Barbecue

By Robert O’Hara

Directed by Damon Kiely †

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Jared Gooding

Costume Design
Aly Renee Amidei*

Sound Design
Heath Hays*

Properties Design
Leah Hummel

Stage Manager
Casey Peek

Production Manager
Becca Levy

CAST

James T .......................................................................................................................... John Henry Roberts*, Terence Sims
Lillie Anne .............................................................................................................. Barbara Figgins, Deanna Reed-Foster
Adlean ...................................................................................................................... Kristin Collins, Kamille Dawkins*
Marie ....................................................................................................................... Celeste M. Cooper, Anita Deely
Barbara ..................................................................................................................... Abby Pierce, Ginneh Thomas

UNDERSTUDIES

Peter Ash, Paulette Hicks, Cynthia Hines, Candice Monique, Marc Rogers, Emma Skorepa

*Denotes Strawdog Company Member
†Associate member, Stage Directors and Choreographers Society
A Conversation with Playwright Robert O’Hara and Director Damon Kiely

**WARNING:** Contains spoilers and adult language.

Dramaturg, Taylor Barfield, sits down with playwright, Robert O’Hara and director, Damon Kiely to discuss *Barbecue*, celebrity, the perils of technology, and America's obsession with watching fucked up people.

**Damon Kiely (DK):** Great, so Taylor’s going to ask some questions, you and I are going to talk, you’re going to swear, we’re going to bleep that out, and this will all be great.

**Taylor Barfield (TB):** This is a wildly raucous play in certain ways and in other ways it is some of the most heartbreaking and real depictions of drug addiction, that I’ve seen this side of the “Intervention” TV Show. Damon, what drew you to this play? And Robert, what drew you to write it?

**Robert O’Hara (RO):** One of the interesting things that made me go down the alleyway of this play is a phenomenon that I like to call, watching white people do shit. There are all these reality shows: watch the white guy build a house, watch the white guy fix the car, watch the white guy go around the world and eat. And I’m like, black people fix cars. They build houses. They eat too. But the thing is, we’re so used to watching white folks doing it. Or the show where you watch the white girl who is sixteen and pregnant. I know sixteen-year-old black people who are pregnant. I don’t know why they don’t have a television show.

So, I started thinking about the stories, the narratives that we are comfortable seeing white folks in, but not seeing people of color in. And that drew me down the alley of writing *Barbecue*, telling the story from two different perspectives, but with the same story.

**DK:** And for me, it started with the reading of the play at Steppenwolf. And I don’t know if I have ever laughed so much in my life. I felt like I was gasping for breath and in pain by the end of it. And without giving anything away, I was also continually surprised. Those are two things I love in a play. I will also say that I have known Robert for a long, long time and we’ve never worked together and so there was a great joy at the idea of finally, if not working directly with him, at least work on his work and talk to him about it and in those ways get great ideas from him and collaborate in that way. That to me was a great joy. And one of the great things about Robert, I’ve always felt, is I have never met anyone who is such a truth-teller. The truth might be funny, but it’s true. I found myself, when I was laughing at things, laughing and going, oh I cannot believe he just did that. I shouldn’t be laughing at that. That’s not right. I feel guilty now. This is terrible. But then, I’d laugh again, probably harder.
TB: Robert, you just talked about the “white people doing things” trope in television, citing specifically “16 and Pregnant.” In the introduction to Barbecue and Bootycandy, you talk about how the truth of the matter is that these characters are fucked up. What is it about watching fucked up people do things that we as Americans find so fucking entertaining?

RO: Well, why do you want to see people who are not fucked up? You want to watch people who are healthy and in control of their emotions and they don’t have any problems? Why would I want to watch that? That’s not interesting. I want to watch people who are more fucked up than I am or just as fucked up. Someone once said to me about my work at a talkback, someone said to the dramaturg, “Is all that really necessary?” And the dramaturg looked at her and said, “none of this is necessary. This is theatre.” Why are you asking if something is necessary? That’s the most stupid question I’ve ever heard. Is it necessary? We’re making the shit up. Why would we want to make something with people who are not in conflict or not fucked up? I think the more fucked up, the better.

TB: Could you both talk a little about the role of celebrity, fame, and money in the play?

DK: One of my favorite stage directions is when Barbara is trying to negotiate with her family to seal the deal—and that’s something I think everyone is trying to do in this play—is that Zippity Boom has a new addiction [in chasing fame and fortune.] We can’t be ok with the everyday boringness of our lives and the boringness of human relations. There’s something that must make that more interesting. Either that’s our obsession with a different celebrity, we can live vicariously through them, or it’s drugs, or it’s alcohol, or it’s our own need for fame, our own need for recognition in whatever field that we’re in. We need a way to feed that hunger, otherwise life’s kind of depressing.

RO: Most of the characters have names from my family. So, my aunts and my mother came up to see the play. My mother’s name is Lillie Anne and my aunts are Adlean and Marie. And there’s a lot of conflict and anger and vulgarity between the characters in the play. And so I was concerned that my aunts and my mom would be like, why are you writing this play with our names in it and that has us cussing and fussing. And they came up and saw it and afterwards thought they were celebrities. They were going up to the actors and saying, oh yeah you played me so well. And I was like, all this stuff that I thought they would be concerned about, the conflict, went out the window the moment they saw that the character had their name. I could have had them killing each other and they’d say, oh my god that was such a good portrayal. That was insta-celebrity.

TB: Do you all think that the advent of the technological age has made the quest for fame and celebrity more dangerous, more drug-like, more difficult to wrangle?

DK: Well, I certainly will say that I’m much more addicted to it than Robert is. I definitely, and I’m not sure why, am more prone to posting about my life than Robert is and I definitely feel the addictive draw of it. It’s like shouting out the front door and seeing who is going to yell back at you.

RO: I know people who have broken off engagements, had knockdown, drag out fights, over Facebook. And I’m like, really? You’re arguing with everyone on earth? Yelling. Because I also create fiction, these sort of mad stories, the idea of putting my real life for everyone to see… I’m a very shy person, whether you know it or not. Damon probably does know. I’m very shy. And I don’t like to be around crowds. I don’t like people to make me the center of anything. I like to drop a little bomb in the middle of the room and tiptoe out.

Visit www.strawdog.org to read the full interview.
CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Kristin Collins (Adlean) is thrilled to be making her Strawdog debut in this brilliant play. Previous credits include *By The Bog of Cats*, *Watch on the Rhine*, *Beaten*, *Marisol* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (The Artistic Home), *Lips Together, Teeth Apart* (Eclipse Theatre) and *Boy Gets Girl* (Non-Equity Jeff Nom), *Vieux Carre*, and *Dating Walter Dante* (Raven Theatre). She also has worked with Victory Gardens, Jackalope Theatre and LiveWire Chicago. Much thanks to Damon and Sam. All her love to Dan, Riley, Declan and Aidan who always encourage her to go out and play.

Celeste M. Cooper (Marie) most recently appeared in Hypocrites/Theater on the Lake remount production of *You On The Moors Now*. Some theatre credits include *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (Court Theatre), *The Hard Problem* (Court Theatre), *Measure for Measure* (Goodman Theatre), *Stick Fly* (Windy City Playhouse), *Never the Sinner* (Victory Gardens Theater), *The Hammer Trinity* (The House Theatre/ Adrienne Arsht in Miami), *The Mecca Tales* (Chicago Dramatists), *Our Lady of 121st Street* (Eclipse Theatre), *How We Got On* (Citadel Theatre), her original one woman shows- *Fight 4 Your Life*, and later *The Incredible Cece* (MPAACT & Stage 773). Her TV/Film credits include a recurring role as the Medical Examiner Jaine Fulltern on *Chicago PD* (NBC), Spike Lee's *Chiraq*, *Sense8* (NETFLIX), and various other projects. Celeste won The Most Promising Actress Award from the Black Theater Alliance in 2014 for her portrayal of Josephine in *Ruined*, which led her to becoming an ensemble member and casting associate with Eclipse Theatre Company. Ms. Cooper has a B.A. in Speech Communications & Theatre from Tennessee State University and an M.F.A. in Acting from DePaul University The Theatre School. Celeste is incredibly grateful for Papa God, family, friends like family, and Paonessa Talent Agency. You can catch her next in Steppenwolf Theatre's world premiere production of *BLKS*.

Kamille Dawkins (Adlean) is more than excited to take on her first role as a new ensemble member of Strawdog Theatre. She hails from the island of Jamaica and has been performing in Chicago since 2014. She has been featured as an actor, singer and musician in Filament's *Pinocchio*, House Theatre's *The Revel* and Strawdog Theatre's *Once In a Lifetime* among other shows. In 2015 she was nominated for the Phylicia Rashad Award for Most Promising Actress following her role in *If Scrooge Was A Brother* with ETA Creative Arts Foundation. Kamille most recently performed in the devised play *Gender Breakdown* with Collaboraction Theatre.

Anita Deely (Marie) is thrilled to be back at Strawdog after appearing in Distance last year. Some recent credits include *After Miss Julie* at Strawdog, *The Woman in White* at Lifeline Theatre Company, *Louis Slotin Sonata* and several performances of *Mud Blue Sky* both at A Red Orchid Theatre. Anita's sort of recent adventures as a dialect coach include *Strandline*, *Pump Girl*, and *New Electric Ballroom* at A Red Orchid Theatre, *The Pride* with About Face Theatre Company, *Pornography* and *Under the Blue Sky* at Steep Theatre Company and her Jeff nominated work as coach of *Old Times* at Strawdog.
Barbara Figgins (Lillie-Anne) is making her Strawdog debut. She is an ensemble member with Irish Theatre of Chicago where she most recently appeared in a Jeff-nominated one-woman show My Brilliant Divorce. Other ITC credits include In Pigeon House, The Shadow of a Gunman, Dancing at Lughnasa, Our Father, Scenes From the Big Picture, WAR and Bold Girls. Other credits: Ellie in Scapegoat: Or Why the Devil Always Loved Us (New Colony); Pam in Exit Strategy (Jackalope Theatre); Miss Tesman in Hedda Gabler (Writers Theatre); The Awake (First Floor Theatre); Polina in The Seagull (The Artistic Home); Richard III (Oak Park Festival Theatre); The History Boys (Timeline, Jeff Award Best Ensemble), Cherrywood (Mary Arrchie). Many thanks to Evan for bringing me on board for this journey!

Abby Pierce (Barbara) is currently a teacher at The Piven Prison Project at Cook County Jail, Piven Theatre Workshop, and Beacon Academy. She will be performing in the upcoming production of All My Sons (Court Theatre). Other theater credits include: Amy and the Orphans (Goodman Theater New Stages); Naperville (Theater Wit); Rolling (Jackalope Theater); With Love and a Major Organ (Strawdog Theatre); Heat Wave (Steppenwolf Garage); Rapture, Blister, Burn (Goodman Theatre u/s); Richard III and Cymbeline (Ricardo Montalban Theatre); Proof and Sideman (Del Rey Theatre); Romeo and Juliet (Geffen Playhouse, Outreach Project). Other film and TV credits include: Chicago Fire, Chicago PD, TBS’s Rooftop Stand Up Comedy Hour, Game Day, The Way To Go, and Silo. Abby is a graduate of The School at Steppenwolf and is represented by Stewart Talent.

SAVE THE DATE: MARCH 10, 2018

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Deanna Reed-Foster (Lillie Anne) is an Emmy Award winning and Jeff nominated actress who is thrilled to be making her Strawdog Theatre debut. Some Chicago credits include: For The Love Of (Pride Theater), The Colored Museum (Pulse Theatre), Even Longer and Farther Away (The New Colony), Marvin’s Room & Mill Fire (Shattered Globe Theatre), Seven Guitars (Court Theatre) and The Bluest Eye (Steppenwolf Theatre). She is an Artistic Associate with Shattered Globe Theatre and a Core Ensemble member of The New Colony Theatre. Deanna can be seen in a recurring role on NBC Chicago Fire. She can also be seen in the upcoming film “Last Flag Flying” and in other films like “Southside With You” and “Roll Bounce”. Deanna is represented by Big Mouth Talent.

John Henry Roberts (James T) joined Strawdog’s ensemble in 2004, where his credits include The Night Season, After Miss Julie, Old Times, Cherry Orchard, Aristocrats (Jeff nomination, Actor in a Supporting Role), Detective Story (Jeff Award, Ensemble), and his own play The Sweeter Option. Recent Chicago credits: The Little Flower of East Orange (Eclipse Theatre — Jeff nomination, Actor in a Principal Role), Diamond Dogs and The Hammer Trinity (The House Theatre), Miss Holmes and Jane Eyre (Lifeline Theatre). Television: Chicago Med, Chicago P.D. He’ll next appear in American Theater Company’s Welcome to Jesus. He’s represented by Paonessa Talent.

Terence Sims (James T) is thrilled to be working with Strawdog Theatre for the very first time. Previous credits include Force Continuum (Eclipse Theater); Monster (Steppenwolf for Young Adults); Between Riverside and Crazy (Steppenwolf Theatre); and To Kill A Mockingbird (Children’s Theatre Madison). He has studied American Theatre Arts at RoseBruford College in London, and is a graduate of Columbia College Chicago. Terence is also a member of Kinfolk Collective, an afrofuturist aesthetic tribe of artists & scholars working to rewrite the present and remaster the narrative of members of the African diaspora.

Ginneh Thomas (Barbara) is excited to be working with Strawdog Theatre Company. Chicago credits include: Monster (Steppenwolf for Young Adults), The Submission (Pride Films and Plays, Jeff Award Winner for Actress in a Supporting Role), and Unspeaking (Broadway Playhouse). Regional credits include: Home (Jubilee Theatre), Julius Caesar (Shakespeare Dallas), Woyzeck (Kitchen Dog Theater), Trysts in Toledo (Theatre Three), and The Story (Boarshead Theatre/Plowshares Theatre). She received her MFA from Southern Methodist University. Television credits include Chase. “Thanks to my mother, because of you I am me.”

Peter Ash (u/s James T) After receiving his training from Columbia College Chicago, Peter Ash has worked with The Plagiarists, Raven Theatre, City Lit Theatre, Promethean Theatre Ensemble and Oak Park Festival among others. Peter enjoys eating nice meals, riding his bike and the outdoors.
CAST BIOGRAPHIES CONT.

Candice Monique Evans (u/s Marie / Barbara) is delighted to be working with Strawdog for the first time. Some of her favorite credits include Children of a Lesser God, The Muse, Wilma Rudolph and Laura Dennis. She also recently contributed in several independent film projects. Candice completed the two-year Acting Conservatory at Act One Studios. She is a proud member of SAG/AFTRA. When she isn't acting, Candice works as a communications coach and team-building facilitator. Daily, she is a proud wife to her supportive husband and momager to her brilliant son.

Paulette Hicks (u/s Lillie Anne / Adlean) is working with Strawdog Theatre for the first time. Other Chicago credits include: Mrs. Delacroix in Dead Man Walking at Piven Theatre, Nanny in The Frozen on the Square with Akvavit Theatre, Constance in King John with Linchpin Theatre, Patricia in The Gray Girl at the Factory Theatre, Emma in Betrayal at Oak Park Village Players, The Abbess in Comedy of Errors at Chase Park Theatre, Dr. Charlotte in Marvin’s Room at Redtwist Theatre and she understudied the roles of Sister Helen Prejean in Dead Man Walking, Margaret in The Goldfish with Route 66 Theatre, and Diane in Little Dog Laughed at About Face Theatre.

Cynthia Hines (u/s Lillie Anne/Adlean) is excited to be making her debut with Strawdog. Previous work includes Women At War (Rivendell Theatre Ensemble); Clybourne Park and Doubt (both at Harper College); and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (Galaxy Theatre Company).

Marc Rogers (u/s James T) is very excited to work with Strawdog Theatre. Marc has appeared in numerous plays, commercials, print ads, and independent films. Some of his past credits include: It Don’t Just...Shake Off (Open Door Theatre), Little Flower Of East Orange (Eclipse Theatre), Sins of The Father (ETA), Upstate (MPACCT Theatre), King Hedley the II (Congo Square Theatre), and Once On this Island (Fleetwood Jourdan Theatre). Marc also performs in the children’s musical, When Good Broccoli Goes Bad. He thanks God for his gifts and opportunities as well as support from family and friends.

Emma Skorepa (u/s Marie/Barbara) is acting/understudying with Strawdog Theatre Company for the first time. As a graduate of Denison University and the study abroad program from the Gaiety School of Acting, she played roles in The Heidi Chronicles, The Remotest Indies of this Living Earth, and Tartuffe. Ohio regional theatre credits include the Colonial Historical Theatre Association and the Columbus Civic Theatre. In fall of last year she assistant stage managed Distance for Strawdog and Savage in Limbo for the Poor Theatre. In Chicago, she has performed with Bard Dog, at Live Read Movie Mondays, and for the Whiskey Radio Hour.

PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

Aly Renee Amidei (Costume Designer) has been a designer and playwright in Chicago since 2000 with a focus on designing for new work and re-envisioned classics. She is a proud Strawdog company member and is the assistant professor of costume design at the university of North Carolina-Charlotte.

Taylor Barfield (Dramaturg) is a freelance dramaturg and theater artist from Baltimore. He currently serves as the Associate Artistic Director for Collaboration Theatre Company. Select dramaturgy credits include Megastasis (Eclipse); Electra (Court); and Cymbeline (Yale Repertory Theatre). Taylor has also
served as assistant director for the world premiere productions of *Man in the Ring* (Court) and *War* (Yale Repertory Theatre) and the Midwest premiere of *Paradise Blue* (Timeline). He received his BA in biology and English from Johns Hopkins University and his MFA in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from Yale School of Drama.

**Mikael Burke (Assistant Director)** is a director, deviser, and educator currently pursuing his MFA in Directing at The Theatre School. When not in school, he serves as Creative Director of Young Actors Theatre in Indianapolis, IN, and previously served as Associate Artistic Director of Indianapolis’ NoExit Performance. He is a proud recipient of the 2012 Robert D. Beckmann Emerging Artist Fellowship from the Arts Council of Indianapolis, and is also a 2017 Princess Grace Award winner in Theatre. Directing credits include: *Still; Hedda Gabler; Eurydice* (TTS) *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea; Middletown; Medea; Macbeth; I Am Peter Pan; The Pillowman* (NoExit). This February, he will direct Nambi Kelly’s adaptation of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* at The Theatre School.

**Jared Gooding (Lighting Designer)** is excited to be designing with Strawdog for the first time. A native of Houston Texas, design credits include the Associate Design of *Lookingglass Alice* (Lookingglass), serving as the Lighting Assistant for The Wiz Live on NBC, designs for The Hypocrites, Timeline Theater, American Blues Theatre, Definition Theatre, Maddision Children’s Theatre, Sideshow Theatre, About Face Theatre, MPAACT, Pegasus Theatre, Next Theatre, Congo Square, Citadel Theatre, and Fleetwood Jourdain Theatre. His work is featured at goodingdesigns.com, he is a company member with MPACCT and an Artistic Associate at American Blues Theatre, and holds a BFA in Lighting Design from DePaul.

**Heath Hays (Sound Designer)** is an ensemble member and Co-Artistic Director at Strawdog Theatre Company, where he has designed over 13 productions including *Improbable Frequency, The Sweeter Option* (Joseph Jefferson Award Nomination for Outstanding Sound Design), *Quiz Show, Once In A Lifetime* and several others. As a freelance sound designer in Chicago, Heath has designed for many companies including Chicago Dramatists, the Hypocrites, Mortar Theatre, BSTC, Raven Theater, A Red Orchid Theatre, and many more.

**Leah Hummel (Props Designer)** is thrilled to work with Strawdog Theatre for the first time. She teaches costume and prop construction at Niles West High School and holds a BFA in Theatre Design & Technology from Western Michigan University. Thanks to Mom, Dad, and Dave.

**Damon Kiely (Director)** is the Chair of Performance at DePaul’s Theatre School and the author of *How to Read a Play: Text Analysis for Directors* (Routledge 2016). His production of *Hank Williams: Lost Highway* won the Jeff Award for Best Musical Production Midsized. He directed the last production in Strawdog Theatre’s longtime home, *Once in a Lifetime*. He served as Artistic Director for American Theatre Company and has directed for American Blues, American Theatre Company, Route 66, A Red Orchid, Next and many others. His original plays *Thieves Like us* and *The Revel* were produced by The House Theatre of Chicago. Prior to moving back to Chicago, he taught, produced, and directed in New York City. He is a winner of the 2000-02 NEA/TCG Career Directing Program, the 2000 Drama League Fall Directing Program, and the 1997 Princess Grace Award.
Becca Levy (Production Manager) is delighted to return to Strawdog Theatre in this new role as Production Manager after Stage Managing Strawdog’s productions of Cymbeline, Distance, and D.O.A. She has been on the stage management team for a number of other amazing Chicago Theatres including Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Jackalope Theatre Company, Red Theater, and Pinebox Theatre Company. Outside of Chicago: Networks Touring Presentations and Famers Alley Theatre. BFA Stage Management, Western Michigan University. Big love to Billy and Patrick!

Robert O’Hara (Playwright) has received the NAACP Best Director Award, the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play, 2 OBIEs and the Oppenheimer Award. He directed the World Premieres of Nikkole Salter and Dania Guiria’s In the Continuum, Tarell McCraney’s The Brother/Sister Plays (Part 2), Colman Domingo’s Wild with Happy as well as his own plays, BootyCandy and Insurrection: Holding History. His new plays Zombie: The American and Barbecue, world premiered at Woolly Mammoth Theater and New York Shakespeare Festival, respectively. He is currently directing a new musical, Uni/son inspired from the poetry of August Wilson at Oregon Shakespeare Festival and a new musical, Bella by Kirsten Childs at Playwrights Horizons. He will direct the world premiere of his play, Mankind, at Playwrights Horizons this fall.

Alexandra Oparka (Assistant Stage Manager) is a recent graduate of Western Michigan University with her BFA in Stage Management. This is her first show with Strawdog Theatre Company. She would like to thank her family for always being her biggest fans.

Casey Peek (Stage Manager) is excited to work with Strawdog Theatre Company again after stage managing Once in a Lifetime. Favorite Chicago credits include The Glass Menagerie and two wonderful productions of All Our Tragic with The Hypocrites, Battleaxe Betty as a part of American Theatre Company’s CORE program, Crime & Punishment and Geography of a Horse Dreamer with Mary-Arrchie, Ploughed Under and The Nutcracker with The House Theatre of Chicago, Brahman(i) with Silk Road Rising and About Face Theatre and Invasion! with Silk Road Rising. Thanks to The Joffrey Ballet and to her friends and family for supporting her theatre habit.

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SPECIAL THANKS

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Barbecue
Who are you to you? Strawdog’s 30th season continues to delve deep into what it means to determine one’s own identity, as we officially take up residence at our new performance space at 1802 W Berenice!

JANUARY 19 - MARCH 3, 2018

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BY SAMUEL ADAMSON
DIRECTED BY ELLY GREEN

The return of a fugitive brother puts the future of businessman Karsten Bernick in peril. Details of long-buried sex and embezzlement scandals surface to force Bernick to face his family, community and demons. Adamson’s version of Ibsen’s 1877 drama premiered at the National Theatre in 2005 to critical acclaim. Ensemble member Elly Green (After Miss Julie, The Night Season) directs our first production in the new Strawdog Theatre.

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BY BENNETT FISHER
DIRECTED BY CODY ESTLE

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