

Tom Haas  
Artistic Director

Jessica L. Andrews  
Managing Director

## INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

presents

# TO CULEBRA

by

Jonathan Bolt

Directed by

TOM HAAS

Costume design by  
BILL WALKER

Set design by  
CHRISTOPHER H. BARRECA

Lighting design by  
STUART DUKE

Production Stage Manager  
JOEL GRYNHEIM

Assistant Stage Manager  
NANCY HART

February 11 - March 7, 1987

*Professional premiere at Actors Theatre of Louisville*

Opening Week Sponsored by Marsh Supermarkets

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FUNDED BY:  
TARGET STORES

**USAIR**  
The Official airline of the  
Indiana Repertory Theatre

Indiana Repertory Theatre is pleased to present  
TO CULEBRA in recognition of the  
Pan American Games.



The 1987  
Pan American Games  
Indianapolis  
7-23 August 1987

# CAST

(in order of appearance)

Charles de Lesseps, .....	Edwin J. McDonough
<i>son of Ferdinand de Lesseps</i>	
Agnes de Lesseps, .....	Amelia Penland
<i>wife to Charles</i>	
Arnault Rau, .....	Hamilton Gillett
<i>the Prosecutor</i>	
Henri Barboux, .....	J. Edgar Webb
<i>the Advocate</i>	
Jules Dingler, .....	Clyde Bassett
<i>first Chief Engineer of the Canal</i>	
Ferdinand de Lesseps, .....	Edward Seamon
<i>"Le Grand Francais"</i>	
Louise de Lesseps, .....	Karen Nelson
<i>Ferdinand's second wife</i>	
Lieutenant Lucien Wyse, .....	Craig Fuller
<i>employed by the Turr Syndicate</i>	
Baron Jacques de Reinach, .....	Frank Raiter
<i>financier</i>	
General Istvan Turr, .....	Michael Lipton
<i>head of Turr Syndicate</i>	
Philippe Bunau-Varilla, .....	Frederick Farrar
<i>Chief Engineer of the Culebra Cut</i>	
Maid.....	Rhonda Stirek
Court Officials.....	Glenn Becker, Michael Bosworth, Scott Enzweiler

\* \* \* \*

Casting by Stanley Soble and Jason La Padura

\* \* \* \*

## SETTING

The play takes place in or near Paris and on the Isthmus of Panama, 1876-1893.  
The trial occurs during the winter of 1893 in Paris.

## Running Times

Act I: 60 minutes

## INTERMISSION

Act II: 60 minutes

## TO CULEBRA: SYNOPSIS

Act I: In 1876, Ferdinand de Lesseps, the great Frenchman who built the Suez Canal, is approached by three businessmen interested in building yet another canal, in the Panama area. De Lesseps consents to attend the International Geographic Conference which is to address the exploration of Central American locations for a canal, but brushes off the idea of building the canal himself for the Turr Syndicate (composed of General Istvan Turr, Lucien Wyse, and Baron de Reinach). Soon we find that de Lesseps has changed his mind and taken on the project to build the Panama Canal, despite the fact that he is 67 years old and retired! De Lesseps' only stipulation to the Turr Syndicate is that the Canal be built at sea level--as the Suez Canal had been. Charles de Lesseps, Ferdinand's son and bookkeeper, is more realistic about the plan, but Ferdinand charges ahead, despite the lack of information presented by Wyse who was appointed to conduct an exploration of the proposed Canal area, part of which is through mountainous terrain. The major obstacle to a sea-level canal is the mountain, Culebra, which stands on the Continental Divide. Even de Lesseps' visit to Panama, with his young wife and small children, fails to curb his enthusiasm in a sea-level canal.

Threaded through this act are court scenes from the trial which takes place in 1893, in which the de Lesseps' are charged with defrauding the investors in their Canal Company. In these court scenes we meet Jules Dingler, the chief engineer for the canal, who lost his entire family to Yellow Fever in Panama. We also learn, through cross-examination of Lucien Wyse, of the terrible climate conditions of the Panamanian jungle, and the considerable difficulties in conducting any work during the rainy season. Throughout, Ferdinand de Lesseps remains filled with the challenge and glory of severing the isthmus and creating a path between the seas, despite the cost in human life or money.

Act II: Charles' worst apprehensions are confirmed when he finds that Wyse has grossly underestimated the time and cost involved in the building of the canal. Wyse is then released from de Lesseps' service. Charles finds out about all the false claims which his father is making to the press about the progress of the canal. Determined to overcome obstacles instead of ignore them, he promises Dingler all the medical facilities, doctors, and clean housing he may need on the canal site. Suddenly they receive word that someone has told the press that Ferdinand de Lesseps, the inspiration of the venture, is dead--the price of canal stock plummets on the French stock exchange, severely threatening the financial stability of the company. In a last ditch effort to save the company, father and son de Lesseps return to Panama to encourage the workers and restore hope among the stockholders that the company will succeed. Even these efforts fail and the French Canal Company collapses. Reinach, whom Charles questions as to the nature of his enormous (and probably illegal) company expenditures, shoots himself after tearing several pages out of the company ledgers.

In the court scenes the financial fiasco of the Canal Company is exposed. Ferdinand and Charles are sentenced to five and six years respectively. Ferdinand's sentence is forgotten, due to his age and now frail health, but Charles' sentence stands, which makes Agnes, Charles' wife, even more bitter toward the old man who gave so little attention to his oldest son. But Charles argues that his father did give him one thing--a bit of his glory. Even though Ferdinand is kept from knowing about the trial, he seems to say goodbye as he shares a tender moment with his son before Charles is taken to prison.

## Jonathan Bolt's Epic Drama TO CULEBRA

Documents the Building of the Panama Canal

"The land divided; the world united," this was the oft-repeated phrase used to identify a centuries-old dream which led explorers to Panama, seeking a passage to unite the seas. The first company to actually attempt this greatest of all engineering feats was led by French entrepreneur Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had masterminded the building of the Suez Canal. De Lesseps took on the directorship of the Universal Panama Inter-Ocean Canal Company at the age of 74, vowing to complete the 50-mile cut in record time, despite considerable obstacles. But the combined effects of the jungle climate, inadequate technology, yellow fever epidemics among the workers, and serious mismanagement of stockholders' funds led the company into bankruptcy, and eventually, to a much-publicized trial for fraud, which resulted in a jail sentence for de Lesseps' son, Charles, the chief administrator of the company.

Playwright Jonathan Bolt has captured the spirit of this great and tragic enterprise in a new play of epic scale, TO CULEBRA. The title refers to the mountain on the Continental Divide which had to be cut through to make way for de Lesseps' sea-level canal. Bolt's play expertly dramatizes the events of 1876-90, moving effortlessly between Paris and Panama, and to various locations in homes, offices, and the jungle digging sites.

The IRT presents this sweeping drama in recognition of the Pan Am Games--to bring to the stage and to Indianapolis audiences a fascinating historic event of particular significance to Pan American relations. Awareness of issues related to the Panama Canal are particularly timely

today as we approach the termination of the American treaties controlling the Canal Zone and prepare to turn full administration of the Canal over to the Panamanian government in the year 2000.

IRT's production of this play is the first since its premiere last March in the Actors Theatre of Louisville's Humana Festival of New American Plays. Previous to this stage premiere, the play had undergone a staged reading at the Circle Repertory Company in New York City, of which Mr. Bolt is a member. IRT's interest in the script began when Artistic Director Tom Haas, Managing Director Jessica L. Andrews and Artistic Associate Janet Allen saw the Louisville production and found it to be an ideal theatrical event with which to celebrate the Pan Am Games.



Playwright Bolt is very much a man of the theatre. An accomplished actor, director and playwright, he is currently in residence at Actors Theatre of Louisville where he has been acting this season and is now directing his own newest play, GLIMMERGLASS, which is based on James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales.

GLIMMERGLASS is Bolt's entry into the 1987 Humana Festival of New American Plays. An earlier play of Bolt's, THREADS, was produced Off-Broadway in 1981 and has been performed at several regional theatres throughout the country. His musical for young audiences, FIRST LADY, was honored with a special performance at the White House in 1985.

Bolt will be visiting Indianapolis periodically during rehearsals of TO CULEBRA, which Artistic Director Tom Haas will direct.



The Tenth  
Pan American Games  
Indianapolis  
7-23 August 1987



Ferdinand de Lesseps, French entrepreneur  
whose company made the first attempt to build  
the Panama Canal; inset--playwright Jonathan Bolt

IRT subscribers will have the unique opportunity to hear playwright Jonathan Bolt speak about his play TO CULEBRA at the Sunday Salon for the production, immediately following the Sunday matinee on February 15. The Sunday Salon is presented free of charge and allows patrons to hear background about the play and its genesis, and to ask questions of either the playwright or the theatre's production staff. Don't miss this chance to meet accomplished American actor, director and playwright Jonathan Bolt.

## **Jonathan Bolt (playwright)**

Jonathan Bolt works not only as a writer, but also as an actor and director. Currently in residence at the Actors Theatre of Louisville where he is directing his own play, GLIMMERGLASS, in the Humana Festival of New Plays, he has also acted in several productions there this season including A CHRISTMAS CAROL in which he played Scrooge. Bolt has acted on Broadway (most recently in Nichols' PASSION), Off-Broadway (primarily with the Circle Repertory Company of which he is a member), and in many regional theatres (including a multi-year association with The Cleveland Play House). Last spring Mr. Bolt became the first American to direct a Bulgarian theatre company, under the auspices of an Arts America exchange.

Bolt's earlier play, THREADS, premiered at Circle Rep in New York in 1982, and has received subsequent productions at numerous regional theatres across the country. His musical for young audiences, FIRST LADY, was honored with a special performance at the White House in 1984. TO CULEBRA first appeared as a staged reading at Circle Rep, and premiered at the Actors Theatre of Louisville's Humana Festival for New Plays in 1986.

Indiana Repertory Theatre is pleased to present the second production of this epic drama in recognition of the Pan American Games.

## Charles Staff Interviews Playwright Jonathan Bolt

Jonathan Bolt could break into that old vaudevillian tune, with a slight switch, and sing, "Just Mention My Name in Bulgaria."

Born and brought up in North Carolina, Bolt has done just about everything in the theater but vaudeville, including a directing stint in that Eastern-bloc Balkan country last year.

In the resident company of Louisville's Actors Theatre, Bolt just closed there in Eugene O'Neill's *MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN* while revising his play, *GLIMMERGLASS*. Under his direction, the play, based on James Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales," will be given its world premiere at Actors Theatre February 26 in the Pamela Brown Auditorium.

His *TO CULEBRA*, first presented to the world by the Louisvillians a year ago, opens at the Indiana Repertory Theatre February 11 to continue through March 7.

Bolt is nothing else if not busy. While appearing as T. Stedman Harder in the O'Neill, the actor-director-playwright stepped into the cast of Arthur Miller's *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* to play Willy Loman's brother, book in hand, on another Actors Theatre stage.

How do you prepare for an Indianapolis premiere, a Louisville world premiere and appear in two shows at once? There's only one way. You're Jonathan Bolt, who, by the way, began his theatrical career as a designer. Can he write incidental music?

"I wish to—I could," he remarked, leaning back in a chair with a big grin, half wicked, half charitable, on his face. Bolt had come to the Hoosier capital on his day off to discuss *TO CULEBRA* with IRT artistic director Tom Haas, to look over the facility, which pleased him very much, and to talk to media representatives.

*TO CULEBRA* deals with the failed French effort to build a sea-level canal across Panama and the ensuing financial scandal that swallowed up Ferdinand de Lesseps, the larger-than-life man responsible for the Suez, and his son, Charles, among others.

"I came on this because of a Teddy Roosevelt musical I'd written for Theatre Works USA in 1980 which they toured for four years. They wanted another show and I thought of a musical about the Panama Canal. But then I started thinking about the father-son relationship, what might have gone on behind closed doors between them.

"Everything factual can be found in David McCullough's The Path Between the Seas. He's a vivid writer, but my play's not an adaptation. De Lesseps (the elder) was full of himself. He wrote a bragging autobiography while digging Panama. I use a couple of speeches, the one about the rainbow in the desert at Suez. But, my God, here's a man who had 12 children, who married an 18-year-old girl when he was 65!

"I don't think I write for myself, a role I'd like to play. You're in everybody. I'm closer to Charles de Lesseps in reality but I'd like to be Ferdinand," he remarked. In the play, and evidently in real life, Charles was the obedient son, a man whose gifts included only certain organizational skills.

Bolt's script calls for music from Verdi's "Aida," commissioned by Khedive Ismail Pasha for the opening of his new opera house and first performed in Cairo December 24, 1871. The official opening of Suez, attended by the Spanish-born Empress Eugenie of France and Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph, took place two years earlier.

"I thought the music suggested the play's grand scale. Americans aren't supposed to write operatic plays like this," he said, referring to the contemporary kitchen-sink and front-porch schools of drama.

Divorced, with a daughter in college, Bolt lives in a little office in Manhattan, which he describes as "quiet and high up," where he writes until all hours, drinks coffee and does the New York Times crossword puzzle to fall asleep to. As to the puzzles, he describes himself as a "medium expert."

"I have to force myself to go to the YMCA, but I keep telling myself, you don't have to get rid of that blubber to write," he said.

After his days as a theatrical designer, Bolt turned to acting and had a continuing role in television's "Combat" with the ill-fated Vic Morrow, beheaded in a tragic helicopter accident in Hollywood.

Though Bolt lost his southern accent--"Either I never had one or it slipped away when no one was looking"--he was generally cast, as he describes it, "with my shoes off and a straw in my mouth. I was the barefoot hillbilly on "Combat."

He wrote his first play in revenge when he was fired as a director--"which wasn't my fault," he added with another big peel of laughter.

"I used to write for the soap, "Ryan's Hope," and I hated it. They were always saying, 'Now if you could find some way to get Pat's shirt off,'" he admitted.

His play THREADS was produced in New York but, according to Bolt, "Frank Rich [New York Times critic] killed it. Everything I've written so far, though, has been produced somewhere. I don't have anything stuffed away in a drawer except the work-in-progress.

"But you've got to be thick-skinned and smart about New York. What I need is an AMADEUS success. In New York, if you're in, you're in. If you're not, you're not," he remarked.

What Bolt describes as a "life-changing" experience came along last year.

"I was the first American to direct a Bulgarian company at the suggestion of Jon Jory (founder and head of the Louisville Company). I staged Tennessee Williams THE ROSE TATTOO in Rousse on the Danube across from Romania. It's a town with cultural ties to Vienna, but the country, of course, is very hard-line communist.

"I was by myself and didn't speak a word of Bulgarian and very few people spoke English. A businessman acted as my translator. He got to the point where he'd say, 'I know, I know what you want, boss, and jump up on the stage and start directing,'" Bolt said.

"The script was in the Cyrillic alphabet, which the Bulgarians claim to have invented. But at least there were the Sicilian passages, the same in English and Bulgarian, and I was given the opportunity to see all but one of the actors more than once in other shows, TWELFTH NIGHT among them," he explained.

"When an actor gets out of school in Bulgaria, he has a job for life. It's all run by the Committee of Culture. It's considered an insult to audition," he revealed, a fact that might send some American actors hurrying to Bulgaria.

"At any rate, the production was a big hit and it's touring Poland now. They'll keep doing it until they wear it out. And the actors loved the play. For once, they didn't have to stand around talking about factories and tractors."

*reprinted, with permission from the author, from the Indianapolis News*

## Ferdinand de Lesseps and the Guilt of Excessive Optimism

*It is only the optimist who succeeds in this world.  
Pessimists are never anything but spectators.*

The greatest of follies, or the greatest of enterprises? The most ambitious scientific feat of the 19th century, or its most terrible financial debacle? A brilliant entrepreneurial scheme in which the prime movers carelessly failed to cover up quite common illegal practices, or a world-wide plot to topple the French government? These and many other vastly contrasting conclusions have been drawn from Ferdinand de Lesseps' attempt to build a sea-level canal across Panama in the 1880's.

History, at least as it was taught to American schoolchildren, has all but dismissed de Lesseps' early work in Panama. But before there was the driving force of Teddy Roosevelt in Panama, there was the driving force of Ferdinand de Lesseps, and before the Panama Canal became the national undertaking of the United States, it was the purely private commercial enterprise of a French company formed upon a curiously noble precept: it was not financial reward de Lesseps sought, but "the union of two oceans, for the good of all humanity." The fact that the Panama Canal would eventually become a political issue involving world commerce and U.S. defense strategy seemed to have little bearing on de Lesseps' pure vision of scientific conquest and in accomplishing this feat simply because the challenge and glory of it cried out to him.

As many historians have since noted, the Panama Canal would not exist today had it not been for Ferdinand de Lesseps and his excessive optimism. Our attraction to de Lesseps has much to do with the qualities he displayed which we tend to hold dear as innately American: his devil-may-care boldness, his belief in the genius of will and positive thinking, his delight at coming back from an underdog position, his trust in scientific progress and exploration--all these qualities make him seem like one of us.

Historian David McCullough's fascinating 1977 study of the creation of the Panama Canal, *The Path Between the Seas*, includes a brilliant analysis of de Lesseps' character, with observations that take us into the very heart of TO CULEBRA.

*The extraordinary venture [of de Lesseps' involvement in Panama] lasted more than a decade. It cost about \$287,000,000--far more than had ever before been spent on any one peaceful undertaking of any kind. The number of lives lost, a subject that had been strangely avoided throughout the Affair, had not been determined, nor was it ever to be with certainty. . . . At least 20,000, perhaps as many as 22,000, died.*

*The fundamental mystery one comes down to in the end is the endlessly trumpeted faith of Ferdinand de Lesseps in success. Was all this the skilled and quite conscious deception of a grand imposter? Or was it the self-deception of a vain old fool who was captured by his past success?*

*Arteries were hardening in the old system, no doubt, but to argue that age was his undoing is to disregard too many other factors of importance. . . . Indeed, it could be as readily argued that his curse was the failure to grow old, his inability to look and act his age. . . . Again and again things could have gone differently, more prudent or realistic views might have prevailed, had he been incapable any longer of playing on his powers--to charm, to flatter, to inspire, to sweep good men onward, contrary to their better instincts, using nothing but the phenomenal force of personality. Men who did know how to compute realistic excavation schedules, men who had experienced Culebra "in the*



wer," serious expert engineers at the top of their form, had listened and agreed and gone ahead as he wished time after time.

At heart, by nature, by every instinct in his body, Vicomte Ferdinand de Lesseps was a rainmaker. He was, as Masefield said of Shakespeare, "the rare unreasonable who comes once in ten generations." . . . An enormous part of his appeal, perhaps the very essence of his appeal, was the fact that he was a nontechnical, nonscientific spirit, the most human of humanists. It made it possible for people to take him to their hearts.

His was not "the faith that could move mountains." . . . His was the faith that the mountains could be moved by technology. He was as much bedazzled by the momentum of progress as by his own past triumph. "Science has declared that the canal is possible, and I am the servant of science," he had remarked. Wondrous new machines would save the day, he told his stockholders again and again. Men of genius would come forth, by which he meant technicians and scientists--workers in physics, mathematics, soil engineering, chemistry, tropical medicine, hydraulics--things about which he knew little or nothing, but which he counted on. . . . So in the largest sense, his tragic folly had been to misjudge the momentum of progress: he had felt certain the machines, the medicines, whatever it took, would be ready in time and he was wrong. And one cannot help but feel that in the end he drifted into that dim stage of his life daunted by an awful sense of betrayal.

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; who strives valiantly . . . who knows the great enthusiasms; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

Theodore Roosevelt, Paris, 1910

# TO CULEBRA Feb. 11-March 7

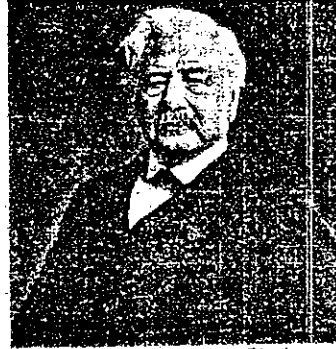
The Prime Movers in the French Panama Canal Affair and Major Characters in the Play...



Lt. Lucien Napoleon-Bonaparte Wyse—first sent by Lesseps to survey possible canal routes. His expedition failed.



Charles de Lesseps, son to the great de Lesseps. He shouldered the financial and legal burden for his father's failure.



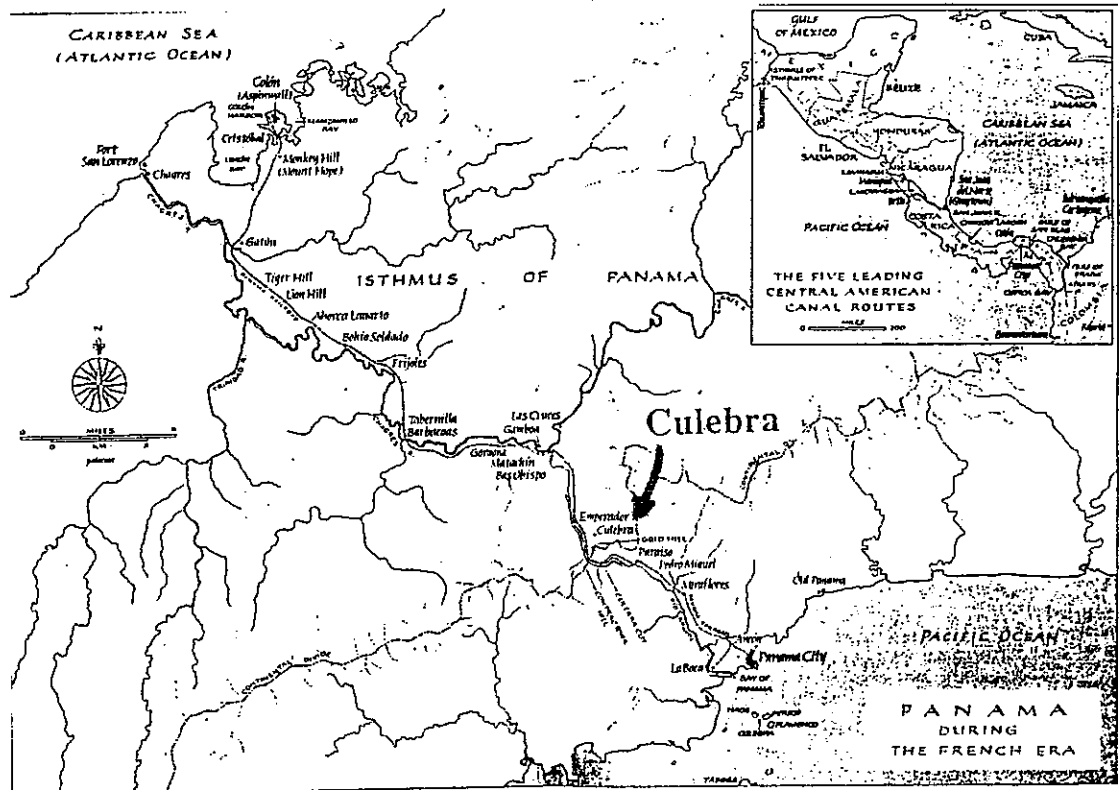
Ferdinand de Lesseps, great French entrepreneur who built the Suez Canal and attempted to build a Panama Canal.



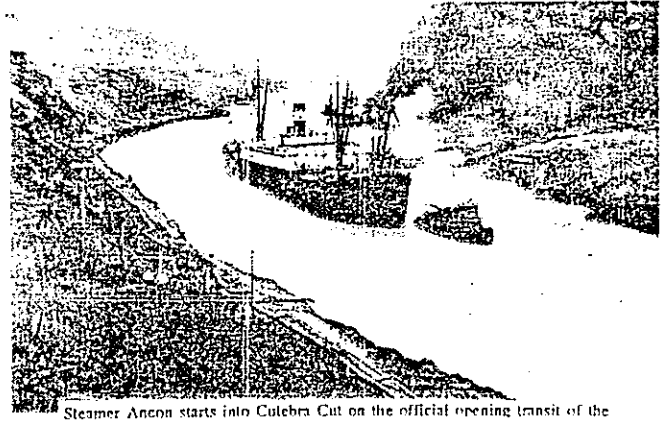
Philippe Bunau-Varilla, the young engineer charged with devising a scheme to build de Lesseps' sea-level canal.

## 1880-1893, France and Panama

When France's hero Ferdinand de Lesseps formed a company to construct a canal across Panama, thousands of citizens rushed to invest their life savings. But shady financial manipulations, idealistic engineering schemes and misleading cost estimates got the Panama Canal Company into trouble almost from the beginning. And when it was revealed that dozens of civil servants, newspapermen and politicians had been put on the Canal Company payroll in exchange for their favors, the resulting scandal rocked France. The company collapsed, politicians were disgraced, de Lesseps' officials were sent to jail, and hundreds of small investors were plunged into poverty. In Panama, thousands of West Indian canal laborers died of Yellow Fever (whose cause was not yet known), or in the devastating landslides at Culebra. Playwright Jonathan Bolt has constructed a play which both reveals a fascinating historic event, and informs our own fascination with the personality of entrepreneurship.



A view of Culebra Cut from Harper's Weekly of July 4, 1895 bears out de



Steamer Ancon starts into Culebra Cut on the official opening transit of the

## "The "Genius of Will" in Epic Theatre

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY, as produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, may have given the American Theatre a good-humored kick in the pants, for it quickly demonstrated that the taste for the epic vision in the theatre is still alive and well, even if the theatre itself seems to have cornered the market on two-character dramas.

The epic vision has always been associated with the theatre, whether it be the vast family histories of the classic Greek tragedies (AGAMEMNON, ELECTRA, etc.); the medieval pageant dramas, which used the Bible as their source to present in a single day the history of man from the Creation to the Day of Judgment; or Shakespeare's lofty visions of medieval Tudor history or his self-contained epics such as ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA and THE TEMPEST.

America's early roots were in the epic vision, and while few of us would want to resurrect BEN HUR or UNCLE TOM'S CABIN, the stage was seen as a place in which the actions of man could be judged against monumental events, journeys and pilgrimages. Eugene O'Neill, America's strongest playwright, created such plays as MARCO'S MILLIONS, covering the journeys of Marco Polo over a 50-year span of history, MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA, and the epic eight-hour STRANGE INTERLUDE. Kaufman and Hart took a turn at the epic with their plays THE AMERICAN WAY and THE FABULOUS INVALID, Thornton Wilder got into the act with THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH, Tennessee Williams with CAMINO REAL and Arthur Miller with THE AMERICAN CLOCK, a chronology of the 30's.

TO CULEBRA is American playwright Jonathan Bolt's foray into epic-size theatre. The subject matter deals with the first attempt to build the Panama Canal, but the heart of the play lies with those persons who become heroes of our world by addressing global tasks and international challenges. Dramatically, their striving reveals the very source of their fall--the ancient bedevilment of hubris. And it is in that clash of the finite ability of the individual with his immense vision, and that self-centered drive that pushes the achiever to exceed himself, that gives birth to dramatic conflict. But Bolt, like many other playwrights who have taken up the challenge of writing on an epic scale, never loses sight of the human level--contained within these great events is a very moving story about a father and son.

The world of TO CULEBRA is one in which a proposal for flooding the Sahara to make a new inland sea, for building huge clamps that would lift ocean-going liners out of the water and lace them on a train and drive them to another ocean were serious considerations. Jules Verne imagined going around the world in 80 days and of rockets to the moon. The world was being conquered by such men as John Wesley Powell who led the first expedition into the Grand Canyon, Othniel C. March, the first paleontologist to discover fossils and the Roeblings who were building the Brooklyn Bridge. Vast personal fortunes were being made by Vanderbilt, Rockefeller and the Rothschilds through epic visions. One of the personality traits which all of these great achievers indisputably shared was the ability to conceive great dreams; and to act upon them with a tenacity which overlooked the impossible--something Jules Verne referred to as "the genius of will." Hopefully, tonight's performance will bring back to the stage a touch of the romantic atmosphere of the 19th century in which scientific achievement seemed limitless, but with a sense of pride in the potential we still hold today to master our universe.

TOM HAAS

# TO CULEBRA February 11-March 7

## by Jonathan Bolt

### A Timeline of Events Related to the Panama Canal

1502 Christopher Columbus, on 4th American voyage, explores Atlantic coast of Panama.  
 1513 Sept. 25. Pacific Ocean discovered by Vasco de Balboa from Darien mountain top.  
 1821 Panama area severs political connection with Spain and joined "Republic of Greater Colombia."  
 1838 May 30. Colombia grants private French company a concession for construction of roads, railroads, and canals across the Isthmus.  
 1846 Treaty between United States and Colombia gives United States transportation concessions across Isthmus in return for guarantee to protect sovereignty of Colombia.  
 1847 Panama Railroad Company organized.  
 1848 Jan. 24. Gold discovered at Sutter's Mill, California, bringing tide of emigrants to Isthmus seeking shorter route from the U.S. east coast to the California gold fields.  
 1848 Dec. 28. Exclusive concession granted by Colombia to private American company for transit system across Isthmus.  
 1859 Jan. 1. The American-built Panama Railroad completed for total length of 47 miles.  
 1869 Nov. 17. Opening of Suez Canal, masterminded by Frenchman Ferdinand de Lesseps, focuses international attention on an Isthmian canal.  
 1875 Ferdinand de Lesseps proposes a sea-level canal at Panama before Geographic Society of Paris.  
 1876 Societe Civile Internationale du Canal Interocéanique organized in Paris to make surveys and explorations for Panama Canal.  
 1878 March 20. Frenchman Lucien Bonaparte Wyse completes negotiations with Colombia for canal concession.



Harper's Weekly: "Is M. de Lesseps a Canal Digger or a Grave Digger?"

1879 May. 135 delegates to International Canal Congress meet in Paris. Proposal for a lock canal rejected by de Lesseps.

1879 Aug. 17. Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique de Panama organized with Ferdinand de Lesseps as President.

1879 Dec. 8. With wife, children and technical committee, de Lesseps embarks for Panama.

1880 Jan. 1. Canal digging ceremoniously inaugurated by de Lesseps in Bay of Panama.

1880 Jan. 10. Excavation of Culebra Cut inaugurated by de Lesseps.

1880 March. De Lesseps makes unsuccessful canal promotion tour of the United States.

1881 Jan. 29. First French construction gangs arrive in Panama.

1881 June. First deaths from yellow fever among Canal employees.

1881 Aug. Compagnie Universelle gains control of Panama Railroad at price of over 25 million dollars.

1882 Sept. 7-11. Series of severe earthquake shocks damage railroad and canal buildings.

1886 De Lesseps again visits Panama with representatives of French Chamber of Commerce. Almost half of the work already done: canal scheduled to open in 1891.

1887 French canal plan changed from sea-level to lock type.

1887 Financial crisis in France over canal.

1888 Dec. 14. Compagnie Universelle goes into receivership. De Lesseps, health broken, retires to his country house outside Paris.

1889 May 15. French company suspends work on Panama Canal.

1891 Oct. French judicial inquiry opened: de Lesseps' last public appearance.

1892 Jan. Charles de Lesseps arrested, his father too ill to be moved.

1892 Nov. Civil trial--Ferdinand de Lesseps and Charles de Lesseps both sentenced to five years in prison for fraud.

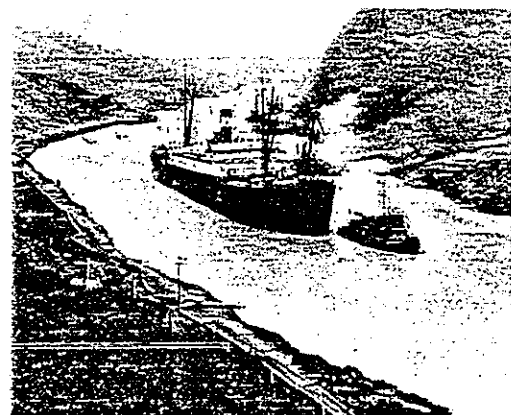
1893 March. Criminal trial--Charles de Lesseps sentenced to 1 year; Ferdinand not accused on this count (bribery).

1894 Dec. 7. Ferdinand de Lesseps dies at his country house, buried in Paris.

1897 Statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps unveiled at the entrance to the Suez Canal.

1903 Nov. 3. Revolt in Panama and declaration of independence.

1903 Nov. 6. Government of Panama recognized by United States.



Steamer Ancon starts into Culebra Cut on the official opening transit of the canal, Aug. 15, 1914.



Culebra Cut - 1903

1903 Nov. 18. United States granted occupation of Canal Zone in perpetuity for payment of 10 million dollars and \$250,000 annuity.

1904 May 4. Acquisition Day. French canal property transferred to United States, for completion of a lock canal.

1914 Panama Canal inaugurated.

1915 Panama Canal opened to commerce.

1947 Nov. Governor of Panama Canal submits report recommending that existing waterway be converted to a sea-level canal at cost then estimated at over 2 billion dollars.