



**Janet Miller:** We launched our new theater company back in June with a musical for a number of reasons. First, no one in Los Angeles had done a fully staged production of *A Man of No Importance*, so that gave us something unique to make our launch more noteworthy. Plus it was a play about doing plays, so it had a nice 'valentine to theater' storyline which felt right for our first season. And I'm known around town for musicals, given my history as a director & choreographer. So all that was pretty logical.

But ultimately none of that matters if you can't get the casting right. If I wasn't sure I had the perfect Alfie - the lead character in *A Man of No Importance* - then there was no way I would have launched the company with that show. It was way too risky to try filling that very special role with someone I hoped to find in open auditions. But I knew Dominic McChesney was the perfect Alfie, so we committed to the show. And he gave us such a beautiful, nuanced performance. It really was a perfect match.

And it's a similar story with BARRYMORE. This is another theater-about-theater show. And again casting is everything. You can't present this piece without the right actor to play John Barrymore. It's not an easy task, because you're bringing the audience a well-known historical character.

Barrymore was incredibly famous back in the day. And for theatricals, Barrymore plays a major role in American theater history. He stunned New York audiences in the 1920s by giving them a shockingly naturalistic Hamlet. He immediately changed the way people saw the role, and after that run, Jack jumped from Matinee Idol to Serious Shakespearean. The point is, people know a lot about Barrymore - his sense of humor, his personal style, his legendary good looks. So if you're going to do this piece, you must have the perfect person to play this part. And I was convinced Gordon Goodman was the ideal choice.

#### **How did Gordon become involved with the production?**

**Miller:** I asked him! I've known Gordon for more than 25 years. I've seen him perform in musicals and straight plays many times and I think Gordon has amassed a brilliant body of work. He is a detailed and thoughtful actor as well as being charming and funny. I just love watching him on stage.

As far as this BARRYMORE project, it's sort of obvious that Gordon's got the look and the wit, but more importantly, Gordon is authentically curious about Barrymore, and very compassionate about Barrymore's difficulties in life. I really believe he is able to bring us not just Barrymore the Celebrity, but Barrymore the complicated human being.

So early on I was very clear: it was 'get Gordon or pick another play.' So I called him and asked if he had ever thought of doing BARRYMORE. The answer was yes. After some discussion, he agreed.

**Gordon Goodman:** It was an interesting phone call.

Janet's being very kind. But it's true what she's saying about my interest in John Barrymore. It goes back many years. I remember seeing Barrymore in the movie *Grand Hotel* when I was younger and being struck by the charming ease of his performance. As I investigated his personal story, I learned he was enormously gifted in fine arts, in writing, and in acting.

For me, Barrymore became a very fascinating case study in the complexities of a truly creative - if slightly out of control - life. I saw Chris Plummer do it, and God, so brilliantly, and it became a character I really wanted to play, to get inside of, especially as I've gotten older. So when Janet called to suggest the project, it was as if she'd been reading my mind.



**Do you feel his story has relevance today?**

**Gordon:** Absolutely. Look around. Walk by any magazine stand. Just try NOT to see some celebrity spinning out of control. They're like shooting stars and they attract the attention of the media. Sure, people tend to remember Barrymore for his antics in his later years - the many wives, the alcohol, the blue sense of humor. It's easy to typecast him as the cliché of an inebriated has-been. But that's not the whole story.

People forget he was the youngest child in a family of super-star actors. His childhood was chaotic. He didn't want to join the 'family business' of acting, yet he defaulted to the stage after a string of depressing false starts in other professions. He started drinking in his early years, and basically never stopped. He became the rage. He had an incandescent personality and a devilish charm. People were literally bewitched by him!

As an actor, Barrymore is still historically relevant because of the naturalism he cultivated on stage, especially in his Shakespearean roles. As Janet said, his style of acting was a true breakthrough in the 1920s and part of the movement into realism that was about to change the acting world.

I think Barrymore's life story can be read as a timeless fable about that monster that consumes so many celebrities. He had no place to pour his life, but back into itself. Nothing in his own life had meaning. He was one of the biggest stars of his day, and it basically ate him alive. And that's an important cautionary tale that's still valid today.

**Was there any special reason you wanted to tackle BARRYMORE now, at this point in your career?**

**Gordon:** I honestly feel it's an important project at a key point in my journey, because it allows me to apply the two halves of my professional skill set to the task. Besides acting, I have a Ph.D. in psychology because I'm fascinated by what makes people do the things they do. Normally, I don't do 99-seat theater. I'm either too involved in new television projects, or working with clients on performance issues and faulty belief systems, or doing academic research in the field of media and entertainment.

As an actor, I'm excited about bringing Barrymore to life in an authentic way. In preparing the role, I've gotten to know him and I think I understand what made him tick, from a psychological perspective. He's a very attractive character.

For example, in my research into Barrymore's life, it is clear to me that he was honest. He was probably the first one to admit he wasn't a good husband, that he was more interested in having fun than working. Acting was just something he landed in because of his family. But he was also extremely intelligent, and had a unique genius that captivated audiences, and other actors of his day, like Orson Wells or Lawrence Olivier. He was shoved into celebrity as a kid, and the money started flowing in - and it's almost impossible to get off that train once you're on it.

So for me, John Barrymore is a particularly rich case study. He was so gifted and so conflicted - about his talent, about his tremendous celebrity, about his ability to love and be loved.

William Luce's play gives the memory of John Barrymore's redemption. It's a beautifully written, loving character study that becomes an ideal vehicle for realism, for presenting the deeper dimensions of a real person's life on stage.

To me, that's what it's all about: making a character three-dimensional. Showing the charm, along with the fears and the imperfections that made Barrymore pitiful, admirable, and loveable all at the same time. I've come to the point in my career as an actor, where I don't want the audience leaving the theater talking about me. I've done my job if, as they leave, they're talking about Barrymore.

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Presented by Good People Theater Company in association with Greenway Arts Alliance, BARRYMORE plays at the Greenway Court Theater, 544 N. Fairfax between Melrose and Beverly. Preview on Friday, Nov. 8 at 8pm, opening night on Saturday, Nov. 9 at 8pm, and running through Dec. 1 (Fridays at 8pm, Saturdays at 2pm and 8pm and Sundays at 7pm.) Tickets are \$25 (\$15 for the November 8 preview) and are on sale now at [www.GoodPeopleTheaterCo.org](http://www.GoodPeopleTheaterCo.org) or by calling the Box Office at 323-655-7679 x 100. Parking is free in the theater's lot (entrance on Fairfax).

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