

on launching a new Uranium Madhouse project: Neal Bell's Cold Sweat

I will have been teaching for eleven years in October. In the first class I taught, in San Francisco in the fall of 2004, I assigned two-person scenes from three plays, and one of them was Neal Bell's *Cold Sweat*. It's a play I had been thinking about since the mid-nineties, when I considered doing it as my thesis production at the Yale School of Drama. I opted for a Peter Handke play that I knew that no theater would ever engage me to do. I felt that I might someday persuade a theater that *Cold Sweat* was worth producing.

And here I am, lo these many years later, embarking on a production of *Cold Sweat* with my very own theater cabal on the east side of Los Angeles. It's our fourth production in as many years, and we have the battle scars to show for it. We are in the process of scheduling auditions, and the response from actors who have read the script so far has been unbridled enthusiasm. They know a juicy, chunky, succulent piece of dramatic writing when they see one. It's a difficult play to characterize: the heroine, Alice Franklin, a surgeon in Vietnam as the play opens, faces wrenching and harrowing developments from the first moments, but she and the people she meets confront it all with a wry sense of humor and verbal relish, so that the piece is infused with a comic spirit even as painful and even devastating losses are sustained.

I have continued to work with *Cold Sweat* in my classes, and veterans of the class can attest that I have come to know the lines of many of the scenes with infuriating precision. Bell's ear for dialogue is impeccable, and the comedy is as much in the rhythms of those exchanges as it is in quips and wisecracks. The humor that the play reveals amidst a barrage

of traumas and losses make the piece endlessly satisfying to work on.

So it's with great excitement that I approach producing and directing this play. I think it is an unjustly neglected work, perhaps because its subject matter is as challenging as its tone is surprising in the face of that subject matter. The play presents the kind of extremity of circumstance, worldly and spiritual, that embody the Uranium Madhouse aesthetic. So I welcome the challenge.

I worked with Alex Fishkin, who has composed music for our last two productions, to create this video that offers a taste of the piece:

As you can see from the end of the video, we are soliciting donations from our friends and community in support of this worthy effort. I hope you, dear reader of my blog, will consider joining us and becoming a part of this effort by making a donation:

We would be very grateful, and we think you will be very proud.

