

# ALLEY THEATRE

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## World Premiere CLEO by Lawrence Wright Explores the Greatest Sex Scandal in Film and Ancient History

*Wright joins director Bob Balaban to stage the titanic love affair between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, April 6 – April 29*

HOUSTON, TX – The Alley Theatre announces the cast and creative team of the world premiere play *Cleo* by **Lawrence Wright**, directed by **Bob Balaban**. Set during the filming of the 1963 movie "Cleopatra", *Cleo* is the story of the affair between **Elizabeth Taylor** and **Richard Burton** and the worldwide scandal that followed. *Cleo* plays the Hubbard Theatre April 6 – April 29, 2018 and is recommended for mature audiences. Tickets are available at [alleytheatre.org](http://alleytheatre.org) or by calling the Box Office at 713-220-5700.

Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton's relationship brought condemnation from the Vatican and the US Congress. Their union advanced the age of the age of paparazzi and tabloid celebrity, ensuring that the names Burton and Taylor would always be associated with the greatest sex scandal in film and ancient history. With lavish sets and costumes, *Cleo* goes behind the scenes and explores what sparked the sexual revolution in Rome in 1963.

"We're thrilled to welcome back Larry and Bob for the premiere of *Cleo*. The cast and creative team was deep into rehearsals and building sets and costumes when Hurricane Harvey hit Houston. We knew we had to find a spot in the season to bring them all back and produce this brilliant work for our audiences. What better way to ring in spring than with a writer, director, and love affair, all of epic proportions," said Interim Artistic Director James Black.

*Cleo* playwright Lawrence Wright is an author, screenwriter, and playwright. He has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* since 1992, where he has won two National Magazine Awards. He is the author of ten books, one of which, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction, and was named by *Time Magazine* as one of the 100 greatest nonfiction books ever written. The book was made into a TV series, "The Looming Tower," and premiered on Hulu on February 28, 2018. His bestselling book *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief* (2013), was nominated for the National Book Award and won the Investigative Reporters and Editors Award. In April, Knopf will publish his next book, a personal history titled *God Save Texas*.

Wright grew up in Dallas and is a longtime resident of Austin. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Society of American Historians. He also serves as the keyboard player in the Austin-based blues band, WhoDo.

Acclaimed director and actor Bob Balaban (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Gosford Park* and multiple films with Christopher Guest including *Waiting for Guffman* and *Best in Show*) directs. Balaban directed and produced the long running Off-Broadway play *The Exonerated* which won the Lucille Lortel, Outer Critics Circle, and Drama Desk awards. Other Off-Broadway directing credits include Arthur Kopit's *Y2K* for the Manhattan Theatre Club at the Lucille Lortel, *Manuscript* at the Daryl Roth Theatre, *Vick's Boy* at Rattlestick Theater, and *Family Secrets* at 37 Arts. He directed the world premiere of Lucy Boyle's *The Blue Deep* at Williamstown Theatre Festival.

The *Cleo* cast includes **Lisa Birnbaum** (American Repertory Theatre's *Sense & Sensibility*, Off-Broadway: *Arielle in F#%king Up Everything*). Birnbaum plays opposite **Richard Short** ("Mary Kills People," HBO's "Vinyl," Broadway's *Jerusalem*) as Richard Burton. The cast also includes **Mark Capri** (The Roundabout's *On Approval*, Broadway's *Private Lives*) as Rex Harrison, **Brian Dykstra** (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis' *The Humans*,

Broadway: *Lucky*) as Joe Mankiewicz and **Adam Gibbs** (*Alley's Ether Dome, Our Town*) as Eddie Fisher. Rounding out the cast is **Estèe Burks** (*The Landing Theatre's In Darfur, Obsidian Theater's For Colored Girls*) Tommy Stuart (*Shakespeare Dallas's Don Quixote, University of Oklahoma's Love's Labour's Lost*), Thomas Valdez (*Corpus Christi's Smokefall, Rent*) and Morgan Starr (*Main Street Theater's Grand Concourse, Stages' Miss Teen*).

*Cleo* creative team includes Scenic Designer Richard Hoover, Costume Designer Alejo Vietti, Lighting Designer David Weiner, Sound Designers Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen, Assistant Director Brandon Weinbrenner, Stage Managers Hethyr Verhoef and Kristen Larson, and Casting by Stewart/Whitley, with Additional Casting by Adam Belcuore, CSA.

Performances of *Cleo* are Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday at 7:30 p.m., Friday at 8:00 p.m., Saturday at 2:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., and Sunday at 2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. *Cleo* is recommended for mature audiences.

**SPONSORS:** *Cleo* is sponsored in part Associate Producers Jerry & Nanette Finger Family Foundation, Trini Mendenhall, and Christina and Stephen C. Morse; and Supporting Sponsors Bank of America, Rand Group, and the Edgerton Foundation New Play Award. The Alley Theatre is supported by the 2017-2018 season sponsor United Airlines, the official airline of the Alley Theatre; Four Seasons Hotel Houston, the official hotel of the Alley Theatre; and Lynn Wyatt.

**TICKETS:** Tickets to *Cleo* are now on sale and start at \$26. Discounted tickets are available for military and senior, and any student, regardless of age, with a valid student ID for designated performances. Tickets can be ordered online ([alleytheatre.org](http://alleytheatre.org)) or by phone (713.220.5700).

**TALKBACKS:** The Alley Theatre will present Artist TalkBacks following the Saturday, April 14 (2:30 p.m.) and Tuesday, April 17 (7:30 p.m.) performances of *Cleo*. These discussions will feature cast and artistic staff.

The Alley Theatre will also present an **Alley In Context with Playwright Lawrence Wright and Director Bob Balaban** following the *Cleo* performance on Tuesday, April 10, (7:30 p.m.). Artist TalkBacks and Alley In Context discussions are free and open to the public.

**PRESS MATERIALS:** [www.alleytheatre.org/press](http://www.alleytheatre.org/press)

**CONNECT WITH US:** #AlleyCleo @alleytheatre

#### **ABOUT THE ALLEY THEATRE**

The Alley Theatre, one of America's leading not-for-profit theatres, is a nationally recognized performing arts company led by Interim Artistic Director James Black and Managing Director Dean R. Gladden. The Alley produces up to 16 plays each year in its newly renovated theatre, ranging from the best current work, to re-invigorated classic plays, to new plays by contemporary writers. The Alley is home to a Resident Company of actors. In addition, the Alley engages theatre artists of every discipline – actors, designers, composers, playwrights – who work on individual productions throughout each season as Visiting Artists.

The Hubbard Theatre renovation was completed in October 2015– and created a new 774-seat state-of-the-art performance venue. Matched with the newly renovated 296-seat Neuhaus Theatre, the Alley offers nearly 500 performances each season. The Company reaches over 200,000 people each year through its performance and education programs. Its audience enrichment programs include pre-show and post-performance talks, events, and workshops for audience members of all ages.

#### **MEDIA CONTACT:**

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