

A photograph of Elizabeth Bunch, a woman with long brown hair, smiling and looking towards the camera. She is wearing a dark, patterned top. In the background, there is a poster for a play titled "By Wam Shakespeare Directed by Jonathan Moiscane OCT. 6 - OCT 21 2016".

MILESTONES:

ELIZABETH BUNCH 70th SHOW AT THE ALLEY THEATRE

Elizabeth Bunch, Alley Resident Actor.
Photo by Melissa Taylor.

Beginning this season we are proud to spotlight members of the Alley Theatre family as they reach milestones onstage and behind-the-scenes. Each program will feature a member of the Alley's staff or company on the occasion of a significant landmark in their career. Elizabeth Bunch performs in her 70th show at the Alley this season. Here is a transcript of her conversation with Literary Assistant Noah Alderfer.

Noah Alderfer: What was your first show at the Alley and how did that come about?

Elizabeth Bunch: The first show I did at the Alley was *Frame 312* by Keith Reddin. I got the audition because I was doing another show and the playwright came to see it. He knew that Pete Masterson was going to direct *Frame 312* and Pete's wife, Carlin Glynn, was going to be in it, and they needed a young version of Carlin Glynn. Half the story takes place in the 60s, and half took place in present day, so they needed someone who was younger and someone who looked like her, and he was like "you would be great."

NA: Nice! So in that first experience with the Alley, did you have any first impressions about what made the Alley unique, or something that drew you in?

EB: *Frame 312* was an amazing way to enter the Alley because we had sort of a divided cast. First of all, the story took place in two different time periods, so in the 1960s it was primarily me and James Black, and then there were these modern day scenes that involved a family. So we had four actors from New York and two resident company members, which were Jeffrey Bean and James Black. I grew up in Northern Virginia going to the Arena Stage and at that point in time, they had a company of actors. To me, that was the end-all-be-all of



Elizabeth Bunch and James Black in *Frame 312*, 2002. Photo by T. Charles Erickson

becoming an actor, if you could have a real job, a real life, and work in one place, I thought that was amazing. So then showing up here and seeing what James and Jeff were capable of, and what amazing talents and honed skills they had, because they worked all the time, from that moment I was totally sold. I actually just begged an audition for the next show that was happening after that, and stayed and did the next show, and it started snowballing from there. But I blame James and Jeff for getting me here.

NA: So how has the Alley changed from when you started performing here to how it is now?

EB: I think one of the most exciting things that's happened in my time here has been the advent of the Alley All New Festival. Even though the Alley would often do world premieres or new plays, or I'd work with some of the playwrights I had worked with in New York, it wasn't a goal, and it wasn't a focus in a driven way. I'm so excited that the new play initiative has such great forward momentum here. So that's really exciting to me.



Elizabeth Bunch in *Grounded*, 2016.
Photo by Lynne Lane.

NA: Especially with the platform we have, being the Alley, in Houston. For those playwrights to not have to go to some tiny hole-in-the-wall theatre to try and get their stuff seen, but to come here, is great.

EB: Yeah I feel like playwrights end up having to make concessions for things because someone will say, "Who's going to produce that with that many people?" or "That's impossible for this reading; we have to cut these corners." At the Alley, I feel like when they show up here, it's like "How can we support you? What do you need to make it work?" It's such a great environment for a playwright. It's

always been a great environment for me, but now to see that extended to playwrights and taking care of these sort of precious, new, young works that they're trying to figure out, I just think it's fantastic.

NA: Absolutely. Do you have a favorite role or production since you've been here?

EB: I cannot choose what I love best, I will give you a list. So I have to choose *Proof*, which I think was the third show I did here. James Black directed that and Chris Hutchison was in that with me when we were dating. *Clybourne Park* was definitely in the top for me. It's a phenomenal script; it was a joy to perform. Also to get the chance to do *Pygmalion* and play Eliza Doolittle -- to do something that's so iconic. I just remember going into my dressing room, Alejo Vietti designed the costumes for that, and I remember at one point looking in the mirror and being like, "I just look so much like Eliza Doolittle." It's just this iconic character. I had never done Shaw before, and to play with that language was so incredible. I would also say that I have to put *Doubt* in there, I would also include *Lieutenant of Inishmore*, for something totally different. Doing *Grounded* by George Brandt directed by Jackson Gay was the most difficult yet most rewarding play I have ever done. But I almost feel like in this coming season, there's already going to be five top ones coming up this year. I know I'm leaving five out that are super-duper important to me, too.



(Far left) Elizabeth Bunch, (right) Chris Hutchison, and (far right) Mack Hutchison in *A Christmas Carol*, 2015.
Photo by John Everett.

NA: It's still a good list.

EB: It is a good list.

NA: So you perform with Chris Hutchison all the time, but through *A Christmas Carol*, you've actually gotten to perform with your son. What was that experience like?

EB: It was fabulous and terrifying. It's very hard to focus on what you're doing when your six-year-old son is onstage with you. But for me, *A Christmas Carol* is so full circle. The first play I ever did was *Christmas Carol*, and I played Belinda Cratchit in a small community theatre, and my dad played Bob Cratchit in the basement of our church. So for that to come full circle years later, where my husband is playing Bob Cratchit, I'm playing Mrs. Cratchit, and one of my children is playing Tiny Tim, that is a pretty profound moment.

NA: So you've been a part of the company for a while, what do you think are some of the benefits of having a resident acting company? What have you most enjoyed about it?

EB: The difference between being a freelance actor, especially in a place like New York, but in Houston as well, is when people are auditioning, they're looking for this particular role to fill. When you're part of a company, they're almost looking at you and figuring out, "where can we put you?" So you get to stretch and do things that are unlike yourself. Some people say the Alley Theatre audiences are on board because they have learned from us that they can see one actor play all these different parts in a believable way. That's what you have with a resident company member. You have an audience that has a greater understanding of what acting is and what theatre is -- that it is masks and disguises and a beautiful world of pretend. Acting is fun when you get to be unlike yourself. But you also sometimes get to be exactly like yourself, and that's a fascinating moment too because, in a way, you're more naked than you usually are. You're used to being out there with a blonde wig and a fat-suit, or a period dress or something, and the audiences have seen you in all these different disguises. But sometimes you're out there in jeans and a blouse and saying, "I feel the same way this character feels and I'm going to be this honest in this moment." The Alley is a really safe place to do that. Our audiences have created that for us.

NA: Is there anything else you wanted to say to our audiences?

EB: We appreciate the support and the care that they take with us when they come to see our shows. It's amazing to sometimes finish a show and go and get in the elevator back to the parking lot with somebody that will say, "I've been a subscriber for 30 years and I remember when you did something that was 12 years ago," or "Did you know this person who was here a decade before you?" It's so amazing to be part of that community. It's also equally exciting to show up in the elevator with someone who's like "I've never been here before, this is incredible, is this what you usually do?" And you go "Well, it's always good, but it's never the same, so keep coming back!"