

In Memory of Terrence McNally

MetroStage, The Board of Trustees and
Carolyn Griffin, Producing Artistic Director
present

FRANKIE §
JOHNNY
by
Terrence McNally
in the Clair de Lune

Stefan Sittig
director

Wendy Roome
video editor


CAST

Veronica del Cerro
Frankie

Michael Kevin Darnall
Johnny

and featuring

Robert Aubry Davis
as Radio Announcer



Originally Produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club on June 2, 1987

METRO
OFF BROADWAY ON THE RIVER'S EDGE
STAGE

We wish to express our gratitude to the Performers' Unions: ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION, AMERICAN GUILD OF MUSICAL ARTISTS, AMERICAN GUILD OF VARIETY ARTISTS, SAG-AFTRA through Theatre Authority, Inc. for their cooperation in permitting the Artists to appear on this program.
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Veronica del Cerro (Frankie) is a native of Washington DC. DC credits include Shakespeare Theatre: *Othello*; Constellation: *Arabian Nights*; GALA: *El Paso Blue*, *Ana en el Tropic*; Everyman: *August: Osage County*; Kennedy Center TYA: *Adventures of Homer*; Borderlands Theatre, AZ: *No Roosters in the Desert*; MetroStage: *Savage in Limbo*; Theatre J: *Andy and the Shadows*, *The Seagull on 16th*; Studio: *My Children! My Africa!*, *Rock n' Roll*; Forum: *Marisol*, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*; Round House: *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. Now living in Santander, Spain, she is involved with Café de las Artes (*Insomnia*, *The Other Map*) and Movimiento en Red (currently: *RitUarte* and *Al Relente*). International devised projects include *Looking for Hamlet* (Teatro del Mundo, Germany), *The Bald Soprano*, *Arthalia* (UK) and *Colourscape* (UK), *El Luto Nos Viene Bien* (Proyecto Bicefalo, ENAT, Mexico City) and *Dead Tree Gives No Shelter* (Knaive Theatre, UK/Denmark). She has directed (*Importance of Being Earnest*, *Time Flies*) and created murder mysteries (*For the Love of the Game*) in Marbella with International Theatre Studio. She has a BS from Virginia Tech (Psych and Theatre Arts), Studio Theatre, MA in Theatre from Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (London), and is a 500HR RYT (yoga teacher), in addition to studying Shakespeare at LAMDA and others.

Michael Kevin Darnall (Johnny) returns to MetroStage having appeared in *Savage in Limbo*, and *The Sand Storm*; REGIONAL: Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park: *Jitney*; Chautauqua Theater Co.: *One Man, Two Guvnors*; Ford's: *Jefferson's Garden*, *A Christmas Carol*; Round House: *Father Comes Home from the Wars*; Studio: *Wig Out!*, *Animal*; Mosaic: *Ulysses on Bottles*; Theater J: *Yentl*; Imagination Stage: *The Jungle Book*; RhinoLeap Prod.: *The 39 Steps*; Constellation: *Journey to the West*, *The Fire and the Rain*, *Metamorphoses*. TV: *The Wire*. AWARDS: Five time Helen Hayes nominee. OTHER: Company Member at The Hub Theatre (*Failure: A Love Story*, *Big Love*), and an Entangled Artist at Spooky Action (*New Guidelines for Peaceful Times*, *The Small Room at the Top of the Stairs*, *Last of the Whyos*, *The Wedding Dress*, *Voltaire's Candide or Optimism!*). Training: SUNY Purchase: BFA in Acting.

Stefan Sittig (director) has worked on nearly 100 productions either as director, choreographer or fight director and his work has been seen Off-Broadway, internationally in Canada, Brazil and Uruguay and at regional theatres across the country. He has directed and choreographed the musicals *Trabajadores* (the world premiere of the Spanish version of Stephen Schwartz's *Working*), Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* and *Red Hot & Cole*, Jerry Herman's *Jerry's Girls*, the 60's review *Beehive* and plays including Terrence McNally's *Mothers & Sons* (as part of the McNally Tribute) and Jason Odell Williams' dramedy *Church & State*, both at MetroStage. Choreography credits include: *Who Is Eartha Mae?* (Theatre Row/NYC), *Jessie* (Chelsea Playhouse/NYC), *Changing Hearts* (Canada); *Flora The Red Menace* (1st Stage), *Man of La Mancha* (Washington Savoyards), *The Wiz* (Atlas), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Open Circle - Helen Hayes Award Nomination), *Polaroid Stories* (Studio), *Noel & Gertie* (MetroStage), *Dorothy Meets Alice* (Adventure Theatre), and *Hollywood Pinafore* (American Century Theater). Stefan is on the board at Virginia Theatre Association (VTA) and on the faculty at George Mason Univ. School of Theater. He holds an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth Univ. and a BA from the Univ. of Virginia. He hosts the podcast *American Theatre Artists Online*, where he interviews leading figures in American Theatre. stefansittig.com

Wendy Roome (video/editor) supported herself for 42 years by working as a research scientist for Bell Labs in New Jersey. In her spare time, she designed lighting and/or sound for over 75 community theater productions, completely rewired one theater, and assisted with set construction. When in-person performances were shut down due to Covid, she began working on video productions. She was the video editor for *Mothers and Sons* in January at MetroStage. Off-stage, she and her wife are owned by several cats, and split their time between Florida & New Jersey.



**CAST &
DIRECTOR**

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Terrence McNally was awarded the Dramatists Guild Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011. He is the winner of Tony Awards for his plays LOVE! VALOUR! COMPASSION! and MASTER CLASS and his books for the musicals RAGTIME and KISS OF THE SPIDERWOMAN. In 2010 the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts presented TERRENCE McNALLY'S NIGHTS AT THE OPERA, a three-play festival of his work. His other plays include FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE; LIPS TOGETHER, TEETH APART; CORPUS CHRISTI; A PERFECT GANESH; THE RITZ; IT'S ONLY A PLAY; SOME MEN; GOLDEN AGE; DEUCE; THE LISBON TRAVIATA; BAD HABITS; THE STENDHAL SYNDROME; DEDICATION OR THE STUFF OF DREAMS; NEXT; UNUSUAL ACTS OF DEVOTION; SWEET EROS; WITNESS; WHERE HAS TOMMY FLOWERS GONE?; and his first Broadway production AND THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT (1965). His other books for musicals are THE FULL MONTY, A MAN OF NO IMPORTANCE, THE VISIT, THE RINK, CATCH ME IF YOU CAN and ANASTASIA. He won an Emmy Award for Best Drama with his teleplay ANDRE'S MOTHER (1990), which he followed with the stage sequel MOTHERS AND SONS (2014). He wrote the screenplays for FRANKIE AND JOHNNY, LOVE! VALOUR! COMPASSION! and THE RITZ. He wrote the libretto for the opera DEAD MAN WALKING with music by Jake Heggie. Among his many awards are a Citation from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best New Play, four Drama Desk Awards, three Hull-Warriner Best Play Awards from the Dramatists Guild, two Obies, two Lortel Awards and two Guggenheim Fellowships. Mr. McNally has been a member of the Dramatists Guild since 1965 and served as its Vice-President from 1985 to 2001. He married Tom Kirdahy in 2015 having been joined in a civil union since 2003. He received the Tony Award for lifetime achievement in 2019. McNally died of coronavirus complications March, 2020.

For more information:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/24/theater/terrence-mcnally-dead-coronavirus.html>

<https://www.amny.com/entertainment/theater/terrence-mcnally-master-playwright-and-gay-pioneer-81-falls-to-coronavirus/>

Tom Viola, longtime director of Broadway Cares/ Equity Fights AIDS, posted that McNally was one of the group's "founding fathers" because he "believed that the most important function of theatre is to create community." He wrote that McNally "gave voice to both the voiceless and those who can stand tall, not only through his art but also his actions. He was a steadfast champion for civil and LGBTQ rights onstage and off. He gave us unforgettable characters who told delicate, brilliant, courageous, and unforgettable stories that reflected the lives and dreams, joys and heartbreak of us all."



**THE
PLAYWRIGHT**

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Metrostage will continue to pay tribute to Terrence McNally,

considered "one of our most original and audacious playwrights" (New Yorker), by presenting a virtual reading of *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*. MetroStage produced two of McNally's plays, *It's Only a Play* (1994-95 season) and *Master Class* (2016-17 season) and in January of this year produced a reading of McNally's play *Mothers and Sons*. He died of complications from COVID-19 a year ago so it is our privilege to be honoring him with these two virtual readings.

Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune premiered off-Broadway in 1987 at the Manhattan Theatre Club starring Kathy Bates and F. Murray Abraham. (Bates won a 1988 Obie Award and was nominated for a Drama Desk Award.) When it arrived on Broadway in 2002, it featured Edie Falco and Stanley Tucci (by the way, I hope everyone is watching the CNN series Stanley Tucci *Searching for Italy*), who were replaced by Rosie Perez and Joe Pantoliano. It received a Tony nomination for Best Revival of a Play and Tucci for Best Perf by a Leading Actor. Most recently, it was revived in 2019, starring Audra McDonald and Michael Shannon. It has received a Tony nomination for Best Revival of a Play and Audra McDonald for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Play. Voting has taken place but the Awards will be presented when Broadway reopens.

This play, a two-hander, has been described as a "feast for actors" (Hollywood Reporter) and has had very interesting casts over the years. In choosing a cast for this reading, I immediately thought of **Veronica del Cerro** and **Michael Kevin Darnall** who had played opposite each other in the MetroStage production of *Savage in Limbo* in 2011. In *Savage in Limbo* they were sexy and had a volatile relationship. Seemed like a no-brainer! Only problem was that the script describes Frankie as "striking, but not conventional good looks." Veronica has far more than "conventional good looks", but why can't a waitress living in a "one-room apartment in a walk-up tenement" with a history of failed relationships be beautiful?? (The 1991 film of the play starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Al Pacino was roundly criticized because Pfeiffer was too beautiful!) The only other issue was that Veronica now lives in Spain so the 6 hour time difference complicated our rehearsal schedule, but we made it work because in my mind this was a perfect cast.

McNally has written an amazing play about two lonely, out of sorts, living on the fringe of society, people; one who has decided there is no time to waste, mistakes have been made, but life is short, and this may just be the "one" who he would like to spend his life with. Problem is that she has given up on love and relationships and is not interested. It is nothing more than a one-night stand, and she would like him to leave. But this short order cook, who quotes Shakespeare and has "sexy wrists" according to the other waitresses at the diner, persists. What unfolds is fascinating, riveting, sometimes funny, but all too real in everyday relationships. As the evening proceeds we learn a lot about what drives each character, which makes for a terrific character study with great dialogue and tension. You must watch to see what happens, but I can promise you will care deeply for both of these people as the tension unfolds.

As an interesting aside, *Frankie and Johnny* was revived on Broadway in 2019, the same year that *Burn This* by Lanford Wilson returned. One of my favorite plays was *Burn This*, starring Paul Morella on our Duke Street stage (1991-92). Both plays portray compelling, complicated relationships that I find fascinating and portray the complexity of all personal/emotional/sexual connections. Such a crazy coincidence that both would return to Broadway the same season. Or maybe not. Theatre has such a curious way of showing how the universe may have its hands in more than we realize.

I would like to thank the great commitment from all involved that made this possible. Veronica and Michael rearranged apartments to look like a one bed apartment, even finding a window to virtually match, and dealt with their lights and audio issues, and of course, the bed sheets and costumes. Stefan and Wendy, continuing from our collaboration with *Mothers and Sons*, are invaluable. Of course, nothing with graphics, playbill etc would happen without the talent and friendship of Chris Banks. So I welcome all to this second virtual reading from MetroStage while theatres are closed, and we are regrouping, rebuilding and raising money for the new theater.



NOTES FROM THE PRODUCER

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As an update to the new theatre, the design has been completed by our architect in collaboration with the condo architects as this former hotel is being converted into condos AND a theatre. It is an exciting prospect for MetroStage to have a beautiful new theatre, still small and intimate, but with state of the art technology, including an advanced air filtration system that is now necessary as a result of Covid-19. Our Capital Campaign to raise \$1,500,000 to outfit and complete the theatre has officially begun so donations are being gratefully accepted. There are naming opportunities, and many ways to receive recognition for helping make this new theatre a reality. Check the website or call me for more information. Our website has a secure donate button and a mailing address if one prefers to send a check. All are tax deductible contributions to a very good cause, helping to continue MetroStage's 35 year history of producing intriguing work in an intimate setting with tremendous talent on stage and off.

