



MILESTONES:

MELISSA PRITCHETT

We are proud to spotlight members of the Alley Theatre family as they reach milestones onstage and behind the scenes. Literary Manager Lily Wolff sat down with Resident Acting Company member Melissa Pritchett, who is celebrating her 55th show on the Alley stage.

Lily Wolff: I don't know your whole story. Are you from Texas originally?

Melissa Pritchett: Yep! I was born in Dallas and we lived in Mesquite for a long time. Then I moved to a reeeally tiny town, called Diana, when I started high school. That was when I really started doing theatre. But I was also dancing. I danced with the Longview Ballet while I lived there. And then I went to Sam Houston State with Dylan (Godwin, Resident Acting Company member).

LW: Yes! There's this whole contingent of amazing people who came out of that program at the same time.

MP: We're all here! I still wanted to keep dancing even though I knew I wasn't going to be a ballerina. And it was probably good that I didn't do that as a career because I think it would be over now! But I had to figure out another way to perform and a musical theatre program seemed...I mean, I sing ok, but, I'm not like A Singer, so that was a bit of a struggle. My mentor was very encouraging of us expanding ourselves and I think that's probably why I ended up doing more acting than anything else.

LW: And did you move to Houston right after college?

MP: I did. I got cast in two shows while I was in my last semester. So I did *Brigadoon* over at TUTS and then I did *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* here.

LW: So when did you become a company member?

MP: They added me to the company in 2008. Before that I would do two or three shows a season. Especially those first few years when I wasn't in the company, I worked a lot at The Great Caruso Dinner Theatre which has since burned to the ground. Because it was mostly mylar and grease (laughs). Dylan also worked there. We have a storied history together. But joining the company has given me the ability to stay in one place. You know, I think all the time about - if I wasn't in the company would I have been able to have kids? It's still hard to have a kid and be in theatre.

LW: How old is your son?

MP: He'll be two in June.

LW: And how is the whole Actor Mom thing going?

MP: I'm still figuring it out. Thankfully I have Elizabeth (Bunch, Resident Acting Company member). She's already gone through this whole part. Joe (Engler, Melissa's husband) is the Master Electrician here, so we do a lot of switching off at the theatre. If I have a show, Lincoln comes with me and we have dinner in my dressing room and then Joe takes him home.

LW: He's growing up backstage!

MP: Yes! No matter how busy we are it's really important that I spend time with Lincoln every day. I always try to find time for us to be locked-in with each other. And we have a great nanny who takes care of him when I'm

in rehearsals. Those are the days that are the hardest, because I leave the house at 11am and don't get back until he's gone to bed.

LW: Would you share with us a little bit about your process as an actor? How are you approaching Lenny, your character in *Crimes of the Heart*?

MP: I've just started trying to learn this one. It doesn't always happen but I try to get the words in my brain as soon as possible. I think a lot about physicality and how the body works in each role. A lot of that is coming from being a dancer. I like to find where the character lives physically, how they move, where they carry weight pretty early on and have a good idea of how that person should feel before we get up on our feet. How would she move around the room? How does it feel in the body to say her lines? You know, the beginning of *Crimes of the Heart* is this long stage direction describing Lenny lighting a birthday candle for herself. I've been thinking a lot about that. How does she do it? How hard is it? And how sad is it?

LW: She's so lonely! Which is also interesting to think about physically - someone who doesn't have much of a physical relationship with other people. I guess the joy is going to come from the people you get to work with?



Elizabeth Bunch and Melissa Pritchett in *All My Sons*, 2015. Photo by John Everett.

MP: Yeah! (Laughs) Absolutely. I'm looking forward to working with Theresa (Rebeck, Director) again. The last thing I did with her was *All My Sons* when we were over at the University of Houston.



Melissa Pritchett and Jeffrey Bean in *Amadeus*, 2011. Photo by Jann Whaley.

LW: Is there a particular moment you experienced with an audience at the Alley that really sticks in your brain?

MP: I don't know if this is super appropriate, but I always think about when we did *Amadeus*. The very first scene of the second act is when I take my top off for Salieri. It was always so terrifying. Standing backstage with my little shawl around me. Just having to trust that they (the audience) would go with me. It was all very tastefully done, I didn't feel like anything was too terribly shocking even though it was a horrible moment in the play. But I always sort of had this fear that they would be on Jeff's side instead of mine.

LW: Jeffrey Bean? Who was playing Salieri?

MP: Yes. I mean, they love Jeff Bean. What if they're totally on Jeff's side. They're not going to care! But, every time, it felt like they were gathering around me. I had my back to them and I could feel them all rally around me.

LW: They had your back.

MP: They literally had my back.

LW: You have a new Artistic Director now! What are you excited about in this time of change?

MP: I'm really excited to see how he sees us as a company. What he thinks we can do and what he wants to push us to do. I'm excited to see where that takes us. And having just seen the first five shows of the season, I think he really has a grasp on who we are as performers. But, I'm excited to get to work with him and have him really feel us as a group. I'm ready to invite him in and really collaborate on something together.