

BORN

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with a senator, Brock hires a journalist to educate Billie. But knowledge is power, and Brock winds up getting more than he bargained for.

"I just love this play. It's just amazingly written," says Robert Cacioppo, the Florida Rep's producing artistic director, who's directing this production. "If I were going to define a classic, I would say that a classic is something that in future generations speaks to that generation, that new generation, in a different way. Garson Kanin, who is the writer, said, 'When I wrote it, I wrote a fable.' And you can really see that it's a fable and a parable, that Brock represents big business, that the senator represents American government, Billie Dawn represents the people, and the writer represents journalism."

Mr. Cacioppo loves "the timeliness of this play's view on power, big business and government, and (its message) that the people need to be involved. The citizens need to be involved. We let bad things happen by not being involved, by not being active, by not voting, by not being aware. We allow big business to get away with golden parachutes and taking advantage of the system. And we also have the ability to stop it."

The original "Born Yesterday" ran for 1,642 performances on Broadway. According to the *New York Times*, its star, Judy Holliday, "never played to an empty seat." The popular Broadway play later became a movie, directed by George Cukor.

"I've always had a love for American plays, whether it's 'The Miracle Worker,' 'Born Yesterday' or 'You Can't Take It With You,'" Mr. Cacioppo says. "I just love the genre."

He even considered starting a theater devoted solely to great American plays he says, saying that there are theaters that perform only Shakespeare, or only Chekov, or only new plays, so why not a venue devoted to classic American plays.

"I just love this play," he enthusiastically, adding that he'd directed a production on Sanibel at the Pirate Playhouse 11 years ago.

"I guess what's striking me now, doing this 11 years later, is how much I've changed in 11 years," he says, "and how I see the play so much more richly, so much more politically,

if you go

>> **What:** "Born Yesterday"
>> **When:** Oct. 24 through Nov. 16
>> **Where:** The Florida Repertory Theatre
>> **Cost:** Premium seating \$38, value seating \$34
>> **Information:** Call 332-4488 or go to www.FloridaRep.org.

because I've become a much more political person. While this play, I think, criticizes America and what's wrong, it's also a very pro-American play. It's also about what's right in America.

"So this time around, I see a great deal more of three-dimensions, both in all of the characters and in the situation that's going on. There are things that are said in the play that are going to ring so true to our audiences today. We're all sort of grappling with an uncertain future and where do we go next, and anger at shenanigans that are happening and are hurting the people.

"I loved it 11 years ago, and now I'm saying, 'My God, this is a rich play, and Garson Kanin was really ahead of his time when he wrote it.' And it's really so much more than a parable and a fable. It really talks about the times we're in right now."

Ironically, when he chose the first three plays for Florida Rep's season — "The Glass Menagerie," "Born Yesterday" and

"Indian Blood" — he had no idea what the current political climate would be.

"Because of so much that has happened in the last eight, nine months in America, I didn't realize how perfect they'd be for us right now," Mr. Cacioppo says. "At 'The Glass Menagerie' at nights, there would be certain lines that Tom would say about the struggling masses, how their fingers were placed forcibly on the failed alphabet of a failing economy, that audiences really literally know. There's a hush, there's an active response to what Tennessee Williams wrote.

"And I think 'Born Yesterday,' while it's a comedy, I think the humor in it will be subtler. Also, the humor in it is sugar that helps the medicine go down in the play, because this is a very political play.

"And then the next play, 'Indian Blood,' is one of A.R. Gurney's new plays. But it takes place in 1946, and is really talking about how big industry is going to leave Buffalo, and the people don't believe it's going to leave. Buffalo in 1946 was the sixth biggest city in America, but they weren't really preparing themselves for industry to continue there. And industry would shortly leave there, and now I'm sure that Buffalo isn't in the top 40 cities in America. But it's interesting, that all

three plays, while the latter two, 'Born Yesterday' and 'Indian Blood' are comedies, but it's really interesting how these three plays are really speaking to our times."

Of course, that's the mission of plays, to entertain us, to make us feel and reflect, to mirror life back to us.

"One of the actors here in rehearsal said, 'Every play is an autobiography'

for the actor," Mr. Cacioppo says, "in the sense that we can only relate to what we know as human beings. And that's what we bring to our characters.

"The same could be said about the audience. Audiences can only relate to what they are as a human being, and it's a very sort of personal thing when you see a play, and you bring all of your prejudice and feelings and loves and hates to a play.

"And I just think, it's a very good play. Even more than 'Glass Menagerie,' I think people are going to be struck that: this is today's headlines, not a 62-year-old play. The play ran on Broadway for a very long time, it has to be one of the top 10 straight plays ever. There has never been a time in 62 years that this play hasn't been done, all over America."

The playwright was constantly receiving royalties, he says, and in the '70s, his royalties doubled. Mr. Kanin called his leasing company, thinking there'd been a mistake.

"And they said, 'No, Garson, it's because of Watergate,'" Mr. Cacioppo says.

He's approaching the play differently this time.

"I feel that when I directed it before, it was more of a fable, and a story," he says. "Now it's more of something that connects with me in a very personal way, and I think, with all of us. It'll still be funny as ever, but I think the humor will come out of irony more."

He claims the set, with \$50,000 worth of furniture on loan from Robb & Stucky, will be "one of the best, most glorious, hugest, biggest set that we ever had. Because this guy Brock comes to Washington, and he's paying \$235 a night, and they make a big deal that that's what he's paying. But inflation is 22 times from 1946 to the today, so (in 2008 money,) he's paying \$5,000 a night for this suite in D.C. And some of the characters talk: 'He's paying \$235 a night, and I make \$18 a week. That's wrong.' Something's wrong here. Something's wrong with the gulf with the very wealthy. The gulf has never been greater with the richest people in America to the middle class. We're all affected by the cost of milk and the cost of gas and the cost of food, and our salaries not going up that much. And yet CEOs are taking \$22 billion dollar payoffs and bonuses. So these are themes this play is talking about."

But, he adds, even if people have no interest in politics, the play is still funny and dramatic, and stands on its own.

"And if you do have a political awareness. That will just make your experience richer.

"What's important is that this is a patriotic play," Mr. Cacioppo says. "So while we talk about criticizing what's wrong, it also very much reminds us about what's right. And what the founding fathers thought of, and what their hopes and aspirations and principles were, and what we have to give back.

"While Garson Kanin's criticizing America and big business and politics and greed and selfishness, he's also a huge patriot. And I think there are some really positive things that this play says about what is great about America. And this is a time we can all be reminded of that. I think we are all still very proud that we're Americans and live in a great country. We're hitting a bump.

"But you know, crises, whether it's the Depression or an anti-war movement, or women's movement, or black movement, or the Civil War, crises breed growth. Who knows how long this current crisis will be, but I certainly hope and certainly believe, that it's going to lead us to the next growth, into a really positive place." ■



COURTESY PHOTO
Deanna Gibson plays Billie Dawn, James Clark plays Harry Brock.