

ANGELS IN AMERICA

Part I: Millennium Approaches

by TONY KUSHNER

Producer's Notes

“So what's it about?” Since we decided to bring *Angels in America* to Sioux City theatergoers for the first time ever, I have heard this question and variations on it repeatedly. But this is a work that does not necessarily lend itself well to sound-bite answers.

If you ask this question of the average person on the streets of Sioux City, he or she will probably tell you that it is a play about AIDS and/or homosexuality. While it is certainly that, it is far more.

Our production, *Millennium Approaches*, is Part One of a two-part work, the whole of which is subtitled *A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. It is very much a product of its place and time, revolving around the emergence of AIDS in mid-Eighties America, but it asks larger and more timeless questions—namely what it means to be an American, a member of the national community. In the author's words: “... how broad is a community's embrace. How wide does it reach?”

While the major characters are all members of the larger American community, each has additional identities. Some they are born with, some are thrust upon them. They are Americans, but they are also what one might call “hyphenated Americans”; they are Mormon (Joe, Harper, Hannah), Republican (Joe, Roy), black (Belize), HIV-positive (Prior, Roy), or homosexual (whether openly or secretly). Each responds to inevitable change in their own way, whether by acceptance or denial of their various identities. Relationships between characters disintegrate and die (to be reformed in Part II; perestroika is, after all, Russian for “restructuring”)—and Louis, ever the idealist, wonders how American democracy will rise to the challenge.

A few characters are inspired by real people: Ethel Rosenberg, whose ghost visits Roy, and her husband Julius were in fact executed for espionage in 1959. Involved in their prosecution was a young Roy Cohn, who worked under Senator Joe McCarthy in the 1950s and did, in fact, die of AIDS in 1986, having been recently disbarred by the State of New York for professional misconduct and insisting to the last that his fatal illness was really “liver cancer”.

We're very proud to bring this monumental work to Siouxland audiences for the first time.

--Eric Newhouse, *Producer*

About the Play: Productions and Accolades

Setting: New York City, Salt Lake City and Elsewhere, 1985-1986

Angels in America, Part I: Millennium Approaches was first commissioned and performed in May 1990 by the Center Theater Group at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. The World Premiere was presented in May 1991 by the Eureka Theater Company in San Francisco, and Part I debuted in London

the following January at the Royal National Theatre.

While Part I was being performed, Part II, *Perestroika*, was still in development. Parts I and II premiered on Broadway at the Walter Kerr Theatre in April 1993, with a cast including Marcia Gay Harden and Ron Leibman.

In 1994, literary critic and Yale professor of humanities Harold Bloom added *Angels in America* to the tail end of his survey of assessment of the great and lasting works of post-Roman literature, *The Western Canon*.

Kushner adapted his own script for a two-part HBO Films miniseries in 2003, directed by Mike Nichols and starring Al Pacino, Meryl Streep, Mary Louise Parker and Emma Thompson (among others). As in the stage production, most of the actors played multiple roles.

In 2004, the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris premiered a two-part opera based on *Angels in America*, composed and conducted by the Hungarian composer Peter Eötvös.

Awards and Accolades

1993 Pulitzer Prize for Drama

1993 Tony Award, Best Play

1993 Drama Desk Award, Outstanding New Play

“Daring and dazzling! The most ambitious American play of our time: an epic that ranges from earth to heaven; focuses on politics, sex and religion; transports us to Washington, the Kremlin, the South Bronx, Salt Lake City and Antarctica; deals with Jews, Mormons, WASPs, blacks; switches between realism and fantasy, from the tragedy of AIDS to the camp comedy of drag queens to the death or at least the absconding of God.”

Jack Kroll, *Newsweek*

“A vast miraculous play ... provocative, witty and deeply upsetting ... a searching and radical rethinking of American political drama ... ”

Frank Rich, *The New York Times*

“An epic theatrical fever dream ... a three-hour cliffhanger that leaves you wanting more.”

Variety

“A victory for theater, for the transforming power of the imagination to turn devastation into beauty.”

John Lahr, *New Yorker*

About the Production

Part I is a play in three acts; there will be two short intermissions during which refreshments will be available from Fiona's Firehouse Bistro.

Dinner will also be available before the show courtesy of Fiona's Firehouse Bistro; contact us about special rates allowing you to enjoy dinner and stay for the show

The story of *Angels in America* will come to a conclusion next year, when we present *Angels in America, Part II: Perestroika* in April 2008.

Cast (in order of appearance)

Lindsay Bottger	Hannah Pitt, Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz, Henry, Ethel Rosenberg
Paul Guggenheimer	Roy M. Cohn, 17 th Century Prior
Bryan Deck	Joe Pitt, 13 th Century Prior, The Eskimo
Amanda Lempares	Harper Pitt, Martin Heller
Brian Gamos	Belize, Mr. Lies
Christopher Gaul	Louis Ironson
Jack Hysell	Prior Walter, The Man in the Park
Iris Seaman	The Angel, Sister Ella Chapter, The Woman in the South Bronx
Directed by	Jamie Lempares and Jessica Wheeler

shot in the dark
P R O D U C T I O N S

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