

WESTON PLAYHOUSE
THEATRE COMPANY

2017

Meet the Cast and Creative Team

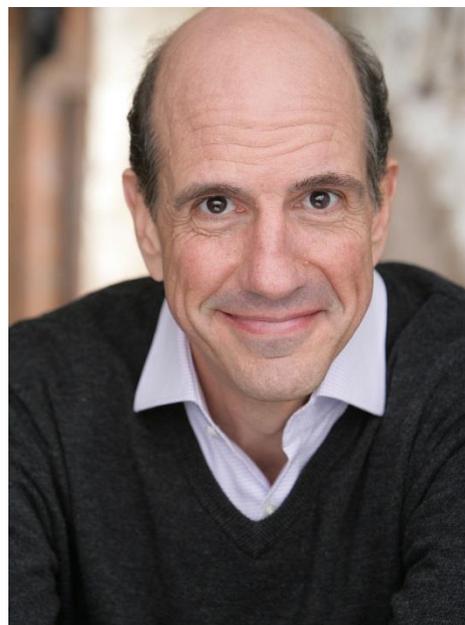
Compiled by Rachel Liff, Administration/Education Intern

MEET THE CAST

This intimate musical is cast with only two actors—one playing Rosemary Clooney and the other playing her doctor...and mother, sister, friends, and everyone in between.



Susan Haefner
Rosemary Clooney



Samuel Lloyd, Jr.
The Doctor

AN INTERVIEW WITH ACTRESS SUSAN HAEFNER

Rachel Liff: How long have you been a part of this project (at Weston and beyond)?

Susan Haefner: Our Weston production will be my third time portraying Rosemary, having originated the role in a sold-out and extended World Premiere (first time the play was presented in two acts) at Cincinnati Playhouse in 2014/15, as well as a follow-up appearance at Showplace Memphis in Tennessee. In Memphis we developed the piece further, adding some new scenes and songs that weren't part of the Cincinnati production, including the introduction of the character of Bing Crosby and new songs such as "Sway," "Mambo Italiano," "Paper Moon," and "How About You."

RL: What drew you to this show?

SH: When I learned of the show, I was initially drawn to the music – I just love singing songs from the 40's, 50's, and 60's and have been doing so for years in musicals and cabarets. I was familiar with many of the songs Rosemary recorded, including her signature tunes like "Tenderly" and "Come On-A My House." In fact, "Come On-A My House" was part of my mother's 45 record collection. I remember singing along to that song when I was younger and loving it. But the main draw as I began doing research was Rosie's life story; her quick rise to fame and triumphs, her heartaches and struggles related to a tough upbringing and resulted in failed relationships as an adult. I was especially impressed by her resilience and courage as she worked her through these hard times. I revisit her autobiographies *The Girl Singer* and *This for Remembrance* often, impressed by her humility, honesty and candor as she tells stories of her life in and out of the limelight. I especially love the warmth and sense of humor that comes through in her writing.

RL: What is the most unique/challenging part of playing a character who was a real person?

SH: It's hard not to be intimidated by Rosemary's fame and legacy, and her gorgeous voice! So my main challenge is to trust in the rehearsal process and stay focused on capturing Rosie's essence without ever resorting to impersonation. Luckily, the writers Mark Friedman and Janet Yates Vogt have done much of that work for me. If I can be true to the text they have written, I can trust that I've captured her. And director Tim Fort, music director Jeff Lodin, choreographer

Felicity Stiverson, and fellow actor Sam Lloyd make it easy. The process has been so much fun, and Sam and I have been having a blast bringing Rosie and all the other people in her life to life. So I'm not intimidated anymore! Just excited.

RL: What kind of research did you do to prepare for this show?

SH: When I first did the show in Cincinnati, we visited Rosemary's home town of Maysville, KY, her grandmother's house on West 3rd street, her retirement home in Augusta, and even tasted a favorite local dessert, transparent pie. I was lucky enough to speak on the phone with her son, Gabriel, as well. He gave me all sorts of insight into what it was like growing up with Rosemary. I've talked to her friends, her brother Nick, and have met many people whose lives have been touched by Rosie and her music. And the icing on the cake...Lots of YouTube! Interviews, her TV appearances, and listening to every recording I can get my hands on.

RL: Who is Rosemary Clooney to you?

SH: I believe all Rosemary ever wanted was to sing and to be herself. Sounds simple, yes? Yet so profound. To me, Rosemary is an inspiration because she was ultimately able to do just that, against incredible odds. A true survivor, she is the perfect example of someone who never, never, never gave up. No matter what. I draw so much strength from her story, and will carry her spirit with me for many years to come. No matter where or when I am working on this play, I inevitably come across people who have a Rosemary Clooney story, having met her or know someone who has met her and have been touched by her warm spirit.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MUSIC DIRECTOR JEFF LODIN

Rachel Liff: How did you become a music director?

Jeffrey Lodin: I have been playing piano since I was 5. I was an actor in high school, but knew that acting wasn't my future. I was asked to music direct some of the musicals at my school and enjoyed working in that capacity. After my freshman year of college, the head of my university music department was asked if he knew somebody that could music direct the first regional production of Godspell (1977). He recommended me and I jumped on it. The show



got great reviews and the producer asked me to leave school in order to tour with the show. I said “absolutely” and have been working as a music director ever since.

RL: Do you have a favorite show you’ve worked on since then?

JL: My favorite thing to music direct is almost always what I’m currently working on. It’s wonderful to just escape into a piece of theatre. I’m also a composer and take great pleasure in music directing my own shows, although I like collaboration and love it when a different music director can help me realize my vision. It lets me step back to see where my mistakes are as a writer, which is often what I do for other writers.

RL: How do you prepare to music direct a show?

JL: Practice. If it’s an established show, I practice with the score and other source material, to get it into my fingers. For a new show, it’s more complicated. If possible, I love to work with the composer and director so that I fully understand their intentions for every musical moment. But, with any show, my job is to support the actors in whatever musical way I can.

RL: What drew you to *Tenderly*?

JL: What drew me to this production was the opportunity to work with Susan and Sam, two dear friends I’ve known and respected for years. I understood that the rehearsal room would be a wonderful place. I also will jump at any opportunity to work in Weston. I worked here once before, on *Damn Yankees* in 2010. But my family has a very long history in Weston. My father-in-law was in the first Weston musical, *Brigadoon* in 1952. I’ve seen many Weston productions since 1986 and have always wanted to work here. It won’t take much to get me back any time.

RL: What is the most unique/challenging part of directing a show comprised of so many famous songs?

JL: The audience may likely recognize many of the songs as Rosemary Clooney standards, but this is a book musical, not a concert. The music is there to support the story being told. The biggest challenge is to never get lost in the song as opposed to having the songs serve the dramatic purpose of the scene. The authors, directors and actors all take apart and reconstruct every song to make sure it serves the story’s dramatic arc.

RL: Does music directing this show with only two actors and three musicians (including yourself) differ from music directing a large show? Do you approach it differently?

JL: The easy answer is no. The show is the show, the members of the orchestra are what you have to work with, and the end result is to make it sound as good as possible. My job is to fill the room with music. With a large cast, you have the challenge of making sure everyone knows where to breathe, what notes to sing, and how to sing them. In *Tenderly*, I have two actors to work with, so my job is more focused and, in some regards, much easier because I only have to listen to two people. In this case, Susan and Sam make my job VERY easy.

RL: Do you enjoy working on smaller shows more than larger shows? Or is it just a different experience?

JL: I enjoy working on the show I'm working on. I just finished working on *Million Dollar Quartet*, which I suppose is a small show as well, but the actors are the band. That presents its own challenge, much like *Once*. The music itself is a character in a show. The same goes for *Tenderly*.

RL: Any last thoughts?

JL: I hope the audience has as much fun watching it as were having putting it together. There's a lot of love in the room among the collaborators on this piece. It stems from loving what we do for a living. It's a beautiful thing we get to do. I think it will translate to the audience's experience.