



# The Master Builder

YALE REPERTORY THEATRE  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY T. CHARLES ERICKSON

**Evan Yionoulis, DIRECTION:** Master Builder Solness is stuck in his work, stuck in his marriage, paralyzed by a fear of retribution and the power of his own darkest ambitions. The world considers him at the pinnacle of his career, but he knows there is more to climb and more to pay for his success. One day a fearless young woman, Hilda, comes to collect on a 10-year-old-promise and pushes him to keep climbing. To her, his fears are the result of a “dizzy conscience.”

When I went to talk to the designers, I shared some early ideas I’d had centering on Ibsen’s images of towers and vertigo, including: for the beginning of the play, an aerial view of a man climbing, climbing, climbing, with a young woman far below waving a white scarf; and, for the end, a view looking up from the ground, with the woman in the foreground, reaching, and the man climbing in the distance. Tim

was able to synthesize all our ideas into a set that both accomplished that sense of vertigo and allowed space for the mysterious world of trolls that Hilda and Solness discuss. Those fabulous windows on the side of the house let us pull the floor out from under Solness when Paul lit them from underneath.

The first image in the show (above left) was a prologue, a kind of nightmare of a man falling. Later (above right), when Solness doubts Hilda’s account of the promises he made on their first meeting, she walks away from him, standing, Ibsen says, like a statue, like a pillar. I had her walk to the peak of the stage, like a figurehead on a Viking ship, as Solness contemplates the consequences of her arrival.

**Timothy Brown, SCENIC DESIGN:** Evan’s initial vision was non-



traditional and focused on the poetry of the text, which is filled with images of great heights. The set is a vision of vertigo—a tower to be climbed—driven by the image of falling. The audience experiences that sense of vertigo right as the house goes to black, when Solness is seen falling from the top. This moment establishes the perspective of the set, which looks straight up along a structure into a cloudy, sometimes smoky sky. The audience gets a glimpse of Solness falling at the very beginning, so we don’t have to show it at the end. It’s an image that stays with the audience throughout the play.

**Paul Whitaker, LIGHTING DESIGN:** Since the set was so abstracted, the lighting was allowed to be more free-form and to follow the emotional journey of the characters. The lighting starts cold and desolate, to reflect the current state of the Solness household, but when Hilda enters it’s flooded with the warm light and hope she brings. Whenever Solness and Hilda are together and discuss the past or their dreams, the lighting shifts out of reality to a more expressive landscape. When Solness talks of the fire that burned down his house, the fire

is splattered across the horizon and the roof piece. When he talks of climbing the tower he is up-lit through the downstage floor window to accentuate the sense of vertigo that Evan wanted to bring to the play. In the image at right, Hilda and Solness have just discussed the first and only time Solness had climbed to the top of a church tower. The upstage sky is green, the color of Solness’s vertigo.



*The Master Builder* by Henrik Ibsen, in a translation by Paul Walsh, ran Sept. 18–Oct. 10 at Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven, Conn., under Evan Yionoulis’s direction. Scenic design was by Timothy Brown, costumes by Katherine Akiko Day, lighting by Paul Whitaker. Scott L. Nielsen was the sound designer/composer. The stage manager was James Mountcastle. Pictured, above, David Chandler (as Halvard Solness) and Susan Heyward (as Hilda Wangel); at left, Solness falling.

# AMERICAN THEATRE

DECEMBER 2009 THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

The Complete Text:  
Lloyd Suh's  
AMERICAN HWANGAP

How Determined Is  
JEFFREY HOROWITZ?

The Mysteries of Poland's  
TEATR ZAR

PLUS:

Race on Broadway,  
W.H. Auden in La Mancha



\*\*\*\*\*AUTO\*\*SCH 5-DIGIT 55401  
0196661019  
MICHAEL DIBLASI ASTC  
SCHULER & SHOOK INC  
123 N 3RD ST STE 210  
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55401-1660

407/97/5239



74470 05549 5