

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL DONALD EDWARDS MANAGING DIRECTOR LINDA DIGABRIELE



Directed by Michael Donald Edwards, *OUR BETTERS*
Opens March 13 at Asolo Rep

"A more devious *Downton Abbey*." – NowToronto.com

(SARASOTA, February 5, 2015) — Before there was *Downton Abbey*, there was ***Our Betters***, W. Somerset Maugham's fiery romantic dramedy about the invasion of sly social-climbing American heiresses into British society. The fifth play in the third season of Asolo Rep's five-year American Character Project illuminates a sect of wealthy, early 20th-century American women who yearned for the pomp and circumstance – and parties – of the British nobility. Directed by Asolo Rep's producing artistic director Michael Donald Edwards, ***Our Betters*** opens **Friday, March 13, 2015 at 8pm** and runs through **Sunday, April 19** at Asolo Rep, with previews **Wednesday, March 11** and **Thursday, March 12 at 8pm**.

In early 20th-century England, broke British aristocrats desperately needed money to maintain their ornate estates, and wealthy American women desperately wanted

-more-

Our Betters

Page 2 of 7

the prestige of marrying well. After marrying a baronet, American hardware heiress Lady Pearl Grayston appears to have everything a girl could want – a posh title, a throng of adoring lovers, and the crème de la crème of British society, including a princess and a duchesse, at her beck and call – but she wants more. When Pearl's little sister, Bessie, crosses the pond to join her sister's enviably glamorous life and find a noble husband of her own, she is unprepared for the scandal that is about to erupt behind closed manor doors.

“Brimming with dynamic and passionate women of position, prestige and wealth, ***Our Betters*** reveals how they prevailed in a society with limited options for women,” said Michael Donald Edwards. “One of the most thrilling elements of directing this piece is the opportunity to look at it as a contemporary play – a new play, set in the period – rather than a revival. The discussion about women and their role in society, the workplace, and in politics, is far from over. It is my hope that our production sparks that conversation in our community.”

In the U.S., author and playwright W. Somerset Maugham is best known for his novels, including *Of Human Bondage*, *Cakes and Ale*, and *The Razor's Edge*. Throughout his career, Maugham also found great success as a playwright, penning such revered theatrical works as *The Constant Wife* and ***Our Betters***, which premiered on Broadway in 1917 and was adapted into a 1933 film. Asolo Rep worked closely with the playwright's estate to create an abridged two-act version of the original play and is thrilled to present this brand new production to the Sarasota community.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

Inside Asolo Rep

*Both Your Houses & **Our Betters***

Wednesday, February 25 at 11am

FSU Center for the Performing Arts

Cook Theatre

Tickets for Inside Asolo Rep are \$5 for the general public and free for donors and Asolo Rep Guild Members.

-more-

Our Betters

Page 3 of 7

Michael Donald Edwards, Asolo Rep's producing artistic director and director of ***Our Betters***, and Frank Galati, the Tony Award®-winning director of *Both Your Houses*, will shed light on their creative processes in this dynamic behind-the-scenes discussion. Led by Asolo Rep's dramaturg/literary manager Lauryn Sasso, the panel will also feature actress Katie Cunningham, who plays Marjorie Gray in *Both Your Houses* and Lady Pearl Grayston in *Our Betters*.

Inside Asolo Rep is sponsored by the Observer Media Group and Hotel Indigo.

The Scoop

One hour prior to every performance of ***Our Betters*** (Opening Night March 13 excluded)

Arrive one hour before curtain to hear the ideas and inspirations that contributed to the making of ***Our Betters***.

Tuesday Talkbacks

March 31, April 7, April 14, 2015

Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Join us for an intimate post-show discussion with featured actors or guests following every Tuesday performance of ***Our Betters***.

Leading Ladies

Saturday, April 11, 2015

Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Immediately following the 2pm matinee, discuss the depiction of women and gender roles with guest panelists and fellow audience members.

Meet the Actors

Sunday, March 22, 2015

Asolo Rep's Mertz Theatre

Immediately following the 2pm matinee, ask questions and learn more from members of the cast.

-more-

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Allie Henkel	Elizabeth "Bessie" Saunders
Brian Owen	Pole
Katie Cunningham*	Lady Pearl Grayston
Buddy Haardt*	Fleming Harvey
Tom Coiner*	Thornton Clay
Anne-Marie Cusson*	Duchesse de Surennes
Ben Diskant*	Anthony Paxton
Denise Cormier*	Princess Della Cercola
Matt Andersen	Lord Bleane
Jonathan Epstein*	Arthur Fenwick
David Breitbarth*	Ernest
Gracie Lee Brown	Maid
Paul Herbig	Footman

**Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.*

SELECTED CREATIVE TEAM MEMBERS

Director	Michael Donald Edwards
Scenic Designer	Lee Savage
Costume Designer	Tracy Dorman
Lighting Designer	Jen Schriever
Composer / Sound Designer	Fabian Obispo
Hair/Wig & Make-Up Designer	Michelle Hart
Voice & Dialect Coach	Patricia Delorey

SELECTED ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

(In alphabetical order)

DENISE CORMIER* GUEST ARTIST, FIRST SEASON (Margaret, *Good People*; Princess Della Cercola, *Our Betters*) credits include the Broadway national tour of *The Graduate*, the long-running Off-Broadway *Bill W. and Dr. Bob*,

-more-

Our Betters

Page 5 of 7

Repertory Theatre of St. Louis' *Good People*, Actors Theatre of Louisville and Cleveland Play House's *Intimate Apparel*, Indiana Repertory Theatre and Pioneer Theatre Company's *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Northern Stage's *Clybourne Park*, and the world premiere of *Annapurna* at Magic Theatre, as well as seasons at Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival and Theatre at Monmouth. Her TV and film credits include *Law & Order CI*, *Six Degrees*, *Guiding Light* and *The Big Gay Musical*. MFA: Shakespeare Theatre Company – Academy for Classical Acting at GWU. www.denisecormier.com

KATIE CUNNINGHAM* GUEST ARTIST, SECOND SEASON (Marjorie Gray, *Both Your Houses*; Lady Pearl Grayston, *Our Betters*) Katie's Asolo Rep appearances include Annette in *God of Carnage*; *Hamlet*, *Prince of Cuba*; *Once in a Lifetime*; and Hamlet in *Hamlet Redux*. Recently, Katie played Brooke in *Noises Off* (BroadwayWorld Nomination, Best Actress); Lady of the Lake in *Spamalot*; and Betsy/Lindsey in *Clybourne Park*. Her Off-Broadway credits include the American Place Theatre and NY Fringe in addition to numerous regional theaters. Katie is a teaching artist at McCarter Theatre Center, a proud Equity member, and alumna of UNC Chapel Hill and FSU/Asolo Conservatory (MFA). www.katiecunningham.com

ANNE-MARIE CUSSON* GUEST ARTIST, SECOND SEASON (Jean, *Good People*; Duchesse de Surennes, *Our Betters*) is delighted to return after last season's *Vanya & Sonia & Masha & Spike*, *Philadelphia*, *Here I Come!* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. NYC: Broadway's *Magic/Bird* (u/s); off-Broadway's *Stalking The Bogeyman*, *Echoes of the War* opposite Richard Easton and Schnitzler's *Far And Wide* at The Mint Theatre. Ms. Cusson toured the country as Truvy in *Steel Magnolias*. Regional: *All My Sons*, *Arms and The Man*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Clean House*, *Our Town*, *A Moon For The Misbegotten* and *Defying Gravity*. As company member of Alabama Shakespeare Festival: Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* and Hermione Danglars in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. TV and Film: *Law & Order*, *SVU*; *As The World Turns*; *The Good Shepherd*; *My Dead Boyfriend*; *Feral Mix*. New Hampshire native and proud member of Actors Equity.

MICHAEL DONALD EDWARDS NINTH SEASON (Producing Artistic Director; Director, *Our Betters*) is in his ninth season as producing artistic director of Asolo Repertory Theatre. He was previously the associate artistic director of Syracuse Stage and served as artistic director of Shakespeare Santa Cruz. A Garland Award

-more-

Our Betters

Page 6 of 7

and Drama Logue Award-winning director, Mr. Edwards has directed at Cleveland Play House, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Geva Theatre, Syracuse Stage, The Shakespeare Theatre, San Jose Rep, Opera San Jose, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Old Globe in San Diego, Virginia Stage Company, the Virginia Opera, the State Theatre of South Australia, Opera Australia, Victoria State Opera, and the Metropolitan Opera. In previous seasons for Asolo Rep, Mr. Edwards has directed his English adaptation as well as Pulitzer Prize-winner Nilo Cruz's Spanish translation of Shakespeare's text in *Hamlet, Prince of Cuba*; as well as *Las Meninas*; *La Bête*; *The Last Five Years*; *The Life of Galileo*; *Perfect Mendacity*; *The Winter's Tale*; *Equus*; *A Tale of Two Cities*; *Darwin in Malibu*; *Nobody Don't Like Yogi*; *Amadeus*; *The Smell of the Kill*; *The Grapes of Wrath* and several pieces in the annual Unplugged festival of new plays.

ALLIE HENKEL THIRD YEAR STUDENT, FIRST SEASON (Minnie Fay, *The Matchmaker*, Elizabeth "Bessie" Saunders, *Our Betters*) is a proud graduate of The State University of New York at Binghamton and is thrilled to be performing on the Asolo Rep stage. Conservatory credits include Li'l Bit in *How I Learned to Drive* and Nurse in *Antigone*. Asolo Rep credits include *You Can't Take It With You* (u/s Alice), *The Game's Afoot* (u/s Aggie).

TICKETS

Tickets for ***Our Betters*** and the entire 2014-2015 Asolo Repertory Theatre season are on sale now. Tickets for ***Our Betters*** start at just \$22. ***Our Betters*** contains mature language and themes. To purchase tickets, call 941.351.8000 or 800.361.8388 visit www.asolorep.org, or visit the Asolo Repertory Theatre Box Office, located in the lobby of the theatre. Asolo Repertory Theatre is located at 5555 North Tamiami Trail in the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts. The box office is open Monday 10am – 4pm, Tuesday 10am – 7:30pm, Wednesday - Saturday 10am – 8pm, and Sunday 10am – 2pm. The box office closes at 5pm when there are no evening performances and phone lines close one hour prior to the start of any performance. Season subscription packages are also available online and by visiting or calling the box office.

-more-

SPONSORS

Asolo Rep is able to present **Our Betters** because of the generosity of its sponsors. Corporate sponsors for **Our Betters** are Sun Hydraulics Corporation, SCENE Magazine, WUSF Public Media, 92.1 The COAST and Williams Parker Harrison Dietz & Getzen. Asolo Rep's major season sponsors are Florida State University, Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Designing Women Boutique, The Shubert Foundation, The Woman's Exchange, Inc., and Tropical Cadillac. Asolo Rep's artistic programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues. Asolo Rep is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.

###

Media Contact:

Sasha Fields
Public Relations Manager
941-351-9010 ext. 4800
sasha_fields@asolo.org