

# ITALIAN AMERICAN RECONCILIATION

By John Patrick Shanley



Presented by  
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania Department of Speech Communication  
Rickenbach Theatre, Kutztown University 2006

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**Kutztown University of Pennsylvania  
Department of Speech Communication and Theatre  
Presents**

**Italian American Reconciliation  
by  
John Patrick Shanley**

**Director**

Laura Johnson

**Scenic Design**

Robert L. Smith

**Costume Design**

Megan McGinty

**Lighting Design**

Austin Davidheise

**Dramaturg**

Bill Bly

**Stage Manager**

Tom Birch

**Production Manager**

Tom Birch

**The New York Premiere of *Italian American Reconciliation* by  
the Manhattan Theatre Club took place on October 16, 1989.**

**Photographs and recording devices are prohibited  
during the performance.**

**Please silence your watches, pagers and cell phones.**

# Italian American Reconciliation

## Cast

Aldo Scalicki .....	Adam Kissinger
Huey Maximilian Bonfigliano .....	Matthew Burns
Teresa.....	Tara Mitchell
Aunt May.....	Wendy Mirto
Janice.....	Kristen Keech
Understudy.....	Syreeta Hill

## Director's Note

What thou lovest well remains,  
the rest is dross  
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee  
What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage  
— Ezra Pound, *Canto LXXXI*

Aldo Scalicki has a story to tell. It's about how he helps his best friend Huey try to get back his ex-wife Janice — Huey feels this will enable him to regain his “strength of being a man.” Janice is a formidable person, so Huey asks Aldo to “soften her up” first, while Huey himself goes to break up with his “nice girlfriend” Teresa in order to go after Janice. Thus the story begins.

Aldo's story is about what it means to love, and how very little that can have to do with anything rational. He tells us this story to teach us a lesson — but it turns out that Aldo has as much to learn about his subject as Huey or any of us.

If you are a film lover you may be familiar with John Patrick Shanley as the Oscar-winning screenwriter of the 1980s romantic comedy *Moonstruck*. Like that movie, *Italian American Reconciliation* is set in an Italian-American neighborhood in New York City — the kind of urban domain Shanley (who grew up Irish Catholic in an Irish-Italian enclave in the Bronx) knows well. In fact, he always envied his Italian friends who, in his eyes, knew how to dress sharp, wear their hair right, and eat great food. Aldo introduces us to this neighborhood, and acts as our guide as he conjures the people and places of his story — which, while set in a recognizable reality, is also a tall tale with hints of the exaggerated detail and heightened truth employed by spinners of folktales.

## Director's Note (con.)

In fact truth-telling is at the heart of this quirky comedy. When dealing with romance, when do we tell lies? When do we tell the truth? For that matter, when dealing with love of any kind — romantic love, the familial love of parent and child, or the platonic love of friends who grew up together — why do we sometimes find that telling the truth is so difficult, while lying is so easy? This question has become part of the actors' challenge in our rehearsal process: separating the truth from the lie as they discover and develop their characters. We, like Janice, may "recognize the truth," and even prefer it — but how easy it is to learn to dissemble!

Playwright Shanley has taken this exploration of the truth to a new level in his recent Broadway hit *Doubt*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2005. In that play, a far more serious work, the audience is left to decide whether a priest is truly a child abuser, or merely the victim of an overzealous nun who runs her parochial school with an iron fist. As Shanley put it in a recent interview, he was interested in "...the cathartic, philosophical power of embracing doubt — of embracing not knowing, embracing that you may never know the truth or falsity of a story." In *Italian American Reconciliation*, on the other hand, Shanley has Aldo explicitly draw the lesson that Aldo himself has found so difficult to learn.

The playwright invokes the larger realities of Italian opera and Shakespearean theatre to make his point. Janice is a contemporary version of Puccini's legendary ice princess Turandot, who has to learn the power of love to melt a frozen heart. Unlike Puccini's heroine however, Janice prefers being her own "castle of thorns" to taking a second chance on love. Turandot's story is a romantic fable that allows the once cruel princess a happily-ever-after ending with her Prince Charming. Janice on the other hand has rejected the romantic for the truth: a choice that doesn't mesh well with Huey's mission. When we finally meet her onstage it is in a balcony scene that resonates with famous precedents like *Romeo and Juliet* (in which the lovers bridge their physical separation with words of love) — to say nothing of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* or Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (in which an emissary is sent to woo the desired woman by proxy). Shanley puts his own twist on the scenario with unexpected results. The excerpt from Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, chosen as the play's epigraph (quoted above), reminds us of Aldo's lesson.

Learning to love well is something each of the characters in this play is trying to do — some with more success than others.

— Laura Johnson

## **Production Crew**

### **Stage Manager**

Tom Birch

### **Assistant Stage Manager**

Julie Remus

### **Scene Shop Manager**

Austin Davidheiser

### **Costume Shop Manager**

Megan McGinty

### **Costume Assistants**

Emily Bahlinger

Syretta Hill

### **Dressers**

Jamie Mohamdein

Drew Wesoski

### **Make-up Designer**

Syreeta Hill

### **Asst. Make-up Designer**

Bentley Zeigler

### **Costume Construction**

Tiffany Dow

Amanda Easterday

Tabitha Giovonni

Ryan Kern

Lindsey Blackwell

Brandon Brady

Angel Brice

Amanda Kimble

Matthew Good

Jennifer An

Kristin Katzman

Lanatia Nalley

Marissa Smith

### **Publicity/Promotion**

Jennifer An

Ali Cvetan

### **Make-up crew**

Michelle Arditi

Tara Mitchell

Amanda Pasquali

**House Manager**

Danzel Novic

**Light Board Operator**

Michael Smith

**Master Electrician**

Pete Phillips

**Lighting Crew**

James Corrado

Adam Kissinger

**Scenic Construction**

Stephanie Davis

Adam Kissinger

John Curcio

Dan Smith

Laura Byrne

Tom Birch

## Who's Who in the Cast

**Adam Kissinger (Aldo Scalicki)** is a senior theatre major and has been an assistant in the scene shop for three years. Previous main stage roles include Sergius in *Arms and the Man*; Mack the Knife in *The Threepenny Opera*; Antipholus of Syracuse in *Comedy of Errors*; and Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer*. Other main stage credits include ASM for *Picnic*. Adam has also designed the set for *The Shape of Things*, and lights for Perforum Spring '05, and for the Sunshine Players presentations of *Snoopy!* and *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*.

**Tara Mitchell (Teresa)** is performing in her fourth main stage production at KU. She performed the roles of Irma Kronkite in *Picnic*, Angelo the Goldsmith in *Comedy of Errors*, and first Servant in *She Stoops to Conquer*. She participated in high school productions, Conversions Repertory Theatre of Philadelphia, and did Extra work for major and minor motion pictures.

**Matthew Burns (Huey Maximilian Bonfigliano)** is proud to be in his second mainstage performance of his career here at Kutztown. He is in his fourth year at Kutztown and his third as a theatre major. Previous performances include Adam Sorenson in *The Shape of Things* and Dromio of Ephesus in last spring's mainstage production of *The Comedy of Errors*. You will see Matthew again in the spring as Uncle Anthony in the mainstage production of *Lucky Stiff*. Matthew is proud to be working with the cast and crew of *Italian American Reconciliation* and hopes to work with all those involved in the future.

**Kristen Keech (Janice)** is a transfer student at KU and is thrilled about being part of IAR. She has studied at The American Musical and Dramatic Academy and some professional credits include, *Christmas in the Country*, *Smoke on the Mountain*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *West Side Story* and *The World Goes Round*.



### Who's Who in the Cast (con.)

**Wendy Mirto (Aunt May)** has worked in many capacities in theatre for several years. She is thrilled to be back in college to obtain her bachelor's in theatre and education. Some of her favorite roles include: Sonya in *Godspell*, Bucks County Playhouse; Le Marquise De Merteuil in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Forge Theatre; Mrs. Frank in the *Anne Frank Theatre Project* in Philadelphia; Bella in *Lost in Yonkers*, Barley Sheaf Players; and Sister Robert Ann in *Nunsense*, Dutch Country Playhouse. She had also performed for ten years in the ballet *The Nutcracker Suite* at Valley Forge Music Fair in Wayne, PA, and Westbury Music Fair in Long Island. Wendy had the pleasure of opening the studios of Universal Studios Orlando in 1990 appearing on an episode of a syndicated Saturday morning television series called "Superboy" through Creative Images Casting. This is Wendy's first year at Kutztown and third year back at school.

**Syreeta Hill (understudy)** is a junior Theatre major at KU. This is her second Mainstage production at KU, having performed in *The Comedy of Errors* last spring. She has also been involved with a group of students from last semester's acting studio class called the addiction scenes where she played a very unconcerned mother.

**Tom Birch (Stage Manager/Production Manager)** Tom was stage manager at KU for *Comedy of Errors*, *Picnic*, *Threepenny Opera*. Tom was also PM for this Fall's *She Stoops to Conquer*. Recently he worked at NY Stage and Film as an ASM intern for the 2005 Powerhouse Theatre Festival at Vassar College.

**Julianne Remus (Assistant Stage Manager)** is a junior Theatre Major. This is her first assistant stage managing position.

## Artistic and Production Staff

**Professor Laura Johnson (Director)** has freelanced as a director and teacher of theatre, musical theatre and opera for over twenty-five years. Her work has taken her across the United States as well as to Italy and Canada. She began her theatre career as a child actor performing in the Pittsburgh area and the mid-Atlantic region, including a tour that played KU's Schaeffer Auditorium a long, long time ago. Professor Johnson has directed plays and musicals for, among others, Lafayette College, Lehigh University, the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, and the Williamstown Theatre Festival. She has directed operas at the University of Cincinnati, Harvard University, the Pennsylvania Opera Theatre, and the Opera Festival of Lucca in Tuscany. Before joining the Kutztown faculty this year she spent two years as Artist-in-Residence with Temple University's Opera Theatre, directing their main stage productions, one of which received the National Opera Association's top award for 2004. Professor Johnson is the first director to have staged the music/theatre works of composer Earl Kim, whose spare musical settings of Samuel Beckett plays have begun receiving international attention. She received the MFA in directing from Boston University's School of Theatre.

**Professor Johanna Forte** (Resident Costume Designer/Design Professor) is Associate Professor of theatre at KU. Originally from Michigan, Professor Forte came to KU with a wide range of professional experience, including designing at Meadow Brook Theatre, SUNY Purchase, two years as a resident costumer at Allentown's PA Stage Company, and assisting New York-based costume designers. The Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival has recognized Professor Forte for her costume designs in *Crimes of the Heart*, *The Lion in Winter*, and *All My Sons*. Presently, she is the faculty advisor for the Sunshine Players. Professor Forte's most recent KU productions include Robert Brustein's adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *The Baby with the Bathwater*, *Ipigeneia at Aulis*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Picnic*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. She resides in Bowers, PA with her husband, Randall, and their two children, Melina and Byron.

## **Artistic and Production Staff (con.)**

**Professor Robert Lewis Smith** (Scenic Design) has spent thirty-plus years teaching design and designing for academic theatres in New York, Virginia, Maryland, and Washington. Before coming to KU, Professor Smith designed scenery for Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre in Missouri, where he designed the set for Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Other professional credits include designs for New York's AMAS Musical Theatre, The New Dramatists, Westbeth Theatre, Syracuse Stage (formally known as the Syracuse Repertory Theatre), the Arkansas Repertory Theatre, A Contemporary Theatre, Theatre Center Philadelphia, the Jersey Lyric Opera, and the New Jersey Ballet. KU Mainstage credits include *Rhinoceros*, *The Servant of Two Masters*, *Olympus on My Mind*, *Moon Over Buffalo*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *The Hot l Baltimore*, *The Seagull*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Baby with the Bathwater*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, *Arms and the Man*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Picnic*, and *The Comedy of Errors*.

**Austin Davidheiser** (Lighting Designer) is new to the staff at KU, also serving as the Scene Shop Manager. Austin has been a production manager, technical director, and master electrician, as well as a freelance designer and technician for various theaters, events companies, and colleges in the Philadelphia area. In the summers, he is the Technical Director for the Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Arts, which is an intensive interdisciplinary arts program for gifted high school students. Design credits include *Laundry and Bourbon/Lone Star* at Camden County College, *Disengaged* at Ohio University; *Pipeline* (sets) for the PGSA Dance Concert, *She Stoops to Conquer* at KU, and a variety of theater and dance productions at DeSales University.

**Megan McGinty (Costume Design)** is designing her first production as a new staff member at Kutztown University. She is familiar with the costume shop, being a graduate of the Department of Speech Comm and Theatre. When she was a student here she assisted with the production of *The Seagull*, *Baby With the Bathwater* and *the Mystery of Edwin Drood*. She recently served as the costume shop manager for *She Stoops to Conquer*. Prior to coming to KU, she worked for Albright College, The Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire, and Without a Cue productions.

### Artistic and Production Staff (cont.)

**Professor Bill Bly** (Dramaturg) joined the KU Theatre faculty just this fall. He received an MFA in Playwriting from Carnegie-Mellon University, and taught dramatic literature and theatre history for nearly twenty years at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. During this time he served as Artistic Director for Harbor Repertory Theatre, the Director of Writing Programs at Wagner College, a Y2K warrior, and founding member of the Hypertext Writers Workshop. His play *Jonas* won the Stanley Drama Award as well as fellowships to the Shenandoah Valley Playwrights Retreat and the Empire State Institute of the Performing Arts. He has also been awarded writing residencies at the Ploughshares International Fiction Seminar and the Vermont Studio Center. He is the author of the hypertext novel *We Descend* (Eastgate), and his writings have appeared in such diverse publications as *The Drama Review*, *Didaskalia*, *TEKKA*, and *Yahoo! Internet Life*. Bill shared the 2002 John Culkin Award for Outstanding Praxis in the Field of Media Ecology with fellow hypertext author John McDaid for their CD *Media Ecology Unplugged*.

## **Acknowledgements**

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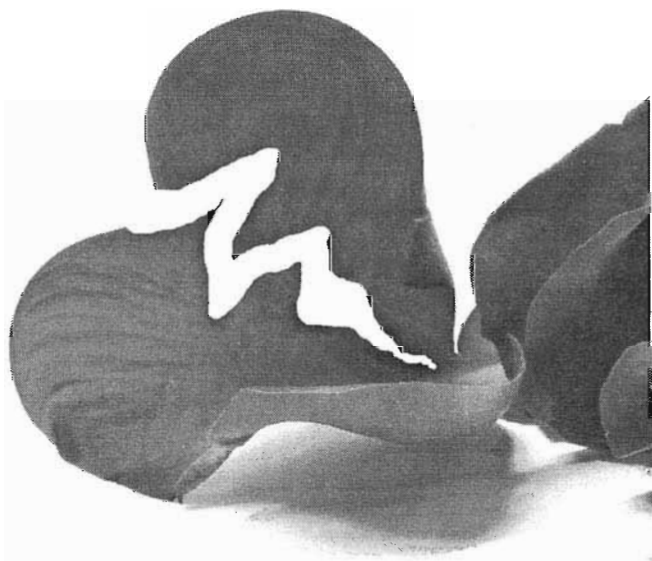
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Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for inclusion at the KCACTF regional festival and can also be considered for invitation to the KCACTF national festival at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC in the spring of 2006.

Last year more than 1,400 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.



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