

★★★ THE HOSTESS WITH THE MOSTESS ★★★

During the 1940s and 1950s, when collegial relationships flourished across party lines in Washington, DC., an invitation to Perle Mesta's home for one of her famous soirees was a sure sign that a public official had reached the pinnacle of power in the nation's capital. Presidents, cabinet secretaries, congressmen, and diplomats were lured to her Georgetown home for parties featuring live music, exotic food, and rivers of champagne and bourbon. Republican and Democratic leaders, after waging fierce battles in the Senate and House of Representatives during the day, amicably discussed their differences and perhaps even worked out a compromise on a complex legal issue under the watchful eye of Mrs. Mesta, the famed Hostess with the Mostess.

In *The City of Conversation*, Anthony Giardina looks back at those days when Washington had not yet been infected with the politics of mutual destruction -- a time when compromise was not a dirty word and the two parties could come together for the good of the nation. His heroine, Hester Ferris, is very much a Perle Mesta-type character. She is a socialite and a Democrat with ties to powerful Republicans as well as members of her party.

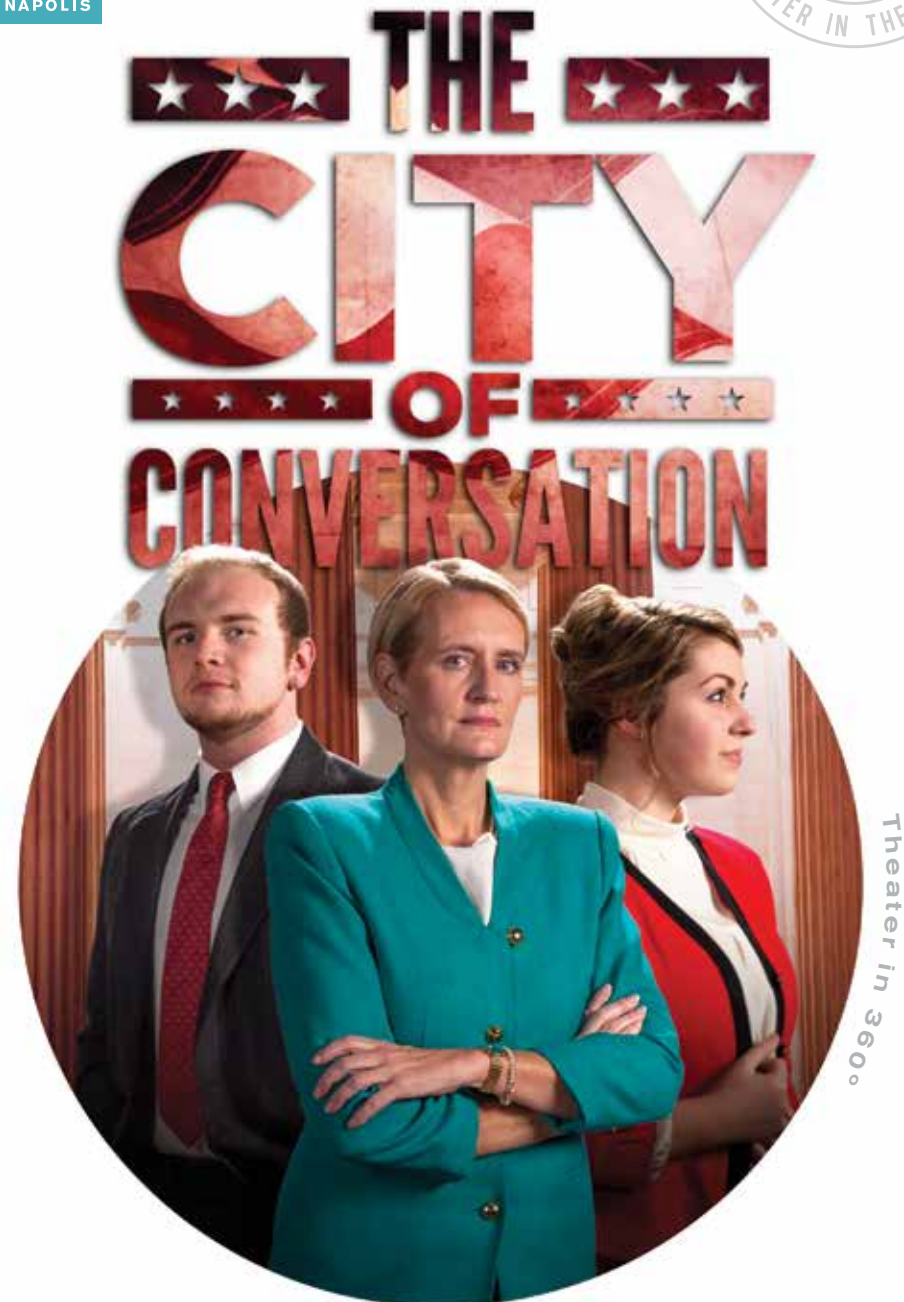
The real Perle Mesta, born in Michigan, was the daughter of an Oklahoma oilman and a silent screen actress. In 1916, she married George Mesta, a Pennsylvania steel manufacturer. When he died nine years later, she inherited a fortune worth more than \$1 billion in today's money. Mrs. Mesta was a savvy businesswoman who successfully carried on her husband's work until she decided to step aside and move to Washington in 1940. She had been a Republican, but changed parties with her move to the nation's capital and became a successful Democratic Party fundraiser. Her contacts at the upper echelons of Washington political society crossed party lines; she was a personal friend of Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower and of Democratic President Harry S. Truman.

Mrs. Mesta's fame was so great that she was the inspiration for Irving Berlin's musical *Call Me Madam*, which had a successful Broadway run starring Ethel Merman, who then reprised her role in a movie version. The composer and playwrights inserted in the Broadway Playbill a statement that their musical was about a fictional character and not a real life hostess. But their title character, Sally Adams, served as the minister to the fictional country of Lichtenburg. Mrs. Mesta was, in fact, the U.S. minister to Luxembourg. She was a feminist at a time when the movement barely existed. She belonged at one point to the National Woman's Party, and was an early supporter of an Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

*The City of Conversation* begins as the influence of Hester Ferris is beginning to wane and the kind of opulent parties that earned widespread acclaim for Perle Mesta are losing their importance. The fictional hostess bemoans the partisanship that is beginning to tear apart not only her country but also her family.

Anthony Giardina's play seems to be particularly relevant to America in 2016. Our country has just gone through its most divisive election in modern times. Political rhetoric has become more inflammatory, more extreme in the toxic atmosphere that grips Washington and the nation. Perle Mesta would undoubtedly be saddened by the extreme partisanship of 2016. The teetotaling Christian Scientist, whose drink of choice was Coca Cola, might also be tempted to lay on the champagne and the exotic foods and try to get Democrats and Republicans to debate issues with mutual respect. America could use a few Perle Mestas and Hester Ferrisses.

– TOM STUCKEY



JANUARY 13 – JANUARY 28, 2017 2016/2017 season



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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The US election season is behind us, and we look ahead to a new president and wonder what changes are coming our way. Many are picking up the gauntlet to ensure that our freedoms and rights are secure for all of us, while others are breathing a sigh of relief that the campaign ads and promises are in the past.

Here at Colonial Players, however, we are gearing up for our election season. The nominations committee has been canvassing for prospective candidates, and the election committee will soon begin their work.

You won't see political ads or posters, and you won't hear candidates bad-mouthing their counterparts in the press. What you will find is a desire in each candidate to do good, to give back to our theater family, and to make our theater the best it can be. Most of our board members were longtime members before taking up the mantle of leadership, but even new members have the opportunity make our good theater even better.

I think that's part of what makes our election so great. Each person can make a difference, and every vote does count. Every one of our members has a right (and responsibility) to determine where our theater is headed, not only in the short term but the long term as well.

I would encourage you if you're a member to read our candidate statements in upcoming News & Cues, ask questions, and vote when the day comes this March. If you're not a member, I'd encourage you to join, and work with us to make sure this theater that we all love thrives for us and future generations.

– SHIRLEY PANEK

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*Colonial Players gratefully acknowledges the generous bequest from Roland Riley, a longtime patron whose gift helps ensure the future economic viability of our theater.*

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

This show, at its heart, is not a political drama; it's a family drama. That's something I said to Mickey and the artistic team when I interviewed for the gig. I said it to each designer, and then I told the cast the same thing after our first reading of the script. I firmly believe that the arguments these characters have and the battles they choose to fight are based in deep, personal resentments and disappointments. But – and there always is one – there is no denying that its political profile was raised on the evening of November 8. After a long and ugly campaign, many families sat together for the holidays and tried to talk about anything but politics because what if they get into another argument?

In the last few months, we explored our own family relationships. How we interact with our parents, siblings, children, partners; and that wasn't always easy. We focused on this family, but found an entire nation, right here, in a small parlor in Georgetown. I'd like to think we became even more relevant in November. If we

thought our nation was divided before, I haven't seen anything to refute that notion since.

One of the first cultural clashes when I moved to the US was that "we don't discuss religion and politics at the dinner table." That is still a foreign concept to me. We're all there, no one can leave, let's duke it out. Let's be adults and have a conversation.

*The City of Conversation* will hopefully show you why it can be good to have these arguments with your family. Sometimes, you need to fight and scream and curse and flip each other off to get the truth out. But – I told you there always is one – I hope this show also serves as a cautionary tale that sometimes fights have consequences. Where do you draw that line? And what is your next fight worth to you? Don't stop fighting. Never stop arguing. Keep thinking. Thank you for spending some time with us.

– RUBEN VELLEKOOP

## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR



*The City of Conversation* is **RUBEN VELLEKOOP'S** directorial debut with The Colonial Players. He also has directed *The Dearest Bar in Baltimore* (reading), *The Who's Tommy* at Kensington Arts Theatre, and a reading from *The City of Conversation* at Colonial Players. On stage, he appeared in *Catch*

*Me If You Can* (NextStop Theatre); *The Who's Tommy* (as George Spelvin, KAT); *Why Torture is Wrong, and the People Who Love Them* (Colonial Players); *Monty Python's Spamalot* and *Avenue Q* (Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre); *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* and *Endgame* (Hallam players). "Big up to Kaelynn, Darice, Atticus, and this whole cast and crew."

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

**ANTHONY GIARDINA** is a novelist and playwright who lives in Northampton MA. He is the author of six novels, and six of his plays have been produced in New York and Washington DC. Giardina's short fiction and

essays have appeared in *Harper's*, *Esquire*, *GQ* and *The New York Times Magazine*. He also has taught at several colleges, and is currently a regular visiting professor at The University of Texas in Austin.



## THE CAST



**PAUL BANVILLE**  
(Chandler Harris)

Recently relocated from New England, Paul is grateful to David Carter for suggesting he audition, to Director Ruben V. for offering the role, and to the production crew and cast for their welcoming community spirit and support (especially in learning his lines!) in his theatrical debut with The Colonial Players! Paul has been sighted (unpaid!) at Middleton's piano bar crooning "The Way You Look Tonight". Cheers!



**IAN BROWN**  
(Young Ethan Ferris)

Ian is in the first grade at West Annapolis Elementary School, where he enjoys studying many subjects, especially science. The youngest of three brothers, he loves playing with Legos and Nerf Guns. Like "Ethan" (his character in the play), he enjoys playing catch. In fact, baseball is his favorite sport - way to go Cubs! Ian is very excited to be making his first appearance with The Colonial Players, and he thanks his Mommy and Daddy for being his handlers.



**CARLOTTA CAPUANO**  
(Carolyn Mallonee)

Carlotta is thrilled to be performing with this awesome cast and crew. Some of her favorite past performances include *Cabaret* (KAT), *Spamalot* (ASGT), *The Rocky Horror Show* (AACC), *Hairspray* (ASGT), and *Big Love* (AACC). Earlier this year, she made her directorial debut with Kensington Arts Theatre's production of *The Who's Tommy*. Carlotta has an AFA in Dance and a BS in Business Administration. When she's not working in theater, she serves as a library associate and early literacy specialist at the Crofton Community Library. Enjoy the show!



**DAVID FOSTER**  
(Donald Logan)

David is ecstatic about making his debut with The Colonial Players for super-topical *The City of Conversation*. A theater major at Anne Arundel Community College, David would like to thank Ruben for casting him, Atticus for recommending that he audition, and the cast and crew for their kindness and talent. Special shout outs to his mother, family, and Justin for all their support. Enjoy the performance!



**REBECCA GIFT**  
(Anna Fitzgerald)

Rebecca is thrilled to be returning to the Colonial Players stage this season. She was most recently seen as Gretchen in last year's production of *Boeing, Boeing*. She is so grateful for this opportunity and to be working with such a wonderful group of people.



**KAREN KELLNER**  
(Jean Swift)

Karen holds a degree in theater from the University of Maryland (Go Terps!). She spent several years in Los Angeles performing in film, commercials, and on the stage. Prior to her move out west, Karen appeared in Colonial Players' production of *Equus*. Favorite roles include Hedda in *Hedda Gabler*, Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Myra in *Deathtrap*, and Athena in *Suite Surrender*. When not acting, Karen teaches acting and film to children. Much love to my family for their support -- especially my beautiful daughters, Ashley & Lindsey!



**HENRY MACDONALD**  
(Young Ethan Ferris)

Henry is in the first grade at West Annapolis Elementary School. This is his first theater experience; he swims and plays soccer, hockey, and basketball. Most of all, he likes to climb magnolia trees, run around with



## THE STAFF (continued)



**MICHELLE BRUNO**  
(Properties Designer)

Michelle is thrilled to be a part of this production! Directing credits include *Communicating Doors* (WATCH nominated) and *Inventing van Gogh*, both Colonial Players productions. Music Directing credits include *Footloose*, *Bugsy Malone*, and *Enchanted Sleeping Beauty*. At home both on and off the stage, some of her more memorable roles are as Hattie in *Kiss Me Kate* (Colonial Players), Armelia in *Ain't Misbehavin'* (WATCH nominated), Mama Euralie in *Once on This Island*, and Narrator in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. She would like to thank everyone involved with this production, as their professionalism made this a great experience. Special love to her husband, Ron Bruno, for all that he is and does.



**MARY BUTCHER**  
(Set Designer)

When Ruben first called Mary last spring, she had no idea what she was walking into, but it's been a roller coaster of pure fun and entertainment, and yes, she'd do it all again. It's her first time designing in the round, but in the last year she's been painting up a storm (*Clue*, *Venus in Fur*, *Sherlock*, and *The Cripple of Inishmann* to name a few). By day she draws things with our very own Terry Averill and by night she's either learning proper tap dancing technique, convincing groups of people to host potlucks, or passionately discussing the revival of Gilmore Girls over a glass of wine. She sends a shout out to Live Arts and the UVA drama department for giving her a chance to dream, design, and build countless numbers of sets. PopPop, this one's for you.

## ABOUT OUR NEXT PLAY

A calendar published in 1999 in a small English village became quite a sensation, first in Great Britain and then in the United States. After all, one would scarcely expect a group of middle-aged women from the Women's Institute of Knapely to pose for a nude calendar, even one done in the best of taste. The calendar sold more than 280,000 copies during the first year and raised millions of dollars over the next decade for leukemia and lymphoma research.

*Calendar Girls*, Tim Firth's comedy about the intrepid group of women from the Yorkshire Dales who became an international sensation, opens February 17 for a four-week run. "Funny, sincere, and just a wee bit naughty..." is the way *Calendar Girls* was described by the *Detroit Free Press*. DCMetroTheatreArts called it an outstanding play "that is full of heart, tears, and laughter, and love." Colonial Players promises an evening of comedy that will be just as tastefully presented as the original 1999 calendar.





## THE STAFF



### **KAELYNN BEDSWORTH** (Producer)

This is Kaelynn's eighth season with CP, and she has volunteered both on the stage and off in a variety of roles, from actress to go-button pusher to steampunk wig maker to Looney Tunes sound effect specialist to smushed-banana cleaner. You may have seen her grace the stage in *The Secret Garden*, *Annie, 1776*, and more. Previous producing credits include *Communicating Doors*. Kaelynn currently serves as Treasurer on Colonial Players' Board of Directors. Thanks to Ruben, the entire production staff, and the cast, who all have made this production run like a well-oiled machine! Kaelynn sends love also to her husband, Wes, who shares this crazy theater world with her on a daily basis.



### **WES BEDSWORTH** (Sound Designer)

Wes has been involved with over 50 different productions at Colonial Players since he joined in 2007. He won the 2010 Washington Area Theatre Community Honors (WATCH) award for outstanding sound design for *Earth and Sky* and has been nominated for sound design for several others. Wes serves as Operations Director on the CP Board, Technical Director on the Production Team, and as one of the CP Webmasters. By day, Wes works for Cardinal Engineering in DC supporting the United States Navy. Love and thanks to Mom, Dad, Susan, Abby, and of course his wife Kaelynn.



### **ATTICUS COOPER BOYD** (Stage Manager)

This is Atticus's first production with Colonial Players, and he could not be more grateful for this experience. He stage manages at many other theaters in the area including Compass Rose Theater, Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre, and Anne Arundel Community College. He is currently the Artistic

Director at Severna Park Middle School for the third year and will be directing *Beauty and the Beast* with them in the spring. He is so blessed to have worked with such intelligent and creative artists during this production. Enjoy the show!



### **ALEX BRADY** (Lighting Designer)

Alex has been designing lighting in Annapolis and Baltimore since 2002. His recent lighting design credits include *Venus in Fur* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* at Colonial Players, *Spring Migration 2016* with the AACC Dance Company, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* at Compass Rose Theater. In April, he performed the role of *Macbeth* in The Theater at AACC's production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Brady is certified in broadsword stage combat by the Society of American Fight Directors. He is an alumnus of the Graduate Institute at St. John's College and teaches in the Humanities Department at Anne Arundel Community College. Brady is a member of the Mid-Atlantic Society for Historic Swordsmanship and competes in historic European martial arts, focusing on the German longsword.



### **CARRIE BRADY** (Costume Designer)

Carrie is happy to be working with Colonial Players again after costuming last season's *Sherlock's Last Case* and this season's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Previously, she costumed for Spirited Productions and Moonlight Troupers/The Theatre at AACC, covering shows such as *The Appeal* and *Twelfth Night* and assisting with *Macbeth*. From time to time, Carrie enjoys helping out at her alma mater, St. Mary's High School Drama Club, with set construction and costumes. She would like to thank everyone who has helped out so much with this show, especially her tireless assistant (and mother), Maryanne Gross.



## THE CAST (continued)

his friends, and play with his big brother, two sisters, and parents. He also likes to read books.



### **JOSH MOONEY** (Colin Ferris/Ethan Ferris)

Josh is excited about making his debut with The Colonial Players. He most recently graduated from Frostburg State University, where he majored in theater with a focus in acting. His most recent appearance in the Annapolis theater scene was last summer's *The Producers* at Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre. His most notable roles include Atticus Finch (*To Kill A Mockingbird*), Carl Hanratty (*Catch Me If You Can*), Sir Lancelot (*Monty Python's Spamalot*), Graupner (*Bach at Leipzig*), and Scrooge (*The Trial of Ebenezer Scrooge*). He would like to thank his tremendously talented castmates, his phenomenal director for bringing this moving show to life, and his family and friends for their constant support! Thank you, and enjoy the show!



### **KATHLEEN CLARKE RUTTUM** (Hester Ferris)

Kathleen graduated from The Catholic University of America with a BFA in Theater. She has been active in the Annapolis theater community for many years. Her most recent role was as Esther Frank in the Bay Theatre Company's production of Arthur Miller's *The Price*. Other memorable roles include Rita in *Prelude to a Kiss*, Kathleen from *Hogan's Goat*, and Margarethe Bohr in *Copenhagen*, all at Colonial Players. She performed as Titania in ASGT's premiere Shakespeare in the Summer's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as well as Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*. For the past 19 years, Kathleen has been the director of St. Mary's High School's theater program. In those years she has directed/produced almost 40 full-scale productions, including musicals and non-musicals. In her "off" hours, Kathleen enjoys knitting and taking care of her wonderful husband of 30 years and her amazing children:

Mary, John, Delia, and Mickey. Kathleen is indeed grateful to be "treading the boards" again on Colonial Players' venerable stage and is honored to be sharing the stage with such talented actors. Special thanks to our director for his joyful energy and his amazing spirit of collaboration.



### **JEFF SPRAGUE** (Sen. George Mallonee, R-KY)

Jeff has appeared on the stage at Colonial Players in *Jekyll and Hyde*; *Kindertransport* (2007 WATCH Award recipient); *Kiss Me, Kate*; *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*; *Over My Dead Body*; *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*; *Chapter Two*; *Sunlight*; *1776*; *Coyote on a Fence*; and *The Liar* (2015 WATCH Award nominee). He has performed at Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and *Hairspray*, and at Dignity Players of Annapolis in *Blue/Orange*, *The Crucible*, and *Sight Unseen*. Directing credits include *Botticelli* (2010 One Act Festival) and *A Few Good Men* at Colonial Players. By day, Jeff is an attorney with the federal government. Love to Kathleen and Ollie.

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WHAT'S GOING ON AT CP.**



THE COLONIAL PLAYERS, INC.  
*presents*



*Written by*  
**ANTHONY GIARDINA**

*Directed by*  
**RUBEN VELLEKOOP**

**THE CAST**  
*(in order of appearance)*

*Jean Swift*.....Karen Kellner  
*Colin Ferris*.....Josh Mooney  
*Anna Fitzgerald*.....Rebecca Gift  
*Hester Ferris*.....Kathleen Clarke Ruttum  
*Sen. George Mallonee*.....Jeff Sprague  
*Chandler Harris*.....Paul Banville  
*Carolyn Mallonee*.....Carlotta Capuano  
*Ethan Ferris (at age 6)\**.....Ian Brown/Henry MacDonald  
*Ethan Ferris (at age 27)*.....Josh Mooney  
*Donald Logan*.....David Foster

\*The role of young Ethan Ferris will be performed by Ian Brown on Jan. 14, 19, 21, 22 (2 p.m.) 27 and by Henry MacDonald on Jan. 13, 15, 20, 22 (7:30 p.m.), 26, and 28 p.m.

**TIME**  
Fall 1979 to January 2006

**PLACE**  
The living room of a townhouse in Georgetown in Washington DC

**ACT I**  
Scene 1: October, 1979  
Scene 2: That Evening

**ACT II**  
Scene 1: Mid-September, 1987  
Scene 2: January, 2009

There will be one intermission between Act I and Act II.

*Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French Inc.*

Taking photographs and using any recording devices are strictly prohibited. Smoking is prohibited throughout the building.