

REGIONAL Roundup

Detroit

Continued from page 19

Purple Rose Theatre has the world premiere of *Months On End* (through March 16). Craig Pospisil's episodic comedy (each scene is a different month) looks at interlocking relationships between and among friends, lovers, siblings, adult children, and parents—10 characters in all.

MARTIN F. KOHN

Connecticut

See if you can follow all of the following: Jeff Provost is no longer

man *Letters from Tennessee* (closed Jan. 27) and the one-woman 2.5 *Minute Ride* (March 21–April 7). (Thrift, Horatio?) Directed by John Tillinger, with Kate Mulgrew as Katharine Hepburn, *Tea at Five* is a cartoonish, irritating, well nigh detestable evening that goes nowhere. The opening night audience, perhaps dazzled by Mulgrew's feat of memory, cheered and stood at the curtain call.

Audiences will be lured by another film legend when Paul Newman has a go at A. R. Gurney's *Ancestral Voices* in a benefit for the Westport Country Playhouse, April 6. Sharing the boards is wife Joanne Woodward, plus Susan Sarandon, and Tim Robbins. Newman is also scheduled

Hedwig, and the rousing band found the tender passion, coy intelligence, and cocky wit in the glam-rock phenomenon.

Also topnotch: *Act Out Productions'* powerful *Our Town* (closed Feb. 17), with Stage Manager Rick Kessler and a deft ensemble finding the humor and poignant humanity in Thornton Wilder's classic; and Otterbein College's potent *Book of Days* by Lanford Wilson (closed Feb. 9), absorbing under Christina Kirk's direction and Dana White's exquisite lighting.

Dayton's Human Race Theatre triumphed with its striking first *Macbeth* (closed Feb. 17), produced with Dayton's *Muse Machine*. Director Drew Fracher and designer



Both photos by T. Charles Erickson

On Connecticut stages: (left) Kate Mulgrew as Katharine Hepburn in "Tea at Five," Hartford Stage; (above) Cameron Blair and Matt Farnsworth in "Betty's Summer Vacation," Yale Repertory Theatre.

director of marketing and public relations for Westport Country Playhouse. Replacing him are Wendy Hart as communications manager and David Mayhew as marketing consultant. Hart comes from Norwalk's Stepping Stones

to open the WCP season as the Stage Manager in *Our Town* (June 5–22).

DAVID A. ROSENBERG

Columbus-Dayton-Pittsburgh

David Centers transformed The Loft into a castle-dungeon haunted by shapeshifting witches. Bruce Croner's passionate Macbeth and Lisa Ann Goldsmith's increasingly mad Lady led the uneven supporting cast.

While Pittsburgh Public

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ELIA KAZAN

"Ernie Martin enjoys an excellent reputation as a director of theatre and as a teacher. We share a long body of experience at The Actors Studio and his work that I have seen there has always been highly skilled and original. He was close to Lee Strasberg and has taught the method with considerable skill. At The Actors Studio I was compelled to ask the actors who had just performed, because I was so struck by the originality of their choices, with whom they had trained. Both times the answer was 'Ernie Martin'. He has an excellent reputation among actors."

ARTHUR PENN

• Founded the Actors Creative Theatre- N.Y. • Former Artistic Director of the Actors Studio – West Coast • Taught for Lee Strasberg for 8 yrs. • Master Classes at Washington U. of St. Louis, Burt Reynolds Institute and the Professional Actors Association of Spain. • Directed in NY, LA Regional theatres & Barcelona, Spain.

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For your interview

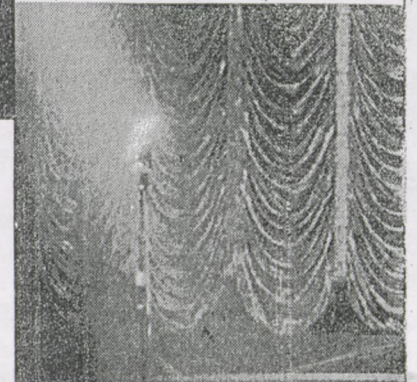
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By Michael Grossberg
Dispatch Theater Critic

Joan OF Ozark

*Playwright ponders influence
of historical figure on small-town actress*

Despite his small-town roots in Missouri, playwright Lanford Wilson has written with insight and sympathy about many segments of American society. The Pulitzer Prize winner returned to the region he knows best for *Book of Days*, which will open Thursday at Otterbein College.

"Not long ago I went back to visit Missouri, and they are more religious than I remembered," Wilson said. "Springfield is the head of the Assembly of God Church, and the Bible Belt runs through there. Both play a role in *Book of Days*."

He latched onto the germ of the idea more than a decade ago while reading about Joan of Arc.

He began wondering how the heroic role in the George Bernard Shaw play *St. Joan* might affect an actress.

"The very next day, I saw a book called *Playing Joan* and thought that somebody else had gotten that idea first," he said. "But it was just another acting book."

Then he shelved the concept, only to start thinking about it again when the Purple Rose Theatre in Michigan commissioned him to write a play set in Missouri.

He chose to write about a small-town actress whose rehearsing for the title role in *St. Joan* reinforces her courage to speak out against an obstruction of justice.

The actress becomes the only person to suspect murder after a mysterious hunting accident in an Ozark farming community. As she tries to uncover the truth, she faces opposition from an aggressive fundamentalist preacher and a lawyer-legislator.

"Take a girl in a small Midwest town who has always played the second lead in the community college's musicals," Wilson said. "What would it do to her to get the part of Shaw's *St. Joan*? How would she approach it, and what would it do to her psychologically? And then, of course, what would that do to the town? Because Joan just refuses to lie. She sees everything and sees right through these inquisitors."

He made the play "slightly more polemical" than he had planned.

"But I just couldn't avoid it. ... Once I realized that we were dealing with the church's inquisition, it just went there on its own."

His 18 full-length plays and two dozen one-acts reflect his experiences growing up in Missouri and California, going to college in Chicago and living as an adult in New York and on Long Island.

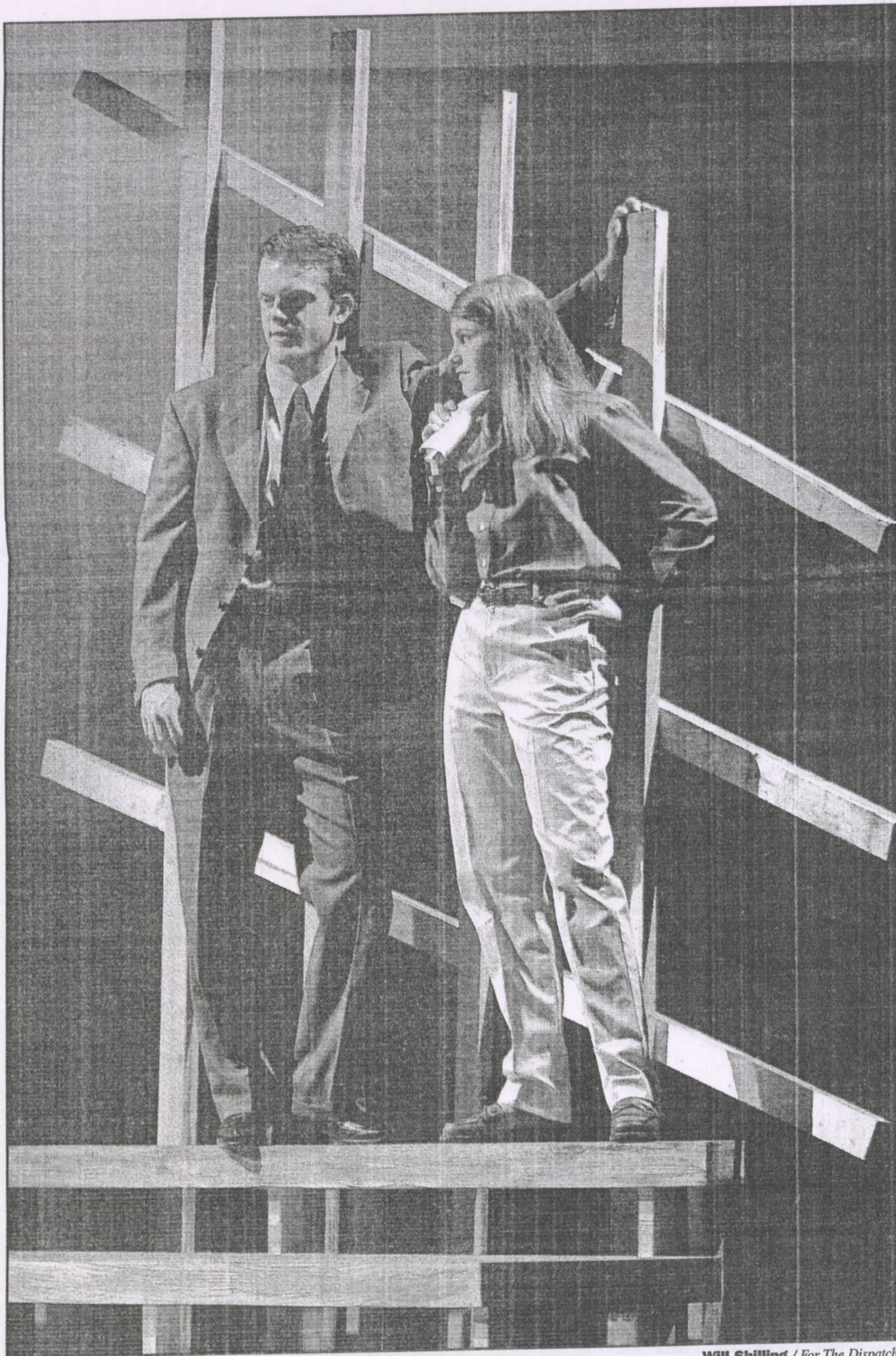
They embrace characters and settings in Missouri (*Fifth of July*, *Talley's Folly*, *Talley and Son*), Illinois (*The Mound Builders*), Kentucky (*The Gingham Dog*), California (*Lemon Sky*, *Sympathetic Magic*, *Redwood Curtain*) and New Mexico (*Angel's Fall*) — as well as Chicago (*Serenading Louie*), Baltimore (*Hot l Baltimore*) and New York (*Burn This*, *Balm in Gilead*).

"Maybe I am more of an American playwright



"I have been told that a search for a family is very strong in my plays."

LANFORD
WILSON



Will Shilling / For The Dispatch

Jeremy Robb and Natalie Arnold in the Otterbein College Theatre production of *Book of Days*

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■ Otterbein College Theatre will present *Book of Days* at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday — and 8 p.m. Feb. 7-9 — in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville. Tickets cost \$14. For more information, call 614-823-1109.