

# 'Shay' begins Tuesday

## The making of a new play

by Kevin McCarthy  
Features Editor



Playwright Anne Commire



Director Tony Giordano

To be successful, every play requires the loving attention of the entire playmaking group—from the playwright to the set painter.

Yet, if there are any two artists who are the driving, creative force behind *Shay*, the first Carolina Playmaker production of the spring semester, they are playwright Anne Commire and director Tony Giordano.

After observing a staged reading of her play last summer at the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre Center in Waterford, Conn., Commire has come to UNC to see *Shay* in full production. Professional freelance director Giordano is here at her request.

"It feels very good to be here," Giordano said. "There's free time to experience and explore. The cast is very disciplined and extraordinarily cooperative." In professional theatre, he added, the cast has far less time to work so hard on a production.

The playwright is also enjoying the relaxed atmosphere at UNC.

"I find it very easy to rewrite down here," Commire said. "But it's extremely difficult for the full-time students to get all the new changes." Most of the changes are nitpicking ones, although, Act II, Scene II, the dramatic confrontation portion of the play, has been reordered.

"I find it very difficult to write the dramatic," she said. "I have a tendency, like most comics, to go too far with tragedy. If I really wrote what I thought, it would be the weepiest play in history."

A native of Wyandotte, Mich., Commire attended Eastern Michigan University and following graduation taught "Ancient history, American history, English, journalism and six hours of hall duty a day" in a Michigan high school.

She then took a job with a Detroit publishing firm for which she later wrote approximately 1,000 biographical sketches for her book, *Something About the Author*, cited by the American Library Association as one of the outstanding reference books of 1971.

In 1967, Commire applied for a job with Meadowbrook Theatre, a professional repertoire group located at Oakland University, Mich. "They asked me if I could

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—Playwright Anne Commire

sew. I laughed insanely and said absolutely not."

She got the job as wardrobe mistress at \$90 a week. "The lady said it was so refreshing to hire someone who didn't claim she could do everything," Commire said.

The following year, she worked with famous lighting designer Jean Rosenthal in New York. But, as she says, "lighting design was not my idea of heaven." So, she decided to come out into the open and end her "cute game as a closet writer."

"My fear of the big-time lessened when I walked into New York." It's just one more step, she said, like going from high school to college.

Then, in 1969-70, Commire wrote her first drama. "I decided I quit my job, eat tomato soup and write my first play." The following year she wrote two one-acts, entitled *Matinee Ladies*.

Commire began writing *Shay* in the fall of 1971. It is the story of a mature, introverted woman who has done everything society asked her to do—grow up, marry, raise a family—and has done it well. The dramatic conflict arises when her children try to change her.

*Shay* is a challenging role, Commire said. "I specifically set out to write a play that would be a total challenge for an actress. Beverly (Bentley) is meeting the challenge beautifully. I'm very pleased about what might happen opening night."

Giordano also had nothing but praise for professional actress Bentley. "She's carrying a fantastic part. And she's doing a phenomenal job on a very difficult role. It's the kind of role you only cast stars for or make stars from."

And Giordano should know: he's been in the theatre business since prep school, where he directed and acted in student productions.

After graduating with an M.A. in drama from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., Giordano toured across the country with a repertoire troupe. "It was crazy," he said about the experience. "When it was all through we hated each other. But it was fun to travel, learn to be an adult and attempt to be a professional. We even thought we were good."

He then taught English and drama at a Long Island high school for five and a half years before taking a job as artistic director at the Isip Art Theatre for the State University of New York at Suffolk.

He is also resident director of four playhouses in eastern United States and has been nominated by the New Jersey Drama Critics Association for Best Director for his work on *Funny Girl*, which played this summer at the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey.

Unfortunately, the award ceremony is Tuesday, the opening night of *Shay*. "I haven't decided if I'm going yet or not," Giordano said. "I'm vain enough to want to be there to win it, and I guess I better get used to it if I lose. It's nice to get feedback occasionally."

Commire agreed. "I'd sometimes even appreciate a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," she said.

Commire was happy to see her play read at the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre Center this summer. She views writing as a selfish occupation unless the writer lets others see his work. "For the first time in four years," she said, "I felt like I had given something back."

Commire and Giordano are looking forward to seeing the Chapel Hill audience's reaction to the play. The world premier of *Shay* at 8 p.m. Tuesday in the Playmakers' Theatre is kind of a test for Commire. She hopes to see whether or not *Shay* is as universal as other artists have said it is.

But *Shay* has a future after its conclusion at UNC. ACT (American Conservatory Theatre) in San Francisco will stage the play in April starring Sada Thompson, who won a Tony Award for Best Broadway Actress of 1972.

Furthermore, New Zealand and Australia recently purchased the two-year option rights for the play which will be produced in the Twelfth Night Theatre in Brisbane, Australia.

Would she like to see *Shay* reach Broadway?  
"That's what we'd all like," she said with a grin.

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# Taster's Choice

## Cinema

"Fantastic Planet." Carolina Theatre. Magnificent, extraordinary film about a planet where Lilliputian humans are kept as pets. One of the most brilliant pieces of animation and one of the most truly magical pieces of science fiction ever filmed. Not to be missed. Dubbed unfortunately. 1:24, 2:55, 4:26, 5:58, 7:29 & 9. \$2. Ends Thursday. Late show: Friday and Saturday, "The Four Clowns." Sunday, "High Plains Drifter." All shows at 11:15. \$1.50.

"1901 Danish Delights." Varsity Theatre. Dreadful skin flick with stupid take sex scenes. Definitely not even one delight. 2:55, 4:50, 6:45 & 8:40. \$2. Ends Tuesday. Late show: "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever." Friday and Saturday at 11:15. \$1.50.

"Nepoleon and Samantha." Plaza I. Poor Disney feature. 3, 5, 7 & 9. \$2. Ends Thursday. "The Paper Chase." Plaza II. Highly satisfying film that is truly outstanding when it examines a student-teacher relationship. Good performances, and a brilliant, truly great one from John Houseman. 2:45, 4:55, 7:05 & 9:15. \$2. Ends Thursday.

"Sleeper." Plaza III. Woody Allen's latest comedy, set 200 years in the future. Very funny, and though it lacks some of the delirious brilliance of "Sex," it is his smoothest, best-paced film. 3:30, 5:30, 7:30 & 9:30. \$2. Ends Thursday.

Chapel Hill Film Friends: "People on Sunday." (Germany, 1929) A study of a day in the life of ordinary people, directed by Robert Siodmak. Shown with "The Goat," a Buster Keaton short. Friday at 9:30. Saturday at 11:30 in Carroll Hall. Admission \$1.50.

Alternative Cinema: "Sambizanga," a simple eloquent and ultimately quite forceful film set against the background of Portuguese colonialism. Made in Africa and directed by a black woman Sarah Maldoror. Friday at 7. Saturday at 2, 4:30, 7 & 9:30 in Carroll Hall. \$1.50.

"Free Flicks: Friday, "Carmen Jones." Oscar Hammerstein's version of the Bizet opera. Not very well filmed. Saturday, "Suddenly, Last Summer." Delightfully overripe Tennessee Williams with great bravura acting by everyone. A lot of fun. Sunday, "State of Siege." Costa Gavras' political thriller with scenes worthy of Eisenstein. Perhaps last year's best film. All films at 8:30 & 9 in the Great Hall.

"When the People Awake, Chile 1972/1973." Sponsored by Bread & Roses. Today at 7:30 in 11 Murphey. Thursday at 11 a.m. in Carroll Hall. Admission free but donations requested.

Three Chaplin shorts, "Beyond the Screen," "The Fireman" and "The Rink." Wednesday at 7:30. Chapel Hill Public Library.

"Modern Times," the first in a series of Chaplin films sponsored by Chapel Hill Film Friends. Chaplin is the definition of film poetry and this film is perhaps his best. Absolutely not to be missed. Funny and extraordinarily endearing. Sunday at 2, 4:30, 7 & 9:30 in Carroll Hall. UNC students \$1.

## Concerts

Kris Kristofferson and Waylon Jennings.

Friday at 8 p.m. in Dorion Arena, Raleigh. Reserve seat tickets, \$5 and \$8, available at all area Record Bars.

Beals and Croft. Sunday at 8 p.m. in Cameron Indoor Stadium, Duke. Tickets on sale at the Record Bar for \$4.50 and \$5.50.

John Ogdon, British pianist, will appear with the North Carolina Symphony on Friday at 8:15 p.m. in Memorial Hall. Admission free to UNC students.

A special Tuesday Evening Series will feature seven student artists in a Scholarship Benefit Concert. Tuesday at 8 p.m. in Hill Hall. The artists include Judy Fisher and Jane McGrath, piano; Philip Teachey, oboe; Margaret Proctor, violin; James Bain, English horn; James Croon, tenor; and Melinda Wilkinson, soprano. Admission \$2 for students, \$3 for adults.

Experimental music program featuring a talk by Dr. Shiangtai Tsun on compositional uses of a computer as a sound source for 20th century music. Thursday at 8:15 p.m. in the East Duke Music Room, Duke University.

## Special Events

International Week—1974. Today through Monday, Feb. 18. Speakers include: Paul Cotton, New Zealand consul general in New York, will discuss "New Zealand's Environmental Problems and Politics," at 4 p.m. Tuesday in room 335 of the School of Public Health. Mladen Solc, director of the Yugoslav Information Center in New York, will speak on "Changing Relations between the USSR and East Europe in the Era of Detente." Thursday at 7:30 in Hamilton Hall.

A variety show, "Give Them a Hand," with 13 performances by foreign students, will be held Saturday at 8 p.m. in Memorial Hall. Admission 50 cents.

International dinners will be held throughout the week at 6:30 p.m. in the following times and places:

- French dinner, today in the Lutheran Church.
- Latin American dinner, Tuesday at the Newman Center.
- Indian dinner, Friday at the Chapel of the Cross.
- German dinner, Sunday at Craig dormitory.
- Chinese dinner, Monday, Feb. 18 at University Methodist Church.

Admission for each dinner is \$2.50. All tickets may be purchased at the Union desk, Carr dormitory, or at Ledbetter-Pickard on Franklin Street.

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