m having so much fun in the rehearsal room with these crazy characters and we aren’t even in costume yet. But the psychology of these characters is so immediate that I feel as if I know them and understand them. They really make me laugh. They drive each other crazy in ways we can relate to and have fun watching. I think when there are deep truths, there can be great humor and that certainly makes a play like this age very well.

**RACHEL:** You directed *A MARRIAGE MINUET* by David Wiltse at the Kitchen a few years ago. It was great fun and very popular with audiences. The *Syracuse Post Standard* review said, “The Kitchen Theatre production of David Wiltse’s “*A Marriage Minuet*” is so bubbly and high-spirited that I’d like to compare it to champagne. But it’s really more like a great fireworks show, with frequent explosions of laughter, linked by somewhat lesser guffaws and chortles.” We could say the same for *PRIVATE LIVES*. Is there a legacy here? Do playwrights working today who write romantic comedies all owe something to Noël Coward? Do you see a relationship between these two plays?

**MARGARETT:** Absolutely. Thanks for reminding me of those words from the *Syracuse* paper. I had forgotten about that, but I keep calling this play a bubbly glass of champagne. And I certainly hope we put on a great fireworks show too. The bubbly part comes from the idea that it’s the kind of play that while you’re

working on it you want to keep reminding yourself not to take it all too seriously. The characters take themselves very seriously, but in working on it, it’s important to have fun so that you can create a world in which the characters (or at least the actors) have a blast driving each other mad. The more upset they get, the more fun we seem to have. I giggled all through the process of *A MARRIAGE MINUET* and I’m hoping this piece is even more effervescent and explosive. It’s a perfect Romantic Comedy. I don’t know if playwrights working today owe something to Coward, but he has set the bar very high. I came across an article in the *New York Times* a couple of weeks ago in which theatre critic Charles Isherwood wrote, “Is it too much to ask for a little Noël Coward when the temperature hovers in the triple digits for weeks on end? Coward didn’t write about the Riemann Zeta Function; he wrote about stylish British swells quipping and bed hopping and drinking Champagne by the bucketful. This sounds quite refreshing right now.” I couldn’t agree more. And what a great way to open the new Kitchen Theatre!

**RACHEL:** I totally agree. I love that we are starting with a comedy. I am drawn to comedy because I find it a soothing survival tool. What aspects of working on a comedy most excite and engage you?

**MARGARETT:** Comedy is much more difficult than tragedy. I used to be dreadfully afraid of directing comedy. I think it was because I didn’t trust my own sense of humor. And it’s just plain scary. What happens if no one finds it funny?! But once I got over myself and my fears I discovered that nothing engages me in quite the same way. It is incredibly fun and fulfilling. Coward gives us the words. We have to push it as far as we can to bring it to life in the most imaginative way possible. I love the creativity involved in developing the moments and in figuring out the tone of the various scenes. It’s kind of like creating a fun roller coaster ride for the audience to take and to manage the emotional highs and lows of that ride is really, really fun. I have the greatest job. I can’t imagine doing anything else. I have been looking forward to directing this play for a while and I am thrilled now that I’m in the room with this scrumptious cast.

**RACHEL:** They are a great group. And your leading man, in so many ways... I want to ask him a couple of questions.

**BRIAN:** Leading man? (in a British accent) Would that be me?

**RACHEL:** It would! Okay, Brian, actors all have a list of “dream roles.” What’s on your list?

**BRIAN:** Iago. Salieri. Benedick. Love to do Sir Toby again. Hmm, three Shakespeare’s—that must mean something. I love Chekhov and George Bernard Shaw, but what roles? Not sure.

**RACHEL:** Elyot Chase wasn’t among them?

**BRIAN:** He was not.

**RACHEL:** And why?

**BRIAN:** Well, I never really entertained the possibility of playing Elyot Chase. I guess in my mind, it was something British actors do, and my sense is that he’s tall and slim and refined in a way that isn’t really suited for my temperament. Or, I should say, isn’t usually cast the way I understand the role, so I never thought a director would consider me. It’s funny, I tell people I’m off to do this play and they look at me, a little surprised and when they get over that they ask if I’m playing Victor. So, I think I’m not alone in my surprise to be having the great opportunity to play this incredible part.

**RACHEL:** I am looking forward to your Elyot Chase!

**BRIAN:** Good. Me, too.

**RACHEL:** Act 1 of *PRIVATE LIVES* begins with the character



Brian Dykstra in  
*CLEAN ALTERNITIVES*

*Sibyl (Elyot's new bride) entering onto a balcony and then you, as Elyot, make your entrance. So you will be the second actor to step out onto the new stage, in the new building, in the new theater at the start of the Kitchen Theatre Company's 20th Anniversary Season. Any thoughts about that?*

**BRIAN:** Sure. Is there a way to do a pre-show beat so as to make sure I am the FIRST actor to step onto the new stage?

**RACHEL:** You'll have to ask the director if she wants to change the opening beat. I'll be curious to see if this ploy works.

**BRIAN:** Me, too.

**RACHEL:** Kitchen Theatre subscribers know you and your work well. Catch us up with what you have been doing since we last saw you at the Kitchen in December in your play, "HO!"

**BRIAN:** I went to Romania to hear a reading of my play STRANGERHORSE in Romanian.

**RACHEL:** Wait! Wait! STRANGERHORSE in Romania? You must share.

**BRIAN:** Well, the translation seemed great. Laughs where they should be. Drama when required. The thing about Romania is that they don't have black actors, so the thought was that they might cast Gypsy actors in the roles of T-Rex and Graham. That's sort of their racial equivalent but it's not direct. For the reading, it was four white guys. So it was a little hard to follow because the audience would "forget" that this or that character was black until lines would remind them of that fact. This, of course, couldn't happen in production because there would be no way to "forget" what you were seeing in front of you. Also, homosexuality is getting out and more accepted, but most people Zach's age would probably be in the closet, and almost certainly to his parents, so that was interesting. They looked at the play as a kind of anthropology, but, of course, getting information from any play or film or television show isn't really documentary information, is it? The play inspired hours and hours of discussion, even into the next few days. I was most interested that the women over there sort of sided with Zach and his lying to Graham, because there seems to be an accepted reality that men will most probably cheat and the women thought they should leave well enough alone. I was surprised that I was arguing for truth with young women who seem to prefer to be lied to in the way Zach lies to Graham. They even said, "See what happens if you ask too many questions? You get shot by a drug dealer." So, maybe they had a point. Not the point I hoped to communicate, but a point, nonetheless.

**RACHEL:** I want to hear more. Maybe we should have an evening with you sharing this experience with our subscribers?

**BRIAN:** I'd be happy to do that.

**RACHEL:** I de-railed your professional update. Let's get back to that.

**BRIAN:** I had a film open (*Knight & Day*) with Tom Cruise and Cameron Diaz.

**RACHEL:** David and I were tickled to see you. We just hated that your scene was in the first 90 seconds of the movie. We didn't quite know what to do after that. We kept hoping Cameron Diaz would go back to the airport and have to check in and you would be the TSA agent again. We thought if this happened a few times in the movie eventually she would drop Tom Cruise and run off with you. That was what we were hoping for.

**BRIAN:** Me, too.

**RACHEL:** Okay, I interrupted you again. What else have you been doing?

**BRIAN:** I wrote (and am writing) two full-length plays, a one act, and am starting a new one-man show about the end of the world as we know it. Maybe some of those things will find their way to the Kitchen stage.

**RACHEL:** Email the drafts! Got anything else on your mind?

**BRIAN:** Let's see, what else? Nothing leaps to mind. Two writers' retreats. A few auditions. And here I am again!

**RACHEL:** And I am so glad, and I am sure I speak for others, that you two are back for our 20th Anniversary Season!

## PRE-SHOW RECEPTIONS – YOU ARE INVITED!

Every season we have an "opening night" on every night of the opening production. These pre-show events celebrate the start of every season. This season, with the new theater and the 20th Anniversary, we are in a party mood, and we look forward to seeing all of you there a half hour before show-time in our brand new lobby.

Our pre-show receptions are being sponsored by a group of West End businesses. We thank them for their warm welcome to the neighborhood. Many thanks to Bikram's Yoga College of India, Bishops Carpet One, Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes, City Health Club, Diane's Downtown Automotive, Fine Line Bistro, Ithaca Acupuncture, John's Convenience Store, Mama Goose, Quilter's Corner, Ithaca Made, Taste of Thai Express, and Napa Auto Parts.

### Ticket Info

Subscription tickets will be available for pick-up starting August 23, 2010 at our new theatre. Come to 417 W. State/W. Martin Luther King, Jr. St. between 11:00am and 4:00pm Monday-Friday. Or call for an appointment, 607-272-0403. Full season tickets can also be picked up at the box office the night of your first performance.

### More about PRIVATE LIVES

There are three new-to-the-Kitchen actors joining the company for this production. Carol Halstead, Emily Renee Bennett and Tobias Burns are all up from NYC. In the role of Louise will be Camilla Schade, last seen in OLD TIMES also directed by Margaret Perry. The set design is by Kent Goetz and it shows off the added depth we now have in our new theater. First preview is on September 1st. Opening night is September 4th.

## COMING NEXT - DANCING WITH THE CCO

Associate Producing Director Lesley Greene takes the reigns as interviewer to learn more about the second show of the season. September 22 - 26, 2010.

**LESLEY:** Okay Rachel, you always interview everyone. I am turning the tables. What is this DANCING WITH THE CCO about?

**RACHEL:** Well, it is about wonderful music, played live by fantastic musicians, and a cast of dancers who are terrific.

**LESLEY:** Is there a story?

**RACHEL:** It is inspired by a very fond memory of the time I spent in Maine when I was a lot younger, working with NYC choreographer Cliff Keuter. Cliff was spending the summer in a wonderful artists' retreat, living in an old house that had a beautiful dance studio that overlooked a tidal inlet. I expected to stay one night, but ended up staying for more than a week and working with Cliff on his new dance piece. There was something magical about this "studio on the ocean."

**LESLEY:** So, it's about your summer in Maine?

**RACHEL:** That location is the inspiration. We will use some of the set from PRIVATE LIVES, and there is the wonderful sense of "ocean" in Act 1 of that play. So, I have dreamt up a story about a young girl who spends a summer at a place called Rock's Edge where she meets an eccentric dance teacher and some other characters who influence her life. Think *Howard's End* meets *Wuthering Heights* meets *Madeline* meets *Eloise at the Plaza*. There is a wonderful group of dancers of many ages, and two musicians from the Cayuga Chamber Orchestra.

**LESLEY:** This sounds wonderful! Thanks for the chance to interview you, Rachel. Next time I'll get you to sit down for a longer chat.

**RACHEL:** When I have a few less plates spinning, I would love to.

