

# Alton Little Theater Set To Produce New Play "Alabama Story" Beginning In Mid March

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ALTON - Alton Little Theater is thrilled to announce that it's received permission to produce Kenneth Jones' most notable play, ALABAMA STORY for eight performances from March 15th through the 24th.

This was a quest for Director Lee Cox, who first learned of the play's existence in 2019 when the St. Louis Repertory Theater produced the work before it was even officially released as a publication.

Cox fell in love with the beautifully written and staged work and became rather obsessed with obtaining production rights as soon as possible - no small feat for a play destined for greatness and only available to professional theatres!

But Cox waited patiently, kept in touch with the playwright, and secured the performance rights for ALT to anchor the remaining shows she would produce for the 90th Season at the Showplace.

Cox and Gail Drillinger are co-directing the show, and Gail also takes on the leading role of Emily Wheelock Reed.

The play is based upon the true story of her life and legacy as a librarian in Montgomery, Alabama 1959, and how her life was turned upside down by the author and illustrator of a controversial children's book, *The Rabbit's Wedding*, and the many challenges they both faced as nearly a whole town and the American Library Association became involved in the love and fear created by one inspiring little book.

Indeed, the true-life character of author Garth Williams, was already the beloved illustrator of *Little House on the Prairie*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Stuart Little*, and more when the book he wrote and illustrated came to the forefront of controversy in the "Deep South of the Imagination."

Nine actors take on the portrayal of history with humor, heartbreak, and hope in re-telling the true story of events in Montgomery.

The cast of Gail Drillinger, Dennis Frymire, Jess McCawley, Sean Williams, Jake Tenberge, Malcolm Kraft, Hal Morgan, Jim Lieber, and Josh Sarver take on the honor of portraying the actual events and people who inhabit this tale.

Indeed, when the play caught Cox's imagination, she had no idea that the events and characters of 1959 would re-play in the world of 2024. Lee simply fell in love with the story as someone who has always loved books and spent many days of her own childhood in the grand stacks of Hayner Library in Alton.

The reference for the importance of knowledge and dreams obtained from good books is a central anchor in her life as she contemplates doing plays she loves before retirement in two years. Thus, Cox has committed to creating dialogues with playwrights all over the country and bringing the best work to the ALT stage!

Playwright Kenneth Jones has been so very helpful, says Cox, "and has given me lots of his original notes and ideas that shaped the writing of the play," she said.

In turn, Cox has teased him that he has created quite a problem for producers, in that the actual book of *The Rabbit's Wedding* has become so difficult to find and purchase because of the play's focus on the maelstrom replaying right now about banning books.

Once again, the Hayner Library's National loan service came to the rescue in securing one of the five copies of the now-famous book that are needed in the various scenes and locations that the play depicts. (And ALT is also putting together a basket of Garth William's books for raffle during the show's run)

Indeed, *The Rabbit's Wedding* became Garth William's most famous book - and the author thanks his detractors for "selling so many copies."

Cox has gently chided the playwright for making the book so difficult to find since at the present time, 60 theaters across the country are licensed to produce the show in 2024.

Alton Little Theater stands proud and almost giddy over the excitement of producing this important new play for the Riverbend region.

Yes, this "little" community theater is taking on a play of importance, to be enjoyed by (hopefully) full houses of people who love good stories and the importance that great literature and great live theater add to all our lives.

Please call the box office at (618) 462-3205 or go online at [atonlittletheater.org](http://atonlittletheater.org) and secure your tickets for ALABAMA STORY.

"ALT may be a small theater in a small town in USA," Cox said, "but we have achieved so very much, and we still know how to dream big!"