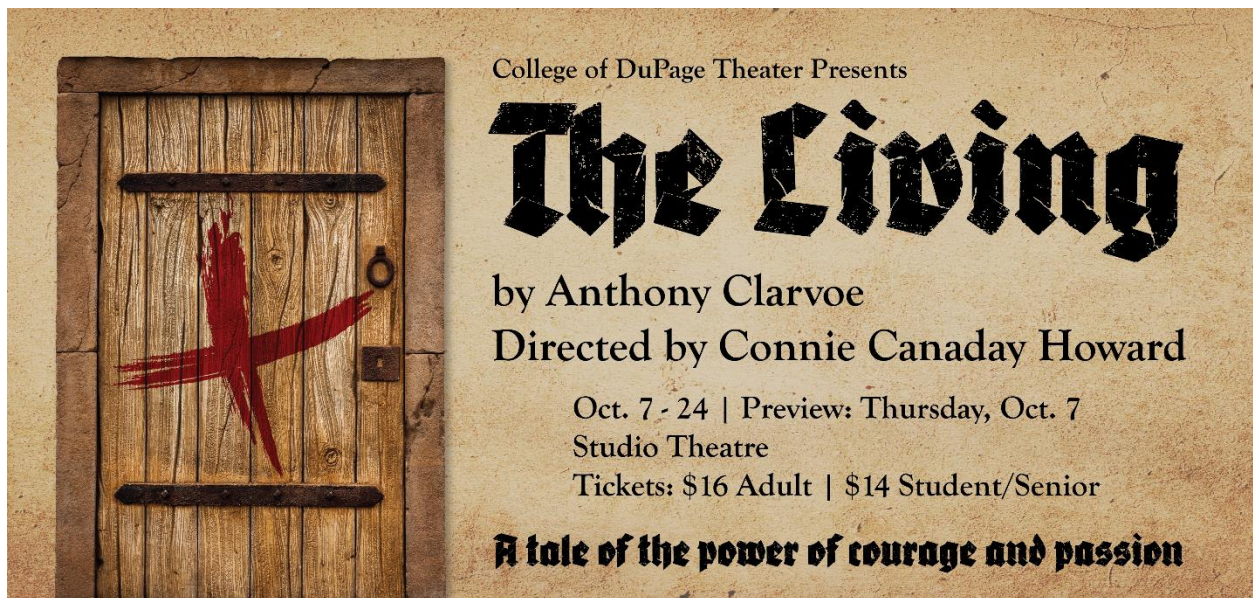


**College of DuPage Theatre Department  
Presents**

**THE LIVING**

**By Anthony Clarvoe**



**Directed by Connie Canaday Howard**

The College Theatre Department sincerely thanks the Library for research support for classes studying the script and production, as well as for the cast, director and production team, working on the project.

**Time and Place:** London, 1665

**Characters:**

Mr. John Graunt, a scientist

Mrs. Sarah Chandler, a shopkeeper's wife

Dr. Edward Harman, a physician

Mrs. Elizabeth Finch, a searcher of the dead

John Lawrence, Lord Mayor, a merchant

Lord Brounker, a cavalier

Rev. Dr. Thomas Vincent, a nonconformist minister

Mr. Sawyer, a cabinetmaker

Paul, Sarah's brother, a shopkeeper

Lawrence's Clerk

First and Second Constables

Robert, a smith from Walthamstow

Mr. Mills, an Anglican Minister

Second Constable

Brounker's Clerk

Andrew, a shopkeeper from Walthamstow

Dr. Goddard, a physician

Jamey, a watchman

Bill, a farmer from Walthamstow

Ensemble

**Please note: Adult Themes and language**

## ***The Living Director's Note***

**Fall 2021**

*The Living* was written in 1991, and first produced in 1993. Set in London, 1665, the script unfolds with heart and even humor during the bubonic plague. To me, it poignantly dramatizes the need, and growth, of community in the midst of much desperation, pain and fear. And this is a theme that many of us have pondered, during the past seventeen months, worldwide.

We will meet many characters, and many who, despite great risk or loss, continue to help and support those afflicted, and fight to end the plague, despite all odds.

Though the play is thirty years old, it has often had productions staged as a reaction to crisis at different moments. Playwright Anthony Clarvoe commented on this in an interview in 2020. "The action of the play is about the impulse to draw back, to lie, to conceal, and to retreat versus the impulse to gather, to commune, to cooperate, to find common ground. Those two conflicting impulses seem to inform our response to every disaster."

Legend tells us that Sir Isaac Newton, not a character in this play, though he's mentioned, formulated his theory on gravitational theory while isolating during the plague. In a beautiful moment, this also informs a character's ultimate reaction to what he's learned from this time, and wants to encourage for us, the audience: "What Newton found: that the world would fly to pieces, but for a great force, a power in every single body in the world, which pulls it ceaselessly toward every other body, which is pulled ceaselessly toward it in turn. No matter what. We learned what holds the world together, in the plague." CCH

### **Anthony Clarvoe**

Anthony Clarvoe has received the American Theatre Critics, Will Glickman, Bay Area Theatre Critics, LA Drama Critics, Elliot Norton, and Edgerton New American Play awards; fellowships from the Guggenheim, Irvine, Jerome, and McKnight Foundations, NEA, TCG/Pew Charitable Trusts, and Kennedy Center; commissions from South Coast Rep, Mark Taper Forum, and Playwrights Horizons; and the Berrilla Kerr Award for his contributions to American theater. Productions include *Pick Up Ax* (South Coast Rep, San Jose Rep), *The Living* (Denver Center), *Let's Play Two* (South Coast Rep), *Ambition Facing West* (Trinity Rep, Theatreworks), *Ctrl+Alt+Delete* (San Jose Rep, George St. Playhouse), *The Brothers Karamazov* (Cincinnati Playhouse, Circle X), *Show and Tell* (Rep Theatre of St. Louis), and *Our Practical Heaven* (Aurora Theatre). His plays are published by Broadway Play Publishing, Inc. *The Art of Sacrifice* was published last year by Random House in the anthology *Plays for Two*. Anthony is a regular instructor at the Playwrights Foundation, Stagebridge, and Playground.

<https://newplayexchange.org/users/1034/anthony-clarvoe>

## About *The Living*

Theater Interview: Anthony Clarvoe on “*The Living*” — Surviving Plague Time

May 24, 2020

*The Living* “is about the impulse to draw back, to lie, to conceal, and to retreat versus the impulse to gather, to commune, to cooperate, to find common ground. Those two conflicting impulses seem to inform our response to every disaster.”

*The Living* by Anthony Clarvoe. Directed by Benny Sato Ambush. A Free Virtual Play Reading produced by Theater of the Blue Marble, underwritten by The Arts Fuse. A benefit for Boston’s Theatre Community Benevolent Fund. The play reading premieres on May 27 at 7 p.m. EDT. After that it will be available 24/7 via recording for an additional three days through May 30, which will allow for more contributions to be made to the TCBF.

A first for The Arts Fuse: the magazine is underwriting a free virtual play reading of *The Living* as a benefit for Boston’s Theater Community Benevolent Fund. This powerful script, set during the Great Plague of London, is by award-winning playwright Anthony Clarvoe (he won an Elliot Norton Award for Best Play in 1998). The drama has some strikingly insightful things to say about our current situation and its challenges to our politics and our humanity.

After the arrival of COVID-19, I wrote about some plague plays (Peter Barnes’s *Red Noses* and Karel Čapek’s *The White Plague* among them), and this script, written in 1991 and first produced in 1993, is a substantial addition to the tradition. For Artaud, plague is a kind of cleansing truth, an illness that obliterates the illness we blithely accept as health. Clarvoe poses, with considerable passion and spiky humor, a fruitful counter to that anarchistic vision: this narrative dramatizes the growth of community in the midst of chaos. The script’s epigraph, from Ecclesiastes, sums up his emphatic perspective: “For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow:/but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; / for he hath not enough to help him up.”

The script was inspired by contemporary testimony from Captain John Graunt; Nathaniel Hodges, MD; Sir John Lawrence; and the Reverend Dr. Thomas Vincent, as well as Daniel Defoe’s amazing historical novel *Journal of the Plague Year*. A piece in the May 15 issue of TLS points out how there are scenes in Defoe’s 18th-century text that remain jarringly relevant — “the wealthy thundering down the road to Oxford and safety, the poor condemned by the riskiest essential employments (searching, nursing, burying), the revelation of powerlessness in authority, the joy of deliverance, and the shortness of memory” — and suggests that an effective film could be made from the text. But Clarvoe has already written a play with all of those elements — and more. You can view what I believe is an innovative Zoom reading/production of a historical drama that speaks to our time below. Please contribute to the Boston’s Theatre Community Benevolent Fund during or after the presentation. **THE THEATER OF THE BLUE MARBLE VIRTUAL READING OF “*THE LIVING*” EXPIRED ON MAY 30.**

The production’s dramaturge Hanife Schulte spoke, via Zoom, with Clarvoe about *The Living*, questioning whether it is an AIDs play, wondering about the challenges of drawing on historical material, and asking what it means to produce the play at the present time.

## Interview with Anthony Clarvoe and Hanife Schulte



Zoom photo of dramatist Anthony Clarvoe speaking with Hanife Schulte.

**Hanife Schulte:** What would you say to those who are producing *The Living* and your other plays?

**Anthony Clarvoe:** The general rule for me is, “Say the lines as I wrote them,” but the stage directions are more my suggestions, and I want directors and designers to feel free to interpret that as fits their circumstances. *The Living* has had enough productions, and it has been around and in my life for so long now, that I’m more comfortable with somebody proposing to take the text and use it as the basis for experiment.

There happens to be interest in *The Living* right now because of the situation that we are in—even before COVID-19 began—I think because it’s a play about a polarized society. Earlier this year there’s been a production, a staged reading, a Zoom reading, now Benny’s project.... One interesting proposal came from Anjalee Hutchinson at Bucknell University, who asked if her devising class could use the piece as part of a devising project. Her interest was in how her students could creatively respond to what is going on in their lives. The text of *The Living* might be part of the mix of their response. And I like that idea very much.

**Schulte:** How have productions of *The Living* struck you?

**Clarvoe:** Early on there were readings and staged readings and workshops and workshop productions. Then I was there for the first couple of full productions because I am still working on the text and trying to understand. It is wonderful when you get the chance to see a play early on within a variety of settings in different cities with different companies of artists and with different audiences, because it teaches you what is inherent in the script, what is working in the script or not, as opposed to what is the chemistry with a particular performer or a particular

director or audience setting. And, it helps me not take credit for the achievements of other artists that I am collaborating with.

This script [of *The Living*] describes basically a production on a kind of Shakespearean stage with a major level and wide stairs and a kind of inner above. I wanted the scenes to flow fluidly, so that there should be at least two staging areas. But also, I liked the image of the stage as having a rift in it, a kind of a split that it took effort to bridge physically for the performers. It had a kind of a fault line through it.

I am from California originally and there is a lot of kind of buried earthquake imagery in *The Living*. It was a response to the experience of being in San Francisco during the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989. One of the conceptions visually with the play was a sense of the kinds of places you can see where the earth has literally cracked. That was a helpful image to have in mind as I wrote. It also meant that just on a practical level, actors could do various kinds of physical activity without having to drag a lot of furniture on and off stage and slowing up the action. As it has turned out, the play has been produced in the round, proscenium, and in thrust stages and in all kinds of circumstances. I very early on said whatever works best for the space that you are in and the world you are trying to create because, for your audience, that whole powerful image of the earth splitting is not going to resonate the same way it does for me. Even when it was done here, in the Bay Area, I don't think that stage did anything like that. And that was fine. I want people to exercise their own creativity.



An image inspired by the Great Plague of London.

**Schulte:** What are the fundamental elements of *The Living* that should not be changed in a staging?

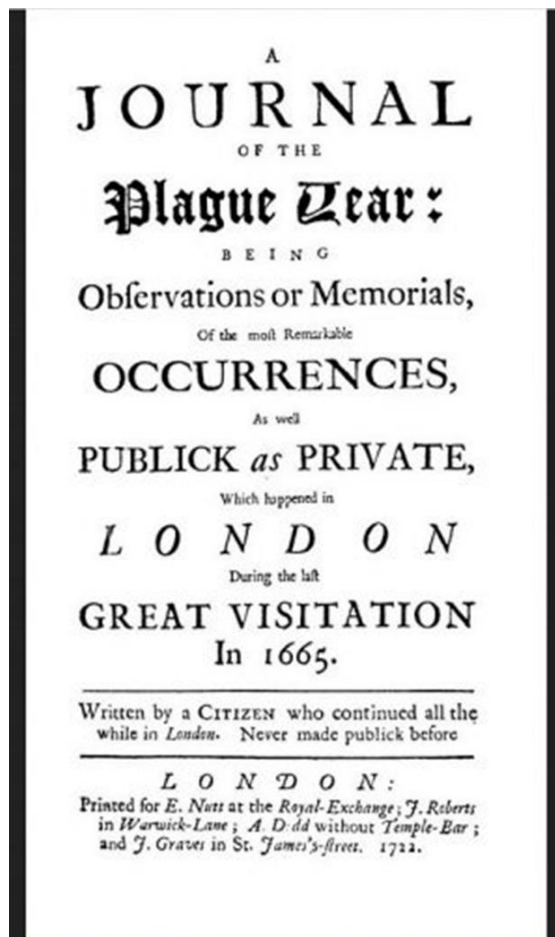
**Clarvoe:** I cannot imagine the play without the distance it imposes between the actors. That is so fundamental to the play. That has turned out to be kind of the signature of the script and one of the things that people respond to now that we are all at a distance from each other. I would not be pleased with the director who decided, “No, we are going to ignore that, and everybody can travel close.”

**Schulte:** I have read several reviews of *The Living* and many associate your play with the AIDS pandemic in the '90s. Did you write *The Living* as a response to that plague?

**Clarvoe:** I did not set out to write an AIDS play. As I am trying to figure out what I am going to write next, there is always a mix of ideas that did not turn out to be the last play that I wrote. I do a lot of reading and looking around to try to get a sense of what stories are exciting to me now. That is partly about what I feel compelled to think about for a year or two obsessively, but also what is going on in the larger world, in the community, and in the country. I might be able to take my private concerns and connect with other people and create a public event.

Obviously, as a San Franciscan, AIDS was in my community. I am not gay, I was not personally at risk, so that was different than the impact that it had on other people in the community of theater artists in San Francisco. But I was still very aware that the experience of AIDS in San Francisco and how we had responded as a community was fundamentally different than what I was seeing in the plays about AIDS that were coming out of New York. These were wonderful plays, specifically *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer, and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* before it was fully produced, reading pieces of it as a work in progress.

But the San Francisco Bay Area responded to AIDS in a very different way than a lot of communities, including New York. We responded, as a larger community, more quickly with a more coherent local public health response that was not about isolating people from each other. Unlike so many places around the world, where they said that this is a problem in the gay community, in San Francisco we said this is a problem in our community, the San Francisco community, and we need to respond as a community. This was at a time when the national government ignored AIDS completely, much in the manner that the members of the executive branch almost entirely abrogated responsibility in a fundamental way for so long in their response to Coronavirus.



**Schulte:** So, what inspired you to write a play about the great plague of London in 1665?

**Clarvoe:** Here is what happened. Daniel Defoe happened. This is all Daniel Defoe. Any time I am writing anything, it is about what kinds of stories excite me at the time, but it is also what kind of formal challenges am I interested in tackling? What kind of theater-making do I want to think about now? At that point in my career, I had wonderful opportunities to work on smaller pieces, as is the case with a lot of younger playwrights, in this country especially, where funding for the arts is such a challenge. The size of your cast and the scope of your production have a lot to do with whether you are produced or not as a playwright. I think it is still the case if you want a full professional production with all of the resources that that brings to bear. It is easier to do if you are writing something small, a cast of three or four and one set, nothing too demanding. It just makes it easier for theaters to say yes to a project like that. I had had opportunities to do plays like that. But the plays that had made me fall in love with theater as a young person were very large. The productions of the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, were stages full of people telling great big stories. I hoped to have an opportunity to write a play at least closer to that scale.

The best way for a writer early in their career to make that happen would be to adapt something, to work from an existing source that the theaters would recognize, that audiences would

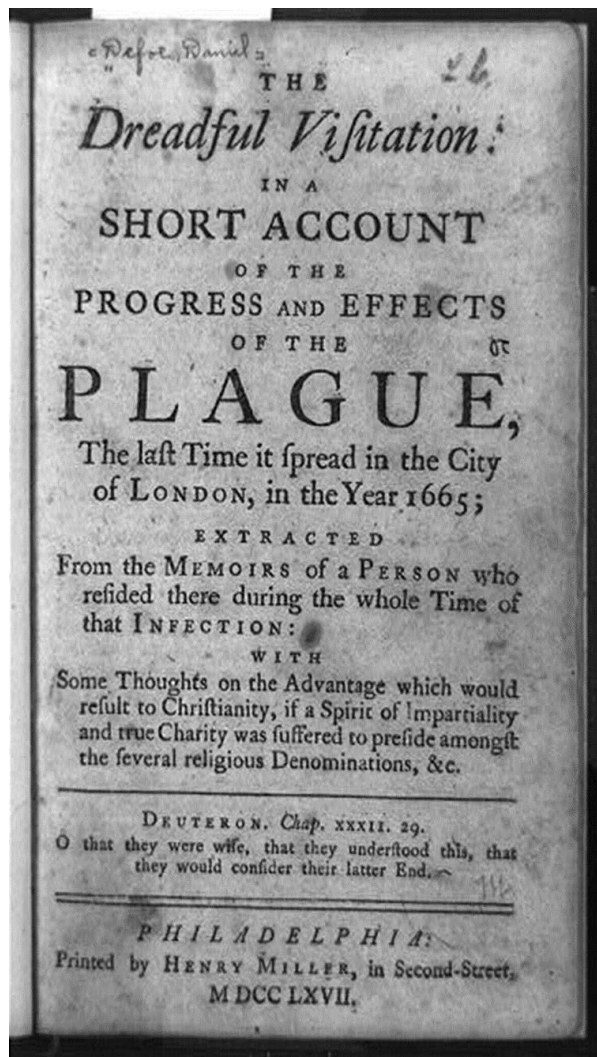


recognize, and that would predispose them to think that this might be fun to see. So I was reading a lot of older fiction especially, and looking around for what might be fun to adapt at the time. There was a lot of Dickens on the American stage, so I thought, Dickens is covered. But what else is there?

I was reading all the novels that I had not read as an English major in college because I was reading almost nothing but plays then. I turned to Defoe. There had just been an adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe* not very long before, very interesting. I read *Moll Flanders*. And then the *Journal of the Plague Year*, and that was it. I said, this is so powerfully resonant for me. Partly it was the story itself, but partly it was Defoe's own process. He wrote it to be a journal, but it is not. It is a novel in the form of a journal which he wrote in 1729, not in response to the plague of 1665, but as a response to an outbreak of plague that had happened in Marseille earlier that year. This is very much a Brechtian process as well because he was trying to respond to what was going on politically and socially by finding good stories and presenting them in a vital way that an audience or a reader could feel empowered to interact with, have opinions about. Defoe was trying to shape opinions and perceptions by what he wrote, and the big argument in 1729 was, should we quarantine? Should we lock down our borders? If anybody develops the plague, should we separate them from the rest of society?

In researching people who were still alive from plague of 1665 and what had been done at that time, Defoe discovered that quarantine only works when the people who are being quarantined fundamentally believe that they are being cared for, that they are not being set aside to die, but that they are being cared for as part of their society.... The reason that is important is that people will not tell the truth about whether they are sick or not if people perceive that anybody who gets the disease and is quarantined is being left to die. People will fight and do all they can do to stay out of quarantine, not to be classified as sick. Of course, that means that the disease spreads even further, spreads even longer because people do not put up their hand and say, I think I am sick. You need to actually convince people that their government, their medical establishment is looking to protect them, not to protect everybody else from them.

So, Defoe wrote about the plague of 1665 to make that point in 1729 and I wanted to try to do the same. I began looking at plague stuff. I tried to get somebody to commission me to adapt Defoe's novel. Nobody went for it. I could not stop thinking about it. The more I tried to think about it, the more it felt like adapting the novel would not work. So much of Defoe's book is about its bookness, about its being a convincing document. It was in reading primary sources—first secondary sources and then primary sources—that I really began finding the story for the play.



I was living in Minnesota at the time, doing a residency at the Playwrights Center in Minneapolis and researching at the University of Minnesota. They have a medical school, so their library had extensive holdings in the history of medicine. I would go looking in the card catalog for books about the plague, and they kept sending me to the rare books collection. They handed me the first edition of John Graunt's book, literally printed in the 1660s. And more things, the proceedings of the alderman, the advice from the College of Physicians, sermons from Dr. Vincent and other people and all of these books, written by and printed by and bought and read by people that actually lived in the plague, who were living in the plague or just had survived it. I really did feel like this was a story that was being literally, personally handed to me to pass along as a way of helping the society that I was in. I did think about the decisions that they needed to make about caring for each other in the same way that Defoe had tried to tell the story as a way of getting his society to do the same.

**Schulte:** Was it challenging to blend creativity with so much historical research?

**Clarvoe:** It was mostly about, as with any project, looking for a story that has scenes that would be exciting to watch and that I would be able to write. In reading about how people had responded to the plague, there were moments that I said, this is actually a combination of something that I am reading, something I'm worrying about, but also something I have experienced at least a version of or know people who have experienced a version of.

At the end of Act I, Dr. Harman is checking his body to see if he has plague tokens yet. People that I knew who were at risk for AIDS did that every night. They were checking their lymph nodes to see, were their lymph nodes swollen, had they developed a response to infection. That felt very powerfully familiar. A gesture that was very theatrical but also very practical and true to life now. So that felt like a connection.

But also, the situation of somebody not being allowed into her own home, somebody else standing guard saying, "You are here, and your family's there, but you cannot pass." Or somebody who wanted to leave her community and being told, "No, you have to turn back. You are not allowed out." Those felt like very powerful experiences of people that I had known in different circumstances, they just felt viscerally powerful and truthful as moments of stage action.

A major turning point was reading Samuel Pepys's Diaries, which are an amazing wealth of every kind of detail of life in London in the 1660s. He talked about the weather in London that summer and some of that language actually wound up in the play. It was very, very hot, which is not how we think of London in this country. Very hot, very dry.... This kind of crackling heat....

In California, we call that earthquake weather. That is a kind of weather that, in our popular imagination, we think presages that an earthquake is coming. Something eerie and uncanny about the atmosphere. I said, if I can recognize what the weather feels like, then I can put myself physically into this environment somehow. In Act 2, the description of walking through the empty city is completely informed by my physical experience of walking through San Francisco the night of the Loma Prieta earthquake when whole streets were deserted, when there was this strange topsy-turvy quality to the landscape. When I could not get home because all transit was shut; because the bridges, the Bay Bridge had been broken. So those experiences went very much into the life of the play. It is not completely unlike the way that actors are trained in various methods derived from Stanislavski to inform their performance with emotionally and physically resonant experiences that they themselves have had or observed firsthand.



**Schulte:** *The Living* has uncanny resonances with our experiences with COVID-19.

**Clarvoe:** Yes, in a strange sort of way. For performers, the most distinctive thing about being in the play is the distance that they have to perform from each other. That kind of physical distancing, social distancing as we are calling it now, was true in the plague in 1665. It was not true during AIDS except for a very brief time when it was not known how the HIV virus was transmitted. It was a very brief time when the means of transmission was not known and there was a kind of physical ostracization. But very quickly, once HIV was identified as the means by which AIDS was transmitted, people realized that there were specific activities that could cause the risk of transmission. But the great majority of human interactions did not. There was a very brief time when it was considered an act of courage and faith to embrace a person with AIDS.

When I made that part of the performance discipline of the play, people's separation from each other, it was a metaphor. But now, it has become literal. Perhaps the most distinctive thing about the play is more relevant now than it was when I wrote it. That has been a striking situation.

The play's production history has not been specific to AIDS. It actually has tended to be produced in communities that are facing some sort of crisis and needing to redefine who they are and how to rebuild. It has been done in Tokyo, in New Orleans, in Florida, in the wake of hurricanes, earthquakes, floods or whatever it is. Your community has a disaster, put on Anthony's play. It is a very strange phenomenon. There are a couple of my plays that I wish would stop being relevant ever again.

**Schulte:** Does it bother you to have a play that becomes popular when there is a disaster?

**Clarvoe:** Unfortunately, there just seems to be a temptation to respond to a disaster by pointing fingers, by separating from each other, and by making people the other. The action of the play is about the impulse to draw back, to lie, to conceal, and to retreat versus the impulse to gather, to commune, to cooperate, to find common ground. Those two conflicting impulses seem to inform our response to every disaster. I do not expect that the play is going to become irrelevant anytime

soon, even though I really, really wish it would. I did not approach the Coronavirus by going, “Oh, yay, my play is going to get busy again.” I had not even thought of that until people began approaching me.



**Schulte:** Is there a protagonist in *The Living*?

**Clarvoe:** I really think of it as a group protagonist play. In a way it is a play about the creation of a protagonist. A lot of the functions of a protagonist are split among different characters. For example, Graunt as a narrator character is a through-line character in that sense. Sarah, of course, is the character that we track from the beginning of the play to the end.

Most consistently, the two of them have parallel and contrasting journeys through the play. Both Graunt and Sarah begin the play by saying, “This is not about me. I am just observing. I am not sick. This disease has nothing to do with me.” And then gradually, through the events of the

play, they come to understand that they have a vital role to play. They can honestly engage. As soon as I saw the play was going to have to impose distance between characters, I knew there would have to come a point that the play would have to end with people touching. That is practically the mathematics of dramaturgy. It took me a long time to figure out who was going to approach. Then, it became incredibly obvious who it had to be, by writing the play.

**Schulte:** Any tips for our staging of *The Living*?

**Clarvoe:** There are two pieces of advice that I would offer based on my experience of having seen a lot of productions of the play. The best piece of direction I ever heard about the play was from Nagle Jackson, who directed the first mainstage production. He said, “Every scene in this play is a negotiation. Your character needs something from the other character or characters in the scene if they are going to survive.” That seems so basic. But what can happen is some actors get caught up in the experience of being in a city during a pandemic. They are tempted to sit back and suffer. Most directors in most productions at some point have to say it is called *The Living*, it is not called *The Dying*. As soon as actors get that, the play just immediately comes to life in a very different way.

It also gets funnier, which is my second piece of obvious advice: find chances for laughter. In the early readings, that was my big fear that the laughs would not be there, and that was going to make for a very long evening. Another reason that I am really happy that Benny is working on it is that he is a funny guy. He is so energetic, and he is such an activist, and so funny. He is exactly the person to be doing this play because he has got the instinct and the skill set for action.

By: Bill Marx Filed Under: Featured, Review, Theater Tagged: Anthony Clarvoe, Benny Sato Ambush, COVID-19, Hanife Schulte., Plague, *The Living*

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**"The Living":** Courage and compassion in the face of cataclysm

**Rebecca Bailey**, Hopkins Center Publicity Coordinator/Writer

## **1665—and Today**

*The Living's* subject is a major event in the annals of Western European civilization, the great plague that swept through London in 1665-66, killing, at its peak in the summer of 1665, about 1,000 persons each hour. The facts of the cataclysm survived thanks to the extraordinary testimony left by contemporary witnesses, including Samuel Pepys, who countered the government's attempts to downplay the death numbers.

Wrote Daniel Rose, who directed the premier production: "Most scholars agree that there was gross underreporting in the weekly Bills of Mortality, caused by families fearful of retribution, and by parish clerks who conspired to prevent widespread panic. By mid-June [in 1665], over a

hundred plague deaths per week were announced in the bills, although the real numbers were much higher. The government's remedy was to hire older women as 'searchers of the dead'—if plague was found, the city quarantined the infected household, nailing shut the doors and posting watchmen to guard against flight. By early July, almost everyone who could afford to leave the capital did so. The King and his court, the Privy Council, families of means, and almost all clergy and physicians fled, leaving the general population to fend for themselves. Those who tried to leave the city after July found the people of the surrounding towns fiercely guarding the roads, turning back anyone from London. The dire lack of doctors and hospitals, coupled with the flight of the clergy, caused great hardship for those who were left behind. A few brave physicians stayed to tend the sick as best they could, wearing protective clothing and beaklike leather headpieces stuffed with herbs. Nonconformist clergymen—whose presence had been outlawed in the Restoration—returned to minister from vacated pulpits. Funerals were forbidden, thus burials took place at night in massive pits dug outside the city walls, attended by the few maverick preachers willing to provide services for mourners."

As the play roams about London, picking up the threads of several stories, we learn many of the medical treatments (or what passed for treatments) in caring for victims of the plague; and, through several scenes set in the chambers of the Lord Mayor of London, we see key political and social leaders of England reacting to the crisis. A dandified member of King Charles II's court reacts with horror, for example, when he finds out that the government may have to pay some of the medical expenses for the plague victims.

Wrote Rose: "As is so often the case in human affairs, fear provoked desperation, despair, and the common response to flee. However, London's Great Plague also saw many acts of uncommon courage and compassion. *The Living* chronicles an extraordinary effort to survive, not just as individuals, but as a society. Historical accounts are full of behavior that illuminates both the worst and best that human beings are capable of. England's institutional response to this epidemic allows many interesting comparisons to crisis in our own times. And the response of the individuals in this play allows us to look into our own hearts - to consider how we will respond if those around us fall."

*The Living* was one of the earlier works of a playwright who's since become a leading playwright and mentor to younger writers. Clarvoe has received the American Theatre Critics, Will Glickman, Bay Area Theatre Critics, LA Drama Critics, Elliot Norton, and Edgerton New American Play awards; fellowships from the Guggenheim, Irvine, Jerome, and McKnight Foundations, NEA, TCG/Pew Charitable Trusts and Kennedy Center; commissions from South Coast Rep, Mark Taper Forum, and Playwrights Horizons; and the Berrilla Kerr Award for his contributions to American theater. He is a regular instructor at the Playwrights Foundation, Stagebridge, and Playground. *The Living* has received over 40 professional and amateur productions.

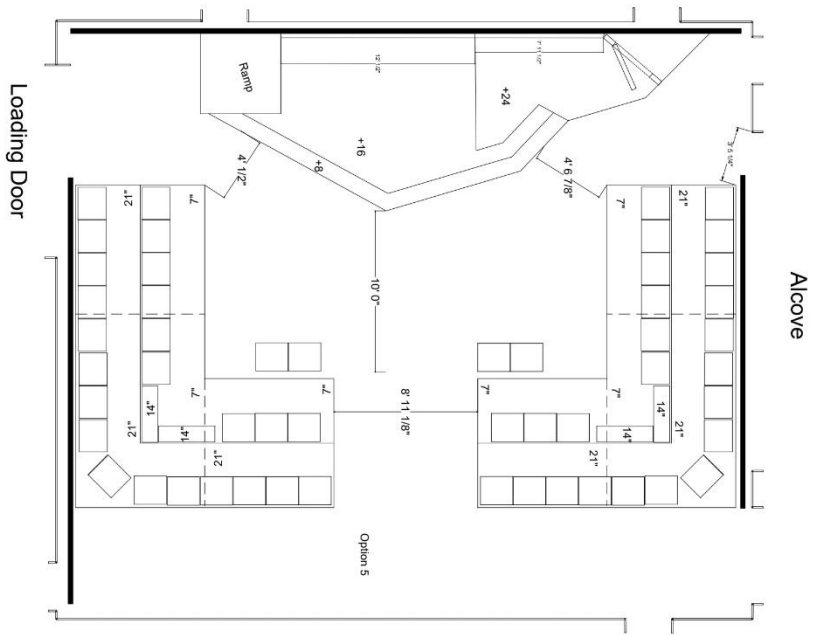
Citation: Bailey, Rebecca. "'The Living': Courage and compassion in the face of cataclysm." Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth, 2019, [hop.dartmouth.edu/news/2019/11/living-courage-and-compassion-face-cataclysm](http://hop.dartmouth.edu/news/2019/11/living-courage-and-compassion-face-cataclysm)

# Costumes Designs:





## Scenic Design:



## Things to think about prior to performance:

- The play reveals both the cowardice and the bravery, often reluctant, of the citizens of London during the bubonic plague in 1665. Reflect on whether you've seen instances of this in the media, or in life, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- *The Living*, though in a very bleak time in our world, seems to focus on the growth of community in the midst of chaos. Where have you seen community growth during the current pandemic, perhaps in ways not utilized previously?

## Things to watch for in performance:

- Dichotomies are paired opposites. Playwright Anthony Clarvoe has noted this about characters in the play (but also his observation about individuals in crisis): “The action of the play is about the impulse to draw back, to lie, to conceal, and to retreat versus the impulse to gather, to commune, to cooperate, to find common ground. In your opinion, how many of the characters see their situation as clear cut, black and white, and how many see it as grey and evolving?”
- This set design is an example of what is called a unit set, which is a scenic design made up of pieces (or units) which can be used to produced more than one setting (or rearranged to do so). Was this set design helpful to the production? Why or why not?
- How is the passage of time conveyed in lighting, sound, use of the set, costume pieces and in character action?
- Observe how the actors establish their relationship with one another. How do we ‘meet’ each character? Does their circumstance affect how we empathize with them?

## **Things to think about the performance:**

- This play was written in 1991, first performed in 1993, but set in 1665 (and includes some more modern phrasing). Now, staged in 2021, think about how the play makes you feel. What **SHOULD** we learn (from the bubonic plague, and from COVID-19), about society's role in public health, and our responsibility to one another?
- John Graunt, a historical character in the play, was a London haberdasher who became intrigued with birth and death records, and began to note and study trends in birth and mortality rates along gender, geographic and other lines; he's considered the parent of demography. He actually predicted the plague three years earlier, though the predications went unheeded. Where have we, as a society, advanced in this regard? When is data helpful, and when does it have limits?

## **Other Analysis Tools:**

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, **WHAT** happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is 'about?' In a nutshell, how does the playwright drive his point(s) home?
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwright decide that this was the most quintessential title for his work?

The running time for this production is approximately 2 hours, including a 15 minute intermission. Please join us for a pre-show discussion Thursday, October 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:45 P.M in MAC 138 preceding the preview performance.

Note that pre-show discussions will include the director and designers, and will be a discussion of the approach to this production. There will be a post-show discussion following the Friday, October 15<sup>th</sup> performance. The post-show will be with director, cast and crew, and we will be fielding questions from the audience.

**Please join us!**