

**THEATER**

**The lowdown on Lanford**

Profile devotes entire season to another gay dramatist

BY STEPHEN BLAIR

**P**rofile Theatre Project has a thing for gay men. The company, which devotes every season to the works of a single playwright, celebrated queer scribes Edward Albee and Terrence McNally in recent years. For its 2005-2006 season, it shines the spotlight on Lanford Wilson, another gay dramatist.

Though he's never authored a play as famous as Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the 68-year-old Wilson has a Pulitzer Prize under his belt for the 1979 comic romance *Talley's Folly*. He has put gay themes front and center in acclaimed works such as *Burn This* and *Fifth of July*.

Profile opens the season Oct. 8, using both performance spaces at Theater Theatre to present simultaneous stagings of *Talley's Folly* and *Talley & Son*. One actress must dart down the hallway so that her character can appear in both productions.

These plays are part of *The Talley Trilogy*, which chronicles a Missouri clan from 1944 to 1977. A staged reading of *Fifth of July*, the third play in that series, follows in November. Along with Wilson, Profile artistic director Jane Unger selected *Burn This*, *Redwood Curtain* and *Sympathetic Magic* to round out the season.

"He's one of my favorite writers," Unger says. "He has an enormous, pertinent and diverse body of work. These are classic plays, relevant to social and political issues in this country today."

Wilson—who will visit Profile in May to conduct a playwrights workshop—spoke with *Just Out* from his home in Sag Harbor, N.Y.

**Stephen Blair:** Have you spent much time in Portland before?

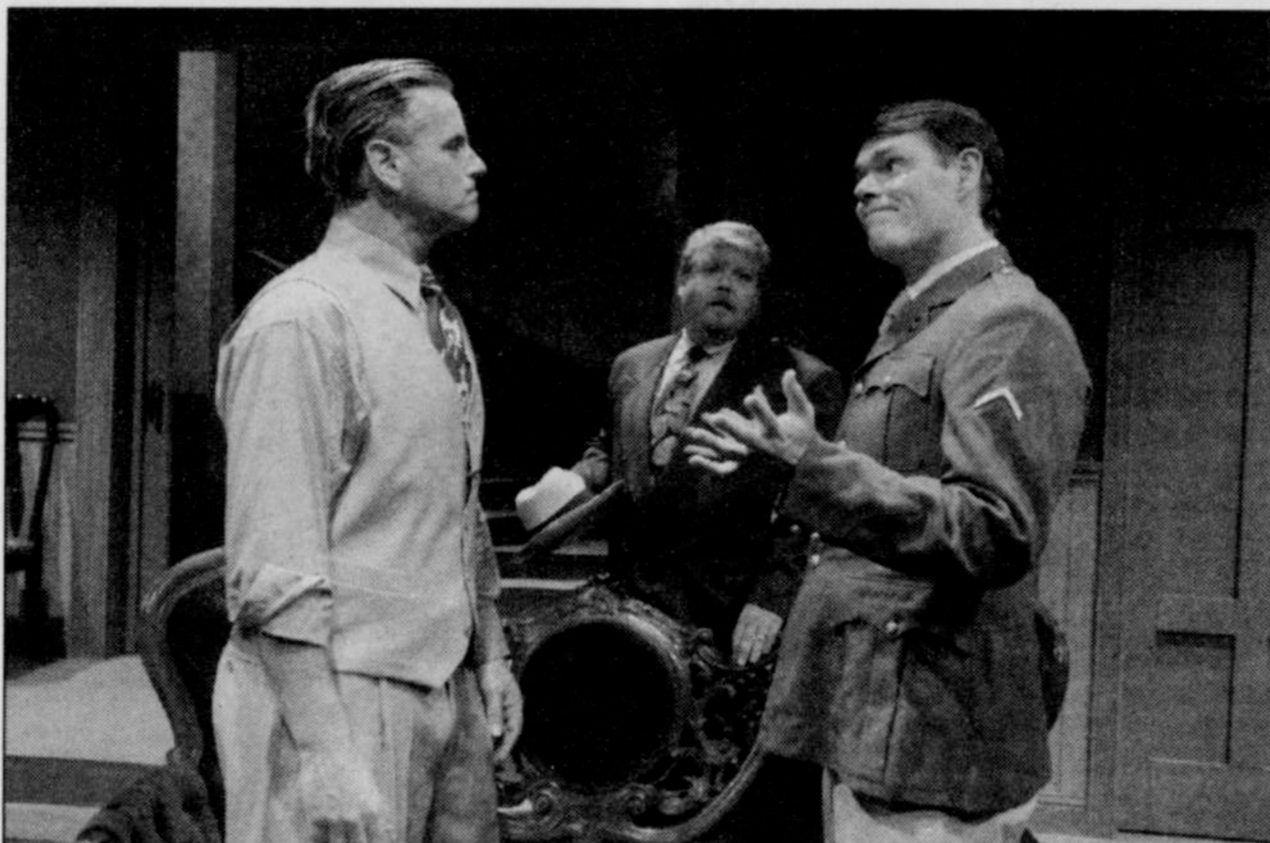
**Lanford Wilson:** I have not been at all. I can't wait to get to Oregon. I'm hoping that some of the roses are blooming when I get there in May. All I know is that everyone's screaming about Oregon. It's the place to be. The people are wonderful and the climate is wonderful and the architecture is wonderful and on and on and on.

**SB:** I read that you don't fly.

**LW:** I've traveled by train and bus all my life because I hated to fly. I just bite the bullet now, like everyone else. I don't think anyone likes to fly. There's nothing to like about it, except the convenience.

**SB:** Which of your own plays are your favorites?

**LW:** The one that Profile is not doing that I like very much is *The Mound Builders*. Everyone should buy it and read it. I like it enormously. I think it's probably my best play. One that I'm still working on and will be working



From left, Tracy Hinkson, Tod Van Voris and Garland Lyons star in *Talley & Son*, a gripping drama of family scandals and intrigue.

on in Portland is *Sympathetic Magic*. I think that's one of my better plays, too.

But you understand, I like the complicated ones and audiences tend to like the very simple ones that are very easy to follow, or at least critics tend to like the ones that are easy to follow and describe. But when you start getting into *Talley & Son*, things start getting complicated. People have devious motives and change right in front of your eyes. All sorts of fun things. But it's difficult to describe, so the critics get a little confused.

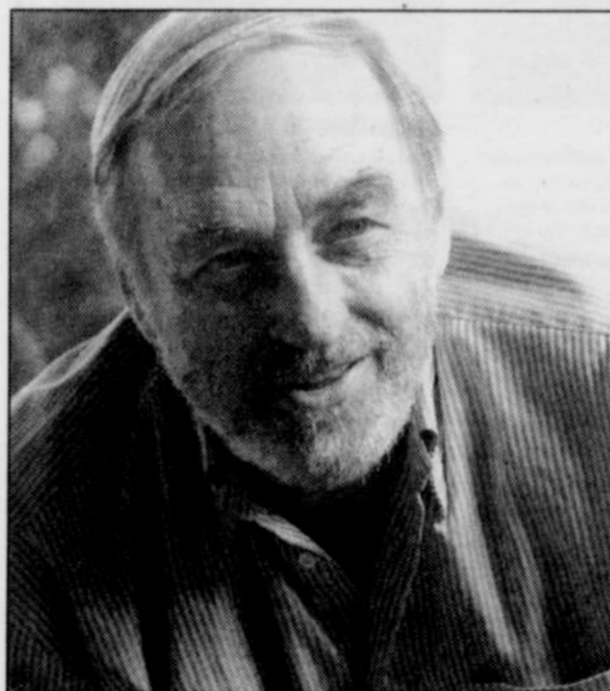
With *Sympathetic Magic* I guess they didn't too confused. I got some of my best reviews and it got an Obie. I reread it for Portland and said, "Oh my God, I want to work on this play."

**SB:** What do you think of Profile's decision to stage simultaneous productions of *Talley's Folly* and *Talley & Son*?

**LW:** I think it's a total hoot. I have no idea if it's going to work. I just talked to Jane Unger, and I guess it's working because she didn't say, "Oh, that doesn't work." It's a fun idea. Wouldn't you love to be the actress, or at least run back and forth with her. Watch what she has to do to get from one place to the other. There will be two plays going on at exactly the same time.

**SB:** What are the benefits and risks of presenting the plays this way?

**LW:** I think it's going to be absolutely enriching to both plays because no matter which one you see first, when you see the second one you'll know what's going on during all of that time. It's like an entire play as a side-



Lanford Wilson received a Pulitzer Prize for 1979's *Talley's Folly*, which will be staged simultaneously with 1981's *Talley & Son*.

bar. *Talley & Son* takes place simultaneously with *Talley's Folly*. It makes the plays twice as wide. No matter which one you see first. It's great fun.

**SB:** What does *The Talley Trilogy* have to say about life in 2005?

**LW:** That's not for me to say. I just don't analyze my plays at all. That's critic talk, and they do it very well. I don't even think about it. I really don't.

**SB:** Do you have a partner?

**LW:** No, I don't. I had one for 15 years and, thank you, I don't need that anymore. This is presumptuous of me, but I'm going to say it because I think it's also insightful: Like so many of those long relationships, the last eight years was faking it. There was nothing there. We had no real respect for each other. And respect is first, especially when you're an artist.

**SB:** What do you think of the current theater scene in the United States?

**LW:** It's like off-off-Broadway all over the country. How much better could that be? They're doing new plays everywhere. They finally decided that you don't have to dress in a long dress and tails to go to the theater. Also, theaters don't have to have crystal chandeliers as big as the dining room. Theater is an exciting thing that you can just go to.

**SB:** How often do you go in to New York City to see a play?

**LW:** I'm a Tony voter, so I have to see all the Broadway plays. This really pisses me off because the good plays are off-Broadway.

**SB:** What's your advice to aspiring playwrights?

**LW:** Start your own theater. Get some actor friends, get a director friend, and find a space to hang out in. You should be an ensemble day and night.

**SB:** What do you do in your leisure time?

**LW:** I garden. I read just about anything. I haven't written much in the last couple of years, so I'm excited about going back to that. ☐

TALLEY & SON and TALLEY'S FOLLY will be performed 8 p.m. Wednesday to Saturday and 2 and 7 p.m. Sunday from Oct. 8 to 30 at Theater Theatre, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. Tickets are \$13-\$28 from 503-242-0080 or [www.profiletheatre.org](http://www.profiletheatre.org).

STEPHEN BLAIR is a Portland arts writer. The first play he ever fell for was a high school production of *The Wiz*.

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