

Michael Milligan: *Mercy Killers*

Thursday, October 1, 2015; 7:30 pm

Friday, October 2, 2015; 7:30 pm

Saturday, October 3, 2015; 2 & 7:30 pm



**A PLAY BY
MICHAEL MILLIGAN
DIRECTED BY
TOM OPPENHEIM**

Mercy Killers is in the tradition of American playwrights from Arthur Miller and Clifford Odets, to Tony Kushner and Anna Deavere Smith in capturing political and social reality in powerful story and unforgettable character.

"Over 60% of all bankruptcies in the U.S. are the result of medical debt, says Milligan. What most people don't realize is that the majority of those bankruptcies, the person involved actually had insurance at the onset of their health crises." This discovery led him to collect stories from people suffering financial disaster on top of chronic illnesses.

After hearing many horror stories of victims of the growing dysfunction of the American health care system, Milligan worked to put a human face on what he believed was a national tragedy. Blue collar 'Joe' grapples with his red state ideals when he realizes the measures he must take to care for his wife. *Mercy Killers* is both a tender love story and an unblinking look at health care in America. It is not ideological. It is a play of mind and heart that leads people to share their thoughts and experiences RED / BLUE and beyond.

"I have spent a couple of years now with 'Joe,'" says Milligan, "listening, arguing, contending about what it means to be an American. Joe reveres the Individual, Liberty and Self-Reliance. I tend towards Pilgrims and the Community of

Principle. But over the course of time, I have grown to respect and honor Joe's Pantheon, and because I've listened and even adopted some of Joe's edits to the script (which he continues to make — sometimes even in the middle of a performance); he has grown to respect mine as well. Though he still thinks my head is in the clouds, he knows my heart is in the right place."

Since Edinburgh, productions of *Mercy Killers* have been non-stop in Off-Broadway theaters, colleges and universities, performing arts centers, church basements, living rooms and the floors of state legislatures. National and state healthcare advocacy groups have sponsored events and partnered with arts presenters. Post-show discussions and forums have represented varying points of view on health care with people often sharing their own health care story. All of which has led Milligan to take issue with the notion of "divide" on the issue. "In our polarized culture, he says, "we tend to vilify one another or, rather, we accept too easily the vilification served by the beneficiaries of a divided populous. My experience acting and interacting with audiences around the country has taught me that we as a people are much more than the two dimensional caricatures our political masters would like us to be."



MICHAEL MILLIGAN (Playwright and Actor)

Michael Milligan has been writing and acting for the theater for almost two decades. Milligan has appeared on the Broadway stage as Little Charles in *August: Osage County*, De Bries in *La Bete*, and as a 'raver' and understudy in *Jerusalem*. No stranger to the one man show, Milligan performed Will Eno's *Thom*

Pain in the original New York run, taking over from James Urbaniak and T. Ryder Smith at the DR2. Other New York credits include *The Golem* with Robert Prosky, the world premiere of *The Empty Ocean* with Harold Clurman Theater Lab, and *Nightlands* with New Georges. He also received 4 Stars for his performance of Lanford Wilson's one-man show, *Poster of the Cosmos*, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The performance which also earned him Best Actor nods in his hometown, Columbus, Ohio. Milligan's other produced plays include *Heroine*, *Urgent: Aliens*, and a musical adaptation of Aesop's *Fables for Circle in the Square* with composer/rocker, Joziah Longo, of Gandalf Murphy and the Slambovian Circus of Dreams. A reading of Milligan's verse play, *Phaeton* was presented by the Harold Clurman Lab Theater featuring Mark Rylance, David Hyde Pierce, and Joanna Lumley. His adaptation of Jack London's *The Sea Wolf* has undergone several workshops and readings, featuring Jay O. Sanders as the enigmatic Wolf Larsen.

Michael Milligan: *Mercy Killers* continued

Milligan received his training from Juilliard where he won the John Houseman Prize for excellence in classical drama. His love of Shakespeare has taken him around the world performing the bard for the Shakespeare Theater, Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare and Company, Cincinnati Playhouse, St. Louis Rep, the Alabama, Colorado, Illinois, and Utah Shakespeare Festivals, Milwaukee Shakes, Shakespeare Festival of St. Louis, and New Jersey Shakespeare in roles as diverse as Hamlet, Mercutio, Romeo, Angelo, Cassio, Dromio, Lucentio, Antipholus, Mark Antony, Edgar, Orlando, as well as many spear carriers and various shrubby movers.

Milligan is a sometime instructor of Shakespeare at the Stella Adler Studio of Acting. He has also appeared at many of the nation's top regional theaters including the Guthrie, Westport Country Playhouse, Charlotte Rep, The McCarter Theater, and Folger Theater in Washington D.C.



TOM OPPENHEIM (Producer and Director)

In his position as Artistic Director and President of the Stella Adler Studio of Acting for over 15 years, Tom Oppenheim has articulated a mission, engaged top faculty, structured a world-class training program, and created a cultural center.

Tom originated the Harold Clurman Laboratory Theater Company in 2002, which has since presented over twenty productions, including eleven world premieres. In addition to producing all of the Lab's plays, Tom also directed *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare (with Steve Cook), *Songs and Statues*, by Peter Nickowitz (world premiere), *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, *What Shall I Give My Children?* by Don K. Williams (world premiere), and others.

Tom created MAD (the Harold Clurman Center for New Works in Movement and Dance Theater), a dance theater company that has presented over thirty new works, the majority of which were commissioned world premieres, and which includes Margie Gillis, Bill T. Jones and Mikhail Baryshnikov on the advisory board.

Tom spearheaded the creation of the Harold Clurman Art Series, which has presented artists including Harold Bloom, Edward Albee, John Ashbery, Julianne Moore and Harold Mabern, in events that are free and open to the public.

The Studio's annual Harold Clurman Festival of the Arts explores the relationship between art and social activism in a week-long presentation of discussions and performances; participants have included Gordon Davidson, Derek Walcott, Olara Otunno, Zlata Filipovic, Ishmael Beah, Anne Bogart, Whoopi Goldberg, Giandomenico Picco, Jonathan Demme, Mike Medavoy, Wallace Shawn and Phylicia Rashad.

A 2009 Festival event inspired a book that Tom co-edited with Herb Kohl; *The Muses Go To School*, was published by New Press in 2012.

Under Tom's leadership the Stella Adler Outreach Division, a program designed to educate urban youth, was created. Since 2004, Outreach has provided free theater training to over 2,000 low income New York City public school students. In addition, the Stella Adler Studio of Acting trains over 500 actors per year. As a result of Tom's vision the Studio has evolved from an acting conservatory to a cultural center with a unique focus in American actor training. Students are encouraged to not only be well versed in theater, art, music and literature, but to also be conscious of and involved in social, humanitarian and political issues.

Tom studied acting at the National Shakespeare Conservatory and with his grandmother, Stella Adler. Acting credits include the title role in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as well as Michael in Buzz McLaughlin's *Sister Calling My Name*, both with the Harold Clurman Laboratory Theater Company, Jambalaya's productions of *Othello* as Iago, and *Featuring Loretta; Henry IV, Part 1* and *Macbeth* at the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival, *Henry VI, Part I, II, III* at Theater for a New Audience, *Juana Queen of Spain* at EST, *Bound East* for Cardiff at The Provincetown Playhouse, *Romeo and Juliet* at the Mint Theater, and *Comparing Books* at the Producer's Club. Film credits include Mike Nichols' *Wolf*, Art Jones' *Going Nomad* and Dodgeball and Deborah Kampmeier's *Virgin and Hound Dog*. TV credits include Sydney Lumet's TV series, *100 Center Street*.

HAROLD CLURMAN LABORATORY THEATER COMPANY

The company grew out of a feeling that the time had come for the Stella Adler Studio of Acting to produce, or reproduce, its spirit, voice and theatrical sensibilities on a professional level. The mission of the Lab Theater is to produce theater committed to the standards and ideals set out by Stella Adler, Harold Clurman and the Group Theater. It serves as a launching pad for its students and an artistic home for its faculty to grow and evolve. It also includes actors, directors, and designers from outside the immediate Adler community who share our humanistic impulse and vision.

THE STELLA ADLER STUDIO OF ACTING

The Stella Adler Studio Of Acting is an acting school based in New York City founded by actress and teacher Stella Adler in 1949. Adler founded the Studio on her belief in the seriousness of her art. Adler and the school have trained many of the brilliant actors of our time. The Stella Adler Studio of Acting is a not-for-profit organization, which trains over 500 actors annually. The Studio also presents public lectures, poetry readings, concerts, theater performances, dance theater events and an annual arts festival. www.stellaadler.com