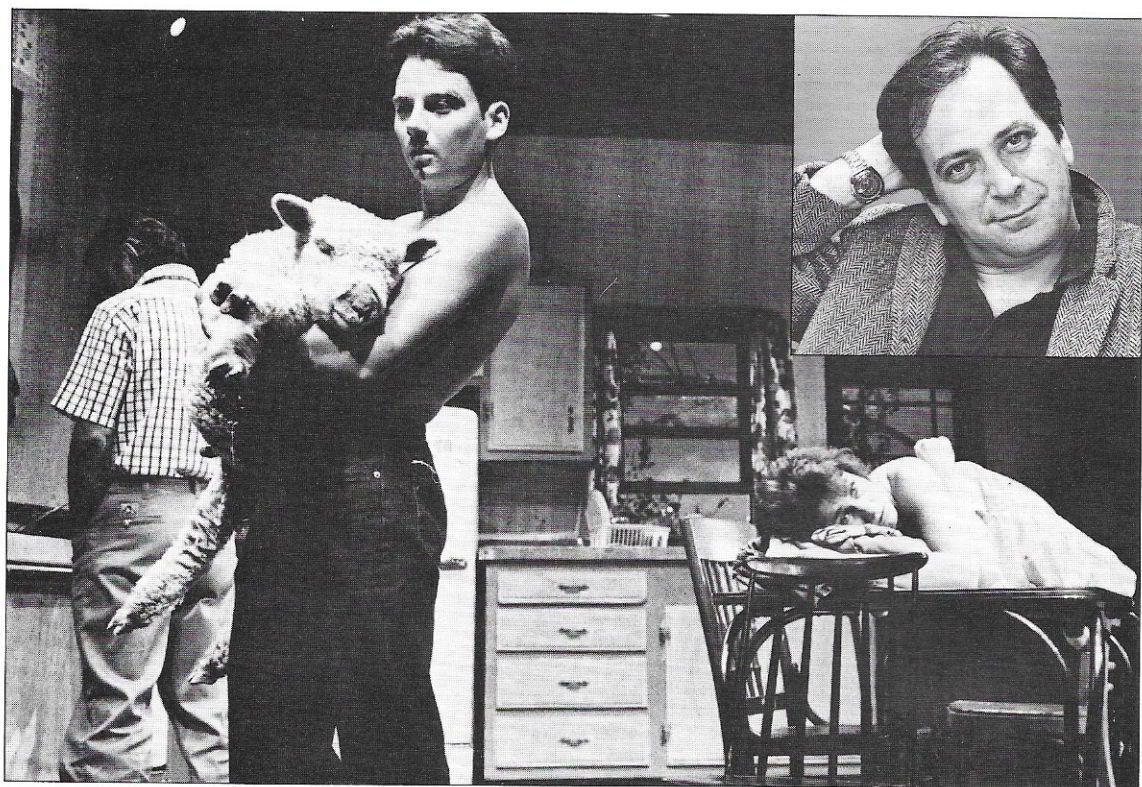


“The ground of his discourse is ever-changing, ever-provocative, which makes Shepard, at least in terms of personality, the inkblot of the '80s.”



Carolyn Cavallero

Allen Namura

perfectly coiffed conk, was Elvis Presley in an early '57 photo. Tight in on him, nose to nose, her bare shoulder slightly pressed forward in anticipation, with a slightly skewed bouffant and a diamond brooch earring, was a beautiful unidentified blond. And what was joining the two figures, in the space between their faces, catching a little light and subtly glistening? Why, their tongues!

Believe it or not, when the show went from Magic Theatre to Circle Repertory Company in New York, and the image was again used on the poster, several shops refused to sell it, although *The New York Times* had no problem printing the image, and where the poster was unavailable in Manhattan, people wanted it.

As early as 1970, we were doing Sam Shepard's work at the Magic Theatre. The first play we did was *La Turista*. Nagle Jackson, over from American Conservatory Theatre, directed, and I played Kent. I saw Shepard briefly in 1968, when Antonioni was passing through Berkeley filming *Zabriski Point*, but never really met him until 1974, when he had returned from England and decided to move to Northern California. We were introduced by playwright Michael McClure at his house in a very gracious and casual atmosphere, and in short order decided to get going on some work. The timing was right. I had just moved the theatre from Berkeley to San Francisco, and our initial plan was that we each—Sam, Michael and I—would bring projects to the theatre and do them. I was hot to do *Tooth of Crime*, which was then tearing up London and a few of the American regional reps. Sam, of course, had other ideas, and we wound up doing *Action* and *Killer's Head* with him directing.

Over the next nine years and some 14 produc-

John Lion is artistic director of San Francisco's Magic Theatre, where Sam Shepard's plays have premiered since 1970.

tions, a pattern developed. Sam would work on a play and show it to me when it was "ready." That didn't mean that it was necessarily "finished." There was never any hard schedule for completion. Sometimes there would be as many as two plays within a year (*True West*, *Buried Child*), sometimes nothing for a few years. Sometimes a project would come up, such as those involving Joseph Chaikin (*Tongues*, *Savage/Love*), or an ensemble piece (*Inacomia*); on rare occasions, a revival, such as *Curse of the Starving Class*. Most of the conversations we had that had any substance were in bars or over pool tables. Just before *Fool* popped up, Sam was on a "red haired people from Texas" kick. He seemed very much interested in Texas history at the time. I assumed he was working on a period piece and let it go that.

I suppose I finally saw about the 11th draft of *Fool*. This was unusual, but a lot of things were happening at the time. One of them was the film *The Right Stuff*. Phil Kaufman, with whom I had school ties, had convinced Sam to consider playing Chuck Yeager. Sam and Chuck hit it off; the deal was closed. I finagled a small role. (I'm the one running after Shepard near the top of the film yelling, "Chuck, Chuck, we want you to fly all of our planes.") In all, 22 actors from the Magic Theatre were in the film.

Anyway, the draft I finally saw had Eddie, Mae and Martin in it but not the "princess." This was odd to me, because we had auditioned about a hundred actresses for the part of the "princess," script unseen. This draft, draft 11, also didn't have "the old man" in it, but the story was essentially there. I was convinced it would play like gangbusters, but it somehow seemed "square." (I don't mean the attitude, I mean the shape.) It was pretty linear, unusual for Sam, and I remarked on it. "Maybe it needs a three-quarter circle surrounding three points of the square," I said. Three weeks later, we had the completed script, with "the old man."