

BURNING COAL THEATRE presents

THE ROAD TO MECO

written by Athol Fugard / directed by Jerome Davis
December 2-19, 2021

All shows
are in-person
& livestreamed!



PLOT SYNOPSIS

At the opening of the play, Elsa has suddenly and unexpectedly arrived from Cape Town due to the contents of a worrying letter Helen has sent. They begin, however, by discussing lighter matters. During this discussion, Elsa notices burn marks on the wall and new curtains. Helen passes this off as a side effect of the lamps smoking. Elsa then reveals that she just broke up with her boyfriend, having come to the realization that “trust” is more important than “love” in terms of “the big words. The two reaffirm their trust in one another and reminisce about the first time they met, when Helen invited Elsa inside her “Mecca.”

When Elsa broaches the subject of the letter, Helen immediately says she regrets sending it. Reading the letter aloud, Elsa points out that Helen indicated that her health was declining and that she was having suicidal ideation. Another major concern is that Helen may lose her house and her work, she asked Elsa for help. Helen admits that Pastor Marius, as well as others in the town, are trying to move her into an old-age home. Indeed, Marius is coming that evening for the application form. Helen further admits that there is darkness in the letter, and that she is cealing with depression.

At the top of the second act, which starts a few minutes after the conclusion of the first, Marius arrives. There is a room at the elderly home available if Helen wants it. Elsa confronts Marius for trying to bully and blackmail Helen into leaving her home. Marius then reveals that the burn marks on the wall are actually from a falling candle which started a fire which Helen did not attempt to extinguish. Elsa and Helen argue about the lie.

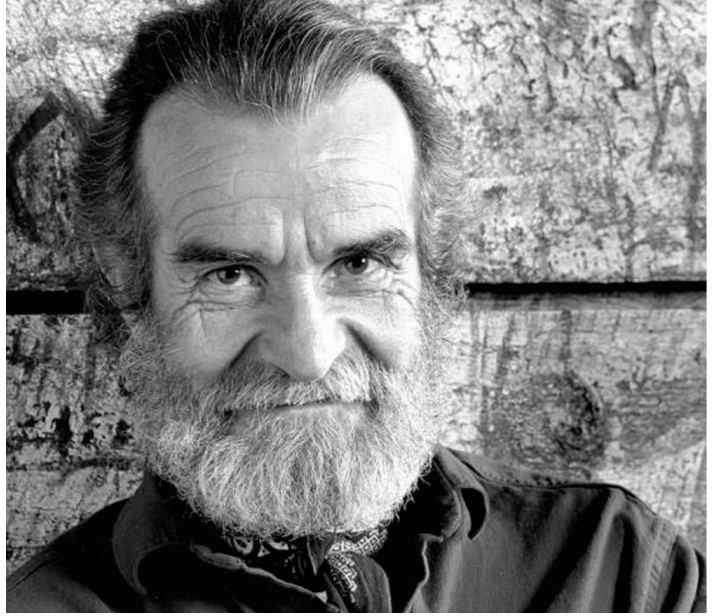
Marius and Elsa then argue over Helen. Elsa asserts that the sculpture of the Mecca express her freedom, which is one of the things Elsa most loves about Helen. She says that Helen is the first free spirit that she has ever known. Marius, on the other hand, retorts that Helen has abandoned her faith (Dutch Reform Church) and her town for the fantasyland the house has become. This has led to her being ostracized and abandoned. Instead of being free, Marius contends that Helen is trapped in the nightmare the house has become.

Helen reveals that the idea for her “Mecca” came to her the night of her husband's funeral. When the curtains of the house were closed, Helen sat and watched a candle, waiting for the darkness to come. Instead, she was impressed by the courage of the small light which seemed to get brighter and brighter. Elsa lights candles around the room and Helen gives the application form back to Marius.

Marius leaves. Helen comes to the realization that the completion of her “Mecca” was a long road, but now that it is done she has lost her life's purpose. Elsa commiserates, expressing her own loneliness. The play ends with the two expressing their love for one another.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born Harold Athol Lanigan Fugard in Middelburg, Eastern Cape, South Africa in 1932, Athol Fugard is the child of Afrikaner and Anglo-Irish descent. In 1935, his family moved to Port Elizabeth, and he began attending primary school in 1938. His secondary education was on scholarship to the local technical college, and he studied Philosophy and Anthropology at the University of Cape Town. Dropping out in 1953, he hitchhiked to north Africa with a friend, and then spent two years working on a steamer ship, the SS Graigauer, in east Asia. It was at this point he began writing.



In 1956, he married Sheila Meiring, who was studying drama at the University of Cape Town. She is now a novelist and poet. The Fugards moved to Johannesburg in 1958, where Athol worked as a clerk in a Native Commissioners Court, which brought home the strong injustices of Apartheid. He founded strong friendships in this period with anti-Apartheid figures, and the political content of his plays brought him in conflict with the National Government. To avoid prosecution, he had his plays produced and published outside of South Africa.

For several years, Fugard lived in San Diego, CA, where he taught as an adjunct professor of playwriting, acting, and directing for UCSD. He was also a Wells Scholar Professor at Indiana University. In 2012, Fugard relocated back to South Africa. In 2015, Athol and Sheila Fugard were divorced. In 2016, in New York City, Athol Fugard married South African writer and scholar Paula Fourie. The two currently reside in the Cape Winelands Region of South Africa.

HELEN MARTINS AND THE OWL HOUSE MUSEUM

Helen Martins was an outsider artist (meaning an artist without formal training or artistic connection) and a recluse who lived in New Bethesda. She was the youngest of six children of Pieter Jakobus Martins and Hester Cornelia van der Merwe. She was schooled in nearby Graaf-Reinet, where she obtained a teaching diploma from the college there, which is now the police training college.



Helen Martins began teaching in the Transvaal in 1919, and she married Willem Johannes Pienaar in 1920. The couple traveled around the country acting in theatre productions. The marriage itself was a rocky one and Helen left her husband on several occasions, eventually divorcing in 1926.

Helen returned to New Bethesda around 1928, and remained there for the next 31 years, particularly taking care of her elderly parents. She was closest with her mother, Hester, who died of breast cancer in 1941. Her father has been charitably described as eccentric, but that relationship was possibly abusive. While caring for her parents, Helen lived in an outside room of the house, with a bed and stove for warmth. After her father died of stomach cancer in 1945, Helen bricked up the windows to his room, painted it black, and put a sign on the door reading "The Lion's Den."

Helen then married a Mr. Niemand, a local furniture restorer. This marriage would last only three months. Helen would then inherit the house from her parents, and set about transforming it into a visionary environment.

It is believed that Helen began this process within the house, employing local builders in order to make significant structural alterations. The interior surfaces of the house were covered in ground glass. Illumination of the interior was supplemented with windows, mirrors, and lights. At this point, Helen began experimenting with cement and wire, first decorating the interior and then moving out into the garden. Her partner at the time, Johannes Hattingh constructed the first of the cement animals as well as much of the early bestiary. They began referring to the place as "Owl House." She was joined in 1964 by Koos Malgas, who helped with the construction of the Camel Yard. This process was intensely



collaborative, with daily meetings to create new works.

Major inspirations for the content of the house were Christian biblical texts, and the poetry of William Blake and Omar Khayyam. The Camel Yard contains more than 300 sculptures, mostly of owls, camels, and people. Most are oriented toward the East, a nod to Martins' fascination with Mecca. A sign in the yard reads "This is My World."

Neighbors in conservative New Bethesda may have been suspicious of the relationship between Martins, who is white, and Malgas, who is coloured. Other sources suggest that Martins also suggest she sold illegally brewed alcohol to her coloured neighbors. This caused a stir within the local Dutch Reformed Church.



Despite the fact that she was reclusive, Martins invited her neighbors to view her home when she decorated for Christmas. Neighbors may have also helped care for Helen's father in his last years, and that they supplied food when her self-care deteriorated. Her eccentric ways and embellished house made for a complicated and complex relationship with her community, often leading to difficulties.

Martins' eyesight started failing due to longtime exposure to the crushed glass she used to decorate her walls and ceilings. Her deteriorating health led to a suicide attempt by ingesting lye in August of 1976. She was taken to the hospital in Graaf-Reinet, where she died two days later



COMPANY BIOS

Leslie Castro (Production Stage Manager). Leslie is a Raleigh-based stage manager and actor. For Burning Coal: Oakwood 2021 (PSM), Oakwood 2019 (Actor), KidsWrite! 2021 (PSM), Winter in Eden (PSM), I and You (Run Crew), and A Midsummer Night's Dream (2019 educational tour, Puck). Shakespeare Theatre Company: Timon of Athens, The Amen Corner, and Peter Pan and Wendy (SM Fellow). Meredith College: She Kills Monsters (Tilly), Marie Antoinette (Yolande de Polignac), Xanadu (PSM), and Waiting for Godot (Lucky). She holds a BA in Theatre, English, and Medieval & Renaissance Studies from Meredith College. Much love to her friends and family for their support, and to the Mecca company for being so wonderful to work with!

Jerome Davis (Director). For Burning Coal: Evita, Ashe in Johannesburg, The Weir (twice), Rat in the Skull, Pentecost, Winding the Ball, Steward of Christendom, Night & Day, Company, Road to Mecca, Juno & the Paycock, Accidental Death of an Anarchist, Taming of the Shrew, Inherit the Wind, Hamlet, Hysteria, Prisoner's Dilemma, 1960, The Seafarer, Shape of the Table, Enron, Jude the Obscure Parts 1 & 2, Shining City, The Heretic, Iron Curtain Trilogy (Raleigh & London), Sunday in the Park with George, Spoonface Steinberg, Written on the Heart, Dark Vanilla Jungle (London), Iphigenia in Splott. Acting: Love's Labours Lost, Mound Builders, St. Nicholas, Skylight and Talley's Folly. Also, Skylight in Orlando and King Lear (Lear/Wilmington). Other: See How They Run (Southern Pines), Twelfth Night in Apex and Turn of the Screw for NC Opera. Jerry worked with or studied with Uta Hagen, Adrian Hall, Richard Jenkins, Hope Davis, Horton Foote, Denis O'Hare, Nikos Psacharapolous, Julie Bovasso, Ralph Waite, Oliver Platt, Ben Gazzarra and Ellen Burstyn at Trinity Rep (Providence), People's Light (Philadelphia), New Jersey Shakespeare, SoHo Rep, Barrow Group, Columbia University, Phoenix Theatre (SUNY/Purchase). This is his 24th year running Burning Coal which he and his wife, Simmie Kastner, founded in 1995.

Lenore Field (Miss Helen). For Burning Coal Theatre: Sunday In The Park With George. Other credits include: Into The Woods, Nicholas Nickleby Part 1 & 2, A Little Night Music (PlayMakers Repertory Company), Marjorie Prime, The New Electric Ballroom, Age of Arousal (Manbites Dog Theater), Look Homeward Angel (Syracuse Stage), The Birthday Party (Little Green Pig Theatrical Concern), The Herd (Honest Pint Theatre), Souvenir: A Fantasia on the Life of Florence Foster Jenkins, Shirley Valentine, Long Day's Journey Into Night, Six Degrees of Separation (Ghost and Spice Productions). Lenore has performed in the Triangle area for 25 years. She received her training at Syracuse University, The Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute, and with coach, Joan Darling.

Abbe Fralix (Elsa). Abbe, a Raleigh-based actor and education artist, is delighted to join Burning Coal once again to tell this story of light. Past productions with Burning Coal include Evita (Peron's Mistress) and Sunday in the Park with George (Frida/Betty). Other credits include Hermione (The Winter's Tale--Sweet Tea Shakespeare), Macbeth (Macbeth—Steadfast Shakespeare Co.), Sir Epicure Mammon (The Alchemist--Steadfast Shakespeare Co.) Rosaline (Love's Labour's Lost--Prague Shakespeare), Agnes (Agnes of God--Elite Theatre). Offstage, Abbe has worked as an education artist with the American Shakespeare Center and the Atlanta Shakespeare Tavern, as well as teaching freelance workshops for local schools. She holds an MFA from Mary Baldwin University and a BFA from William Peace University. Thanks as always to her family for their support, and to her partner, Patrick, for showing her how to jump!

Elizabeth Huddleston (Costume Designer). For Burning Coal Theatre: Costume Design: The Weir. Costume Assistant: The Iron Curtain Trilogy. Board Op: Ashe in Johannesburg, Stuff Happens, Kidswrite 2018. Elizabeth has worked as a costume designer and design assistant at Texas Shakespeare Festival, Chicago Opera Theater, and Theater at Monmouth. She holds a BA in Theatre from Case Western Reserve University and is currently based in Raleigh.

Emily Johns (Props Designer). Emily is excited to be back with Burning Coal doing props design! You can catch her costume designs in Cary Players' production of *Its A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*, opening in December! She is a proud Meredith College theatre, Graduate (still undefeated, lol!), and she hopes you enjoy this unique and beautiful show!

Eric S. Kildow (Dramaturg). For Burning Coal Theatre: *Man of La Mancha*, *Brigadoon*, *As You Like It*, *Shining City*, *Good, Ruined*, *The Heretic*, *(Three Man) Tempest*, *Jesus Fund*, *Diary of Anne Frank*, *Fayetteville Street*, *Outrunning Bullets*, *ASYLUM*, *The Wiz*, *Blue Sky*, *Spoonface Steinberg*, *Oakwood*, *Skylight*, *Written on the Heart*, *Heisenberg*, *The Royale*, *Darkside*, *Peter Pan & Wendy*, *Normal Heart*, *King Charles III*, *Stuff Happens*, *Ashe in Johannesburg*, *The Container*, *Camelot*, *Poetry in Motion*, *Animal Farm*, *A Thousand Words for Snow*, *Conversations I Always Wanted to Have*, *Evita*, *I & You*, and *The Road to Mecca*. Eric is Associate Professor of Theatre at Kent State University in Ohio and works as a freelance dramaturg & director. As an artistic associate of the London-based *Loitering With Intent Theatre*, he presented the devised work *TurnRight/TurnLeft: A Manual for the End of the World* at the Fleet Street Theatre in Hamburg, Germany. He is a member of the Stage Directors & Choreographers Society, Literary Managers & Dramaturgs of the Americas, Lincoln Center Director's Lab and Burning Coal Company of Artists.

Brian Linden (Rev. Marius Byleveld). Brian is happy to be on stage again at Burning Coal Theatre Company where he has performed in *Darkside*, David Edgar's *Iron Curtain Trilogy*, as Salvador Dali in *Hysteria*, and as Oppie in *The Love Song of J. Robert Oppenheimer*. He lives in New York City where he has collaborated on experimental theatre and performance art with Joshua Kaufman at the *Unchilding Project*, Liliana Porter & Ana Tiscornia at the *Kitchen*, Pablo Helguera at the *BAM Next Wave Festival* and the *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*, and Randall Sharp at the *Axis Company*. Regionally, he has performed with Shakespeare festivals in Nebraska, Pennsylvania, San Francisco, and Idaho. On television, he has appeared on "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" (NBC), "Conan" at the Apollo Theater (TBS), and as Abraham Lincoln in four episodes of "Mysteries at the Museum" (Travel Channel). He sends his love to his companion VRS and to his father DRL.

Cynthia Mandese (Assistant Stage Manager). Cynthia is excited to work on her first show with Burning Coal. She is currently working on an independent film, *Crystal Lake*, as a Script Supervisor, PA, and as Rachel, *Star Wars* as S.S. and PA. She has worked with other theatre companies such as *Theatre in the Park*, *Cary Players*, *Skyward Prime*, *Creepy 2 Films*, *Loran Bolding Productions*. *Old Man Old Man* (ASM 2020), *Imaginary Friend* (PA), *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* (Props), *Of Good Stock* (ASM), *Two Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (ASM, Denise).

Erin Morales (Scenic Designer). For Burning Coal Theatre: *I And You*. For Theatre in the Park: *The Gravitational Pull of Bernice Trimble*. For UNCSA: *Love and Depositions* (A Devised Theatre Piece), "Same Sh*t, Different Year (An Immersive Soundscape)", *Luna Gale* (as Scenic Charge), and *The Fairytale Lives of Russian Girls* (as Lead Painter). Erin is a recent graduate from UNCSA with a BFA-Scenic Design Concentration and is excited to be working with Burning Coal again. You can see her next work at Zeider's American Dream Theatre in February for a show called *Ophelia Chooses*.

Christopher Popowich (Lighting Designer). Christopher has designed the lighting for numerous productions for Theater, Opera, and Dance in Canada, the UK, Asia, and the United States. His professional highlights include the world premiere of Balls and the Asian premiere of Art, for Singapore Rep; Nunsense in Rome for Teatro Dell'Orologio; Journey West in London and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival; Terrorism and A Midsummers Night's Dream in London. He is a frequent designer for Burning Coal Theatre Company in Raleigh. Recent productions include I and You, Evita, Camelot, The Weir, King Charles III, and The Royale. Christopher's opera design credits include The Ring Saga, Magic Flute, Lost in the Stars, and Soldiers Tale for Opera Theatre of Pittsburgh. Other Pittsburgh credits include The Skull of Connemara, House, Julius Caesar and the Beckett Festival for Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theatre. In Canada, Christopher's work includes shows for Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary Opera, Toronto Workshop Productions, Stephenville Festival, and the Globe Theatre. He is Co-owner and Principal Designer in C & C Lighting, an architectural and entertainment lighting design company in Pittsburgh (cclightingdesign.com). Major projects include lighting for the Gulf Tower, the Koppers Building, the Hunt Library and the Randy Pausch Memorial Bridge.

Ana Radulescu (Assistant Director). Ana is excited and delighted to be assistant directing Athol Fugard's The Road to Mecca. Previously for Burning Coal she was the director of Dennis Kelly's Girls & Boys and Animal Farm, an original adaptation which toured North Carolina public schools in March of 2020, as well as the assistant director to Jerome Davis' remount of Iphigenia in Splott in 2019. Some recent/favorite directing credits include 'Tis Pity She's A Whore and The Death of Bessie Smith with Greensboro College, Bacchae at Skidmore College for SITI Company Workshop, and How We Got On for Skydive Productions. She is a recent directing graduate of Greensboro College and a member of the Dramatist Guild, as well as having served as the Young Ambassador for North Carolina representation within the Dramatist Guild. She is a directing alumni of the National Theater Institute, SITI Company Anne Bogart, and the Hangar Theatre Lab. Ana is the founding artistic director of Skydive Productions, a North Carolina based production company that is committed to telling stories by voices who are not traditionally heard.

Meredith Riggan (Scenic Charge Artist). Meredith is a North Carolina based artist and is excited to be returning to Burning Coal Theatre Company for the production of Road to Mecca. She has previously painted for Burning Coal in the productions of I and You, Evita, 9 lives, Boys & Girls, Housecleaning Part 2 -Conversations I Always Wanted to Have, A Hundred Words for Snow, Tally's Folly, Camelot, The Container, The Great Celestial Cow, Ashe in Johannesburg, The Weir, Stuff Happens, King Charles III, Normal Heart, Peter Pan and Wendy, Darkside, The Royal, Heizenberg , Written on the Heart, Skylight, SPOONFACE STEINBERG, The Wiz, and Good. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Scenic Art from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Meredith has worked as the Scenic Charge Artist at several theatres around North Carolina including William Peace University, Half Pint Theatre, Sweet Tea Shakespeare, Triad Stage, City Arts-Greensboro Children's Theatre, The Winston Salem Theatre Alliance, ECU Loessin Playhouse, along with several freelance jobs such as repairing sculptures for the Greensboro Children's Library and painting custom pet portraits through her business, Riggan Originals.

ColeTrain (Shop Dog "Paint Assistant"). ColeTrain is excited to be apart of another production at Burning Coal Theatre. He has been "assisting" his Scenic Artist Mom in several theatres since he was 7 weeks old. He has no formal training in Scenic Art, but will retrieve a paint brush occasionally. He is great at supervising projects, looking cute, and tries to leave a paw print on every set. ColeTrain is a 10/10 good boy.

Kirby Wahl (Dialect Coach). An actor, director, and dialect coach, Kirby is a Professor in the Department of Performing Arts at Elon University, where he is also an Associate Dean for the College of Arts & Sciences. He has directed many Elon productions, including *Macbeth*, *Ajax*, *August: Osage County*, and *Clybourne Park*. Local performances include *The Prisoner's Dilemma* (Hasim) and *Jude the Obscure* (Richard Phillotson) at the Burning Coal, and *The Mystery of Irma Vep* and *The Illusion*, at Greensboro's Triad Stage. He has served as dialect coach for numerous Burning Coal productions, including the 2014 Raleigh and London performances of *The Iron Curtain Trilogy*. Other professional acting credits include New York City's Riverside Shakespeare Company, the Arizona Theatre Company, and the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. A Certified Teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework and Knight-Thompson Speechwork, professional memberships include Actors' Equity Association, VASTA, and Body-Mind Centering Association. He lives in Burlington with his wife and four dogs.

NC STATE EDUCATION STANDARDS

The state of North Carolina values the skills and competencies of Arts education due to their applicability to other disciplines. These productions are designed to give your students exposure to the competencies and specific standards listed below.

This production and the related study materials will provide students with specific knowledge and skills to address the following Standard Course of Study Competencies and Objectives in the Theatre Arts.

- **COMPETENCY GOAL 1:** The learner will write based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.
 - Grades 3-5
 - 1.02: Recognize the beginning, middle, and end of a story
 - 1.03: Infer lessons from multicultural stories, fairy tales, tall tales, legends, and myths.
 - 1.06: Refine reading comprehension by using verbal and non-verbal communication.
 - Grades 6-8
 - 1.01: Recognize and explain unique characteristics of the dramatic script such as dramatic structure and dialogue.
 - 1.04: Produce written, verbal, and visual responses to written and/or performed dramatic material.
 - 1.05: Identify themes and plots from multicultural literature.
 - Grades 9-12
 - 1.03: Compare and contrast play structure in relation to other forms of literature.
- **COMPETENCY GOAL 7:** The learner will analyze, critique, and construct meaning from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
 - Grades 3-5
 - 7.01: Build skills to critique self and others in a respectful and constructive manner.
 - 7.03: Convey personal reactions to various texts.
 - 7.05: Communicate emotions and thoughts evoked by performance.
 - 7.07: Suggest alternative characters, settings, or events after viewing or participating in a performance.
 - Grades 6-8
 - 7.01: Recognize and practice audience etiquette.
 - 7.03: Develop verbal, visual and written responses to works of informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions from various cultures.
 - 7.04: Express meaning perceived from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
 - Grades 9-12
 - 7.02: Develop and relate a world view of theatre in society.

- COMPETENCY GOAL 8: The learner will understand context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the past and present.
 - Grades 3-5
 - 8.04: Experience live or recorded performance
 - 8.05: Discuss the similarities and differences between live and recorded theatrical events.

Stuff Happens is also designed to address the following Core Curriculum Anchor Standards in Language Arts Literacy and Social Studies.

- Reading Anchor 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Reading Anchor 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- Writing Anchor 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- Writing Anchor 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.