

ENSEMBLE STUDIO THEATRE-LA

Overview

Led by Artistic Directors Michael C. Mahon and Laura Jane Salvato, Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA is one of Los Angeles' premier developmental and producing theaters and the West Coast branch of New York's renowned Ensemble Studio Theatre. Founded by Artistic Director Curt Dempster 30 years ago, Ensemble Studio Theatre provides a long-term artistic home to more than 450 member playwrights, actors, directors, and designers, among them winners of Academy, Emmy, Obie and Tony Awards and the Pulitzer Prize. Our company has developed and launched some of the most accomplished voices in the American theater, including Christopher **Durang**, Richard **Greenberg**, David **Mamet**, Marsha **Norman**, José **Rivera**, Shel **Silverstein**, John Patrick **Shanley**, and Wendy **Wasserstein**.

Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA's on-going developmental activities include a weekly **Playwrights' Unit** led by Neil Cuthbert and coordinated by Elizabeth Logun; **Sunday Best**, a monthly "artistic gymnasium" where actors, directors, and writers develop new work in an environment that supports creative risk (chaired by Ray Xifo); and a **Directors' Unit** for mid-career stage directors led by Dan Bonnell. EST-LA also presents two annual developmental festivals:

- **WINTERFEST** – two weekends of readings, staged-readings and fully rehearsed performances of new theatre and performance art initiated by our membership, and
- **FIRST LOOK / FULL LENGTHS** - rehearsed staged-readings of full-length plays under consideration for future production.

Over the past twelve years, through its interwoven developmental programs and full productions, Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA has fostered hundreds of new American plays and theatre artists.

Chronology

Ensemble Studio Theatre- The LA Project (known as Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA or EST-LA) was established under Co-Artistic Directors Risa Bramon Garcia and Debra Stricklin in the fall of 1992. The company's early programming included monthly 'Salons' at members' homes around Los Angeles, and weekend artistic retreats at the Biltmore Hotel, Murietta Hot Springs, and Will Geer Theater Botanicaum.

In 1994, EST-LA presented its first WINTERFEST, a three-day festival of member-initiated readings that introduced 24 plays to the Los Angeles audience. Many were subsequently produced in LA, New York, and Chicago. Selections from this festival became part of company's one-act series **Summer Shorts**, co-produced with The Fountain Theatre.

In 1995, WINTERFEST featured 37 new plays over 4 days, including “Doing Lunch” which moved to Ensemble Studio Theatre’s **Marathon Festival of New One Act Plays** in New York. Other pieces were adapted for film: *Women Without Implants* by Anne DeSalvo became an award-winning short film, and *Miles and Nicky* by Peter Berg inspired his feature film directorial debut, *Very Bad Things*.

In 1996, EST-LA produced the company-wide event, **First Look LA**. Over a period of four months, producer Sarah Finn and twenty-five company members and friends read and critiqued more than 500 new plays from across the United States. The best work was presented to packed houses over a period of two weekends at The Lost Studio. In total, 25 new plays were introduced, including Theresa Rebeck’s *A View of the Dome* (subsequently produced in LA, New York, regionally, and published by Samuel French). Also the full-length comedy *Expecting Bobby* went on to a successful, critically acclaimed eight-week run at The Odyssey Theatre, co-produced by EST-LA and The Odyssey Theatre Ensemble.

Following this success, EST-LA was commissioned by **Home Box Office** to bring a theater presence to the **US Comedy Arts Festival in Aspen, Colorado**. Our company conducted a nation-wide search for the best new comedic writing, acting and directing talent. A play selection committee evaluated more than 800 plays over a six-month process. Our company premiered nine of these in Aspen, winning the festival’s highest honor, the **MCI Jury Award for Outstanding Performance**. The following year, we returned to Aspen at the invitation of HBO, bringing five new plays selected from more than 1,200 entries.

During the 1998-99 season, under the Artistic Direction of Garrett M. Brown and James Eckhouse, EST-LA became a resident company at Theatre/Theater on Hollywood Boulevard at the invitation of Nicolette Chaffey and Jeff Murray. In addition to our regular programming, we presented the premiere of **The Underground Soap** at Café Club Fais Do-Do. Under the creative direction of Laura Jane Salvato and Patricia Scanlon, this multi-plot cabaret incorporated live music and four interwoven storylines that unfolded over several weeks. In June 1999, the company co-produced **FIRST LOOK / FULL LENGTHS** with the Falcon Theatre in Burbank featuring rehearsed, staged-readings of four new full-length plays under consideration for future production. One month later we launched a new developmental program to address the unique challenges of solo work (**Solo Flights**), and presented a series of original solo pieces at the HBO Workspace.

In 2000-2001, EST-LA produced the world premiere of Michael Connor’s *Berkshire Village Idiot*, directed by James Eckhouse and produced by Laura Jane Salvato at the Gascon Center Theatre (nominated for an *LA Weekly* Award for Solo Performance). *Berkshire Village Idiot*, which opened Off-Broadway in September 2003 following a successful run at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, was developed in Solo Flights and Sunday Best. **FIRST LOOK / FULL LENGTHS 2000** featured *Coca-Cola Snakie* by Colin Mitchell, *Bing* by Jacqueline Wright (subsequently produced by Theatre of NOTE), *Lily-Livered Creche* by Elizabeth Logun, and *Home by Dusk* by Garrett M. Brown.

FIRST LOOK / FULL LENGTHS 2001 featured *And Still the Dogs* by Brian Cousins, *The Law Makes Evening Fall* by Sherry Kramer, *The Great Wall* by David Levinson, and *Beyond the Sea* by Susan Merson. Both *And Still the Dogs* and *The Great Wall* went on to full production the following year.

In October/November 2001, under the Artistic Direction of Michael C. Mahon and Laura Jane Salvato, EST-LA took part in the **Edge of the World Theater Festival**, presenting twelve performances of **COME**, four solo pieces by Michael Connor, Jennifer Nicole Lynn, Louis Mustillo and Patricia Scanlon at Theatre/Theater. WINTERFEST 2002 expanded to include Wednesday performances and featured over 35 projects.

Beginning March 7, 2002 for six weeks, Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA presented the world premiere of the Ovation and *LA Weekly* Award-nominated ***And Still the Dogs*** by Brian Cousins, directed by Dan Bonnell at Hollywood's Lillian Theatre. This critically acclaimed "modern noir" mystery examined America's arrogance and naiveté in our dealings with other nations and posed timely questions about our nation's responsibility when importing our culture to the rest of the world (Executive Produced by Laura Jane Salvato, Produced by Alison Graham Faggen). *A Noir Nite Silent Auction* at Creative Space (Chaired by Lori Shearer) benefited the play and added to the fun.

Also in March, EST-LA collaborated with the American Film Institute to present staged readings of excerpts from six new scholarship-winning screenplays in the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's ***Sloan Film Summit*** at The Museum of Television and Radio in Beverly Hills.

FIRST LOOK 2002 featured *In Between* by J. Holtham, *What Remains* by Susan Merson, *Dunston's Pub* by Colin Mitchell, and *Toes* by Shira Zeltzer. The festival ran May 30 – June 9, 2002 and was produced by Susan Merson and Jenny O'Hara.

In November 2002, EST-LA presented the ***First Annual West Coast Marathon of New One-Act Plays*** featuring five short works: *Ambulance Men* by Garrett M. Brown, *Zen and the Art of Mourning a Mother* by Barbara B. Goldman, *Lamb* by Elizabeth Logun, *Hope Bloats* by Patricia Scanlon, and *Five Actors* by David Starzyk. Produced by Sally Fairman and Alison Graham Faggen and Associate Produced by Maureen Flannigan, MARATHON 2002 played to packed houses for a five-week run. WINTERFEST expanded to three weekends and was produced by Isabel Storey, Elizabeth Logun, and Jennifer Rowland featuring a gallery of arts and crafts curated by Julie Pop and Liz Ross. FIRST LOOK / FULL-LENGTHS 2003 featured *Helsinor* by Todd Alcott and *The Last Seder* by Jennifer Maisel. It was followed that summer by the world premiere of Jacqueline Wright's dark comic book-inspired ***Buddy Buddette***, directed by Matt Almos at the McCadden Place Theatre. This critically acclaimed new work was produced by Joe Foster and Maureen Flannigan with Laura Jane Salvato.

In fall 2003, Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA presented the critically acclaimed world premiere of *The Shore* by Alison Tatlock, directed by Adam Prince at the Stage 52 Playhouse thanks to major support from The Annenberg Foundation. In the new year we were honored to be selected from among 45 of LA's top theatre companies to be part of "Hot Properties" at [INSIDE] THE FORD where we presented the world premiere of *Stage Directions* by L. Trey Wilson, directed by Dan Bonnell (two Ovation Award nominations: World Premiere Play and Best Ensemble Performance). "Hot Properties" is a collaboration of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and A.S.K. Theater Projects supported in part by a generous grant from the James Irvine Foundation. After breaking box office records at [Inside] the Ford, *Stage Directions* extended for four additional weeks at The Odyssey Theatre Ensemble.

WINTERFEST and FIRST LOOK 2004, combined into one exciting event know as "March Madness," performed next at the Miles Memorial Playhouse in Santa Monica, produced by Michelle Haner, Tamara McDonough, and John Nielsen. March Madness featured 25 new plays and ran March 18-21 and 25-28, including two FIRST LOOK plays selected from over 70 submissions: *Bright Boy: The Passion of Robert McNamara* by Katy Hickman, directed by James Eckhouse; and *Butter* by Elizabeth Logun, directed by Nick Ullett.

The season concluded at Stage 52 with our critically acclaimed *Marathon 2004*, produced by Isabel Storey, featuring three one-acts: *The News* by Billy Aronson (world premiere), *The Honey Makers* by Deborah Grimberg (West Coast premiere) and *Buffalo Wings* by Steve Monroe (world premiere).

Our 2004-2005 season opened with the world premiere of Elizabeth Logun's farcial *Butter*, directed by Dave P. Moore and presented at [INSIDE] THE FORD as a co-production with Chautauqua Theatre Alliance. This production was presented with the generous support of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Ford Theatre Foundation, and the James Irvine Foundation.

Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA is a member of LA Stage Alliance and a proud founding member of **PLAY7**, an innovative audience development program created and administered by representatives from Los Angeles' top independent producing theatres.