

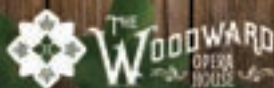
A WORLD PREMIERE from an AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR



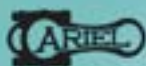
DOMERSET TAVERN

A new comedy by Daniel Mark Epstein

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Classroom Connections presents

THE WORLD PREMIERE OF

SOMERSET TAVERN

BY DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

DIRECTED BY BEN VICCELLIO

MTVARTS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
BRUCE JACKLIN

THANK YOU TO EVENT SPONSORS ORA AND SUE SMITH

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN is a playwright, poet, and biographer. His plays have been produced Off Broadway and in regional theaters, including *JENNY AND THE PHOENIX* (the Baltimore Theatre Project), *THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR* (St. Peter's Church, New York), and *JEFFERSON AND POE* (Symphony Space, New York). His radio plays, *STAR OF WONDER* and *THE TWO MENORAHS* have become mainstays on National Public Radio.

His biographies, including *The Lincolns: Portrait of a Marriage*, and the international best-seller *The Ballad of Bob Dylan*, have been translated into many languages. He has taught playwriting in the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars, and at Towson State University. His honors include the Prix de Rome (Rome Prize) and an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and several honorary degrees. His collected poems, *Constellations*, will be published this autumn.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Sixty-five years before our play is set, Shakespeare wrote, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

Three hundred years on, a sociologist named Erving Goffman came along and called it Dramaturgy: theatre-as-metaphor for human behavior. In our everyday, we're all actors performing roles to shape how others perceive us. Through this lens, "identity" is not fixed but constantly constructed and tailored to time, place, and audience. We sculpt ourselves to fit the moment, adjusting to the demands of the scene.

Goffman split us into two: the Front Stage where we polish ourselves to both fit and manage expectations (social, cultural, relational), and the Backstage, where we drop our guard, shed our armor and reveal our more authentic selves.

But here we are. It's 2025, and the Backstage is fading. Cultural shifts have blurred the boundaries between public and private, encouraging constant self-monitoring and relentless impression management, turning even our most personal moments into curated displays for an audience that never goes home. As performance becomes the societal norm, authenticity takes a hit, leaving us trapped in perpetual Front-stage exhibitions that corrupt true connection with ourselves and with others.

Psychologists call it "masking," and it's active and exhausting work. And it's a matter of survival... or so we tell ourselves. But we spend so much time performing—at work, in relationships, online—that we easily lose sight of who we really are. The masks we wear to win acceptance only build walls of isolation as others fall in love with our performances while our true selves remain unheard, unseen, and untouched. What begins as self-protection transforms into self-imprisonment.

We end up creating the very thing we're trying to avoid. The repression is the neurosis. Paging Dr. Freud.

The theater is a liminal space, straddling two worlds—the conscious and unconscious, the staged and the authentic. No wonder so many of our greatest thinkers have been fixated on it. While the world urges us toward nonstop self-presentation, the stage offers a kind of liberation. Here, the explicit acknowledgment of performance creates a sanctuary where truth can safely emerge. What psychoanalysts call "The Return of the Repressed" happens before our eyes; our brave actors' deliberate assumption of character creates an alchemy where artifice reveals what's genuine.

This is why, to my mind, theatre remains our most potent cultural mirror. When we watch actors put on their "masks," something in us recognizes our own performativity. The proscenium's framed unreality exposes reality in ways nothing else can. What Jung termed "The Shadow"—those disowned parts of ourselves—finds representation in characters whose struggles echo our own. And, unlike our detached scrolling through curated digital performances, theatre happens in shared space and time—an active and collective ritual that has, for millennia, fulfilled our fundamental need for communion. We experience a "collective effervescence"—a rare synchronicity of experience that dissolves our carefully constructed boundaries.

We sit together, we laugh together, we cry together, we breathe together.

In the dark of the theater, we see what our everyday performances deny us: the complicated truth of being human, raw and messy and unresolved. The theater doesn't just show us masks—it shows us why we wear them, what happens when they slip, and sometimes, if we're paying attention, how we might learn to live without them.

So, thank you for stepping into our theater. If you understood all the references in this note, congratulations—you qualify for partial credit in an absurdly expensive liberal arts degree.

And welcome to Somerset Tavern.

BEN VICCELLIO is an actor, writer and Associate Professor of Drama & Film at Kenyon College. His acting credits include the role of the role of Oedipus in Frank Galati's OEDIPUS COMPLEX at The Goodman Theatre; CHERRY ORCHARD, THEATRICAL ESSAYS, and the world premiere of MEN OF TORTUGA at Steppenwolf; the role of Petruchio in SHORT SHAKESPEARE: TAMING OF THE SHREW, Macbeth in SHORT SHAKESPEARE: MACBETH, and Guildenstern in HAMLET at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre. Ben has also also acted for film and television, as well as in the odd commercial... some of them, he claims, very odd. His writing for the stage has been produced in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Aspen.



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SETTING

The Time: An April morning in 1660

The Place: A tavern on the Eastern Shore of Virginia

THIS PLAY WILL BE PERFORMED WITHOUT AN INTERMISSION

CAST OF CHARACTERS

BRIDGET BRIGHTON	Shauna Marie
AUBREY DRAW	Steve Herbst
EDGAR WEATHERVANE	Jake McAskill
ROLAND BANNISTER	Stephen Stone
MORGAN NIGHTINGALE	Courtney DeCosky

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director.....Ben Viccellio	Costumes.....Susan SB Brown, Kristen VanValkenburg
Artistic Director.....Bruce Jacklin	
Producer.....Janis Stone	
Production Manager.....Megan Evans	Lighting Designer.....Arin Laycook
Stage Manager.....Josh Callahan-Foley	Light Board Operator.....Elisa Lybarger
Incidental Music...Howard & Judy Sacks	Sound Engineering.....Alex Thompson
	Sound Assistant.....Emma Parsissom
Set Design.....Daniel Mark Epstein, Sarah Longaker	Ticketing.....Scott Swingle & the Mount Vernon Arts Consortium
Carpenters.....Steve Herbst, Jayson Herbst	Media Design.....Carrie Haver, Markt Playbill.....Megan Evans & the Mount Vernon Arts Consortium
Scenic Painters.....Bruce Jacklin, Jeckly Mucua	Public Relations.....Fahlgren Mortine
Props.....Bruce Jacklin	



Author Daniel Mark Epstein writes....

I wanted to capture the purity of the American spirit when our people were beginning to discover and define themselves as a unique culture, long before the Revolution. The 17th Century was an era of vast possibility here. There was no systemic racism in the provinces. The court system depended on the common sense and compassion of independent Justices of the Peace. And the energy of the theater was beginning to have its influence, in a new world that applauded actors, yet feared them, as challengers of an empire that held artists in suspicion. This play is based upon a true case: The first play produced in America was THE BEAR AND THE CUB (1665), in a tavern, and the actors were tried for treason in the same tavern where they acted their play. This is a matter of historical record. The contents of the original play are lost to history. A record of the trial survives, but our play does not represent it.



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CAST MEMBERS



COURTNEY DECOSKY (Morgan Nightingale) is thrilled to be back on stage at the Woodward Opera House in the world premiere of SOMERSET. Favorite local credits include PUMP BOYS

AND DINETTES, STEEL MAGNOLIAS, and SAVIN' UP FOR SATURDAY NIGHT at the Alcove, THE WOLVES at Kenyon College, and the world premier of THE FINAL TABLE at CATCO. Favorite California theatre credits include THE CHRISTMAS CAROL at South Coast Repertory, NIGHT OF THE IGUANA and HENRY IV at A Noise Within, and SIX ACTORS IN SEARCH OF A DIRECTOR at The Odyssey, written and directed by Steven Berkoff. Film and television credits include GONE (NBC Universal), MINDHUNTER (Netflix), and LIZ HERE NOW, which is in post-production. Courtney is active in the community arts, not only as the lead singer of the Americana band Six Miles to Nellie, but also as co-owner of Nellie Six Productions with her husband where she provides vocal and acting coaching. More information at www.nelliesix.com. Courtney is a graduate of Ohio University with a BFA in Acting and a Lifetime Member of the Actors Studio.



STEVE HERBST (Aubrey Draw) is excited to bring Aubrey Draw to life for the first time in this original production. He is originally from Columbus and moved to Mount Vernon in 1996.

He has been in numerous productions with MTVarts, MVAC, Licking County Players, Weathervane Playhouse, and Millersport Community Theater. Thank you to Bruce Jacklin, Ben Viccellio, and Daniel Mark Epstein for the honor and privilege of working on this incredible project. Steve's wife Kellie also deserves special thanks for always supporting all of the theater, music and shenanigans that keeps our journey so interesting and entertaining. Enjoy the show.

SHAUNA MARIE (Bridget Brighton) is a human, actress, theatre artist and educator, and dog mom. She is fortunate to get to



play onstage with other creatives and is always so excited to get to hang out with her MTVarts family, back at the historic Woodward Opera house. The last time she got to

play onstage was as Mary in JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR at the Renaissance Theatre in Mansfield, Ohio. Her next role is a huge secret so cross your fingers and toes! Thank you so much to Daniel, Ben, and this cast and creative team for their support during this process. Enjoy the show! Hi, Noah! Loaf yew! @sheisblackjoy



JAKE MCASKILL (Edgar Weathervane) is honored to be a part of this incredible team bringing SOMERSET TAVERN to life for the very first time. He was last seen as Lt. Schrank in WEST

SIDE STORY at the Ohio Theatre with Opera Columbus this past February, and has worked in nearby community theatres such as Little Theatre Off Broadway and Curtain Players. Jake is also a professional voice actor and audiobook narrator, and wants to thank his loved ones for their support, Bruce Jacklin for reaching out to him about this opportunity, and the rest of the production team for trusting him with Edgar Weathervane.



STEPHEN STONE (Roland Bannister) says "It is a privilege to work with such a fine cast & crew on this world premiere." This is his first Classroom Connections effort, having previously

been in several MTVarts musicals and four Classic Series productions to go along with too many Bruce Jacklin & Co. dinner theater plays. Stephen is long retired and lives in Mount Vernon with his wife Janis. He enjoys his family time with granddaughter Lanah, daughter Leah, and son-in-law Chris.

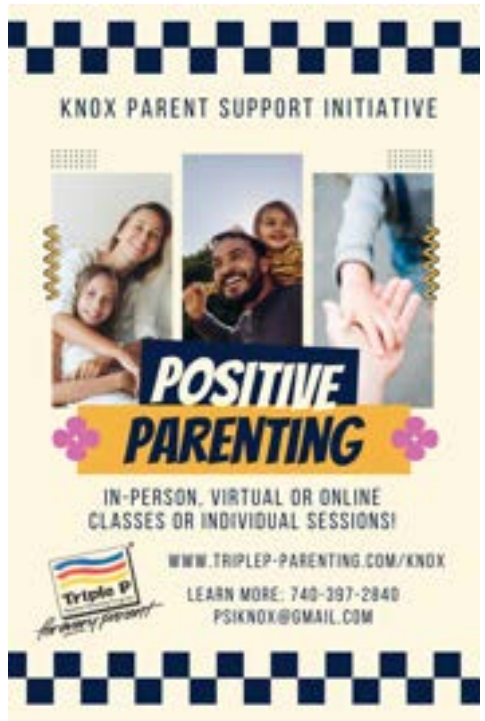
PRODUCTION CREW

SUSAN SB BROWN (Co-Costume Designer) has been designing and building costumes since her first year in college—that is, since 1963. She holds an MA in Theatre, an MFA in Theatre Design, and has completed most of the coursework toward a PhD in Theatre. In addition to her academic background, she worked for three summers at a Non-Equity summer stock company and designed for the New York Renaissance Festival for three summers as well. She later taught Theatre, Costume Design, and Make-up Design for 15 years at Ashland University. She has been involved with MTVarts since 2009 and was delighted to accept the opportunity to design costumes for SOMERSET TAVERN.

JOSH CALLAHAN-FOLEY (Stage Manager) is proud to support this original production from behind the scenes. A professional photographer and videographer at Ariel Corporation, Josh studied film at Full Sail University and has a background in both theater and film. He is thrilled to help bring new work to the stage and hopes you enjoy the show!

ALEX THOMPSON (Sound Engineer) is a professional audio engineer with experience in all kinds of events for all sizes of audiences. His favorite events are musicals and plays. SOMERSET TAVERN will be his 79th show and 24th with MTVarts. When he is not spinning knobs or taping microphones to people's faces, Alex likes to spend his time in the garden, kitchen or anywhere one of his three amazing cats may be.

KRISTIN VANVALKENBURG (Co-Costume Designer) loves all sides of the theater curtain, but her preferred role is off-stage, hands-on, and creative. In costuming, she gravitates towards a sculptural, mixed-media, and constructive project. With an apparent affinity for bears, her most recent contribution to MTVarts was Ursula's costume in the 2024 production of THE LITTLE MERMAID JR. Kristin loves sharing a passion for theater with many friends, her children, and her four nieces. She is grateful for the chance to be involved in bringing this original work to life for you!



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