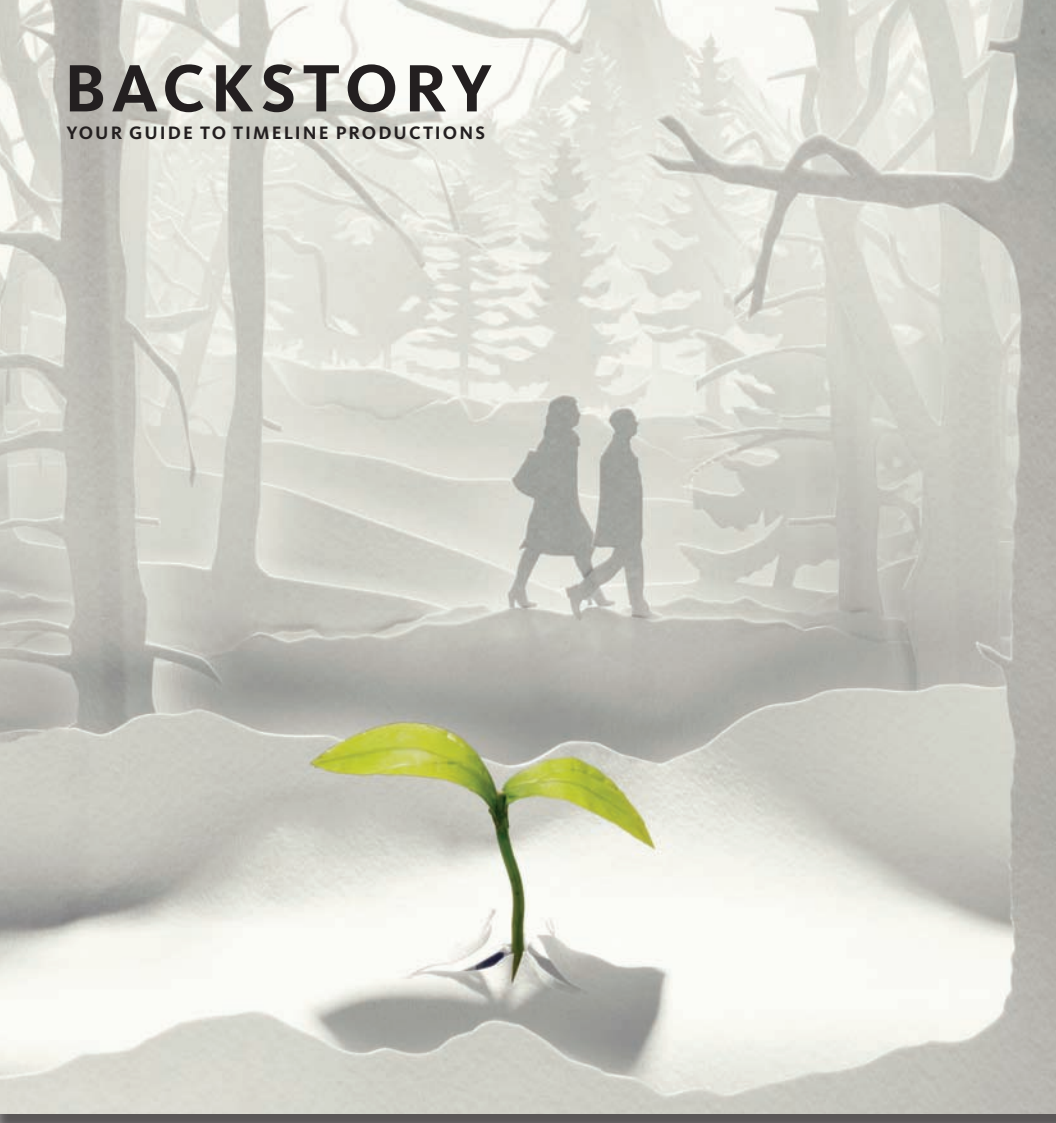


BACKSTORY

YOUR GUIDE TO TIMELINE PRODUCTIONS



BY LEE BLESSING

A WALK IN THE WOODS



YESTERDAY'S STORIES.
TODAY'S TOPICS.

Timeline
Theatre Company

PRESENTED AT
theater
wit
smart art

a message



Dear Friends,

I am delighted to welcome you to TimeLine's 15th season, with an expanded schedule featuring more than 100 additional performances than last season and a venture outside of our home, going from Wellington Avenue to Theater Wit on Belmont.

Thank you for helping to make the last couple years such an exciting period of growth for TimeLine. We've nearly doubled our subscriber base and grown the organization in smart ways that have kept us artistically ambitious while also furthering our streak of operating in the black year after year. We are incredibly proud to have been recognized by *Chicago* magazine as its "Best Theater" in 2011

and by *The Wall Street Journal* as the nation's theater "Company of the Year" for 2010, and we're focused on continually making TimeLine a stronger organization and a more exciting place for you to experience world-class art.

Producing *A Walk in the Woods* at Theater Wit allows us to do just that, running this show in conjunction with Lee Hall's hilarious and stirring play *The Pitmen Painters* a few blocks away at our home base at 615 W. Wellington Ave. Producing in two venues enables us to share our mission with more people, igniting dialogue among a broader audience about how history resonates with social and political issues of today.

To launch this season's dialogue, TimeLine's Company Members chose Lee Blessing's 1986 Pulitzer-Prize finalist *A Walk in the Woods*, a poignant, funny and provocative debate about the art of negotiation. Written and first presented

in the Reagan/Gorbachev era, this was a play "of the moment" when it premiered, transforming front-page headlines of arms negotiations between the U.S. and Soviet Union into riveting theater.

Revisiting it 25 years later, the international landscape has surely changed, yet the importance of talking with our enemies is as relevant as ever. I write this in late July with the news dominated by coverage of the debt-ceiling stalemate in Washington, D.C. (something that I pray will be old news by the time you read this). We're inundated by up-to-the-minute reports on closed-door meetings, well-orchestrated political theater and precious little willingness to negotiate. It's a tiring exercise that easily prompts cynicism about the futility of negotiation.

Yet, after being at the first rehearsal for *A Walk in the Woods* a few days ago, my cynicism was stripped, and hope was miraculously (if

only temporarily) restored about the possibilities—and critical need—for finding compromise with our adversaries.

Lee Blessing's play presents U.S. negotiator John Honeyman and Soviet negotiator Andrey Botvinnik—the unlikely of allies—debating and cajoling over the course of a year, striving for even scraps of common ground in arms negotiations. These two noble and determined civil servants have committed their careers to working abroad and doing right for their countries and the world, while also trying to leverage their power back home amid a tide of politics and gamesmanship. They discover their daunting task can't be achieved at the formal negotiating table, under the scrutiny of the media. Rather, they seek out the tranquility of the woods outside Geneva, alone, away from the spotlight. Two rivals finally able to talk uncensored, not about what divides them, but about what they have in common.

With the gracious approval of Lee Blessing, TimeLine has added a little twist to the proceedings, casting

“They seek out the tranquility of the woods outside Geneva, alone, away from the spotlight. Two rivals finally able to talk uncensored, not about what divides them, but about what they have in common.”

the role of Botvinnik as a woman named Anya instead of the initial name of Andrey. This contemporary twist was implemented not only as a nod to a long overdue need for equality in positions of political power, but also as an intriguing layer of gender politics in an already complex tangle of negotiating techniques. We are proud to feature two of TimeLine's finest artists, Company Members David Parkes as Honeyman and Janet Ulrich Brooks as Botvinnik. Under the direction of Associate Artistic Director Nick Bowling, they will bring Blessing's masterful script to life.

I thank you for being a part of the kickoff of our 15th year, and I hope you'll join us back on Wellington Avenue for the other shows that round out the season. BJ Jones, Northlight Theatre's artistic director, makes his TimeLine directorial debut

with *The Pitmen Painters*, a deeply moving story of a group of miners in north England who became improbable art-world sensations. Acclaimed director Rachel Rockwell makes her TimeLine debut with *Enron*, a raucous theatrical ride taking you inside the backrooms of the now-legendary fallen company. And heralded local journalist John Conroy makes his playwriting debut with the world premiere of *My Kind Of Town*, a thoughtful and passionate examination of the Chicago police-torture scandal he has reported on for more than 20 years, probing the heart of corruption, responsibility and the culture of law and order.

It's a thrilling line-up of plays, and we can't wait to talk about them with you.

All the best,

“We are incredibly proud to have been recognized by *Chicago* magazine as its ‘Best Theater’ in 2011 and by *The Wall Street Journal* as the nation's theater ‘Company of the Year’ for 2010.”

the playwright

Lee Blessing's plays include *A Walk in the Woods* (Pulitzer Prize and Tony and Olivier award nominations, American Theater Critics Association Award), *Going to St. Ives* (Lucille Lortel Award nomination), *Thief River* (Drama Desk Award nomination), *Cobb*, *Chesapeake*, *Eleemosynary*, *When We Go Upon the Sea* and *Down The Road*. He was the featured playwright of Signature Theatre's 1992-93 season, which included his plays *Fortinbras*, *Lake Street Extension*, *Two Rooms*

and the world premiere of *Patient A*.

Recent premieres include *Great Falls* (2008 Humana New Play Festival); *A Body of Water* (Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Award, Guthrie Theater and Old Globe Theatre) and *Lonesome Hollow* (Contemporary American Theatre Festival). Oregon's Profile Theatre devoted its 2010-11 season to Blessing's plays. Other plays have premiered at Yale Repertory, Arena Stage, Steppenwolf, Old Globe, Alliance and

Seattle's A Contemporary Theater, among others.

Blessing's television credits include TNT's *Cooperstown* (Humanitas Award). He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim, Bush, McKnight and Jerome Foundations. He heads the graduate playwriting program at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, and lives in Brooklyn and Los Angeles with his wife, playwright and writer/producer Melanie Marnich.

the play



A Walk in the Woods was first presented at a staged reading during the 1986 National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Conn.

It was produced on Broadway in 1988 at the Booth Theatre, in collaboration between the American Playhouse Theatre and Yale Repertory Theatre.

Sam Waterston played Honeyman and Robert Prosky played Botvinnik. A London production in 1988-1989 featured Alec Guinness in the role of Botvinnik and Edward Hermann as Honeyman.

The play was a nominee for the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the 1988 Tony Award for best play and an Olivier Award. It was subsequently produced at La Jolla Playhouse in California.

The play was produced in Los Angeles at the Conejo Players Theatre in 1991 and at the Lonny Chapman Group Repertory Theatre in 2010. Other productions have been at the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick, N.J., in 2003; the American Ensemble Theater in Washington, D.C., in 2010; Northern Stage in White River Junction, Vt. in 2010 (For the first time a woman was cast as the character of Honeyman in this production); and the Kathleen Howland Theatre in Canton, Ohio, in 2011.



Janet Ulrich Brooks and David Parkes portray the arms negotiators in TimeLine's production of *A Walk in the Woods*. Playwright Lee Blessing gave permission for TimeLine to cast a woman in the role of the Russian negotiator; it marks the first time the play has been cast in this way.

TIMELINE:

Key moments in United States-Soviet arms negotiations

- **January 20, 1981** Ronald Reagan is inaugurated.
- **July 1981** Paul Nitze, 74, is asked to lead the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) talks.
- **November 1981** The first round of INF talks between Nitze and Yuli Kvitsinsky, his Soviet counterpart, begin in Geneva, Switzerland.
- **June 1982** Half a million people walk from the United Nations to Central Park in New York City to demand nuclear disarmament.
- **July 16, 1982** Nitze and Kvitsinsky drive to the Jura Mountains, on the border of Switzerland and France. The two men take their famous "walk in the woods" and draft their own plan for arms reduction.
- **September 12, 1982** In a meeting with President Reagan, Nitze tries to save the arms-reduction proposal. Reagan rejects the plan.
- **January 1983** A departing member of the White House staff leaks details about Nitze and Kvitsinsky's "walk in the woods."
- **January 28, 1983** Nitze and Kvitsinsky resume INF talks in Geneva, Switzerland after recessing November 30, 1982.
- **March 1983** President Reagan announces the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which quickly becomes known as Star Wars. However, the proposed defense plan

Special Events and Resources

the conversation

TimeLine looks forward to engaging our audience in conversations inspired by our productions. We hope you will participate in the array of additional resources and online communities available:

SUNDAY SCHOLARS

After the show on **Sunday, Sept. 25** is Sunday Scholars, a one-hour panel discussion featuring experts talking about the play's themes and issues. **Admission is free.** Visit timelinetheatre.com for panelists and more.

COMPANY MEMBER DISCUSSION

Our Company Members shape the artistic vision and choose programming for TimeLine. On **Sunday, Oct. 16**, join them for a free post-show discussion.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS

On **Thursdays, Aug. 25, Sept. 15 and Oct. 6; Sundays, Aug. 28, Sept. 4 and 18 and Oct. 9; and Wednesdays, Aug. 31, Sept. 21 and Oct. 12**, moderated by a TimeLine Company member and featuring cast and production staff.

STUDY GUIDE

A **study guide** is available at timelinetheatre.com.

BLOG AND MORE!

Find behind-the-scenes insight and conversation on our blog, **Behind the 'Line**, via timelinetheatre.com.



For the latest, "like" us on Facebook (**TimeLine Theatre Company**) and follow us on Twitter (**@timelinetheatre**)!

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union had surpassed the United States in the number and size of nuclear weapons. The U.S., though, had more effective targeting and delivery systems. All nuclear-arms talks necessarily dealt not only with the number of weapons but also the means of improving their delivery, defense systems, testing and future weapons.

Before the talks started there was already disagreement about numbers and types of weapons. The Soviets wanted to count the missiles of Western allies toward the total number of U.S. missiles for the purposes of the negotiations. The U.S. delegation wanted to count total numbers of weapons, not the speed or effectiveness of their delivery.

Early Cold War negotiations relied on the principle of Mutually Assured Destruction. The theory was that neither the Soviet Union nor the U.S. would initiate a nuclear missile attack because both had systems in place to launch nuclear missiles in response to a nuclear assault. The resulting

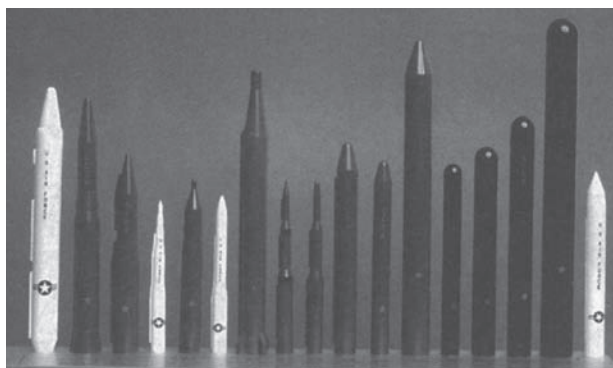
devastation on each country was a sufficient deterrent to nuclear conflict.

However, in spring 1983, in advance of the presidential election, President Ronald Reagan announced his plan to create the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a proposed defense system that could shoot down nuclear missiles from land and space. Although the technology for SDI—nicknamed Star Wars by opponents because the program sounded like science fiction—had not yet been developed, the Soviets perceived it as an attempt to shift the balance from mutually assured destruction. The proposed defense system was seen as an act of aggression and a violation of earlier treaties, increasing tensions between the two countries.

At the height of the Cold War arms build up during the Reagan administration, the Pentagon spent \$34 million per hour on armaments. In spite of a recession, Reagan was reelected in a landslide in 1984, carrying 49 states, in part because of his Cold War hawkishness.

During this period, the Soviet Union was undergoing an upheaval. While presenting a united front to the Americans and the world, the country was soon to face an economic crisis and its leadership was in disarray. There were four General Secretaries of the Communist Party between 1982 and 1985—Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko (he died in office) and Mikhail Gorbachev—and this flux in leadership provided an additional challenge to arms negotiations.

Models of Soviet and American weaponry similar to those used during talks and presentations in the 1970s. Soviet weapons were represented as large and black, American ones as small and white. (Getty Images)



“[It was] the most flagrant disobedience toward negotiation instructions that I had ever heard.”

—Richard Burt, director of politico-military affairs for Secretary of State George Schultz, on the “walk in the woods”

The events of the play are inspired by negotiators Paul Nitze and Yuli A. Kvitsinsky, who were involved in talks to limit Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) between 1981 and 1984. In 1982, under the real risk of the talks stalling, the two men left the negotiating sessions in Geneva, Switzerland, drove to the Jura Mountains on the border of France and Switzerland and walked up a logging road into the woods.

During this unofficial walk in the woods, Nitze and Kvitsinsky created a proposal for sweeping arms reductions, and each agreed to take the document back to their respective countries. Their discussion was not authorized, and they had wildly exceeded their mandate as negotiators.

Although the proposal was promising, it became caught in internal politics on both sides and was rejected.

President Reagan was initially interested but hardliners in his

administration, like Richard Perle, Assistant Secretary of Defense, argued fiercely against giving up faster missiles.

Kvitsinsky presented the proposal to Deputy Foreign Ministers Georgi Kornienko and Victor Komplektov. Here, Nitze's reputation as a past hardliner worked against the negotiations: Kornienko and Komplektov argued the proposal was a hoax; they accused him of being naïve and ordered him not to respond to the United States.

Nitze and Kvitsinsky's clandestine meeting and negotiation attempt was leaked, and it convinced many European nations the United States and Soviet Union were serious about genuine negotiation. It paved the way for the nearly successful arms-reduction negotiations in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1986 and finally the INF Treaty in 1987 and Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in 1991.

appears to violate the terms of the previously negotiated ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty, increasing tensions between the countries. The Americans broadly interpret the old treaty as leaving room for new defenses, while the Soviets are outraged by a perceived American breach of the treaty.

- **September 1983** A civilian South Korean airliner strays into Soviet airspace; two air-to-air missiles shoot it down. The 269 passengers and crew are all killed.
- **November 1983** The United States goes ahead with positioning Pershing missiles in Germany. The Soviets walk out of the INF talks in part because Pershing missiles are one of the items being negotiated.
- **1984** Ronald Reagan is reelected President in a landslide; he carries 49 states.
- **March 11, 1985** General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko dies in office and the Soviet Central Committee names Mikhail Gorbachev as his replacement.
- **July 31, 1985** Nitze and Kvitsinsky have an unofficial dinner together in Boston.
- **November 19, 1985** Reagan and Gorbachev meet for the first time in Geneva; although nothing comes of the summit, it is apparent the men like each other.
- **April 26, 1986** Four nuclear reactors in Chernobyl, Ukraine, melt down, offering a poignant image of the risks of nuclear exposure.
- **October 1986** Nitze accompanies Reagan to arms

the quotes



Paul Nitze (far left) in Reykjavik in 1986, exhausted during major arms negotiations, pictured with (from left) White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan, President Ronald Reagan, Secretary of State George Schultz, National Security Advisor John Poindexter and Arms Control and Disarmament Agency head Kenneth Adelman. (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library)

“We came up with a piece of paper which both of us agreed to support with our governments. He wasn't very hopeful that he would be able to get support in his government. I was hopeful that I could get support in my government, but it was quite different than anything that had been cleared by our administration in advance. When I took it back and took it up with the President and his immediate advisors, they were really quite impressed with it. They thought this really might be the breakthrough everybody had been looking for.”

“If Kvitsinsky found support for this in Moscow, he would let me know through a man in their embassy in Washington. But the weeks went by, and I never did hear from this man in their embassy in Washington. So I became persuaded that he hadn't found any support amongst the Russians. Then later, people on the U.S. side began to object, so the whole thing met an early death.”

—Paul Nitze, the chief American negotiator in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces talks, in an interview on what came to be called the “walk in the woods”

“Well, Paul you just tell the Soviets that you're working for one tough son-of-a-bitch.”

—President Ronald Reagan's response to Paul Nitze in rejecting the “walk in the woods” proposal

“In each session it will go through episodes of competition in wit and humor, calm dead seriousness, oratory or at least attempts at eloquence, and at least on his part outrageous polemics which I choose to believe offer me fine opportunities for brilliant thrusts, rebuttals and repartee. But underlying it is a sense of deadly seriousness.”

—Paul Nitze on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces negotiations with Yuli Kvitsinsky

“[My colleagues] depicted Nitze as a shrewd and dangerous American hawk who hated communists and the Soviet Union. Out of previous experience the general attitude towards him in Moscow was persistently negative. That is why my confidential contacts with him were met with suspicion and the results of them considered rather a proof of Kvitsinsky's gullibility.”

—Yuli Kvitsinsky reflecting on the “walk in the woods” 25 years later

the players

Paul Nitze inspired the character of John Honeyman

“I have been around at a time when important things needed to be done.”

—Paul Nitze

Born in 1907, Paul Nitze had a long career in the government spanning multiple presidencies.

At the time of the “walk in the woods,” Nitze was an elder statesman. Trained as an investment banker, he entered government service during World War II. He began familiarizing himself with weapons when he was vice chairman of the Strategic Bombing Survey for President Harry S. Truman, assessing the accuracy and damage of the bombs used in World War II. Known as a Cold War hawk, Nitze authored the policy paper NSC-68, which urged the build up of military forces to counter Soviet expansionism.

He was director of policy planning for the State Department in the Truman administration. President John F. Kennedy appointed him Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and, later, Secretary of the Navy. He continued

to serve as Secretary of the Navy for President Lyndon B. Johnson and later became his Deputy Secretary of Defense. He was a member of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) delegation. He opposed the ratification of SALT II. He was a member of the Committee on Present Danger, a watchdog group that feared the Soviet nuclear threat. He met future president Ronald Reagan while on the committee.

He became President Reagan's chief negotiator for the INF Treaty. He participated in the promising but failed arms-reduction negotiations

negotiations in Reykjavik, Iceland. The Americans and Soviets are incredibly close to an arms deal, but it falls apart over whether the countries could continue research and testing while abiding by the ABM Treaty.

- **December 1987** Nitze succeeds in negotiating an INF treaty; the terms are better for the U.S. than the “walk in the woods” proposal.
- **1988** Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union begin again. Nitze is part of the team. The negotiations are too complicated to be completed before the end of the Reagan administration.
- **1991** START is ratified right before the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- **December 5, 2009** START expires.
- **April 8, 2010** President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev sign New START in Prague. The treaty becomes effective January 26, 2011.

Paul Nitze (left) with his Soviet counterpart Yuli Kvitsinsky during the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces negotiations in 1981.



between Reagan and Gorbachev in Reykjavik, Iceland, negotiated a successful INF treaty and worked on early START negotiations.

He continued to write and offer opinions about nuclear weapons after he retired. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1985. He died Oct. 19, 2004, in Washington, D.C.

President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev signing the INF Treaty in the East Room of the White House, 1987. (White House Photographic Office, via Wikimedia Commons)



Yuli Kvitsinsky inspired the character of Andrey Botvinnik

“That was an abortive child, impregnated and delivered by Mr. Nitze.”

—Yuli Kvitsinsky, on the proposal generated by the “walk in the woods”

Yuli Kvitsinsky was Paul Nitze’s Soviet counterpart during the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces negotiations between 1981 and 1984. He was 45 when the negotiations began; Nitze was 74.

He was the son of a Polish engineer and grew up in Siberia. He was assigned to East Germany between

1959 and 1965. He served in Soviet embassies in Berlin and Bonn and spoke German and English.

When Nitze suggested they could solve the problem by negotiating alone, Kvitsinsky was intrigued and agreed to their “walk in the woods,” where the two men sat on a log in the rain and hammered out a plan for real arms reductions.

Kvitsinsky was described as always holding the Soviet line but not being an ideologue. One diplomat said of him, “After a while you even get to like him.”

The Russian Revolution included the belief that women should be treated equally and have equal access to work. Articles 22 and 122 of the Soviet Constitution of 1918 promised women employment on an equal basis with men. The massive number of deaths of Russian men in World War II also meant that women entered the Soviet workforce in significant numbers during and after the war. In 1944, women made up 40 percent of the workers in the iron and steel industry.

In spite of the government’s promises of inclusion, Soviet women remained under-represented in more prestigious and powerful positions. Although 20

percent of Communist Party members were women, men almost exclusively held the highest-ranking positions.

However, several Soviet women have achieved high-ranking diplomatic positions.

Nataliya Alekseevna Narotchnitskaya, born in 1948, was a Soviet diplomat to the United Nations between 1982-1989. She is a vocal conservative and nationalist.

Roza Otunbayeva, born in 1950, became the president of Kyrgyzstan in 2010. She was a professor of philosophy before becoming involved in politics. In the 1980s, she was head of the Soviet delegation to UNESCO in Paris. Otunbayeva

was the Soviet ambassador to Malaysia. She became Kyrgyzstan’s first ambassador to the U.S. and Canada.

Olga Yakovlevna Ivanova, born in 1948, is a career diplomat. She worked in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign affairs and as an adviser to the Russian mission to UNESCO in Paris. In 2004, she was named ambassador to the Republic of Mauritius; her posting marked the first time the ministry appointed a female as ambassador to a foreign nation.

In fact, the world’s first female ambassador was a Russian. **Alexandra Kol-lontai** (1827-1952) was a communist revolutionary. She was appointed ambassador to Norway in 1923.

Diplomacy Today

the negotiators

The Foreign Service, under the auspices of the U.S. State Department, generally handles diplomatic work in the United States. High-level negotiations or state visits may be performed by the Secretary of State, members of the President’s staff, handpicked members of Congress, ambassadors and/or past presidents. Members of the Foreign Service take exams and serve in countries worldwide.

For arms negotiations, a team of experts—including internal White House strategists, arms experts and negotiators—may be involved in the talks. When a treaty has been agreed on, the leaders of countries step in to sign it. In the U.S., the Constitution requires the treaty be ratified by the Senate.

In many cases, the work of the negotiators goes unnoticed. Though members of the negotiation team can have a wide variety of backgrounds, they generally also have had long careers within the government.

the interview

Artistic Director PJ Powers

(PJP): In the early 1980s U.S. and Soviet arms negotiators Paul Nitze and Yuli A. Kvitsinsky famously left a Geneva negotiating session for an unofficial “walk in the woods.” How much did their story impact your play?

Lee Blessing (LB): The actual event took place in 1982, I think, and it wasn’t reported in the world press for several months after that. I was aware of the story, but I didn’t conceive the play until late spring 1985, so clearly it had knocked around in my subconscious for a while before it occurred to me to make a play inspired by it. However, I was in no way trying to recount the particular negotiations between Nitze and Kvitsinsky.

I didn’t so much want to tell their story as the story of two such men in two such jobs. So I fictionalized both men completely. I needed the Soviet to be both more experienced and more charming than the American—to surprise American audiences somewhat and make them able to “hear” the Russian’s ideas without too much prejudice.

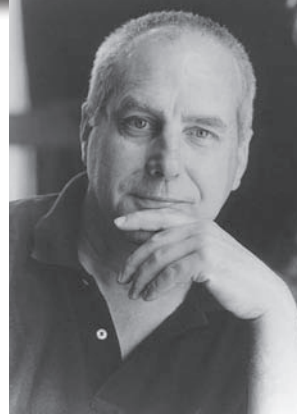
I heard much later that Nitze had seen the play and enjoyed it.

PJP: Looking back at this play 25 years after writing it, we’re obviously in a very different international political landscape. Yet your play is so resonant about the importance (and perhaps futility) of negotiating with adversaries. What excites you about having audiences experience this play in 2011?

LB: I recently saw another production and it did seem to hold up quite well for everyone. The theme of the play—humanity faced for the first time in history with controlling a destructive technology that could literally wipe out all life on earth—certainly hasn’t become dated.

In the 1980s the threat seemed to be two superpowers creating enormous stockpiles of armed, targeted nuclear weapons. Today, it has more to do with our unsuccessful attempts to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons to smaller, less stable regimes—and to even smaller, sub-national groups (including terrorists).

But the essence of the threat—our human ingenuity for creating destruction outpacing our ability to make peace and establish trust between rival groups—hasn’t really changed.



PJP: Your body of work includes many plays that explore challenging and controversial current events, and you are one of the most daring dramatists for writing about topics “of the moment.” Yet many of your plays also become fascinating historical pieces. Do you think of yourself as a writer of history plays?

LB: Of course I don’t think of myself as a writer of historical pieces. But current events have that pesky habit of turning into history over time, don’t they? My only ambition is to write plays that people are still going to want to see 20 years from now. After 9/11 *Two Rooms*, a play I’d written during the Reagan era about Americans being kidnapped in Beirut, got a lot of new productions. Audiences had no trouble plugging those 1980s events into those of 2001.

“I was fascinated by these nations putting some of their best people in critically sensitive jobs with the sole intention of letting them fail. It’s hard to find a more existential situation than that.”

When I write about current events, I always try to conceive the story in a larger historical context.

PJP: In this play you never get specific about actual historical players. Was that a deliberate choice?

LB: It wasn’t my ambition to point fingers at specific individuals in this play (though I do now and then in other plays). My thought was to focus on the existential nature of the Geneva negotiations.

I was fascinated by these nations putting some of their best people in critically sensitive jobs with the sole intention of letting them fail. It’s hard to find a more existential situation than that. Besides, this sort of attitude had reigned over the proceedings through many administrations to some extent or another. Reagan wasn’t the only president who didn’t believe in the ability of the negotiations to effect real change.

PJP: TimeLine approached you with the idea of casting a woman in the role of Andrey Botvinnik, the Soviet negotiator, and you graciously agreed. How do you think gender politics might impact this play?

LB: I have seen a production with a woman playing John Honeyman, American negotiator. There have been at least two of those. I think it works fine, actually. While it wouldn’t have been as likely in the 1980s, our experience of the intervening years has made us accustomed to women being at the highest levels of power in any number of nations.

It was not unknown in the ’80s, of course. Great Britain’s Margaret Thatcher and (interestingly) women prime ministers in both India and Pakistan were leading the way back then in terms of broadening our views on this issue.

I don’t think interpersonal gender politics would affect

the play’s two characters all that much. The issues in the play are so overwhelming (and sexless—or sex neutral), that neither character could afford to waste much time or energy on scoring points in that arena.

PJP: This play is about two people talking on a bench—did you ever worry that it would have trouble involving audiences?

LB: In every production I’ve seen, that concern evaporates early. The issue is irresistibly involving, since it concerns the continued existence of every man, woman, and child on the planet. I tell my writing students that a play works when it becomes our play—and this play actually starts out that way.

Also, it’s not really a two-character play. The surrounding forest—the natural world itself—is just as much at risk as we are from nuclear Armageddon. Throughout the play it’s standing there silent—but it’s speaking to us all the same.

This is an edited version of TimeLine’s interview with Lee Blessing. For the complete version, please visit our blog Behind the ‘Line, via timelinetheatre.com.

backstage

TimeLine's Board leadership is crucial to the success of the organization, and we are pleased to recognize the incredible support and guidance of TimeLine's recently elected Board President Cindy Giacchetti.

Cindy first came to TimeLine in 2003 to see *Hauptmann* by John Logan. "As a criminal defense attorney I was intrigued by the similarities to today's criminal cases—including frenzied media coverage and the use of 'junk science' in the courtroom," Cindy remembers. "As I was coming out of the theatre I saw a card advertising the next production—*Hannah and Martin*. I had read Hannah Arendt's work and could not believe anyone else recognized that she was a fascinating subject for a play. After seeing that production, which was superb and included a compelling performance by David Parkes, I knew that TimeLine was a special theatre and I was hooked."

What has been Cindy's favorite TimeLine show? "*The History Boys* had all the signature elements of TimeLine at its best," she says. "An intelligent, thought-provoking and

heartrending production that charmed and captivated its audience. The casting was perfect and Nick Bowling's concept of directing it as an ensemble piece with the focus on the boys was brilliant. I also think that turning the entire theatre space into the school pulled the audience right into the story. That intimacy is a TimeLine trademark and one of the qualities I most love about our work."

But high quality theatre is not the only reason Cindy enjoys TimeLine productions. "A TimeLine play is not just 120 entertaining minutes in a dark theater," she notes. "It is the conversation you have with others, or even with yourself, hours and sometimes days after the applause ends. And I always learn something at TimeLine. There is a strong commitment to research and scholarship behind



TimeLine Theatre's Board President Cindy Giacchetti.

every play. TimeLine feeds its audience's curiosity through *Backstory*, lobby displays and other events. They educate us not only about the historical background of the play but about the underlying issues that continue to affect our lives today."

During her time on the Board, Cindy has helped guide TimeLine through years of extraordinary growth. "It is very exciting to see how many people we are reaching and it is gratifying to know that they then spread the word to their friends. Our audience members and donors are

TimeLine's 2009 Chicago premiere of *The History Boys* by Alan Bennett was a landmark production for the company, running for six sold-out months.



"A TimeLine play is not just 120 entertaining minutes in a dark theater. It is the conversation you have with others, or even with yourself, hours and sometimes days after the applause ends."

extremely supportive of the work we are doing and this support is crucial to TimeLine's continued growth," Cindy remarks. "TimeLine's stature in the city has grown as people have recognized the quality of its art. I believe that in the future TimeLine will be recognized not just as a major Chicago theater, but as a respected contributor to theater on a national and even international level."

Cindy attributes TimeLine's success to its commitment to its mission and smart management. "You could say that, consistent with our mission, we are an example of how history continues to affect the present and the future," Cindy observes. "The first thing the TimeLine Company Members produced 15 years ago was not a play, it was a business plan. Today the Company and the Board continue to insist on the same high standards in running the business as in producing the art. I think the leadership of PJ Powers as Artistic

Director and Elizabeth Auman as Managing Director is a testament to this principle. And I believe this principle will provide a solid base for our growth over the next 15 years."

As TimeLine launches its 15th anniversary season with *A Walk in the Woods*, Cindy is excited to lead the organization through its next phase of development. "I think I have learned the most about leadership from being involved with the TimeLine Company, the staff, and the Board for many years," Cindy says. "Like our Company and staff, each of our Board members brings great intelligence, passion and commitment to TimeLine. I think the best way to lead is to create an environment that empowers these talented people and then get out of their way as great things happen! This has been TimeLine's ethic for the past 15 years and I am happy and privileged to follow in the tradition of TimeLine's own leadership history."

BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy @ Historical Research by Maren Robinson

Written by Maren Robinson, PJ Powers, Lydia Swift and Lara Goetsch

Edited by Karen A. Callaway & Lara Goetsch

Photography by Lara Goetsch

Graphic Design by Lara Goetsch

A Walk in the Woods Photo Illustration by Ryan Robinson

Backstory is published four times each season.

Pictured on front cover (from left): Actor Janet Ulrich Brooks; director Nick Bowling; Brooks and actor David Parkes; scenic and lighting designer Brian Sidney Bembridge and costume designer Jacqueline Firkins; and Parkes.

Pictured on back cover (from left): Set design model; (around table) Brooks, sound designer Andrew Hansen, stage manager Cheney Tardio, Bowling, Parkes; artistic director PJ Powers, projections designer Mike Tutaj and Bembridge.

Our Mission:

TimeLine Theatre presents stories **inspired by history** that connect with today's social and political issues.

Our collaborative artistic team produces provocative theatre and educational programs that engage, entertain and enlighten.



August 18 - November 20, 2011

by **LEE BLESSING** | directed by **NICK BOWLING**

Two superpower arms negotiators—one a witty but cynical Russian veteran and the other an idealistic American newcomer—meet informally in the woods after long, frustrating hours at the bargaining table. TimeLine presents this compelling play with a twist: The two characters (originally written as two men) are portrayed by TimeLine Company Members Janet Ulrich Brooks and David Parkes. Their absorbing, revealing and humorous conversations become a dynamic and brilliant debate

on both the eternal hope and relentless futility of high stakes politics.

Cast

Janet Ulrich Brooks **
David Parkes

Production Team

Brian Sidney Bembridge,
U.S.A.: *Scenic and Lighting Designer*

Jacqueline Firkins, U.S.A.:
Costume Designer

Andrew Hansen:
Sound Designer

Mike Tutaj: *Projections Designer*
Maren Robinson: *Dramaturg*

Cheney Tardio**:
Stage Manager

John Kearns:
Production Manager

***Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.*

Those designers and scenic artists identified by U.S.A. are members of United Scenic Artists, IATSE Local 829, AFL-CIO

Location

A Walk in the Woods is presented at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Avenue, Chicago. For directions, parking and dining information, visit timelinetheatre.com.

AUGUST 2011

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

SEPTEMBER 2011

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

OCTOBER 2011

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

NOVEMBER 2011

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20						

- Regular Performance
- Preview Performance
- Opening Night *Sold Out*
- Post-Show Discussion with cast & production crew *Free*
- Sunday Scholars a one-hour post-show panel discussion with experts on the themes and issues of the play *Free*
- Company Member Discussion a conversation with TimeLine's Company members *Free*

SHOW TIMES

PREVIEWS 8 PM (*Except 6 pm on 8/21*)
OPENING NIGHT 7:30 PM
WEDNESDAYS & THURSDAYS 7:30 PM
FRIDAYS 8 PM
SATURDAYS 4 PM & 8 PM
SUNDAYS 2 PM