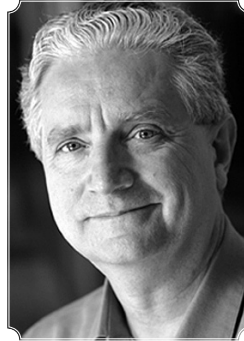


From the Artistic Director

"Perfect love means to love the one through whom one became unhappy."

—Kierkegaard

The flywheel of 19th century science and technology seemed to spin the globe faster: its momentous objectivity began to conquer diseases and accurately plumb complicated physical phenomena like electricity, chemistry, and the biological processes of life. Was all life fundamentally knowable? And words like soul, spirit, morality, religion and so on, merely fuzzy primitive generalizations of the past? Could even the matted loam of the emotions have something like a mechanical basis, able to be unearthed and manipulated, as Freud suggested?



Bourgeois civilization, clothed in the energy of its new materialism made possible by industrialization, exacted sacrifices of its citizens if they were to get on in it. The individual conformed, fitted in, put on hold or submerged those parts of his being that didn't help with the basic necessities of getting and spending. But as the buildings got bigger and the locomotives faster and the din of the factories and pile drivers deafening, a parallel need to make aggressive claims for the Self asserted itself violently.

A countermovement throughout the era emerged, as though to protect something the culture discovered in itself as important, perhaps more important, than the periodic table of elements. One of its guises was Romanticism, which plunged into the subjective, and that mysterious sense in each individual that the experiences he is having are *his alone*. The exploration of humanity's interior life, particularly its tangled dark flora of love and sex, became a principal obsession of 19th century mass culture and high art alike. For rich and poor, this obsession took the form of the melodrama, which sought to create mindless sensation with its orgy of murdering, gambling, and cliff-hanging situations. In High Art, (a term the Victorians used) it took the form of

countless dark psychological journeys, as in, for instance, the works of Poe, the later works of Goya, and in music, in a vast array of works by composers from Schubert and Schumann to Mahler at the end of the century.

Electricity extended man's active life deep into the night. It was immediately used to expand human pleasure as well as productivity; commercial lighting made the department store and the amusement park intense focal points of escape and stimulation. And it filled the language with expressions all having to do with erotic excitement. Lovers "sparked." A

new affair could "recharge" you, because you "made the connection." A certain person "turned you on." Even Whitman sang of "the body electric."

The two main characters in Sarah Ruhl's play, Dr. Givings and Mrs. Givings, are perched on the edge of a new light, a new consciousness. Dr. Givings could be thought of as the new hero who would appear in popular literature in the 19th century: the scientist/engineer who would bring rationality to the fore in transforming society. Mrs. Givings has the seeds of the new progressive woman, who will call for equality, intellectual opportunities, and a broad reaching freedom. But in fact, there is a much richer journey underway in this play than simply an evocation of history. They must live with the problem of the ideal of conjugal love, and the reality, so well put by Anton Chekhov: "If you are afraid of loneliness, don't marry."

And that is where we turn the lights on, and the story begins.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Beattie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kurt Beattie, ACT Artistic Director

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