By Terrence McNally
Directed by Jane Unger

February 9 – March 6

Time & Place: December 2014, An apartment in Manhattan’s Upper West Side

THIS PLAY HAS NO INTERMISSION AND RUNS APPROXIMATELY 90 MINUTES.

STUDY GUIDE

Study guide prepared by Jessica Gleason, Marketing & Publications Manager
Portland’s premiere mid-size regional theatre company is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodriguez and Managing Director Sarah Horton. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artists Rep’s mission is to engage diverse audiences in fresh, thought-provoking and intimate theatre. We are committed to world-class acting, directing, design and stagecraft that support new playwriting and aspire to embody great literature, moving audiences to truly feel — to experience — storytelling in a way that only the best live theatre can.
Welcome to Artists Rep and to the 5th production of our 2015/16 season, *Mothers and Sons*, by one of the American theatre's most acclaimed contemporary playwrights, Terrence McNally. Artists Rep has a long history of producing McNally’s work and long-time subscribers will likely remember our local premieres of now contemporary American classics *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, *Master Class* and *Love! Valour! Compassion!*! Like our past productions of McNally’s work, Portland audiences are among the first to see *Mothers and Sons* in its regional premiere following its 2014 Tony-nominated Broadway debut.

*Mothers and Sons* exemplifies the kind of intimate, provocative and timely theatre experience that has helped define Artists Rep for more than 30 years. Its basic premise is the most deceptively simple dramatic structure: four characters find themselves in a room together (in this case a New York apartment) and are forced to confront their shared history in real time. This kind of dramatic pressure cooker is made more visceral and potent by the intimacy of our performance space, and it requires nuanced work from accomplished professionals to be successful.

At the helm of this production is acclaimed director Jane Unger, who founded Profile Theatre and in 2004/05 produced an entire season of Terrence McNally plays. It’s safe to say that no director in Portland knows Mr. McNally’s work better. We have assembled a cast led by Resident Artists JoAnn Johnson and Michael Mendelson, two of Portland’s finest actors who have been working together on our stages for many years, alongside Ryan Tresser, an accomplished actor who had barely been in town a few weeks before he walked into Artists Rep’s audition room. I want to call attention to the extraordinary talent on and behind our stages in production after production — professionals whose work can rival the best in their field. Like so many of us, they have been drawn to Portland’s vibrancy and quality of life and now make this city their home. As our company’s name would suggest, these local artists are as vital to defining Artists Repertory Theatre’s identity as the plays and the spaces in which they are presented.

I hope you enjoy today’s performance and that you’ll return for each play in the diverse lineup that makes up the second half of our 2015/16 season.

Warmly,

Dámaso
ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Terrence McNally was awarded the Dramatists Guild Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011. He is the winner of Tony Awards for his plays *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and *Master Class* and his books for the musicals *Ragtime* and *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*. In 2010 the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts presented *Terrence McNally’s Nights t the Opera*, a three-play festival of his work. In 1996, he was elected to the Theater Hall of Fame.

More recently, the musical *The Visit*, for which he wrote the book, opened at Broadway’s Lyceum Theater. *It’s Only A Play* opened at Broadway’s Schoenfeld Theater in the fall of 2014. *Mothers and Sons*, his 20th Broadway production, received a 2014 Tony Nomination for Best Play. Off-Broadway, *Golden Age* opened at Manhattan Theatre Club’s Stage One at City Center and the Pearl Theatre premiered *And Away We Go* at their new home on 42nd St. Other plays include *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, *Lips Together, Teeth Apart, The Lisbon Traviata, Corpus Christi, The Ritz, Some Men, A Perfect Ganesh, Bad Habits, The Stendhal Syndrome, Dedication or the Stuff of Dreams, Deuce and Unusual Acts of Devotion* at the La Jolla Playhouse and Philadelphia Theatre Company.

He has written the books for the musicals *The Full Monty* and *A Man of no Importance*. He also wrote the libretto for the opera *Dead Man Walking* which had its premiere at San Francisco Opera. His newest opera, *Great Scott*, will be premiering at Dallas Opera in the fall of 2015. He has written a number of TV scripts, including *Andre’s Mother* for which he won an Emmy Award. He has received two Guggenheim Fellowships, a Rockefeller Grant, and a citation from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.
Dear Jane,

I’m again honored that you have chosen to do another play of mine in your beautiful, important city. You have taken very good care of me over the years in Portland and I am grateful.

_Mothers and Sons_ is a play I didn’t know I was going to write when I sat down three years ago with a raging case of flu determined to write a play about what has happened to this country, but especially our LGBTQ community, in my lifetime.

My husband was in London (of course he was my husband in only a handful of states then). Maybe I was trying to write the fever and aching joints out of me since he wasn’t there and the Theraflu was not doing its job.

I also had a deadline to meet. I had promised the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope, Pennsylvania, that I would write a new play for Tyne Daly to open their summer season. It was mid-February and we would open over Memorial Day weekend. Time was not an option.

I looked at the wedding band on my left hand, fourth finger, and began. I thought about the young man who had come to New York to be the gay man he knew he already was. I was 17 years old – too young to get into a gay bar but old enough to know where the men were. Like most people, I was looking for love. My story isn’t much more complicated or interesting than that. If you think Andre is me in tonight’s play, you’re right.

Along the way, I found love often enough but I lost the love of my family as well and we became strangers. It was both our loss.

Since those many years ago I have made my own family for myself and by now we are generations deep in happiness and sadness and fulfilling relationships. The only people missing in my life are my parents. My husband’s father was his best friend. How I envy him that. I was not with my father when he died. When my mother died I was working on a show in Chicago. All I can do is live with her inability to love me as I truly am and try to remember the way she was and maybe even begin to understand us both a little.

I adored her, you see. She was my mother.

AIDS is not the only scourge that decimated generations of gay men and women. The wounds of homophobia are still raw, deadly and tearing families apart. Deadline or no deadline I had to write this play.

Cal is a survivor of our darkest years but if this play has a hero, it’s Will. If it has a future, it’s Bud. There are no villains, only a mother decimated by her inability to enter a new world, a world born of the tragedy of AIDS and now vibrant with new freedoms and infinite possibilities.

God bless Katharine, too. She was Andre’s mother.
Terrence McNally 1/27/16
ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

This is JANE UNGER’S Artists Rep debut. She is the founding Artistic Director of Profile Theatre Project in Portland whose mission celebrates the playwright by presenting a full season of plays by a single writer. In her 15 years helming Profile, she featured the following playwrights: Arthur Kopit, Tennessee Williams, Constance Congdon, Arthur Miller, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, Romulus Linney, Terrence McNally, Lanford Wilson, Wendy Wasserstein, John Guare, Neil Simon, Horton Foote, Lee Blessing and Athol Fugard. During that time, Jane produced 55 productions, (directed 35), 31 staged readings, (directed eight, acted in three), and 20 concert readings through the One Night Stand series she conceived and implemented. Jane worked directly with many of these writers on new play development, including the world premiere of Romulus Linney’s “Klonsky and Schwartz,” co-directed by Linney and Unger. Other directorial work includes Triad Stage, Inge Theatre Festival, Great Plains Theatre Conference, Creede Repertory Theatre, Idaho Theatre for Youth, Storefront Theatre, Miracle Theatre, CoHo Productions, JAW, Portland Center Stage, New Rose Theatre. Among the awards Jane has received, she is especially proud of Profile being among the first 10 recipients honored by the American Theatre Wing in 2010 with a National Theatre Company Grant, Portland’s Drammy Award for Best Director for Wings and the Drammy Lifetime Achievement Award for her founding of Profile Theatre Project. Upcoming: workshop reading of Yussef El Guindi’s The Talented Ones at Artists Rep as part of their new play commission initiative TablelRoomlStage.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Mothers and Sons is one of those rare plays that organically knits together the political and the personal. I cannot think about this play without being in awe of the dramatic changes that have occurred in this country regarding gay rights in the past 25 years. And, I cannot think about this play without thinking of Katharine Gerard, a dynamic character that Terrence McNally has lovingly rendered, rage and all.

Mothers and Sons is Katharine’s story. Through the prism of this complex character we witness the collision of the very recent past with our rapidly moving present regarding the treatment of homosexuality. Katharine’s son, Andre, fell victim to the AIDS epidemic that devastated a generation in the 1980s and early 1990s.

During the 20 years that Katharine has mourned the loss of her son, the world that reinforced the shame and outrage she felt at her son’s homosexuality has undergone a sea change.

Over the last 25 years, families and friends of those who have passed away from AIDS have contributed 6’-by-3’ panels — about the size of an average grave — to a giant tapestry known as the AIDS Quilt.
Gay marriage first became legal in isolated states with Massachusetts leading the way in 2004 followed by Connecticut in 2008, Vermont, Iowa and District of Columbia in 2009 with more states joining them in a slow but steady evolution. In the short time since this play’s Broadway debut in March of 2014, the Supreme Court issued its historic decision, legalizing gay marriage for the United States and signaling a massive cultural shift. That’s how timely this play is.

But even though laws may change, people’s feelings do not. Paralyzed by her son’s death, Katharine is stuck in a world that is becoming obsolete. She clings to her condemnation of homosexuality as an easy target for the anger she feels over her son’s death.

While gay marriage is now legal in all 50 states, the country is still divided. It is one of many issues that polarize this nation. In Katharine Gerard we gain insight into what lies behind someone’s truculence around a seemingly political issue and what it takes to move the needle ever so slightly toward greater acceptance of those we may not understand but do, indeed, love.

Having produced a season of plays at Profile Theatre Project by the remarkable Terrence McNally in 2004/05, it gives me deep pleasure to be working on Mothers and Sons, one of his newest and most expertly crafted pieces of writing. I thank Dámaso and Artists Rep for the opportunity and Terrence for the words and his vision.

Suggested Reading
compiled by Jane Unger & Luan Schooler

There are many relevant books, plays, stories and films to expand the Mothers and Sons experience. Here is a (very) partial list:

*Plays Well With Others* by Alan Gurganus
*The Best and Only Everything* by Augusten Burroughs
*Some Men* by Terrance McNally
*The Baltimore Waltz* by Paula Vogel
*The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer
*Angels in America* by Tony Kushner
*Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel
*Safe Sex* by Harvey Fierstein
*A Queer History of the United States* by Michael Bronski
*And the Band Played On* by Randy Shilts
*Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* by Kenji Yoshino
*The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* by Michael Warner
The seed of Mothers and Sons took root in 1988, when Terrence McNally wrote a short play called Andre’s Mother. Set at the funeral for Andre, a young gay man who died of AIDS, the play features his silent mother, Katherine, and his lover, Cal. Katharine is disabled by her fury and disgust at her son for being gay; incapable of compassion or love for either her child or his grieving lover, she will not spare a word for either.

In Mothers and Sons, McNally brings Katharine and Cal forward two decades, to meet again. In that time there have been seismic changes for gay Americans and their place in the larger culture. Consider the breathtaking revolutions on two fronts – AIDS and Marriage Equality:

- In 1995, AIDS-related deaths in the U.S. were at their highest level ever; life-saving combination drug therapies were not yet widely available. It was still necessary to include information that one cannot contract AIDS from toilet seats or shaking hands in public service ads.
- In 1993, the Hawaiian Supreme Court ruled that denying marriage rights to same sex couples violated the Equal Protection Clause of the State constitution, starting a backlash that led to thirty states passing constitutional bans on same sex marriage. These 20 years have seen a tumultuous series of gains and losses as states grappled with civil unions, constitutional bans, and finally, marriage equality when the Supreme Court ruled it a right on June 26, 2015.

When Katharine arrives unexpectedly at Cal’s door, his world has changed for the better: he is now happily married to another man and they have a young son; their marriage is remarkably unexceptional. But for Katherine change has been harsh: her rock-solid beliefs rest on shifting sands, and the world has left her behind and alone. Progress is neither commonly understood nor easily shared.

Perhaps the strength of Terrence McNally’s Mothers and Sons rests in this: it examines and celebrates the remarkable changes of the last 20 years, but also considers the experience of those who are not in agreement, who feel excluded and abandoned. We may or may not agree with Katharine’s position, but we can appreciate the high price her anger and fear have extracted, and be reminded of the urgency of compassion in the face of overwhelming loss and in the ferocious struggle of political discourse.
**Learning about AIDS/HIV**

*Source: aids.org*

*AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.*

An HIV-positive person receives an AIDS diagnosis after developing one of the CDC-defined AIDS indicator illnesses. An HIV-positive person can also receive an AIDS diagnosis on the basis of certain blood tests (CD4 counts) and may not have experienced any serious illnesses. A positive HIV test does not mean that a person has AIDS.

Over time, infection with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) can weaken the immune system to the point that the system has difficulty fighting off certain infections. These types of infections are known as opportunistic infections. Many of the infections that cause problems or that can be life-threatening for people with AIDS are usually controlled by a healthy immune system. The immune system of a person with AIDS has weakened to the point that medical intervention may be necessary to prevent or treat serious illness.

**HIV is the virus that causes AIDS.**

H-Human: because this virus can only infect human beings.

I-Immuno-deficiency: because the effect of the virus is to create a deficiency, a failure to work properly, within the body’s immune system.

V-Virus: because this organism is a virus, which means one of its characteristics is that it is incapable of reproducing by itself. It reproduces by taking over the machinery of the human cell.

A-Acquired: because it’s a condition one must acquire or get infected with; not something transmitted through the genes

I-Immune: because it affects the body’s immune system, the part of the body which usually works to fight off germs such as bacteria and viruses

D-Deficiency: because it makes the immune system deficient (makes it not work properly)

S-Syndrome: because someone with AIDS may experience a wide range of different diseases and opportunistic infections.
**HIV can be transmitted from an infected person to another through:**

- Blood
- Semen
- Vaginal secretions
- Breast milk

Blood contains the highest concentration of the virus, followed by semen, followed by vaginal fluids, followed by breast milk.

**Activities That Allow HIV Transmission**

- Unprotected sexual contact
- Direct blood contact, including injection drug needles, blood transfusions, accidents in health care settings or certain blood products
- Mother to baby (before or during birth, or through breast milk)

_Below are a few examples of posters released throughout the 1980s to educate people about AIDS and HIV._

![Posters](image-url)
1996
President Bill Clinton of the United States signs the Defense of Marriage Act into law, which bans the federal Government from recognizing same-sex unions.

1998
Hawaii and Alaska become the first U.S. states to pass constitutional amendments against same-sex marriage. Other U.S. states followed suit and passed similar amendments in the following years, reaching a peak of 31 in 2012.

1999
The Supreme Court of the U.S. state of Vermont rules that excluding same-sex couples from marriage violates the Vermont Constitution and orders the legislature to establish same-sex marriage or an equivalent status.

2000
Governor Howard Dean from the U.S. state of Vermont signs a civil unions bill into law, thus making Vermont the first state in the U.S. to give full marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands signs into law the first same-sex marriage bill in the world.

2001
Two same-sex marriages are performed in Ontario, Canada. Although registration of the marriages was initially denied, a successful court challenge upheld their legality on 10 June 2003, thus retroactively making them the first legal same-sex marriages in modern times.

2003
Supreme Court of the U.S. state of Massachusetts orders the Legislature to open marriage to same-sex couples in the landmark Goodridge v. Department of Public Health ruling. The Court also rules that if the Legislature fails to do so in 180 days, same-sex couples will be able to marry without any impediment.

2004
Massachusetts became the first U.S. state to legalize same-sex marriage.

2006
New Jersey unanimously rules in favor of same-sex marriage.

2007
Washington, Oregon and New Hampshire sign domestic partnerships bills into law.

A court of the U.S. state of Iowa strikes down its ban on same-sex marriage as a result of a legal challenge. About 20 couples obtained marriage licenses and one couple married before the judge issued a stay of his ruling pending appeal.

2008
May 15: The Supreme Court of California legalizes same-sex marriage in the landmark In re Marriage Cases ruling. The ruling took effect on 16 June.

October 10: Connecticut legalizes same-sex marriage.
November 4: A referendum seeking to constitutionally ban same-sex marriages in the U.S. state of California is approved by 52.2% of voters thus overturning same-sex marriage in California, this event being noteworthy because it was the first time in modern history that same-sex marriage has been overturned.

2009
Iowa, Vermont and New Hampshire legalize same-sex marriage.

2010
U.S. District Court of Northern California declares that Proposition 8, a 2008 California-electorate ban on same-sex marriage, violates due process and equal protection clauses in the U.S. Constitution. Supporters of the proposition eventually appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, which issued a ruling in 2013.

2011
New York signs a same-sex marriage bill into law.

2012
Washington and Maryland sign a same-sex marriage bill into law. Voters in Maine, Maryland, and Washington approve same-sex marriage laws in referendums, becoming the first US states to legalize same-sex marriage through this process, while voters in the US state of Minnesota become the first to reject a constitutional amendment seeking to ban same-sex marriage in their state.

2013
Delaware, Rhode Island and Minnesota sign same-sex marriage bills into law. The Supreme Court of the United States rules that supporters of Proposition 8, the same-sex marriage ban in California, lacked standing to appeal a court’s 2010 decision that deemed the ban unconstitutional, thus legalizing same-sex marriage in California.

2014
Oregon, Colorado and Pennsylvania found their state’s bans on same-sex marriage unconstitutional, legalizing same-sex marriage in Oregon and Pennsylvania. The United States Supreme Court allowed appeals court decisions striking down same-sex marriage bans in Virginia, Indiana, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, and Utah to stand, allowing same-sex couples to begin marrying immediately in those five states.

2015
Same-sex marriage becomes legal in the United States of America as a result of a Supreme Court ruling. Marriages started immediately except in Louisiana and Mississippi.

2. Link to New York Times articles written during Broadway premiere: