

# F irebelly Productions

**SPRING 2008**

**2007-2008 Season**

Firebelly continues its mission to offer young adults opportunities in professional theatre and to reach out to those in the community. Our fall and summer productions are directed by two new young directors and bring new and “old” classics to the community.

**Oct. 11-Nov. 4** *Nothing Sacred* by George F. Walker, based on Dostoyevsky’s *Fathers and Sons*, Directed by Guest Director Robb Hunter (Master’s candidate at Virginia Commonwealth University)

**Feb. 14- March 4, 2008** *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* by Eugene O’Neill, Directed by Kathi Gollwitzer

**June 26 - July 20, 2008** *A Body of Water* by Lee Blessing, Directed by Guest Director Michael Ryan Fernandez (Graduate student at DePaul University, Chicago IL)

**Oct. 13- Nov. 16 2008** **To Be Confirmed...** but most likely it’s a comedy! Check our Web site for details!

**All performances** at Theatre on the Run, 3700 South Four Mile Run Drive, Arlington, VA 22205; Box office 703.409.2372, visit [www.firebellyproductions.net](http://www.firebellyproductions.net)

## **NOTHING SACRED**

Providing the opportunity for a Master’s student at Virginia Commonwealth University to direct a show within professional theatre is part of Firebelly’s mission. In November 2007, Robb Hunter, a previous fight choreographer and weapons instructor for Firebelly, debuted as Director. He selected a piece with plenty of gunplay and fist fights, *Nothing Sacred* by well-known Canadian playwright George Walker. Several groups attended the production including the AAUW, Northern Virginia Chapter, who dubbed Walker as “the most well-known Canadian writer we’ve never heard of” and a high school writers group attending a workshop at Cooper Union College in Maryland. While both groups had plenty of questions during talk-backs with cast and crew, the students found more laughter in this production than we imagined. The Cast found both talkbacks insightful and encouraging.



*From Nothing Sacred, photo by Ray Gniewek*

## **LONG DAY’S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT**

When we announced this show, one longtime patron commented that “you certainly are taking on ambitious works.” Indeed, to give young actors and technicians a challenge, Firebelly never shies from difficult, challenging works. In addition, Eugene O’Neill, as a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, *Long Day’s Journey into Night* hit our mission statement headon: great literature, great opportunities for young actors and technicians, and great for student and older audiences. Reviews were strong, “Under Gollwitzer’s firm hand, the results form a mesmerizing ensemble, make a convoluted text clear, humanized, and upbeat.” See all our reviews at [www.firebellyproductions.net](http://www.firebellyproductions.net).



*From Long Day’s Journey into Night. (Ray Gniewek)*

## **A BODY OF WATER**

Opening in June and directed by Michael Ryan Fernandez, a film and directing Master’s candidate at DePaul University in Chicago, this play by American playwright

Lee Blessing is a suspenseful and mysterious exploration of the relationship between memory and identity. A middle aged couple awake one morning in a living room in a house near the water. We don't know who they are, how they got there, or how they are related. And neither do they.

## Firebelly Receives AAUW's Elizabeth Campbell Award for Advancement of the Arts

Firebelly's Kathi Gollwitzer and Barbara Walthall accept the Elizabeth Campbell Award for Advancement of the Arts from the American Association of University Women (Northern Virginia Chapter) on May 17, 2008.

"This award really validates for us the work we set out to do," said Barbara. "We are honored to be in such good company of such other talented and dedicated recipients."

The award was named for the late founder of WETA who was a member of the organization. Campbell personally delivered the application for UHF Channel 26 to Newton Minow, Chairman of the FCC in 1961, and the station's offices were originally located in her home. She was a force in the movement to support the arts throughout her long life, and died at the age of 101 in 2004.

While the award may go to groups or individuals in disciplines other than theater, many of the recipients have been theaters or theater artists. Among the recipients in the theater arts have been [The Arlington Players](#), Eric Schaeffer of [Signature Theatre](#), Inna Shapiro of [Classika Theatre](#), Jack Marshall of [The American Century Theater](#), Christopher Henley of the [Washington Shakespeare Company](#) and Paata and Irina Tsikurishvili of [Synetic Theater](#).

Other winners this year include Ray Gniewek, who has donated his photographic services to Firebelly and other arts companies for many years. "Ray has substantially elevated the perception and artistic competency of Firebelly, and many others, in the Washington area." Gollwitzer commented. "We are delighted that Ray joins us in an award this year, too."

This award is the second award for Firebelly since its inception in 2002. In 2003, it received the Bright New Star Award from the Arlington Commission for the Arts.

## TOADS...WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Because many of our Actors and Technicians are students, they move on to additional performance opportunities and careers. A sampling of where our young "toads" are:

**Nick Yenson** (*Sylvia, Of Mice and Men*) graduated from the University of Limerick (Ireland) with a degree in Irish music and dance. He recently performed in *Riverdance* in Ireland, the U.S. and the UK, has moved to California, and

is auditioning for several dramatic parts, including *The History Boys*.

**Phillip James Brannon** (Firebelly's *Of Mice and Men, Waiting for Godot*) graduated from DePaul University as a Goodman Fellow. He has worked non-stop since his graduation. He performed at Chicago's Goodman Theatre's *A Christmas Carol*, as Maurice in *The Ballad of Emmett Till* (April 26-June 1, 2008), as Aaron the moor in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. ("Some superb acting moments here—most notably the meta-theatrical instant when Phillip James Brannon reacts to being cast as the villainous moor."—*Chicago Tribune*). This fall he appears in *Amadeus* in Chicago Shakespeare Courtyard Theatre, Sept. 6-Nov. 9 2008.

**Kristin Villanueva** (Firebelly's *Sylvia, Waiting for Godot*), graduated from Syracuse University, recently received rave reviews in Colorado for her performances in *Comedy of Errors*. "The New York-based Villanueva's performance ... makes this production a "don't you dare miss it" offering." Now a graduate, she has the lead as Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well* at Shakespeare and Co., Lenox, MA June 20-Aug. 31, Directed y Tina Packer.

**Michael Eggleston**, (*Of Mice and Men, Waiting for Godot*, and technical crew for *The Children's Hour*) remains in the class of 2010 at Yale University.

**James Shirey** (*Of Mice and Men*) begins his second at Harvard University in September 2008..

## New Partners/ People

Firebelly will be working with Pathways Homes and their 18-25 year old youth to provide education, background information, and theatrical experiences to these youth who are looking for new, productive ways to be involved in their community and opportunities for personal growth.

Anna Gionfridda joins Firebelly as an intern/ assistant. Anna was assistant stage manager for *Nothing Sacred* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. A recent Fine Arts major from James Madison University, Anna will continue to learn new realms as a stage manager and sound booth technician with *A Body of Water* this summer.

Michael Ryan Fernandez joined Firebelly as stage manager for *Nothing Sacred* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. A recent graduate from George Mason University with a BA in theatre, Mike is gaining hands-on, substantial training in professional theatre with Firebelly. This summer, he will direct Firebelly's production, *A Body of Water*, in preparation for his Master's programs at DePaul University.

Visit our Web site for other toad highlights, [www.firebellyproductions.net](http://www.firebellyproductions.net)

( All photos by Ray Gniewek for Firebelly Productions)

