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Thursday, April 23, 2015

Behind the Curtain Interview with THE LIAR's Rusty Ross

Full Given Name: Rusty Ross. Was I given this name? Yes. At birth? Yes! Oh, you mean, is it printed on my birth certificate? Funny, I don't have that document in my pocket just now...

Hometown: Houston, Texas (There are several fellow Texans working on *The Liar*).

What do you love about *The Liar*: Beyond the fact that this is simply a delightful, terrific play, I think the marriage of elevated language with comedy that's tuned for a contemporary ear is particularly delicious here. Sometimes when one works on classical comedy, there are contextual references in the jokes (a recent public shaming, a popular song lyric, something the King was known to have done) that would have been instantly recognizable to an audience at the time, but, several hundred years later, act instead as a bit of an abstraction layer between the audience and the comedy. Here, that doesn't happen. The audience can revel in Ives' wonderful "classical" verse right alongside the comedy, and it's a joy. (Incidentally, what is also clear is that fart jokes apparently do survive across the ages and, wisely, Ives has, just maybe, included one or two here...).

First time on stage: First time standing on a stage was at the age of three. Shortly thereafter, I publicly declared that I wanted to be a stage manager when I grew up.

Favorite moment on stage: Wow, more than a few blood-pumping moments spring to mind: an amazing orchestra playing that stunning entr'acte right beneath our toes in *South Pacific*, the absolute destruction of the junk shop in *American Buffalo*, peering out from atop Mt. Crumpit in *Grinch*...

But maybe one of my favorite moments was simply a particular student matinee of *Midsummer Night's Dream* in Utah several years ago. That young audience was astonishingly knowledgeable about the play and about Shakespeare, and couldn't have been more attentive and engaged. Performing that morning felt like magic.

Dream role you've not performed yet: It may seem like a pat answer, but I really believe this: The role I always most want to perform next is the one that hasn't been written yet. While I love (and am humbled) to work on great material which stands on the shoulders of great past productions and performances, there is nothing quite like bringing text to life for the first time, to being a part of creating something brand-spanking new amongst a group of fellow artists.

Book on your nightstand: Books? You mean those things on printed pages? Well, there is an iPad on my nightstand, which contains thousands of "books," several of which I am currently reading, and none of which I am currently finishing. A few are: Lynda Barry's *Cruddy*, Thomas Pynchon's *V*, and the recent *Becoming Steve Jobs*. Actually, I lie. There is one set of printed pages



Rusty as Max in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* on Broadway.

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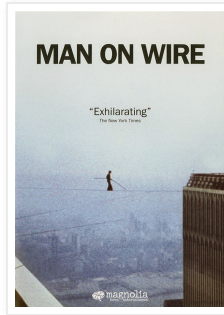
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on my nightstand, too, that I am reading and reading and reading right now: David Ives' *The Liar*. Heard of it? It's pretty good!

Last great movie you saw: *Man on Wire*, the documentary about Philippe Petit's exhilarating and astonishing tightrope walk between the Trade Center towers. I saw this gem of a movie when first released, and just re-watched it in the context of working on style in this play. Petit's exuberance and buoyancy (both figurative and literal) is quite apt to *The Liar*, I think.



Guilty pleasure: Cakes, pies, cookies, you name it! Mention just about any American city to me, and I'll tell you a great place to find dessert there. I once worked at a West Coast theatre that was down the road from a really great restaurant. Occasionally, the chef made a special chocolate pudding. Before long, on the nights he had made it, he would leave me a message at the theatre to let me know! Not long after that, he just added it to the regular menu. It remains on the regular menu to this day.

Best piece of advice you've received: Well, I wasn't around to hear this from him personally, but wasn't it William Goldman who said, "nobody knows anything?" I'm being a bit facetious, of course, but I do think there is value in not forgetting that everyone is ultimately on their own individual journey, in their own time, and in their own unique way. There are so many great teachers and mentors out there, but it's the soup made from picking and choosing ingredients from all of them that can ultimately be the most potent. Oh, scratch that. Best piece of advice I have received is: "Don't mix metaphors."

Posted by [Westport Country Playhouse](#) at 3:49 PM

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