

PROVINCETOWN BANNER

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7/18/96

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“Men’s Lives” is a fish tale worth catching

By Helen Cummings

The Provincetown Repertory Theatre has kicked off its 1996 summer season with a production that is bound to strike a responsive chord among Cape theatergoers. How often can you attend a play in such a way that when the actors are peering out at an imaginary ocean, they are, in fact, within spitting distance of the real thing?

“Men’s Lives,” based on Peter Matthiessen’s book of the same name, is a less ambitious work than the original. Joe Pintauro, who adapted the nonfiction book for the stage, has used an economy of scale in an attempt to compress and distill 300 years of commercial fishing history into a two-hour, one-act play.

Perhaps Pintauro thinks that in giving us a portrait of a single family and having them reference the past, the viewer will get a sense of the much larger picture that here can only be alluded to.

What we get, instead, is a truncated and distorted sense of present time. We do not know how much time passes during the course of “Men’s Lives.” The characters do not change in appearance, the set is not altered — nothing to give us the

illusion of time gone by. And yet, the events are so many, that in this family’s ability to cope with one catastrophic event after another in such seemingly rapid succession, they come off as being almost superhuman. If nothing else, the severe hardships and crises to which they are habitually subjected would tend to hasten the aging process, not thwart it.

THEATER REVIEW

This is not a play for the faint of heart. The lives that are lived with such dependence on and proximity to the sea are not pretty. This family, the last of a breed, has not been spared any of the brutality and in this, Pintauro seems to say, they are representative of the many generations of families who have lived and died by the sea, and fought to preserve their threatened way of life.

In the final analysis, all is not lost. Out of the wreckage of these lives, there are the stories they come forth to tell. Some are small and personal; others are so deeply and commonly felt, that they begin to take on the power of myth. What is important now is that these oral histories be written down, recorded, made into a body of literature that will survive for posterity.

In an effort to achieve this, Pintauro has lifted Matthiessen right

out of his own book and set him down as a character in the play. Ken Hoyt plays the author/narrator with such low-key aplomb that his prevailing presence isn’t an intrusion. By befriending this tight-knit clan, he is absorbed into their lives and into the structure of the play.

Perhaps Pintauro’s greatest contribution is the prominent role he has given to women in a primarily male-dominated world. It is to the playwright’s credit that, in a work titled “Men’s Lives,” we find a wise woman at the center. Alice, as portrayed by Beverly Bentley, takes us through this play and shows us how, by her example, women like her have endured and survived alongside their men. We can, if and when we want, take pity on her. But Bentley, who imbues this charmer with such resilience and fortitude won’t let us grieve for long.

There are some technical problems that director Christopher Smith needs to work on. The sports fisherman as arch-enemy is overdrawn to the point of absurdity. And although his comical appearance provides welcome comic relief, the guy who is putting the screws to you isn’t funny. The hat with the buoys and lures hanging off it and the loud boom box have to go. We get the point. He’s obnoxious enough without them. And the staging of the last drowning sequence is awkward and painful to watch — not because it is a moving enactment, but because the strain in the performance is so transparent.

'Men's Lives' brilliant and haunting drama

By ALAN W. PETRUCELLI
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — The program for "Men's Lives," now receiving its New England premiere at the Provincetown Repertory Theatre, describes Joe Pintauro as the play's author.

That's like describing Picasso as a painter. For Pintauro is a master poet, a genius who knows how to use and caress, even violate, the English language so that his words create images that are heartfelt and sinfully haunting. And those images — images of darkness and

REVIEW

death, shame and sorrow, hope and resignation — stock the soul of "Men's Lives," lifting it into the arena known as Great Art.

You may find yourself wanting to turn away from the relentless starkness and pain unfolding before you. But you will never escape the images.

"Men's Lives" chronicles the fate of a generations-old fishing family struggling to survive against the inevitable: pollution, dwindling stock, government bureaucracy, sports-fishing lobbyists. The five fictitious men and one woman who populate the play live in a dune shack on Long Island, but they might as well be Cape Codders; the setting, Provincetown. They go by simple first names — William, Lee, Popeye, Walt, Nate, Alice — and represent the everymen and everywomen who have fought, and continue to fight, such battles. (The only non-family member is Ken Hoyt, as Peter, who acts as narrator and who has promised to chronicle the family's story.)

Pintauro has taken Peter Matthiessen's book and crafted it into a series of vignettes that never once come across as a tirade against the commercial fishing industry. This is a story of life and tradition, and little gets in its way. Time is suspended, actions are suggested. The set, on the floor of the stifling town hall, is an intimate patch of dune land, a hull of a boat, patches of dried sea grass, netting, driftwood, lobster traps.

ON STAGE

- **WHAT:** "Men's Lives"
- **PRESENTED BY:** Provincetown Repertory Theatre
- **WRITTEN BY:** Joe Pintauro
- **DIRECTED BY:** Christopher Smith
- **WHEN:** 8 nightly, except Mondays, through July 28
- **WHERE:** Town Hall, 260 Commercial St., Provincetown
- **TICKETS:** \$16.50
- **RESERVATIONS:** 487-6400

We only have to contend with Pintauro's images. Some are unnerving: Popeye drowning, gasping for air, trying to rid his body of the rubber waders that are bringing him down, crying out for God to save him, to snatch his life back from the very waters that have offered him life. Some are poignant: A pregnant Alice going to the water's edge so that her unborn son can get accustomed to the pounding surf. Some are shameful: The revelation of Alice's secret that she mortgaged the shack to pay for food — food that cannot be bought with the little money her husband and sons earn. It's a shame that has brutalized her, yet she continues to cling onto hope. Finally, one day, she breaks: "Women drown too! Women drown in the open air!" she cries.

The beauty of the play is that Pintauro never asks us to pity these people. And we never do. We feel for them, we pray with them, we share their hopes and dreams, we understand their resignation.

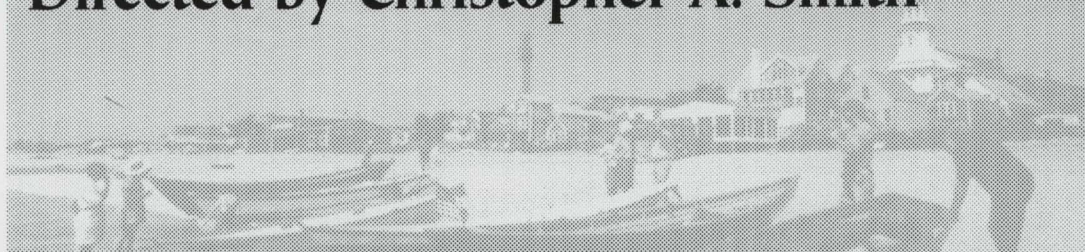
The cast is superb, never undermining the prose, never resorting to "old salt" stereotypes, never once losing the grip that Pintauro has latched onto our emotions and hearts, and that director Christopher Smith manages to keep there. "Men's Lives" is the story of everyone who's struggled for what they have believed in, and demands to be seen.

Men's Lives

by Joe Pintauro,

Adapted from the non-fiction book by Peter Matthiessen

Directed by Christopher A. Smith



JULY 12-28 — 8 PM

Town Hall Auditorium, 260 Commercial Street, Provincetown

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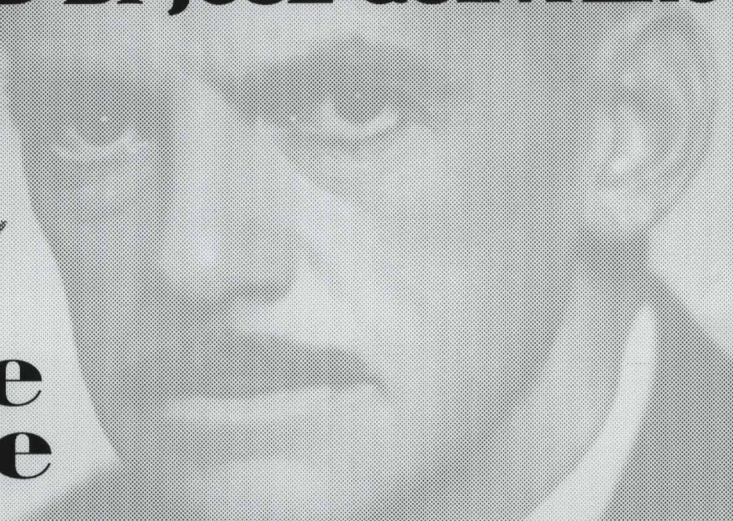
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AUGUST 1-18 — 8 PM

Pilgrim Monument & Provincetown Museum, High Pole Hill, Provincetown

SUBSCRIBE



The Provincetown Repertory Theatre is proud to present:

Men's Lives

by Joe Pintauro

Adapted from the non-fiction book
by Peter Matthiessen

Directed by

Christopher A. Smith

Set Design:

Austin K. Sanderson

Lighting Design:

Linda O'Brien

Sound Design:

Evan Sadler

Casting Consultants:

Collinge/Pickman Casting

Stage Manager:

David George

Kenneth Hoyt

Artistic Director

Evan Sadler

Managing Director

The Provincetown Repertory Theatre gratefully acknowledges a generous grant from The David A. Schoolman Trust. This gift made possible the leasing of Town Hall Auditorium for this production of our 1996 season.

We would like to thank *Cape Air* Airlines for generously donating travel for our cast and crew between Boston and Provincetown.

The production acknowledges the assistance of The Costume Collection, a project of Theatre Development Fund, Inc.

The family depicted in this play is fictitious, but the characters embody the many generations of fishing families who have populated the East Coast of Long Island for over 300 years. Their proud history and their recent challenges are beautifully chronicled in Peter Matthiessen's moving document, "MEN'S LIVES," which was the inspiration for this play.

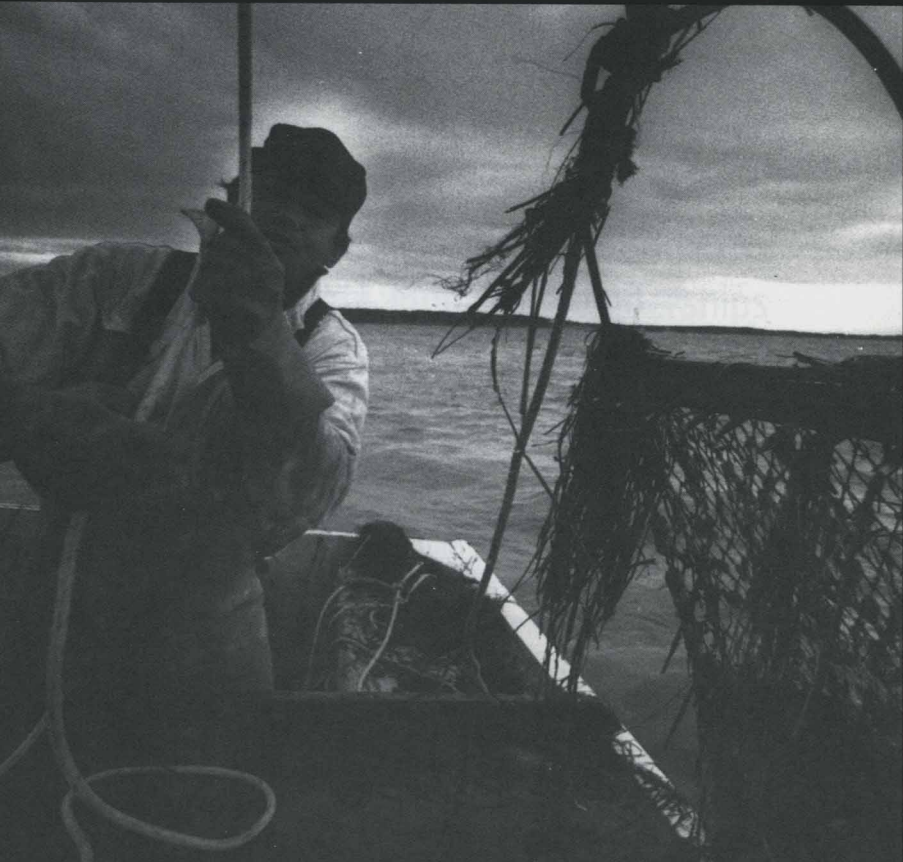


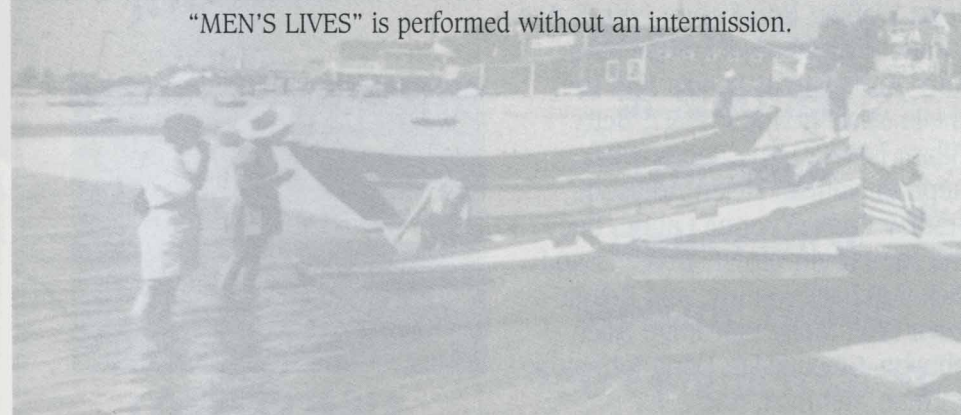
Photo: Barry A. Donahue/Cape Codder

Men's Lives

Cast — in the order that they appear

Peter.....Ken Hoyt*
 William.....Reed Rudy*
 Lee.....Jerry O'Donnell*
 Popeye.....Richard Mover*
 Alice.....Beverly Bentley*
 Walt.....Pirie MacDonald*
 Nate.....Joe Lomba
 Chuck, Senator, Courtney.....Michael C. Mahon*

"MEN'S LIVES" is performed without an intermission.



* Members of Actors Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

Technical Crew: Sara Dwyer, Julia Minsky, Grace Ryder-O'Malley.
 "Men's Lives" was originally developed and produced by Bay Street Theatre Festival Sag Harbor, New York.

"Men's Lives" is presented by arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc. in New York.

T H E C O M P A N Y

BEVERLY BENTLEY (ensemble)

began her career in 1951 in New York. Broadway credits include: Peter Ustinov's *ROMANOFF AND JULIET* (Plymouth Theatre), *THE HEROINE* (Lyceum Theatre). Off-off Broadway includes: *TENNESSEE* by Romulus Linney and *WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE* (Ensemble Studio Theatre); *TRANSATLANTIC BRIDGE* (Playwrights Horizons), *BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFE* (Image Theatre) and *DEER PARK*. Film credits include: *A FACE IN THE CROWD* directed by Elia Kazan, *SCENT OF MYSTERY* starring Peter Lorre and Denholm Elliott; *CHUD*, *RELIGION, INC.*, produced by Michael Mailer, with Sandra Bullock; *PAINTER SUN* by Gary Wortzel. Television credits include: *NAKED CITY*, *THE DEFENDERS*, *OMNIBUS*, *EURYDICE*, *TIGER AT THE GATE*, as Helen of Troy with Kate Reid and Anthony Quayle, *WOMEN REBEL* with Piper Laurie. In Provincetown in 1966, she was a founding member of Act IV. Beverly is a member of the Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference where she performed in five plays and went on to play the lead in Lloyd Richard's world premiere of *SHAY* by Anne Commire. Provincetown productions include: *LOVE LETTERS*, co-starring Guy Strauss (Provincetown Art Association & Museum), *THE ROAD TO MECCA*

(Welfleet Harbor Actors Theatre), *THE LION IN WINTER* (Provincetown Theatre Company). She produced two talented sons, Michael and Stephen Mailer, two of the most important productions she will ever be involved in.

NATALIE COULTER (ensemble)

A native Australian, Coulter has recently returned to the U.S. to work on two independent films, *DEAD SILENCE* and *THE ROCKET*. Among her theater credits, her favorite roles include *PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK* (Mlle Depoitiers), *TWELFTH NIGHT* (Viola), *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST* (Gwendolen), *HEDDA GABLER* (Mrs. Elvsted). Coulter is based in New York City where she studied with Uta Hagen for four years and is currently a working finalist at the Actors Studio.

ALISON CROWLEY (ensemble)

A founding member of Provincetown Rep. Crowley appeared last summer in *FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE: AN EVENING OF SHORT PLAYS BY JOE PINTAURO*. Other theatre credits include: *LADIES IN RETIREMENT* with Julie Harris and Eileen Brennan, directed by Charles Nelson Reilly (Coconut Grove Playhouse, Fla.), *OLD TIMES* (Courtyard Playhouse, NYC), *A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHT DREAM* directed by Morris Carnovsky (Palmer Theatre, Ct.). TV credits include: *EVERYTHING'S RELATIVE* (CBS),

SALEM WITCH TRIALS (BBC). Alumnus of The Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center and has studied with Uta Hagen and Charles Nelson Reilly.

WILLIAM J. DEVANEY (ensemble)

Regional theatre credits include: *VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE* (New Rep), *GETTING OUT* (Back Alley Theatre), *OURSELVES ALONE* (Boston Shakespeare Co.), *AUTUMN GARDEN* (Lyric Stage), *RED NOSES* (Trinity Rep), *UNDERGROUND* (Yale Rep), *BLUE NARCISSUS* (Boston Playwrights Theatre), *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* (Nora Theatre Co.) Film credits include: *MYSTIC PIZZA*, *KENNEDY'S OF MASSACHUSETTS*, *JENNY'S SONG*, *LIP SERVICE* and *BLOWN AWAY*. Devaney's television credits include: *MILLER'S COURT*, *SPENSER FOR HIRE*, *SCOOP*, *DISTANT JUSTICE*, *UNSOLVED MYSTERIES*. Devaney has worked with directors Adrian Hall, Tina Packer, Vince Dowling and is proud to add Jose Quintero to his prized list.

DAVID GEORGE (Stage Manager)

David became a professional stage manager in 1974 following several years as a scenic designer and technical director. He has stage managed over 24 Equity productions and has the dubious and exhausting distinction of managing 14 musicals in a row. David sailed into Provincetown in 1993 while on a year long cruise of the East Coast, and decided to stay. David served as stage manager for *FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE: AN EVENING OF SHORT PLAYS BY JOE PINTAURO* and is a founding member of the Provincetown Rep.

KEN HOYT (ensemble)

Founder of Provincetown Rep, Hoyt appeared in the inaugural production of *FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE: AN EVENING OF SHORT PLAYS BY JOE PINTAURO*. L.A. theatre credits include *WHO'S AFRAID OF*

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Stage Review

'Men's Lives' catches the drama of fishermen

By Bill Marx
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PROVINCETOWN — Peter Matthiessen's 1986 nonfiction study "Men's Lives" is a remembrance of

fishermen past, a hymn to what the author calls "the gritty spirit that was once more valued in this country than it is today." The volume hails the macho chutzpah of Long Island's family fishermen, poor but proud

workers whose centuries-old relationship with one another and the sea has been destroyed by pollution, tourism, sport fishermen and political corruption. A sprawling compendium of anecdotes and history, "Men's Lives" is an unlikely candidate for drama. Yet playwright Joe Pintauro and the gutsy Provincetown Repertory Theatre not only hook Matthiessen's big one, but almost haul the beast in.

Pintauro boils down the book's numerous clans into one, focusing on its 30-year battle to save the striped bass, the last profitable catch, from being declared off limits to commercial fishermen. Reports of the fish's demise are out-and-out lies. Greed and real estate values roll over the workers fighting for their livelihood: patriarch Walt and his combative sons, thoughtful William, alcoholic Lee and doomed Nate. Pintauro shies away from Matthiessen's tales of suicide and depression, but he movingly evokes the lonely integrity of the family's grace-under-pressure life.

Departing from the book, Pintauro expands on the role women played in the world of small fishermen. Walt's wife, Alice, is determined to keep up the old ways, despite the tidal waves of time. Her eloquent self-destructiveness cuts

through the script's sentimentality, though Pintauro's insistence that economic forces destroyed the family trivializes the tale's deeper conflict between man and nature. Luckily, the playwright includes chunks

of Matthiessen's descriptions of the sea's danger and wonder, such as a beautiful passage about seeing "the great clean skull of a fin-back whale, dark bronze with sea water and minerals."

MEN'S LIVES

Play in two acts by Joe Pintauro, adapted from the nonfiction book by Peter Matthiessen

Directed by Christopher A. Smith. Set, Austin K. Sanderson. Lighting, Linda O'Brien. Presented by the Provincetown Repertory Theatre

At: the Provincetown Town Hall Auditorium, Provincetown, through July 28

Austin Sanderson's impressive set, made up of huge sails, rigging, nets and a boat, adds the requisite salty atmosphere. And though the acoustics in the Provincetown Town Hall are ghastly, the PRT cast supplies the New England premiere of "Men's Lives" with strong performances, particularly Beverly Bentley's cantankerous Alice and Jerry O'Donnell's short-fused Lee. As Walt, Pirie MacDonald drifts in and out of focus, though he has moments of gaunt inspiration. Christopher Smith's inventive staging ranges from a boisterous showdown in Albany to a slow-motion drowning at sea. Not even Smith, however, can do much with a mawkish ending or Pintauro's risky decision to include Matthiessen as a character.

Still, unlike playwright Israel Horovitz, whose "Henry Lumper" and "North Shore Fish" use the ailing New England fishing industry as little more than a dramatic backdrop, Pintauro takes on vital issues about the future of manual labor and its traditions of economic and spiritual independence. Even with its flaws, "Men's Lives" has the elemental power of Matthiessen's hump-back whales, "black shining rocks in the silver ocean."