

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

2016-17 SEASON

PLAYGUIDE

OCTOBER 12 – NOVEMBER 6

ABIGAIL/1702

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT:

The amazing Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa on comics, Arthur Miller, and the Devil himself

BEHIND THE SET:

How designer James J. Fenton dreamed up the haunting world of *Abigail/1702*

SALEM, 1692:

The incredible hysteria that set the story in motion

WRITTEN BY

Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

DIRECTED BY

Tlaloc Rivas

SEAN DANIELS
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



ELIZABETH KEGLEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PRESENTS

ABIGAIL/1702

WRITTEN BY

ROBERTO AGUIRRE-SACASA†

FEATURING

TREVOR DAME

MARK KINCAID*

JON KOVACH*

RACHEL NAPOLEON*

CELESTE OLIVA*†

SCENIC DESIGNER

JAMES J. FENTON

COSTUME DESIGNER

ANNE KENNEDY

LIGHTING DESIGNER

MARÍA-CRISTINA FUSTÉ

SOUND DESIGNER

DAVID REMEDIOS†

CASTING DIRECTOR

JUDY BOWMAN, CSA

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

CASEY L. HAGWOOD*

PRODUCER

PETER CREWE

DIRECTED BY

TLALOC RIVAS†

OCTOBER 12 – NOVEMBER 6, 2016

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† Member MRT Patriot Program. *Member of Actors Equity, the union of professional actors and Stage Managers in the United States

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The Cast of ABIGAIL/1702

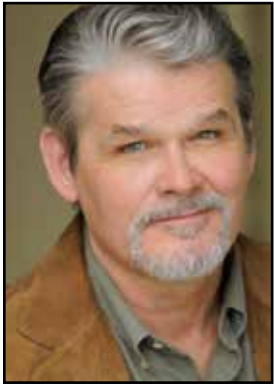


TREVOR DAME

(Little Boy)

MRT: Debut. **Regional:** *Once On This Island*, Middlesex Community College Children's Theatre; *Dragons of the Winds*, *Peter Pan*, *Little Mermaid*, *Snow White*, Pelham Youth Community Theatre (Penguin Players). **Education:** Lowell Catholic. **Other:** Trevor has a black belt in Kempo Karate and

loves songwriting, singing, animals, horror stories, and fishing.



MARK KINCAID

(Older Man)

MRT: Debut **Regional:** *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Zorro*, *God's Man In Texas*, *The Miracle Worker*, *Southern Cross*, *Carapace*, *Medea*, The Alliance Theatre; *Richard II*, *Hamlet*, *Tartuffe*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Christmas Story*, *Bus Stop*, *Charley's Aunt*, *Far East*, Theatre in The Square;

The Georgia Shakespeare Festival; *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Last Night of Ballyhoo*, *The Living*, Georgia Ensemble Theatre; *The Chase*, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, *Dividing The Estate*, *The Savannah Disputation*. The Horizon Theatre: *13th of Paris*. The Aurora Theatre: *Dracula*, *A Body of Water*, *Betrayal*; Theatrical Outfit; *The Goat*, *The Pillowman*, Actors Express. The Old Globe Theatre, The McCarter Theatre, People's Light and Theatre Company, Mill Mountain Stage, and The Hippodrome State Theatre.

Awards: Suzi Bass Award for performance as Louis De Rougemont, *Shipwrecked*. **Other:** Mr. Kincaid is very happily married to the beautiful and gifted actress Tess Malis Kincaid and is the very proud father of the remarkable Barbara Rose Kincaid.



Jon Kovach, Mark Kincaid, and Rachel Napoleon.
Photo by Meghan Moore



JON KOVACH

(Younger Man)

MRT: Debut. **Off-Broadway/New York:** *Nothing, The Tank; The Wedge Horse*, Fault Line Theatre Co.; *Of Mice and Men*, Bay Street Theatre; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Capital Repertory Theatre. **Regional:** *4000 Miles, Fly, A Christmas Carol*, Playhouse in

the Park; *Taking Shakespeare, Band Geeks!*, Human Race Theatre Co.; *Girlfriend*, Wellfleet Harbor Actors' Theatre. **Film/TV:** *The Ides of March*, Lionsgate; *A Kind of Murder*, Killer Films, *Six Degrees of Murder*, Investigation Discovery; *Suddenly Rich*, TLC. **Education:** Miami University, BA Theatre '11. **Awards:** Best Experimental, United Solo-NYC; Rising Star, League of Cincy Theatres; Fringe First, San Diego Fringe Festival. **Other:** Jon is the founding artistic director of Unity Productions in NYC. Winning awards and critical acclaim as an actor, musician, director, writer, and producer, Jon continues to expand on his career in the arts.



CELSTE OLIVA

(Older Woman)

MRT: *It's a Wonderful Life* (Sally Applewhite/Mary Hatch). **Off-Broadway/New York:** *Sheer Madness* (Barbra DeMarco). **Regional:** *Arcadia* (Hannah James), *Grounded*, (The Pilot), Nora Theatre; *Rich Girl, Beeley's New Car, Ch'inglish*, Lyric Stage; *Reconsidering Hanna(h)*, Boston Play-

wrights Theatre; *Sheer Madness*, Charles Playhouse. **Film/TV:** *November Criminals, Bleed for This, Olive Kitteridge, Sex Tape, The Sins of the Preacher, The Company Men, Brotherhood, The Waterfront, Sexting in Suburbia, The Edge of Darkness, The Invention of Lying, The Woman, 21, Gone Baby Gone, Mystic River. Awards:* IRNE, Best Actress 2013 *Ch'inglish*; Best of Boston, Best Actress 2013. **Nominations:** *Grounded*, IRNE nomination 2015; *Grounded* (2014), *Ch'inglish* (2012), Elliot Norton nomination.



RACHEL NAPOLEON

(Younger Woman)

MRT: Debut. **Off-Broadway:** *Fashions for Men*, Mint Theatre; *Arbitrary Astral Borders*, NY Fringe Festival. **Regional:** *June Moon*, Williamstown Theatre Festival. **Film/TV:** *Sobrevivo, Call Sheet, The Blacklist, Good Girls Revolt. Education:* BA in theatre performance from Western Michigan University.

For my family and friends, my heart and soul and for the real Abigail, may you be forgiven.



Mark Kincaid, Jon Kovach, Rachel Napoleon, Trevor Dame, Celeste Oliva, and Tlaloc Rivas.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Before turning to the theatre in my early-twenties, I was a student of history and politics. The events of Salem, MA in 1692 were seared into me as a cautionary tale of an early American society torn apart by repression (religious, sexual), fear (of its native inhabitants) and vengeance (reverends and judges blinded by political gain).

Years later, I was introduced to *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. Those same events in Salem were weaved into a parable of the 'witch-hunt' – a parallel and commentary to the McCarthy-led prosecution and blacklisting of citizens with any leftist-leanings or sympathies. Twelve-years ago I directed a production of *The Crucible* in Maine on the eve of the election between Bush and Kerry. Those words regained a new and profound immediacy in the wake of 9/11 and subsequent wars in the Middle East.

And today, as I write this in the middle of rehearsals for *Abigail/1702* by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, a new perspective emerges: one of redemption in a society still reeling from its self-inflicted wounds of mistrust, uncertainty and sin.

Blah blah blah ... but what about the witches, spirits and demons?

Don't worry. We'll get to that soon enough.

We think we know everything that needs to be known about the events in Salem, but then a new perspective is unearthed by the brilliance of Aguirre-Sacasa – a writer whose sympathetic portrayals of women in TV's *Big Love*, *Glee*, *Supergirl* (and others), the recent reboot of the cult-film *Carrie*, and his ongoing *Afterlife With Archie* comic book series show a profound desire to bring three-dimensionality to characters outside of the dominant culture.

Believe me when I tell you that every writer in the country hit themselves on the head and exclaimed, "Why didn't I think of that??" when they first heard of the premise of *Abigail/1702*, which asked the question: what happened to Abigail Williams after the events of Salem 1692? There are plenty of 'easter eggs' for you to find – as well as new ones you never would have imagined.

However, Aguirre-Sacasa isn't content with just telling a 'what if' story. We, as the creative team – actors, designers, technicians, etc. – have been tasked to present to you not only a new portrait of a young woman who has been (to a certain degree) unfairly portrayed by history, but to also bring those very witches, spirits and demons to fruition through Aguirre-Sacasa's imagination – and yours (as the audience).

Hold on tight. It's going to be a bumpy night.

— *Tlaloc Rivas, Director*

Q&A: ROBERTO AGUIRRE-SACASA

Roberto is a playwright (American Psycho, Say You Love Satan, The Muckle Man), screenwriter (Carrie, Glee, and the upcoming Riverdale), and comic book writer (Fantastic Four, Afterlife with Archie). He is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and the Chief Creative Officer of Archie Comics.



Did you always know you wanted to include supernatural elements in this story?

That element of the piece evolved as I was working on it. At first I was surprised when it started going that way, but I don't know why, because often my plays start in a realistic world and then, at the fringes, supernatural or genre elements start creeping in—ghosts, aliens, sea monsters—so in a way, I shouldn't have been so surprised when the devil walked in to *Abigail/1702*.

What made you say “I’ve got to write this play?”

Abigail/1702 came out of two impulses. The first is my deep, abiding love of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Years ago, I was doing a play at Steppenwolf, and I was watching their production of *The Crucible*, and I was reminded what a great play it is. In the lobby afterwards, they were selling copies of Miller's script with his annotations, and there was a section in the back detailing the historical people the play is based on. At the end, there was a single sentence about Abigail that read something like: “Legend has it Abigail turned up years later in Boston as a harlot.” I read that sentence, the hair on the back of my neck stood up, and I thought, “That's a play.”

The second impulse, which flowed from that revelation, was how drawn I was to the character of Abigail, who is an agent of chaos in *The Crucible*, but then leaves suddenly and you don't know what happens to her. I wanted to take one of the most irredeemable characters in theatre, up there with Iago, and try to redeem her.

Did you take on any research while writing?

When I started writing *Abigail/1702*, I thought it was going to be a history play. I did a lot of research about the Salem Witch Trials, Puritan life and religion, and the way women functioned and lived in that society. I re-

searched everything from the pirates of that time, to smallpox, to Samuel Sewall's public apology to the young nation about his role in the Trials, which galvanized me. I read about Arthur Miller's writing of *The Crucible*, and the real people he based his characters on. When I'm writing, I often like to expose myself to works of art that are of the same world, so I started reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories. He wrote two, “The Minister's Black Veil” and “Young Goodman Brown,” that both featured the devil as a character. When I read them, something clicked, and I realized

that I wasn't writing a history play, but a ghost story. The play is a Gothic folk tale set in the New England woods.

Were there places you felt you wanted to fill in gaps in the history?

When I was younger I used to confuse *The Crucible* with historical fact. In high school, when I studied the Salem Witch Trials in history class and *The Crucible* in English class, I thought they were one and the same. It was only later I found out that Miller had taken huge liberties in writing that play. So for this piece, it was less about finding historical gaps than just giving myself permission to use artistic license, to allow myself to tweak events. Like Miller's play, *Abigail/1702* is not purported to be historical fact, because I changed things as well.

“I wanted to take one of the most irredeemable characters in theatre, up there with Iago...and try to redeem her.”

You’ve done a lot of horror writing – does that genre excite you? Do you see this as a horror story?

Of course horror excites me. Those are the movies I like to see, the stories I like to read. A lot of my plays flirt with horror. With *Abigail/1702*, there's a way this play could have easily been a psychological horror story, a character study about the way this woman was tormented by metaphorical ghosts—her guilty con-

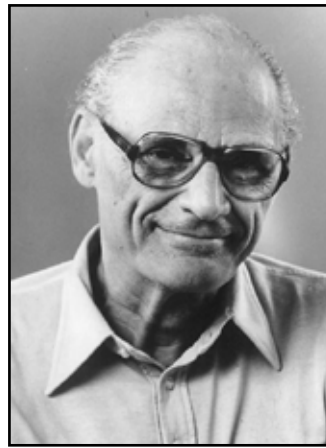
science—but of course it becomes a real ghost story, and she is pursued by a physical embodiment of the devil.

When I first turned in this play, a lot of people commented about how happy they were to read a play of mine that didn't have supernatural elements... and then they got to the scene with the devil. Ultimately, this is a much woollier play for all of its horror elements, and I love it that much more for them.

“With every new story that pops into my head, I always think of it as a play first.”

What's it like to write a play, versus a comic book?

The mediums are totally different. Plays are alive, they happen with living, real human bodies that are constantly in motion. Even if the character is being still, they're existing, right in front of your eyes. In comics, they're frozen images and your imagination fills in the blanks. There are common elements in all of my writing: I like twists and surprises, with muscular, genre storytelling.



Both Arthur Miller and Nathaniel Hawthorne influenced Aguirre-Sacasa's writing.

If

someone were to sit down and read all of my work, from the stage, to comic books, to television and film, I think they'd see recurring themes and motifs. For instance, I've written Archie comic books, an Archie play, and now I'm working on an Archie TV show, and while I've been able to explore different sides of those characters through each medium, many of the core themes remain the same

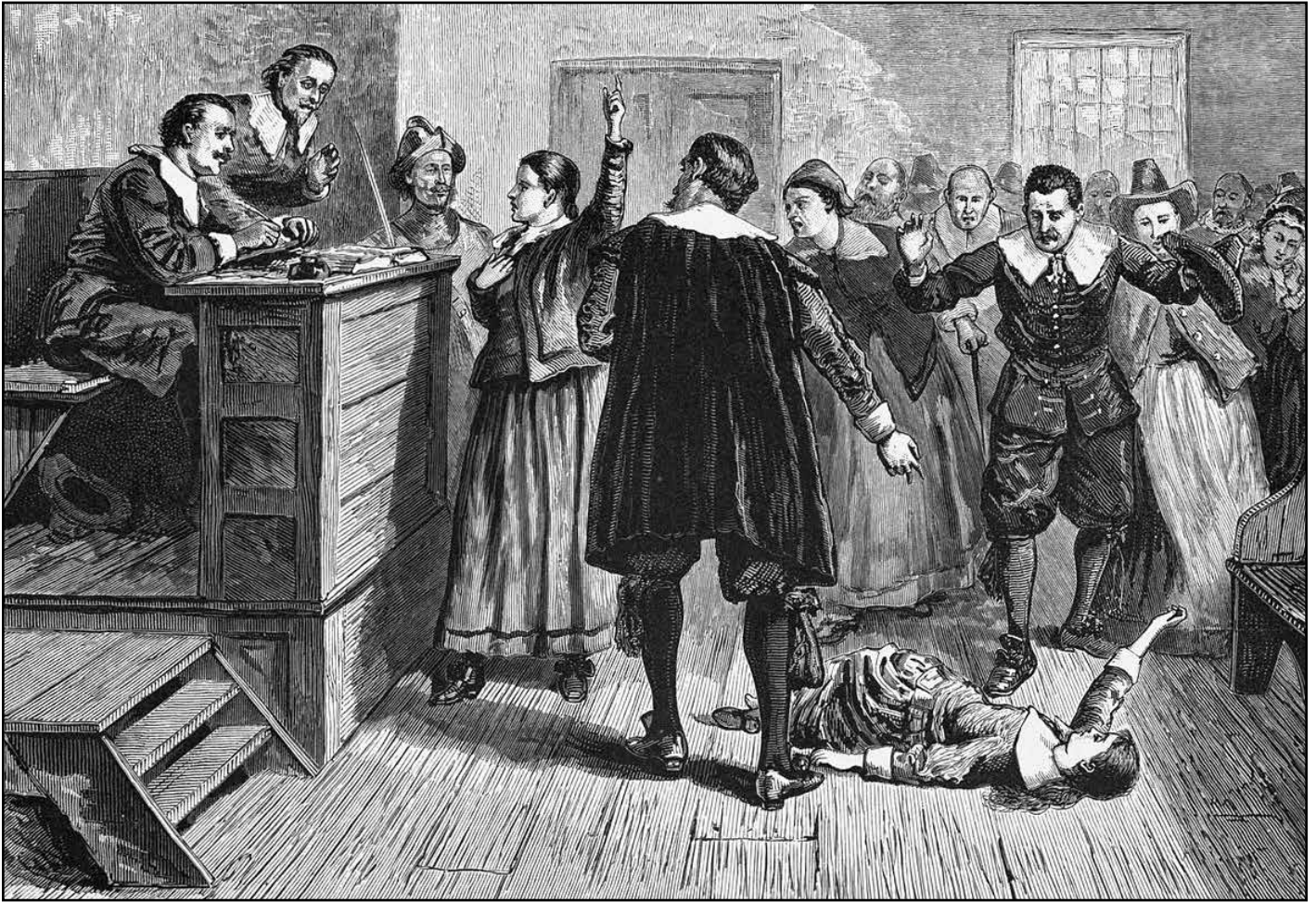
Why do you write for the stage?

Early on I was just drawn to it, especially to the people who work in theater. I felt like they were my tribe, as people like to say. When I do it, I do it just for me. Even now, when I spend much of my time working in television, with every new story that pops into my head, I always think of it as a play first.



Rachel Napoleon, Mark Kincaid, and Jon Kovach. Photo by Meghan Moore.

SALEM WITCH TRIALS



Witchcraft at Salem, engraving. The girl on the floor is usually identified as Mary Walcott, another of the “afflicted girls.”

THE HYSTERIA

It's hard to imagine the utter hysteria that rocked Massachusetts in 1692.

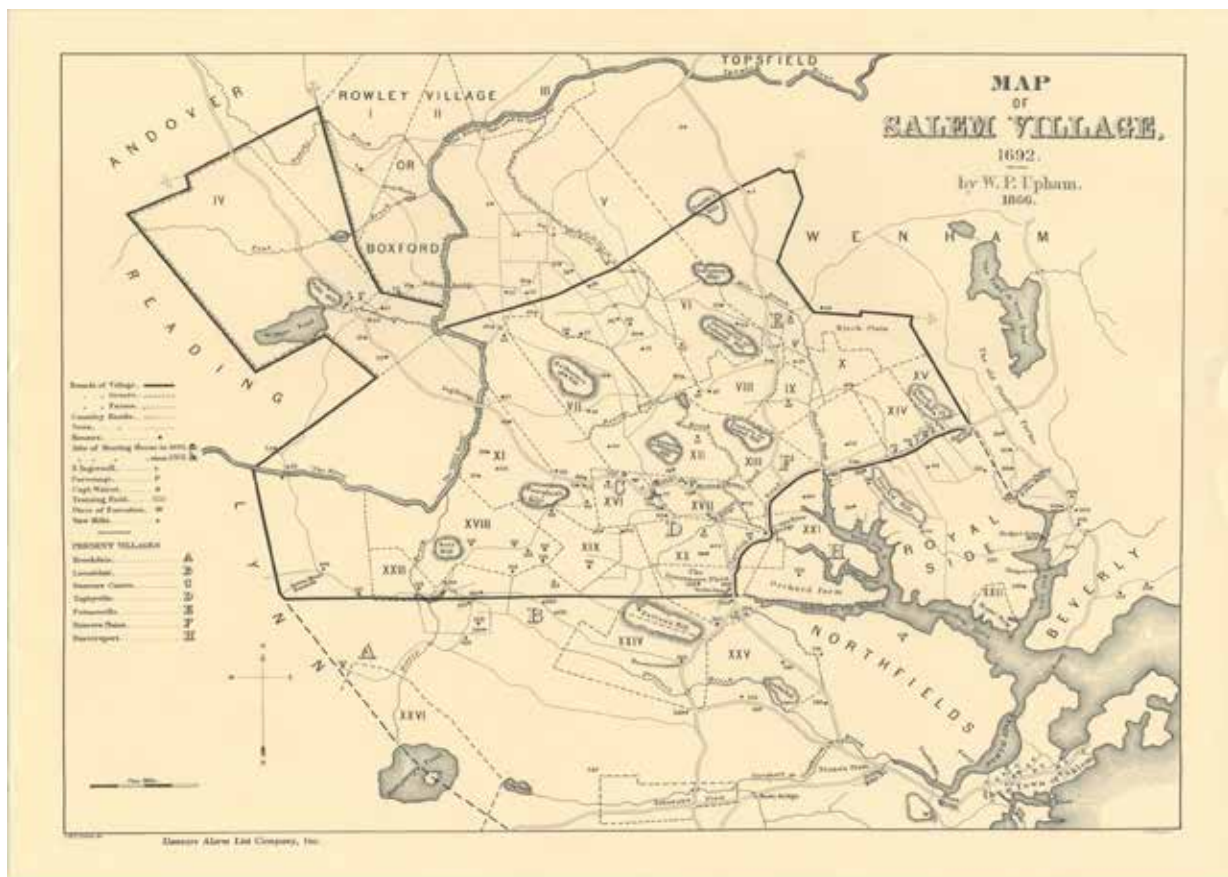
Young girls would launch **into terrifying, ecstatic seizures**: shrieking, convulsing, ripping apart bibles and hurling insults and pastors—supposedly manipulated by their own fellow townspeople, through the dark magic of witchcraft; the adults in the community responded with simultaneous awe, horror, and approval.

It had started in Salem: **legions of accusers called out others for sorcery and doing the Devil's bidding**. Most (but not all) accusers were young women and girls—some as young as nine—many of them orphaned.

And so the trials began. Nine justices—well-off community members—were drawn from the colonial General Court. Often, evidence of guilt was no more than impassioned testimony from a neighbor; still it was enough to send the accused to the gallows—especially if they did not confess.

BY THE NUMBERS

Before a year was out, the hysteria had spread to at least 22 Massachusetts villages; all in all over 150 people were arrested; **59 were tried in Salem; 31 were convicted; and 20 were executed**. Many of the convicted simply confessed to escape execution.



Salem Village (now Danvers) in 1692.

WHAT HAPPENED?

The Puritans were deeply religious, they placed supreme value in knowledge of the Bible, and were often biblically literal. **To a Puritan, the Devil was no metaphor;** he was as real as their next door neighbor. Demonic forces could possess people here on earth, and a witch could use them to inflict the devil's bidding on others.

What's more, life was bleak and brutal for the early American colonists. Food and firewood were earned by endless days of toil. **Vivid, ever-present Death** took its harsh toll in disease, wars, and hostilities with Indian neighbors; village elders told of men, women, and children hacked to death or carried off into the woods. A stringent class system made social advancement nearly impossible for most. And when one wasn't working, one was in church.

Women's and girls' prospects were especially grim; entirely dependent on the charity of men, they could not vote and didn't own land. If orphaned—as many children were—their only survival option was domestic servitude, filling days in the endless tedium of spinning yarn and hauling laundry to the closest stream.

So in the words of historian Diane E. Foulds: **“What a lark to willfully turn things on their heads at the Sunday service, to shriek and rave with total impunity... Girls who had been bored and neglected now found themselves pitied and awed, even deferred to, until the game got out of hand.”**



Imagining of the Salem witch trials by Joseph E. Baker, 1892.

ABIGAIL WILLIAMS

12-year-old Abigail may have been the most ruthless accuser of the Salem hysteria. **An orphan**, she was taken in by her uncle, the reverend Samuel Parris, emotionally distant and volatile, hardly the type to offer comfort to the grief stricken girl who had lost both parents.

The winter of 1692 was unforgivingly cold. Food and firewood were scarce. Abigail, who filled long days in the endless tedium chores, had only the family's slaves, Tituba and John Indian, for company, aside from Parris' 9-year-old daughter Betty (who would become one of the prime accusers of the trials.)

We do not know what caused Abigail's terrifying seizure; **Abigail fell to the floor thrashing and shrieking**. She barked like a dog, grabbed fistfuls of embers from the fireplace and tossed them into the air, and raced around the room crying "whist, whist, whist," frantically telling of the spirits who demanded she sign her name in the devil's book.

Practically overnight, the quiet, distressed Abigail became the center of attention in her small New England community. Newly emboldened, she would disrupt sermons at church, shouting out at the reverend mid-speech. In the trials, she led a delirious chorus of accusers, drawing her own blood as she **taunted and condemned innocent victims to die**.

There is little record of Abigail's life after Salem.



The deposition of Abigail Williams vs. George Jacobs, Sr. The text reads: Abigail Williams Testifyeth & saith that an old man that goes with two sticks hath appeared to & hurt her many times by pinching & bringing the book for her to set her hands unto, & the man told her his name was Jacobs the father of Geo: Jacobs & the Grandfather of Margaret Jacobs & he had made said Margaret set her hand to the book & Sarah Churchwell & his son Geo: Jacobs & his wife & another woman & her husband viz. Mr. English & his wife: also that she said Margaret had hurt her pretty much to day & at other times & brought her the book several times to night but not before.



The execution of Ann Hibbins for witchcraft on Boston Common. The Salem executions were carried out on Proctor's Ledge, now an unassuming patch of land off of Route 107.

THE TWENTY VICTIMS

Nineteen innocent men and women were found guilty of witchcraft in Salem and hung. One man, Giles Corey, refused to confess and was tortured by pressing for three days, until he died.

Anyone executed for witchcraft could not be buried in the hallowed grounds of a cemetery. They would be given an undignified burial, often at the execution site. Family members might then retrieve the body, and bury them again on family property.



The twenty victims are memorialized in Salem, Massachusetts, adjacent to the cemetery where many of their families are buried.

THE EXECUTED VICTIMS:

Bridget Bishop, Salem

Reverend George Burroughs, Wells (now Wells, Maine)

Martha Carrier, Andover

Giles Corey, Salem Village (Danvers)

Martha Corey, Salem Village (Danvers)

Mary Easty, Topsfield

Sarah Good, Salem Village (Danvers)

Elizabeth Howe, Topsfield

George Jacobs Sr., Salem Village (Danvers)

Susannah Martin, Amesbury

Rebecca Nurse, Salem Village (Danvers)

Alice Parker, Salem

Mary Parker, Andover

John Proctor, Salem Village (Danvers)

Ann Pudeator, Salem

Wilmot Redd, Marblehead

Margaret Scott, Rowley

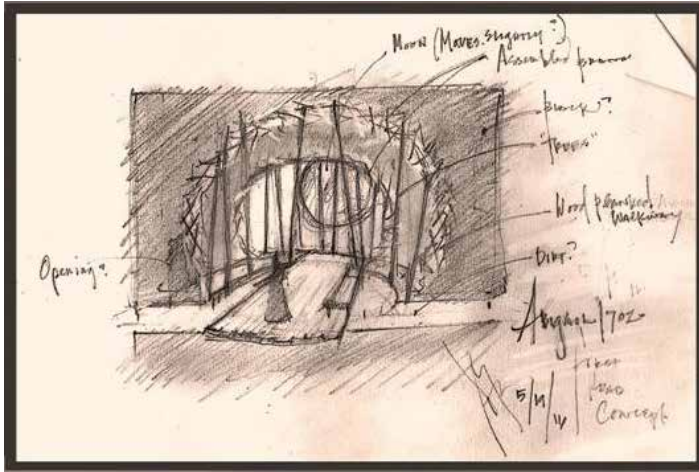
Samuel Wardwell, Sr., Andover

Sarah Wildes, Topsfield

John Willard, Salem

Q&A: JAMES J. FENTON, SCENIC DESIGNER

James J. Fenton is a nationally celebrated scenic designer whose productions at MRT have included *The Outgoing Tide*, *The Devil's Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith*, and *Mrs. Mannerly*.



Preliminary "thumbnail sketch" of the set design.

What was your starting point for the physical world of the play?

I found that this story begins and ends in the Circle in the Woods – and this also provides a ceremonial location for the set to evolve from, a place of protection, mystery, danger and redemption. An emotional, psychological, and physical sphere that has surrounded Abigail her entire life. A place where she goes to hide and then

to be free.

As with *The Outgoing Tide*, this play is set in real-world locations that are always shifting. What special challenges does that create?

I have attempted to free myself of absolutes insofar as any given location. Abigail seems to slip in and out of a natural chronology in time and space as she reflects on her life throughout the story. I found that visually overlaying her Circle in the Woods (trees, garden, path, and moon) with the interior elements of her home (bed, fire-place, chairs, and floor) helped me to believe that things are not so strictly defined. It creates one of those arcane locations that I find hiking through the forest, where an

“a ceremonial location for the set to evolve from, a place of protection, mystery, danger and redemption.”

ancient structure has been re-taken by nature. Something forgotten waiting to tell its tale again.

Sean has called you a “master of theatrical realism” in reference to your attention to detail. What details give this set its character?

That’s really quite humbling. I would say I indulge in a certain obsession over the use and treatment of real materials that bring their own textural integrity. Rather than affecting surfaces with overtly scenic paint treatments I try to choose substances that come with their own historic or tactile realism. One example here is the naturally felled trees you see. Also, the prop master Brendan Conroy and I have worked very hard to seek out actual colonial artifacts for the furnishings, set dressing, and properties.

What were your favorite research findings for this project?

Obviously the period and historic location offer a rich and evocative palate to work with. The imagery and literature of Colonial Massachusetts can really transport you. Just simply walking through the



Developed sketch of the set design.



Research images that influenced the design.

consequence he provides heavily informed the content and atmosphere of the research, as well as his invocation of circular imagery. This led me towards more ephemeral art installations of natural materials like Andy Goldsworthy and the Land Art movement.

What's something you're doing with this set that you've never done before?

Well this will be my first forest of real trees... hahaha!

Why do you design for the stage?

That is a question I ask myself over and over again... Designing environments for performance was an inevitable destination. It is beyond just what I love to do, it is something I have always done. I love to tell and be told stories, so I absorb the emotional content of these fictions and develop ceremonial and expressionistic architecture that responds in both the historic and immediate context.

In other words I am a big nerd.



Andy Goldsworthy's Oak Room was a significant inspiration for the set.

"I try to choose substances that come with their own historic or tactile realism."



Finished scenic model for Abigail/1702. The onstage forest will be populated by real, naturally felled trees.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS IN *ABIGAIL/1702*

Asmodeus: The King of Demons, alternately referred to as the King of the Nine Hells, the Demon of Lust, one of the Seven Princes of Hell, and the Devil on Two Sticks. The name appears in numerous Christian and Jewish traditions, including the *Dictionnaire Infernal*, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the Testament of Solomon, the Talmud, the Book of Tobit, and the Kaballah.

Barbados: Island near South America, colonized by the British in 1627.

Bloodletting: The intentional draining of blood for therapeutic or medicinal purposes, by either cutting or leeches. Once widespread, it was not discredited as a treatment for most ailments until the late 19th century.



Bloodletting by leeches, 1639

Brackish: A mix of salt and fresh water

Castle Island: Island in Boston Harbor, fortified since 1694 to defend the port. It was connected to mainland South Boston in 1928.



Castle Island today; www.mass.gov



1863 Depiction of Asmodeus from Collin de Plancy's Dictionnaire Infernal

Gallows Hill: The site of the hangings for witchcraft in 1692. The specific site of the hangings was confirmed as Proctors Ledge in January 2016, a small patch of land behind a Walgreens Pharmacy on Route 107.

Harlot: A prostitute or promiscuous woman

Kennebec River: 170-mile river running southward through Maine; the launching place of hundreds of ships as far back as 1607

Lamb of the Lord: Title for Jesus, derived from John 1:29, in which John the Baptist exclaims "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Poultice: A small, moist mass of material applied to relieve bodily soreness and inflammation

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSIONS

Playwright Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa says that he wanted to redeem “one of the most irredeemable characters in theatre.” **Do you think the play succeeds in redeeming her?** Do you think Abigail herself is deserving of that redemption?

Are there acts you believe can **never be forgiven**?

How is John Brown’s spiritual path like Abigail’s? How is it different? Are there points where their paths intersect?

In the playbill, MRT lists the characters as “Younger Woman,” “Older Man,” etc., rather than by the characters’ actual names. **What do you imagine the reason is?**

In his director’s note, Tlaloc Rivas says that the team is tasked to **“bring those very witches, spirits and demons to fruition.”** Do you find perspective on well-known characters of the witch trials and *The Crucible*—Abigail, John and Elizabeth Proctor, even the Man in Grey—that “comes into fruition” in a way it hadn’t before?

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

- *A Storm of Witchcraft* by Emerson Baker
- *Death in Salem* by Diane E. Foulds
- Full transcripts of the Salem proceedings: University of Virginia Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive: saalem.lib.virginia.edu
- *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller

More about the playwright: *The Washington Post*, “The Killer Career of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa”
https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-killer-career-of-roberto-aguirre-sacasa/2016/05/05/dcb59f82-07f2-11e6-b283-e79d81c63c1b_story.html

THANK YOU

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