

A black and white portrait of Emily Dickinson, a young woman with dark hair parted in the middle, wearing a dark, long-sleeved dress with a white collar and a dark necktie. She is seated and looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

UA Theatre and Dance
Presents:

Is My Verse Alive?

A Staged Reading

Written By
Dr. Steve Burch

DINAH WASHINGTON CULTURAL ARTS CENTER

November 12th

Is My Verse Alive?

Dr. Steve Burch
PLAYWRIGHT

Annie Levy[†]
DIRECTOR

Allison Millwee
STAGE MANAGER

CAST

Emily Dickinson

KELLEY SCHOGER

Thomas Higginson

KYLE CHESNEY

Mabel Loomis Todd

KATHARINA FOX

Stage Directions

EMILY EARLE

Presented by with grant support from The Alabama Humanities Foundation, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)



CAST & CREW

ANNIE G. LEVY† (Director) is a theatre-maker and director whose work often revolves around modern mythology, historical turning points and scientific breakthroughs. Her recent piece *TREE ARMY: The CCC Project* brought the history of the Civilian Conservation Corp back into the state parks that the CCC built in the 1930s through performance. Her piece *SIX SEEDS: The Persephone Project* will have its international debut in Prague in 2019. Levy is a founding member of World Wide Lab, an international director's collective and theatre laboratory. With WWL, she has created work for the Irondale Center in Brooklyn, Teatro Due in Rome, Syros Institute on the Greek Island of Syros, Art Zone 453 in Taipei, Taiwan, and for the Superior Theatre Festival in Thunder Bay, Canada. She has also created and directed new work with theatre incubator warner | shaw, the Northwood Theatre Company and various other theatres, including City Center, Dixon Place, HERE, The New Ohio Theatre, Theatre at the Tank, Fringenyc, Space on White and Access Theatre. She has received a FAIR assistantship at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, a residency at Robert Wilson's Watermill Center, was a Paul Artist Resident at Indiana University, Bloomington and a Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Uptown/Downtown Artist. She is a member of the Lincoln Center Theatre Directors Lab and an associate member of SDC. She received her BA and an MA in Cognitive Science in Education from Columbia University and her MFA from Sarah Lawrence. She is the head of the MFA Directing and Stage Management concentrations at The University of Alabama. www.annielevy.com

ALLISON MILLWEE (Stage Manager) is a Sophomore Theatre major from Houston, TX. Previous UA credits include *Suddenly*, *Last Summer* (ASM), *A Bright Room Called Day* (ASM), and *August: Osage County* (PA). She thanks her family and friends for their continued support.

KELLEY SCHOGER (Emily Dickinson) is Assistant Professor of Acting & Movement in the graduate and undergraduate theatre programs at The University of Alabama. She is an actor, movement specialist and nationally certified teacher of the Alexander Technique. She performed professionally in New York City for ten years as an actor and puppeteer. As a movement specialist, she has coached and created ensemble movement sequences at Arena Stage in DC, various theatres on

the east coast, and with physical theatre company, Complicite, through their artist education program. Kelley wrote, choreographed, and performed a short solo movement piece, *Her Destined Port*, at La Mama Experimental Theatre Club in New York City in 2015. She is currently developing a new one woman show, *Beauty, Identity, Release* that will be performed in Austria in Dec. 2018. At UA she performed the role of Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* in 2016. She has led workshops in movement and acting throughout the country, and is a member of The American Society for the Alexander Technique, Southeastern Theatre Conference and Association of Theatre Movement Educators. Kelley is delighted to be delving into the world of Emily Dickinson in Dr. Burch's beautiful play.

KYLE CHESNEY (Mr. Laurence/Fight Captain) is a Third year MFA Theatre with a Concentration in Acting Candidate from Laurel, MS and will be graduating this spring. Previous UA credits include: *The Philadelphia Story* (Sandy), *Hamlet* (Horatio), *A Bright Room Called Day* (Herr Swetts/Traum), *August: Osage County* (Sgt. Gilbeau) and *Little Women* (Mr. Laurence). Other credits: *Richard III* (Ensemble) with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival and *The Full Monty* (Harold) with Festival 56.

KATHARINA FOX (Mabel Loomis Todd) is a Senior German and Theatre double Major with a minor in Journalism and Creative Media from Tuscaloosa. Previous UA credits include *Vinegar Tom* (Ellen/Kramer), in *August: Osage County* (Mattie Fae Aiken) and *Appropriate* (Looter/Rachael U/S).

EMILY EARLE (Stage Directions) is a Sophomore BA Theatre major with a Concentration in Musical Theatre from Jackson, MS. Previous credits include *Our Town* (Emily), *All Shook Up* (Natalie), and *Little Shop of Horrors* (Audrey). Roll tide!

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

This is a love story between two people who could not express let alone acknowledge their attraction.

This is also the story of the creation of a book, one of the four pillars of American writing.

I began this in the spring of 2012 after reading a reprint of Thomas Higginson's "Emily Dickinson's Letters" from the Atlantic Monthly, October 1891. What impressed me was the extent that their epistolary relationship had an arc to it of repressed passion (erotic and romantic) which Dickinson and Higginson could only express in their writings to each other. I hastily scratched out a draft, intending it as a possible play of letter readings between these two characters, but I quickly abandoned that idea.

Some months went by. Then in a conversation with a colleague, I realized that what I was missing was a third character (Mabel Loomis Todd) and at least some scenes where Dickinson and Higginson actually talk and interact together. Which they actually did. Twice. After this next draft, I was steered to two wonderful books, *White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson*, by Brenda Wineapple and *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* by Peter Gay. Their books did not alter my storyline or its conclusions, but each deepened my understanding of these three remarkable people.

Right now, approximately 90-95% of the dialogue comes straight from the letters and some poems and diary excerpts. I have taken some dramatic license in carving out my narrative, but, perhaps surprisingly, very little. Their second meeting has no documentation, other than it happened. The events during that meeting are the only purely fictional element of the play (though I have streamlined characters and shifted some times, e.g., not getting into Higginson's second marriage after Mary's death or Dickinson's late engagement, placing the first meeting between Higginson and Todd at a later date than actually occurred, etc.). But I think the story is true, or close enough to true though I am sure my interpretation of Emily is only hampered by my own limitations.

Steve Burch

Professor,
Playwriting, Theatre History

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