



7•TOWERS•presents

# BURN THIS

WRITTEN BY LANFORD WILSON



BALLET  
*Austin*



austin creative alliance

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

AARON BLACK

7 Towers' production of Lanford Wilson's *Burn This* has been about 12 years in the making. I first read this script in an undergraduate acting class in 1998 or 1999. I fell in love with the script and became determined to act in it. I have never given up on that dream, despite several obstacles and near misses along the way. Fortunately the formation of this company, the encouragement and support of friends, acquaintances and family, and small acts of blind faith have made it possible.

At its heart, I believe *Burn This* is a love story. Like Shanley's *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea* it tells the story of people who are not perfect. They have problems, some of which don't seem fixable. For many viewers, it asks for a kind of empathy that may not be easy to give. It challenges audiences, because it does not present a good guy who is all good, a bad guy who is all bad or a heroin who is necessarily always likable. Many pieces of evidence lead me to believe that Wilson wrote these characters based upon real people that he actually knew, who may or may not have been able to conquer their personal demons. At times Wilson also wrote himself, his own words into each of these characters. *Burn This* is not for everyone and we may get some interesting reactions from audience members, especially since there really is no exit row, apart from the stage itself. Part of the 7 Towers mission is to produce plays that ask difficult questions. We would like to thank the Austin theatre community for affording us a place to take risks.

# DRAMATURGE'S NOTE

CHRISTINA GUTIERREZ

As much as it is an unconventional love story, *Burn This* is also a play about absence. Robbie's death creates a void that each of the play's characters struggle to fill—with work, denial, addiction, anger, and, ultimately, with love. Although they never appear on stage, Robbie and Dominic's presence in Anna's longing, Pale's rage, and Larry's loneliness are central to the play's thematic and historical contexts. Written in 1986, *Burn This* was produced alongside a number of powerful plays that came to be categorized in theatre history as "AIDS plays." These pieces, including Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985), William Hoffman's *As Is*, (1985) Harvey Fierstein's *Safe Sex* (1986), Paula Vogel's *Baltimore Waltz*, and, of course, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1993), chronicle the theatre's reaction to the early years of the AIDS epidemic. They stage the panic, fear, and grief of both victims and survivors, and find moments of beauty and transcendence amidst tragedy.

While there is no indication that any of the characters in *Burn This* have HIV or AIDS, the play does stage the loss of young gay men. Issues of identity and secrecy, central to the AIDS plays, arise in Anna's description of Robbie's funeral. Seemingly insignificant details, like Robbie's television appearances and interviews in *The Advocate*, a leading national gay and lesbian magazine, speak to the backdrop of cultural and political activism which accompanied the AIDS epidemic in the late eighties and early nineties. Pale's anger at the visibility of Robbie's sexuality and his disagreements with Anna about who really knew Robbie "deeply," reflect the same anxieties present in the AIDS plays. Like many gay male characters of his time, Robbie's death makes him alternately the subject of blame and veneration. Absence thus grounds the play in its original artistic context, and simultaneously facilitates a story about love and loss that speaks across generations.

TELL THE TRUTH

# CAST

## SUZANNE BALLING

AS ANNA

Suzanne Balling moved to Austin in 2007. Stage credits here include *The Guys*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, *LEAR*, *Humble Boy*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Dead White Males* (B. Iden Payne and Austin Theater Examiner nominations, Austin Live Theatre APPLAUSE), *Sleeping Beauty* (B. Iden Payne ensemble nomination), *Hotel Morocco*, *The Long Now*, *Miss Wither-spoon* (B. Iden Payne award), and *Twelfth Night*. She has also performed in New York, Boston, Houston, and her home town of Galveston. She is currently working on *The Bystander Theory*, a feature-length film.

## AARON BLACK

AS PALE , DIRECTOR AND CO-ARTISITC DIRECTOR

Aaron Black is from Norman, Oklahoma. He holds a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Acting from OU and a Masters of Fine Arts from the New School/Actors Studio in New York. He has worked for the Vestige Group, Austin Shakespeare and City Theatre in Austin and has also worked as an actor in New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta, New Jersey and Oklahoma. He and Dramaturg Christina Gutierrez are Co-Artistic Directors of 7 Towers Theatre. Aaron would like to thank everyone who has supported 7 Towers, his family, and the teachers who have inspired him. You may see Aaron in future theatre productions in Austin and in the upcoming Austin-produced feature film *Eviction* (previously titled *Hollow Oaks*). Look for it at next year's SXSW.

## SCOT FRIEDMAN

AS LARRY

Scot Friedman is a stage and film actor, and has voice-over credits in animation, film, commercial, and theatrical productions. Past performances include *Rumors*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, *Of Mice and Men*, *How the Other Half Loves*, and *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* (City Theatre), *The Guys* (Flash Productions), *The Night of the Iguana* (Different Stages), *Two Rooms* (Rapscllions of the Periphery, 2010 Austin Theatre Examiner nomination for best lead actor in a drama), *The Taming of the Shrew* (Hidden Room, 2010 B. Iden Payne winner for outstanding production of a comedy), and *Hotel Morocco* (Echo Players). This is his first 7 Towers production.

## TOM GREEN

AS BURTON

Tom Green appeared most recently as Dr. Halb in a chick & a dude's production of *Paradise Key* at Hyde Park Theatre (B. Iden Payne nomination for Best Actor in a Drama). Other recent credit's include roles with Zachary Scott Theatre in *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Clean House*, *Take Me Out*, *The Exonerated*, and *Keepin' It Weird*. Green has also appeared in Austin Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *Mary Stuart*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Julius Caesar*. Green also appeared in TV's *Friday Night Lights*.

YOU CAN'T IMAGINE A FEELING

# CREW

## CHRISTINA GUTIERREZ

CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, DRAMATURG, CO-PRODUCER, LIGHT AND SOUND DESIGNER

Christina Gutierrez is a Ph.D. candidate in Performance as Public Practice at the University of Texas at Austin, working on a dissertation about medievalism in performance. She has worked as a dramaturg and text coach both academically and professionally, most recently for Present Company's *The Winter's Tale*. She is the former resident dramaturg at Austin Shakespeare and the Young Shakespeare summer program. She has also worked with RAS Productions, The Colorado Shakespeare Festival, the Rude Mechs, Salvage Vanguard Theatre, the University of Texas at Austin, UT's Cohen New Works Festival, the UT New Theatre program, The University of Colorado at Boulder, and Whittier College.

## ANNA BERKEN

SET DESIGN, GRAPHIC ARTIST

Anna Berken is a professional web designer, illustrator and journalistic artist. She has a degree in Visual Communications from the University of Minnesota. Last year, she art directed the feature-length film *Eviction* by RAS Productions, creating sets and props for the independent film, as well as the marketing materials and website. *Burn This* is her first project in theatre. She is grateful for the creative challenge, and the confidence and dedication of Aaron and Christina.

## AMEER MOBARAK

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Ameer Mobarak is a graduate from the University of Texas in Mathematics. During his time at UT, he became involved in the Madrigal Dinner where he served as actor, director, and producer. Recently he has acted in Present Company's productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*. Ameer is excited to be working with 7 Towers.

## RAE WYMAN

STAGE MANAGER

Rae Wyman is a recent graduate from Texas State University with a BFA in Performance and Production. Some of her past stage management credits at Texas State and in Austin include *A Little Princess*, *The Producers*, *All Shook Up*, *Bat Boy: The Musical*, *Macbeth*, *Noises Off*, *The House of Blue Leaves* among several others. Rae was also awarded First Alternate in Stage Management for KCACTF Region VI in the Spring of 2011 and the Meritorious Achievement in Stage Management for KCACTF Region VI in the Spring of 2010. She would like to thank Aaron and Christina for an amazing ride and wishes everyone a good show!

## AMANDA LOMBARDI

COSTUME DESIGN

Amanda Lombardi is a recent graduate from Kent State University in Ohio, with a degree in Fashion Design. She moved to Austin in September, with plans to start her own fabric company. For *Burn This*, while staying true to New York City in the 1980's, Amanda strived to highlight the quiet complexity of the characters, and help visually make these moments real. A million thanks to the cast and crew for making Austin feel like home!

## PAUL SCHIMELMAN

FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER

Paul is a "damned Yankee" hailing from NYC originally, but has lived long enough in Texas to grudgingly call it home now. He teaches stage combat to both UT-Austin and Texas State University theater students, and is also the senior coach and fencing instructor for UT-Austin's fencing program. He enjoys helping students grow using conflict and chaos as tools of passion.

EVERYONE HAS A PASSION.

# ABOUT 7 TOWERS

## WHO WE ARE

Aaron Black and Christina Gutierrez began 7 Towers in 2010 as a collaboration between an actor and a dramaturg, both interested in the basic relationship between story, performer, and audience. Placing a particular emphasis on organic rehearsal processes and honest storytelling, we value fundamental methods of communication over flashy spectacle. We are committed to the use of research in the creative process, striving for the closest possible representation of life, emotion, and events. In this way, we utilize the spectrum of academic and practical approaches to performance, continually connecting text to human experience. In the rehearsal room, we value improvisation and intellect, allowing actors' intuitive understanding of self and story to shape both process and product. We thrive on experimentation.

We are motivated by what Martha Graham describes as a "queer, divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive." Our fundamental vision is of a theatrical process that searches for precise and deep truth, deeper than what the average person, or even the average artist will accept as sufficient.

## OUR MISSION

7 Towers is dedicated to making theatre that challenges the status quo, both in content and in production style. We seek to produce both new and classic plays that ask exhaustive and probing questions about the society we live in and the function of art within it. We are not interested in asking questions we already know the answers to. Our dedication to process simultaneously grants actors a greater degree of creative freedom in the rehearsal room and makes them more responsible for the product in production.

We believe that exploring contemporary experience through direct, honest, and often irreverent storytelling can open live theatre to new and diverse audiences. Whenever possible, we produce in venues that allow us to explore the connection between space and story, often creating opportunities for interaction with new communities.

7 Towers is a sponsored project of Austin Creative Alliance, a non-profit arts service organization.



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CHARLES TUBBS AND FAMILY

THEN WRITE 'BUTZ'

# SPECIAL THANKS

7 TOWERS WOULD LIKE TO GIVE SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS:

THE AUSTIN CREATIVE ALLIANCE

BALLET AUSTIN

THE CIRCUS TENT REHEARSAL SPACE

THE DOUGHTERY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

MATT LATHAM

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THIS' ON IT.