

Red Well Revealed: An Interview with Bob Schulte

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The PCFINE Program Committee is pleased to present a Red Well Theater Group production of *Dinner with Friends* on Saturday, May 14th. Here Barbara Keezell interviews Bob Schulte, the founder and director of the Red Well Theater Group.

Barbara: Can you give us some backstory on how the Red Well Theater Group came to be?

Bob: I had an epiphany while planning a group therapy conference, back in 2002. The play 'ART' very unexpectedly came to my mind as a possible plenary idea. Its simplicity in conveying interpersonal and group themes was appealing and I was familiar with play reading from my prior career as a theater director. Serendipitously, there was another therapist colleague, John Dluhy, whose own theater career as an actor had yet to be fully realized. As director and actor we became a sort of work couple, pursuing our theatre ambitions together, part-time, in the service of our professional development as clinicians. I feel grateful to John and very fortunate to have such talented, creative partners in the work of the Red Well Theater Group. We are a cadre of Washington, DC area group therapist colleagues who share a love of theater and a commitment to dynamic group therapy training.

Barbara: How did you choose this particular play for the PCFINE audience?

Bob: Authentic emotional communication and creative collaboration are vitalizing processes in successful intimate relationships. This truism was "in play" from the beginning of the script selection process. Susan Phillips, my contact at PCFINE, and I entered into a long-distance



Dinner with Friends rehearsal

Belinda Friedrich, Eleanor Counselman, Barbara Keezell, Ron Goldman, Justin Newmark, and Bob Schulte.

collaborative partnership, searching together for a play that would be intellectually and affectively compelling for an audience of couple therapists. We each recommended titles, read plays, and even scouted out current productions. We were thrilled to discover *Dinner with Friends*, by David Margolies.

Barbara: How is your process of preparing a play reading similar or different from the traditional way a play would be rehearsed?

Bob: Theatre has its own way of staying experiential and not being too didactic or intellectual. In the theatre I would say to the actor, "Don't tell me, show me." In the RWTG, however, the actor is part-performer, part-therapist, and part-audience. So, we have to find a way to allow the therapist-actor an authentic experiential encounter with the play and also provide an opportunity to reflect and make meaning of their experience. When we reach performance time, we extend the same invitation to the audience to be in meaningful dialogue about how the play was experienced and then relate this to their practice of psychotherapy. For me, the process of

enactment, reflection, and meaning-making is the essential commonality between theatre and psychotherapy.

Barbara: What can you tell us about the play and the program you have planned?

The play opens in the fashionable Connecticut home of Karen and Gabe. They are giving a dinner for their married best friends Beth and Tom, which Beth attends alone. By dessert time, it emerges from the devastated Beth that Tom has left her for another woman. Gabe and Karen are heartbroken, having expected "to grow old and fat together, the four of us."

When a couple is struggling with infidelity endless questions emerge in search of deeper truths. "Why?" "Are you in love with him/her?" "What do we tell our friends?" Our educational program features a theatrical case study of two married couples coping with the shock of betrayal and its cascading effect on their many entwined relationships—self, spouse, children, family, friends, and neighbors.

A clinical commentary relevant to couples therapy and an audience discussion follow the play reading. *Dinner With Friends*, winner of the

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To “Like” or Not to “Like”

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Social Networking has many benefits and uses that we will continue to discover as we evolve as users and as the medium evolves into its next iteration. The standard of care is moving towards including social networking and electronic media in any disclosure forms a therapist may give to a client. I have found that to be very helpful. I now include in my policies and procedures page a couple of sentences about use of social media and electronic communication and make sure to go over this in a first meeting.

I say something to the effect that any type of electronic communication should be assumed to be in the public sphere, meaning that I have no idea what happens to it or who has access to it. I try to keep electronic communication to a minimum, and I explain that it is never an appropriate way to communicate anything of any real sensitivity. But I also leave room to understand that each person uses electronic media differently, and that at times we may have to discuss what and how that is impacting our work together.

This last principle is perhaps the most important one. I strive to create a space in which I can talk with my clients about how and why they (and we) do the things we do. This includes the use of electronic communication and social media. Likewise, of increasing importance for us as clinicians is to understand that social networking is a part of our life and as such we need to evolve how we will integrate it into our practices and professional lives.



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2000 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service of New York.

Barbara: What do you want to convey or teach with this play?

Bob: The needs of secure attachment and exploratory excitement are difficult at times to reconcile within enduring intimate relationships. It's instructive to look at how each couple in this play works out their unique balance between these two basic dimensions. A companion idea is around the concept of fit. As therapists, we know there are good fits and bad fits. How does this factor predestine a couple's future? In this play, both couples are challenged to reconsider their mate choices, without a guarantee of how that reappraisal might impact their lives.

Barbara: How did you come to create this Boston-based ensemble of therapist-actors?

Bob: I have to go back nearly ten years. Like an old school movie director, I fondly remember, “discovering” Barbara Keezell (yes, you!) acting the role of the proverbial “difficult patient” in a demonstration group led by the legendary Anne Alonso. Barbara was mesmerizing. She eventually joined RWTG as a guest artist in presentations of *The Great God Pan*, by Amy Herzog. Barbara was the natural person to turn

for help in “discovering” an all-Boston cast. Boston has some very impressive therapist-actor talent! Ron Goldman is an accomplished actor and playwright in his own right. And Justin Newmark and Belinda Friedrich bring considerable gifts of empathy, emotional responsiveness and spontaneity to the art of play reading. Eleanor Counselman, a self-proclaimed Red Well Theater Group “groupie” and previous discussant for *The Great God Pan* presentation at AGPA, will be our discussant and will facilitate the audience reflection and discussion. We are very fortunate to have this all-Boston ensemble present *Dinner With Friends* for their colleagues and friends.

Dinner with Friends, winner of the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, will be performed at 1 p.m. on Saturday, May 14th at the Universalist Unitarian Church in Belmont. There will be a reading of the play, followed by clinical commentary and audience discussion. A reception will be held afterwards. Free parking is available and the church is on the #74 bus line from Harvard Square.



PCFINE Calendar of Events

- May 1st **Brunch.** 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. “*Working with Contempt in Couples.*” Eric Albert theoretical presenter; Nina Avedon clinical presenter; David Goldfinger moderator.

- May 14, 2016 **Dinner with Friends.** 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. A play reading and facilitated discussion.