

## ■ LOS ANGELES

Tinashe Kajese in Athol Fugard's *Victory* at the Fountain Theatre.

As a rule, Athol Fugard does not see productions of his work directed by other people—but he took a chance in 2000 with Stephen Sachs's production of *The Road to Mecca* at the Fountain Theatre in Los Angeles. The reward—even more than a good night at the theatre—was an ongoing relationship between the playwright and director. Fugard entrusted Sachs with the world premiere of 2004's *Exits and Entrances*. Now Fugard has turned to Sachs again, for the U.S. premiere of his latest work, *Victory*, which runs at the Fountain through March 9.

For both Fugard and Sachs, it is a particularly meaningful project. An explosive drama about the “New South Africa,” the play explores the confrontation that occurs when an elderly white man discovers his home being burglarized by two young blacks, including the daughter of a woman he trusted and employed. The situation draws from a series of four violent burglaries suffered by the playwright himself—but more than a reflection on his own experiences, the play was a chance to comment on the lost opportunities his

country has seen since the end of apartheid in the early '90s. “South Africans want to cling to the moment when the miraculous happened, and not deal with the squalor and betrayal of the present,” says Fugard.

For Sachs, it is a message that is likely to resonate especially well with American audiences. “America is a country born from a dream of hope, an ideal of freedom, like the new post-apartheid South Africa,” says the director. “Yet inequality still exists in both places. In America, the chasm between the privileged and the deprived is spreading greater and greater. Some of the ills and blindness dramatized in *Victory*, American audiences will recognize as their own.”

That's not to say viewers should expect a lesson in politics or economics from one of South Africa's—and the world's—most cherished writers. “I don't think Athol considers himself a ‘political’ writer,” Sachs explains. “*Victory* is a powerful and deeply moving play about the collision of three human lives—a profoundly honest human story no matter which country you live in.” —David Kornhaber

## ■ SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

## WITHOUT A TRACE

“When I go, I leave no trace.”

You might think the speaker is some sage or vagabond. In fact, it is Everett Ruess, a responsible young voyager with a keen eye for arts and literature who disappeared in 1934 at age 20 while exploring the canyon country of Escalante, in Utah. Now, some 70 years later, Debora Threedy's play *The End of the Horizon* (playing March 14–30 at Salt Lake City's Plan-B Theatre Company) tells Ruess's story and that of his distraught family.

Threedy claims to suffer from “next-bend-itis,” which she describes as “the overpowering desire to know what's around the next bend or over the next hill”—so she feels connected to Ruess's passion for exploration. Don't mistake Ruess for Christopher McCandless, though, the protagonist of Jon Krakauer's 1996 non-fiction book (now a much-praised film) *Into the Wild*. “Ruess wasn't some reckless kid who got himself in too deep,” Threedy asserts. “He had spent a good part of the preceding four years wandering alone in wild places, including the northern Arizona desert just south of where his last camp was found.”

Director Kay Shean, whose own son went missing for several years in a foreign country (but has since returned safely), adds, “It's a crackling good story. With increased awareness today in how we may be damaging the planet, and with the rapid disappearance of wilderness areas, it's a good time to explore the connection between man and the wild beauty of nature.” —Eliza Bent

## ■ AUSTIN, HOUSTON AND GALVESTON, TEX.



## THE Happiness QUESTION

A FATHER DYING OF THE plague...a daughter who sets the world on fire...memories that come to life in the shape of puppets...it's all part of daily life for one peculiar family in *Rot*, named best original show in 2007

by the *Houston Press* and now being revived by *Mildred's Umbrella Theater Company*, in collaboration with *Bobbindoctrin Puppet Theatre*. “The main proposition that drives *Rot* is the question: What is happiness?” says author/director John Harvey. “Not only for the family, but also for the two gentlemen who sit in the family's front room”—in their underwear—“and watch the family argue and dream.” This creepily funny play, featuring an original score by Meghan Hendley, ran in January and February at Houston's *DiverseWorks*, *Super Happy Funland* and the *University of Houston* and at *Rude Mechanicals's Off Center Space* in Austin. It will show at the *Strand Theatre* in Galveston March 14–15. —Elaine Allen

Jennifer Decker in *Rot*.