

Gerald Schwarz  
Dramaturg  
Jim Turner  
Producer

THE  
Newsletter 5 / September 2001  
ELIZABETH RIVER THEATRE COMPANY  
FOUNDED IN 2000

**CALENDAR:** THE ZOO STORY & THE SANDBOX  
AN EVENING OF TWO ONE-ACTS BY EDWARD ALBEE  
Sept. 28 / 29 (8 PM); Sept. 30 (2:30 PM)  
Oct. 3 (2 PM) (Special Literary Festival Performance)  
Oct. 5 / 6 (8 PM)

The Stables Theatre, 46<sup>th</sup> Street, East of Hampton Blvd. Norfolk.

A Coproduction with the Department of Communication and  
Theatre Arts and the Literary Festival of Old Dominion University.

Edward ALBEE will be in town for Old Dominion University's Literary Festival. In honour of one of the living legends among American playwrights, we have joined forces with the ODU theatre program: two of his early one-acts will be directed by Christopher HANNA (director of ODU's theatre program) and Gerald SCHWARZ (ERT co-founder and dramaturg), respectively.

Sets for both shows are by Jill SNAPP, costumes by Chrisse RUBENSTEIN. The cast includes Jim TURNER, Michael HUNTER and Virginia VAIL (familiar faces to all ERT patrons), as well as Victoria BLAKE, Willy MCGHEE and Juan Antonio ESTELA. Here are a few words about the plays, by the directors:

GERALD SCHWARZ ON  
**THE SANDBOX**

14 minutes about Life and Death and the American family - how can you possibly play this?

So few notes to play, so many wrong turns to take... a scary assignment.

But if Edward Albee, just around the time of his professional self-discovery at the comparatively mature age of 30 could write it, we should be able to put it on stage. For me, *The Sandbox*

CHRISTOPHER HANNA ON  
**THE ZOO STORY**

Forty years after it first stunned artists and audiences into changing the face of American theatre, Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* retains its magic. Its theatrical power has become more surprising to me in rehearsals, lately, as I've come to appreciate the ingredients Albee uses to hold his audience: two actors, two benches, and unforgettable dialogue.

That's it. And that's plenty.

In preparing to direct *The Zoo*

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(SCHWARZ ON THE SANDBOX, CTD.)

is the most appropriate play to honour this great playwright: It is, more profoundly and more tightly than any other of his plays, the search for his self.

And although it may still smell of the absurdist theatre of the 1950s that begat it (and to which American audiences never took a particular liking) - look around yourself these days, and you may find proof of what Albee claimed 40 years ago:

There could be nothing more absurd than a supposedly "realistic" image of the reality we are facing.

(HANNA ON THE ZOO STORY, CTD.)

*Story*, I had initially looked for some visual image, sound montage, or inventive staging that could "rediscover" the text for contemporary audiences. The process of that search became both humbling and inspiring for me, as I slowly gave over to the power inherent within the words themselves and the ability of skilled actors to bring them to life.

Put simply, Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* is one of the most beautifully crafted plays ever written for actors and directors. Working with Jim and Michael on material like this is a special joy that has reminded me, mid-career, what a generous gift a playwright gives us all when he sits down and writes a masterpiece.

***ADVANCE TICKETS FOR THE ZOO STORY & THE SANDBOX  
ONLY THROUGH ODU - 683-5305 !***

***"Slave Shack", finally !***

What seemed almost like a curse on **Michael T. FOLIE's** controversial new play *Slave Shack* has now definitely been lifted - in the two showcase performances the ERT has put on in early September at Rio's Café in downtown Norfolk. Writing for the *Virginian-Pilot (Compass, Sept. 13)*, Montague **GAMMON III** lauded ERT co-founder and director **Jim TURNER's** work, which "got just about everything out of this script that it offered"; he also had praise for the leads **J. Michael HUNTER** ("one of the area's few truly professional film and TV actors... (who) still has all the ability that made him one of the most sought after local actors") and **Keisha MAINOR** ("delivered most of her lines... with a sincere intensity.") And he concludes about the ERT: "This small group is going to be an important force in serious local theatre!" Touché!

PS: If you missed *Slave Shack* this time round - stay tuned! We will work on a longer run in the Spring of 2002!

*Thank-you's* are due to the theatre faculty of Old Dominion University, who realized the potential in collaborating with the ERT and shouldered most of the burden of the *Zoo Story & Sandbox* double bill; **Peter GOEBEL** for making Rio's Café available for *Slave Shack* and lifting roadblocks; the **North Street Playhouse**, most notably **Terry BLISS**, for production support in the shape of rental material for *Slave Shack*, and everybody who offered encouragement and advice - personally or in the mail.