



BACKSTORY

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS



Your behind-the-scenes look at TimeLine productions

YESTERDAY'S STORIES.
TODAY'S TOPICS.

TimeLine
Theatre Company

MESSAGE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR PJ POWERS

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the inaugural edition of *Backstory*, your behind-the-scenes look at TimeLine's upcoming production! For years we've heard about how much you appreciate the ways we share our research and give you an insider's view of our production process. Expanding on that idea, this new publication will be mailed exclusively to all TimeLine subscribers to help set the stage for what you'll see at the theatre. We'll blend information about the play's historical context with insight into why we chose the script and how the cast, director and design team are approaching it in the rehearsal room. We hope *Backstory* will give you an even greater opportunity to learn about the world of the play and reflect further about the questions it raises.

This inaugural issue takes you inside *A Man for All Seasons*, Robert Bolt's classic tale of morality, virtue, and the fight to stay true to one's faith and beliefs.

It's a story that has withstood the tests of time as a relevant examination of religious doctrine stepping into the arena of political affairs. Throughout history these strange bedfellows have struck a very personal chord in each of us while igniting heated and righteous screaming matches, and from high-atop our respective soap boxes we seem incapable of rational discussion when issues of church and state collide. All too often, the rhetoric in newspapers, television programs, web blogs, picket lines and pulpits is filled not with thoughtful examination of ambiguity and complexity, but rather with incontrovertible absolutes and the marching orders to defend them.

Robert Bolt lays out a story in which the stakes are raised far beyond stump speeches and editorials, however. The mastery of *A Man for All Seasons*—and the reason why TimeLine decided to put it on stage—is that the opposing viewpoints in the play are not laid out in pure black and white tones. Instead, Bolt delves



not only into the grey areas of the arguments themselves, but into the

grey areas that lurk inside each character as they seek to reconcile their own conscience.

And amidst all the shouting, finger-pointing and ever-widening partisan schism that we face today, *A Man for All Seasons* asks us to carefully examine what we purport to hold dear... and consider to what end we'll fight to maintain it.

TimeLine is delighted to share this play and our first edition of *Backstory* with you. We hope that both will inspire and provoke you, and we look forward to seeing you back at the theatre to continue our discussion.

Best wishes,



PJ Powers
Artistic Director

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

By **Robert Bolt**

Directed by **Edward Sobel**

NOVEMBER 5 — DECEMBER 18, 2005
previews 11/1–11/4

First staged in 1960, Robert Bolt's masterpiece is a ferocious battle between church and state, faith and politics, and one man's struggle to maintain his principles when he is pressured to abandon them. When England's Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas More, is asked by Henry VIII to annul his marriage so he can re-marry, More is torn between serving his King or staying true to his beliefs. His defiance of Henry ignites a political firestorm and forces More to pay the price of his disloyalty.

PLAYWRIGHT ROBERT BOLT

Born in 1924 and raised in Manchester, Robert Bolt served in the British Air Force during WWII and afterward attended Manchester University. Best known for his play *A Man for All Seasons* (which, in 1960, ran for 637 performances on Broadway and won four Tony Awards), Bolt also wrote *Flowering Cherry* and *Vivat! Vivat! Regina!* (both of which also appeared on Broadway), as well as *The Tiger and the Horse*, *Gentle Jack* and *State of Revolution*.

Bolt also found success adapting works for the screen; he was

nominated for an Academy Award for *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), won an Oscar for *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), and won a second the following year for his adaptation of *A Man for All Seasons*. He also wrote 1984's *The Bounty* (starring Mel Gibson, Anthony Hopkins and Laurence Olivier) and 1986's *The Mission* (starring Robert DeNiro and Jeremy Irons).

Though he reportedly described himself as "something between an agnostic and an atheist," Bolt's plays often examined characters—frequently historical

figures—pressed by powerful people to adopt religious or moral positions they feel are untenable.

Bolt himself was once jailed as part of a protest in support of nuclear disarmament; though he "hated breaking the law" — maintaining, as does his representation of Thomas More, that the presence of laws are "infinitely valuable"—he felt the proliferation of nuclear bombs "was something that one was more or less bound to dig in one's heels about."

Following a long illness, Robert Bolt died in 1995.

SETTING THE STAGE

A Man for All Seasons takes place in London from 1526 through 1535, during the reign of Tudor king Henry VIII.

Before decimalization, the British pound (£) was made up of 20 shillings, and each shilling was worth 12 pence (240 pence = £1). Inflation was rampant during the

Tudors' reign, making it difficult to gauge what their money was worth in today's terms; however, while a laborer might have earned a shilling per day, noblemen could spend the equivalent of a year's salary for many laborers on a single feast or garment of clothing.

The Renaissance, which began in Italy, made its way to England during the rule of the Tudor monarchs, leading to an explosion in art, music, literature, drama and fashion. Poets and musicians were often sponsored by the Court, though if one's patron fell out of favor with the King, one's own fortunes and safety were compromised.

Post-Show Discussions

Join members of the cast and production team for free post-show discussions on **November 10, 13 and 17**.

Backstory Credits

Dramaturgy & Historical Research
by Gabriel Greene.
Rehearsal Photography by Lara Goetsch.
Design by Rogue Element.

Sunday Scholar Series

Following the performance on Sunday, November 20, join us for our Sunday Scholar Series, a one-hour panel discussion with experts talking about the themes and issues of *A Man for All Seasons*. The cost to participate is \$10 (plus the normal ticket price or flexpass for the show). Panelists will include:

Fr. Robert Bireley, Loyola University historian of Reformation

Mary Beth Rose, University of Illinois at Chicago professor of English (Renaissance literature/drama; director of Institute for the Humanities)

Chuck Chadd, attorney and legal historian, author of manuscript *N Pope in England*, which recounts the play's events in detail

To reserve tickets for the Sunday Scholar Series, please call **(773) 281-8463**. You need not attend the November 20 performance of *A Man for All Seasons* to attend the Scholar Series.

1170 Thomas Becket is murdered by knights acting on the orders of King Henry II in a dispute over the King's authority over the church in England.

1478 Thomas More is born.

1485 Henry Tudor defeats Richard III in battle and ascends to the throne as Henry VII, beginning the House of Tudor.

1491 The future Henry VIII is born. His older brother Arthur is first in line for the throne.

timeline of events

THE PLAYERS

Thomas More was one of the Renaissance's foremost humanist scholars, taking care to educate his daughters in literacy and Latin, an uncommon practice at the time. More seriously considered joining a monastery, but eventually left—it is said—because he could not see himself taking a vow of celibacy. Nevertheless, More remained a devout Catholic afterwards, leading his family in daily prayer and even donning a hairshirt (an uncomfortable garment worn as an act of mortification—i.e. as a physical act of penance). Gaining a reputation for honesty and fairness in various legal and advisory positions in Henry VIII's court, More also found time to write *Utopia*, the book from which the term for “perfect society” originated. (“Utopia” also translates from Greek to “no place”—emphasizing the impossibility of such a society.)

Henry VIII is most often thought of today as an overweight womanizer, however the young monarch that appears in *A Man for All Seasons* was an accomplished athlete, author and musician. Henry excelled at tennis (a slightly different version of the sport that we play today), wrote a book—with the help, it is believed, of Thomas More—entitled *A Defence of the Seven Sacraments* (for which Pope Leo X awarded him the title “Defender of the Faith”) and is often credited with the composition of “Greensleeves,” in addition to several other pieces.

Thomas Cromwell was one of Henry VIII's most trusted and important advisors, and he is credited with shepherding the king's 1534 Act of Supremacy (which anointed Henry as “the only Supreme Head in Earth of the Church in England”) through Parliament. Though he was instrumental in securing Henry's annulment from his first wife, Catherine, Cromwell's later insistence that Henry marry Anne of Cleves—a marriage that ended disastrously—led to his own execution... which, reportedly at Henry's insistence, was carried out at the hands of an inexperienced headman who required several attempts to finish the job. Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), the military leader and politician who led the overthrow of the British monarchy, is descended from Thomas Cromwell's sister, Catherine. (Although she married, her children kept her name.)

A CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE

With a sterling reputation and close friendship with the king, Thomas More was an ideal candidate to replace the late Cardinal Wolsey as Lord Chancellor of England. But at the same time, there was a “great matter” brewing:

Henry VIII sought to divorce his wife Catherine in favor of Anne Boleyn, desperate to sire a male heir to the throne. The

divorce—like the marriage, years earlier—required special dispensation from the Pope. The Pope's refusal to allow the divorce led to England's split from Rome and Henry establishing himself as the Supreme Head of the Church of England. When the State demanded its citizens take a compulsory oath acknowledging Henry's position, most scrambled to do so. More did not.

More's silence on the matter resounded thunderously. As the king's unhappiness about More's lack of support grew, greater and greater pressures were exerted on More and his family. Sir Thomas More's adherence to his principles in the face of such trials is one of the compelling stories in history.

1502 Henry's brother Arthur dies making Henry heir to the throne.

1505 Thomas More marries Jane Colt; they will have four children together: Margaret (seen on-stage in *A Man for All Seasons*), Elizabeth, Cecily and John.

1509 Henry VIII is crowned king of England.

1510 Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon's first pregnancy, a daughter, miscarries and dies on January 31.

1511 Thomas More's wife Jane dies. Soon after, More remarries the widow Alice Middleton.

1513 Henry VIII fathers a second son, who dies soon after birth.

1514 Henry's third son also dies soon after birth.

1516 Thomas More writes *Utopia*.

1517 Martin Luther posts his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, triggering the Protestant Reformation.

1521 Henry VIII and Thomas More write against Martin Luther's actions. Henry VIII is awarded the title “Defender of the Faith” by Pope Leo X.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR EDWARD SOBEL

TimeLine's Artistic Director PJ Powers (PP) recently chatted with director **Edward Sobel (ES)** about TimeLine's production of *A Man for All Seasons*.

(PP) Ed, what first intrigued you about this play?

(ES) I first became familiar with the play in high school, and have had it in mind ever since. The ideas in the play seem particularly compelling now, given the current political climate in America: we are asked to examine the intersection between our political obligations and our conscience, and of government and religion. I also love the intelligence and wit of the writing, and Bolt's command of language and theatricality. But what I'm finding most important in thinking about the play is what our world demands of a man who seeks goodness with a whole and open heart.

(PP) History has proven that this story is pretty timeless, yet the matters of church and state seem to be colliding fairly regularly these days. What do you think *A Man for All Seasons* has to say about the issues that government, religion and our judicial system are facing today?

(ES) The play raises some important questions on those topics, without providing glib answers. I'd prefer to let audiences discover most of those for themselves. But I will say that with each reading of the play, I always seem to come

back to the question: What do I value? Are there things that I feel to be so true that they are worth ultimate sacrifice?

(PP) You spend a great deal of time working on new plays in your role as Director of New Play Development at Steppenwolf. Why did you find yourself turning to this seemingly well-known classic?

(ES) Because I spend a great deal of time working on new plays at Steppenwolf. It's nice to have an opportunity to do a play that someone else has already fixed.

Seriously, the merits of this specific play aside, living an artful life means to always challenge oneself to do better or do differently, and to embrace the unfamiliar. I look for projects that are unlike what I've just done.

(PP) This play seems to be structured somewhat differently than many of the new plays that probably cross your desk. Stylistically, how is this play different from a lot of things you work on?

(ES) There is the strong influence of Bertolt Brecht. Many of the devices Brecht used are incorporated by Bolt in the play. He has taken an historic subject, just as Brecht does in *Galileo*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, and others. This plac-



DIRECTOR EDWARD SOBEL

es emphasis not on what is going to happen—most people know that Galileo recanted, that Hitler rose to power, and that Thomas More was executed—but on why it happened. Each scene, as in Brecht's plays, is meant not only to construct a linear narrative, but is an event meant to demonstrate a particular view on the central question of why. There are broad jumps in chronology—some scenes take place in consecutive time, others months or even years later than the previous. Bolt has created a narrative figure, the Common Man, who functions in ironic counterpoint to the action of the scenes and to More himself. He serves as a human Brechtian scene title. As with Brecht, the play is highly metatheatrical; both the text and the production acknowledge we are in a theater watching a play.

One way in which Bolt differs from Brecht, and from many of the scripts I see, has to do with the length of scenes. Bolt has written a number of scenes in the play that are quite long by 2005



standards—that makes a different kind of demand on the actors than the brief, cinematic scenes currently in vogue.

(PP) You and I have talked a lot about wanting to give the play a very fresh, contemporary feel and avoiding any stuffiness or “masterpiece theatre” qualities. What makes you feel that way about it?

(ES) When the play was written in the early 1960s a number of the conventions Bolt employed were innovative. Forty years later they are now more familiar. But it is important to maintain the dynamic energy with which Bolt was trying to attack the material. In addition,

as we mentioned, Bolt was heavily influenced by Brecht. Both men argue that one of the worst crimes one can commit in the theatre is to present ideas in a deadly way. Brecht’s entire body of work is based on the premise that one wants to make an audience see something as if it were new. The challenge for us is to find the best way to accomplish that through the production choices.

In addition, “period” plays bring a whole set of pre- and misconceptions in front of an audience in terms of human behavior. What interests me in the theatre are real human beings, who love and hate and eat and have sex, people of passion even when that passion is directed toward ideas. I just try to present plays in a way that I myself would be interested in watching.

(PP) Sir Thomas More is the tragic hero of the

play, yet it’s easy to also find him to be a fairly frustrating and thick-headed hero to get behind at times. What are your thoughts on this complex guy?

(ES) The stupid little joke I keep running in my head, is “Hey, the guy is no saint. Oh wait, he is.”

More was a truly remarkable man. He avidly embraced the worldly life, was renowned as a generous and gracious host, raised a family and educated his female offspring in a way that challenged the conventions of his time, was a sophisticated social thinker and philosopher, and an adept statesman. And yet he loses, by our standards, everything. Why? Yes he was perversely stubborn, arrogant, and arguably even selfish. But ultimately, I think it’s because his faith in the essential goodness of people came into conflict with the changing moral code by which the rest of the world was beginning to abide. A new code which I’d argue, is still with us.

(PP) Timeline Company Member David Parkes is your leading man in this show, playing Sir Thomas More. I know you worked with David at American Theatre Com-

pary a couple years ago on Brett Neveu’s play, *American Dead*. Why did you want David to play Thomas More?

(ES) David is an actor of enormous range. He has a keen intelligence, emotional availability, and a charismatic presence. One of the potential traps of the play is for More to seem more acted

striving for something, as opposed to simply being martyred.

(PP) You and the design team are working to reconfigure the theatre and create a very striking and dramatic audience/actor relationship. Can you tell us a little about your ideas and your inspiration?

(ES) Our approach to the whole production is to present the play in

as visceral, muscular and elemental a way as we can. Rather than adhering strictly to period, which might result in a fossilization of certain elements of the play, we wanted to create an environment that was acknowledging period but still felt contemporary. The actor/audience relationship is the most basic decision one can make, and all else follows from it. I hope we’ve created a seating configuration that echoes the theaters and architecture of the period, such as the Globe, the great hall at Hampton Court and Parliament, and that concentrates the energy in the room in a similar way, but also seems fresh and new.



1527 Henry VIII petitions the Pope to annul the marriage to Catherine on the grounds that the marriage was forbidden by biblical law.

1529 Sir Thomas More is appointed Lord Chancellor of England.

1532 Bullied by Henry VIII, the clergy accepts the king as Supreme Head of the Church in England. Thomas More resigns as Lord Chancellor.

1533 Henry VIII grants himself an annulment. The same year, he announces his marriage to Anne Boleyn and their daughter, Elizabeth, is born.

1534 Parliament passes the Act of Supremacy, declaring Henry’s children by Anne Boleyn to be legitimate heirs.

1535 For refusing to acknowledge Henry VIII as Supreme Head of the Church, Thomas More is executed.

1536 Henry VIII accuses Anne Boleyn, who could not provide three attempts, of adultery and treason. She is found guilty and is executed.

1537 Henry fathers a male heir with Jane Seymour, his third wife.

1540 Thomas Cromwell is executed for treason.



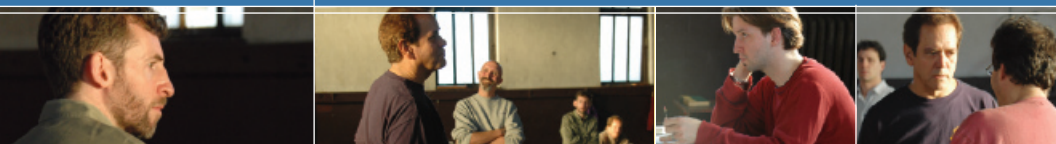
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A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

NOVEMBER 5 — DECEMBER 18 *Previews 11/1-11/4*

Thursdays and Fridays at 8pm | Saturdays at 4pm and 8pm | Sundays at 2pm

Reserve your tickets now at (773) 281-8463

(Note: Saturday, November 5 only has an 8pm performance. There is no performance on Thanksgiving, November 24)

November 2005

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
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27	28	29	30			

December 2005

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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24

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