A MESSAGE FROM THE artistic director

Thank you for joining us for Nixon’s Nixon by Russell Lees! We are excited to kick off our 35th anniversary season with this imaginative political satire and welcome back director Elaine Vaan Hogue. Elaine and the cast of Nixon’s Nixon have collaborated before on New Rep’s stage in Imagining Madoff and we are thrilled they have joined together again to explore Lees’ creative version of the infamous story of President Nixon’s resignation.

As New Rep’s 35th season is my first as Artistic Director, we intend to fully incorporate our season’s theme of TRANSITION as we embark on a new chapter. We hope that this season’s plays will make you laugh, reflect, empathize with others, and spark conversation about the vital ideas of our time.

We invite you to join us as our season continues with Trayf, a comedic coming-of-age story about young Chasidic men grappling with their friendship, identities, and assimilation. During the holidays we will continue with our seasonal tradition of a large-scale musical production with Oliver! I am thrilled to be directing this beloved musical. My hope is to bring new theatricality to this classic show with an exciting look and fresh perspective.

Thank you again for visiting us today, and please do share your experience with friends and family. We appreciate your support and look forward to seeing you again soon as we transition into a new chapter of art-making and advocacy. Feel free to reach out to me at michaeljbobbitt@newrep.org and share your thoughts.

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NIXON’S NIXON
BY RUSSELL LEES
DIRECTED BY ELAINE VAAN HOGUE

CAST
(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

JOEL COLODNER*
JEREMIAH KISSEL*

Henry Kissinger
Richard Nixon

There will be no intermission.

NIXON’S NIXON is presented by special arrangement with Dramatist Play Service, Inc. New York.

NIXON’S NIXON was produced Off-Broadway by The Shubert Organization, Capital Cities/ABC, Jujamcyn Theaters and Robert LuPone and Bernard Telsey. Originally produced by MCC Theater. Executive Directors: Robert LuPone and Bernard Telsey, Associate Director: W. D. Cantler, Administrative Director: Lynne McCreary.

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NIXON’S NIXON
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“Tell me, Nixon, do you contemplate what the history books will make of you? Do you wonder about your place in history?”

“They gave me so much power, why are they surprised I used it?”

Excerpts from Nixon’s Nixon by Russell Lees


Watergate. Kissinger referred to Watergate as the “domestic passion play”.

Russell Lees’ satirical comedy smartly conceives the complex relationship between these two powerful men and cleverly imagines their engagement in a moment of historical crisis.

In the words of the playwright—“...the play is not so much about historical personages and their character traits as it is about the very human and personal struggles in retaining or relinquishing great power and coming to terms with one’s legacy.”

Power is often described as being seductive. The use and abuse of power for personal gain in the political arena is inevitable. In Nixon’s Nixon we are witness to fierce, visceral debate between Nixon and Kissinger. As the two men role-play, taking on with relish the colorful personas of Brezhnev, Kennedy, Mao, Golda Meir, and even Julie Nixon, we enter a world of corruption and subversion, illuminated by Lee’s shrewd use of humor. The parallels one might make with the contemporary political landscape in America are striking. History, indeed, repeats itself.

“History repeats itself – first as tragedy, second as farce.”

—Karl Marx

“I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country...corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed.”

—Abraham Lincoln
Nixon continues to fascinate.... Somehow his paranoia, obsessiveness, grandeur and pettiness live, stashed away in the dark closets of the American psyche. We can’t help but air them out every now and then.
- Russell Lees, Playwright

INSPIRATION FOR NIXON’S NIXON
Playwright Russell Lees had long wanted to write a play about American history, he told Deseret News, but he “couldn’t think of any successful examples.” Then a friend who’d been reading a biography of Henry Kissinger remarked that the night before President Richard Nixon resigned was “awfully dramatic.” After reading the same biography, as well as biographies of Nixon and Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein’s The Final Days, Lees knew he “had to write something!”

SURPRISE APPOINTMENT
Richard Nixon hardly knew Harvard professor Henry Kissinger when he appointed him Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs in 1968. The appointment surprised many Washington insiders. The two men seemed to have little in common, including their views on foreign policy. Kissinger, an adviser to Nixon’s rival Nelson Rockefeller, had been an outspoken critic of Nixon’s candidacy. Yet Nixon and Kissinger bonded over their distrust of bureaucracy, resentment of Congressional interference, predilection toward unilateral decision-making, and preference for covert activity. At the same time, each man strove to safeguard his own position of power. Unbeknownst to one another, they “eavesdropped on themselves,” as historian Joan Hoff puts it. Nixon installed a secret electronic recording system in the Oval Office, and Kissinger ordered his staff to tape, or transcribe from notes, all of his own phone conversations and many of his meetings.

MUTUAL LOATHING
Nixon and Kissinger formed a powerful alliance in the White House, but tapes and transcripts reveal their loathing for one another. Behind closed doors, they questioned each other’s mental stability. Nixon called Kissinger “a crybaby,” “a dictator,” “psychopathic.” Kissinger declared Nixon “a madman,” “a drunk,” “unfit to be president.” They gave each other nicknames: Nixon was “Meatball Mind,” Kissinger “My Jewboy,” an epithet Nixon periodically used to taunt Kissinger, which Kissinger endured in obsequious silence. Kissinger regularly leaked valuable information, thereby endearing himself to the press, which in turn fostered his popularity with the public. (He even gained a reputation as “a swinging single”!) Fearing he’d be overshadowed, Nixon felt aggrieved by Kissinger’s growing stature. Kissinger mollified Nixon with flattery.

WATERGATE OBSESSION
On June 17, 1972, burglars hired by Nixon appointees broke into Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate complex in Washington, DC to install hidden microphones. For more than two years, Nixon denied involvement in a cover-up of the break-in. He continued to work steadily, meeting daily with numerous leading government officials, even after May 1973, when televised public hearings began on the Watergate scandal, and July 1973, when he
-refused to hand over tapes to the Watergate special prosecutor. But in 1974, as his close senior aides and attorney general were indicted for their role in the break-in and cover-up, and as evidence mounted exposing his own culpability, Nixon became so obsessed with the Watergate investigation he saw almost no one in the White House. To maintain a faade of industriousness, he kept up only his public appearances. In the words of political scientist Matthew Beckmann, “Richard Nixon effectively quit being president well before he resigned the presidency.”

RAGE AND BOOZE AND SUICIDAL DESPAIR
While Nixon resented Kissinger’s grasping for power and influence, and occasionally talked of firing him, Watergate made Kissinger indispensable. Nixon sought to use foreign policy crises to offset threats of impeachment, and Kissinger (now also secretary of state), was the face of US foreign policy. Eventually the balance of power shifted as Kissinger took advantage of Nixon’s weakness. A long-time problem drinker and pill taker, Nixon became increasingly erratic in his behavior. Matthew Beckmann encapsulates the concerns of journalists and White House staff:

[C]olumnist Stewart Alsop worried the President was “on the naked edge of a nervous breakdown” ... Hunter S. Thompson reported Mr. Nixon was “crazy with rage and booze and suicidal despair” ... Woodward and Bernstein’s Final Days (1974) depicted a distraught Nixon roving the White House, whispering to his predecessors’ portraits ... Alexander Haig, Nixon’s final Chief of Staff, acknowledged that he had had the White House physicians hide the President’s pills for fear he might kill himself ... David Gergen, a speechwriter in Nixon’s White House, stated the implication: “There was a time during the Watergate crisis when President Nixon was nearly incapacitated.”

DEFIANCE
In February, 1974, a Federal grand jury secretly named Nixon an unindicted co-conspirator in alleged obstruction of justice. In July, 1974, the US Supreme Court unanimously decreed that Nixon must comply with the special prosecutor’s subpoenas of sixty-four taped conversations. When Nixon resisted, providing many fewer tapes, the House Judiciary Committee approved three articles of impeachment: obstruction of justice, misuse of power, and contempt of Congress. On Monday August 5, the White House released transcripts of three conversations ordered by Federal Judge John J. Sirica. One of them, “the smoking gun,” exposed Nixon’s involvement in an effort to use the CIA to halt the FBI’s Watergate investigation. The next day, a still defiant Nixon told his Cabinet he would not resign.

FEAR AND FAILINGS
On Wednesday, August 7, a group of Republican Senators informed Nixon he would not survive a Senate impeachment vote. When Nixon told his family he would likely resign, they urged him not to. Later that night, Nixon summoned Kissinger to the Lincoln Sitting Room. In Nixon’s Nixon, Russell Lees includes known facts of that meeting, but the play is not meant to reflect historical accuracy. Rather, as Variety theater critic Mark Blankenship affirms, Lees imaginatively enhances historical facts with “the fear and failings that so often turn politics into drama.”

PRODUCTION HISTORY
In 1996, after a four-week run at the MCC Theatre, Nixon’s Nixon moved to the Westside Arts Theatre/Downstairs and became a rarity for its time: a mainstream hit with a political focus. The play was revived at the Lucille Lortel Theatre in 2006.
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meet the artists

JOEL COLODNER*  
(Henry Kissinger) returns to New Repertory Theatre after performing in Two Jews Walk Into a War..., Regular Singing, Freud’s Last Session, Indulgences, Three Viewings, Imagining Madoff, and The Elephant Man. Regional credits include The Haunted Life, Native Gardens, A Christmas Carol, and It’s a Wonderful Life at Merrimack Repertory Theater and Our Town at The Huntington Theatre. Originally from New York City, he now resides in Portsmouth, NH.

JEREMIAH KISSEL*  
(Richard Nixon) returns to New Rep after most recently being seen in Two Jews Walk Into a War..., Fiddler on the Roof, Imagining Madoff, and King of Second Avenue. Kissel is a forty-year veteran of Boston’s professional theaters and has played leading roles for Huntington Theatre Company, American Repertory Theater, Merrimack Repertory Theatre, The Lyric Stage Company of Boston, Shear Madness, Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, and various out of town companies when they have passed through Boston. Recent roles include Bernie Madoff at 59E59 in NY, Cyrano at Gloucester Stage Company, and Scrooge at Central Square Theater. He is the winner of several IRNEs, as well as two Norton Best Actor Awards, most recently in 2014, and most notably, the very first Norton Best Boston Actor Award in 1990. He is also the recipient of the 2003 Norton Prize for Sustained Excellence. Screen credits include “The Town,” “The Fighter,” “Joy,” “Stronger,” “Body of Proof,” “The Wrong Car,” and “Castle Rock.”

RUSSELL LEES  
(Playwright) was a founding member of TheatreWorks/West (TWW) in Salt Lake City where he was involved in producing, directing, and performing for many seasons. His play Monday Night Football and co-written musical, The Foggiest Notion were produced by TWW. For several years, Russell served as the director of the French Language plays at the University of Utah, directing works by Molière, Lonesco, and Feydeau, among others. He studied under the aegis of Derek Walcott at Boston University/Boston Playwrights’ Theatre (BPT) which produced The Case of the Blue Narcissus directed by Constantine Arvanitakis. His play Nixon’s Nixon (initially workshopped at BPT) has enjoyed two off-Broadway productions and dozens of regional productions as well as a world-wide tour and a production at the Harold Pinter Theatre in London’s West End. His play Monticel’, about the complicated relationships of Thomas Jefferson and the Hemings family, was produced at BPT directed by Wesley Savick. Russell works writing interactive narratives and was the creative director of The Dark Eye, an interactive adventure based on the tales of Edgar Allen Poe featuring the voice of William S. Burroughs. Russell currently lives in Montreal where he writes for the video game franchises Assassins Creed, Far Cry, and Watchdogs.

ELAINE VAAN HOGUE  
(Director) returns to New Repertory Theatre after most recently directing Straight White Men, Oleanna, Baltimore, The Amish Project, Imagining Madoff (Elliot Norton nominee for Outstanding Production), and The Kite Runner. In 2014 she co-curated the inaugural Next Rep Black Box Festival. Regional directing credits include The Tempest (Arts After Hours); After Orlando--A Theatre Action and A Disappearing Number (Central Square Theater); Metamorphosis (Boston Center for American Performance); Walking the Volcano (BCAP/BPT); Crave (Nora Theatre Company); Thin Air: Tales from a Revolution (UMKC); Infinity’s House (Majestic Theatre); Fen (New Theatre); Runaways, The Labyrinth
of Desire, The Penelopiad, Execution of Justice, Lizzie Stranton, The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek, Angels in America and many others (Boston University). As an actor she appeared in the world premiere of Dark Room (Bridge Repertory Theatre); Mrs. Packard (Bridge Repertory Theatre/Playhouse Creatures); The Journey (BCAP/InMotion Theatre); Friends of Armenia (Faneuil Hall); The Road to Mecca (BCAP); Creation: Mythic Weavings (Magdalena USA); and When Jennie Goes Marching (Olney Theatre Center). She is a fervent member of The Magdalena Project, an international network of women in contemporary theatre and recently participated in her sixth Transit Festival at the Odin Teatret in Denmark. Upcoming projects include directing The Wedding Gift (Emerson Stage) and the premiere of Representation and How To Get It in which she will play the visionary human rights activist, Julia Ward Howe. Ms. Vaan Hogue teaches in the School of Theatre at BU. Originally from Los Angeles, she resides in Central Massachusetts.

AFSOON PAJOUFAR (Scenic Designer) is a designer of stage and environment for theatre, opera, and performance. She is originally from Tehran, Iran. Her recent design credits include; Collective Noun at Paradise Factory, NYC, S.I.N.S.O.F.U.S at Harvard University, The Lathe of Heaven at Booth Theatre-Boston, and Heartland at New Repertory Theatre. Her design for Cabaret was chosen for the 2019 American Exhibition at the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space. She currently resides in Brooklyn, NY. www.afsoonpajoufar.com

ZOE SUNDRA (Costume Designer) returns to New Repertory Theatre after most recently working on 1776 as the Assistant Costume Designer. Regional costume design credits include Ragtime, James and the Giant Peach, and In the Heights (Wheelock Family Theatre), Poppea (New England Conservatory), and Ru Paul’s Drag Race Allstars Season 4. Sundra holds a degree from Massachusetts College of Art and Design and teaches at the Boston Arts Academy and the Cambridge School of Weston. Originally from Hartford, CT, she currently resides in Cambridge, MA.

AJA JACKSON (Lighting Designer) returns to New Repertory Theatre after most recently working on Becoming Dr. Ruth and Straight White Men. Other regional credits include Photograph 51 (Nora Theater Company), The Black Odyssey (Central Square Theatre), Hear Word (American Repertory Theatre), Nat Turner in Jerusalem (Actors’ Shakespeare Project), Ragtime (Wheelock Family Theatre), and Breath and Imagination (Lyric Stage Company of Boston). Jackson works as the Resident Lighting Designer an interdisciplinary movement company. She received her BFA from the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film, her MFA from Boston University, and serves as a mentor at Brighter Boston. Originally from Omaha, Nebraska, she now resides in Brighton, MA.

ELIZABETH CAHILL (Sound Designer) will make her New Repertory Theatre debut in this production of Nixon’s Nixon. Regional credits include The Wolves, Road Show, Camelot, Warrior Class (Lyric Stage), Small Mouth Sounds, Men on Boats (SpeakEasy Stage), Macbeth and Equivocation (Actors’ Shakespeare Project), Be More Chill, Cabaret, Tick Tick Boom (Baldwin Wallace University), Familiar (A.R.T. Institute), Dark Room (Bridge Rep), The Earth Room, Nomad Americána (Fresh Ink Theatre), Photograph 51, The Revolutionists (The Nora), ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas, Alligator Road (Greater Boston Stage Company), The Hotel Nepenthe, and Hamlet (BrownBox Theatre Project). Cahill holds a BFA in Theatre Design and Technology from Emerson College. Originally from Northborough, MA, she currently resides in Jamaica Plain, MA.
HEATHER RADOVICH* (Production Stage Manager) will make her New Repertory Theatre debut with this production of Nixon’s Nixon. Regional credits include Pride & Prejudice (Actors’ Shakespeare Project), Elephant & Piggie ‘We Are in a Play’ (Wheelock Family Theatre), Power Play (Shakespeare Now!), and stage manager for the 2018 season at Priscilla Beach Theatre. Radovich holds an MFA in Stage Management from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and a BA in Theatre Arts from Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, California. Originally from northern California, she now resides in Jamaica Plain, MA.

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