

Twisted Tale: Actors' Theatre plays theatrical mind games in 'Lucky Time'

By [Christina Waters](#)

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LUCKY STREAK *Martin Sampad Kachuck, who plays Jeremy, says he is “truly treasuring the time being spent with Wilma and this engaged cast.” Photo: Tarmo Hannula*

It was a dark and stormy night ... and according to the fertile imagination of Santa Cruz playwright John Chandler, all is not well in a certain isolated farmhouse. Chandler has conjured up one devil of a tasty and twisted tale called *Lucky Time*, a two-act psychological puzzle produced by Actors Theatre.

“Yes, I’d call it a ghost story,” the playwright admits, “in the sense that we all harbor ghosts we’re trying to come to grips with.” Chandler recalls a recurring dream from his teenage years in which he had killed someone, buried the body, and could not remember where he’d buried it. “I could not rid my waking self of the suspicion that it had actually happened. And I think that ominous note of reality floating above appearance prevails in this play.”

Chandler’s play is in good hands. His wife’s! “Her direction animates the play in ways I hadn’t been able to visualize,” the playwright says of his director spouse.

The play opens on the front porch of a ramshackle farmhouse in rural Central California. We see two men, one an urban type in a jacket and tie, the other in T-shirt and blue jeans, engaged in casual conversation. Jeremy (Martin Sampad Kachuck) is thanking farmhouse owner Luke (Andrew Davids) for helping to change his flat tire. “You were in luck,” Luke tells him. And suddenly the pace quickens.

Director Wilma Marcus Chandler is having fun with this assignment. “It’s a complete joy to be working on John’s play. His writing and the depths of his thoughts have always inspired me, and I feel grateful that he has trusted me and my wonderful cast and crew with this script.” Acknowledging that the Actors’ Theatre has a tradition of “offering a mystery play in harmony with the season,” the director describes *Lucky Time* as “a psychological drama that slowly unfolds secrets, fears and dreams of what in life is truly of value.”

We asked each of the five actors centrally involved for their thoughts about preparing for a role, working with renowned director Chandler, and collaborating in such an intimate psycho-drama.

Steve Capasso (The Father)

“Preparing for my role in *Lucky Time* or any role for that matter involves mining the script for clues about the character. In *Lucky Time*, I have four lines to show what a lousy father I was. I grew up in New Jersey where there was no shortage of a—holes so I have a plethora of examples to draw from. Plus, I love playing bad guys. Who doesn’t love to hate a bad guy?”

“Wilma and I have known each other for years, but this is the first time we are working together on the same production. As director, Wilma will say that she’s ‘winging it,’ but actually she knows exactly what she wants and knows how to get it from actors. She can be firm, disciplined and on task, but is very open to suggestions and trying ideas.”

Ann McCormick (The Wife)

“From the first read-through of the play I was intrigued. I find the characters to be complex, and the story itself to be compelling and creepy. My process in preparing for a role starts with studying the script to look for any hints regarding my character, as well as asking myself how she might be feeling and why as I read her scenes. I then build a backstory for the character. I also draw from previous character studies, both formal and informal, and my own life experiences.

“Working with a director with Wilma’s experience and talent has been a true pleasure. She seems to have a basic vision of what she wants and hones it throughout the rehearsal process. She’s adept at getting the results that she wants from her actors and is also open to our input.”

Helene Simkin Jara (Mrs. Grady)

“It’s been quite a journey for me in that I never go to scary movies, so I can’t use personal experience to lean on. As far as preparing for the part, I have done what I ask actors to do when I’m directing and make up a back story of who she is, why she is living in this remote area and what her relationship is with her husband.

“I enjoy working with Wilma. Her style of directing allows the play to evolve organically and have a certain rhythm.”

Evan Hunt (Mr. Grady)

“My part in the play is such a small one ... I’m just a memory, mostly seen in the background. But I love working with Wilma, who’s been a mentor of mine for many years. I direct plays too, and I learn every time I watch her work, see what she’s noting and how she approaches a story.”

Martin Sampad Kachuck (Jeremy)

“The play is certainly a challenging psychological thriller filled with ambiguities, clues and mounting tensions. The play also is character driven. Building a character takes time and patience; intensive study of the script. I try to tune into my own gut and life experience that parallels the character’s own flurries.

“Most discovery happens in rehearsal. It is in the interactions with folks onstage and with our director Wilma’s expert guidance that the depth of the character is shaped and revealed. I’m truly treasuring the time being spent with Wilma and this engaged cast. We are building that trust that needs to happen between intimate performers even if the play’s situation between our characters is tense and ominous. All of us in the cast share this commitment to try our best to make this show come to life in its full twisted brilliance.

“Wilma is a godsend—she is whip smart, insightful, creative, demanding, loving, hilarious, generous beyond normal lines and incredibly patient. I consider myself beyond lucky indeed to have done some shows with her, and certainly to have this opportunity to play together.”

Andrew Davids (Luke)

“Martin and I have some large speeches as well as rapid-fire dialogue that requires us to talk on top of each other’s lines. This takes a lot of attention and trust. I practice on my own every day, but it really comes alive when we can see and hear each other. This is a story that takes place in a remote cabin, on a rainy night, within the span of about 15 hours. Although it’s mostly about the two men, the other characters are woven into the play so intimately that the audience always feels their presence. The cast is fantastic and every actor is finding ways to fill out their role in such a way that you believe you know them, you identify with them, you ache for them.

“I’ve known Wilma for a long time; she’s a hero in the theater community. She puts the ‘direct’ into directing. If you’re playing it too safe she’ll say something like, ‘I’m already bored to tears,’ but when you get to the heart of a character or scene, she’ll fold her hands together, smile, and say, ‘that gave me chills.’ It’s very gratifying. If she senses you’re stretching into authentic creative territory, she’ll coax you to push through the discomfort to find something real and meaningful.”

Runs Oct. 17–27 at Actors’ Theatre, 1001 Center St, Santa Cruz; 831-431-8666. Shows Thu.–Sat. 8pm and Sun. 2pm. \$35 general, \$32 students and seniors. santacruzactorstheatre.org



TEAM SPIRIT Martin Sampad Kachuck plays opposite Andrew Davids, who says the “rapid-fire dialogue that requires us to talk on top of each other’s lines ... takes a lot of attention and trust.”

Photo: Tarmo Hannula