

### Reviews of “The Lover at the Wall: 3 Plays on Bahá’í Subjects”

“The Lover at the Wall is an important publication of three plays, as it is one of the first attempts to express a newly emerging religious culture in dramatic terms.

“There is always the danger of religious drama being seen as an attempt to proselytize, but Mark Perry has avoided this pitfall by bringing to life real historic moments, as in the plays *A New Dress for Mona* and *On the Rooftop with Bill Sears*, or, in the case of *Band of Gold*, by creating the realistic fiction of two diverse families dealing with marital strife.

“Using spiritual, transformative experiences in theatre is a difficult task. The ineffable is difficult to give shape to. I applaud Perry’s efforts, especially with the very moving play *A New Dress for Mona*, which will touch the heart and challenge the mind of believer and secularist alike.”

Valerie Senyk, Professor of Theatre Arts  
Georgian College University Partnership Centre

“Mark, your work is an inspiration to me, not only the purity of heart with which you approach it, but also the strength, discipline, intelligence and power of your play writing skill. In these three plays, the range of your voice and storytelling prowess is established. It is a precious gift you give to us all with these heartfelt and moving scripts. “

Bill George, Founder  
Touchstone Theatre / Kingfisher Theatre

“An inspiring collection of work that will be invaluable to Baha'i writers and performers for many years. Mark Perry's heart--filled with a love for Baha'u'llah as well as the theatre--is on every page. The introduction offers an elegant and poetic explanation of the place of drama in the New Era. I can see myself revisiting this book many times for inspiration, for reference, and for the well-told stories and unforgettable characters.

“**A New Dress for Mona:** This re-vision cuts to the heart. It was impossible to read with dry eyes; I'd love to see a production of it as written in its new form. I found "A New Dress for Mona" to be as gripping as Wendy Kesselman's new adaptation of "The Diary of Anne Frank."

“**Band of Gold:** I couldn't stop laughing even though my heart ached for all of the characters and their very real, very challenging struggles. A hilarious and truthful portrayal of what it's like to be a member of Baha'i community at this time.

“**On the Rooftop:** Even though I'd read some of Mr. Sears' work, I felt I got to know him through this piece. There were some lovely moments of humor and tenderness. It made me want to re-read his books with fresh eyes and understanding.”

Cindy Dawn McCallum, Author

## Reviews of “A New Dress for Mona”

“*A New Dress for Mona* is a compelling story of a young woman’s bravery in the face of nearly impossible odds.

“The play is about Mona Mahmudnizhad, 17 years old, who was one of ten Bahá’í women executed by the Iranian government in Shiraz on June 18, 1983. Mona’s true story is a compelling example of faith and bravery illuminated by Mark Perry’s forceful and beautiful script.

“As Bahá’ís search worldwide for acceptance and in particular for the scope of human decency to survive in their native countries, this play tells the story of not only one young woman’s plight but the continued threat to religious freedom in a modern world.

“In producing *A New Dress for Mona* we found that the under-told story of the Baha'i faith and persecution in Iran was one with which our students were unfamiliar. As a theatre committed to education in inclusive techniques of storytelling this drama rooted in fact affords students an opportunity to explore documentary theatre. As a theatre committed to discourses including new and challenging subject matter, plays like *A New Dress for Mona* afford students and audiences to engage in dialogs essential to understanding a broader scope of international experience.”

*McKay Coble, Professor and Chair  
Department of Dramatic Art, UNC-Chapel Hill*

“Written with feeling, sympathy and clarity, Mark Perry’s compelling and highly creative account offers a unique insight into the life of one of the most significant players on the contemporary world stage. Perry shows us how Mona played such important yet unseen roles in shaping the current history of the Baha’i Faith after the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

“Perry has a refined sense for the intimate aspects of Mona’s life – the texture of her character, her inner connection to her Creator, and her desire to serve humanity.

“Perry invites us into Mona’s life, lets us engage her responses to the events in her life, and illustrates her ability to transcend the social and cultural constraint. We can feel her optimism and resilience in the face of relentless persecution and ever-present uncertainty.

“Moving the reader beyond today’s self-centered attitudes towards life, Perry introduces us to a life led with purpose. Readers will inevitably be inspired to reflect on the meanings and purposes of life.

“Ultimately, Perry tells the story of a teenager who had the same desires and dreams as her peers, but who was living in a starkly different world – a world of trust and faith and love and even serenity! The play shows us how that is possible.”

Ladan Doorandish, Media consultant

## Review of "On the Rooftop with Bill Sears" (2004 Production)

**"In the Beginning was the Word . . .**

*"A sensational play by The Drama Circle ponders life's deepest questions with a deft comedic touch worthy of any theatre buff's undying attention*

"*On the Roof Top*, a play by Mark Perry, takes the written word of 1950's television and radio personality Bill Sears and transforms it into an incredibly moving one-man homage to the universal quest for meaning and purpose.

"Perry, who is also the play's lone actor, and director Julian Chachula have created a stirring production primarily based on Sears' book *God Loves Laughter*, a short, poignant and hilarious tale of one boy's desire for answers to questions posed by the universe and, in particular, by a recurring dream--one featuring an elderly white-bearded man dressed in white robes who appears in the glow of white light.

"As a fan of the book, I have to admit my skepticism toward the idea of a one-man play based on a story spanning a few decades. Moreover, having met Perry, I wondered how such a soft-spoken, mindful, wise-worded individual such as he could command the stage for 75 minutes of dialogue. These preconceived and ill-conceived notions were tossed out the window as soon as Perry strode on stage in full Bill Sears regalia, dripping with charisma and youthful exuberance.

"He rarely let the audience escape the character's personality, which it must be said, is one of ultimate attraction. You like him, immediately. You root for him, though you are purposefully not exactly sure with whom or what he's competing. You want resolution for his sake, yet you don't want the play to end because it's all so very entertaining. Along the way you are moved, if you are at all human, by the genuineness of the story and its main character's struggle, though hilarious it may be.

"Perry, who converses with the audience like a storyteller throughout the performance, begins with an introduction to who exactly Bill Sears is at a crucial time in his life—a "successful" and secure TV and radio pioneer about to strike it rich with a new contract. With brilliant writing and directing, present conversation with the audience is linked to Sears' early childhood and strained relationship with his father, who wished he had a normal son--one who played ball instead of playing philosopher.

"Why is the sky blue, father?"

"Who is God exactly, and where does he live? What sort of house does he have?"

"How big is the universe and why exactly are we here?"

"His father, one of several characters Perry emulates, wants no part of this sort of inquiry. Perry's comic timing coupled with the writing tug at the heart of anyone who has had a difference of opinion with a parental figure.

"During one skit, Perry plays the role of a rambunctious childhood version of Sears determined to read the Bible for himself despite the protestations and whoopins from his traditional father. This Biblical battle between father and son is insanely funny but is ultimately won by the younger Sears who finds

the mysterious “white-light” man of his dreams in *The Book of Revelations*. This was as a child and merely half the answer he was looking for.

“Sears was a master storyteller for CBS and later as an author and beloved friend for members of the Baha’i Faith the world over. Perry does this man justice, tracing Sears’ childhood experiences and professional life to create the necessary tension for the play's climax. Perry and Chachula create space for immediate reflection and the appropriate ending for further reflection during the drive home.

“Flashbacks are intense but spaced properly and magically written, leaving just the right amount of curiosity in the air. So when the audience is returned to another flashback sequence, you feel as if answers are coming. The brilliance of the play, however, lies in the asking of questions and the constant reflection on one's life. When the answers do come, and they do, a real sense of completion fills the room. Then, you realize Sears’ adventure is just beginning and want to delve into the untold story of his life after CBS.

“There are many details specific to Sears' life but although they certainly create the backdrop to this play's personal and biographical significance, the real message is in the universality of trying to find meaning in one’s life. Do I take the money and run or do I take the road less traveled? It’s a message of the heart and the curious mind. It’s really a tale about finding the significance of your dream and going for it.

“Yet, Perry and Chachula don't merely tell a story, though touching it certainly is. They cast characters and re-embrace the past with remarkable clarity. The writing is well mapped out, considering the intricate weaving of Sears' life and the incredible revelation at the heart of the story. The directing was a chore, no doubt. But Chachula pieces everything together properly, giving the audience time to breathe when it needs to breathe. He lets us get lost in the moment never forgetting that each moment serves a greater purpose.

“The acting is tremendous and perhaps the most amazing thing about the performance, aside from the essence of the tale, is Perry's ability to rival Sears as a yarn spinner. He brought words and lives to life again. This is no small task and Perry was more than up to the challenge.”

Mark Derewicz, Writer