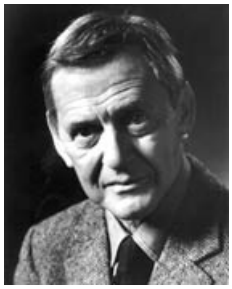
Tony Randall



Tony Randall
Biography

Tony Randall achieved his dream with the 1991 launching of his National Actors Theatre. For over a decade, he worked tirelessly to raise the money necessary to kick off his idea of such a theatre company. Now the dream is a reality. But that doesn't mean that Randall has retired from the areas of acting for which he has become best known. As a matter of fact, he is not only artistic director of the company, but actor and director as well. But you expect the utmost in versatility from Tony Randall, who, by the way, was recently inducted into the prestigious Theater Hall of Fame.

The National Actors Theatre is a not-for-profit subscription based company formed to bring the great classical repertoire of the world, with the finest actors, to a theatre that is within reach of all-- from the serious playgoer to students, and to the very young who will have the opportunity to experience, for the first time, the glories of one of our greatest arts. The National Actors Theatre will serve as a living library of our national and world theatre, ensuring that classical drama is as vital and immediate today as when it was written.

The Company is preparing for its next production (May 2003) of the oldest surviving play in the Western theatre tradition- Aeschylus' "The Persians," written in 470 B.C. NAT's most recent production was the acclaimed "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui" at the Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts at Pace University along with Mr. Randall starred Al Pacino, Steve Buscemi, Dominic Chianese, Billy Crudup, Charles Durning, Paul Giamatti, John Goodman and Chazz Palminteri.

Recently the National Actors Theatre made a historic transition. National Actors Theatre and Pace University have embarked on a cultural partnership intended to provide a new home for NAT; to enhance the educational opportunities for the Pace University family, and to aid in the revitalization of lower Manhattan through the arts. The agreement will see NAT taking up residence at the University's state-of-the-art 655 seat Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts and will enable the Company to further many of its original goals.

When Tony Randall founded NAT over twelve years ago, it was his intent to create a theatre company in a permanent location that would present fresh and illuminating productions
of well-known, time-honored works from the standard dramatic world repertory; produce lesser-known but equally important theatrical works; and, reproduce outstanding productions from America's regional theatres and international stages that might otherwise never enjoy such wide public acclaim. NA T also was created with a most important mandate -to educate and expose young people to the theatre. For ten years NAT's High School Outreach Program has provided, at no cost to the children or their schools, a theatre enrichment program for New York's public schools.

"The collaboration with Pace will provide a marvelous opportunity for us," said Tony Randall. "We will be able to continue

along our already successful path and to expand further
upon the dream. The ability to utilize both the students and the outstanding resources of Pace University and the professional theatre community will enable us to create a sophisticated theatreenvironment and present a multi-production season accessible to the established theatregoer, as well as students and our new neighbors in the re-energized downtown community."

In the company's first season, the plays were "The Crucible," " A Little Hotel on the Side" and "The Master Builder." Tony appeared in "A Little Hotel...," and directed the production of "The Master Builder." The second season began with "The Seagull," followed by a Tony Award-nominated production of "Saint Joan," and ending with the screwball comedy "Three Men on a Horse" starring Jack Klugman and Tony Randall. The company's third season opened with the Tony Award-nominated production of "Timon of Athens" with Brian Bedford and was followed by "The Government Inspector" with Tony and Lainie Kazan. It concluded with "The Flowering Peach" with Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson. Tony also starred with Jack Klugman that summer in an eight-week national tour of "The Odd Couple" to benefit N .A. T .

In its fourth season, The National Actors Theatre presented the musical comedy "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." Its fifth season featured Richard Brinsley Sheridan's comedy "The School for Scandal" with Tony playing Sir Peter Teazle, and "Inherit The Wind," starring George C. Scott as Henry Drummond and Charles Durning as Matthew Harrison Brady. "Inherit the Wind" broke box-office records for the company and was hailed by critics. Among the accolades the production received were the Best Revival and Best Actor Award (Scott) from the Outer Critics Circle, a Drama Desk Award for Scott, and the production was nominated for the prestigious Tony Award in the categories of Broadway revival and Best Actor. Tony appeared in the original 1955 production of the play in the role of E.K. Hombeck, and on a few special evenings recreated his role in the revival. He also played selected performances in the lead role of Henry Drummond. Tony and J ack Klugman successfully reprised their "Odd Couple" roles last summer at the Haymarket Theatre in London as a benefit for The National Actors Theatre, and in December (1996) Tony played Scrooge in A Christmas Carol at the Paramount in New York. The National Actors Theatre opened its sixth season with an acclaimed production of "The Gin Game" starring Julie Harris and Charles Duming and directed by Charles Nelson Reilly. The production has received nominations for Outstanding Revival by the Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk Committee, and TONY Awards. Charles Nelson Reilly received a TONY nomination for Best Director. Julie Harris received her historic TONY nomination for Best Actress. The NAT production of "The Gin Game" is on National tour through May 1999. Tony .lias,Just finished starring with his good friend Jack Klugman Neil Simon's "The Sunshine Boys". The NAT production opened to ecstatic reviews ast Se tember and ran through June 1998. "Night Must Fall" starring Matthew Broderick, which o ed a limited engagement March 8, 1999 and ran till June 27. Next NAT presented the acclaimed "Judgment At Nuremberg" starring Maximilian Schell, George Grizzard, Michael Hayden, Robert Foxworth, Marthe Keller and Joseph Wiseman. This stirring drama was written by Abby Mann and based on the War Crimes tribunals following the Second World War. In the Spring and early Summer of 1999, Tony and Jack appeared together in Tom Stoppard's "Rough Crossing" at the Coconut Grove Playhouse in Florida, and in the NAT production of "The Sunshine Boys" in Texas and he has starred in a production of "Damn Yankees" in Houston.

Tony Randall is a comedian. You start with that and it is something everyone accepts. There is all that television-- from "Mr. Peepers" to "The Odd Couple" and more-- to prove it. And those brilliant movie comedy roles. And the theatre.

But the Emmy A ward-winning actor is more than a funny man. He's one of the more erudite and accomplished conversationalists. He's an authority on opera and a serious student of
the theatre and art. You see him talking with Carson and Letterman-- and it's a highly amusing conversation. But you realize, too, that he knows what he's talking about.

Above all, Tony Randall is an actor of seemingly limitless range. Yes, he can break you up with laughter as the fastidious Felix of "The Odd Couple" or in the Doris Day comedies, but
there is also something very human and touching about those baffled characters he has played. And, when he has the opportunity, as in Broadway's "M.Butterfly" or such a movie as "No Down Payment," he can create a character of dramatic strength-- with comedy overtones only pointing up the characterization. Take his funny and poignant characterization in "Love, Sidney," the TV series spinoff ofhis memorable "Sidney Schorr" performance.

Still noted is the successful five year run of "The Odd Couple," which was based on the play by Neil Simon. Now in syndication, "The Odd Couple" is a phenomenon many cities run
two or three episodes nightly. Simon's Felix was one of those roles that seemed to have been written for him. He had played it on stage and was the immediate choice for the television
movie.

In 1991, as a gala black tie benefit for his theatre, Tony brought "The Odd Couple" back to Broadway. Reunited with Jack Klugman and featuring an all-star cast, this production was
treated by press and public as one of the outstanding theatre events of the decade. Tonyand Jack reprlsed their roles for two more gala National Actors Theatre benefits. In January 1992, they were again joined by an all-star cast for two one night benefits of "The Odd Couple" in Palm Beach and Los Angeles. In 1995, Jack and Tony toured the U.S., and in the summer of '96 brought Felix and Oscar over to London.

Despite his busy schedule with movies and all of the many talk show appearances he makes, he is also a frequent guest star on variety shows. He fits easily into dramatic and comedy
sketches, and even sings and has been known to dance a bit, adding rating points to these shows with his appearance.

Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the son of an art dealer, he graduated from Tulsa Central High School, then emolled in Northwestern University, where he majored in speech and drama. In
New York he studied at Columbia University and the Neighborhood Playhouse with the renowned Sanford Meisner. He also studied movement with Martha Graham and voice with Henri Jacobi, with whom he still studies.

His Broadway debut was in 1941 in "A Circle of Chalk." Soon thereafter he appeared with Ethel Barrymore in "The Corn is Green" and with Jane Cowl in "Candida," playing the role
of Marchbanks. After a short stint as a radio announcer, he was set for Elia Kazan's production of "The Skin of Our Teeth" but, after rehearsing one day, he was called into the Army. He served four years in the Signal Corps, being discharged as a Lieutenant.

After his discharge, he acted and directed in summer stock in Washington, D.C., before moving to New York and ajob with Harry Morgan's highly popular radio show. In the theatre
came roles with the legendary Katherine Cornell in " Anthony and Cleopatra" and as the stuttering brother in "The Barretts of Wimpole Street." With Lilli Palmer and Sir Cedric Hardwicke, he appeared in Shaw's "Caesar and Cleopatra."

It was the Edward Chodorov comedy, "Oh, Men!, Oh, Women!", which really established him in the theatre. He played Arthur Tanner, the bibulous movie idol (he was also in the Fox film version, but in a different role).

In the meantime, television had come into his life. He was a natural for the panel shows and his Mister Weskitt opposite Wally Cox in "Mr. Peepers" made him one of the most popular television actors of the day.

In the theatre, there was Lawrence and Lee's powerful courtroom drama, "Inherit the Wind" starring Paul Muni, based on the famous Scopes trail. Tony's character, that of a cynical
reporter, was based on H.L. Menken. After 17 months in the role, he was off to Hollywood and the film version of George Axelrod's "Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?" Life Magazine summed up his film work by saying, "Tony Randall is the finest new comedian the movies have found in a couple of decades."

A complete about-face came with the performance of unusual dramatic depth as the ~ desperate, pathetic husband opposite Joanne Woodward in "No Down Payment." But there have been many other notable Randall screen appearances: "Let's Make Love" opposite Marilyn Monroe "The Mating Game" with Debbie Reynolds the trilogy of his

Doris Day-Rock Hudson movies, "Pillow Talk," "Send Me No Flowers," and "Lover Come Back," in which his special character becomes one of the dominant elements. He is proud, of his many tour-de-force characterizations in the little known "The Seven Faces of Dr. Lao."

Tony recently returned to the screen in the May, 2003 20th Century-Fox release of "Down With Love," a re-make of his classic "Pillow Talk" starring Renee Zellweger and Ewan McGregor. The film was selected as the Opening Night film of the 2003 Tribeca Film Festival.

There has been more theatre, too, notably the musical comedy, "Oh, Captain!," based on the successful Alec Guinness film, "The Captain's Paradise," as well as the aforementioned "The Odd Couple," which he frequently toured with his television co-star Jack Klugman, to record- breaking box office receipts. Add a sell-out touring version of "The Music Man." And, in 1989, he scored with a rare dramatic theatre role in the original Broadway production of "M. Butterfly."

To the despair of his agents who had to turn down lucrative movie offers-- he has three times joined John Neville's repertory company in Nova Scotia. His Trigorin in Chekov's "The Sea Gull" won raves from theatre critics, including the illustrious Clive Barnes, who journeyed to see it. A year later he rejoined the company, this time to direct Ibsen's "The Master Builder." And then he directed and starred in "The Diary of a Scoundrel."

Says Tony: "I love classical music with the same passion with which I despise rock 'n roll." For Columbia Records, he provided a stunning narration of "Facade," conducted by Arthur
Fiedler. "Facade" is a comical piece consisting of 21 poems written by Edith Sitwell and put to music by Sir William Walton during the 1920's. (It might be noted that Tony recorded two highly successful record albums for Mercury Records. These spoofed the "Mickey Mouse" sound of some of the dance bands of the '30s, and Tony's rendition of "Boo Hoo" may be the most definitive this side of Carmen Lombardo.) He and Jack Klugman also did an album called "The Odd Couple Sings" on London Records. Opera audiences have known him as a regular on Texaco's Opera Quiz and as intemtission commentator on TV's "Live from Lincoln Center."

For over two decades, he has been the National Chaimtan of the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation for which he is a tireless worker. But he lends his support and prestige to all manner
of causes in which he believes.

A man of many opinions, Randall says, "There's only one thing worse than a man who doesn't have strong likes and dislikes, and that's a man who has strong likes and dislikes without
the courage to voice them." Randall has rarely failed to make his opinions known. His anti-smoking campaigns are famous. He has been known to snatch a cigarette from someone like Johnny Carson during a TV appearance. The Carson's and their like not only take it, but respect it. He's also outspoken on the subject of producers and critics who think of him solely as a comic. "I'm an actor," he says." Any actor skilled in his profession should be able to do comedy parts, but that's where the similarity ends."

An example of the wide range of his talents is a show that was particularly meaningful to him. fu the title role of "Sidney Schorr," the actor portrays a middle-aged, New York
homosexual whose unexpected association with a teen-age girl changes the course of his life. "Love Sidney," the NBC-TV series filmed in New York, found him continuing the funny-sad adventures of the same character. Never one to flinch from controversy, Tony took on the forces who complained of the implied homosexuality of the character. After some sharply witty attacks by Randall in the press and on talk shows, the opposition backed down. "Sidney" remained a character who "was what he was." And so, in a different sense but always, does Tony Randall.

His TV and movie appearances have lessened with his immersion into the National Actors Theatre, but he has still had time for two films for Disney, "Sunday Drive" and "Save the

Dog," as well as the Agatha Christie mystery, "The Man in the Brown Suit." fu September 1993, there was a TV special movie reuniting him with Jack Klugman in further adventures of "The Odd Couple." fu this period, he also completed two theatrical films, "That's Adequate," a spoof on the "B" movie genre, and "It Had to Be You," a Joseph Bologna/Renee Taylor comedy.

Tony Randall also starred in the British farce, "Two futo One," at the Paper Mill Playhouse, where he broke all existing records, and he starred in a production of "The Man Who Came To Dinner" with the Kenley Players in Ohio.

But the most exciting role Tony has played recently is that of new husband and father. After along, happy marriage of 54 years, Tony's wife, Florence, died in 1992 after a long illness.
Tony has since found love again with actress Heather Harlan, whom he met while she was interning at the National Actors Theatre. The two were married in New York by Mayor Guiliani on November 17, 1995. Then on April 11, 1997 Tony and Heather became first time parents to J lovely Julia Laurette Randall. On June 15, 1998, Tony and Heather became parents again with young J efferson Salvini Randall making his debut.

But, at this writing, his work, energy and talent remains devoted to his National Actors Theatre.

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