

BACKSTAGE

Artistic
Director
Charles Morey

Managing
Director
Chris Lino

Edited by
Kirsten Park



**A World Premiere
Written by Bess Wohl**

Directed by Charles Morey

January 8-23, 2010

Smart, artistic, empathetic and funny, Emma is everything a younger sister would idolize. But she's also spent the last eight years in and out of psychiatric hospitals. Perhaps a week at a cabin in the woods will restore Emma to the beautiful and spirited woman her sister Kay remembers and longs for.

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A Note from the Playwright



Playwright Bess Wohl

*Pioneer Theatre Company was very fortunate to have playwright Bess Wohl in house during the weeks leading up to the production of the world premiere of her third play, *Touch(ed)*. Ms. Wohl was asked to share a few words about the development of this play.*

Normally I start writing a play because something is bugging me—either in my own life or out in the world—and I have to write to figure it out. If it's something that makes me too irate, the play ends up being a screed, and if it's something I don't really care about, the play dies at page twenty-five. But if it's bugging me consistently, like a pebble in my shoe, and I start writing to try to get rid of it, I may very well end up with a play.

Ibegan working on *Touch(ed)* several years ago on a lonely and strange trip I took to the Berkshires. I was a Brooklyn girl, stranded in the "wilds" of Massachusetts, and even though it was idyllic Norman Rockwell country, it seemed to me surreal and frightening. I felt totally alienated and convinced that at any moment I would be swallowed up by a bear. And so, of course, I began to write.

The pebbles that were bugging me at the time involved questions about what family members owe one another, the effect of a weakened family member on the surrounding members, the way we all balance taking care of each other and insisting on our own freedom—and what the cost of that freedom is.

So that was what I intended to write about—but the most exciting moment for me is always when new themes start emerging and the play becomes about something unexpected. After all, if a play winds up being about exactly what you thought it was, you might as well have written an essay.

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**PIONEER
THEATRE
COMPANY**

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What excites me is the force of the unconscious, and the strange way that creative works start to take on a life of their own.

For example, I had started out thinking it was obvious who the most “crazy” character in the play was, but now I’m not so sure. In fact, I’m not even sure I know exactly what it means to be “crazy” anymore, and what it means to be sane. As I wrote and rewrote the play, my sympathies began to shift from character to character, and I started to see the world from their points of view—much more interesting to me than my own.

And then, of course, there was the delicious moment of watching the characters “become flesh, literally” (to borrow a phrase from Billy) as this incredible company of actors began to embody them in rehearsal, and [Director] Chuck [Morey] began to uncover moments and nuances I never knew existed in my own work. (I also realized, for the first time, how many props I had written into this play! Zester? Melon baller? Breadmaker? What was I thinking?)

By now the pebble in my shoe, far from disappearing, has become more like a mountain, one that never lets you reach the top. But that’s what’s exciting to me about this process—setting out to find answers and ending up with a mystery.

—*Touch(ed)* Playwright Bess Wohl



Clockwise from Left: Jennifer Joan Thompson as Kay and Alex Podulke as Billy; Kelly Hutchinson as Emma; Kelly Hutchinson, Dennis Parlato (Doctor), Alex Podulke and Jennifer Joan Thompson; Dennis Parlato and Jennifer Joan Thompson.

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New Plays Initiative

An institutional commitment to the development of new plays has been one of the long-term goals of Pioneer Theatre Company. The world premiere of *Touch(ed)* represents the theatre's first production of its New Plays Initiative, first launched in 2008.

"The future of theatre as an art form depends on new work," says PTC Artistic Director Charles Morey. "It's exciting to think that Pioneer Theatre Company could be the incubator for the next great play, or the emergence of fresh new voices in the American theatre."

Elizabeth Williamson who joined PTC in October 2008, oversees the New Plays Initiative, and for much of the year can be found in her office reading works from new as well as established playwrights from all around the country.

Williamson estimates she has read over 200 scripts in the 15 months since she began.

"We look for compelling pieces in all genres," says Williamson, although she adds that musicals are not part of the search at this time.

In addition to reading scripts of new plays submitted by literary agents and others, Morey and Williamson also work together to identify playwrights to whom PTC will offer commissions to write new plays.

While *Touch(ed)* arrived "ready to go," PTC has also begun staged readings of new plays. Staged readings provide valuable help to the playwright as the initial phase of development.

In 2010, PTC will host developmental readings by Brooke Berman who has been produced by Steppenwolf and New York's Second Stage theatre, and Kyle Yarrow, one of the youngest playwrights to ever win an Obie Award.

CONTENT ADVISORY

SYNOPSIS: Kay's older sister Emma is everything a younger sister would idolize—smart, funny, artistic, and empathetic. She has also been in and out of psychiatric hospitals for the last eight years suffering from what the doctors tell Kay is schizophrenia. As a last resort, Kay removes Emma from the hospital to spend a week with Kay and her novelist boyfriend in a cabin she has rented in the woods. She hopes the change in surroundings will help Emma. Billy, Kay's boyfriend, suffering from writer's block, strikes up a friendship with Emma during the week, and Emma seems to be getting better. Kay begins to hope that she may get back the sister she remembers and idolizes.

LANGUAGE: There is a fair amount of strong language in the play, including conversational vulgarities and profanities. The language includes slang descriptions of sexual activity, mostly used for comic effect, and the occasional use of the so-called "R" rated obscenity (used as an adjective or an exclamatory oath).

SMOKING & DRINKING: Emma smokes, and the main characters drink beer or wine during the course of the play.

SEX: Kay and Billy kiss and "make out" and engage in sexual banter, but there is no explicit sexual activity in the play.

VIOLENCE: Billy cuts his lip in one of the opening scenes, and it bleeds profusely. There are discussions of suicide, but such activity is not depicted.

FOR WHICH AUDIENCES?: Because of the strong language, *Touch(ed)* will likely be offensive to conservative audience members and is inappropriate for pre-teens. Teenagers should attend at a parent's discretion. The play's discussions of mental illness and suicide could be disturbing for younger audience members.

RATING: If it were a movie, *Touch(ed)* would be rated "PG-13" or "R."

RUNNING TIME:

Two hours and 25 minutes, which includes one intermission.



Visit the Loge Gallery during *Touch(ed)* to see the work of artist Suzanne Tornquist.

Ms. Tornquist is a Utah artist who has gained national recognition for her versatility as a painter and illustrator. Her work has been shown at the Springville Art Museum, and the Madden Museum in Greenwood Village, Colorado. Currently, she is showing work at Alpine Art in downtown Salt Lake City.

Loge Gallery



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Touch(ed)
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production possible, is
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The Bireley Foundation

Director and Cast for *Touch(ed)*

CHARLES MOREY (Director) has been the Artistic Director for PTC since 1984 and has directed over 70 productions. He is pleased to present the world premiere of the first play produced as a result of PTC's New Plays Initiative.

KELLY HUTCHINSON* (Emma) Films include *Catch Me If You Can*, *Slippery Slope*, and *Hysterical Psycho*. On television, Kelly has been seen on *Law & Order*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *Hack*, *The Jury*, as well as a recurring role on *Strangers with Candy*. Broadway credits include *Desire Under the Elms*, *Major Barbara*, and *Macbeth*. Off-Broadway, she has been seen in *Or* (Women's Project), *The Voyage of the Carcass* (Soho Playhouse), Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* at New York Theatre Workshop, and *Romola* and *Nijinsky* at Primary Stages.

DENNIS PARLATO* (Doctor) most recently appeared at PTC in *Paint Your Wagon* and *The Vertical Hour*. His film credits include Tom DiCillo's *Johnny Suede* and *Delirious*, Eddie Muller's *Dillinger's Dead*, Greg De Felice's *Bury the Evidence*, *Rick*, *First Born*, *Starting Out in the Evening* and *Bride Wars*. Broadway credits include: Lawrence in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, Mr. Robinson in *The Graduate*, John the Baptist in *Salome*, Captain Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*, CIA agent Walter Anderson in *Chess*, and Rooster in *Annie*.

ALEX PODULKE* (Billy) is very happy to return to PTC after appearing here in *The Heiress* and *Enchanted April*. His film and TV credits include *Welcome to the Cosmos* and *Guiding Light*. His recent New York credits include *Corleone*, the Shakespearean *Godfathers* at the NY Fringe Festival, *Flesh and the Desert* at Theatre Row, *Romeo and Juliet* in Central Park, and *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Metropolitan Opera. He has numerous regional credits including six seasons at the Guthrie Theater. Alex's one-man show *DNA* and *the Dancing Fool* has been produced in MN and CA. Alex is a graduate of the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

JENNIFER JOAN THOMPSON* (Kay) is making her Pioneer Theatre debut. She has appeared on television in *The Good Wife*, *All My Children*, and *Guiding Light*. Her Broadway credits include *Dividing the Estate* (Lincoln Center Theater). Regionally she has appeared in *Bloodline: Children of Argos* and *Julius Caesar* (both at the Hangar Theatre). Her New York credits include *Gallathea* (HERE), *Measure for Measure*, *House of Blue Leaves*, and *Holiday* (NYU Grad Acting). Jennifer holds a BA from Yale University and an MFA from NYU/TISCH.

UNDERSTUDIES:

NATALIE BLACKMAN (u/s, Emma) recently appeared as Sophie in *Master Class* at Salt Lake Acting Company, and has performed many roles with University of Utah Theatre. Favorites include Little Sally in *Urinetown*, Mamma in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and Maria in *Treasure*. She attended Circle in the Square Theatre School and will graduate of the University of Utah's Actor Training Program in 2010.

STACEY HULL (u/s, Kay) is a native of Glendale, CA and a senior in the U of U's Actor Training Program. She has appeared in several Babcock Theatre productions, including *The Seagull*, *Blood Wedding*, *Medea*, and *Helen*. She was also seen in Studio 115's *Bus Stop* as Cherie and is a recipient of the Victor Jory Scholarship. Stacey is very thankful for the opportunity to understudy this wonderful production.

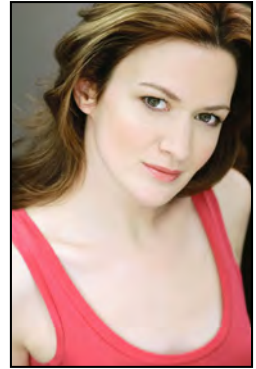
JAKE MILO KOEPL (u/s, Doctor) is excited to be working on his first production at Pioneer Theatre. He recently played Eugene in *Biloxi Blues*, and E.J. Lofgren in *Harvey*, both at the Neil Simon Festival, and Alan in *Time and the Conways* at the Babcock Theatre. He just completed his BFA in the Actor Training Program at the University of Utah and is very pleased to be using his education.

ANDY RINDLISBACH (u/s, Billy) has appeared with the U of U Theatre as Billy in *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, Katurian in *The Pillowman*, and recently as Dionysus in *The Bakkhai* for the department's Classical Greek Theatre Festival. Other favorite roles include Jimmy in *The Rainmaker* at Hale Centre Theatre and Jason in *Rabbit Hole* at SLAC. He will graduate from the University of Utah's Actor Training Program in 2010.

* Represents member of Actors' Equity Association.

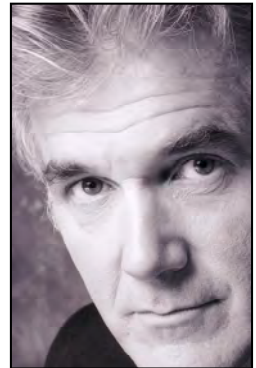
KELLY HUTCHINSON

Emma



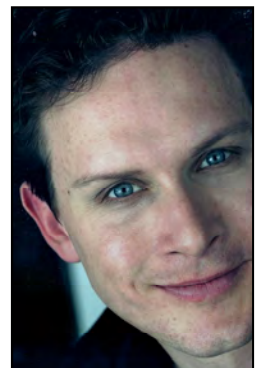
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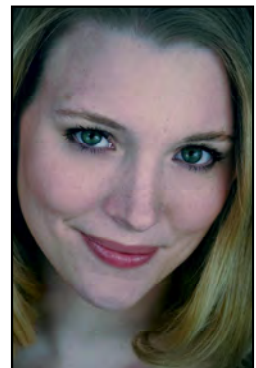
ALEX PODULKE

Billy



JENNIFER JOAN THOMPSON

Kay



More cast information at:
[www.pioneertheatre.org/
2009-2010-season/touched](http://www.pioneertheatre.org/2009-2010-season/touched)