

Q&A with Playwright Bill Cain

by Michael Cotey, Director of *EQUIVOCATION*

During the summer after my first year of grad school at Northwestern, I read a large stack of plays looking for the show I would direct during my second year. *EQUIVOCATION* was the first in the stack and while I did the due diligence of reading the other thirty or so plays, none of them could compete. Reading Bill Cain's complex, funny, highly theatrical and deeply human play was like riding a heart pounding roller coaster. His play is a gift – to directors, actors, designers, and audiences. Bill not only succeeds in juggling many balls – politics, history, religion, family, art – he does it while delivering a play that speaks from the heart. One doesn't need to know a thing about Shakespeare or the Gunpowder Plot to love this play because it also speaks to the anxieties of the world we find ourselves in.

I've never had the chance to revisit a play like I will with *EQUIVOCATION* at Next Act (which I couldn't feel more honored to be doing). This time around I worked up the nerve to talk to Bill Cain and ask him some questions about the creation of his brilliant play.

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MICHAEL COTEY: Where did the idea to write *EQUIVOCATION* come from?

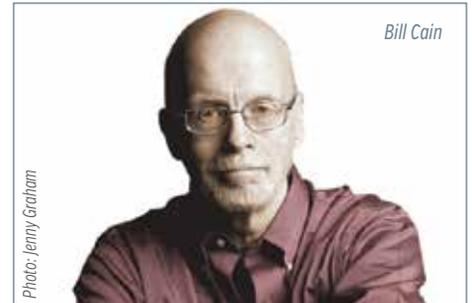
BILL CAIN: *EQUIVOCATION* began while I was standing in the Tower of London – shouting distance from the Globe Theatre across the river – and looking at the words prisoners of conscience had engraved in the walls of the Tower at the same time that Shakespeare was making a fortune writing for the King. And I wondered – which would I have rather been – a prisoner of conscience – or a writer writing for a corrupt regime?

MC: Did you have any other plays or movies in your head while you were putting *EQUIVOCATION* down to paper?

BC: Always. *DEVIL'S DISCIPLE* by Shaw was helpful. *GALILEO* by Brecht. Big canvas modern pieces. *LAWRENCE OF ARABIA*. *BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER KWAI*. As well as *MACBETH*, *LEAR*, *CYMBELINE*, *RICHARD III*, etc.

MC: What do you hope people walk away with from having seen this play?

BC: Someone after the original production wrote, "I came out of the show wishing to be bigger, truer, bolder." That.



Bill Cain

MC: How does being a Jesuit priest affect being a playwright, and vice versa?

BC: The job of a Jesuit priest is to find God in hidden places. This leads me to overlooked stories. Overlooked characters: Shakespeare's daughter Judith, Tom Wintour, etc.

MC: This play has an artist [one of the greatest of all time] grappling with both internal and external forces. Were you grappling with anything in particular as you wrote this play?

BC: Shag [Shakespeare] says in the play something to the effect that truth defies dramatic structure. Although the structure of *EQUIVOCATION* is rock solid, it is a very complex scaffold built to tell the story. It has five plays-within-the-play, two elaborate executions, domestic and public plots, politics and family – all done with complex doubling. This was not an easy structure to find. But once in place, it seemed inevitable.

Our vision of life is frequently reduced to melodrama. Good vs. bad. Usually with good triumphing. My goal was to reflect



Photo: Timothy Mader

Michael Cotey & David Cecsarini in *MICROCRISIS*

Continued, next page

accurately – as accurately as I could – my understanding of our complex time through studying and understanding the situation of our hero writer in his time.

MC: Your sense of humor has been described as impish. How would you describe it? And how do you find balance using humor in a play like *EQUIVOCATION* where the stakes are so high and where the endings are tragic for some?

BC: I don't think my humor is impish. I have a mind that embraces paradox and contradictions. It embraces chaos and finds implicit meaning in it. I would call my humor – oh, call it what you want. I find many things that are very serious, very funny. Drama is opposites meeting. Half of the time, that's very funny. The other half, it's heartbreaking.

MC: One of Shagspeare's first lines to his actors is in response to one of them calling Lear insane and he says, "Not near as insane as what's outside those doors," and it feels as though Shag could be talking about today's America. Your play also deals with truth and how to say the truth in difficult times, yet 2017 has been a year where what is "true" feels up for grabs day-to-day. How does *EQUIVOCATION* speak to the world we find ourselves in that maybe it didn't when it premiered in 2009?

BC: I am told of an incident that happened when the play was done at UC Santa Barbara. The day of opening night was the day of the campus shoot-

ing at UCSB. Seven were killed. Twice that number injured. They decided to perform the play. When the actor playing Shag said, "Not as insane as what happens outside those doors," I am told there was a shudder of recognition. They decided to do the play to give people a safe, creative place to be. A way to deal with madness outside. I hope the play retains that function.

MC: What's your favorite Shakespeare play and why?

BC: *LEAR*, I suppose, because of the scenes on the heath. Man is stripped of everything down to his naked being – and still that being is glorious. Lear finds room in his heart only when everything else is taken away.

Plays like *EQUIVOCATION* are the reason I direct. It's challenging and complex, full of big ideas, great passion and tremendous energy. And what an embarrassment of riches we have with the group of actors we've assembled to tackle this beast! Above and below Next Act's logo are two words; Intimate and Powerful. No truer words will describe your experience when you come see *EQUIVOCATION*.

– Michael Cotey

Tax Saving Opportunity for Retirees With IRA Accounts

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Find out more at www.nextact.org/support/ira-distributions

Save the Date
May 3, 2018
for
Bravo, Next Act!

Special Celebrity Guest, Anthony (Tony) Crivello

This reading series has been crafted with the theatre lover in mind; we celebrate what engages us, excites us, inspires us about this mysterious, wondrous pastime of telling stories from a wooden platform.

THE SEEDS OF BANQUO

by Angela Iannone

I confess, Shakespeare's *MACBETH* holds a special place in my heart. For one, the title character is one of very few anti-heroes in the canon, offering a daunting challenge to play fully, without hope for a great cathartic reward at the end. On a lighter note, however, my second attempt remains extremely memorable, since that's what brought Ms. Deborah Staples into my life as "my" murderous partner, Lady M.

The play also figures prominently in Bill Cain's *EQUIVOCATION*, which depicts Shakespeare in the flesh in 1606, poised to write one of his darkest, most powerful tragedies. It's fascinating to be a fly on the wall as a great play takes shape under the master's hand.



This confluence of "The Scottish Play" (Substitute name for *MACBETH* to avoid bad luck.) at Next Act will be made complete with a highly animated reading of Angela Iannone's remarkable creation, *THE SEEDS OF BANQUO*. Her play chronicles two rehearsal days in the life of famed American tragedian Edwin Booth, during which he reveals his brilliant psychological in-

sights about *MACBETH*, as well as his need for command and control within his theatrical troupe. Iannone has captured what was certainly Booth's great charisma, his intensity, wit, intelligence and theatrical power as shown in a mere rehearsal setting.

At this one-night reading of *THE SEEDS OF BANQUO*, Next Act audiences will enjoy the double reflection of the inner workings of a great Shakespearean play and a legendary actor's approach to mining the deep, complex truths which lie within.

THE SEEDS OF BANQUO

Monday, February 12 • 7:30 PM

Tickets \$15

THE BOOK OF WILL

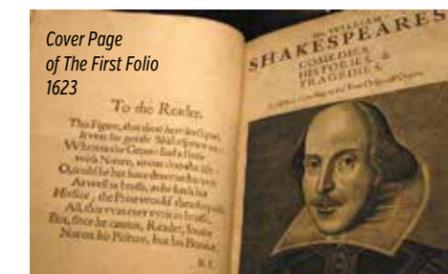
by Lauren Gunderson

Back in the ol' days, 1980-86, I had the distinct good fortune to serve as a founding acting company member of the fledgling Shakespearean troupe, American Players Theatre, in Spring Green. Those were formative, if turbulent, years for many of us as young actors. That theater on the hill was my apprenticeship studio where I developed a deeper appreciation for an art form which, up until then, I had treated more lightly than it deserved.

We went our own way out at APT, guided and inspired by the artistic founders who wanted to give back to Mr. Shakespeare his clear, unfiltered voice, unencumbered by heavy directorial concepts, inept movie stars or the slicing and dicing of the texts. Some judged us artistically naive, but the impulse to clear the way for the three most powerful tools at our disposal – language, thought and imagination – was the right one, and still applies to any sort of play which depends upon words.

Another formidable tool which came to be deployed at APT was a weighty volume of the Shake-

spearean collection of plays known as *The First Folio*. This collection was compiled primarily by two of Shakespeare's closest friends and colleagues, actors John Heminges and Henry Condell. The book was actually an act of belated desperation, partly spurred by the death of Shakespeare himself, then of lead actor Richard Burbage, suggesting the imminent dissolution of the "old guard" of players, scribes, prompters and managers who had known, spoken and lived the plays. Many did not exist in printed form; there was a real danger much of Shakespeare's work would be lost, or bastardized beyond all recognition.



A LOVE AFFAIR

Lauren Gunderson's love for Shakespeare has drawn from her this heartfelt homage to the passionate, determined men and women whom we have to thank for the best preserved copies of most (but not all) of *The Bard's* remarkable plays. She channels her love through Henry and John, who, when the chips are down, seek refuge and inspiration from within their chosen way of life, the theatre. And as we hear why they trust in make-believe, we believe also, in the power and glory of the art of storytelling. Gunderson's play aims straight for the heart of theatre lovers, and we can't wait to share her story with you. Please join us.

THE BOOK OF WILL

Tuesday, February 20 • 7:30 PM

Tickets \$15

Among my mom's immediate family in their small Ohio farm town known as Columbus Grove, there was an understanding that if you wanted to meet Catholics in the area, you'd need to go "northwest 'bout 8 miles up ta Kalida." [long "i"] This isn't to say that there were no Catholic celebrants in Grove; yes there were some, and they had their own church, as did Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentacostals, and others. Rather, I think the local lore had more to do with the fact that Kalida's clean and peaceful streets were dominated by St. Michael's Catholic church, a veritable cathedral overlooking the flat plains of NW Ohio. Though modest in terms of Notre Dame or Cologne, St. Michael's classic architecture and exuberantly-tall bell tower cannot help but make an impressive statement on the horizon, and within the culture. Hence, the Kalida Catholics.



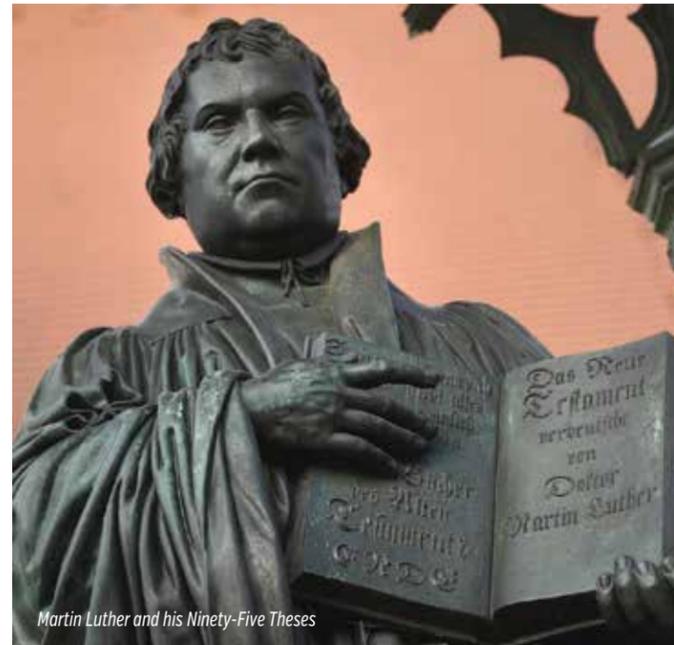
St. Michael's & the plains of Ohio

This anecdote of local culture has never been anything but a gentle stereotype, most probably supported by demographics. But nothing more.

IT'S A START

Five hundred years ago, according to medieval urban myth, a German professor of theology [also a composer, priest, and monk], nailed his Ninety-Five Theses – which criticized practices of the Holy Roman Catholic religion – to the doors of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg. Though Martin Luther's picaresque pamphleteering has slim basis in fact, his criticisms were stinging and palpable, and eventually earned him the honor of excommunication by the Pope, and being branded an outlaw by the Holy Roman Emperor [usually the German king]. Luther's public actions and professed beliefs, especially against the practice of selling indulgences [the exchange of money for forgiveness from God], have been credited with starting The Reformation, which gave rise to a new "brand" of church generally known as Protestantism, as in *protest*.

This was no Kalida Catholic anecdote; it was unholy war. Catholic-Protestant conflict would engulf middle Europe for the next 150 years, and thousands upon thousands of innocents were slaughtered,



Martin Luther and his Ninety-Five Theses

countries smashed, kingdoms lost. As the character Robert Cecil says in our play, *EQUIVOCATION*, all for "petty theological differences tearing us apart."

FOLLOW THE MONEY

But, there was more than theology at play. Those indulgence payments added up to vast fortunes, used to support a privileged clergy and build great religious palaces such as St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Besides believing that faith alone was the ticket to heaven, Luther didn't think it was fair for poor people to bear the rich man's burden. Further, his translation of the Bible from obscure Latin into German opened the door to textual interpretations and insight by the many, rather than the infallible few, or the one. There was a feel of populism in the reform and it took root and gained strength through the common people – the kind of revolutionary strength that threatens the indulged, corrupted and empowered.

The Reformation was inseparable from politics. The royals who ruled Europe were seen as God's anointed; they ruled through religious warrant as well as by heredity and law. And speaking of heredity, in England, 1533, King Henry the Eighth wanted the Church to annul his first marriage in quest of a male heir with his second wife-in-waiting, Anne Boleyn. The Pope would not agree, so Henry initiated the English Reformation, separating the Church of England from papal authority [and himself from Catherine of Aragon], and appointed himself the Supreme Head of the Church of England. By this action, the official English religion became Protestant, and England joined the religious turmoil emerging in Europe.

THE ELIZABETHANS

In Shakespeare's time, 70 years on, Queen Elizabeth had adopted somewhat tolerant but decisively anti-Catholic policies. The Act of Uniformity required all to attend Protestant church services, though the penalties for non-compliance were not overly severe. But beneath the repression there simmered a mood of rebellion, a dream to restore the Holy Catholic faith across the land. This feeling continued through the transition from Elizabeth's death to the 1603 installation of James VI of Scotland [also Protestant] onto the English throne as James I. There was hope that James would be more tolerant than his predecessor; that hope proved in vain.



Ann Boleyn with King Henry VIII, head of church and state.

GUY FAWKES

With apologies to both learned historians and you, patient readers, we finally come to The Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and the events which sparked Bill Cain's play, *EQUIVOCATION*. It was reported by King James I that the government had discovered a plot by Catholic recusants, supported by Jesuits and engineered by Guy Fawkes, to light the fuse to 36 barrels of gunpowder in a cellar room directly beneath the House of Lords. The time of detonation was to be November 5th, as the King convened Parliament. The explosion would have lopped off the head and shoulders of English government, as the King, his Queen, his son and heir, Lords and many nobles –



Celebrating on Bonfire Night

not to mention many hundreds of citizens in the vicinity – would have met instant death. The perpetrators also sparked a Midlands rebellion, with plans to kidnap the King's daughter and install her as the new Catholic monarch, controlled by her keepers. To this day, a debate remains on how, exactly, the plot was discovered, but discovered it was, and the conspirators paid with their lives.

A BURNING MEMORY

November 5th is celebrated as Bonfire Night, or Guy Fawkes Night, when his effigy is repeatedly burned and Britains celebrate the continuation of monarchy, unity and rule of law. One could imagine the consuming heat of those bonfire flames as a reminder of the fervent belief and dangerous passions that burned Europe for a century-and-a-half, before cooler heads prevailed. One might also point out that no matter what the subject matter, fervent passions and beliefs are always in danger of exploding, if not cooled by reason. No doubt Shakespeare had much to say in this regard, and in *EQUIVOCATION*, playwright Bill Cain has brought the bard to brilliant life to speak on his own behalf.

See you at the theatre.

David



Guy Fawkes & the Gunpowder Plot Conspirators

As part of our community mission, Next Act offers the theatre space for rent. Each producer is solely responsible for the content and quality of their performances. Here's what they have to say about their upcoming productions.



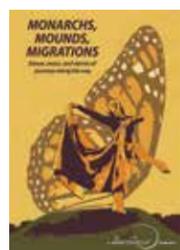
Imagination Theatre presents
VOLUME CONTROL

Imagination Theatre is bringing Little Black Dress INK's nationally sourced Female Playwrights ONSTAGE Festival to Next Act Theatre's Performance Space. The event will feature local actors reading short plays written by female playwrights from across the nation. The event is free to the public. However, donations will be collected to benefit the Milwaukee Women's Center. **Sunday, January 21 • 5 pm.**



Danceworks presents
WOMEN WHO DANCE

Danceworks Performance Company shares the stage with other inspiring, eclectic dancing women from the Milwaukee Community. Sarah Wilbur, founding Artistic Director, returns to the city to remount Disclosure Tactics, a dance for herself and 25 women that asks the question, why do we dance? Another force to be reckoned with, the vibrant women of Panadanza will perform dances of Latin America and lead a Brazilian Samba lesson! Women and men alike – let's celebrate the Women Who Dance! **March 2 – 4. Tickets \$22-\$27. Tickets must be purchased through Danceworks at danceworksmke.org or 414-277-8480 ext. 6025**

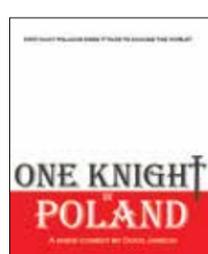


DanceCircus presents
MONARCHS, MOUNDS, MIGRATIONS

DanceCircus Artistic Director Betty Salamun directs a diverse cast of dancers, musicians and guest performers in *MONARCHS, MOUNDS, MIGRATIONS*, an original full-length dance-theatre performance. *MONARCHS, MOUNDS, MIGRATIONS* weaves together the migration stories of monarch butterflies – symbols of spirituality and transformation – ancient Mississippian mound builders – pursuers of arts and creativity in urban communities – and new migrants – seekers of hope and roots in new communities.

March 8 – 11. Tickets \$17, on sale February 1.

Doug Jarecki presents
ONE KNIGHT IN POLAND



One night of suspense and betrayal. One nearly forgotten piece of history revealed. One chance to save the human race. Doug Jarecki dares to show us Poland like we've never seen in this hilarious thriller. With the fate of the world hanging in the balance, one knight can change everything.

March 16 - 25. Tickets \$25

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WHAT'S NEXT

is a quarterly publication of Next Act Theatre
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Editors Rebecca Moder & David Cecsarini Layout Rose Delaney

In *EQUIVOCATION* an artist finds he is being used as a propagandist. Instead of using his art to pursue truth and enlightenment, he is employed to propagate falsehoods and deception. The conflict makes for a compelling story relevant to our alternative facts world.

Dara Larson, our featured artist, is also a seeker of truth, and as such she confronts the conflict between what is and what could be. She explores the shifting grounds of our political and social landscapes through metaphoric and emotional depictions of architecture and environments. Construction, destruction, planning, imagination, alternative fact, chaos, rising tides, bridges, walls, and winds of change are all part of the artistic visual vocabulary she uses to help us become more aware of and question the realities we all face.

Dara is a Professor of Art at Alverno College and for the past six years has also worked as a mentor artist and collaborative partner at the arts incubator Redline Milwaukee. Her studio practice includes a focus on intuitive mark-making to examine architecture, environments and urban spaces that reveal symbolic connections to the cultures who populate them.



Target Town by Dara Larson

She has traveled extensively throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas and combines global art and culture with a local viewpoint. Her artwork has been exhibited and collected internationally. Next Act is honored to feature the art of Dara Larson, and invites all to learn more about her and her work by visiting her website, daralarsonfineart.com.

HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART An Italian Shoemaker's Tale

Milwaukee-born actor, Tony Crivello's Italian roots go deep. In the couple of conversations we've had, his connection to family, to the Milwaukee Italian community rings clearly; he brims over with pride and respect for his heritage. It's no wonder Tony bonded years back with Steve Scionti, an actor hailing from his own Italian-American clan in Middleton, Connecticut.

The show these two guys are bringing to Next Act is a product of that bonding over roots, that love and respect for family, as seen through the growing up struggle of a young man in his Italian-American midst.

As with many families, parents want their children to grow up smart, adopt a trade or profession, and make a good living to support families of their own. But there's often a conflict be-

tween parental practicality and a young person's dreams. *HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART – An Italian Shoemaker's Tale*, gives us Steve, a bright, talented young man who wanted to do the impractical, wanted it desperately, but got strong pushback from Pop. Steve's grandfather, Angelo Morello the shoemaker, offered alternate advice, and encouraged Steve to pursue his happiness.



Steve Scionti, in HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART

Now, years later, as the family gathers for Angelo's funeral, Steve relives that journey through a series of humorous and touching vignettes, magically transforming himself into eight different characters – family members and friends – who taught him some of life's lessons, for better or worse.

HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART is a gorgeous portrayal, an uplifting celebration of the wisdom of family and the joy of life. As Scionti tells it, "Family goes across all racial and ethnic lines. You don't have to be Italian to enjoy this show."

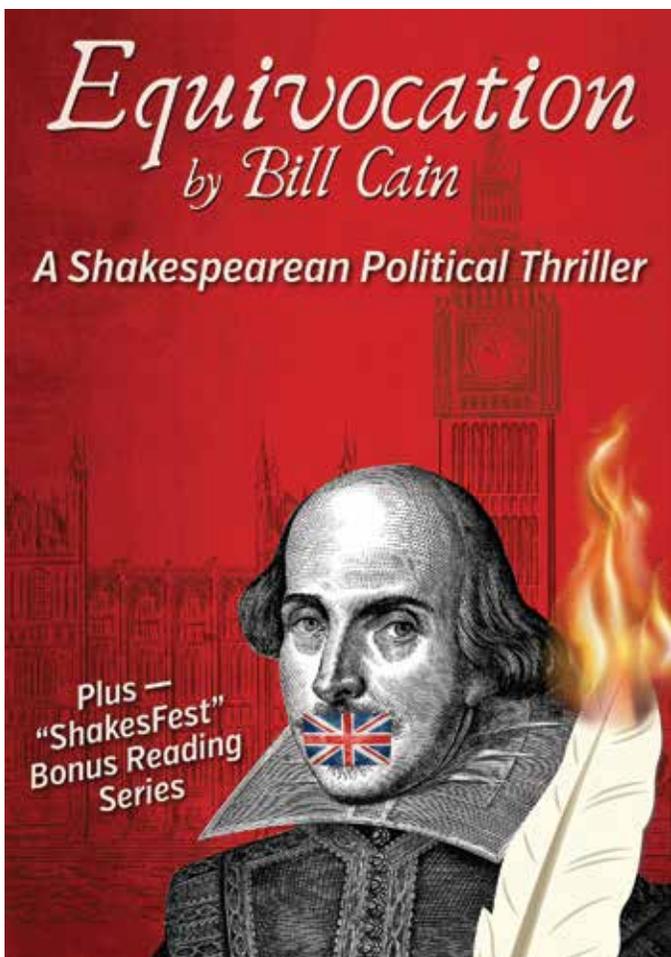
HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART, with Steve Scionti, directed by Anthony Crivello, coming **May 2 – 6, 2018**. The perfect play for that bit of Italian in all of us. Tickets on sale now.



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William Shakespeare is commissioned by Sir Robert Cecil, the most powerful man in England, to write the true history of the Gunpowder Plot – a failed attempt to kill King James I. But as “Shag” and his actors rehearse their new play, they suspect the government’s version might be a product of “alternative facts.” Now, the greatest writer of all time must decide between writing a lie and losing his soul, or writing the truth and losing his head.

“...one of the most bracingly intelligent, sizzlingly theatrical American plays in a decade...” - Variety

February 1 - 25, 2018

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 Preview 7:30	2 Opening 7:30	3 4:30 8:00 P
4 2:00 7:00			7 1:30 7:30 P	8 7:30 T	9 7:30	10 4:30 8:00
11 2:00 P T	12 BANQUO 7:30		14 1:30 7:30	15 7:30 P T	16 7:30	17 4:30 8:00
18 2:00 P T	19 7:30 S	20 BOOK OF WILL 7:30	21 7:30	22 7:30 T	23 7:30 P	24 4:30 8:00
25 2:00 P	Personal Preview (Begins 30 minutes prior to curtain)					
	T	S				SHAKESFEST! Play Reading

Directed by Michael Cotey
Featuring David Ceccarini, T. Stacy Hicks, Josh Krause, Eva Nimmer, Jonathan Smoots and Mark Ulrich

EQUIVOCATION is sponsored by Jerry & Donna Martynski and Gordana & Milan Racic