

THE HOT L BALTIMORE

WITH
(IN SPEAKING ORDER)

JUDD HIRSCH - TRISH HAWKINS - ELIZABETH STURGES
HENRIETTA BAGLEY - CONCHATA FERRELL - BURKE PEARSON
LISA EMERY - ZANE LASKY - KEN KLIBAN - STEPHANIE GORDON
BRIAN TARANTINA - JONATHAN HOGAN - CLARIS NELSON

A PLAY BY

LANFORD WILSON

A PRODUCTION OF THE CIRCLE THEATRE COMPANY

DIRECTED BY

MARSHALL W. MASON

PRODUCED BY

GLEN ROVEN AND JEFFREY SWEET



ROVEN
RECORDS
Spoken Word

Roven Records
The Circle Repertory Company production of
Lanford Wilson's

The HOT L BALTIMORE

Directed by Marshall W. Mason

CAST

in order of speaking

Bill Lewis.....JUDD HIRSCH
The Girl.....TRISH HAWKINS
Millie.....ELIZABETH STURGES
Mrs. Bellotti.....HENRIETTA BAGLEY
April Green.....CONCHATA FERRELL
Mr. Morse.....BURKE PEARSON
Jackie.....LISA EMERY
Jamie.....ZANE LASKY
Mr. Katz.....KEN KLIBAN
Suzy.....STEPHANIE GORDON
Paul Granger, III.....JONATHAN HOGAN
Mrs. Oxenham.....CLARIS NELSON
Suzy's John, A Cab Driver &
A Pizza Boy.....BRIAN TARANTINA

Place: The Lobby of the Hotel Baltimore

Time: A recent Memorial Day

Act I: 7 A.M.

Act II: Early afternoon

Act III: Just after midnight

A Note From Marshall W. Mason,

The HOT L BALTIMORE was an extraordinary achievement. First produced by the Circle Repertory Company in February 1973, Lanford Wilson wrote it for the members of the Circle Rep Acting Company. You will hear most of the original cast here, re-creating their performances for a new audience: Judd Hirsh, Conchata Ferrell, Trish Hawkins, Burke Pearson, Henrietta Bagley, Zane Lasky, Stephanie Gordon and Jonathan Hogan. The other actors on this recording are all members of Circle Rep, taking on their roles for the first time: Lisa Emery, Elizabeth Sturges, Brian Tarantina, Ken Kliban and Claris Nelson.

There are many remarkable things about *HOT L*. It was produced for a commercial run Off-Broadway that ran a record 1,166 performances. It was produced by the legendary Group Theater manager Kermit Bloomgarden. It was Lanford Wilson's first big hit, and won him the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and an Obie Award for Best American Play.

Harold Clurman, the founder of The Group Theater
and critic for *The Nation*, wrote:

"The Circle Repertory Company offers the best cast and the truest ensemble in New York. They become one with the entire fabric, which constitutes the real play in the theater. One can barely distinguish between the script and the acting."

Clive Barnes of *The New York Times* declared that *HOT L* was the "herald of a new pattern," being the first play to transfer from off-off-Broadway to a long commercial run. Now, you can have the pleasure of listening to that theater rarity: a true ensemble bringing to life a great play. I directed this recording of *HOT L* with stereophonic separation so that the listener can follow the complex symphony of Lanford's play as if you were seated in the theater, watching it. I am very proud that Lanford dedicated the play to me, and that I won my first Obie Award for directing it. We all had a great time revisiting this masterpiece.

You will feel the excitement. I hope you enjoy it.

-Marshall W. Mason-

Lanford and HOT L by Jeffrey Sweet

My introduction to Lanford as a playwright was in 1970, when I saw his play *Lemon Sky*, which alas did not have the run it deserved. But there was something about the combination of the poetic, the colloquial and the experimental that spoke directly to me.

I decided to follow this guy Wilson. And I followed him to a space that was constructed upstairs from a shoe store on Broadway near 82nd Street. The group (co-founded by Wilson with Marshall W. Mason, Tanya Berezen and Rob Thirkeld) called itself the Circle Repertory Company. One of the early productions was a triple bill in 1972 of one acts by Lanford, and one of those was called *The Great Nebula in Orion*, which also knocked me out. And, when I heard that he had written a new full-length play, I showed up for one of the early previews in March 1973.

It was *The HOT L BALTIMORE*. I later learned that it was a play that Lanford tossed off so as to give most of the actors in Circle Rep parts to play. However casually it was written, it made for an intoxicating evening of theatre, and it introduced me to the extraordinary actors of that pioneering company. I was so overwhelmed I instantly bought a ticket to see it again a couple of days later, while the play was still in previews.


As I arrived in the lobby, I saw a nervous figure and instantly knew who he had to be. I approached him. "You're Lanford Wilson." He confirmed this. I said, "I want to interview you."

Now, if Lanford had had much experience as a public figure, he would have known the proper reply would have been, "For whom?" But he was green at this game, and he said, "OK." I just wanted to talk to him, and I figured if he agreed to be interviewed, I could talk to him for an hour or so. And a few days later, we met and I recorded the conversation.

My hunch about the play proved accurate. It opened, received extraordinary reviews, and then was transferred to a commercial production off-Broadway, where it ran for 1,166 performances. And as luck would have it, I had an interview with the new, hot young playwright. I called up an editor at *Newsday* and said, "No need to send someone to interview Lanford Wilson. I've done it." The editor laughed and invited me to mail the piece to him (remember mail?). I did. He published it. Then he asked me to interview Richard Rodgers, Peter Cook and Dudley Moore and a number of other folks on the scene. With those credits I was able to write a book about Second City called *Something Wonderful Right Away*. (By coincidence, Lanford told me that it was going to Second City that got him started thinking about switching from writing fiction to plays.)

HOT L helped launch Circle Rep to another level, and for the next twenty-odd years it was not only Lanford's home, but its artistic director Marshall W. Mason produced the premieres of a series of some of the defining plays of the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties. Circle also launched the careers of some of our major actors, many of whom created parts in Lanford's plays.

Circle finally closed its doors in 1996 (a plaque now graces the wall of the building near Sheridan Square where it made its home), but its influence lives on, not least in serving as a model for other companies, notably Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre. (Steppenwolf and Circle collaborated on two notable productions of Lanford's work - the remarkable revival of *Balm in Gilead* and the premiere of *Burn This*.)



I had the pleasure of getting to know Lanford better. The same year *HOT L* was the best American play of the season, *A Little Night Music* was the best American musical. I was a little friendly with Stephen Sondheim and took great pleasure in setting up a meal at Joe Allen's where I introduced them. Afterwards, Lanford and I walked to Greenwich Village (where we both had apartments). Exhilarated by meeting Sondheim, Lanford sang me much of the score of the opera version of Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke* he had written with composer Lee Hoiby. (His talents as a playwright outstripped his talents as a singer.)

Some years later, *The Dramatist*, the magazine of the Dramatists Guild, asked me to do a major interview with him, which gave us the opportunity to spend the day together in Princeton, where he was involved in a revival of his Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Talley's Folly*, at the McCarter Theatre. (That interview is included in my book, *What Playwrights Talk About When They Talk About Writing*.) This was an excuse to catch up at length. At the time, he had finally stopped the hard drinking he had been doing for years. It was good for his health, but he said he hadn't learned how to write sober and so wasn't working on anything.


In 2009, the Dramatists Guild honored him with a Lifetime Achievement Award, and I was asked to have a hand in producing the evening. This meant I wrote a speech about Lanford for Richard Thomas to read (Richard credited Lanford's *Fifth of July* for reviving his career). Various actors who had the luck to work with him were present to cheer him. I remember Laurie Metcalf, Judith Ivey and Tanya Berezin were at the head table with Richard, Terrence McNally and me. (Judy dubbed it "the cool kids table.") If he had ever entertained doubts as to the place he had claimed in the community's heart, they must have been set to rest that night. He and I and a few others went out for coffee afterwards and he told us what he believed happened to the characters in *Lemon Sky* in the next decade. (The characters, after all, were based on his family.) Intrigued by his stories, we urged him to write *Lemon Sunset* or whatever it might be called. He seemed to be considering the idea at evening's end. It was the last time I saw him. He died in 2011.

Not long ago, I wrote a play called *Kunstler* about the radical attorney, and Glen Roven suggested we record it. After we finished that project (available on Audible.com!), I told him how much I loved audio versions of plays. Glen asked me if I wanted to try my hand at producing some with him. We decided to start with two Lanford Wilson projects.

One of them is this recording of *The HOT L BALTIMORE*. We managed to get most of the leading players of the original production, and Marshall W. Mason, the original director, agreed to direct. It didn't matter that 40 years had passed. The voices were the same. Trish Hawkins magically drops 40 years and becomes the romantic teenage hooker, Conchatta Farrell knocks out April's raunchy lines with the brio I remembered from those two magical previews, and Judd Hirsch is the unrequited lover behind the counter again. Not to overlook the several other magical performances and the guest performance of Lisa Emery as Jackie.

To have helped put together this recording is satisfying on a couple of levels. One is that it gives me the opportunity to publicly salute and thank Lanford and Marshall and the work that inspired me when I was starting out as a playwright. And another is anticipating the pleasure new audiences will have at being introduced to one of the key works of the American stage.

Jeffrey Sweet is a playwright with a long history of working Off-Broadway and in Chicago. Several of his scripts are included in *The Value of Names and Other Plays*. He also wrote *Something Wonderful Right Away* (a history of Second City) and *The O'Neill* (a history of the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center).



THE HOT L BALTIMORE

TIMINGS:

ACT ONE: 44:17 - ACT TWO: 34:59 - ACT THREE: 32:07

TOTAL TIME: 1:51:23

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REMIXED & REMASTED BY

IRA YUSPEH

Art Direction by

ASHLEY JACKSON

SPECIAL THANKS TO DAVID BYRD

FOR THE USE OF HIS ORIGINAL ARTWORK

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