



» Playwrights Local honors Mac Wellman with a three-day festival.

Odd Ball

Playwright Mac Wellman returns home for a festival in his honor. / BY BARRY GOODRICH /

WHILE BROADWAY IS OFTEN the promised land for playwrights, Mac Wellman sees the Great White Way as more of an artistic wasteland.

"Broadway is a disaster and off-Broadway is not that good," says the 71-year-old playwright. An absurdist, Wellman has written 80 experimental, avant-garde plays during the past 45 years, including *Bad Penny*, *Crowbar* and *Terminal Hip* (in which he creates his own language), three works that won him an Obie Award for best new American play in 1990.

While he's had several off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway performances, it's not surprising Wellman dislikes the safe artistic nature of most Broadway productions. "Most notions of structure are attempts to write some other play that's already been written," says Wellman. "There's something false about that. I think all art should be experimental. ... Life is an experiment."



Cleveland, 1986 ♦♦ Set in Cleveland, this naturalistic work delves into the relationship between a daughter preoccupied by the prom and her mother. "The daughter begins to sense something's wrong," says Wellman. "It turns out the mother's from another universe."



Bitter Bierce, 2001 ♦♦ The play chronicles the life of the darkly sarcastic writer known for *The Devil's Dictionary*. "I've been reading [Ambrose Bierce] since I was a kid," says Wellman. "He makes Mark Twain look like a sentimentalist." One scene has Bierce holding a head of cabbage while saying, "This is about as large and wise as a human head."



Harm's Way, 1978 ♦♦ The play takes on working class and political topics without the typical rhetoric of those subjects. "It's the first play [of mine] I really kind of liked. I ended up writing about violence and guns in the vast, empty Midwest," Wellman says. "Everybody gets angry at everybody else. I was once told that anger is emotion searching for an idea."

STAYING POWER



AFTER KARAMU House, the historic African-American theater, laid off director Terrence Spivey last year, one might expect he'd skip town. You'd be wrong. After a 2016 full of directing local shows, Spivey rejected a job offer in his native Texas. Instead, in January he took a gig as an artistic associate at Shore Cultural Centre in Euclid and is directing a second staging of *Objectively/Reasonable: A Community Response to the Shooting of Tamir Rice, 11/22/2014*, which runs at Waterloo Arts through March 11. We spoke with Spivey about why he stayed, Rice and his new role.

// SHEEHAN HANNAN

Q: Why do you think Tamir Rice's story still resonates deeply?

A: When [show creator] David Todd interviewed Samaria [Rice], her other kids kept asking her, "Mom, why do you have to travel, why do you keep talking about him on the news?" She said, "He's no longer your brother. He's a symbol." It's almost like he represents an angel.

Q: After Karamu House, what made you stay?

A: There's something here that seemed unfinished for me. I also got a chance to connect with Samaria. We became friends. [*Objectively/Reasonable*] was a signature of peace that really said, Terrence, it's not a matter of having unfinished business at Karamu; it's having unfinished business in Cleveland.

Q: What do you hope to do in the 850-seat theater at Shore Cultural Centre?

A: For the first year, we're not putting up any major productions. We're looking to do four workshops, every two or three months. Maybe an actors' workshop and musical theater for kids, professional development for kids. And also, four staged readings. The first one is going to be a staged reading called *How I Learned What I Learned* by August Wilson. It's basically a one-man show.