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## 'Southern Comforts' writer was raised in Mine Hill

NOVEMBER 16, 2008

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Mine Hill native Kathleen Clark mined her Morris County roots while writing "Southern Comforts," which opens Thursday at the Morris Museum's Bickford Theatre in Morris Township. She also tapped her family roots to craft this warm comedy about a December-December relationship between a stoic Jersey widower and a vivacious Southern widow.



Mine Hill native Kathleen Clark mined her Morris County roots while writing 'Southern Comforts,' which opens Thursday at the Morris Museum's Bickford Theatre in Morris Township.

(Courtesy of Kathleen Clark)

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Clark's still a Jersey girl, living in Leonia, from where she's gaining national attention as a playwright to be reckoned with. "Southern Comfort" premiered in Florida with Hal Holbrook and Dixie Carter, then played off-Broadway in 2006 at Primary Stages, directed by Judith Ivey. Ivey, a two-time Tony winner, also directed Clark's "Secrets of a Soccer Mom" in New York at the Snapple Theater.

Quite a resume, but Clark is still excited about "Southern Comforts" making its New Jersey debut in the county where she grew up. Following this production, which continues through Dec. 14, the Women's Theater Company in Parsippany will revive "Secrets of a Soccer Mom" in May.

"My parents and relatives are still in Mine Hill, so it's very exciting," she said. "Of course, they saw ('Southern Comforts) in New York, too. I think we had two vanloads (of friends and family) come in for that."

She also has her family to thank for inspiring the characters in "Southern Comforts."

"My mother was from Tennessee and married a Jersey guy," she said. "But ('Southern Comforts) was based on my grandmother following my mother and coming to New Jersey, where she also met a Jersey man and got married. But it is really more about relationships. Falling in love is the easy part. Living together is the hard part."

Particularly for septuagenarians who have grown used to their ways, much like Gus, a retired stone mason.

"There are people who accept that they will live alone for the rest of their lives," she said. "(Gus) had no intention of ever getting married again. But no matter how old you are, there's always hope. You never know who's going to walk through the door."

Artistic director Eric Hafen said he appreciates the local flavor of "Southern Comforts," but it was not the only reason he booked it for the Bickford.

"Our Guild president, Rose Pancirov, saw it in New York and told me about it the next day," said Hafen, who's also directing the show. "As it happened, I was going into the city the next day, so I went to see it and I just thought it was a charming, late-in-life romance that our audience would love. As for it being set in Morris County, that's a fluke. I just thought, 'This is serendipitous.'"

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The cast features Jerry Marino, who appeared on Broadway with Anthony La Paglia and Allison Janney in the 1998 Tony-nominated revival of "A View from the Bridge," and Michele LaRue, a veteran of several New York stages.

Clark can't make the opening, but is planning on attending a talkback performance on Dec. 4.

Tickets are \$35; \$30 for seniors; \$28 for museum members; \$15 for students; \$27 for groups of 10 or more. The theater is at 6 Normandy Heights Road. For information, call (973) 971-3706 or visit [www.bickfordtheatre.org](http://www.bickfordtheatre.org).

• The Women's Theater Company will get around to Clark's soccer moms soon enough, but first, Parsippany's professional theater company opens its 2008-09 season with Theresa Rebeck's "Mauritius," which premieres Friday and continues through Dec. 7.

"Mauritius," a thriller with strong threads of sinister comedy, churns a sibling rivalry between two estranged sisters who argue about who owns some rare stamps, while a couple of sinister, seedy collectors conspire to get their hands on the prize.

As a playwright, Rebeck was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for co-writing "Omnium Gatherum," but also is a busy television writer and producer, best known for her work on "N.Y.P.D. Blue" and "Law and Order: Criminal Intent."

In Parsippany, director Lauren Mills of Hopatcong has assembled a strong cast of New Jersey stage veterans, including Robin Thomas, Lenny Bart, Duncan Rogers, Julie Sihilling and Nino Spallacci.

Tickets are \$18; \$15 for seniors. Performances are Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. The center is at 1130 Knoll Road in the Lake Hiawatha section. For information, call (973) 316-3033.

### Off-off Morris

• A busy week for premieres reaches all the way to Hackettstown, where Centenary Stage Company ushers in the [holiday](#) season with the world premiere of "... At the Small Empire Music Hall." Actor Allen Lewis Rickman, who starred at Centenary last year in "My Three Angels" and co-wrote this tribute to the English music hall tradition with Karl Tiedemann, directs. It opens Friday and continues through Dec. 7 at Centenary Theater, 400 Jefferson St., on the campus of Centenary College.

"... At the Small Empire Music Hall" follows three generations of performers through a series of Christmases in the early 20th century. The cast features London West End stage veteran Suzannah Lawson Matalon, along with Centenary assistant professor Lea Antolini, who also choreographed the show. Gabriel Toth serves as musical director.

Tickets are \$17.50-\$22.50. For information, call (908) 979-0900 or visit [www.centenarystageco.org](http://www.centenarystageco.org).

### High School Theater

• Did you hear about the rumors at Parsippany High School? The drama department will present Neil Simon's "Rumors" as its fall production, with curtains Thursday and Friday at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday at 3 p.m. Performances take place in the school auditorium, 309 Baldwin Road. Tickets are \$12; \$8 for seniors.

### Auditions

• Follow the Yellow Brick Road and make a left on Carrell Road to Brundage Park Playhouse in Randolph, where auditions for the For Kids by Kids production of the musical "Oz!" take place Monday and Wednesday from 7 to 9 p.m.

Director Mark Carovale is looking for actors ages 8 through 18. Auditioners are asked to prepare an a capella song. Show dates are Feb. 6-22. For information, call (973) 989-7092 or visit [www.brundageparkplayhouse.org](http://www.brundageparkplayhouse.org).

Send information and photos to Morris Stage at the Daily Record, 800 Jefferson Road, Parsippany, N.J. 07054, fax to (973) 428-6622, or e-mail [features@dailyrecord.com](mailto:features@dailyrecord.com). Please submit information three weeks in advance.

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