

FINE PRESIDENTS

By Rick Cleveland
Directed by Mark Clements

Executive Producers Carol & Rob Manegold

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The Quadracci Powerhouse Season is Sponsored by H. Richard Quadracci Ewens & Emilio Cabrera In Memory Of Harry And Betty Quadracci

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MILWAUKEE REPERTORY THEATER

MARK CLEMENTS CHAD BAUMAN

Artistic Director Managing Director

Presents...

MARCH 10 - APRIL 5, 2015

QUADRACCI POWERHOUSE



By **Rick Cleveland**Directed by **Mark Clements**

Executive Producers Carol & Rob Manegold

A Co-Production With **Arizona Theatre Company**



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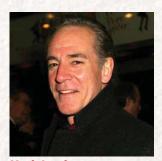
About the Play

Five Presidents brings us to the Executive Board Room at the Nixon Library on April 27, 1994. It is the day of Richard Nixon's funeral: a historic occasion at which the five living U.S. Presidents—four exes and one current—gather together to mourn, honor, and criticize one of our history's most controversial political figures. As each of the five presidents arrives, he shares insights into being a member of "the most exclusive club in the world." Some are old friends, others are new acquaintances, and all are still stinging from pasts as political adversaries. As they bring up old grievances and political differences, they test their tenuous relationships. The presidents not only banter with and challenge each other, but they also question Nixon's legacy as the afternoon unfurls. As good-natured ribbing leads to rising tension, the presidents struggle with the legacy they all share, and the choices they have made.

It's impossible to be in this job without feeling a special bond with the people who have gone before.

-President Bill Clinton, Speech announcing the death of Richard Nixon, 1994

Cast and Creative Team



Mark Jacoby George H.W. Bush



Martin L'Herault Jimmy Carter



Reese Madigan
Special Agent Michael Kirby



Steve Sheridan *Ronald Reagan*



Jeff Steitzer *Gerald R. Ford*



Brit Whittle *Bill Clinton*



Rick Cleveland
Playwright



Mark Clements
Director

Todd Edward Ivins *Scenic Designer*

Brian Jerome Peterson
Sound Designer

Brent Hazelton *Production Dramaturg*

Rebecca Lindsey Assistant Stage Manager Mary Folino Costume Designer

Lauren Wilde *Makeup Designer*

Hannah Greene
Assistant Director

Jesse Klug *Lighting Designer*

Jill Walmsley Zager

Richelle Harrington Calin Stage Manager

Kimberly CarolusStage Management Apprentice

PROFILES OF THE PRESIDENTS



Number 37 **RICHARD NIXON** (1969-1974) Political Party: Republican

With a degree in law, Nixon started his political career as a California Congressional representative, then won a seat in the Senate before becoming Vice President to Eisenhower. Though he lost a very close election in the 1960 presidential run to John F. Kennedy, he secured his own presidency in 1968. While in office he pursued revenue sharing, the end of the draft, anticrime laws, and a broader environmental program. His global accomplishments included creating a treaty with the U.S.S.R. to limit strategic nuclear weapons and establishing a relationship with China. The Watergate Scandal dominated the start of his second term in 1972, and eventually led to his resignation in 1974.



Number 40 **RONALD REAGAN** (1981-1989) Political Party: Republican

Reagan started his career as a Hollywood actor, appearing in 53 films over the course of two decades. As president of the Screen Actors Guild he got involved in the debate over Communism in the film industry, his views becoming more conservative. He served as Governor of California before running for president in 1980. After a failed assassination attempt on him within his first few months in office, his approval ratings soared. His immediate focus was on increasing employment, curbing inflation, and cutting taxes. In 1986 Reagan and Congress worked together to simplify the tax system that exempted millions of low income households from income taxes. He worked with the Soviet Union on arms reductions, declared war against international terrorism, gave support to anti-terrorist insurgencies, and maintained a free flow of oil during the Iran-Iraq war by ordering Naval escorts in the Persian Gulf.



Number 38 **GERALD FORD**(1974-1977)
Political Party: Republican

After Nixon's Vice President, Spiro Agnew, resigned during the start of the president's second term, Ford took over as Nixon's VP. With Nixon's resignation, he became president under the Twenty-fifth Amendment. On top of dealing with the repercussions of Nixon's scandal and resignation, Ford found himself faced with problems of inflation, energy shortages, and a suffering economy. He started his term by pardoning Nixon, an act that raised much controversy. A major concern during his presidency was stimulating the economy while still managing inflation issues. Maintaining Nixon's international policies, Ford dealt with the aftermath of the collapse of Cambodia and South Vietnam, and expanded aid to Israel and Egypt in an attempt to promote peace between the countries.



Number 41 **GEORGE H. W. BUSH**(1989-1993)
Political Party: Republican

Before becoming president, Bush held a number of high-ranking positions, including Congressional Representative, UN Ambassador, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, and Director of the CIA. He served two terms as VP to Reagan before becoming president in 1989. Immediately Bush faced the end of the Cold War and Communism, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and the resignation of reformist President Mikhail Gorbachev with whom Bush and prior presidents had worked. Other international issues included sending American troops into Panama to overthrow the regime of Governor Manuel Noriega, and reversing Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait during Desert Storm.



Number 39 JAMES CARTER (1977-1981) Political Party: Democrat

Starting his career as the Governor of Georgia, Carter eventually won a tough presidential campaign against Ford in 1977. During his presidency eight million new jobs for American citizens were created, he expanded the national park system, and promoted civil service reform. He also created the Department of Education, and appointed a record number of members of unrepresented citizen groups to government jobs. Internationally, he established an agreement between Israel and Egypt through the Camp David Accords in 1978. The Iran Hostage Crisis overshadowed the last fourteen months of his administration and he lost his second campaign for the Presidency.



Number 42 **WILLIAM J. CLINTON** (1993-2001) Political Party: Democrat

Clinton gained his passion for politics after meeting JFK as a delegate to Boys Nation while in high school. In 1976 he was elected Arkansas Attorney General and won the governorship in 1978. After losing a bid for a second term, he regained the office four years later and he held that post until 1992 when he was elected president. In 1998, he became the second president to be impeached for lying under oath about personal indiscretions with a White House intern. He was tried in the Senate and found not guilty of the charges against him. Though infamous for this event, Clinton's two terms in office marked the country's lowest unemployment rate in modern times, the lowest inflation rate in 30 years, and a drop in crime rates across many cities. Internationally, he aided Bosnia during the Yugoslav Wars, became a global proponent for an expanded NATO, and pursued a worldwide campaign against drug trafficking.

Always give your best. Never get discouraged.

Never be petty. Always remember, others may hate you.

Those who hate you don't win. Unless you hate them.

And then, you destroy yourself.

-Richard Nixon, Farewell speech to White House staff, August 9, 1974

PRESIDENTIAL CODENAMES

Every President and Vice President of the United States, as well as presidential candidates, some high level staff, and presidential family members, get a Secret Service codename. Often, the president is presented with a list of options or a letter the codename must start with. After the name is chosen, all members of the president's family will receive or choose codenames beginning with the same letter.

See below for codenames of the six presidents in the play and their First Ladies:

Richard Nixon: Searchlight **Pat Nixon:** Starlight

Gerald Ford: Pass Key **Betty Ford:** Pinafore

Jimmy Carter: Deacon Rosalyn Carter: Dancer

Ronald Reagan: Rawhide Nancy Reagan: Rainbow

George H.W. Bush: Timberwolf **Barbara Bush:** Tranquility

Bill Clinton: Eagle

Hillary Clinton: Evergreen

Interesting codename fact: Maureen Reagan shares a codename with current presidential daughter Sasha Obama, Rosebud, while her sister Doria's codename, Radiant, is very close to Malia Obama's codename, Radiance.



PEOPLE REFERENCED IN THE PLAY



Donald Rumsfeld:

served as White House Chief of Staff under President Ford and later served as Secretary of Defense for President Ford and President George W. Bush.



Dick Cheney:

served as a White House Chief of Staff under President Ford, Secretary of Defense under George H.W. Bush, and as Vice President under George W. Bush.



H. Ross Perot, Sr:

American businessman who ran for president as an independent in 1992 and 1996, earning a small portion of the popular vote during each election.

Photo credit: Allan Warren



Henry Kissinger:

noted author, scholar, and diplomat who served as Secretary of State under Presidents Nixon and Ford. Photo credit: Thomas J. O'Halloran **Alexander Haig:** four-star general who served as White House Chief of Staff under President Nixon and served as Secretary of State during the Reagan administration.

Ann Richards: Democratic governor of Texas from 1990 to 1994 who broke down barriers for women and minorities, and made major reforms to social institutions in the state. Defeated in the Texas gubernatorial race by George W. Bush in 1994.

Bob Dole: Republican U.S. Senator from Kansas from 1969 to 1996 who ran for president in the 1996 election.

Bob Hope and Bing Crosby: prominent American entertainers and actors who starred together in a series of "Road to..." films.

G. Gordon Liddy: organizer of the Watergate burglaries and chief member of the White House Plumbers, a special investigation unit during the Nixon administration, who was convicted and served more time in federal prisons than any of the other Watergate conspirators.

Gennifer Flowers: model and former actress whose accusations of an affair with Bill Clinton scandalized and almost ended his first presidential campaign.

Hosni Mubarek: president of Egypt from 1981 to 2011 who rose to power after the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. Resigned in 2011 after protests against his government and its policies.

Hubert Humphrey: Democratic Vice President under Lyndon B. Johnson from 1964 to 1968 who was narrowly defeated in the 1968 presidential election by Richard Nixon.

Hunter S. Thompson: controversial American journalist whose new style and unabashed opinions led to the coining of the term "gonzo journalism"; highly critical of not only politics, but American life.

Irving "Swifty" Lazar: well-known agent who served Hollywood and the literary world for almost fifty years.

Red Skelton: performer, host, and NBC star for many years, who later acted in over 30 films.

Reverend Billy Graham: well-known American evangelist who served as a spiritual advisor to several presidents, including Richard Nixon.

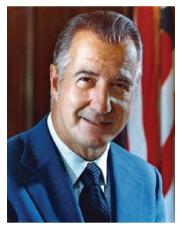
Smothers Brothers: Tom and Dick Smothers hosted a TV show called the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* that was politically left-leaning, and was eventually censored and cancelled due to its controversial content.

Yitzhak Rabin: Israeli Prime Minister who strove for peace with Palestine, serving from 1992 to 1995.

Assassinated in 1995.

Spiro Agnew:

served as Vice President under Richard Nixon, but was forced to resign after pleading no contest to a charge of income tax evasion.



Boutros Boutros-Ghali:

Egyptian diplomat who was the first African and Arab to hold the position of UN Secretary General. Served from 1992-1996.

Photo credit: Wikipedia



Wolf Blitzer:

journalist who is best known for his work covering American politics and international events; he has reported and hosted programs for CNN since 1990.

Photo credit: Larry Busacca, zimbio.com



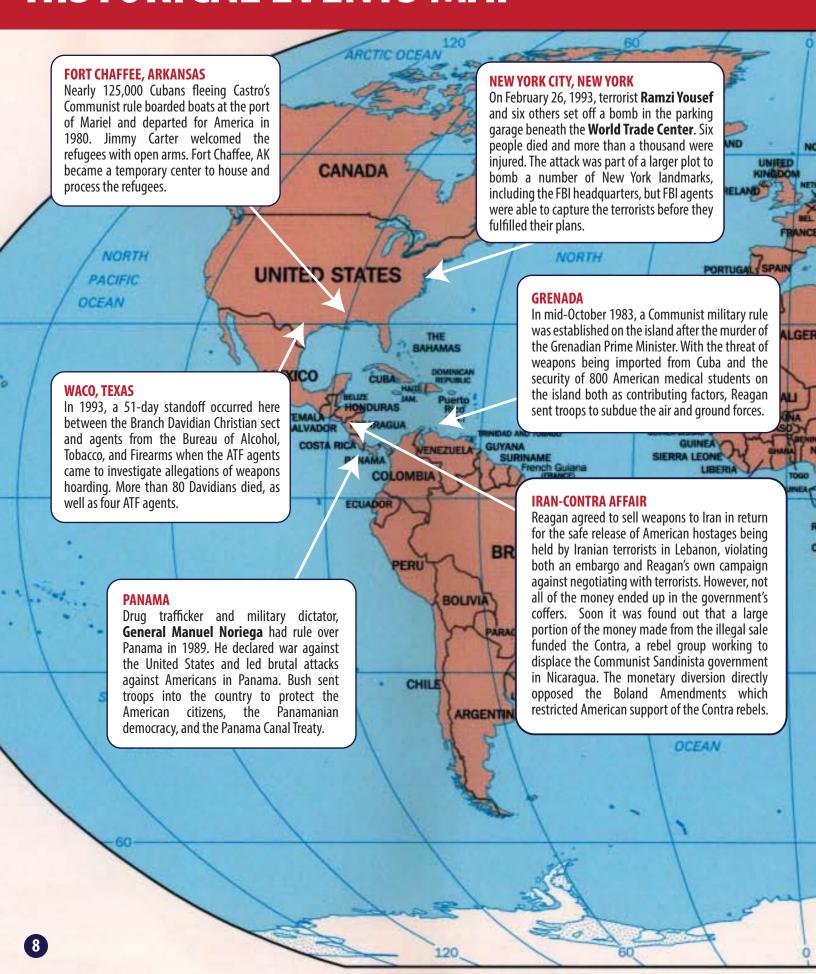
Anwar el-Sadat:

Egyptian president from 1970 to 1981 who fought for peace with Israel and received the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize as a result. Assassinated by extremists in 1981.

Photo credit: Wikipedia



HISTORICAL EVENTS MAP



BOSNIA

Called the deadliest European conflict since WWII, the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001) were a series of civil wars between the varied ethnicities in the former Yugoslavia. In Bosnia, the Serbian minority led a campaign of ethnic cleansing and war crimes against the primarily Muslim Bosnians. Carter went as an envoy to Bosnia, without the overt support of Clinton's administration. Many UN officials, including **UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali**, worried that having another envoy in the mix would only complicate and delay negotiation processes.

RUSSIA

RCTIC OC

Nixon visited Russia in 1994, causing an uproar when he met with the former Vice President, Alexander V. Rutskoi, who had recently tried to lead an insurrection against President Boris Yeltsin, a man with whom Nixon had previously been on good terms. Yeltsin, in turn, cancelled his own meeting to see Nixon. Nixon went on to speak at the Russian Parliament about the economic and strategic futures of both countries.

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SOMALIA

BASCAR

BEIRUT, LEBANON

In 1983, two attacks against Americans in Lebanon occurred. The first was the **US Embassy Bombing** in Beirut where 63 people were killed, including a number of CIA employees. The second was the **Marine Barracks Bombing** in the Beirut International Airport where 241 American Marines were killed.

PACIFI

LIBYA

In April 1986, Reagan authorized an air strike against five Libyan military targets and "terrorism centers" in retaliation for the Libyan support of terrorism against American troops and citizens.

IDAN

In 1979, a group of Iranian students stormed the US Embassy in Tehran and took 52 people hostage. Carter's attempt to retake the compound and rescue the hostages—Operation Eagle Claw—failed. **The Iran Hostage Crisis** played a significant role in Carter's 1981 presidential defeat to Reagan. The hostages were released hours after Reagan's inaugural speech.

INDIAN

VIETNAM

The Vietnam War (1959-1975) erupted between the nationalistic forces whose goal it was to unify Vietnam under communist rule, and the United States (with the aid of South Vietnam) who tried to stop the spread of communism. Believing a victory to be impossible, many Americans opposed the war.

SOMALIA

ANGOLA

From the mid-1970s, Somalia faced rebellion, civil war, drought, and escalating rates of starvation. In the early 1990s, over 50,000 people died in the civil wars and 300,000 died of starvation. During Bush's administration, UN peacekeepers were sent into Somalia to provide humanitarian relief, but the continued violence against both natives and American soldiers proved to be too much. When he took over the presidency in 1993, Clinton gave the order for all American soldiers to withdraw by March 1994.

PERSIAN GULF

The Gulf War started in 1990 when Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein declared a holy war against, invaded, and occupied Kuwait under the false premise that it was siphoning oil from Iraq. **Operation Desert Storm**, a massive US-led air offensive, led to a cease-fire a few months later in which Iraq recognized Kuwait's sovereignty.

GULF OF TONKIN

During the **Gulf of Tonkin Incident** in 1964, the North Vietnamese fired directly at US ships on international waters. Following this, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was established by **President Lyndon Johnson**, allowing him to send the first US ground troops to Vietnam.

Antarctica

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OTHER TERMS AND ALLUSIONS IN THE PLAY



Betty Ford Centers: not-for-profit alcohol treatment centers and drug rehabilitation clinics. First Lady Betty Ford co-founded the first center in California in 1982 after completing her own treatment for chemical dependency. Ford specifically wanted a center that addressed the needs of women, and now Betty Ford Treatment Centers specialize in programming for the entire family unit affected by addiction. Photo credit: AP



Watergate: On June 17, 1972, five men broke into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate building. After a call from a security guard, they were arrested in possession of a large sum of cash and surveillance and recording equipment. Congress convened a special committee to investigate a possible connection between the burglary and the Nixon White House. After sixteen months of investigations, the committee found a direct link between President Nixon and covering up the White House's connection to the plot. This led to the House Judiciary Committee drawing up articles of impeachment, but before the impeachment proceedings could occur, President Nixon resigned. Photo credit: AP

Carter and Desert Storm: During the first Gulf War, Carter expressed his opposition to military action vocally and vehemently. He went so far as to send letters to heads of state and members of United Nations Security Council urging them to revoke their support for Bush's military intervention and eventual war.

Logan Act: a law that makes it illegal for an unauthorized American citizen to have private correspondence with a foreign government in order to negotiate or intend to influence them in opposition to American policies or actions.

Energy Crisis: In 1973, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel in what later became known as the Yom Kippur War. As the war continued, and the Soviet Union supplied arms to the anti-Israel coalition, the United States began to resupply Israel's arsenal. In response, OAPEC (Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries) reduced petroleum production and placed an embargo on oil exports to the U.S. Even after the embargo was lifted in 1974, oil prices remained high, supply was lower, and the effects of the crisis lingered throughout the 1970s, leading to the establishment of the Department of Energy in 1977.

Carter and the rabid bunny: In 1979, President Carter was fishing in Georgia when a rabbit swam close to his boat; Carter used his paddle to splash water on the rabbit so it would change course. The innocuous incident exploded in the news and was heralded as the president's encounter with a "killer bunny."

Air traffic controllers strike: In August of 1981, members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization began a labor strike. President Reagan threatened to fire almost 13,000 of the striking members if they did not return to the job. The strike ended due to Reagan's actions.

National Healthcare Initiative: In 1993, the Clinton administration proposed sweeping healthcare reform, spearheaded by a task force led by First Lady Hillary Clinton. The proposal included many provisions that are similar to the current Affordable Care Act, but the measure was defeated in Congress in 1994.

Whitewater: Bill and Hillary Clinton made investments into a failed savings and loan company during the 1970s and 1980s, allegedly profiting illegally from the investments. During Clinton's presidency, Congress convened hearings and a special investigation into the allegations, but no formal charges were ever filed against the Clintons. Fifteen other people were convicted of crimes related to the controversy.

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell": In 1993, Congress passed a policy allowing homosexual members of the military to serve as long as they did not reveal their sexuality, and officers were not allowed to ask about it. This policy was a compromise when Congress threatened to override Clinton's attempt to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military.

Assassination attempts:

President Ford: President Ford was the victim of two separate assassination attempts in less than one month in 1975. First, Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, a follower of Charles Manson, shot at the president from less than an arm's length away, but her gun did not fire and no one was injured. A mere two weeks later, a radicalized former FBI informant and accountant, Sarah Jane Moore, attempted to kill Ford, but a bystander, Oliver Sipple, stopped her.

President Reagan: In March of 1981, a mere two months into his presidency, President Reagan was shot by John Hinckley, Jr. outside a Washington, D.C. hotel. Reagan was shot in the chest, only a few inches from his heart, but made a full recovery. His press secretary, James Brady, was critically injured in the shooting, as well as two members of Reagan's protective detail.

President Bush: During a visit to Kuwait in 1993, the former president narrowly avoided a car bomb plot to assassinate him in response to the Gulf War. Intelligence indicated that the plan was orchestrated by the Iraqi Intelligence Service; President Clinton ordered a missile attack on the organization in retaliation later that year.



Secret Service Agents put handcuffs on Lynette Fromme after she pulled a gun on President Ford Photo credit: AP



President Clinton Jogs to McDonalds: Cast member Phil Hartman portrayed President Clinton in many *SNL* sketches, but the most famous is a sketch in which the president pops into McDonald's for a quick break amongst the people, and proceeds to eat a bite or two of most items on the menu. Photo credit: NBC



Chevy Chase as President Ford: *SNL* cast member Chevy Chase portrayed President Ford as a bumbling, klutzy man in sketches that spanned several years. President Ford was good-humored about the ribbing, and even appeared on the show with a message directly from the Oval Office. Photo credit: NBC

Rowan and Martin's Laugh In: Laugh In was a popular sketch comedy show that ran from 1968 to 1973. The show coined many catchphrases, but when Richard Nixon appeared on a 1968 episode and uttered the show's signature phrase, "Sock it to me," history was made. Some still attribute the rise in his approval ratings to his appearance on the program.

Saturday Night Live: Over its forty-year history, *Saturday Night Live* has lampooned many American political figures, presidents not excluded. In *Five Presidents*, Presidents Ford and Clinton refer specifically to their portrayals on the television program.

SAG-AFTRA: Two entertainment industry labor unions, the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, merged together in 2012. Ronald Reagan served for seven terms as president of SAG in the 1940s and 1950s.

Burdick vs. United States: In 1914, a grand jury convened to investigate whether a federal employee was leaking information to the press. The reporter, George Burdick, involved in the case refused to testify. President Wilson pardoned the reporter, and the court decided that the acceptance of the pardon on the part of Burdick implied an "admission of guilt."



Nixon in China: 1987 opera created by composer John Adams, librettist Alice Goodman, and director Peter Sellars that depicts Nixon's historic 1972 visit to the People's Republic of China. Photo credit: Jeff Busby

AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT RICK CLEVELAND

Playwright Rick Cleveland sat down with Arizona Theatre Company Literary Associate Katherine Monberg to answer some questions about the play and the *Five Presidents* journey from script to stage.

Katherine Monberg: What sparked the idea to write a play about the meeting of the five living U.S. presidents at Richard Nixon's funeral?

Rick Cleveland: I first got this idea during the first season of *The West Wing*. Someone showed me the iconic photo of those five presidents, four exes and one current, together at Nixon's funeral, and it struck a chord. Because of Watergate, Nixon's presidency changed the office for everyone that came after. I started wondering what these guys might have talked about when they were together on that memorable day, behind closed doors.

KM: The U.S. presidents are some of the most iconic figures in the collective American consciousness. What are the challenges or opportunities that come with writing about such well-known figures?

RC: Oddly enough, *Five Presidents* is my fourth play about presidents. When I was writing my first, *My Buddy Bill*, I realized that I needed to allow myself enough poetic license to be able to treat these real-life men as characters, while at the same time keeping the words I put in their mouths completely and utterly credible.

KM: One of the many brilliant facets of *Five Presidents* is the subtlety that weaves decades of American political history into the immediate, natural conversation of the men together in the room. How much research went into crafting the political side of their conversation?

RC: In short, a ton. I probably did as much research on these five presidents as I would have if I were writing a biography about them, I was especially keen on finding descriptions and quotes from private, off-the-cuff moments in their lives.

KM: You have an impressive résumé as a screenwriter as well as a playwright – The West Wing, Six Feet Under, Mad Men, Nurse Jackie, and House of Cards. What is different about writing for the screen and writing for the stage?

RC: Writing for a television series requires you to be fast. Especially if you're writing a script for an episode while the show is in production. From a first draft to a finished episode might happen in three months or less. Writing a play is a luxury. I've written four or five drafts of Five Presidents over the course of two years, and we

haven't even started rehearsals yet.

KM: The past few years seem to have inspired a wave of interest in the political drama as a genre – I'm thinking of television's *The West Wing, House of Cards,* and *Scandal,* and recent stage plays like Mario Correa's *Commander* and, of course, *Five Presidents.* What about the genre do you think has suddenly captured the interest of American audiences, and why now?

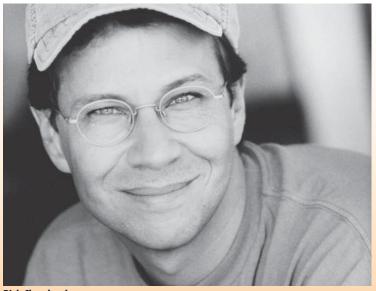
RC: I think people have always been interested in politics. Look at Shakespeare's plays: at least half of them are political. These days, politics seem to be America's bloodiest sport. A few years ago, I was working with Robert Redford on a script for the sequel to *The Candidate*. And then Barack Obama won the Democratic nomination, and we stopped working on it. That moment was exactly the wrong time to be working on a political satire. Now though, people are feeling pretty cynical about politics again, and I think that's one of the reasons why *House of Cards* is such a hit. It's the anti-*West Wing*.

KM: Is there anything else about the play or the writing process you'd like to share with us?

RC: I hope folks thoroughly enjoy the play. I hope they feel like a fly on the wall while watching it. I hope they find it immensely entertaining, and entirely credible. As for the process of writing a play? It's oh, so very lonely.

Postscript / RC: In 1968, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. actually appeared on *Meet the Press* and predicted that our country would have an African American president in forty years. You can see the clip on YouTube.

http://www.nbcnews.com/video/meet-the-press/25042123#25042123



Rick Cleveland

FEATURED ARTISTS: JOSIAH LAUBENSTEIN, NICK NARCISI, AND CHRIS O'REILLY ACTING INTERNS AND FIVE PRESIDENTS UNDERSTUDIES

The old adage about performance says, "The show must go on." But what happens if an actor in a show falls sick or has to go out of town? How does the show go on, then? Enter the understudy. Milwaukee Rep's Artistic Internship Program's Acting Interns all understudy principal roles for the Powerhouse and Stiemke shows. For Milwaukee Rep's production of *Five Presidents*, Acting Interns Josiah Laubenstein, Nick Narcisi, and Chris O'Reilly are understudying all six roles.

On any given day, they will attend the six to eight hour long principal rehearsal where they observe the actors they are understudying, paying close attention, says Laubenstein, "to how they navigate their lines and movement." Then the interns go to a shorter understudy rehearsal. "Our job is to uphold the integrity of the character that has been created by the principal actor," says O'Reilly, "to create our own character while still maintaining the semblance of the character that the principal created onstage." The rehearsals are truly preparing the understudies to go onstage at any moment's notice. "Our main job is to fit seamlessly into the show," says Narcisi. Even if they do not step in for a principal actor, their hard work culminates in an understudy performance held in one of The Rep's rehearsal halls. There they are able to perform for their stage managers, other interns, Artistic staff, and Rep staff members. This process, however, is not necessarily the norm in theaters. "What we are allowed to do is rare." says O'Reilly. "The fact that there are frequent understudy rehearsals is unique." This on-the-job training and the acting interns' involvement in the rehearsal process is central to Milwaukee Rep's Internship Program.

Milwaukee Rep's Artistic Internship Program has gone a long way in preparing the acting interns for the challenges of this production. Most importantly, it establishes them as an important part of the production's team. "They appreciate an understudy's work," says Narcisi. O'Reilly adds, "People treat you as a professional here." The transition from amateur or collegiate work into professional work is one benefit of the program all three emphasized. Each is coming from a collegiate setting: Laubenstein is a Third Year Acting MFA Candidate at the University of South Carolina; Narcisi recently completed his BFA in Acting from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Campaign; and O'Reilly graduated with a BA in Writing Intensive English from Marquette University. "Negotiating the shift from education to professional, that has been my favorite part," says Laubenstein. "The expectations are higher; they want to see the best you can offer right away." Narcisi adds, "The amount and scope of the work put on here by the artists, it is amazing." Working in a major regional theater, alongside internationally respected professionals, has been a priceless experience. "You grow as an actor because you grow as a person," says O'Reilly. "Growing as a person always lends itself to being a better artist."

Understudying characters that are based not just on real people, but on incredibly iconic public figures, has proved challenging and exciting for the interns. All three cite research as a large part of preparing for these roles. Using videos and radio recordings of Inauguration speeches, State of the Union addresses, and political debates, the interns have been able to learn a lot about the presidents' physicality, facial expressions, and speech patterns. "We have only seen their public persona in these videos," says Laubenstein. "But even though the play does not take place in the public, there is a formality. It gets let down at certain times, but I think that persona is very present. When you are that persona so often, it is hard to distinguish." In the end, their goal is not to do impressions, but to capture the essence of the character. "Playing real people," O'Reilly says, "you just want to humanize them."

So who are their favorite presidents? "I like Teddy Roosevelt and his crazy work ethic," says Laubenstein. "I respect that." Narcisi agrees, but then has to change his mind. "I have to say Abraham Lincoln because I am from Illinois, and if I do not, I feel like I cannot live there anymore. His face is on our license plate." O'Reilly takes a different route. "James K. Polk," he says, "founder of Oregon. Portlandia would not exist without James K. Polk."



O'Reilly, Narcisi, and Laubenstein strike their best presidential poses.



Visiting The Rep

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. In the central rotunda is a large staircase which leads to The Rep's Quadracci Powerhouse theater and lobby.

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Financial support enables The Rep to:

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- ★ Maintain our commitment to audiences with special needs through our Access Services that include American Sign Language interpreted productions, captioned theater, infrared listening systems and script synopses to ensure that theater at The Rep is accessible to all;
- ★ Educate the next generation of theater professionals with our Artistic Intern Program which gives newly degreed artists a chance to hone their skills at The Rep as they begin to pursue their theatrical careers.

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