

KNOXVILLE

A New Musical

SEPT 04-22

Book by **Frank Galati**
Music by **Stephen Flaherty**
Lyrics by **Lynn Ahrens**

Directed and Choreographed
by **Josh Rhodes**
Based on the Asolo Rep
production directed
by **Frank Galati**

Adapted from
A Death in the Family
by **James Agee**
and *All the Way Home*
by **Tad Mosel**

Commissioned and
first produced by
Asolo Repertory Theatre,
Michael Donald Edwards,
Producing Artistic Director,
Linda M. DiGabriele,
Managing Director.



John Taylor Kelly: by Shawn Poynter

CLARENCE
BROWN
THEATRE

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

AUDIENCE
ENGAGEMENT
GUIDE



Photo courtesy of the Asolo Repertory Theatre

Artistic Director/Department Head
KENNETH MARTIN

Associate Artistic Director/Assistant Professor
KATIE LUPICA

Managing Director
TOM CERVONE

Production Manager
SUSAN L. McMILLAN

Grants, Outreach, and Education Manager
HANA SHERMAN

Audience Resource Guide written by
BRADY CRADDOCK

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This production made possible by a generous grant from



FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

As we raise the curtain on this extraordinary work, I am reminded of the unique power of collaboration in the world of theater. This show began in the mind of Frank Galati, a giant in our art form, and travelled to the desks of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty. Together, they and the amazing artists at the Asolo Repertory Theatre breathed life into this work for the first time and allowed it to sing.



Today, you will see another group of artists - some from the original production, some new - take the work that has already begun to find its voice and, with this new production, explore, refine and deepen that voice. In revisiting this show, we have had the privilege of delving deeper into the characters, the themes, and the world they inhabit. We have asked new questions, explored new possibilities, and found new meaning in places we hadn't seen before. This process has been a collaborative journey, with our creative team and cast bringing fresh energy and perspectives that have breathed a different life into the material.

Frank Galati's book brings a depth of vision that is both intimate and grand, capturing the story in a way that is unique. Lynn Ahrens' lyrical genius breathes life into this world with words that resonate deeply, echoing the hopes, dreams, and struggles of the characters with poignant beauty. And Stephen Flaherty's music — soaring, haunting, joyous—binds it all together, creating a score that will linger in your heart long after the final note has been played.

This musical is not just a performance; it is a journey, an exploration of the human spirit, and a celebration of the resilience that often defines us. This production is a testament to the power of storytelling and the impact of art on our lives. It invites us to see the world through new eyes, to feel with new hearts, and to understand with new minds. It is an honor to share this journey with you, and to present a work that speaks so profoundly to the human experience.

As we embark on this adventure together, I invite you to open yourselves to the magic of the theater, to the emotions that these characters will stir within you, and to the timeless themes that this musical so beautifully illuminates. This is not just a new musical — it is a living, breathing work of art that will inspire and move us all.

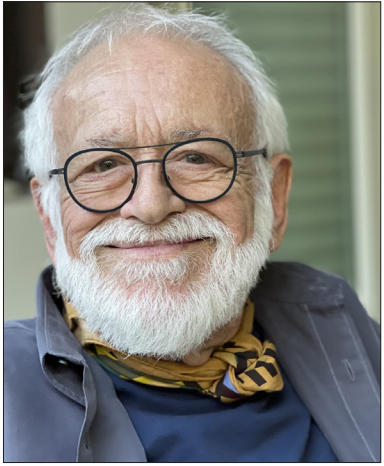
Thank you for being here with us, for supporting the arts, and for being a part of this incredible moment. **Welcome to the show.** ■

We recognize and value diversity in all forms, including age, ethnicity, family structure, gender identity, national origin, race religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, and veteran status.

We believe inclusivity and diversity in our workplace should reflect the increasing multicultural and global society in which we live. We seek to foster excellent creative research, scholarship and professional practice by creating a welcoming environment, ethical recruitment practices, and a diverse student body who will have lives of awareness and understanding through their creative research, teaching, practicing and advocating for others in a diverse world.

Detailed information on our DEI initiatives can be found here:

<https://theatre.utk.edu/diversity-inclusion/>



THIS PRODUCTION OF 'KNOXVILLE' IS DEDICATED IN LOVING MEMORY OF **FRANK GALATI**

FRANK GALATI was born in Highland Park, Illinois in 1943. His adaptation of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* began at Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, and went on to Broadway, where it won Best Play and Best Direction Tony Awards in 1990, and is currently playing, to critical acclaim, at the National Theatre in London. He was also nominated for another Tony, for his direction of the original

production of *Ragtime* in 1998. As Associate Director of the Goodman Theatre, he directed *The Winter's Tale* and wrote and directed *She Always Said, Pablo*, text adapted from Gertrude Stein and images of Picasso, which went on to a successful run at the Kennedy Center. He was Artistic Associate at the Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota, Florida, where he adapted and directed the musical *Knoxville*, from James Agee's novel *A Death in the Family*. He directed at the Metropolitan Opera, The Lyric Opera of Chicago and San Francisco Opera, and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Screenplay for *The Accidental Tourist* in 1988. Galati was Professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University for over 25 years. Before his passing last year, he was inducted into the American Theatre Hall of Fame. ■



LYRICIST & COMPOSER **LYNN AHRENS & STEPHEN FLAHERTY**

LYNN AHRENS and **STEPHEN FLAHERTY** have been creating musicals together since 1983. For the Broadway premiere of *Ragtime* (directed by Frank Galati), they won the Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards. They are four-time Grammy nominees and received nominations for two Academy Awards and two Golden Globes for Twentieth Century Fox's animated feature film,

Anastasia, which they also adapted for Broadway. Their many mutual theatre credits on and off Broadway include *Once On This Island* (2018 Tony Award, Best Revival of a Musical); *Seussical* (one of the most produced shows in America); *Rocky*; *My Favorite Year*; *Chita Rivera-The Dancer's Life*; *A Man of No Importance* (Outer Critics Circle Award, Best Musical); *Dessa Rose*; *The Glorious Ones*; *Lucky Stiff* and *Little Dancer*. They're delighted that their latest show, *Knoxville*, is being presented right here in the city where the story is set, and would like to thank the cast and everyone at the Clarence Brown Theatre. Ahrens and Flaherty serve on Council for the Dramatists Guild of America, where they co-founded the DGF Fellows Program for Emerging Writers. In 2014 they were awarded the Oscar Hammerstein Lifetime Achievement Award, and in 2015 they were inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame. www.ahrensandflaherty.com. ■



DIRECTOR/CHOREOGRAPHER **JOSH RHODES**

Josh is honored to be here in Knoxville working on such a beautiful piece of NEW musical theater. Josh recently directed and choreographed the Broadway revival of *SPAMalot* after a successful run at the Kennedy Center. Other directing and choreography credits include *Dear World*, *Mack & Mabel*, and *Grand Hotel*, (Encores!) Ken Ludwig's *Baskerville*, and *Guys and Dolls*, (Old Globe), *Cabaret*, *The Sound of Music*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Knoxville*, and *Evita* (The Asolo Rep) *Jersey Boys*, *Chess* (The Muny) and *Tommy* (Kennedy Center). On Broadway Josh choreographed Rodgers & Hammerstein's

Cinderella, *It Shoulda Been You*, *First Date*, and *Bright Star*. On London's West End, he choreographed *Carousel* for the English National Opera and *Sweeney Todd* starring Emma Thompson. Josh recently made his film director debut with the musical film, *Beau*. The film has garnered multiple laurels and awards in festivals all over North America. The creative father of this production, our dear one, Frank Galati, would have a sparkle in his eye and an enormous smile were he here watching his show come to life. We owe everything to Frank for inspiring us to investigate this material with enormous passion, while having a "marvelous" time doing it. Thank you, Frank. ■

THE CHARACTERS



JASON DANIELEY*
AUTHOR,
James Agee



ALAN CHANDLER*
JAY FOLLET,
husband



HANNAH ELLESS*
MARY FOLLET,
wife



CLAY COOPER
ANDREW LYNCH,
Mary's brother



McKINLEY MERRIT
VICTORIA, Mary's
young friend / Others



**LAURA BETH
WELLS***
JESSIE,
Jay's Mother



NICK BARRINGTON
RUFUS FOLLET, the
child hero of the work



CHRIS HOCH*
RALPH FOLLET,
Jay's brother



LILI THOMAS*
SALLY,
Ralph's wife



EVIE ANDRUS
Knoxville Fiddler



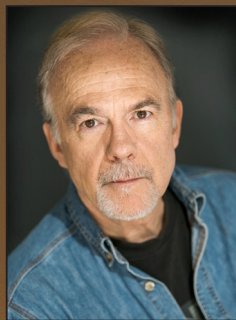
SAMMY PONTELLO
MAN AT THE SCENE
/ Others



DWELVAN DAVID*
THE FERRYMAN/
DOCTOR



**SHINNERRIE
JACKSON***
AUNT HANNAH
LYNCH, Mary's aunt



BRIAN O'NEILL*
(JOEL, Mary's
Father / Others)



KATY WOLFE*
CATHERINE,
Mary's Mother

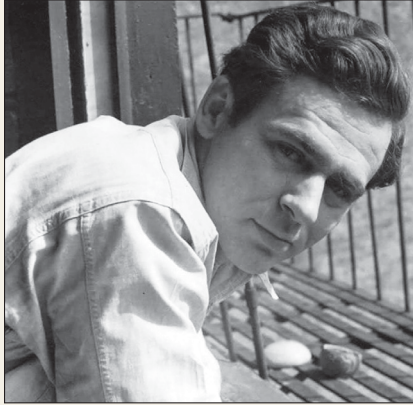
* Members of Actor's Equity Association, the union of professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.



Photo courtesy of the Asolo Repertory Theatre

ABOUT JAMES AGEE

By Brady Craddock



On November 27, 1909, just one mile away from this very theatre, James Rufus Agee was born in his childhood home at Highland Avenue and 15th Street, presently renamed James Agee Street. His father, Hugh James Agee, came from a family of southern Appalachian yeomen and lived most of his life in Knoxville, while his mother, Laura Whitman Tyler, hailed from an educated family originally from Kalamazoo, Michigan. They married in 1906 and, after James, had one other child, a daughter named Emma Ferrand Agee.

When James was only six years old, his father suddenly died in an automobile accident. This event not only changed James as a person, but the trajectory of his entire life, and culminated in the writing of one of the most acclaimed English novels of the twentieth century, *A Death in the Family*.

After his father's death, Agee went through rigorous schooling. He first attended St. Andrews School near Sewanee, Tennessee, where he met a lifelong mentor and friend in Father James Harold Flye. Flye and Agee exchanged letters for the duration of Agee's life, with Flye filling a paternal role that Agee was missing. After a brief attendance at Knoxville High School in 1924, Agee traveled with Flye through Europe for a year before landing at Philips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. There, he discovered his passion for literature and published many short stories, plays, and poems in the school's newspaper. He eventually served as the editor – a trend that was continued in college, where he served as editor-in-chief of *The Advocate* at Harvard University.



The house in Knoxville James Agee grew up in.

Upon graduating, Agee moved to New York and became a writer at a number of major magazines. He worked as a reporter for *Fortune* and made a career in writing

book reviews for *Time*, at some points reading and reviewing up to six books a week. Most notable, however, was his pioneering work as a film critic, something he began at *Time* and later continued at *The Nation*. This led him to lend his creative talents to Hollywood, contributing to the writing of several successful screenplays, such as *The African Queen* (1951) starring Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn, and *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), an adaptation of David Grubb's bestselling novel, starring Robert Mitchum, Shelley Winters, and Lillian Gish.

Outside of his work in film, Agee did not receive much commercial recognition for his own writing. His talent was apparent to those who had access to his work. He received the 1934 Yale Younger Poets Award for his only published poetry collection, *Permit Me Voyage*, but his debut novel sold a meager 600 copies in its original publication before being discontinued. Beginning as a scrapped project for *Fortune*, the novel was titled *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and was first published in 1941. It details a novelized account of sharecropper families living in Alabama during the Great Depression. Agee traveled to Alabama with photographer Walker Evans, who documented the families Agee wrote about in a series of pictures. Though it has since received critical acclaim in subsequent editions after Agee's death, its original failure discouraged him, and he abstained from publishing many of his fiction works in the years following.

Though he did not revisit Knoxville much in his later life, the impact his birthplace had on Agee is prevalent in many of his writings.

He became distanced from Christianity with age, but much of his work reveals a deep understanding and compassion for the role that faith played in the lives of his family and upbringing. He had an ongoing battle with his mental health throughout his adult life and fell in and out of alcoholism. Despite this, he touched the lives of many. Over the course of three marriages, he had four children and forged friendships with fellow writers and creatives that lasted until the end of his life.

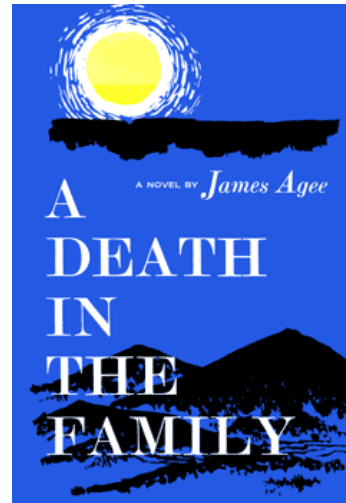
At the age of 45, having fallen into ill health after suffering a heart attack, James Agee died in a taxicab in New York City, on his way to a doctor's appointment. The date was May 16, 1955, only two days before the 39th anniversary of his father's passing. ■

ABOUT **A DEATH IN THE FAMILY**

“We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee, in the time that I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child.”

- James Agee, “Knoxville: Summer, 1915”

James Agee first began writing *A Death in the Family* in 1948. It was a project he worked steadily on for years, but it was still incomplete when he died in 1955. The novel's publication in 1957 was edited by Agee's friend and protégé, David McDowell, who pieced together sections of the manuscript in what he guessed to be the author's intention. There are two sections of the original manuscript that fall outside of the timespan of the novel, which McDowell included in italics as flashbacks to the endings of Parts I and II, and he also elected to include Agee's 1938 prose poem, “Knoxville: Summer, 1915,” (quoted above) as a prologue to the text. It is McDowell's edition of the novel that was widely circulated and remains in publication to this day. The novel posthumously won Agee the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1958 and has been included in *Time's* List of 100 Best English Written Novels. Its critical success is largely responsible for upholding Agee's legacy and shedding light on his other works.



In 2007, Michael Lofaro, a professor of English at The University of Tennessee, published a revised edition of the novel based on the discovery of Agee's additional manuscripts and notes. *A Death in the Family: A Restoration of the Author's Text* includes content never seen in the McDowell edition, including a new opening, a reordering of events, and additional chapters.

Regardless of the edition, what has kept *A Death in the Family* in the minds and hearts of readers is Agee's ability to convey nostalgia. His prose is brimming with a masterful balance of darkness and beauty, and the novel somehow manages to stand triumphantly in between the overlapping genres of poetry, realism, fiction, and autobiography. He uses a multi-perspective narrative style, seamlessly weaving through the minds of the Follet and Lynch families. The novel profoundly explores many of the forms that love and grief can take, and Agee never fails to remind the reader that there are an infinite number of ways these emotions can be experienced and expressed.

Agee's work is a pinnacle of American literary modernism, breaking the mold of traditional narrative to take whatever form necessary to convey whatever human experience he wants the reader to understand. It is rooted firmly in Knoxville, Tennessee, and explicitly details

what the town was like in 1915. Through the eyes of young Rufus and his family, we are granted a vision of Gay Street, Market Square, L&N Station, and Fort Sanders. The distance of nearly 115 years feels quite small, however, when the sentiments that Agee imparts on us are timeless. ■

LEGACY AND ADAPTATIONS

Because of its timelessness, it is unsurprising that *A Death in the Family* has resonated with so many people since its initial publication. It also has served as the inspiration for many adaptations.

In 1960, *All the Way Home* premiered on Broadway. Written by Tad Mosel, this first dramatic version of *A Death in the Family* largely follows the plot of the novel, but organizes the flashbacks so things happen in chronological order. It ran for 333 performances and has seen multiple revivals off-Broadway. It was nominated for Best Play at the 1961 Tony Awards, and Colleen Dewhurst won Best Actress in a Play for her performance as Mary Follet. The play won Mosel the 1961 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

The title of Mosel's adaptation comes from a quote in the novel, in a section of a prose poem that concludes Part I: “*How far we all come. How far we all come away from ourselves. So far, so much between, you can never go home again. You can go home, it's good to go home, but you never really get all the way home again in your life. And what's it all for? All I tried to be, all I ever wanted and went away for, what's it all for?*”

All the Way Home was then adapted into a film of the same name in 1963, directed by Alex Segal. It featured a star-studded cast, including Jean Simmons as Mary, Robert Preston as Jay, and Pat Hingle as Ralph. It also featured the film debut of actor John Cullum as Andrew. Cullum was born in Knoxville and attended the University of Tennessee before embarking on a successful career on Broadway. There have been many subsequent screen adaptations of *All the Way Home*, including a 1971 TV film with Joanne Woodward, a 1981 television film with Sally Field and William Hurt, and a 2002 adaptation for PBS that was filmed in Tennessee.

American composer Samuel Barber adapted the prologue to the novel into an orchestral song, intended to be sung by a soprano, in 1947. It is still sung by vocalists to this day. William Mayer, another American composer, adapted the novel into an opera in 1983.

Perhaps the most ambitious and visionary adaptation to date, *Knoxville* transforms Agee's modernist novel into a breath-taking American musical. Although the original premiere of this new work by Frank Galati, Lynn Ahren, and Stephen Flaherty was temporarily halted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the musical eventually made its debut at the Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota, Florida in 2022. At the Clarence Brown Theatre, *Knoxville* is having its second premiere in the very neighborhood its story takes place in. ■



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