

# Production Notes

## *From the Director* **Kristin Kundert-Gibbs**

I first encountered *Armitage* while in graduate school at The Ohio State University. Playwright Don Nigro was in residency there while the theatre department was producing his play *1942*. He also taught playwriting and directed a reading of a new play that he was working on, *Armitage*. I was cast as Elaine.

The previous summer, I had met Don in Kent, Ohio, where I was acting with Porthouse Theatre Company. He was present during rehearsals for the world premiere of his show *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*, in which I was cast as Zoe.

The time I spent with Don during these two productions began a lifetime relationship. I write him when I am looking for a script, and he sends me suggestions, even scripts. At first, it was photocopies of text typed on his typewriter. Now it is in a PDF file. He is generous with his time and his words, giving freely to all. He has written over 300 plays from his historic home in Malvern, Ohio.

The ghosts that populate the town of Armitage are pieces of the playwright (in some senses very thinly veiled). Don, a recluse who writes and feeds feral cats, lives alone in a small town in Ohio. He has an amazing sense of history and a depth of knowledge of literature and art that surpasses anyone I know. He wanders his house and the forests around it like Zach, Eva, and Elaine, reads without ceasing like Fay and

John, and writes the web of his thoughts, memories, and desires like Margaret.

As you encounter the ghosts of the Pendragon family, you will find insights into the mind of America's most prolific playwright. Enjoy the journey.

## *From the Dramaturg* **George Pate**

The great thing about Arthurian legends is that they have no single definitive source. The stories are based on a combination of early Celtic folklore and semi-historical accounts of a sixth-century British commander holding off Saxon mercenaries-turned-invaders. Reinvention and appropriation form the heart of the legend's continuity. British and French writers have been adapting the stories and characters to comment on their times and their histories for over a century. In other words, you can't get them wrong. The play's major characters are mostly drawn from twelfth-century-or-later developments to the legend starting with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, although they are probably best known through Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. For those in the know (or those who would like to be), Zachary is Uther, Eva is Ygraine, John is Arthur, Fay is Morgan, and so on. Don Nigro's choice to combine Arthurian tropes with American history follows in this tradition by using *mythos* as a lens through which to view the past. Instead of Saxons and Britons clashing on Badon Hill, though, the warrior class to which Zachary Pendragon belongs dukes it out on Capitol Hill. The cutthroat, high-tension politics of the mid-nineteenth century constantly casts shadows over the domestic drama in *Armitage* in the same way that war frames the interpersonal conflicts in Camelot. In both cases, the human conflicts provide a new way of understanding the historical/political conflicts and vice versa.