

W SCHOOL OF DRAMA
UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

The
Octavia

THE OCTAVIA

written by ANNE WASHBURN

directed by KEN RUS SCHMOLL

Stage Manager
Andrew Forrest

Assistant Directors
Amanda Friou
Cody Holliday-Haefner

CAST

<i>XERXES, a Greek slave/GAIUS CASSIUS, a senator.....</i>	Skye Edwards
<i>PETRONIUS, a writer/PARIS, an actor.....</i>	Phillip Ray Guevara
<i>NERO, a boy, etc.</i>	Michael Place
<i>POPPEA, a redhead.....</i>	Hazel Lozano
<i>SENECA, a philosopher and man of letters.....</i>	Jeffrey Fracé
<i>AGrippina, mother of Nero/LESTIA, a prostitute.....</i>	Porscha Shaw
<i>OTHO, a sophisticate/BURRUS, advisor to Nero.....</i>	Adrian Tafesh
<i>OCTAVIA, a girl/ATTIUS, an assistant.....</i>	Tamsen Glaser
<i>Stage Directions.....</i>	Andrew Forrest and Amanda Friou

Part 1 - Tinder
Part 2 - Flame
Part 3 - Ash (unwritten)

The presentation runs about 8.5 hours including two intermissions and one lunch break

Special acknowledgments: Todd London, Karen Hartman, University of Washington, Josh Beerman, Anne Stewart, Alain Gowing

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Anne Washburn's recent plays include 10 out of 12 (Soho Rep), *Antlia Pneumatica* (Playwrights Horizons), *Mr. Burns* (Woolly Mammoth), *Devil At Noon* (A.T.L. Humana Festival), *The Small* (Clubbed Thumb), transadaptations of Euripides' *Iphigenia In Aulis* (Classic Stage Company) *Orestes* (Folger) and *The Internationalist* (13P; VineyardTheater). Honors include a Alpert award, a Guggenheim, a Whiting, a PEN/Laura Pels award, a NYFA fellowship, and several MacDowell and Yaddo residencies. She is an associated artist with The Civilians, Clubbed Thumb, New Georges, Chochiqq, and an alumna of New Dramatists and 13P.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Ken Rus Schmoll is a freelance director based in New York City. He directed the world premieres of three Anne Washburn plays: *The Internationalist* for 13P, *October/November* at Ensemble Studio Theatre, and *Antlia Pneumatica* last season at Playwrights Horizons. Other recent credits include MJ Kaufman's *Sagittarius Ponderosa* for the National Asian American Theatre Company, Jenny Schwartz and Todd Almond's *Iowa* at Playwrights Horizons (Drama League Award nomination), Max Posner's *Judy for Page 73*, Ayad Akhtar's *The Invisible Hand* at New York Theatre Workshop (Lucille Lortel Award nomination), and Jordan Harrison's *The Grown-Up* at the Humana Festival of New American Plays. He is a usual suspect at New York Theatre Workshop, an affiliated artist with Clubbed Thumb, co-mentor of the Clubbed Thumb Directing Fellowship, a three-time Sundance Theatre Institute alum, a former co-chair of the Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab, and the recipient of two Obie Awards.

UPCOMING LAB PROJECTS

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

In 2005 I read Caryl Churchill's difficult but very toothsome translation of *Tyestes*, a gruesome play by the Stoic philosopher and playwright Seneca. Seneca was tutor and advisor to the young emperor Nero and, in her introduction, Churchill mentioned the existence of a curiosity, a play called *Octavia*, in which both Seneca and the emperor Nero appear as characters. *Octavia* is a ripped-from-the-headlines drama written at or not long after the time of the events it depicts: Nero's divorce and murder of his wife, Octavia, the daughter of the emperor Claudius who preceded him. For years this play was attributed to Seneca, though scholars no longer believe that to be the case.

I became interested in the question of what it would be like to be a stoic philosopher—a man whose life work is to consider how human beings ought to behave—placed in the position of influencing the behavior of the most powerful man in the world. I became interested in the question of what it would be like to be a playwright, creating the man whose role, emperor, is unimaginably powerful.

And I wondered who had written *Octavia*.

I received a commission from Yale Rep to write a play, which we all assumed would be of normal length, about the relationship between Seneca and Nero. I began writing it in the summer of 2007 and it quickly became clear, within the first half hour, that the material instead required unusual length to explore itself fully. I wrote a playsworth of material and then put it aside for other tasks I needed to complete more quickly. In 2008 the director Ken Schmoll and I worked for a week at the invaluable New Dramatists, a playwrights service organization in New York headed at that time by Todd London, to workshop the material I had thus far. The response was encouraging and a few years later I wrote another two hours and Ken and I workshopped the whole in two days. The time since then has been taken up with other deadlines and other plays, with productions, teaching. I have been wanting to return to the play and to finish it; in part because a play which is not completed is a ghost hovering saggily in the corner like an only half deflated helium balloon, and in part because I'm curious how it all comes out. But marshalling the resources of time and attention to complete this play had alluded me until Todd London's very generous invitation to come work here. In the past few months Ken and I have been working with a group of very talented and game graduate students, as well as two very fine professional actors, to workshop the material as it exists so far, and to give me a chance to move forward with the project in an undivided fashion.

This draft is not yet complete; I believe we are somewhere around the two-third mark, I should be done with the play by March.

When writing a play based on historical events, the task of the playwright is to research like mad, and then to write towards your curiosities, to write the scenes that history hasn't been able to illuminate to your satisfaction. Most of the events in this play are true, or reasonably true, as best as we are able to determine the truth. I've been interested, during this election, in seeing how quickly and persistently lies constellate around political personalities—powerful women in particular—and so I have, sometimes with reluctance, abandoned some of the most scurrilous and interesting rumors which surround these figures.

- Anne Washburn, January 2017

Cino Nights

directed by Daniel Talbott
Taking place at found performance spaces in the U-District
Late February/Early March

More info at www.uwdramalabs.com

REMAINING MAINSTAGE SHOWS

Maple and Vine

by Jordan Harrison
directed by Sean Ryan
January 17-29
Floyd and Delores Jones Playhouse

As You Like It

by William Shakespeare
directed by Jeffrey Fracé
February 7-19
Glenn Hughes Penthouse Theatre

Orlando

adapted by Sarah Ruhl
from the novel by Virginia Woolfe
directed by L. Zane Jones
April 25-May 7
Glenn Hughes Penthouse Theatre

Sueño

by José Rivera
directed by Jane Jones
May 23-June 4, 2017
Floyd and Delores Jones Playhouse

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