

## FEBRUARY ALMANAC

### 90 YEARS AGO (1922)

The Curran Theatre opens in San Francisco. It will both produce and present work; early tenants include the Theatre Guild and the Civic Light Opera. The Broadway-style house will also stand in for a New York theatre during shooting of the classic film *All About Eve*.

### 50 YEARS AGO (1962)

Jerome Robbins directs the fancifully titled *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad* at Off Broadway's Phoenix Repertory Theatre. The downtown hit by Arthur Kopit features Jo Van Fleet, Austin Pendleton and Barbara Harris. A Broadway transfer and a film adaptation will follow.

### 30 YEARS AGO (1982)

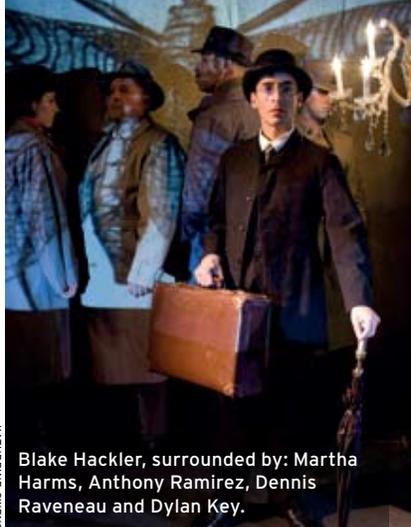
Polish the flatware: A.R. Gurney's *The Dining Room* opens Off Broadway at Playwrights Horizons. The collage of WASP decline will go on to run for 583 performances, prompting Don Shewey of the *Village Voice* to pen an essay called, "Can Playwrights Horizons Survive Success?"

### 20 YEARS AGO (1992)

After a five-year campaign, the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis announces \$26,114,345 in pledges—at the time, the highest amount ever raised by an American theatre.

## ■ DALLAS

# A KAFKAESQUE LOVE STORY



KATHERINE OWENS

Blake Hackler, surrounded by: Martha Harms, Anthony Ramirez, Dennis Raveneau and Dylan Key.

WHEN A PROFESSOR AT A COMMUNITY college with delusions of grandeur begins delivering lectures a tad too arcane for the tastes of his supervisors, he gets fired. So starts Len Jenkin's latest play *Time in Kafka*, which bows at Dallas's **Undermain Theatre** Feb. 15–March 17. Jenkin describes the play as a "part fairy tale, part time-travel love story."

Broke and with a baby on the way, Professor Spellman dreams he's visited by Franz Kafka. Kafka tells Spellman about a novel he wrote in 1913 while visiting a spa in northern Italy. "Kafka actually did go to this spa," Jenkin says. "So did Thomas Mann and Rudolf Steiner. Kafka was a bit of a hypochondriac," he adds. Kafka tells Spellman that he left the novel at the spa and never returned. The next day, Spellman boards a plane bound for Italy in search of the Hartungen Clinic near Lake Garda. There he

meets a cast of characters that includes a Russian countess, a doctor, an old general, various hustlers and a harlot—and slowly realizes he has traveled back in time. Meanwhile, Spellman's pregnant wife has reported her husband missing and is having Italian authorities dredge Lake Garda. Spellman uses his cell phone one last time to let his wife know how to find him, and she sets out on a time-traveling hunt.

"There are strange tales that get told and a series of philosophical conversations," says Jenkin, who cites Kafka's diaries and Kafka criticism by Guy Davenport as informative. Black-and-white projections by longtime-collaborator John Arnone will pepper the stage. When asked if the play is Kafkaesque, Jenkin responds, "I suppose it'd have to be!" —*Eliza Bent*

## ■ SAN FRANCISCO

# I'll Meet You in the Deep, Dark Woods



ANNIE PALADINO

Marilet Martinez explores *Tontlawald*.

**P**AIGE ROGERS COULDN'T believe her eyes and ears. There she was at a **UCLA Live** performance by the fabled experimental Polish troupe **Teatr ZAR**—and suddenly, unexpectedly,

all her preconceptions about storytelling in the theatre were evaporating into thin air. Plot? Character? Text? No, she realized, sometimes all you need to tell a story are the barest of essentials: the actors' bodies and voices. Movement and song.

For Rogers—co-founder (with her director husband Rob Melrose) of San Francisco's **Cutting Ball Theater**—this was an epiphany that wasn't going to waste. From the moment of her first encounter with ZAR, she knew she wanted to create an original theatre piece utilizing the Grotowski-derived process that seemed to imbue ZAR's work with such elemental power. But, Rogers knew, ZAR worked for years to perfect each of its performances. "How in the heck are we even going to simulate this kind of developmental process in the amount of time we have to prepare productions?" she asked herself.

Nearly five years later, Rogers has an answer: Just do it, one step at a time. Resident playwright Eugenie Chan created a nonlinear text based on improvisations inspired by an

ancient Estonian fairy tale—about a mysterious, haunted forest known as *Tontlawald*—that Rogers's son had encountered in elementary school. Co-director Annie Paladino and choreographer Laura Arrington came on board to work with an ensemble of actors. The music (which Rogers felt should be American, in the same way that ZAR's music is Eastern European) was cobbled together from sources that included Rogers's own jazz-pro grandparents. When ZAR returned to the U.S. on tour last May, four of its members (including artistic director Jaroslaw Fret) joined Rogers and her eight-member *Tontlawald* cast for a revelatory workshop.

Now *Tontlawald* is ready for its debut production, Feb. 17–March 11. The story—of a traumatized girl who discovers what Rogers called a "Freudian representation of herself" when she's swallowed up by the magical forest (the tale is available on [www.cuttingball.com](http://www.cuttingball.com))—may be twisty and complicated, but its method is elemental: bodies and voices, movement and song. —*Jim O'Quinn*