



BILL W. and Dr. BOB

by Stephen Bergman & Janet Surrey *Directed by* Rick Lombardo

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AN INVITATION TO YOUR THEATRE TO

“PASS IT ON!”

**TO PRODUCE A CRITICALLY-ACCLAIMED
COMMERCIALY-SUCCESSFUL**

OFF-BROADWAY PLAY

**WHICH WILL EXPAND AUDIENCES TO INCLUDE DIVERSE
RACIAL, CULTURAL, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS**

AND

BUILD COMMUNITY

THROUGH A LIVELY CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN:

*** NON-PROFIT THEATRE**

*** LOCAL TREATMENT CENTER(S)**

*** DEDICATED FINANCIAL DONORS**

*** CIVIC INSTITUTIONS**

*** AND THE “RECOVERY” COMMUNITY**

LETTER FROM THE AUTHORS

Stephen Bergman and Janet Surrey

BILL W. AND DR. BOB, the story of the relationship between the two men that led to the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935, was a smash hit in Boston last year, breaking the record for ticket sales in a three-week sold-out run at the 400-seat non-profit New Repertory Theatre. Directed by Rick Lombardo, it moved to Off Broadway in February 2007 and is in its third month of an open-ended run at the 355-seat New World Stages—“The sleeper hit of the season! Pick of the week!”—NYTheatre.com.

“An insightful new play”—The New York Times

“An endearing portrait of friendship uplifted by warm humor”—The New Yorker

“An earnest production with inspired performances”—Associated Press

“A textured and truthful telling of AA’s story...inspiring”—Boston Globe

“Deeply humane, audience-embracing, intelligent writing, a leavening of humor and an innate power of biographical storytelling. A remarkable story!”—Variety (For other reviews, see press package enclosed).

It is written by the husband and wife team of Stephen Bergman (a doctor who, under the pen-name “Samuel Shem,” is author of the classic medical novels THE HOUSE OF GOD and MOUNT MISERY, which have sold over three million copies) and Janet Surrey, a clinical psychologist widely published in the fields of substance abuse, relational psychotherapy, and Buddhist practice.

In both Boston and New York the play has attracted diverse audiences: regular theatre-goers, and the large community of people connected with Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step recovery programs, treatment centers, and civic groups (see NYTimes feature, 4/2/07, enclosed). It began life in New York with an advance sale of \$235,000—considered exceptional in the current Off Broadway market. The “word-of-mouth” is remarkable, and through the AA network and the play’s website (billwanddrbob.com), it is now being talked about all over America. In talkbacks with audiences we have heard variations of the same comments over and over: “This isn’t just a great play, it’s a phenomenon!” And: “I didn’t know anything about AA—but I loved this play!”

Although the play focuses on the founding of AA, we have come to realize that at heart it is not simply about alcoholism, it is a great American success story—of healing. Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith were alone and about to die, and they discovered that “The only thing that can keep a drunk sober is telling his story to another drunk,” that is, the healing power of authentic connection. Audiences have shown us that this is a universal human story of the deadliness of isolation, and the healing power of connection.

We invite you to participate in using BILL W. AND DR. BOB not only as a powerful, humorous, inspiring and redemptive theatre event, but also to bring in a new diverse audience of theatre goers (some of whom may never have been in a theatre before), and to create links that will build community.

A MODEL

Through our experience in Boston and New York we have come to see a model for doing this. It is simple, and not hard to create—people are attracted to this work. The elements that can be linked up are as follows:

- 1) Regional theatre production.** Six characters, simple set, piano. Media coverage, because of the themes of the play, has always been substantial. There is opportunity to do outreach, education, community building around the play. April is National Alcohol and Addiction Month, and coordination with other community groups around this date might be helpful.
- 2) Local substance abuse treatment center.** Most communities have private treatment centers that are interested in being part of the larger community and becoming more well known as resources. Funds to enhance the non-profit production, in return for recognition in the Playbill or display in lobby, are often easy to obtain. In Boston and New York, both local and national treatment centers have “bought the house” at a discounted ticket price, and then held benefit/fund-raisers, selling tickets for whatever price they wish. Talkbacks with actors, director, and authors are a great attraction.
- 3) Dedicated financial donors.** Every community has philanthropists with a special connection to AA—either personally or through family members. In Boston we easily raised \$108,000 non-profit enhancement money for the production; in New York most of our \$1,100,000 budget came from those who had some connection to treatment centers, or family members in 12-step programs—their investments, though for profit, were made because they believed in the project, not for monetary gain. Many of our investors

have expressed interest in bringing the play to their cities—one of them may well live in your city, and want to get involved. We can help connect you.

4) Civic institutions. Public and private, state, federal and corporate involvement is easily arranged. Large medical and insurance companies bought blocks of tickets for people in treatment centers and halfway houses. In both Boston and New York there have been “special events”, talkbacks and fundraisers: local family therapy institutes, Gold Foundation buying tickets for medical students, Boston Housing Authority, AA affinity groups such as “Doctors Helping Doctors” and “Lawyers Helping Lawyers”. Grants, such as federal and state arts grants—many of which emphasize “community outreach” and “diversity of audience”—may be obtained.

5) The “recovery community”. This is a responsive, dedicated, closely-linked network that will support the play with passion and intelligence. Many attend the play with their “group,” and return with their mothers, fathers, children, friends to see the show again. They want to let people see what AA “is really about,” to dispel some of the myths of this anonymous fellowship. As several audience members said in talkbacks: “For the first time I felt that the last stigma of going to AA has vanished.” Another comment: “This is like going to the best meeting ever!”

As WBAI, Pacifica Radio in New York put it: “There is something rare and exciting happening at the New World Theatre... Theatre producers often aspire to find ‘new audiences,’ (and it’s happening here.)... Profoundly moving and highly dramatic. It is theatre for a new audience.”

Join us in this gratifying and creative endeavor. Contact information:

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Note: presentation of the play does not imply affiliation with nor approval or endorsement from Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.