

Catch him if you can

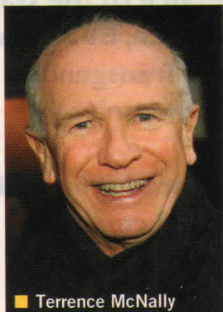
Terrence McNally speeds into the fifth decade of his illustrious career with new works premiering in New York, San Diego, and San Francisco
By Gerard Raymond

“My cup runneth over, as they say,” says Terrence

McNally cheerfully. The renowned gay playwright has cause to be ecstatic. He has a new play, *Dedication or The Stuff of Dreams*, running in New York, and an even newer work, *Crucifixion*, receiving its world premiere in San Francisco in October. In addition, he is one of the talents behind *Chita Rivera: The Dancer's Life*, an unusual Broadway-bound musical event opening in September in San Diego, and he has penned the lyrics for a 20-minute musical composition by Jake Heggie, “At the Statue of Venus,” for soprano Renée Fleming that will mark the opening of a new opera house in Denver, also in September. Oh, and in the months ahead will come another new play (*Some Men*), and a new musical, *Catch Me If You Can*, written with Mark Shaiman and Scott Wittman.

Not bad for a man who went through a bout of lung cancer a few years ago and who celebrates his 66th birthday in November.

“It is just a wonderful time in my life,” Mc-



Terrence McNally

Nally explains. “I seem to have gotten over my health problems, and I’m in a very good relationship.” This December the playwright marks the second anniversary of his Vermont civil union with attorney Tom Kirdahy, who fortuitously came into his life not long after McNally lost a long-term partner, playwright Gary Bonasorte, to AIDS in 2000.

“I never feel more alive than when I am in rehearsal, and I am happy to be working with some great colleagues,” McNally exclaims. He has been writing plays featuring gay characters since one of his earliest works, *And Things That Go Bump in the Night*, which suffered a quick demise on Broadway in 1965. In 1975 he enjoyed his first Broadway success with the yearlong run of *The Ritz*, a riotous comedy set in a gay bathhouse. Two decades later he won the Tony award for Best Play with *Love! Valour! Compassion!* Featuring a remarkable performance by longtime collaborator Nathan Lane, McNally’s tale of the endurance of gay friendship became the definitive gay play of the 1990s in much the same way that Mart Crowley’s dark *The Boys in the Band* had de-

DVD

Chicago and Paris on DVD

Two classics from queer directors hit DVD in September from Buena Vista Home Entertainment. Jennie Livingston’s drag-ball extravaganza *Paris Is Burning* makes its DVD debut September 6 with outtakes and a commentary, while Rob Marshall’s Oscar-winning *Chicago* gets a Mama Morton-size three-disc collector’s edition September 13, with the entire soundtrack plus eight new extra features.



LANE: JAMES LEVENSE; McNALLY: GETTY IMAGES



■ Nathan Lane (third from right) resumes his work with McNally in *Dedication* or *The Stuff of Dreams*.

...fined the 1960s. The following year McNally won the Tony again for *Master Class*, his portrait of opera diva Maria Callas.

In *Dedication* (now playing at New York's Primary Stages) McNally examines the price people are willing to pay for the fulfillment of their dreams. A children's theater director and his actress wife are put to the test when they meet up with an old lady (played by Marian Seldes) who owns an abandoned historic theater they would dearly love to acquire. The playwright wrote the part of the theater director with Nathan Lane in mind—and luckily Lane was able to open the show in New York between filming *The Producers* and rehearsing for the upcoming Broadway revival of *The Odd Couple*. (He leaves the production in early September.)

McNally's work on *Chita Rivera: The Dancer's Life* honors another longtime collaborator: Rivera earned Tonys for starring in two McNally-penned musicals, *The Rink* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. "I know Chita very well, so I felt comfortable writing a character called Chita," the playwright says, referring to the stage persona he and Rivera created for her musical "autobiographical play."

"At the core of the show is the discipline to which a dancer has to adhere to have a real career in the theater," McNally continues. "Chita is committed to live performance, and talking about it becomes a master class in becoming an artist."

McNally led his own de facto master classes at San Francisco's New Conservatory Theatre Center during the 15 months he spent in residency with the company developing the drama *Crucifixion*. "I have had shows that have been commercial and I have been lucky, and here I have an opportunity to pay back," he explains. The play turns on the murder of a Los Angeles television producer by a Jesuit priest. "It's a challenging piece for me to pull off," McNally says. "[But] I am intrigued by the random acts of violence and also the inevitability." ■

Raymond writes on theater and film and lives in New York City.

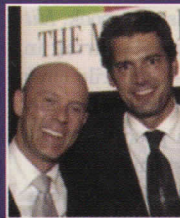


16th Annual Los Angeles Leadership Awards

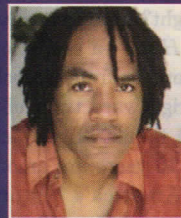
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