

Mrs. Ollie Espenshade ..... Kristin Griffith  
 Anna ..... Patricia Kilgarriff  
 Mrs. Mabel Wentz ..... Cynthia Darlow  
 Penny Hassett ..... Victoria Mack  
 Mr. Paul Espenshade ..... Cliff Bemis  
 Vernon Hassett ..... Sean Patrick Hopkins

SETTING:

The entire action of the play takes place in the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Espenshade.

ACT ONE

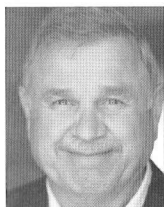
A Saturday afternoon in June, about one o'clock.

ACT TWO

Scene One: The same day, about six-thirty.  
 Scene Two: Two hours later.

ACT THREE

Scene One: A Sunday evening in early August.  
 Scene Two: A Saturday afternoon, some weeks later.



Cliff Bemis



Cynthia Darlow



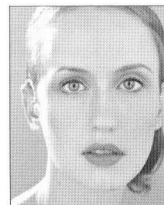
Kristin Griffith



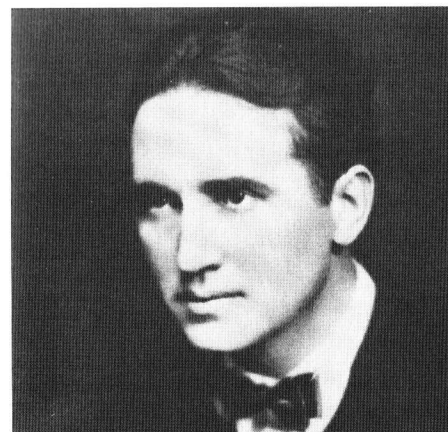
Sean Patrick Hopkins



Patricia Kilgarriff



Victoria Mack



Acclaimed as an “apparently omniscient observer of American life” (as described by Robert Benchley), with “a gift for quick, true and varied characterization unsurpassed by any of his contemporaries” (*Theatre Arts Monthly*), Pulitzer Prize-winner George Kelly stood out among the most distinctive of interwar Broadway dramatists. In his ten full-length works—from early classics such as *THE SHOW-OFF* to his theatrical swan song, *THE FATAL WEAKNESS*—the playwright crafted a signature style that critics came to regard as “the Kelly play:” trenchantly honest “serious comedies” examining middle-class morals and manners.

George Edward Kelly was born on January 16, 1887 in Schuylkill Falls, Pennsylvania, as the seventh of ten children born to the remarkable “Philadelphia Kellys.” An industrious Irish-Catholic family, the Kellys rose from humble origins to enact an American rags-to-riches saga. George’s siblings included Olympic sculling champion and construction mogul John Kelly (also the father of Grace Kelly), and Walter C. Kelly, who became world-famous as a vaudeville headliner. After early apprenticeship as a draftsman, the shy but stage-struck George followed his older brother into the theatre. Beginning in 1911, Kelly acted in touring companies and, from 1915, in vaudeville sketches: a staple of the form alongside song-and-dance variety.

Vaudeville proved a formative training ground for Kelly, who honed his “remarkable instinct for the theatre” on the precision and stage business of the “two-a-day.” Beginning with 1916’s *FINDERS KEEPERS*, Kelly found great success as a playwright of sketches on the Keith-Orpheum circuit. After serving in France during WWI, Kelly continued to write such comedies as *THE FLATTERING WORD* (1918; Mint Theater Company, 2000), the first of numerous plays with theatrical subjects. In contrast to his academy-trained peers, Kelly was described in 1927 by *Theater Arts Monthly* as “more than other young American playwright of his generation, distinctly of the theatre.”

The early 1920s lifted Kelly to the height of popular and critical acclaim, with plays that he both wrote and directed. While 1922’s *THE TORCH BEARERS* convulsed audiences with its “travesty on the amateur actor,” 1924’s *THE SHOW-OFF* was hailed as a masterwork by many critics, including Heywood Brown, who called it “the best comedy which has yet been written by an American.” Although Kelly decried the Twenties as “The Vulgar Age,” the era’s go-getting business spirit satirically fueled *THE SHOW-OFF*, whose title character Aubrey Piper became a synonym for a blustering braggart. Kelly created another American archetype in the obsessive, destructive housewife of his next play, the 1925 psychological drama *CRAIG’S WIFE*, which earned him a Pulitzer Prize. By this time, a new Kelly play excited comparable anticipation to a new work by Eugene O’Neill.

After *CRAIG’S WIFE*, Kelly’s plays declined in favor, as he followed his hits with a number of stringent problem plays that strayed away “from the satire upon which his reputation is founded,” according to John Mason Brown. *BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM* (1927, about a promiscuous upper-class flapper) and *MAGGIE THE MAGNIFICENT* (1929), evoked the playwright’s puritan upbringing and placed

CONTINUED

him out of step with the uninhibited Twenties. Nevertheless, critics continued to admire the playwright's "keen insight," craftsmanship, and artistic conviction. Joseph Wood Krutch observed in 1929, "A George Kelly play that is a failure is often more memorable than the successes of other playwrights."

While only two new Kelly plays opened in the 1930s, the playwright continued to expand his range on Broadway and in Hollywood. PHILIP GOES FORTH (1931; Mint Theater Company 2013) mixed a poignant coming-of-age drama with barbed theatrical satire. The play affirmed Kelly's sense of the theatre "as a disciplined craft and as an art but also something of a divine calling," as Foster Hirsch describes. Disappointed by the mixed reception of PHILIP, Kelly ventured to Hollywood, where he worked for five years as a script consultant and screenwriter. The artistic constraints of the "Dream Factory" proved no less frustrating to the perfectionist Kelly, and in 1936, he returned to Broadway with REFLECTED GLORY, a star vehicle for Tallulah Bankhead.

With his last Broadway plays, THE DEEP MRS. SYKES (1945) and THE FATAL WEAKNESS (1946), Kelly created two of his most mature and unconventional works—leading Mary McCarthy to observe, in 1947,

that a Kelly play "is not like anything else while on the surface it resembles every play one has ever been to." Both character studies of married suburban women, with plots of suspected infidelity, THE DEEP MRS. SYKES and THE FATAL WEAKNESS critiqued the values of the postwar era, when the "primacy and validity of the nuclear family... was not to be questioned," as John M. Clum writes. Produced by the Theatre Guild, and starring the comedienne Ina Claire, THE FATAL WEAKNESS earned some of Kelly's most admiring reviews. However, settling neither into expected grooves of "capricious comedy or psychological drama" (The New York Times), THE FATAL WEAKNESS failed to find an audience, and did not revive Kelly's Broadway career.

After a 1947 Broadway revival of CRAIG'S WIFE directed by the playwright, Kelly shifted into semi-retirement. The comedy WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS (1951; to be presented as part of the Mint's "Further Readings" series on October 20) counted among four unpublished plays that never materialized on stage, although "Playhouse 90" produced Kelly's 1956 teleplay starring Shirley Booth as Washington party hostess Perle Mesta. The same year, Kelly's niece became one of the most famous women in the world, as the movie star Princess of Monaco.



Bernardo Cubría and Natalie Kuhn in the Mint's 2013 production of PHILIP GOES FORTH. Photo by Rahav Segev



Rachel Moulton, Christine Toy Johnson, Carole Healey, Natalie Kuhn and Bernardo Cubría PHILIP GOES FORTH at the Mint, 2013. Photo by Rahav Segev

As a young girl dreaming of an acting career, Grace Kelly was fondly encouraged by her Uncle George, who applauded Grace's turn in one of her first theatrical appearances: a 1949 summer stock production of THE TORCH BEARERS at the Bucks County Playhouse in Pennsylvania.

Throughout the decades of his own celebrity, Kelly was deeply reticent about his private life. A 1930 profile in Times Square Tintypes claimed, "(Kelly) honestly dislikes publicity and actually goes out of his way to avoid it." While the press noted him as a lifelong bachelor, Kelly was actually involved, for over fifty years, with his companion William E. Weagly (a union that Kelly kept closely guarded from his conservative family, to whom Weagly was always presented as his valet and private secretary). With Weagly by his side, Kelly moved in 1957 to a retirement village in Sun City, California. He died at the age of 87 in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania on June 18, 1974, his plays long out of theatrical fashion.

In the twenty-first century, it is increasingly unlikely that George Kelly will "pass

unremarked" (to quote Mary McCarthy) as a significant twentieth century American playwright. In recent years, revivals of THE TORCH BEARERS (Williamstown Theatre Festival, 2009), THE SHOW-OFF (Westport Country Playhouse, 2013) and the Mint's PHILIP GOES FORTH have revitalized interest in Kelly. Foster Hirsch writes, in summarizing the playwright's singular body of work: "His dialogue, his theater business, and his controlled rhythm are unfailingly graceful. Kelly is a miniature portraitist of American manners; and within its own self-imposed limits, his vision is shrewd and rigorous. He is a moralist who mixes his homely sermons with droll, ironic laughter, and his manners plays...are among the most distinctively stylized works in the American repertory. Kelly's position in American drama is unique and it is high."

*Dr. Maya Cantu is a theater historian, scholar and Dramaturgical Advisor for the Mint, where she most recently worked on John Van Druten's LONDON WALL. This year, Maya received her DFA in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at Yale School of Drama.*