

THE PEAR AVENUE THEATRE

PROUDLY PRESENTS

The Shaker Chair

by

Adam Bock

DIRECTOR

Ann Kuchins

PRODUCER

Diane Tasca

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Valerie Pagendarm

SET DESIGN

Norm Beamer

LIGHTING DESIGN

Ben Hemmen

STAGE MANAGER SOUND DESIGN

Debbie Heiman

Gordon Smith

Produced by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Services

CAST (IN ORDER OF SPEAKING)

DollyRoberta Morris
Marion..... Carolyn Ford Compton
Jean.....Beverley Griffith
Tom..... John Beamer /Rob Dario
Lou..... Adrienne Walters
Frank.....Vic Prosak
Piglet..... Pearblossom

Scene: *Marion’s home & a farm nearby*

Time: *The present*

There is no intermission.

A strobe light will be used at one point in the performance.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director.....Ann Kuchins
 Producer..... Diane
 Tasca
 Stage Manager..... Debbie
 Heiman
 Assistant Director..... Valerie Pagendarm
 Set Designer..... Norm
 Beamer
 Lighting Designer..... Ben Hemmen
 Sound Design..... Gordon
 Smith
 Costume Designer.....Diane Tasca
 Publicity Directors..... Jeanie K.
 Smith
 & Shannon Stowe
 Postcard Designer..... Patricia
 Tyler
 Program Consultant..... Susan Petit
 Website Designer.....Ray Renati

Videographer..... John
 Beamer

DIRECTOR’S NOTE

Two wars. The biggest recession since the Great Depression. A jobless recovery or a double-dip recession. A cataclysmic earthquake in Haiti. The biggest environmental disaster ever in the Gulf of Mexico. These are only some of the challenges that face us today, and as my mother rhetorically asks, “What can we do?” This is the question that is addressed in *The Shaker Chair* against a backdrop of factory farming and marital discord. On a deeper, more personal level, the question is “How do I want to live my life?”

The Shakers (the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing) believed in the simplicity of life. They lived almost every minute of their lives expressing their passion for God, who was both male and female. Their work was an expression of their devotion. As the character Jean says, “The whole world was their church. Everything they did was a prayer.” The Shaker philosophy of “doing” is the defining metaphor of the play, which offers up different perspectives on how to live one’s life and how to deal with the challenges that confront us.

In working on this play, I met Carletta Richardson, who is doing something about a problem that she cares passionately about. She runs the Recycled Pig Sanctuary Rescue in Yuba City, an organization that began with pigs and now includes sheep, goats, and a cow. Carletta was instrumental in finding us a pig for our play. Beverley Griffith Fagundes, who plays Jean, is also passionate about the treatment of animals, and she and her husband Rocky volunteered to foster the pig at their home in San Jose for the run of the play. For every performance, Beverley brings Pearblossom, our piglet, to the Pear and turns him over to one of our wonderful volunteers. We could not do this play without all their help.

Can you imagine what our world would be like if we all took some small—or grand—action to advance something that we passionately cared about? Before you leave, perhaps you could take action by making a donation in our piggy jar for Carletta’s animal rescue.

—Ann Kuchins, June 2010

ABOUT THE PLAY AND THE PLAYWRIGHT

Although Adam Bock was born in Montreal and now lives in New York City, his theatrical career first took off in the Bay Area. A number of his plays have been produced—and several premiered—locally: by Encore Theatre and Shotgun Players, where Bock is an artistic associate. His work has also been performed in New York, Edinburgh, London, Los Angeles, and Toronto, as well as at the Humana Festival in Louisville, Kentucky. Bock's plays include *Swimming in the Shallows* (1999), a winner in New England's Clauder Competition; *Five Flights* (2002); *The Drunken City* (2005); and *The Thugs* (2007), which won an Obie (Off-Broadway Award) for best playwriting. He has also garnered numerous Bay Area awards, including Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards and the Glickman Award, given for best new play.

Many of Bock's signature elements are threaded through *The Shaker Chair* (2004). He often writes dialogue full of fragments and overlapping speech, and he likes minimal, suggestive sets. His frequently hyperactive characters struggle to make sense of their lives, whether they are worried about romantic relationships or social issues. Although Bock's plays generally have one or more gay characters, he treats sexual orientation as just one of many traits. (A main character in *Swimming in the Shallows* is a gay male shark with relationship problems.) Bock says that he likes to put women "in the center" of his plots because women traditionally have been given secondary roles in theatre.

The Shakers (whose official name was the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing) retreated into their religious communities, but they led active lives and had a strong sense of social justice. Perhaps because they were founded by a woman, Mother Ann Lee, the Shakers also believed in sexual equality, which they combined with celibacy. Yet to have equality one has to take it actively. Bock wants to create pivotal roles for women, and he does so in this play. Three of the four females have names that are not limited to women: *Marion*, *Jean*, and *Lou*. These

characters are more active, not defined by their relationships to men. In contrast, the fourth female character, Marion's sister, has a name—

Dolly—that aptly reflects her immature, passive personality (and also recalls the first cloned sheep). Dolly's dependence on her controlling husband is counterpointed by the other characters' struggle against powerful polluting businesses.

The Shaker Chair is about taking charge of our lives. The play explores the question of how relatively powerless individuals can fight back against more powerful interests. Must we take risks for the things we believe in, even when the odds are against us? How big can those risks reasonably be? What happens if we let others make important decisions for us? When, in short, should we decide that we just won't take it any more, and what can we do to change it—whatever "it" is? The play asks these questions, but leaves us to answer them.

--Susan Petit

WHO'S WHO IN THIS PRODUCTION



John Beamer (*Tom/alternate*) is an actor, writer, and filmmaker. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from New York University's Tisch School, with a concentration in film.



Carolyn Ford Compton (*Marion*) is enjoying her third production at the Pear, having performed in *Eccentricities of a Nightingale* and *Misalliance*. (This is her first appearance with a pig as a co-star--she hopes Pearblossom remembers all her blocking and dialogue.) Of her many performances on the Peninsula, her favorite roles include Sister Clarissa in *Over the Tavern*, Reba in

Last Night at Ballyhoo, Maggie in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Eleanor in *Lion in Winter*, and Isabel in *Kitchen Witches*. When not rehearsing, Carolyn is a floral designer. Her favorite real-life role is Grandma. She sends love and appreciation to her darlin' Darryl.



Rob Dario (*Tom*) is pleased to play the Pear once again, having previously appeared in *Space Is Blue (And Birds Fly in It)* and *Three Sisters*. Rob is from San Francisco and has worked with many Bay Area theatre companies, such as Asian American, Impact, Shotgun Players, Berkeley Rep, Berkeley Playhouse, SF

Shakes, New Conservatory, and Darkroom (Vallejo). He works in film, print, and television, and is also a graphic designer. He thanks the cast, crew and his Aunt Daryl, and loves his parents, brothers, and Tofu.



Beverley Griffith (*Jean*) began her performing career as a dancer at the Moulin Rouge in Paris and the Lido in Las Vegas, and she recently danced in Circus Conelli in Switzerland. Dramatic work includes Shady Shakespeare: *Richard III* (Queen Margaret), *As You Like It* (Adam), *Romeo & Juliet* (Nurse); Bus Barn: *Leading Ladies*

(Florence), *Enchanted April* (Mrs. Graves); Palo Alto Players: *Noises Off* (Dotty); City Lights: *Noises Off* (Dotty), *Lysistrata* (Kleonike); Pigeon Players: *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Lady Bracknell); Renegade Theatre: *Waiting to Dance* (Grace). TV work includes *Monk*, the commercial *Plant Sense* and voice for *BeatlesRadio.com*

Roberta Morris (*Dolly*) makes it a pair of Pear shows with this production. Last year she was Lady Wishfort in *The Way of the World*. Roberta's theatrical husbands have included actors from Connecticut (when she was Grandma Gellman in TheatreWorks' *Caroline, or Change*) and Portugal (when she was



Emma in Northside's *Over the River*). Finally she has a spouse from her native Queens (Stoop ball! The Flushing train!). Roberta also performs original material, usually concerning patent law, and in this capacity has been seen in Michigan, at Stanford, and most recently at the Salishan Resort in Oregon.



Vic Prosak (*Frank*) has been involved in Bay Area theatre on and off since college at USF and Sonoma State. He has appeared locally with Bus Barn Stage Company, Palo Alto Players, Renegade Theatre Experiment, and Santa Clara Players. Personal highlight roles include Bocker Slade in *The Wake of Jamie Foster*, John Landis in *Fifth of July*, and Sparger in *Kennedy's Children*—all produced by Cañada College—and Lee in *True West* at SF State. This is Vic's first production with the Pear.



Adrienne Walters (*Lou*) is thrilled to be in *The Shaker Chair*, her first production at the Pear Avenue Theatre. Recently, she was in Aesop's *Funny Fables* at New Conservatory and *Romeo and Juliet* at Palo Alto Players. Adrienne also had a wonderful time in Women's Will's *Playfest 2.0* and the new staged readings at City Lights this year. Next, she can be seen in *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* at Altarena Playhouse in the fall. For her family, and Brian.

Debbie Heiman (Stage Manager) is excited about participating in another show at the Pear. For several years, Debbie has enjoyed working with theaters as a stage manager. Her productions include *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *A Thousand Clowns*, *Pack of Lies* and many others. The rest of her time Debbie is a teacher in the Bay Area.

Ben Hemmen (*Lighting Designer*) returns to the Pear to light *The Shaker Chair*. Most recently he lit *Little Shop of Horrors* over at Bus Barn, stage managed Lamplighters' production of *Iolanthe* in SF, and is trying to keep the day job happy (sleep was optional). Questions and comments can be directed to ben@hemmen.com.

Ann Kuchins (*Director*) most recently directed *Nickel and Dimed* at the Pear. At the Pear Ann has also directed new plays by Bay Area play-wrights: *Homeland Prayer* by Jeff Carter, *Space Is Blue (and Birds Fly in It)* by Gregory Meyer, *Dence* by Sharmon Hilfinger, and *A Package for Max* by John Angell Grant. She also directed the original production of Bobbi Fagone's play *Thunderbabe* at the Altarena Theatre. Some of the published plays that she has directed are *Pack of Lies* (Palo Alto Players) and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* and *Steel Magnolias* (Hillbarn Theatre). Ann is immensely impressed with the talent of the actors in

The Shaker Chair, their diligence in working on a very challenging and exciting script, and their enthusiastic inclusion of Pearblossom (the piglet) in their ensemble.

Valerie Pagendarm (*Assistant Director*) was honored to work on lightboard/sound for the Pear's very first show, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Since then, she has served as assistant director for a number of Pear productions. It has been a pleasure to work with Ann and this fine cast.

Gordon Smith (*Sound Designer*) is happy to be returning to work as sound designer at the Pear. He hopes to continue his interest in theatre in future productions here and elsewhere. Thanks to the awesome cast and crew, and, of course, to Jeanie.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their contributions to this production, the Pear thanks:
 Ellen Smith Leslie Guidera & the Rare Breed Ranch of
 Patricia Tyler Capay Valley (home of Pearblossom)

SPECIAL THANKS to Carletta Richardson, founder of the Recycled Pig Sanctuary Rescue, in Yuba City. She was instrumental in finding our piglet, Pearblossom. Carletta is dedicated to the kind and ethical treatment of farm animals. We commend her for her ongoing pig rescue effort.



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