

Why THE SECRET MASK

by Edward Morgan

THE SECRET MASK is a father-son play that will speak to everyone. We all lose people who are dear to us; we lose track of once-close friends or become estranged from family members. Then, even if we rarely think on it, somewhere inside us there's a sense of loss and a longing for reconciliation. And sometimes it actually happens. That's what *THE SECRET MASK* is about.

The story is set in Canada, where a somewhat harried businessman named George finds himself confronted with the chance to recover his relationship with his father – and he takes it. Of course, it's not that simple. In fact, it's incredibly inconvenient, and George is considerably challenged and changed before all's said and done. But that's the essence of this wonderful, warm-hearted play and it's pretty universal.

A GOOD FIT

It was early last spring when David sent me *THE SECRET MASK* and asked if I'd like to direct it. I assume he thought it would be a good show for me because the story is told with a fluid sense of

space and time, and because it's about serious matters but has a lot of humor. David saw it as my kind of play and he was right. I happily accepted.

Then we cast three actors I'll be glad to see and work with again. Drew Parker plays George. He's worked with me in Virginia and Alabama but this will be his first show in Milwaukee. Jim Pickering plays Ernie (George's father) and he and I have a long collaborative history. And the delightful Tami Workentin plays everyone else, which is sure to be fun.

DEEPER CONNECTION

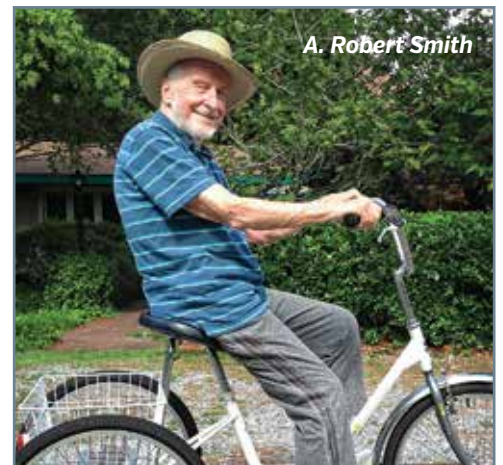
What David didn't realize when he sent me *THE SECRET MASK* is that this story is particularly meaningful to me because I've lived through something like it.



Robert & Edward

One morning in June 2011, my 86-year-old stepdad wandered into his kitchen unable to talk or think straight. He was tongue-tied and in a fog. His housemate called 911 and en route to the hospital the medic asked him his age, address and birthday, none of which he could recall. It was a stroke: the left side of his brain was flooded with blood from a

ruptured vessel, wiping out circuits needed for diction, speech and memory. The result was aphasia (the inability to produce spoken language) and agraphia (the inability to retrieve words). As he later described it, "I could visualize answers to questions, but the words wouldn't form in my mouth. I sometimes uttered different words than I was thinking. It felt like my brain and mouth were on different wavelengths."



A. Robert Smith

RECOVERY

My stepdad, A. Robert Smith, was a journalist and an author, yet after his stroke he could barely read. His speech was peppered with misplaced words. But his doctors told him that if he worked

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Edward Morgan is a freelance theatre director, playwright and teacher, based in New York. This will be his 12th directing assignment with Next Act.

hard enough the right side of his brain might pick up some of the lost faculties of the left. So he set to with determination. He was endlessly patient with himself. He chuckled and shrugged at his halting speech and strange verbal substitutions. He spent countless hours with a lovely speech therapist half his age and developed a huge crush on her. And slowly but surely, he began to recover his life of words. In a matter of months he was reading the paper, practicing limericks and sending emails. His recovery wasn't ever complete. He still used odd words here and there, his speech got ragged when he got tired and his writing needed an editor like never before. But in the five years after his stroke, he managed to finish and publish an autobiography, a book of proverbs and write several magazine articles about his stroke. He passed away peacefully last fall at age 91.

THE SECRET MASK begins with George arriving at the hospital where Ernie is recovering from a stroke.

Much like my stepdad, Ernie struggles with memory and language (often to comic effect). But also like my stepdad, Ernie is charming, good-natured and continues to surprise. George has no idea what he's in for.

My story doesn't completely mirror the play; my stepdad and I were never estranged. But even so, we had a kind of reconciliation, in the sense of a "reunion" or "bringing together." Our relationship was certainly transformed through his recovery and my role in it. That personal resonance makes this a special production for me and I look forward to bringing that feeling and my experiences into rehearsal.

THE SECRET MASK is going to be richly entertaining: a unique, funny and touching story for all who come to see it.

***THE SECRET MASK* runs Nov. 16 - Dec. 10.**

FAQ: WHAT IS THE PRODUCER'S CIRCLE?

by Anne Lehmer

The **Producer's Circle** is a group of Next Act supporters who are so passionate about our mission they invest \$1,000 or more each year. When you join the Producer's Circle, you enjoy benefits like behind-the-scenes VIP access and invitations to exclusive events like the "Gathering of Stars" preview party held at the UWM Olson Planetarium. On a gorgeous mid-September evening, supporters joined the cast of *SILENT SKY* for cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and a sneak-preview reading from *SILENT SKY*. Then, astrophysicist and Planetarium Director Dr. Jean Creighton explored the science behind the play in an enlightening and highly entertaining presentation. Dr. Creighton fielded questions from guests and actors alike, lending authenticity to the production and the audience experience. Many told

us it was the perfect appetizer before the main course: seeing the whole play on stage. Learn more by contacting Anne at 414-278-7780.



UWM's Planetarium Courtyard



The Venerable Spitz A3P Projector, circa 1960

YOUR \$ AT WORK

by Anne Lehmer

You put a real floor in the rehearsal hall!

You know your donations support the productions you see on stage, but did you know they can also be critical to building the space in which the creative magic happens? Thanks to your generous donations over the past year, we were finally able to finish the floor of the rehearsal hall with proper underlayment and commercial-grade vinyl. Not only does it have a professional look, but it cleans easily and eliminates the plywood splinters. Actors, visitors, renters, Next Actors and everyone that uses the rehearsal hall will appreciate your help making this happen. Thank you for your support!



Before



During



After

For years you have shown your passion for the Next Act Theatre mission with your contributions. As you plan for your future, consider a plan that benefits you and Next Act Theatre at the same time. To learn more about including Next Act in your estate plans, contact Anne at 414-278-7780.

Save the Date: May 3, 2018 for BRAVO, NEXT ACT!



Mike and Ericka Burzynski, with boater-topped Jerry Martynski, enjoy last year's BRAVO!

Photo: Timothy Moder

Part of Next Act's mission

is to focus on local talent as much as possible, and to develop ongoing relationships with an extended family of artists. By and large, we remain true to this cause, but from time to time, a certain project offers the opportunity to bring new artists into our midst. It is my pleasure to introduce to you one such artist, actor Drew Parker, hailing from Los Angeles. Drew will be featured in our upcoming production, *THE SECRET MASK*, along with local favorite Tami Workentin and local legend, James Pickering. The show is directed by Edward Morgan.

Among these four artists, Ed Morgan is the point of intersection: he has worked with each actor on a variety of projects over the years. Morgan has enjoyed many happy collaborations with "Pick," while serving as Associate Artistic Director for the Milwaukee Rep. He also directed Pick and Tami in Next Act's inaugural production at our S. Water Street home, *THE EXONERATED*, in the fall of 2011.

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Drew Parker came onto Morgan's radar screen down at Alabama

Shakespeare Festival, about five years ago. Drew was selected as part of the company to read one of Morgan's original plays in a developmental workshop. Drew recalls, "As my character evolved for the reading, Edward first wanted to guide me toward his original conception. But after a while, he embraced what I was finding in his writing, and I think that sort of cemented our introduction to each other."

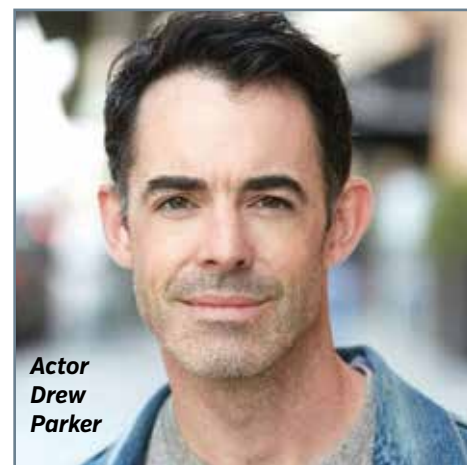
Drew didn't start out in Los Angeles. He's a midwestern boy, who grew up in Detroit concentrating on sports with an all-round athleticism, excelling in football, basketball and baseball. "But, in my last year of high school, I got cast in the drama department's *THE WIZARD OF OZ*, and that kind of turned my head. I thought, 'Hey, this is really interesting. I wonder where it goes?'"

EASTWARD

As it turns out, it led to a BFA degree in Theatre at the University of Detroit and then an ambitious turn to the east to begin his career in New York. Auditions, auditions, more auditions, as well as studio acting classes and side-survival jobs kept Drew on

the move. "The thing about New York is that most actors want to get to Broadway, or off-Broadway. But I love auditioning for the regional theatres; they come to New York looking for actors. I want to get out there and just play all kinds of roles, in relatable stories, in live theatre across the country."

"I'm inspired by Brian Cranston's career [*Breaking Bad* Emmy-winner]. In his book, *A Life in Parts*, he describes how fortunate he's been to work in the business all these years, not to become a big star but just to be able to ply his craft. He's done it with passion and integrity, choosing work that fulfills his values and challenges his acting skills to the limit."



Actor Drew Parker

BECAUSE IT'S THERE

Drew's next project with Edward Morgan provided him with one such "push-the-limit" challenge. The play was *K-2*, by Patrick Meyers, produced by Virginia Stage Company in 2015. Evidently, Drew's impression on Morgan during the Alabama reading had endured, and he was recruited to portray one of two mountaineers stranded on the second highest peak in the world, in a life and death struggle for survival.

"It was draining: physically and emotionally," says Drew. "The first week of rehearsal we trained at a rock climbing gym," literally learning the ropes and getting in climbing shape. "And one time, deep into tech rehearsal, I was close to the edge. I was up on the wall, mid-climb, and Edward was perched in one of the theatre's side-box seats, high up, so he could be close to us up on our theatre mountain. He gave me some picky note which frustrated me, and I stepped out of character for a moment to say, 'Edward, if you give me another note like that, I'm going to climb over to that opera box and stab you with my ice axe.'"



Photo: Sam Flint

"And Edward didn't hesitate a second. He said, 'Hey look, I hired you guys because you said you were up to the challenge. So, I'm just going to keep pushing you to be the best you can be.'"

"We get along pretty well," says Drew.

OUT WEST

Drew is relatively new to LA, having moved there recently to join his girlfriend. "It's great to be here with Casey, but I miss New York; that city has definite char-

acter, and an attitude. It's different here - so much concrete. I've developed a survival strategy to cope with the traffic jams, the mind-numbing sprawl and day jobs as bartender or server. I hike. I go out to Crestline, in the San Bernardino mountains, and get out on a trail, explore a cave, or, yes, climb a mountain. It clears my head, releases me from the concrete jungle."

I asked Drew, now age 38, about long-term ambitions. After a pause, he began, "I love actors. I love making a safe place for actors to do their work. You get to do that as a director. I guess my real dream is to eventually run a theatre. I think it would be exciting to learn how it works, to figure out how to build an audience and keep them, to create a space to tell stories people want to hear."

Sounds like we'll all get along well.

Welcome, Drew Parker, into the Next Act family, to help tell our next story. We're glad you're here.

Edward Morgan has been working with Next Act Theatre since 2005. *THE SECRET MASK* will be his 12th mainstage assignment. Below is a look back at the many and varied productions he has directed.



COYOTE ON A FENCE
by Bruce Graham
2005

Pictured Jonathan Wainwright, Olivia D. Dawson, David Ceasarini



LAST OF THE BOYS
by Steven Dietz
2006

Pictured John Kishline, David Ceasarini



FAITH HEALER
by Brian Friel
2008

Pictured Jonathan Smoots



LOMBARDI: THE ONLY THING
2008

Pictured David Ceasarini, John Kishline



MARY'S WEDDING by Stephen Massicotte
2009

Pictured Braden Moran, Georgina McKee

Photo & Lighting Design by Jason Fassl



THE EXONERATED
by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen
2011

Pictured Rick Richter, Tami Workentin, James Pickering



microcrisis by Mike Lew
2012

Pictured David Ceasarini, Alexandra Bonesho

Photo by Timothy Moder



RACE
by David Mamet
2014

Pictured Jonathan Smoots, Tiffany Renee Johnson, David Ceasarini

Photo by Timothy Moder



BACK OF THE THROAT
by Yussef El Guindi
2015

Pictured Christopher Tramantana

Photo by Timothy Moder



BRAVO, CARUSO!
by William Luce
2015

Pictured David Ceasarini

Photo by Timothy Moder



UnSILENT NIGHT
by John Kishline & Edward Morgan
2016

Pictured Andrew Muwonge

Photo by Ross Zentner

When you hear the name Doug Jarecki, you probably think of the actor. Maybe you saw the Milwaukee native in one of several Next Act productions since his first, *7 STORIES*, in 2009. Perhaps you've heard that he's involved in our summer program, Next Actors, or have even seen him around the Waukesha Civic Theatre running their education program.



Debra Babich, Doug Jarecki & Robert W.C. Kennedy in *7 STORIES*.

Only a precious few know Jarecki as a playwright. His first play, *TWAS THE MONTH BEFORE CHRISTMAS*, premiered at Next Act in 2015 and will return this December.

This play, which started as a comedy sketch about Joseph and Mary in couples counseling, looks at the Biblical characters through a contemporary light. "Virgin birth? Son of God? What if someone made these claims today? Of course people would have doubts," Jarecki points out. "We always view these figures as not real people but characters in *'The Greatest Story Ever Told,'*" referencing the 1965 Biblical epic about the life of Jesus. "There's never any focus on possible doubt or second guessing." The finished play adds the three wise men, as well as the innkeeper and his daughter, to the main story.

Jarecki reveals that the three wise men offered "the most wide open storyline." All of the characters have doubt about something, but one wise man in particular has more than just geography to overcome on this journey. Jarecki reflects, "I thought it was fascinating to have a real discussion about faith and what it feels like when you believe."

The show was met with great praise after its first run. "One of the best compliments we received was that it was very silly and sweet but very respectful, and that's hugely important to me," he remembers. It is clear how much this story means to Jarecki,

who was raised Catholic. Even if an audience member isn't a person of a professed faith, "these are real issues that happen to be set against the backdrop of the greatest story ever told. You will be able to connect with something in this story no matter where you're coming from."

Jarecki's last appearance at Next Act was in *UnSILENT NIGHT*, in which he played multiple characters, a feat all the actors (including Jarecki himself) accomplish in *TWAS THE MONTH*. As Jarecki says, "I like the idea of people jumping around in this play. It almost has the feel of just filling whatever role is needed as we push toward that night in Bethlehem."

While some of the script has been modified to clarify ideas, the cast, the director, and, most importantly, the message of his play are still the same. "One of the kings says, 'It couldn't hurt to try to be a little more generous one night out of the year,'" Jarecki explains. "That's where it starts, that feeling you get on Christmas, that warmth and how far can you take that, how can you carry that into the rest of your life. I view Christmas as a starting point of something better and bigger."

Jarecki likes the Next Act venue so much that he is renting it again in March to produce his second full length play, whose working title is *ONE KNIGHT IN POLAND*. He describes it as "a very fun, silly show, but, a lot like the Christmas show, it has a definite heart to it."



John Cramer, Sara Zientek, & Lindsey Gagliano in *TWAS THE MONTH BEFORE CHRISTMAS 2015*

***TWAS THE MONTH BEFORE CHRISTMAS* runs December 15 - 23. Tickets are \$25 and may be purchased through the Next Act ticket office, 414-278-0765.**

"The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree."

"Like father like son."

Often these aphorisms are used in disparaging ways to point out generational misbehaviors or misdeeds. But, more often they describe just the opposite and are used as complements to recognize the values and talents shared and passed along by example and through love. *Acorns and Trees* celebrates a paternal legacy of creativity by featuring a number of pairs of father/son artists. One of these pairs is that of the late Willis [Wis] Guthrie and his son Gerald [Gerry] Guthrie.

Wis was an art professor and head of the art department for over 35 years at Carroll College (now Carroll University). In addition to being a beloved and inspiring father and teacher, he was a prolific artist known for his imaginative assemblages. Gerry followed in his father's footsteps to become a professor in the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois-Champaign/Urbana for 28 years where he taught animation and foundational studies. His own digital animations have screened and won awards in over one hundred national and international film festivals. The new lobby installation, "Acorns and Trees" will show not only art work done by each Guthrie, but also a collaborative piece that they completed in 2005, when Wis was 87! (He died in 2016 at age 98.)

The Guthries will be joined by other father/son artists for what will be a unique exhibition of the creative spirit. Look for a complete listing of these generational pairings on Next Act's website.



"Avon Man" by Willis Guthrie and Gerald Guthrie, 2005, mixed media

Curator Jim Toth is a local artist and has been a Next Act subscriber since before it was Next Act.

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WHAT'S NEXT

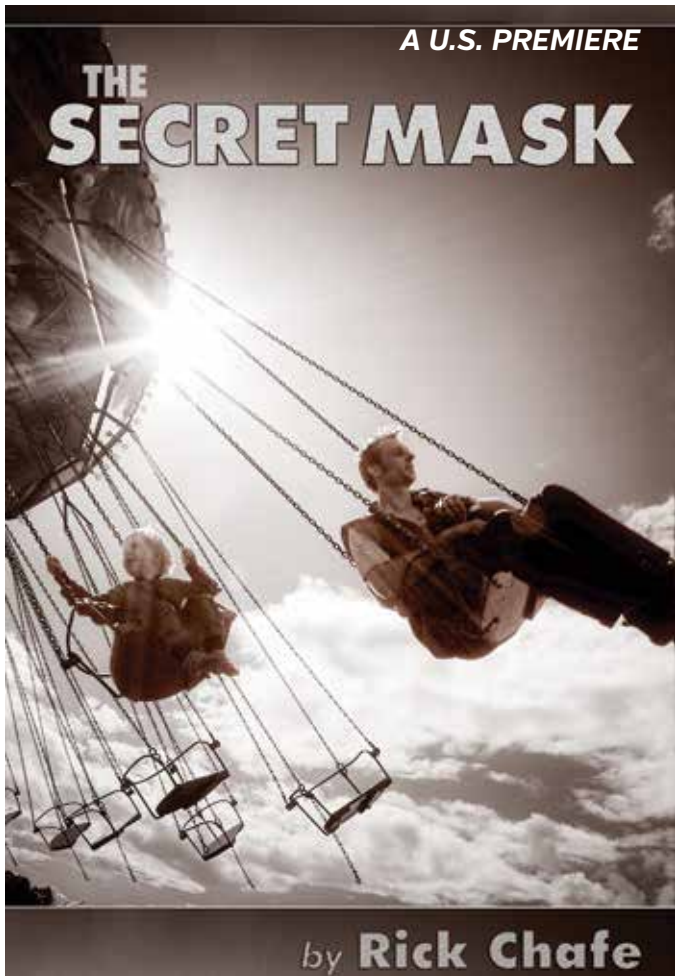
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"A funny and heart-warming story of a father-son reconciliation."

George and his father, Ernie, haven't spoken for years, but out of the blue, George gets a call to help Ernie cope with the aftermath of a stroke. Ernie struggles to regain language and memory, as George tries to overcome his long-hurt feelings, caring for a charming stranger he once called Dad. Each man must make sense of the past while facing an uncertain, newly-entwined future – a moving parable of prodigal fathers and sons.

*"...a rare combination of heartbreak and humor."
 Capital Critics' Circle - Ottawa*

November 16 - December 10, 2017

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				Preview 7:30	16 Opening 7:30	17 4:30 8:00
19 2:00 7:00		21 7:30	22 1:30 7:30	Thanksgiving Day	24 7:30	25 4:30 8:00
26 2:00			29 1:30 7:30	30 7:30	1 7:30	2 4:30 8:00
3 2:00	4 7:30		6 7:30	7 7:30	8 7:30	9 4:30 8:00
10 2:00	Personal Preview (Begins 30 minutes prior to curtain)					
	Talkback		Pay What You Can			

Directed by Edward Morgan
 Featuring James Pickering, Tami Workentin & Drew Parker

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