

# HUDSON VALLEY **Weekend**

JUNE 23-29, 2010

CELEBRATING LOCAL: MUSIC, THEATER, ART, FILM AND MORE

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# SMILING THROUGH THE TEARS

BY DANA GAVIN  
WEEKEND@  
THEHUDSONVALLEYNEWS.COM

de'Adre Aziza rehearses as Billie and Adam Rothenberg as Hal in "We are Here" by Tracy Thorne, directed by Sheryl Kaller. Mainstage, Vassar & New York Stage and Film's Powerhouse Theater, June 29 - July 11, 2010. © Vassar College / Buck Lewis Photography

**THE POWERHOUSE THEATER SEASON** hits its full stride next week, with the world premiere of "We Are Here," written by actor and playwright Tracy Thorne and directed by 2010 Tony nominee (for "Next Fall") Sheryl Kaller. The work takes place in the present and the past, and while music plays a significant part of the storytelling, it is not a traditional musical. It is about tragedy and loss: a loving and tightly knit, mixed-race family is shaken to the core when its youngest member

dies. The play grapples with the nature of grief, remembrance and love, and what develops when something bad happens to inherently good people.

When I spoke with Thorne, I asked her how she came to write "We Are Here."

"A couple of things," she said. "I was thinking about what it would be like to have a child who died. And something (Samuel) Beckett had written to a family friend." Thorne was referring to a note from Beckett on the occasion of his friend's father's

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Adam Rothenberg appears as Hal, de'Adre Aziza appears as Billie, and Adriane Lenox appears as Vera in "We are Here." © Vassar College/ Buck Lewis Photography

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death: "I know your sorrow and I know that for the likes of us there is no ease to be had from words or reason and that in the very assurance of sorrow's fading there is more sorrow ... (I) wish for you only that the strange thing may never fail you, whatever it is, that gives us the strength to live on and on with our wounds."

"Beckett's 'strange thing,' what gives us the strength to go on," stayed in her mind, said Thorne. "I wanted to think about the banal part (of grief). I wanted to place a narrative on that."

Grief as a theme isn't unique, but Thorne had a revolutionary idea up her sleeve.

"I wanted them to be a happy family!" she said with a laugh. I had to laugh with her, because everyone knows artists don't create works around well-adjusted people.

Thorne confirmed that common assumption: "Happy people aren't interesting."

She found another avenue into the complexities of emotion that can occur in happy families. "My family (in the play) will sing to one another," she said of her revelation. "None of them is a musician – the singing is a way to experience the emotion without them having to talk about it."

Thorne said having a happy fictional family has led people to discover other themes: "Someone has suggested the play is about how people take care of one another. They are good people – high-functioning people who have the ability to do that. That's what Beckett was thinking: 'My family friend was a good man. How do the good souls persevere?' I was thinking of (Anton) Chekov as well. You live life to endure."

Director Kaller was full of praise when I spoke with her, and eager to take on the challenge even as she was enjoying her Tony nomination (Michael Grandage ultimately took home the award for his work on "Red").

"I love the play," she said. "Tracy wrote a very insightful and poetic play about family, love, relationships and surviving. She's incorporated music into it in an amazing way."

Returning to Powerhouse ("my artistic home," said Kaller) this summer is part of a very full and exciting year: "I've just made my Broadway debut, and been nominated for a Tony – I feel like I'm being so taken care of. After all of the magnificence of opening a show on Broadway, (I can) go back to my artistic roots. I believe in New York Stage and Film – that's why I do theater. I'll go from Radio City Music Hall (for the Tony award show) to Vassar."

The idea of a happy family in tragic circumstances appealed to Kaller. "I lost my mom at a young age; I couldn't reconcile that. Tracy is exploring something that's very important. I admired her writing and her play so much for her exploration of that."

Returning to the Hudson Valley is a creative exploration for Kaller as well. "I have to say that I learned the art of collaboration at Powerhouse. I came back as an older and wiser person, open to checking the ego at the door. I was so ready to be fertilized by this process. Powerhouse is committed to finding playwrights' voices."

Kaller will have impressive players to aid her in bringing Thorne's play to life: the cast of "We Are Here" includes Uzo Aduba ("Coram Boy"), Tony nominee de'Adre Aziza ("Passing Strange"), Tony winner Adriane Lenox ("Doubt," "Chicago"), Larry Pine ("The Seagull," "Angels in America"), Adam Rothenberg ("The Retributionists") and Michael Cummings ("Joe Turner's Come and Gone").

## "We Are Here"

June 29-July 11

By Tracy Thorne

Directed by Sheryl Kaller

Performance dates and times: June 29, 30, July 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 at 8 p.m.; July 3, 10, 11, at 2 p.m.

Tickets: \$35

Mainstage in the Powerhouse Theater  
124 Raymond Ave., Poughkeepsie.  
845-437-7235 or <http://powerhouse.vassar.edu>