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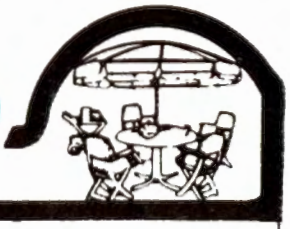

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The House Of John Guare

By Paul Guest Smith

AT THE TOP of the show is Artie Shaughnessy leading off with a medley of his biggest hits you know, "Where's the Devil in Evelyn" and "We're Back Together Again" and all the other wonderful chestnuts in his bulging songbook. If, in fact, you have never heard of these songs, or of Artie Shaughnessy, it is only because he hasn't yet "made it." But this promising songwriter/singer zookeeper has the highest hopes that he will soon be a success.

The House of Blue Leaves was written by John Guare in 1971, and it premiered in the Truck and Warehouse Theatre, with Harold Gould, Anne Meara, Katherine Helmond and Frank Converse among the stars. A black comedy, it was considered the ultimate zaniness, a live-action cartoon with little or next-to-no grip on reality. Clive Barnes wrote in *The New York Times:* "I laughed a great deal, yet I suspect that beneath the idiot laughter and the cruel jokes we are intended to feel compassion for the world's lost."

It might well be that the world has at last caught up with Guare's eccentric vision. The play is now viewed with more compassion, and the comedy has acquired a deeper and darker resonance. His writing credo is that life is full of disparate elements, all of them going on at the same time. "Tragi-comedy has been there in all my plays," he writes. "I think when you go to the theatre you want as much to happen as possible. You start to write a comedy and you say, 'But look at what is really happening underneath.' It's risky business, yes, but it's worth the risk. A play is only a house of cards, and you always want to see how much a work can bear."

The misguided, pathetic characters in *The House of Blue Leaves* dream of their fantasies, with no luck. Artie hacks out song after song, all more of less sounding the same (except for one, which sounds suspiciously like "White Christmas"). His mistress in the apartment downstairs, Bunny Flingus, hangs on to the equally hopeless illusion that he'll marry her once he has put his wife, Bananas, in the lunatic asylum that gives the play its odd title. The irony is that Bananas, the most certifiable of all these crazy characters, is also, at strange and sudden intervals, the sanest one of all. (She may be "bananas" but she is the only one who knows "White Christmas" when she hears it.) The rest of the cast includes an old friend who has become a Hollywood mogul, a deaf movie starlet, a gaggle of unpleasant nuns, and the Shaughnessy's soldier son, who has gone A.W.O.L. and come home — to blow up the Pope in Yankee Stadium.

The setting is a seedy little apartment in the Sunnyside section of Queens. The date is October 4, 1965, and John Guare remembers it well. At the time, he was in Egypt hitching his way to Rome, realizing a dream that had been with him through 16 years of Catholic schooling: "All my life, the nuns kept saying, 'Get to Rome, get to Rome, get to the Holy City,' Finally, I got to Rome, and the day I arrived I looked at the front page of the Italian papers, and there was the Pope on Queens Boulevard!"

Pope Paul VI was, of course, making his historic visit to address the United Nations, in the hope of ending the war in Vietnam. John Guare commented: "The play is about getting noticed, and I just happened to wonder how somebody would get noticed if he was really desperate to get noticed. Assassinating the Pope was what I came up with a wild idea at that innocent time, and the audiences received it as such. It was as if they viewed the play through a glass wall, as if they were saying 'Here we are. We're safe here watching this strange world.' Afterward they would come up to me and say, 'Oh, the play is so kooky. Blowing up the Pope! How do you think up these things?' Well, history has made these events just simple kitchen-sink reality.

"I saw the play again, right after the Pope had been shot," Guare said. "The reaction to the play had changed entirely. It was as if that terrorist attack on the Pope had shattered the glass wall, and the audience had tumbled down on the same side of the play."

The recent revival at Lincoln Center and on Broadway was enormously successful. It starred John Mahoney as Artie Shaughnessy (he won the Tony award for best actor in 1986), Swoozie Kurtz as Bananas (she won the Tony for best actress), and Christine Baranski. The production won the Tony for best revival, and the original production in 1971 won Best Play of the Year by the New York Drama Critics.

We are now being given the opportunity to see the play in its limited run here on Staten Island, and I hope you will laugh and cry and come to love these zany characters as much as everyone associated with this production and others have done.■

Paul Guest Smith has directed more than 30 plays for various Staten Island companies. By day he is the managing editor of a prestigious Wall Street newspaper.

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Staten Island Civic Theatre

presents

House Of Blue Leaves

By John Guare

Directed By
PAUL GUEST SMITH

Designed By
Jeffrey Drucker

Costumer
Jennifer Straniere

Music and Lyrics
By John Guare

This production is made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, Staten Island Council on the Arts and Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of New York.

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Artie Shaughnessy ..... VINNIE PERRERA
Ronnie Shaughnessy ..... JOHN GRIFFIN
Bunny Flingus..... LISA RAMPULLA
Bananas Shaughnessy ... KAREN COOPER SMITH
Corinna Stroller ..... KRIS ENSMINGER
Head Nun .....ELAINE BEATTY
Second Nun..... ELLEN MITCHELL
Little Nun .....ANDI GIORDANO
Military Policeman..... MICHAEL WHELAN
Man in White ..... PHILIP STRANIERE
Billy Einhorn..... RICHARD CARDINALI

SCENE

An apartment in Sunnyside, Queens, New York City; October 4, 1965

There will be one 15-minute intermission.

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WHO'S WHO in the CAST

VINNIE PERRERA *(Artie Shaughnessy)* was last seen here at Staten Island Civic Theatre as Lt. Shrank in *West Side Story*. Also for Civic Theatre, he was Nathan Detroit *(Guys & Dolls)*, Ali Hakim *(Oklahoma!)* and Lawyer Craven *(Sly Fox)*. Other roles include Captain Hook *(Peter Pan)*, Juror #7 *(Twelve Angry Men)*, Ed Gallo *(The Fantastiks)*, First Gangster *(Kiss Me Kate)* and Harry the Hoofer *(Time of Your Life)*. Vinnie's favorite roles for Civic Theatre include Harry McAffee *(Bye Bye Birdie)* and Rooster Hannigan *(Annie)*, both of which he recreated at Lincoln Center.

LISA RAMPULLA *(Bunny Flingus)* was recently seen in *Dan McGrew* and *Human Comedy* for Richmond Theatre Collection. She also starred in *Patience* at RTC, and received a Reggie for her performance. Other credits include Susy in *Hot L Baltimore* for us; and Jenny Diver in *Threepenny Opera* and Mrs. Kendal in *The Elephant Man* for Seaview Playwrights Theatre. Lisa directed *A Life in the Theatre* for Seaview. She would like to thank Paul for giving her another "juicy" character to bite into!

RICHARD CARDINALI *(Billy Einhorn)* reprised his role as Frank in *Lovers & Other Strangers* here at Civic Theatre last fall. For Civic Theatre he was seen as Speed in *The Odd Couple*, Carmine Vespucci in *The Ritz*, Big Julie in *Guys & Dolls*, the jeweler in *Night of January 16th*, Sergeant Carlino in *Wait Until Dark*, and other varied roles. Richard acted in *Express Stops* at Jason's Park Royal, *When Tomorrow Comes* for the Adelphian Players in Brooklyn, and many other productions at Seaview and Shakespeare Theatres.

KRIS ENSMINGER *(Corinna Stroller)*

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returns to the Island stage after an absence of 8 years. Kris last appeared in an experimental theatre production of *The Duchess of Malfi* at the American Theatre of Actors in Manhattan. Her past roles on Staten Island include Mina in *Dracula* and Angelique in *The Imaginary Invalid*, both directed by Paul Guest Smith. She studies acting with Ernie Martin and is working on a nightclub act.

JOHN GRIFFIN *(Ronnie)* is happy to be back performing again at Civic Theatre, after playing Diesel in our smash summer production last year of *West Side Story*. This spring at CSP he played Don Carney in *Biloxi Blues*. John wishes to thank his parents for their constant encouragement, and he dedicates his performance to someone very special.

ANDI GIORDANO *(Little Nun)* has been performing for as long as she can remember. Not only does she sing, dance and act, but she has been a singer/guitarist in rock bands on both coasts. On the theatre scene, she fought pirates as *Peter Pan's* Tiger Lilly; waltzed in *Hello Dolly;* played the gun-toting Lina Darling in *Nine;* and enjoyed the tropical *South Pacific*. This is her Staten Island Civic Theatre debut, and she especially thanks the great cast and crew. Andi studies acting with Letty Serra York and dance at the Dance Company of Performing Arts. Special thanks to Steve and Raven for their "understanding."

ELLEN MITCHELL *(Second Nun)*. It was bound to happen: Catholic girl makes good. From hooker *(Cabaret)*, to evil (Miss Hannigan in *Annie)*, to the other woman (Cathy in *Lovers & Other Strangers)*, and a host of other characters, to Nun! Ellen has stage-managed at least 10 shows for Mr. Smith; she is a member of the Board of Directors of Staten Island Civic Theatre – which alone should be cause for sainthood! In her free time, Ellen is a fulltime student and fulltime registered professional nurse.

KAREN COOPER SMITH *(Bananas)* is pleased to be working with such a terrific ensemble, and she wishes to thank her close family and very special friends for their support. Karen studied voice and drama, and she has been in some wonderful shows. Special thanks to Ian, Paige and Paul.

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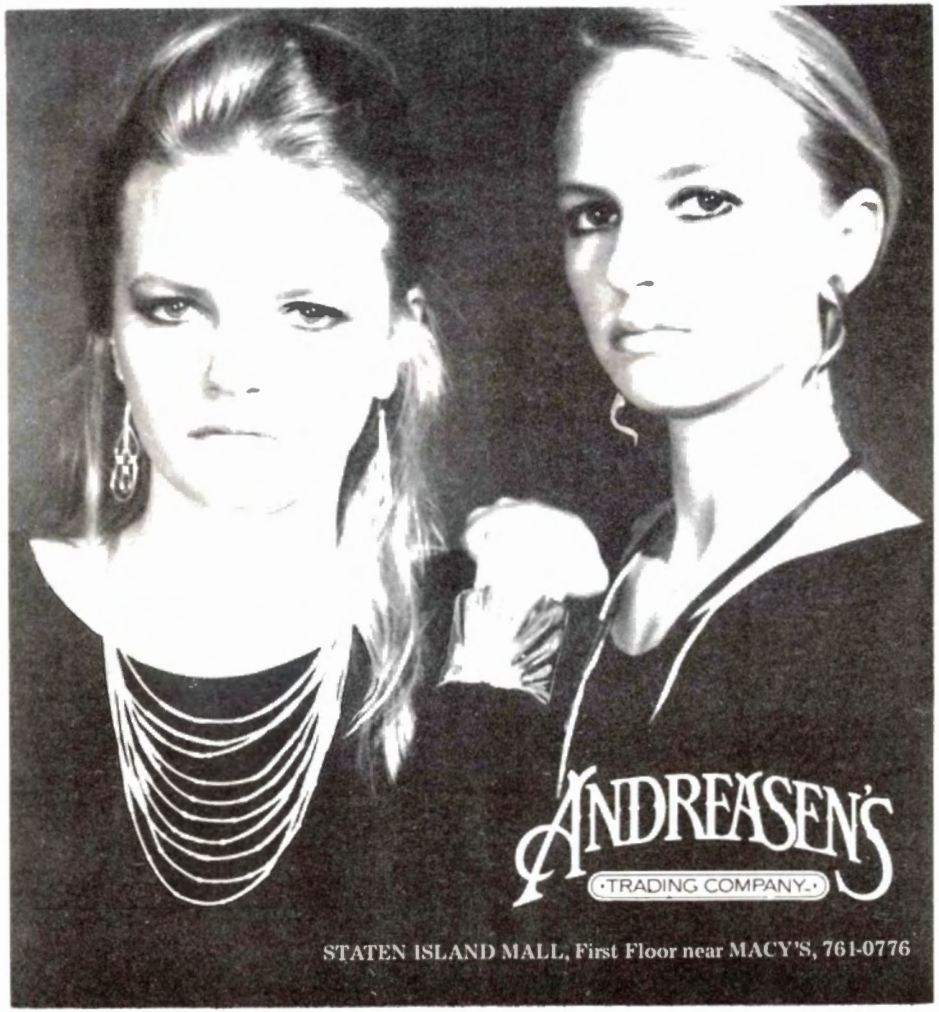
ELAINE BEATTY *(Head Nun)*. Elaine's last acting here at Civic Theatre was to portray Mrs. Drudge in *The Real Inspector Hound*. Other productions in which she appeared, also directed by Paul Guest Smith, are *Dracula, Pygmalion* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, all at Looking Glass Players.

PAUL GUEST SMITH *(Director)*. Paul's last directing experience was our production last season of *Follies*, for which he won the *Staten Island Register* award for best director of a musical. Paul is thrilled to be working with such a talented cast, and he specially thanks his family for their love and support.

MIKE WHELAN *(M.P./Assistant Director)* recently appeared in the Narrows Community Theatre production of *Over Here*. His last few appearances include Bob Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol* (Park Players in New Jersey); Igor in *Cactus Flower* (MAP Players in Manhattan); and Perchick in *Fiddler on the*



Roof (Center Players in Bayonne). Also, he stage-managed the recent off-Broadway show *Christina Rosetti*. Mike wishes to thank the cast and crew for making it one of his most pleasant experiences in Staten Island theatre.

DAN SHEEHAN *(Sound Designer)* was seen most recently in our last production *1940's Radio Hour;* last season he appeared in our production of *Noises Off*. Dan also has worked for Richmond Theatre Collection; by day he works for a television video company.

GERALD HAZZARD *(Assistant Director)*. A past creative contributor of many Civic Theatre productions, Gerald returns to us after several years absence. We welcome him back to the theatre and know he will continue to be an asset to us.

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CAST

KAREN COOPER SMITH

VINNIE PERRERA

LISA RAMPULLA

CAST

KRIS ENSMINGER

JOHN GRIFFIN

CAST

FROM LEFT: ELLEN MITCHELL, ANDI GIORDANO, ELAINE BEATTY

RICHARD CARDINALI

STAFF FOR "THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES"

Director	Paul Guest Smith
Set & Lighting Designer	Jeffrey Drucker
Technical Director	Jeffrey Drucker
Sound Designer	Dan Sheehan
Costumer	Jennifer Straniere
Flyer Design	Ken Tirado
Assistant Directors	Gerald Hazzard
	Mike Whelan
Stage Management	Ellen Mitchell
	Ursula Amesse
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OPENING NIGHT ..... **JUNE 24, 1988**

CREDITS

The Director wishes to thank Jennifer Straniere, Center Stage Productions, Christ Episcopal Church, the Costume Collection and Staten Island Academy.

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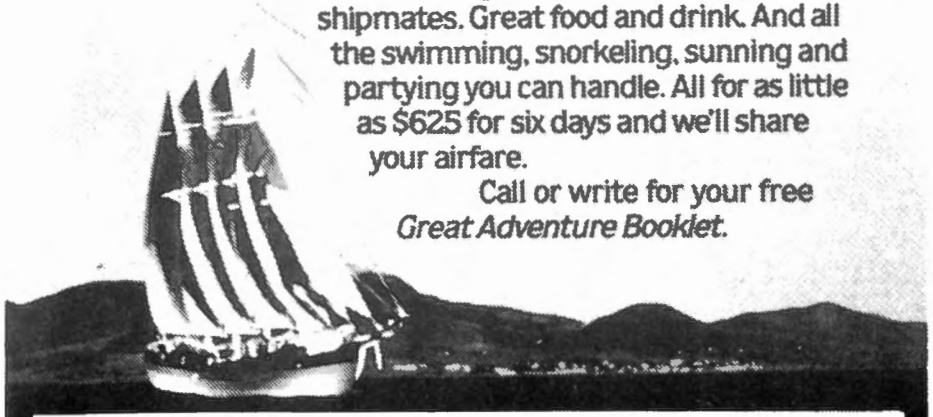

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