

Howard Korder's
characters look
to a land of opportunity
for change

West turn

By James Hebert
ARTS WRITER

The first time Howard Korder gazed on a Western landscape, it sent him reeling — and set film spools spinning in his head. “It was like seeing a movie in Cinemascope, after you’ve watched it on TV in pan-and-scan mode,” says the playwright and native son of the Bronx, describing a trip to Utah as an actor fresh out of college.

From that initial vision of freedom and open spaces, though, have come plays that look past the West’s endless promise, past its clichés of redemption and reinvention, to examine (and sometimes satirize) the real lives of people drawn by its call.

In works as varied as “The Hollow Lands” and “Search and Destroy,” Korder — who also has written for film and TV — moves in for the closeup, revealing the abandoned hopes and dashed aspirations that blow like tumbleweeds across his characters’ wide-screen dreams.

What has changed over those years of writing is that Korder, who was named the Old Globe Theatre’s first playwright-in-residence in 2006, has become a confirmed Westerner himself.

His latest play, “Sea of Tranquility” — which opens at the Balboa Park theater Thursday — is set in Santa Fe, N.M., a place Korder has called home for 14 years now.

“I don’t think anyone makes a conscious decision to leave where they came from without some hope or dream that things will be better,” Korder says of the characters in “Sea of Tranquility” (and, though he’s not explicit about it, his own move west).

“I think that’s certainly part of the American character. This idea that you will be better somewhere else. That there is another you to be found. And that one is the you that you truly imagine yourself to be.”

‘LIFE’ LESSONS

If you believe in the power of positive thinking, Korder has imagined himself straight to the forefront of American playwrights. He arrived with a splash in 1988, when his “Boys’ Life” became a hit in New York and wound up nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

By that time, Korder already had seen several of his works produced. His passion for playwriting grew from a Bronx childhood spent visiting the theater occasionally (“We would take in an annual musical,” Korder says) and reading voraciously.

“As soon as I could read, that’s what I did,” he recalls. “I think most writers begin

SEE Korder, E7

DETAILS

“Sea of Tranquility”

When: In previews: opens Thursday. Runs 7 p.m. Tuesdays-Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Fridays; 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays; 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays, through Feb. 10

Where: Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park

Tickets: \$19-\$59. **Phone:** (619) 234-5623

Online: TheOldGlobe.org

Howard Korder's “Sea of Tranquility” is set in his adopted home of Santa Fe, N.M.
John Gibbins / Union-Tribune

Arts

SUNDAY
January 13, 2008



THE SAN DIEGO
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Howard Korder sits in on rehearsals for his black comedy "Sea of Tranquility" at the Old Globe. Korder has been working on a new play for the theater since he was named its first playwright-in-residence in 2006.

John Gibbins / Union-Tribune



of "Tranquility" was commissioned and had its first reading in 2003. *Time* magazine named it one of the best plays of 2004 after it opened off Broadway.

Korder had guidance at SCR from Jerry Patch, then a longtime dramaturge and coach at the theater and now the Globe's co-artistic director. The playwright credits Patch not just with supporting his work (and steering him to the local residency) but fostering the careers of many other dramatists.

Michael Bloom, who is directing "Tranquility" at the Globe, also has an SCR connection, having directed the play's original reading there. Helping develop the play has heightened his appreciation for Korder's work.

"I think he's about as smart a writer as there is writing today," says Bloom, who is artistic director of Cleveland Play House. "And Jerry Patch has said this, and I totally agree with him: (Korder) is really the unsung writer of the American theater."

"Obviously some parallels can be made to Mamet's work. But actually I think the range of what Howard is dealing with emotionally is far greater than most of what Mamet is writing."

The home front

With its sometimes audacious blend of the humorous and the tragic, and its mix of characters who are all over the emotional map, "Sea of Tranquility" showcases some of that range.

The play centers on Ben and Nessa, a married couple who have broken away from their staid Connecticut home to settle in Santa Fe.

Ben is a psychotherapist who seems in some ways more troubled than his patients. Nessa, a writer, has troubles of her own, including a mysterious and persistent illness and a strained relationship with the rather misanthropic archaeologist whose work she is documenting.

The work also is shot through with class and ethnic tensions — the yawning gap between native culture and its complicated legacies, and what Korder calls "us wonderful, cosmopolitan, clueless travelers," for whom "none of this is seen."

That aspect has its flash point in Gilbert, a convict of

KORDER

Characters are all over the emotional map

CONTINUED FROM PAGE E1

with an imitative impulse. I guess I wanted to see if I could do what other people were doing to me as a reader."

Deciding what kind of writing to do was harder, but his eventual move into acting helped narrow the choices.

"I certainly thought: Novelist? Short-story writer? And then I thought, boy, that all seems really hard. I think I can see how to write a play."

Korder also found that he loved the immediacy and the tactile pleasures of theater.

"Theater is a very practical medium," he notes. "There are a lot of actual things that have to work for the play to come off. There are bits and pieces, and it matters how you say things."

"You really know if it works or not. You know it instantly. Sometimes you know it to your dismay, and other times to your delight. Because there's an audience there, and they're telling you how they're feeling."

They were feeling mostly enthusiastic about "Boys' Life," which for many seemed to capture the feeling of late-Reagan Era New York, although some critics found it on the sitcom-y side.

The play, a sharp-edged series of comic riffs on the lives of three not-always-admirable heterosexual males, was directed by William H. Macy for the Atlantic Theatre Co., which Macy had co-founded with the playwright David Mamet.

Korder himself came to be thought of as a Mamet protégé, partly because of his often staccato, overlapping dialogue and (at least early on) his work's male-centric perspective.

As Korder branched out (and headed west), he found a new artistic home at South Coast Repertory Theatre in Orange County. That's where "Search and Destroy" and "The Hollow Lands" debuted (the former moving on to Broadway), and where "Sea

based on changing circumstances. But do you yourself, in your essence, ever really change?"

Second home

If Korder is a little stuck at the moment, it's not quite so serious an impasse as Ben and Nessa face. The playwright's Globe residency has gone past its originally stipulated 18-month duration, as Korder continues to work on a new play incubated by the program.

"I've gotten an extension on my term paper," as Korder puts it.

He's reluctant to talk about the nature of the new work — not just due to fear of spreading spoilers, but also because he doesn't want to spoil it for himself.

"Part of writing, I think, is telling a secret," Korder says. "That's part of what's in every play. You have a secret to tell, and you can tell it in different ways."

"You can tell it to someone over drinks. Or you can keep it to yourself and write it all down. For me those things tend to be mutually exclusive."

"That's a fancy way of saying that if I tell you, then I'll say, 'What the hell — I'm not going to write it down.'"

And while the themes of restlessness, indecision and

when you think of concise. But at the same time, there's a greater ease to it, because it's really along the lines of how we talk."

For Bloom, "the other really interesting metaphor is the house" — Ben and Nessa's adobe, whose breakdowns and failing foundation seem to mirror Nessa's ill.

"A lot of times, Easterners move to Santa Fe and they expect something very different from what they get in these adobes," Bloom says.

"What they find basically are mad huts. That house operates more classless as you head further west," Korder says, the challenges Ben and Nessa face in uprooting themselves, and trying to put down roots in a different society."

For the characters, Korder says, the wide-open frontier also has turned into a dead end. "Nearly everyone in the play is 'stuck somewhere,'" says Korder. "They're stuck at a point they very much want to move past, but don't know how. Or they know they're stuck, but they're not sure they do want to move past it."

"The play is floating the idea, which is meant to be unpalatable, that people maybe don't actually want to change. Or that it's really not possible for them to change. That you are who you are."

"You modify your behavior

native heritage whom Ben tries to counsel in jail. Gilbert's struggles illuminate the realities behind the mythical Santa Fe of quaint adobes, its image as a place where people while away the hours getting their chakras on.

"There's obviously a lot of cliché that centers around places like this," Korder says. "And my own experience is that there's another, very different world to be talked about."

Although accepted wisdom is that "the country grows more classless as you head further west," Korder says, the play's viewpoint is that "it's really not true. We're in conflict everywhere — externally and internally."

"There are a lot of ethnic and class divisions in the play. It is trying to talk about the Western version of something that happens everywhere," says Erika Rolfsrud, a graduate of the Globe/USD MFA program and a cast member of the recent, Tony-winning "Coast of Utopia." Returns to the theater to play Nessa. She says she appreciates not only Korder's humor but the hyper-realistic feel of the dialogue.

"What I really like about it is it's incredibly concise," Rolfsrud says. "There is no fat on the meat."

"You think of hard edges

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James Hebert: jim.hebert@uniontrib.com; (619) 293-2040

JAN - 3 2008

Old Globe presents 'Sea of Tranquility'

Award-winning
play to run
through Feb. 10

BYLINE NAME
Scout Staff

The Tony Award-winning Old Globe will present Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquility*, directed by Cleveland Playhouse Artistic Director Michael Bloom, to run in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 12 - Feb. 10.

Tickets for *Sea of Tranquility* are currently on

sale and can be purchased by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, on the Globe website at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

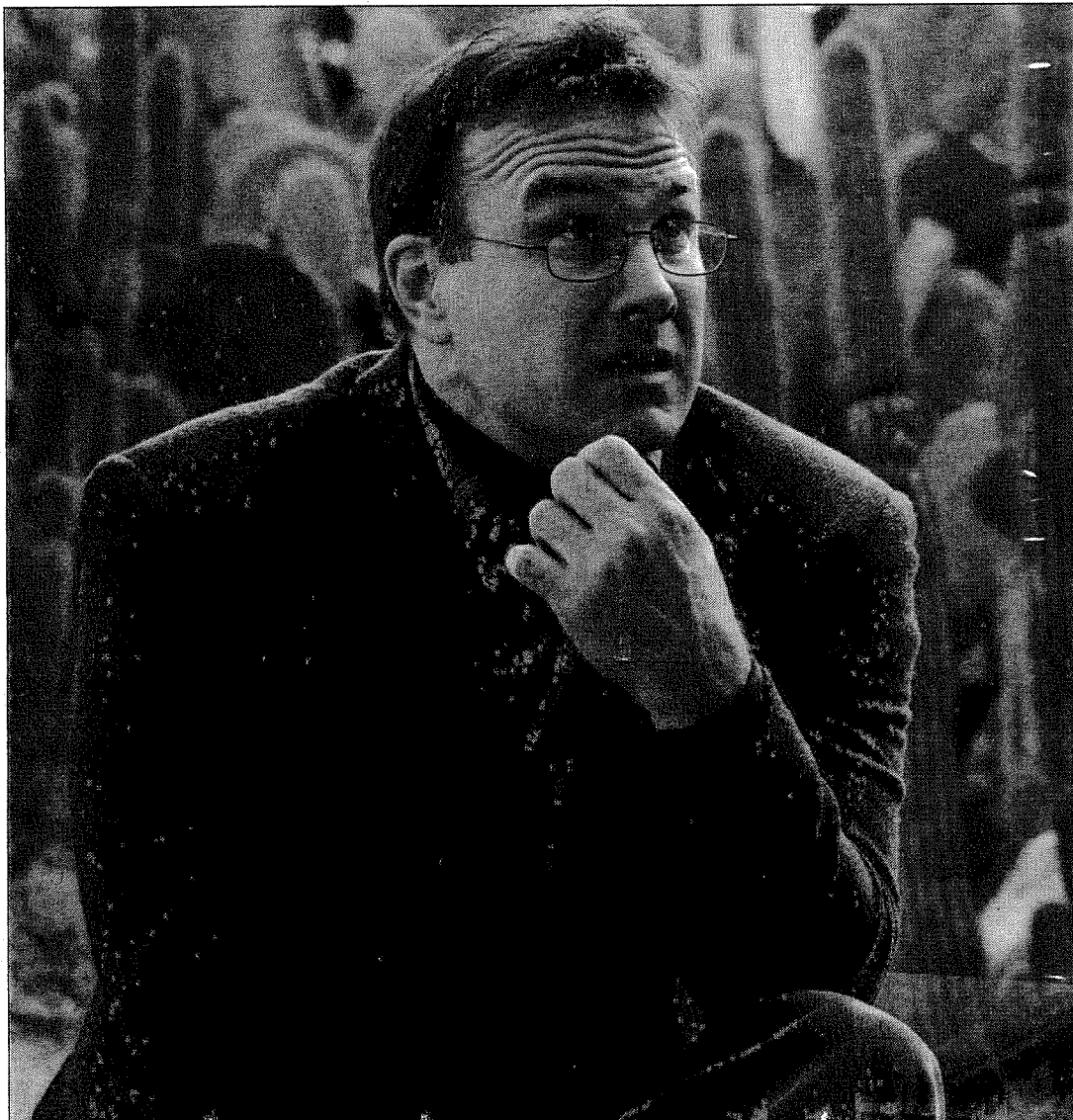
Award-winning Old Globe Playwright-in-Residence Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquility* was named one of Time Magazine's best plays of 2004.

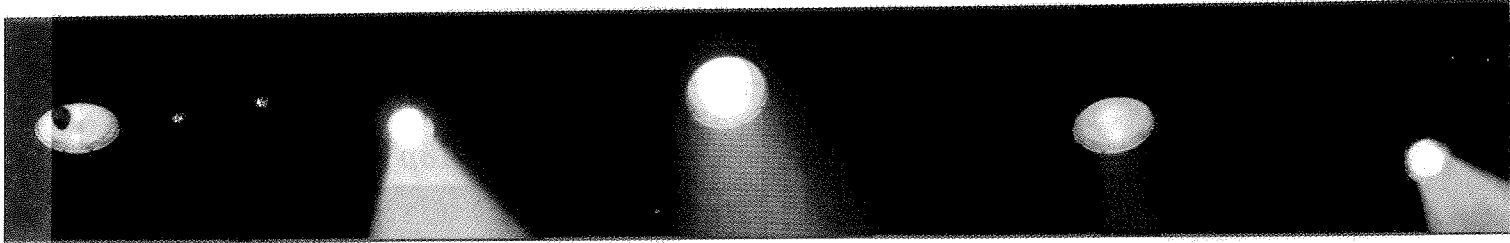
In this clever and often hilarious play, a psychologist and his wife sell their house in Connecticut to start a new life in the southwest.

His attempts to heal an eclectic string of patients gradually reveal a surprising mystery - both in his past, and in the human condition. New York's Village Voice cheered, "Korder's tremendous gift for language crackles with surprise and creates scenes that build to intense heat."

The cast of *Sea of Tranquility* includes Carlos Akuna as "Gilbert/Roman," Globe/USD MFA Student Ashley Clements as "Kat," Nike Doukas as "Phyllis," Old Globe/USD MFA student Joy Farmer-Clary

(Hamlet, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) as "Astarte," Globe/USD MFA Student Sloan Grenz as "Josh," Ted Koch (Pig Farm) as "Ben," Jeffrey Kuhn as "Randy," Rosina Reynolds (*Missing Footage*) as "Ashley/Adele," Old Globe/USD MFA graduate Erika Rolfsrud (*Cymbeline*) as "Nessa," Ned Schmidtke (*Blue/Orange, A Body of Water*) as "Johannsen/Barry" and Globe/USD MFA Student Tony Von Halle as "Milton."





SDJJ | what's going on

by eileen sondak

January on Stage

Local opera buffs have been counting the days until the San Diego Opera launches its 2008 season – and we won't have much longer to wait. The 43rd season will get underway with Wagner's powerful "Tannhauser" on Jan. 26. The opera hasn't been performed here for nearly 40 years, so this stunning new production (featuring heldentenor Robert Gambill in his signature role, and soprano Camilla Nylund) is a must-see.

Opera Director Ian Campbell wanted to recreate Gunther Schneider-Siemssen's vision of "Tannhauser," and now with cooperation from Gunther and the Met (and with the magnificent costumes designed for the Met's production), Campbell is ready to unveil this treasure. Michael Hampe will direct "Tannhauser," and Campbell predicts audiences will say this performance "burned itself into my memory."

Theater-goers have learned to adore the story of "Aida," but from April 12 – 23, aficionados will savor Verdi's original operatic version, starring Indra Thomas in the title role. Zandra Rhodes' exotic production of "The Pearl Fishers" will return May 3 – 11, with husband-and-wife Ekaterina Siurina and Charles Castronovo in starring roles.

Mainly Mozart starts its 12th Annual Spotlight Series Jan. 25 - 27 with an evening devoted to Bach. Pianist Marc Shapiro will be among the performers. You can support the organization's educational programs and the 2008 Festival (and have a fanatastic evening) by attending Mainly Mozart's elegant black-tie gala Jan. 19 at the Hyatt Regency, La Jolla. The event features table settings by leading designers and a performance by a Mainly Mozart string quartet.

The music plays on at the San Diego Symphony, when Giancarlo Guerrero conducts a program

featuring Jeff Thayer on violin (Jan. 11 – 13). Downtowners can enjoy "Symphony Exposed," a special introduction to the symphony spotlighting "Pictures at an Exhibition" Jan. 10.

The Jacobs' Masterworks Series will offer a special one-night performance on Jan. 24 that pairs the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with the San Diego Symphony. Pinchas Zukerman will conduct and perform Beethoven's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. That is what you call a "superconcert." Marvin Hamlisch will lead the orchestra for a Winter Pops concert with Jennifer Holliday (Broadway's Original "Dreamgirl") Jan. 18 – 19.

The San Diego Rep is staging a workshop production of "The Blessing of a Broken Heart" (Jan. 4 – 20) – based on the award-winning book by Sherri Mandell. The piece was adapted and directed by the Rep's Associate Artistic Director Todd Salovey as part of the Lipinsky Family San Diego Jewish Arts Festival. This moving story (about an American mother who moves her family to the outskirts of Israel to seek greater meaning and purpose to her life) is an inspiring lesson in the power of love.

The Old Globe is back on the boards with two shows this month.

"Sea of Tranquility," (by Globe playwright-

■ Pinchas Zukerman will conduct and perform Beethoven's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. That is what you call a "superconcert."



HOT MOVES: For a latin-inspired show that is sure to make you sweat, check out Tango Fire, perhaps the most sultry dance performance the La Jolla Music Society has ever seen.

ALL SET UP: An image from *Tannhäuser* that faithfully depicts the famed Metropolitan Opera production by Gunther Schneider-Siemssen.



PHOTO © MARTY SOHL, COURTESY OF SAN DIEGO OPERA

in-residence Howard Korder) launches the 2008 season on the Main Stage Jan. 12. This comedy – directed by Michael Bloom – was named one of *Time* magazine's best plays of 2004. The story revolves around a psychologist and his wife who sell their Connecticut home to start a new life in the southwest. The play is full of surprises and clever dialogue.

On Jan. 5, the Cassius Carter Stage will unveil a world premiere commissioned by the Globe. The play, titled "In this Corner," is about boxing champ Joe Louis – who became an American icon after he fought German boxer Max Schmeling in 1938. Schmeling and the "Brown Bomber" reunite in a psychiatric ward in this fascinating play. Steven Drukman penned "In this Corner," which should fit the Carter's theater-in-the-round configuration to a T. Sounds like the Globe has two important works in production this month (and they'll both run through Feb. 10).

Kid-friendly shows are a lot harder to find after the holiday

season, but Diversionary Theater has a New Year's gift for families that will enjoy its world premiere Jan. 18 – 27. "Daddy Machine" is an audience participation show that should be fun for the four-and older crowd. The musical is based on a children's book. Take the little ones and enjoy!

Broadway/San Diego has just one show this month, but it's the farewell tour of Andrew Lloyd Webber's rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" – with superstar Ted Neeley recreating his unforgettable performance (he did the film version as well). "Superstar" will play at the Civic Theater Jan. 2 – 6.

The North Coast Rep will introduce a San Diego premiere on Jan. 12. "String of Pearls" – (which the *New York Times* called "a hilarious blend of sex, satire, poignancy, and absurdism") is a tour de force for four actresses (who play 27 characters), but the show is aimed at mature audiences, so leave the kids at home.

The La Jolla Music Society's dance series will import the hottest tango company in Buenos Aires Jan. 25. "Tango Fire – Estampas Portenas" will perform its one-night stand at the North Park Theater. Grammy Award-winning musicians Mark O'Connor, Ramsey Lewis and George Winston will appear at the North Park Theater this month as well. O'Connor's Appalachia Waltz Trio arrives Jan. 10, the Ramsey Lewis Trio will bring its brand of jazz to the theater Jan. 26, and Winston performs his New Age music Jan. 27.

The California Center for the Arts in Escondido will present "The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley" Jan. 27. Meanwhile, its Museum continues to showcase four exhibitions that explore ritual, myth, spirituality, and tradition – through Jan. 27. The work of Niki de Saint Phalle is among them.

The Reuben H. Fleet Science Center's IMAX Theater is still bringing "Sea Monsters" to life. This prehistoric adventure tries to uncover the secrets of the ancient leviathans that ruled the seas 80 million years ago. "Dinosaurs Alive" is also showing, along with "The Living Sea" a celebration of the "world ocean." The hands-on exhibition, "So WATT! An Illuminating Look at Energy," the popular "Kid City," and "Aging for All Ages" are all still entertaining audiences at the Fleet this month. ✧

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Monday October 15, 2007

3 Heshvan 5768

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Arts

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Art briefs

For the week of 10/12

Bloom to direct in San Diego

The Cleveland Play House artistic director Michael Bloom will direct the west coast premiere of Howard Korder's "Sea of Tranquility" at The Old Globe in San Diego. The production will preview on Jan. 12 and open on Jan. 17. It will be Bloom's first at the Old Globe.

Bloom directed the first public reading of "Sea of Tranquility" as part of the 2003 Pacific Playwrights Festival at South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, Calif. It is a dark comedy that chronicles the deterioration of a therapist's life just as he is attempting to reinvent himself in a new home in Santa Fe.

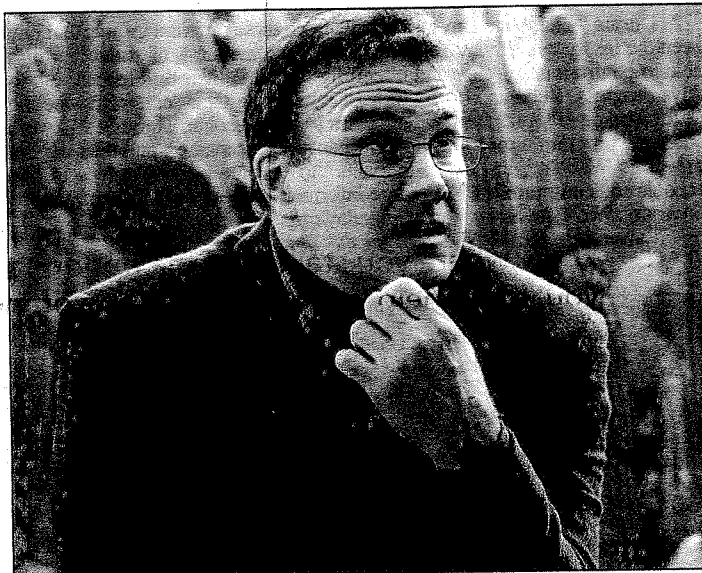
SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Rancho Santa Fe
Review

DEC 27 2007

Old-Globe to present acclaimed 'Sea of Tranquility' Jan. 12-Feb. 10

The Tony Award®-winning Old Globe will present *Sea of Tranquility*, by Howard Korder, directed by Cleveland Playhouse Artistic Director Michael Bloom, to run in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 12 – Feb. 10.

Award-winning Old Globe Playwright-in-Residence Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquility* was named one of *Time Magazine's* best plays of 2004. In this clever and often hilarious play, a psychologist and his wife sell their house in Connecticut to start a new life in the southwest. His attempts to heal an eclectic string of patients gradually reveal a surprising mystery – both in his past, and in the human condition. *New York's Village Voice* cheered, "Korder's tremendous gift for language crackles with surprise and creates scenes that build to intense heat."



Ted Kych as "Ben" in The Old Globe's West Coast premiere of SEA OF TRANQUILITY, by Howard Korder, directed by Michael Bloom, playing in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 12 through Feb. 10, 2008; Photo/Craig Schwartz.

Tickets for *Sea of Tranquility* can be purchased by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, on the Globe Web site at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.



UPDATED: 12 :55 p.m. EDT, January 28, 2008

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ROCKIN!



Video: Lead singer of The Twilight says he's misunderstood

Play House's Bloom catches mixed notices for 'Sea' in San Diego

by [Tony Brown / Plain Dealer Theater Critic](#)

Saturday January 26, 2008, 12:00 AM

The early reviews are in on Cleveland Play House artistic director Michael Bloom's West Coast premiere of "Sea of Tranquility." The results: mixed.

Bloom, who chose not to direct at all this season in Cleveland, spent the holidays in rehearsals (and 70-degree weather) in San Diego, where Howard Korder's newish play opened 10 days ago at the Old Globe Theatre, one of the country's leading regional venues.

As of Wednesday, critics at two dailies -- the Los Angeles Times and the San Diego Union-Tribune - - and at the entertainment trade newspaper Variety had weighed in on what the Times called a "turbulent, two-act, 14-character psychodrama."

(Hmm. Sounds like a typical meeting here on the theater desk.)

Neither of the two daily reviewers seems to have had a unqualified good time at the play -- about a Connecticut psychologist and his wife whose lives alter after moving to Santa Fe, N.M. -- but they disagree as to whether it's a problem with the script or with the actors and director.

In the Times, Lewis Segal faults the playwright for recycling characters and



Craig Schwartz

Actors Jeffrey Kuhn and Ashley Clements share a moment in Howard Korter's "Sea of Tranquility," a world premiere that Cleveland Play House artistic director Michael Bloom is directing at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego.

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lauds Bloom and company for doing a good job with what they had.

"We've met some of these people before (the young Jewish Nazi, for example), and Korder gives too many of them florid confessional arias that seem shortcuts to characterization. However, director Michael Bloom and the cast turn these speeches into star turns -- whether it's Nike Doukas scolding the stage with corrosive fury as a mother who hates her son or Ned Schmidtke playing two utterly different sleazeballs with the same perfect control."

But at the Union-Tribune, James Hebert suggests the opposite might be true.

"It might simply be that the actors and director Michael Bloom need a bit more time to find, in performances and staging, a dynamic range that fits the script's. 'Sea' also challenges them with its structure -- the play is made up of mostly short, not always organically connected scenes. Quick blackouts lend them a sketch-like feel.

"When things are in sync, the play can sing -- though Korder's humor, which feeds on all the dippy cliches about places like Santa Fe, is in a defiantly minor key."

Variety's Bob Verini calls the play a "mordant comedy," but faults actor Ted Koch for playing an "earnest yet flaccid" central shrink.

Apparently referring to Koch, Verini writes: "Despite a rather gaping hole at the center of helmer Michael Bloom's Old Globe production, there's enough absorbing story and pungent thought to make this 'Sea' worth setting sail on."

Other reviews are expected from the San Diego-area weeklies.

The show runs through Sunday, Feb. 10. For more information, go to www.oldglobe.org.

Banging away

If you were looking forward to this coming weekend's opening of the Bang and the Clatter's new performing space in downtown Cleveland, be advised that there is about another month of banging and clattering to go before it actually happens.

The spunky, hard-hitting BNC (the shorthand comes from the company's non-functional Web site, www.bnctheatre.com) was supposed to open its new space at 210 Euclid Ave. in the East Fourth Street entertainment district on Friday, Feb. 1, with Adam Rapp's "Blackbird."

But construction on the former shoe store near the old May Co. department store and the current House of Blues has hit snags involving heating and air-conditioning equipment and city financing, BNC co-founder Sean Derry said.

So now the target opening date is Friday, Feb. 29.

Meanwhile, the company continues its third season of in-yer-face theater at its original downtown Akron franchise, 140 E. Market St., where Craig Wright's "Orange Flower Water" continues until Saturday, Feb. 9, and Rapp's "Essential Self-Defense" opens Friday, Feb. 22.

This just in: Derry and co-founder Sean McConaha say plans are moving forward on a new Akron space as well.

For more information, don't go to the Web site. Instead, call 330-606-5317.

**SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Rancho Bernardo
Journal**

JAN 17 2008

**'SEA OF TRANQUILITY' AT OLD
GLOBE**

The Old Globe Theatre is presenting the West Coast premiere of "Sea of Tranquility" by Howard Korder, award-winning Old Globe Playwright-in-Residence. The play runs from Jan. 12 to Feb. 10 and revolves around a psychologist and his wife, who sell their house in Connecticut to start a new life in the Southwest. He then has several eclectic patients who help him discover a surprising mystery about himself in the process. Tickets for the show can be purchased by calling 619-23-GLOBE, or on the Globe Web site at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

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JAN - - 2008

Old Globe Theatre

"*Sea of Tranquility*," by Howard Korder and directed by Michael Bloom, runs January 12 through February 10. In this clever and often hilarious play, a psychologist and his wife sell their house in Connecticut and start a new life in the southwest. His attempts to heal an eclectic string of patients gradually reveal a surprising mystery – both in his past, and in the human condition.

For tickets and information, call (619) 23-GLOBE or visit www.TheOldGlobe.org.

Cassius Carter Centre Stage

"*In This Corner*," by Steven Drukman and directed by Ethan McSweeney, runs from January 5 through February 10. In 1938, there was no bigger sporting event than the bout between German boxer Max Schmeling and American "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis. World War II is about to change how Americans view the world around them and this fight elevated Louis from African-American hero to All-American icon. In 1970, the two men reunite in the most unlikely of places: a psychiatric ward. The Cassius Carter Centre Stage becomes the ultimate arena and every seat is ringside as the decisive battle begins – for honor, country, and for self-respect.

For tickets and information, call (619) 23-GLOBE or visit www.TheOldGlobe.org.

JAN 16 2008

"Sea of Tranquility"
『静寂なる海』

不仲な中年夫婦の新生活と人間関係 / H・コーダー作ブラック・コメディ

⑤ コネティカット州で暮らす精神分析医ベン・グリーンとライター妻ネサは、結婚3年目にして早くも問題を抱え、全てを忘れて新たな生活をスタートするべく、住居を売却し、ニューメキシコ州サンタフェへ移住する。ベンは新天地でファミリーカウンセリングを開始。最初の患者は緊張した面持ちのフィリス、彼の恋人アシュレー、フェリスの息子ジョシュだった。また、ベンは投獄中の患者、ラテン系アメリカ人のギルバートに面会するため刑務所を訪れる。数回のカウンセリングを経て、次第にギルバートの過去や驚くべき秘密が霧(あらわ)になり…。

⑥ 夫婦関係を修復するためにアメリカ南部へ移り住んだカップルと、彼らが出会う多彩な人間像を描くブラックコメディ。2004年にタイム誌上でベスト・プレイに選ばれた秀作。脚本家ハワード・コーダーはこれまでにピューリッツァー賞演劇部門にノミネートされた"Boys' Life"を含む多数の戯曲を発表している。"Search and Destroy"はデイビッド・サーレによって映画化された。

⑦ THE GLOBE THEATRES (Old Globe Theatre), 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park / 619-239-2255 (T)。期間—2/10(日)迄。上演—火・水曜: 7pm、木・金曜: 8pm、土曜: 2pm & 8pm、日曜: 2pm & 7pm。チケット—\$42 ~ \$59。
<http://www.oldglobe.org>



Sea of Tranquility / The Globe Theatres
/ Photo by Craig Schwartz

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Del Mar Village Voice

JAN 17 2008

Old-Globe to present acclaimed 'Sea of Tranquility' through Feb. 10

The Tony Award®-winning Old Globe will present *Sea of Tranquility*, by Howard Korder, directed by Cleveland Playhouse Artistic Director Michael Bloom, to run in the Old Globe Theatre through Feb. 10.

Award-winning Old Globe Playwright-in-Residence Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquility* was named one of *Time Magazine's* best plays of 2004. In this clever and often hilarious play, a psychologist and his wife sell their house in Connecticut to start a new life in the southwest. His attempts to heal an eclectic string of patients gradually reveal a surprising mystery — both in his past, and in the human condition. *New York's Village Voice* cheered, "Korder's tremendous gift for language crackles with surprise and creates scenes that build to intense



Ted Kych as "Ben" in The Old Globe's West Coast premiere of *SEA OF TRANQUILITY*, by Howard Korder, directed by Michael Bloom, playing in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 12 through Feb. 10, 2008; Photo/Craig Schwartz.

heat."

Tickets for *Sea of Tranquility* can be purchased by calling (619) 239-GLOBE, on the Globe Web site at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Rancho Bernardo
Journal

JAN 24 2008

'SEA OF TRANQUILITY'
AT OLD GLOBE

The Old Globe Theatre is presenting the West Coast premiere of "*Sea of Tranquility*" by Howard Korder, award-winning Old Globe Playwright-in-Residence. The play runs through Feb. 10 and revolves around a psychologist and his wife, who sell their house in Connecticut to start a new life in the Southwest. He then has several eclectic patients who help him discover a surprising mystery about himself in the process. Tickets for the show can be purchased by calling 619-239-GLOBE, or the Globe Web site at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
Sentinel

JAN 1 1 2008

Old Globe presents 'Sea of Tranquility' Jan. 12- Feb. 10

Old Globe will present Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquility*, directed by Cleveland Playhouse Artistic Director Michael Bloom, to run in the Old Globe Theatre Jan. 12 - Feb. 10.

Tickets for *Sea of Tranquility* are currently on sale and can be purchased by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, on the Globe website at www.TheOldGlobe.org, or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

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The cast of *Sea of Tranquility* includes Carlos Akuna as "Gilbert/Roman," Globe/USD MFA Student Ashley Clements as "Kat," Nike Doukas as "Phyllis," Old Globe/USD MFA student Joy Farmer-Clary (Hamlet, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) as "Astarte," Globe/USD MFA Student Sloan Grenz as "Josh," Ted Koch (Pig Farm) as "Ben," Jeffrey Kuhn as "Randy," Rosina Reynolds (Missing Footage) as "Ashley/Adele," Old Globe/USD MFA graduate Erika Rolfsrud (Cymbeline) as "Nessa," Ned

Schmidtke (Blue/Orange, *A Body of Water*) as "Johannsen/Barry" and Globe/USD MFA Student Tony Von Halle as "Milton."

The production team includes Michael Bloom, director; Scott Bradley, scenic design; David Kay Mickelsen, costume design; Robert Vierzel, lighting design; Paul Peterson, sound design; Elizabeth Lohr, stage manager.

The internationally-acclaimed, Tony Award®-winning Old Globe is one of the most renowned regional theatres in the country and has stood as San Diego's flagship arts institution for 71 years.

The Old Globe produces a year-round season of 15 plays and musicals on its three stages, including its highly-regarded Shakespeare festival. The Globe has become a gathering place for leading theatre artists from around the world, such as Tom Stoppard, Daniel Sullivan and Chita Rivera, among many others.

Numerous Broadway-bound premieres and revivals, such as *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *The Full Monty* and *Damn Yankees*, have been developed at The Old Globe and have gone on to enjoy highly successful runs in New York and at regional theatres across the country.

Highlights of the Globe's 2007/2008 Season include the world premiere musical, *A Catered Affair*, written by Harvey Fierstein and John Bucchino, the West Coast Premiere of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's *Oscar* and the Pink Lady, the 10th Anniversary production of Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole*

Christmas!, *In This Corner*, by Steven Drukman, Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquility*, as well as the world premieres of *Dancing in the Dark* and *Beethoven, As I Knew Him*. Under the leadership of Executive Director Louis G.

Spisto, Artistic Director Jack O'Brien and Resident Artistic Director Jerry Patch, the Globe is at the forefront of the nation's leading performing arts organizations, setting a standard for excellence in American theater.

JAN 10 2008

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Award-winning Old Globe Playwright-in-Residence Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquil-*

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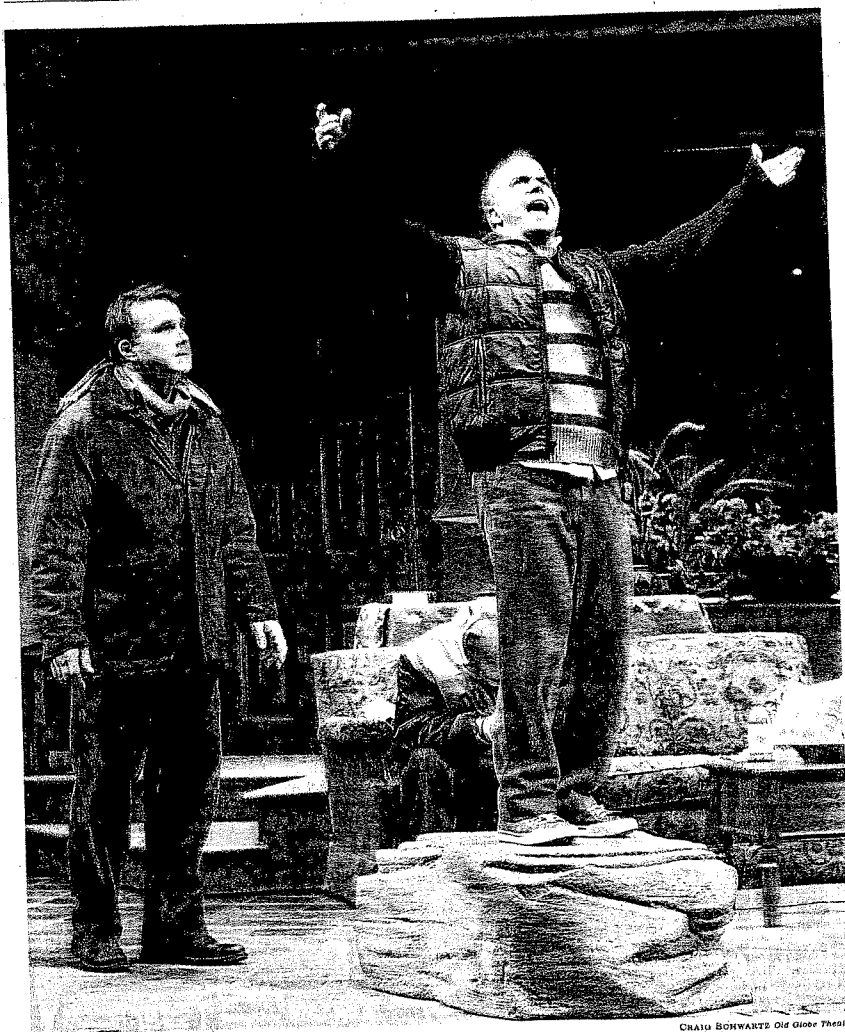
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CHAD BOWHARTS/Old Globe Theatre

PSYCHODRAMA: In the 14-character "Sea of Tranquility," directed by Michael Bloom at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, Ted Köch, left, plays a psychologist with too much on his plate and Jeffrey Kuhn is a sitcom writer intent on becoming profound.

THEATER REVIEW

No calm waters here

Howard Korder's 'Sea of Tranquility' is filled with jokes and great acting, but do we believe any of it?

By LEWIS SEGAL
Times Staff Writer

SAN DIEGO — We're far from any sea or any tranquility in Howard Korder's "Sea of Tranquility," running through Feb. 10 at the Old Globe Theatre. Seen Saturday, this turbulent, two-act, 14-character psychodrama asks provocative questions about our ability to change for the better or escape the past even by running away and starting over.

The very first line ("How was Hanukkah?") sets off an uproar, and we're quickly plunged into a number of disintegrating relationships: husband and wife, mother and child, therapist and patient, scholar and research assistant. The environment is disintegrating too from long-buried secrets that poison past and present.

An award-winning playwright-in-residence at the Old Globe, Korder is perhaps best known in Southern California for "Search and Destroy" (South Coast Repertory, 1990)

and telecasts of his "Lip Service" (HBO, 1988), "The Passion of Ayn Rand" (Showtime, 1999) and "Stealing Sinatra" (Showtime, 2004). He's brilliant at rapid-fire contemporary dialogue that often reveals more about the speakers than they'd like, and that talent serves him strongly here in a story about a psychologist with too much on his plate.

Ben (Ted Köch) and his wife, Nessa (Erika Rolfsrud), have moved from Connecticut to Santa Fe, N.M., where their relationship begins to fall apart as disastrously as their picturesque 70-year-old adobe house. Nessa is working with an academic on a book exploring the controversial theory that the Anasazi cliff-dwellers of the American Southwest ate their enemies — and another kind of cannibalism pervades Ben's therapy sessions as his patients eat one another alive.

We've met some of these people before (the young Jewish Nazi, for example), and Korder gives too many of them florid confessional arias that seem shortcuts to characterization. However, director Michael Bloom and the cast turn these speeches into star turns — whether it's Nike Doukas scolding the stage with corrosive fury as a mother who hates her son or Ned Schmidtke

'Sea of Tranquility'

Where: Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

When: 7 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays

Ends: Feb. 10

Price: \$29 to \$62

Contact: (619) 23-GLOBE or www.theoldglobe.org

Running time: 2 hours, 15 minutes

playing two utterly different sleazeballs with the same perfect control.

Schmidtke also gets the biggest laugh with a great joke about academic tenure, and this is a play full of jokes — gallops humor in many cases, deliberately undercutting the serious themes being explored. Indeed, sometimes you wonder whether the character closest to Korder's heart is Randy (Jeffrey Kuhn), a sitcom writer intent on becoming very, very profound. That's because this play keeps coming at you with the speed and verbal dexterity

of a sitcom, even as we see Nessa sickening from some mysterious illness and Ben torn apart by a combination of guilt and ethical conflict.

Rolfsrud makes Nessa's decay palpable and horrifying, while Köch deftly traces his character's eroding confidence. Rosina Reynolds and Carlos Acuña are adroitly double cast in nice/nasty roles, and four of their colleagues belong to the Old Globe/University of San Diego MFA program.

They're all excellent, and Bloom keeps the performance as a whole sharply entertaining. But there's the question of whether we believe any of it except for Rolfsrud. We're too aware of Korder pulling the strings, introducing plot complications and a startling coincidence involving the ownership of the house as structural strategies: sudden transitions from light to dark or, if you like, Korder-as-Randy straining to transcend his sitcom ID. "Sea of Tranquility" has plenty of substance to recommend it, but its glib style belongs to Randy, body and soul.

Scott Bradley's scenic units roll in and out, arise and descend, revolve and compress: a show in themselves, and other technical credits are also first rate.

lewis.segal@latimes.com

Ride a bit turbulent for Old Globe's 'Sea of Tranquility'

ANNE MARIE WELSH
FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

When playwright Howard Korder emerged — on the East Coast with "Boys Life" in 1988, on the West Coast with "Search and Destroy" in 1990 — he seemed an unsparing, yet mordant satirist of male mores. Greedy desires for sex or for drugs and corporate money drove his self-justifying characters. They were as crude and rude as David Mamet's similarly preoccupied guys, but more charming and, painfully for them, more self-aware.

Korder's been writing for television of late, but he still possesses a Mamet-like ear for clipped, elliptical speech and a rangy skill, to the point of glibness, with language. Those gifts drew the support of the Old Globe's co-artistic director Jerry Patch, who brought him to the theater as

REVIEW
"Sea of Tranquility"
When: 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; through Feb. 10
Where: Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego
Tickets: \$29-\$62
Info: (619) 234-5623
Web: www.oldglobe.org

strengths propel a wide range of characters through the turbulent convolutions of his "Sea of Tranquility," now in a well-cast, though ultimately unsatisfying, production at the Old Globe.

The man at the center is Ben, a family counselor who has left Connecticut with his second wife, Nessa. Married just a few years, they're looking for peace and perhaps healing in Santa Fe, N.M. Designers Scott Bradley (set) and Robert Wierzel (lighting) conjure so precisely the colors, textures and domestic de-



PHOTO COURTESY OF
CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Ted Koch and Jeffrey Kuhn in "Sea of Tranquility."

at sunset that — this being Korder — we know the dream may turn nightmare.

Smartly, director Michael Bloom shows us that dream before cutting to the reality of Ben's office for the play's

darkly hilarious first scene. Ben (Ted Koch) looks uncomfortable in his skin already. He's conducting a therapy session for Ashley and Phyllis, played to the hilt by Rosina Reynolds and Nike Doukas, two vibrant actors here very well matched. Phyllis (Doukas) has just discovered her "real" sexual identity as a lesbian, but son Josh, a race-loathing Jewish genius fascinated by Hitler and fascism, sits silent and snarling nearby.

Ben's impotent in the face of such conflicts, which worsen when he heads home. There, his loving wife (Erika Rolfsrud) has developed a serious immune system disorder that may be related to her low self-esteem or to an environmental catastrophe. Once a promising fiction writer, she's now a "popularizer" working with an eccentric archaeologist. He's certain the long-thought-peaceful American Indian tribes nearby were

cannibals. There's that — and also Nessa's freeloading brother Randy (Jeffrey Kuhn). He's a manic Hollywood writer recently fired from a sitcom and madly trying to reinvent himself, while he wrecks the family's hot tub.

Korder reveals Ben's slow descent into a "physician, heal thyself" confrontation with himself through a series of scenes, separated by black-outs, with various "clients." It's in these scenes that this tonally mixed play turns up the dramatic heat and stakes its best claim to seriousness. One wayward soul is a young runaway who'd been sleeping in L.A.'s Griffith Park after abandoning the half-crazy drifter who helped her earn pocket money. Her name's Astarte and though her long monologue begins too schematically, when actor Joy Farmer-Clary gets cooking,

► 'SEA,' 31

► 'SEA'

Continued from 24

the speech becomes a corker about conscience battling denial and escapism.

Ben's pro-bono work in penitentiary brings him to Gilbert, jailed for murder and seeking some relief — from depression or conscience or both. Carlos-Acuna proves potent as this angry inmate who debunks and deflates his would-be helper.

By today's shrunken standards for stage production, "Sea of Tranquility" is a big cast affair; 11 strong actors play 14 roles. Among the standouts is Globe regular Ned Schmidtke. He's reptilian as a threatening, pin-striped attorney whose cool charm belies his savage intent; he's droll as the wacky and wise pot-bellied archaeol-

ogist in biker duds. Reyno doubles well into the a role of Astarte's hipp turned-capitalist mother; cellent in a much narrow part is Tony von Halle as impassive, screwed-up American Indian taken in by Nes-

In the end, though, there's just too much happening this churning "Sea of Tranquility." Korder challenges every expectation, creating a world in which each character seems lost and the seemingly moral center, Ben, can't hold his world together. The plot structure so closely mimics Ben's confusion that it feels cluttered and tonally out of control.

A tighter directorial hand might help, but mostly, Korder needs to rewrite a tighter focus on Ben not-so-grown-up "boy" who decides to get started on himself as the curtain closes.



http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_review&reviewid=VE1117935856&categoryid=33

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Posted: Mon., Jan. 21, 2008, 2:45pm PT

Sea of Tranquility

(Donald and Darlene Shiley Stage; 581 seats; \$62 top) An Old Globe presentation of a play in two acts by Howard Korder. Directed by Michael Bloom.

Ben - Ted Koch
 Ashley/Adele - Rosina Reynolds
 Phyllis - Nike Doukas
 Josh - Sloan Grenz
 Nessa - Erika Rolfsrud
 Randy - Jeffrey Kuhn
 Gilbert/Roman - Carlos Acuna
 Astarte - Joy Farmer-Clary
 Kat - Ashley Clements
 Milton - Tony von Halle
 Johannsen/Barry - Ned Schmidtke

By BOB VERINI

The mordant comedy "Sea of Tranquility" skewers three perennial, peculiarly American myths: People who want to change can change; people who want to effect change can make a difference; and the American West is the "new Arcadia" within which change becomes possible. Scribe Howard Korder assembles a baker's dozen of contemporary grotesques to potently prove, with comic brio, it ain't necessarily so. Despite a rather gaping hole at the center of helmer Michael Bloom's Old Globe production, there's enough absorbing story and pungent thought to make this "Sea" worth setting sail on.

Santa Fe, N.M., fabled fount of renewal (as celebrated in "I Want" songs in tuners "Rent" and "Newsies"), is the port of call for relocated East Coast therapist Ben (Ted Koch), ensconced with new wife Nessa (Erika Rolfsrud). A hack writer, she's collaborating with a local archaeological team to gain enhanced cred by proving the gentle, flute-playing Anasazi were cannibals.

Just as Nessa battles local tradition, idealistic Ben -- with a need to atone for Connecticut sins, revealed late -- butts up against a daftly challenging client list, starting with Jewish lesbian Phyllis (Nike Doukas)

at wit's end with skinheaded son (Sloan Grenz) sporting a "What Would Hitler Do?" T-shirt. The therapist tries comforting a convict (Carlos Acuna) with a mysterious connection to his house and a tortured soul (Joy Farmer-Clary) who comes by to drop hints of abuse and mind control.

Things are scarcely better at home, where walls are cracking and foundations shifting. Manically self-absorbed brother-in-law Randy (Jeffrey Kuhn) is in from L.A. seeking hot tub time and the ministrations of a luscious underage runaway (Ashley Clements). More troubling still is Nessa's slowly debilitating illness, with a possible casual relation to the Native American sacred grounds her work is disturbing.

Through line linking these disparate strains must be Ben's determination to make things right, but the likeable, shambling Koch never exudes the requisite questioning intelligence. One can easily believe he screwed up a psychiatric practice but never that he embarked on one: He's earnest yet flaccid in consultations, gazing out in anguish instead of boring into a patient's psyche.

Robert Wierzel lights him for full focus during the numerous scene changes, but all we see is a big ol' bear getting mopier over time.

Absent a keenly analytical therapist, we're left to concentrate on his retinue, happily a varied and compelling lot. Doukas makes a blazing impression in two brief scenes, and Kuhn is so ecstatically wired it'd be no surprise to spot an extension cord trailing off behind him.

In two chameleon-like feats of doubling, Rosina Reynolds shifts from Phyllis' bubbly inamorata to a steely, raging Southwestern dowager, and Ned Schmidtke effortlessly embodies both an elegantly sinister attorney and a bearded, do-rag-wearing biker type.

Most compelling of all is Rolfsrud's Nessa, whose agonized journey of discovery and eventual stoic resignation dramatizes the oxymoron of Korder's title. There's no sea of tranquility anywhere, just endlessly choppy waters one does one's best to navigate.

Scott Bradley's massive, terraced set amusingly evokes a cross-section of an archaeological site, out of which helmer Bloom deftly retrieves artifacts of modern malaise in a latter-day "You Can't Take It With You," perhaps better retitled "You Can't Take It, Can You?" If Korder's anatomization of contempo impotence doesn't dig deeply enough to qualify as archaeology, as a piece of dramatic sociology it unquestionably absorbs and entertains.

Sets, Scott Bradley; costumes, David Kay Mickelsen; lighting, Robert Wierzel; sound, Paul Peterson; stage manager, Elizabeth Lohr. Opened, reviewed Jan. 17, 2008. Runs through Feb. 10. Running time: 2 HOURS, 15 MIN.

Read the full article at:

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THEATER REVIEW

'Sea' might be a bit too tranquil

Cast seems adrift from script's emotional level

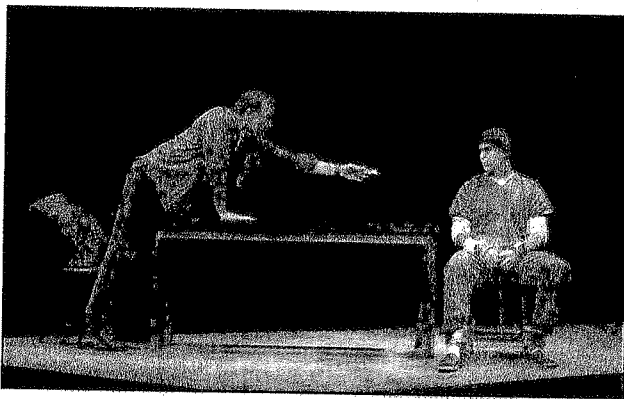
By James Hebert
ARTS WRITER

The Sea of Tranquility sounds like a swell place to go dip your toes, unless you know it's on the moon and has the added gall not to contain any water at all.

The couple at the center of Howard Korder's "Sea of Tranquility" seem similarly let down by their adopted hometown of Santa Fe, N.M. It's where they'd hoped to find some serenity, maybe rinse away a few sins. Instead, old miseries prove as mutable as a lunar landscape.

It doesn't hurt the title's symbolism that "sea of tranquility" also happens to be the name of an acupressure point (it's at mid-chest, so you know), and holistic-happy Santa Fe has no shortage of acupressure joints.

But as staged in the work's West Coast premiere at the Old Globe Theatre (where Korder is playwright in residence), the play has emotional terrain that shares an un-



As the therapist Ben, Ted Koch gets around, here volunteering his services to an inmate played by Carlos Acuna. *Craig Schwartz*

fortunate feature with the moon version of the "sea"; it's more than a little flat.

Korder's witty, biting dialogue has zip to spare, but the production often feels as though it can't quite catch up to the writing, instead cruising along in a lower emotional gear. That puts it at odds with the

SEE 'Tranquility,' E12

DETAILS

"Sea of Tranquility"

When: Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 7 p.m.; Thursdays-Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7 p.m.; through Feb. 10.

Where: Old Globe Theatre

Tickets: \$19-\$59

Phone: (619) 234-5623

Online: TheOldGlobe.org

▶ 'TRANQUILITY'

CONTINUED FROM E1

Misfits and misanthropes wander through

play's tone, which shifts (sometimes precipitously) from stretches of tense dialogue to scenes of crackling comedy.

It might simply be that the actors and director Michael Bloom need a bit more time to find, in performances and staging, a dynamic range that fits the script's. "Sea" also challenges them with its structure — the play is made up of mostly short, not always organically connected scenes. Quick blackouts lend them a sketch-like feel.

When things are in sync, the play can sing — though Korder's humor, which feeds on all the dippy clichés about places like Santa Fe, is in a defiantly minor key.

The afflictions begin with Ben and Nessa, who've fled their old lives in Connecticut to start over in Santa Fe. Ben (Ted Koch) is a therapist who preaches that healing and personal change flow inexorably from the power of imagination. (The "Field of Dreams" model of wellness.)

"Act as the person we wish to be," he tells clients, though it gradually becomes clear that his gospel of self-transformation is itself something of an act.

Nessa is a mess in more overt ways: A writer, she suffers from a vague fatigue and a very nasty rash, though her mordant humor (helped immensely by Erika Rolfsrud's ace delivery) survives intact.

"Everyone at Sarah Lawrence had me pegged for a slim but assured volume of wry short stories by the time I was 24," she says self-mockingly, a nod at her career as a "popularizer" of fringe-y sci-

ence ideas — cats in the afterlife and the like.

"I believe I've put them in their place."

These newcomers, settled into a spiffed-up old adobe, are in turn put in their place — by the lingering grievances of locals, by a bitter clash of cultures, by their own vain attempts to run from themselves, even by the house itself, whose infirmities seem twinned with Nessa's troubles.

Among the misfits and misanthropes who wander through is Nessa's brother Randy (Jeffrey Kuhn), a TV writer and human nerve ending who is the most purely comic presence, and Gilbert (very strong Carlos Acuna), a Santa Fe native and hard case whom Ben is counseling in prison.

We also meet a few of Ben's clients — most memorably Ashley and Phyllis (Rosina Reynolds and Nike Doukas, both spot-on), a couple newly embracing their lesbianism but not yet sharing group hugs with Phyllis' neo-Nazi son Josh (Sloan Grenz).

Even with the big reveal of a scandal-tinged past, Ted Koch's Ben seems to convey hurt or unsureness a bit grudgingly. It's worth wondering whether an actor (a good one) who has such a naturally bluff, guy's-guy bearing is the ideal fit for this brittle, conflicted and ultimately vulnerable character.

The lost souls Korder has sketched out may thirst for tranquillity, but what this production needs is anything but.

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James Hebert: (619) 293-2040; jim.hebert@uniontrib.com

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
SD Reader

JAN 31 2008

Sea of Tranquility

According to Howard Korder's comedy-drama *Santa Fe*, New Mexico, has replaced California as the place, if not to find, heal, or reinvent oneself, then at least the site for major depressurization. Everyone - a Whitman's sampler of various neurotics - has toxic underpinnings (even a house). Reactions to their burdens range from allergies to murder. A relocated family counselor (and demoted psychiatrist) wants to do good but — physician heal thyself finds that his meddling magnifies peoples' troubles. Korder raises some fundamental questions: Can people change? Are our emotions, as psychobiologists aver and antidepressants corroborate, just chemically induced? Are spells, curses, and charms for real? Korder's written a funnier and much deeper play than the one currently at the Old Globe. As if reticent to face its implications, director Michael Bloom has staged *Tranquility* just this side of sitcom, his actors chipper-mannered and wavy-gestural and clinging to a "type." The result is a consistently strange tone that, when in doubt, encourages easy laughs over more upsetting matters. David Kay Mickelsen's costumes run the New Age gambit. Scott Bradley's set, a 70-year-old rough wooden plank house with cracking adobe walls, is a gem. And Robert Wierzel's expert lighting has a creamy, high-desert feel.

OLD GLOBE THEATRE, 1363 OLD GLOBE WAY, BALBOA PARK. THROUGH FEBRUARY 10; THURSDAYS, 8 P.M., FRIDAYS, 8 P.M., SATURDAYS, 2 P.M., SATURDAYS, 8 P.M., SUNDAYS, 7 P.M., TUESDAYS, 7 P.M., WEDNESDAYS, 7 P.M. 619-234-5623.

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"Sea of Tranquility" at the Old Globe Theatre

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San Diego Arts
"Sea of Tranquility" at the Old Globe Theatre

By Welton Jones
 Posted on Jan 18 2008
 Last updated Jan 18 2008



Like Big Sur and Monument Valley, Santa Fe just does things to people's minds. Really. Even dramatists.

"Sea of Tranquility," now on view at the Old Globe Theatre, is Howard Korder's reaction to the New Mexico city's force field. Interesting. Reminds me of Willa Cather's minor masterpiece set around Santa Fe, "Death Comes For the Archbishop": It's more about author's bedazzlement than it is about the characters or the place.

Nobody's perfect among these 14 people. The older characters are more complex than the young, thank goodness. But throughout, stereotypes get a rigorous workout.

The central figure, played with dogged fortitude by Ted Koch, is a shrink come down in the world, trying to forget a lurid past and launch a family counseling practice in a town rich with mystic hedonists.

The parade of patients opens with a newly-lesbianized Jewish mom who brings along not only the jolly girlfriend but also the sullen son with the swastika haircut. Nike Doukas and Rosina Reynolds play mom and chum, respectively, with a relaxed off-handedness that increases in charm retrospectively as the nuts pile up while Sloan Grenz wrestles with the first of several youthful caricatures with suggest Korder is impatient with anybody not yet kicked around sufficiently by the world.

Others of the same ilk – sketches as unconvincing as a grownup's imitation graffiti – are represented by Joy Farmer-Clary, bland as a misunderstood daughter stalked by Scientology; Ashley Clements, vague as a teenage runaway just passing though on the way west from the Burning Man Festival; and Tony von Halle, all spacey as the token Native American.

The shrink's home life revolves around his second wife, a pop writer who snaps, "Don't mock my oeuvre," which turns out to be sex after death. Erika Rolfsrud takes advantage of this character's extra cracks – the couple's new house seems to be killing her and she's getting death threats, sort of, from Indians objecting to her proposed book on cannibalism among the pueblo people – and makes herself always welcome in the mix, as does Jeffrey Kuhn, who romps through the biggest stereotype of the piece – the neurotic, insecure, brother-in-law Hollywood writer – like a spaniel let into the meat locker.

Well, maybe there is one even more traditional stereotype, the oily Hollywood lawyer on the Scientology payroll. Ned Schmidtke plays him so keenly that everybody in the house, guilty or not, fell silent and shifty as he showed the shark's grin.

Schmidtke is one of the three actors who do double duty here. He's also effective as a larger-than-life renegade archeologist in biker gear, a rather bold homage to Christy Turner, father of the Anasazi

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drag, a laudible odd homage to Christy Turner, ruler of the Atlasazi cannibal theory.

The other doublers are Miss Reynolds, a San Diego icon nailing a steel-tipped art tycoon when not radiating determined karma as the saner lesbian, and Carlos Acuna, who plays a hard case Latino convict that our shrink encounters while doing volunteer therapy (not enough problems in his regular life, apparently) and the con's cop brother.

Seems like I've left out somebody but I'm not even going to count. All these characters entwine themselves like a tangle of plotlines leftover from a semester of Modern Novel 101 and it's not incorrect to suggest that little works out very well.

The shrink, probably a proxy for the author despite any protestations to the contrary, wants to peel away everybody's problem but effective results are as elusive as plumbing repairs to his house. Most of the problems are just hauled off by their victims. The glimmers of hope at the end there are dubious.

The Globe production is smoothly rounded, though Scott Bradley, with his foam rocks and inaccurate slice of sky, doesn't solve the needs for outdoor atmosphere. The costumes (David Kay Mickelsen) seem about right and so does Michael Bloom's staging, ultimately quite straightforward and facile.

The despairing wife accuses her inconvenient brother of operating "a random patter sitcom joke generator." Howard Korder knows well about such things. They fizzle in places like Santa Fe.

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Dates : 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through Feb. 10, 2008.
Organization : Old Globe Theatre
Phone : 619 234-5623
Production Type : Play
Region : Balboa Park
URL : www.oldglobe.org
Venue : Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

*About the author: Welton Jones has been reviewing shows for 50 years as of October 2007, 35 of those years at the UNION-TRIBUNE and, now, six for SANDIEGO.COM where he wrote the first reviews to appear on the site.
 More by this author.*

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JAN 31 2008

'Sea of Tranquility' a stormy voyage for patrons

By Eileen Sondak

With the world premiere production of "In This Corner" turning up the heat on the Old Globe's Cassius Carter Center Stage, the Globe recently opened a new show on its Main Stage.

"Sea of Tranquility" sounds like it ought to be more serene than the boxing-themed play next door. But don't let the soothing title fool you. There's no smooth sailing here.

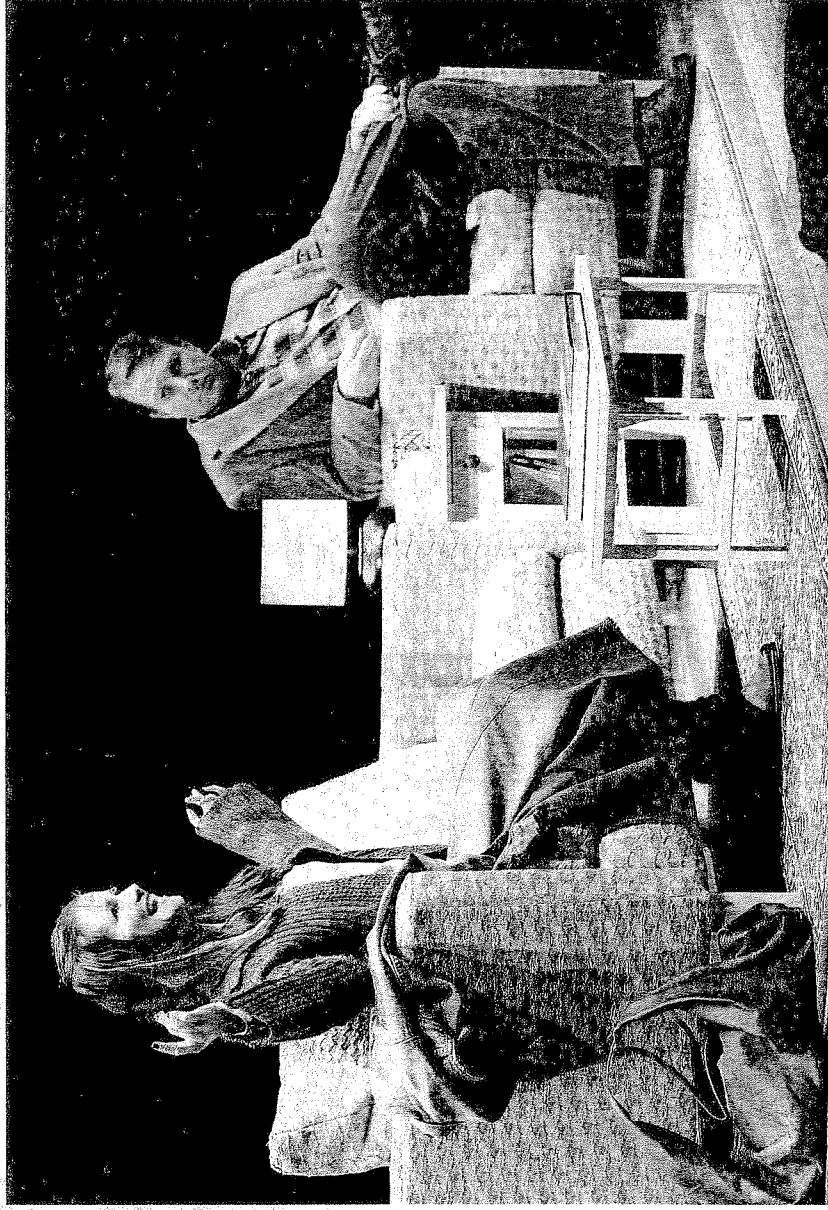
The play (written by award-winning Old Globe playwright-in-residence Howard Korder) came to San Diego with a good pedigree, named one of Time Magazine's best plays of 2004.

Unfortunately, the production left some first-nighters wondering what all the fuss was about.

The characters — and there are more than a dozen in this play — are more like caricatures, and it looked like director Michael Bloom (artistic director of the Cleveland Playhouse) was at a loss for what to do with most of them. The most interesting ones made only minor appearances in the uneven two-act play.

The central character is a psychologist, who has moved to his lovely Santa Fe home from Connecticut to start a new life with his wife.

With a psychologist at its core, it's no surprise the show relies heavily on therapeutic sessions with patients for its dramatic punch — and for its humor as well. Ted Koch plays the main character without much conviction, and a few of his talky patients are too quirky to be believed or too



Joy Farmer-Clary as 'Astarte' and Ted Koch as 'Ben' in The Old Globe Theatre's production of 'Sea of Tranquility' by Howard Korder, playing in the Old Globe Theatre through Feb. 10. The play was named on of Time Magazine's best of 2004, though our reviewer calls the play 'uneven.'
Provided photo by Craig Schwartz

dull to care about.

In the case of Astarte (the wackiest and talkiest of the lot), you might find yourself wishing she'd get off the couch and let someone else have a turn. But don't blame Joy Farmer-Clary for her character's shortcomings. Farmer-Clary gives a fine performance as the mixed-up girl seeking help from a therapist who needs help himself.



Review

Jeffrey Kuhn gets stuck with another outrageous character, Randy. This hyperactive Hollywood type makes a bouncy entrance and continues to act spastic or absurd throughout the show. Local favorite Rosina Reynolds is wasted in the mousy

Ashley role at the beginning, but she gets a chance to display her brazen charm in Act 2 as Adele.

A real standout in the cast is Carlos Acuna, who gives a creepy performance as the prison inmate, then changes colors and becomes the guy's well-balanced brother at the end of the play.

Ned Schmidtke is another strong presence on stage, but his role as a

sleazy lawyer is far too small, and his beatnik character is just another cliché. Most of the play focuses on less interesting people (including the psychologist), and the surprise revelations don't do much to spice things up.

One of the more unpleasant characters who ends up in the psychologist's office is Josh — the Jewish boy with a Nazi insignia tattooed on the side of his head. Sloan Grenz does his best to keep you fascinated, but (like too many of the characters in this play), Josh is just too unlikeable — and unlikely.

You'll enjoy seeing Erika Rolfsrud — a familiar face from several Globe productions, and a respected Broadway actress — as the psychologist's sickly wife, even if she never wears anything more attractive than a baggy sweatshirt or a frumpy robe.

"Sea of Tranquility" is described as a comedy (albeit a dark one), and many audience members were laughing heartily during the performance, but it left the rest of us out in the cold.

You can judge for yourself, if you get down to the Old Globe before the show closes on Feb. 10.

Performances are at 7 p.m. on Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday; 8 p.m. on Thursday, Friday and Saturday; and Saturday and Sunday have 2 p.m. matinees.

Tickets range from \$19 to \$59 and are available at 619-231-GLOBES or at www.TheOldGlobe.org.

SAN DIEGO CLIPPING
SD Union Tribune

JAN 19 2008

'Sea' might be a bit too tranquil

THEATER REVIEW

Cast seems adrift from script's emotional level

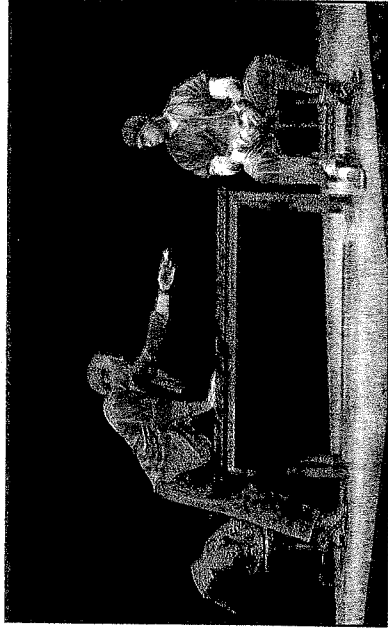
By James Hebert
ARTS WRITER

The Sea of Tranquility sounds like a swell place to go dip your toes, unless you know it's on the moon and has the added gall not to contain any water at all.

The couple at the center of Howard Korder's "Sea of Tranquility" seem similarly let down by their adopted hometown of Santa Fe, N.M. It's where they'd hoped to find some serenity, maybe rinse away a few sins. Instead, old miseries prove as malleable as a lunar landscape.

It doesn't hurt the title's symbolism that "sea of tranquility" also happens to be the name of an acupuncture point (it's at mid-chest, so you know), and holistic-happy Santa Fe has no shortage of acupuncture joints.

But as staged in the work's West Coast premiere at the Old Globe Theatre (where Korder is playwright in residence), the play has emotional terrain that shares an un-



As the therapist Ben, Ted Koch gets around, here volunteering his services to an inmate played by Carlos Acuna. Craig Schwartz

DETAILS

"Sea of Tranquility"

When: Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 7 p.m.; Thursdays-Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7 p.m.; through Feb. 10.

Where: Old Globe Theatre

Tickets: \$19-\$59

Phone: (619) 234-5623

Online: TheOldGlobe.org

SEE 'Tranquility,' E12

'TRANQUILITY'

CONTINUED FROM E1

Misfits and misanthropes wander through

play's tone, which shifts (sometimes precipitously) from stretches of tense dialogue to scenes of crackling comedy.

It might simply be that the actors and director Michael Bloom need a bit more time to find, in performances and staging, a dynamic range that fits the script's. "Sea" also challenges them with its structure — the play is made up of mostly short, not always organically connected scenes. Quick blackout-like transitions when things are in sync, the play can sing — though Korder's humor, which feeds on all the dippy clichés about places like Santa Fe, is in a defiantly minor key.

The afflictions begin with Ben and Nessa, who've fled their old lives in Connecticut to start over in Santa Fe. Ben (Ted Koch) is a therapist who preaches that healing and personal change flow inexorably from the power of imagination. (The "Field of Dreams" model of wellness.)

"Act as the person we wish to be," he tells clients, though it gradually becomes clear that his gospel of self-transformation is itself something of an act.

Nessa is a mess in more overt ways: A writer, she suffers from a vague fatigue and a very nasty rash, though her mordant humor (helped immensely by Erika Rolfsrud's ace delivery) survives intact.

"Everyone at Sarah Lawrence had me pegged for a slim but assured volume of wry short stories by the time I was 24," she says self-mockingly, a nod at her career as a "popularizer" of fringe-y sci-

ence ideas — cats in the afterlife and the like. "I believe I've put them in their place."

These newcomers, settled into a spiffed-up old adobe, are in turn put in their place — by the lingering grievances of locals, by a bitter clash of cultures, by their own vain attempts to run from themselves, even by the house itself, whose infirmities seem twinned with Nessa's troubles.

Among the misfits and misanthropes who wander through is Nessa's brother Randy (Jeffrey Kuhn), a TV writer and human nerve ending who is the most purely comic presence, and Gilbert (very strong Carlos Acuna), a Santa Fe native and hard case whom Ben is counseling in prison.

We also meet a few of Ben's clients — most memorably Ashley and Phyllis (Rosina Reynolds and Nike Doukas, both spot-on), a couple newly embracing their lesbianism but not yet sharing group hugs with Phyllis' neo-Nazi son Josh (Sloan Grenz).

Even with the big reveal of a scandal-tinged past, Ted Koch's Ben seems to convey hurt or uneasiness a bit grudgingly. It's worth wondering whether an actor (a good one) who has such a naturally bluff, guy's-guy bearing is the ideal fit for this brittle, conflicted and ultimately vulnerable character.

The lost souls Korder has sketched out may thirst for tranquility, but what this production needs is anything but.

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James Hebert: (619) 293-2040; jim.hebert@uniontrib.com

January 31, 2008

Front Row Center with Eileen Sondak

'Sea of Tranquility' anything but

Sea of Tranquility, the play currently in production on the Old Globe's Main Stage, sounds like it ought to be more serene than the boxing-themed, *In This Corner* (playing at the Globe's sister theater next door).

But don't let the soothing title fool you. There's no smooth sailing in this *Sea*.

The play (written by the award-winning Old Globe playwright-in-residence Howard Korder) came to San Diego with a good pedigree and was named one of *Time Magazine's* best plays of 2004. That gave local audiences good reason to anticipate a top-notch theatrical experience.

Unfortunately, the production that opened in Balboa Park recently, left some first-nighters wondering what all the fuss was about.

The characters (and there are more than a dozen in this play) are more like caricatures – and it looked like director Michael Bloom (artistic director of the Cleveland Playhouse) was at a loss for what to do with most of them.

The most interesting ones made only minor appearances in the uneven two-act play.

The central character is a psychologist, who has moved to his lovely Santa Fe home from Connecticut to start a new life with his wife.

One of the best things about the show is the stunning set (by Scott Bradley, whose triumphs include Broadway as well as a few Old Globe hits).

Bradley's designs for the southwestern-style abode are brilliant, and the moveable set adjusts nicely to the needs of the psychologist's office as well.

Credit Robert Wierzel for lighting the piece so that the southwestern sun seems to stream in through the back windows, as well. Wierzel also has an outstanding background on Broadway and other leading theatre capitols, although this is his first production for the Old Globe.



Craig Schwartz/Special To The East County Californian

Erika Rolfsrud as "Nessa" and Ted Koch "Ben" in The Old Globe's West Coast premiere of *Sea of Tranquility*, by Howard Korder, directed by Michael Bloom. The show plays through Feb. 10.

With a psychologist at its core, it's no surprise the show relies heavily on therapeutic sessions with patients for its dramatic punch – and for some of its humor as well (think of the *Bob Newhart Show*, the film, *Ordinary People*, or any Woody Allen movie).

Ted Koch plays the main character without much conviction, and a few of his talky patients are too quirky to be believed or too dull to care about.

In the case of Astarte (the wackiest and talkiest of the lot played by Joy Farmer-Clary), you might find yourself wishing she'd get off the couch and let someone else have a turn.

But don't blame Clary for her character's shortcomings, blame the script. She gives a fine performance as the mixed-up girl seeking help from a therapist who needs help himself.

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A real standout in the cast is Carlos Acuna – who gives a creepy performance as the prison inmate, then changes colors and becomes the guy's well-balanced brother at the end of the play.

Ned Schmidtke is another strong presence on stage, but his role as a sleazy lawyer is far too small; and his beatnik character is just another cliché. Most of the focus of the play is on less interesting people (including the psychologist) – and the surprise revelations don't do much to spice things up.

One of the more unpleasant characters that end up in the psychologist's office is Josh – the Jewish boy with a swastika tattooed on the side of his head.

Sloan Grenz does his best to keep you fascinated, but (like too many of the characters in this play), Josh is just too unlikable and unlikely.

You'll enjoy seeing Erika Rolfsrud (a familiar face from several Globe productions, and a respected Broadway actress as well) even if she never wears anything more attractive than a baggy sweatshirt or a frumpy robe. Rolfsrud plays the psychologist's sickly wife.

She appears to be allergic to their historic home, and that adds an element of mysticism to the mix. Too bad that theme wasn't explored with a little more depth.

Sea of Tranquility is described as a comedy (albeit a dark one), and many audience members were laughing heartily during the show, but it left the rest of us out in the cold.

You can judge for yourself. The play will be on the boards through Feb. 10.

ON STAGE

CHECK THIS OUT

Fourteen's a crowd: The Old Globe Theatre's current *Sea of Tranquility* wants to be a musical. The 14 characters are so relentlessly stereotyped through dialogue that songs are the next natural medium for their development. But that initial chord never materializes—we're stuck with a crowd of almost tokenized basket cases, from a neurotic gay mom to a flighty Hollywood writer, all of whom rarely exhibit the flirtations with reality that would bump up their believability (San Diego staple Rosina Reynolds is pretty good in dual roles). The focal figure is a shrink named Ben (Ted Koch), transplanted to the Southwest amid a smarmy past. His clientele's traits eventually lead him into deeper questions about his life and the human experience—unfortunately, he doesn't seem to solve many people's problems along the way. You have to see an outstanding Ned Schmidtke as a greasy Scientology attorney, and director Michael Bloom lets the story speak for itself.

But beyond playwright Howard Korder's fixation on Santa Fe, that story's interesting plot points are few and far between. The show runs through Feb. 10 at the Old Globe mainstage, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park. \$46-\$56. 619-23-GLOBE or www.oldglobe.org.

—**Martin Jones Westlin**



Sea of Tranquility

Somewhere beyond the Sea of Tranquility

By CHARLENE BALDRIDGE | DOWNTOWN NEWS

If one were looking for the Sea of Tranquility, one would find that it is a dry sea situated within the Tranquillitatis Basin on the moon. That's where Apollo 11, the first moon-lander, set down. "Sea of Tranquility" also provides the name of a rock/space rock band, the title of several songs, and the title of Howard Korder's 2004 play, which was named one of the year's best by Time magazine.

Korder's work deals with a psychologist (Ted Koch) who moves with his new wife from the east coast to present-day Santa Fe. As the play unfolds the audience learns the move and the change in practice were occasioned by Ben's divorce and a precipitous fall from his former, exalted position as a psychiatrist.

Korder introduces us to Ben's anthropology-obsessed wife, Nessa (Erika Rolfsrud), who works with local fauna – digs and descendents – to prove that the Anasazi dined on each other's flesh. The more she discovers, the sicker she gets with an unidentified, incurable disease. Her wasting, however, is a mere metaphor for what goes on

beneath the house and beneath Ben's seemingly unflappable exterior. The psychologist is a classic passive-aggressive, as evidenced in his interactions with Nessa, her rudderless, irksomely ebullient brother (Jeffrey Kuhn) and sessions with his troubled clients, clients' relatives, a prisoner, a policeman and an attorney for an organization resembling Scientology.

Foremost for loopiness is Astarte (a grand performance by Globe/USD MFA student Joy Farmer-Clary), the adrift, apparent lovechild of two flower children. Remembered for his turns in "A Body of Water," "Blue/Orange" and "Pericles," Ned Schmidtke is brilliant as both the rather scary attorney and a rootin'-tootin', classic denizen of Santa Fe.

Others include Rosina Reynolds and Nike Doukas as lesbian clients; Sloan Grenz as their rebellious offspring Josh; Carlos Acuna, who portrays a convict who fulfills Ben's do-gooder instincts; Ashley Clements as a runaway teen; and Tony von Halle, as a native American who first threatens then ultimately beds the dying Nessa.

One wishes only for a less wimpy

protagonist, one that the playwright could give more to do than stand at scene edges and look helpless, one who has the courage to say no and pick the lint from his own navel (think Dr. Phil). The denouement is like that old Tom Waits homeless loop.

The action fades as Ben takes the tune once more from the top. He is typical of many in his profession. Real, sad and humorous, the ending offers no hope, no solutions and no neat resolutions. Life is devastating and yet we go on playing the same song over and over again.

"Sea of Tranquility" is dense, trying one's patience while at the same time bringing mirth and a dash of granola upon which to chew. Staged by Michael Bloom of the Cleveland Play House in his Globe directorial debut, the show's star, if there is one, is Scott Bradley's facile scenic design, lushly lighted by Robert Wierzel to give one a bone-deep hankering for the Southwest and its open skies.

"Sea of Tranquility" continues Tuesdays through Sundays through Feb. 10 in the Old Globe Theatre, \$29-\$62, www.theoldglobe.org or (619) 23-GLOBE.



PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Ted Koch as Ben and Erika Rolfsrud as Nessa in The Old Globe Theatre's West Coast premiere of "Sea of Tranquility," playing in the Old Globe Theatre main-stage through Feb. 10.

SAN DIEGO
Reader

February 7, 2008

Sea of Tranquility

According to Howard Korder's comedy-drama *Santa Fe, New Mexico*, has replaced California as *the* place, if not to find, heal, or reinvent oneself, then at least the site for major depressurization. Everyone - a Whitman's sampler of various neurotics - has toxic underpinnings (even a house). Reactions to their burdens range from allergies to murder. A relocated family counselor (and demoted psychiatrist) wants to do good but — physician heal thyself - finds that his meddling magnifies people's troubles. Korder raises some fundamental questions: Can people change? Are our emotions, as psychobiologists aver and antidepressants corroborate, just chemically induced? Are spells, curses, and charms for real? Korder's written a funnier and much deeper play than the one currently at the Old Globe. As if reticent to face its implications, director Michael Bloom has staged *Tranquility* just this side of sitcom, his actors chipper-mannered and wavy-gestural and clinging to a "type." The result is a consistently strange tone that, when in doubt, encourages easy laughs over more upsetting matters. David Kay Mickelsen's costumes run the New Age gambit. Scott Bradley's set, a 70-year-old rough wooden plank house with cracking adobe walls, is a gem. And Robert Wierzel's expert lighting has a creamy, high-desert feel.

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SAN DIEGO
Reader

February 7, 2008



Sea of Tranquility

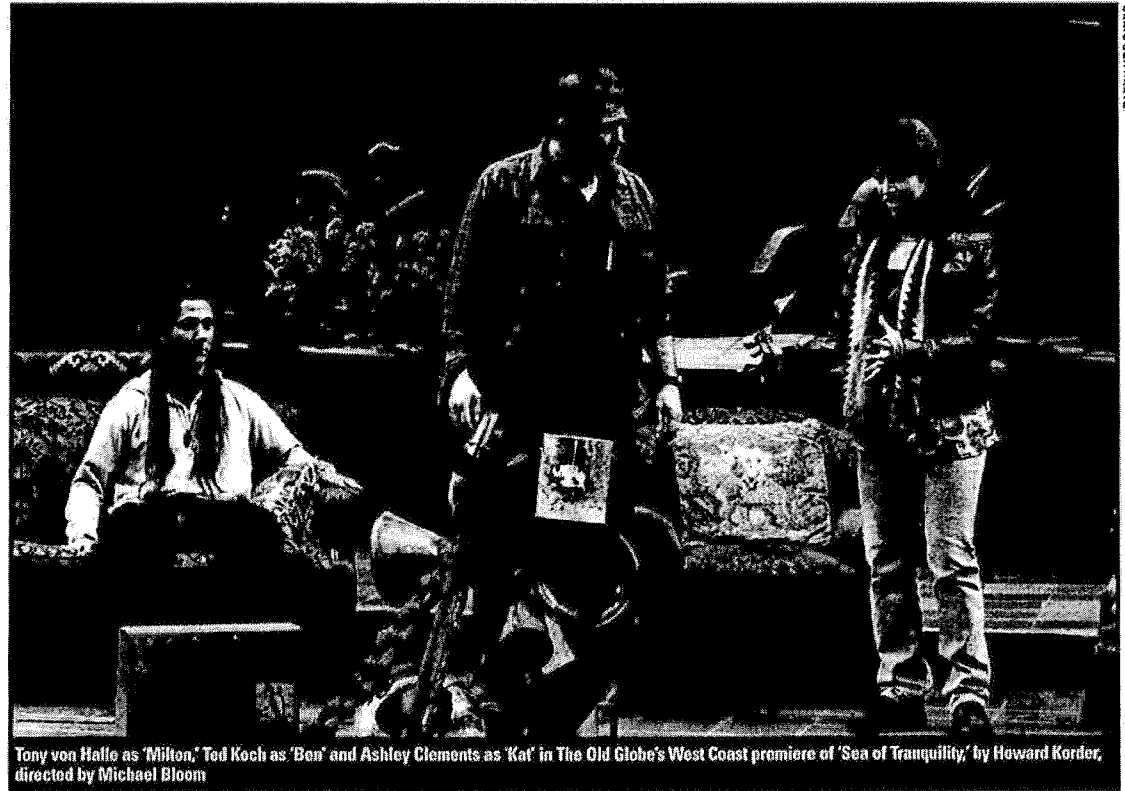
THEATER

Shipwrecks, gamblers and moving shrinks

by Jean Lowerison

Sea of Tranquility

If tranquility is what psychotherapist Ben (Ted Koch) and his wife Nessa (Erika Rolfsrud) were seeking when they packed up their belongings in Connecticut and moved, they picked the right house. The homey if crumbling old adobe house in Santa Fe is about as restful looking as they come, with a cactus garden on the deck and southwestern colors within.



Tony von Halle as 'Milton,' Ted Koch as 'Ben' and Ashley Clements as 'Kat' in The Old Globe's West Coast premiere of 'Sea of Tranquility,' by Howard Korder, directed by Michael Bloom

But then life and a seemingly endless parade of quirky but utterly unengaging characters starts trooping through the house – oddball clients for Ben, a couple of teenage runaways, a TV writer who speaks sitcom, miscellaneous unexplained others barely named and unclear of dramatic purpose. After a while, tranquility gives way to the suspicion that you're watching a farce – except that it's not very funny.

The Old Globe Theatre's production of Playwright-in-Residence Howard Korder's 2004 play *Sea of Tranquility* plays through Feb. 10, directed by Michael Bloom.

Sea of Tranquility seems to be about broken people in a disintegrating house, and about uprooting and re-inventing oneself (and questioning whether that is possible). But what are we to make of characters like teenage Jewish neo-Nazi Josh (Sloan Grenz) or Native American inmate Gilbert (Carlos Acuña), who answers Ben's question about why he killed his victim with "What was my f-ing choice?" Or another character who asks, "What does it matter what you believe as long as you believe it?" Are these people you'd willingly spend a couple of hours with?

Then there's the long riff by Nessa about the disappearance of the Anasazi people, the point being that their disappearance was due to internal, not external action. I think this is meant to apply to you and me as well, but it does not seem a particularly enlightening observation.

Time magazine named *Sea of Tranquility* to be one of the ten best plays of 2004, so perhaps my expectations were too high. The word from here is that even Rosina Reynolds can't float this sinking boat, though she and Ben have by far the best scene.

Randy gets it right for the production when he says, "I looked inside myself like you're supposed to, and there's nothing there."

But Scott Bradley's set is terrific.

Sea of Tranquility plays through Feb. 10 at the Old Globe Theatre. Shows Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets call 619-234-GLOBE or visit www.theoldglobe.org.