



Michael Johnston [l] and Brent Shockley [r] star as a yuppie gay British couple struggling with various issues (including a meddling mother, portrayed by Delores Walker [c]) in *Straight and Narrow* at The Actor's Workshop in Houston.



STRAIGHT AND NARROW

Actor's Workshop Premiere
to Benefit

Houston's Assistance Fund

Straight and Narrow, Jimmie Chinn's hit British West End comedy, premieres at the Actor's Workshop in Houston September 8 with a special benefit performance for The Assistance Fund. The show begins its regular run September 9, with performances through October 9.

Straight and Narrow features Michael Johnston and Brent Shockley as a yuppie gay couple who design and build kitchens in Manchester, England. This production marks a rematch for the two Houston actors, who starred in a highly successful production of Harvey Fierstein's *Safe Sex* at The Actor's Workshop in 1992. Douglas Matens, who directed that show and starred in its companion piece *On Tidy Endings*, will again coach Johnston and Shockley.

A departure from the current genre of AIDS-related plays, Chinn's script addresses the contemporary issues of "coming out" to family and a gay man's desire to have a child. Although Bob has lived with lover Jeff for years, he is unable and unwilling to communicate this fact to his mother, Vera, with even the slightest degree of honesty. Consequently, Bob and his sisters go to great lengths to camouflage his lifestyle from the matriarch, who chooses to ignore the obvious.

While examining a piece of homoerotic art in her son's living room, Vera interprets its content as "two brothers having a dance." She constantly brings up the subject of marriage to her unreceptive son. Oblivious to the root of a conflict between her son and Jeff, she innocently proclaims, "If there's anything queer going on here, I want to know about it!"

Delores Walker, who creates a dynamic picture of the overbearing mother, Vera, feels that her character knows about her

son, but plays the game as a defense mechanism. "She wants Bob to tell her, but is afraid that her asking would be a moral judgment. A mother may go into denial, but she always knows when her son is gay. I don't think any woman could be that out of touch with her child."

Johnston feels a special bond with his character, Bob. The actor, who came out to his family after the recent Stonewall 25 events in New York, says he fully understands Bob's dilemma. "Just like the play, my mother did not want to know. But it's great to have supportive sisters similar to the love expressed by Bob's siblings in *Straight and Narrow*."

"I also have a mother who prefers to ignore my lifestyle issues," adds Shockley. "To my surprise, my rather conservative sister has been a jewel. Our communication was practically nonexistent, until the 'not-so-secret' secret came to light. We are much closer now."

Fortunately, Bob did not inherit his mother's controlling nature. Instead, the baggage he carries over from his dysfunctional family environment is the inability to communicate in his relationships. Unaware that his partnership with Jeff has become stale and ordinary, Bob prefers (like his mother) to think that everything's hunky-dory on the domestic front. "Everything is 'cozy,' as he likes to call it. It's 'our' home and we've built a life together," remarks a restless and despondent Jeff to Bob's sister Lois.

Like her character (Lois) in *Straight and*

STRAIGHT & NARROW



by
Jimmie Chinn

directed by
Douglas Matens

with

Michael Johnson **Brent Shockley**
Theo Lane Pitre **Dolores Walker**
Carol Dougherty **Harlow Blackman**
Paul Drake

Narrow, actress Theo Lane-Pitre is accepting of alternative lifestyles and has discussed the issue of homosexuality with her eight- and 11-year-old children. "I have taught them that we are all children of the same God. I am comfortable with them seeing the sexual situations of this show, although the language is a bit adult for their age."

Actor Harlow Blackman, who plays Lois' loving husband Bill, is equally comfortable with the subject and its audience. "It would be a terrible experience to be an actor in a show that you don't trust or respect the people." Rounding out the cast in comedic roles are Carol Dougherty as Bob's neurotic sister and Paul Drake as her philandering, sexually confused husband. Eileen Colleton serves as assistant director.

Although the central focus is on a gay couple, Matens does not feel the piece is a "gay" play. "It's a play about relationships and family values. The casting is strong, with Johnston and Shockley portraying a normal couple who could be straight." Directing his fifth show at TAW, Matens credits Artistic Director Karen Douglas with offering adventuresome and versatile programming during the

theatre's 13 seasons in Houston.

Shockley said The Assistance Fund was of special significance to him, as he lost his longtime companion, Don Johnson, to AIDS complications during rehearsals for the show.

"The irony of this show, for me, is that the time commitment associated with the play that kept us apart during his waning days is now my greatest solace after his death." Shockley said he is dedicating his performance to Johnson's memory.

Straight and Narrow is being presented by The Actor's Workshop in Houston September 9-October 9. Performances are Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8:30 p.m., with Sunday matinees at 5 p.m. (no performance on Sunday, September 11) The Actor's Workshop is located at 1009 Chartres. For reservations, call (713)236-1844.

A special preview performance on Thursday, September 8 benefits The Assistance Fund, which pays medical insurance premiums for people with AIDS who have not yet qualified for other assistance. The Executive and Professional Association of Houston is co-sponsor of the fund-raiser. For tickets (\$15), phone (713)529-4788.

The Actors Workshop

1009 CHARTRES AT LAMAR

P.O. BOX 22366

HOUSTON, TEXAS 77227-2366

RESERVATIONS: 236-1844

The Actors Workshop

presents

**STRAIGHT
& NARROW**

by

Jimmie Chinn

directed by

DOUGLAS MATENS

set by

KELLY T. CAMPBELL

lighting by

NATHAN DENNY

assistant to the director

EILEEN T. COLLETON

Artistic Director

KAREN DOUGLAS



This production has been made possible in part,
through grants and assistance from
CULTURAL ARTS COUNCIL OF HOUSTON
AMERICAN AIRLINES
NATIONSBANK

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Straight and Narrow is being presented through
special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

CAST

in order of appearance

BOB.....	Michael Johnston
JEFF.....	Brent Shockley
NONA.....	Carol Dougherty
LOIS.....	Theo Lane Pitre
VERA.....	Dolores Walker
BILL.....	Harlow Blackmon
ARTHUR.....	Paul Drake

*The play takes place in the home of Bob and Jeff
just outside of Manchester, England.*

TIME:

A Sunday afternoon. July, 1985

There will be one fifteen minute intermission.

BIOGRAPHIES

DOUGLAS MATENS (Director) is the Associate Artistic Director here at TAW. He directed our productions of *The Nerd*, *Stepping Out*, *Safe Sex* and *On Tidy Endings* where he also performed the role of Arthur. He appeared as Junior in *Dearly Departed* and Ken Gorman in *Rumors*. Elsewhere, he has directed productions of *Picnic*, *Enter Laughing*, *How the Other half Loves* and *Fame, the Musical*. An actor and dancer for over twenty years, he toured the United States and Mexico with the Texas Ballet and has been seen in local productions of *Butterflies are Free*, *The Foreigner*, *Crimes of the Heart*, *Other People's Money*, *The Last Days at the Dixie Girl Cafe* and *Cabaret* to name a few. Doug also designs sets here at TAW.

MICHAEL JOHNSTON (Bob) first appeared at TAW as Anthony Marston in *Ten Little Indians* and most recently as Albert Prosser in *Hobson's Choice*. He has worked in or on productions of *Eastern Standard*, *Safe Sex*, *Sly Fox*, *Other People's Money* and *Stepping Out*. He'd like to thank Karen Douglas and Doug Matens for their invaluable guidance and for bringing him closer to himself, and his sister, Pam, for being there.

BRENT SHOCKLEY (Jeff) returns to The Actors Workshop hoping to repeat the success of his performance in the 1992 TAW hit **Safe Sex** by Harvey Fierstein. Brent was last seen in Skyline Theater's production of Christopher Fry's classic **The Lady's Not for Burning** and played a leading role in Gary Laird's **Christmas Present** at Kuumba House Repertory. An enthusiastic writer, he is the theater critic for *This Week in Texas* magazine and is especially proud of his recently published interview with actress Lynn Redgrave. An active member of the Diana Foundation, he was a lead singer and dancer in the 1994 Diana Awards Show. Brent has served on TAW's Board of Directors for two years. His performance is dedicated to the loving memory of Don Johnson.

CAROL DOUGHERTY (Nona) is making her first appearance at TAW but she has performed on many other Houston stages. Among her favorite roles are Ruth Condomine in **Blithe Spirit**, Nina in **The Cocktail Hour**. Nurse Ratched in **One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest**, Madrigal in **The Chalk Garden** and Lucy in **Narrow Bed**. Carol thanks her family for all their support over the years.

THEO LANE PITRE (Lois) was first seen on TAW's stage in the wacky musical **Six Women With Brain Death...Or Expiring Minds Want to Know**. Last spring, her performance here as Maggie in **Hobson's Choice** received critical acclaim. Elsewhere in Houston, she has worked at Stages Repertory Theatre in Arthur Kopit's **Wings**, Theatre Southwest and four consecutive seasons at the Wortham Center with the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Houston. Productions include Agnes Gooch in **Mame**, Jenny in **Paint Your Wagon**, Laura in **The Glass Menagerie**, Darlene in **Daddy's Dyin....Who's Got the Will**, Ella in **Charlie's Aunt** and Mrs. Penniman in **The Heiress**. Ms. Pitre is currently working on completing her undergraduate degree with the goal of obtaining a masters degree in Theatre.

DOLORES WALKER (Vera) is making her TAW debut in **Straight and Narrow** but has been active in and around Houston area theater for the past 16 years. She has appeared in over 25 productions and worked in all facets of theatre. Some of her favorite roles include Martha in **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?** Hattie in **Laundry and Bourbon** and Mrs. Antrobus in **The Skin of Our Teeth**. Most recently she was seen in **Other People's Money** and **Lend Me a Tenor**. Dolores also worked on the film **Gambler V** which just finished shooting in Galveston. She is looking forward to being a first-time grandmother in December.

HARLOW BLACKMON (Bill) Though this production marks Harlow's debut at The Actors Workshop, he has been a steady local performer since his arrival in Houston four years ago. Among his favorite roles are Skip in Preston Jones' **Texas Trilogy**, Mr. Manningham in **Angel Street**, Greenwald in **The Caine Mutiny**, and the writer in Neil Simon's **The Good Doctor**. Harlow makes his living writing for the public relations department of the M. W. Kellogg engineering firm. A native of Winnsboro, Louisiana, he is a published poet and playwright.

PAUL DRAKE (Arthur) made his stage debut in TAW's **Run For Your Wife** and appeared most recently as Eddie in **Cementville**. In addition to working behind the scenes in many other shows, he recently made his movie debut in the feature film **Material Witness**.

PRODUCTION CREW

Stage Manager.....Paul Drake
Properties.....Eileen T. Colleton
Light and Sound Technician.....Nathan Denny
Set Construction.....Kelly Campbell, Quint Bishop
Costumes.....Karen Douglas
Sound Design.....Douglas Matens
Dialect Coach.....Martin Burniston
Photography.....Delton Seif
Marketing.....Bruce Stuart

CLASSES AT THE WORKSHOP

THE ACTORS WORKSHOP offers classes in beginning and advanced acting taught by Artistic Director, **Karen Douglas**. **INTRODUCTION TO ACTING** a popular six-class series, begins on Tuesday, September 13th and again in January beginning on the 10th. For more information call: 228-3900

WAITING IN THE WINGS

Opening November 4th is the first local staging of Neil Simon's Pulitzer Prize winning ***Lost in Yonkers***. This comedic-drama is based on the author's teenage stay with his stern grandmother and his affectionate but retarded aunt. ***"His funniest and most impressive play ever!"***

OUR VERY SPECIAL THANKS

The Salvage Center The AIDS Assistance Fund
Michael Johnston Karen Trout-Winn