

**GRAHAM THATCHER (BHP 1963 - 70, 77-78, 83, 91,94-95, Special Projects Cast Member 2012 and 2015, Former BHP Board Member).** After a final curtain call Graham exited this earthly stage on May 31, 2018. He was born in 1939 in Sioux Falls, SD and raised in Kensington, CA near Berkeley, to a mother involved in community theatre and a father who was an opera singer and choir conductor. He received his first make up kit when he was five, which began a lifetime in the theatre.

When Graham was a kid he lived in California and his grandparents lived in Sioux Falls. So his family would meet at Camp Remington to vacation together in the summer. It was during one of those times that he first learned of the Black Hills Playhouse. He was nine when he first attended a production in the tent theatre at Legion Lake, thus beginning a life long love affair with the BHP. His parents would take him to shows as often as possible over the years during those vacations in the Black Hills.

Graham returned to the BHP in 1963 as a graduate student and first stepped on its stage to play Linus Larabee, Sr., the 70ish patriarch of a wealthy Long Island family, in *Sabrina Fair*. He recalled in his bio for *Party Pieces* at the BHP in 2012, "It was the kind of "character" role I would play throughout my life. The makeup took an hour and a half and I ended up looking pretty much like I do now ... but with more hair! Now the makeup takes no time at all! As I was growing up, I knew the names of all the character actors and the heavies in the movies. While the other guys wanted to be Roy Rogers, I wanted to be "Gabby" Hayes. Knowing that he was a Shakespearean actor who got rich growing a beard, putting on a funny hat and taking his teeth out made it even more intriguing. When I was eight my parents gave me a make-up kit for Christmas. My after school times were filled with putty noses, deep scars, false beards, changed ages, and new ethnicities and dialects. Every day was Halloween! It probably sounds more than a bit crazy. But as W.H. Auden put it, 'Human beings may be divided, not into the hypocritical and the sincere, but into the sane, who know they are acting, and the mad, who do not.'"

Graham and his wife, Anna Marie, met at the BHP in 1968 and were married in 1970, beginning a theatrical partnership with her and continuing a life long relationship for them both at the BHP! Over his long association with the BHP, Graham played many roles. He was a young company member who cleaned toilets, washed dishes and served on all the production crews and later served as teacher, director, and actor in numerous regular season and special BHPAA productions. He was a human repository of memories of the early years at the BHP and his stories of those days will surely be missed!

“Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince. And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.” (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet Act V, Sc. 2*)

## MEMORIAL CAST PARTY PROVIDES FITTING FINAL ACT FOR GRAHAM THATCHER

*Reviewed by Lois West Duffy and Anna Marie Thatcher*

The first of a two-show series called “Memorial Cast Party starring Neil Graham Thatcher,” produced by Anna Marie Thatcher, his leading lady for 48 years, provided a fitting final act for a much-loved and admired teacher, writer, actor, friend, and self-described “happy guy.” The show played to a full house - a cast of about 175 people - who joined in the celebration in the Historic Theatre of the Performing Arts Center in Rapid City on Monday, July 9, 2018. It had a one-night run in Rapid City, with the second production to be staged at the Hacienda de Las Flores in Moraga, California on September 9.

Graham himself provided the theme for the show, “becoming stardust,” as he described the act of dying. But the show, composed of numerous scenes focusing on aspects of Graham’s life, was much more complex than that simple theme might indicate.

The stage was simply set with costumes representing the roles Graham had inhabited in the plays produced by Periaktos Productions as ethics programs for Continuing Legal Education (CLE). Music by Gordy Pratt and Kenny Putnam kicked off the show, followed by a rendering of Graham’s favorite piece of music, “Recuerdos de la Alhambra,” beautifully performed by Chris Johnson. Anna Marie provided the welcome and closing comments, inviting cast members to share personal stories after the official program ended.

The production included recollections by a few cast members who had shared life's stage with Graham. Wayne Gilbert waxed on "The Group Theatre Years," Ron Reed recalled "Early Years at the Black Hills Playhouse and University of South Dakota," and Jay Hornbacher provided "Memories of a Fellow Actor." Joyce Jefferson offered "Memories of a Mentor," closing with Graham’s admonishment to “Get the Check” - a kind of secret joke among actors. Jeff Viken recalled "Memories of the Friend and Lawyer Educator" and Janet Brown recalled "Memories of the Arts Advocate and Supporter." T. Mychael Rambo, who played the solo role in "Thurgood Marshall's Coming!," produced by Periaktos Productions, spoke of "Memories of the Playwright and Director." Rambo's performance, which began with a rousing direction of the entire cast singing “This Little Light of Mine, I’m Gonna’ Let it Shine,” was a highlight of the evening. Following his soliloquy, Rambo sang a moving “None of Us Are Free if One of Us is Chained,” accompanied by The Band.

Periaktos Productions provided clips of Graham’s Roles in CLE, and video of some of Graham's commercial work (including outtakes) from Hot Pink, Inc. provided a bit of comic relief! Music was an important feature of the evening with Meredith Meersman on piano, Gordy Pratt on guitar and percussion, Kenny Putnam on fiddle, and Dalyce Sellers playing guitar and singing. Vocal numbers, selected by Anna Marie as her tribute to Graham, included an inspirational “The Wind Beneath My Wings” and a nostalgic “Autumn Leaves.” A wistful “I’ll be Seeing You” closed the show and it’s safe to say the number left not a dry eye in the house. Graham’s starlight, as the performances demonstrated, will shine forever.

Such a production would not have been possible without the backstage crew that included Cheryl Rudel (Set Décor), Amy McClure (Lighting), David Andrews and Rodger Hartley (Sound), Adam Schendzielos (Stage Manager), Susan Turnbull, Bill Fleming and Hot Pink, Inc. Staff (Photo Banners and Program Design), Jay Roman (Editing of Periaktos Video) and Nick Johnson and Staff (Assistance at the Performing Arts Center). Randall Iverson of Crow Ridge Productions filmed the stage production.

Memorabilia adorned the reception area and numerous photo banners, created by Susan Turnbull, depicted Graham's many roles during his lifetime. Chris Johnson and Paula Meloy set the mood with a variety of instrumental tunes. Catering assistants included Becky and Dowell Casselli-Smith, Marie and Chuck Fullenkamp, Marnie Gould, Kim and Don Kelley, Mary Linda McBride, Ginny and Darrel Nelson, Yoko Sugawara, Lisa Teachout, Nancy Teachout, Pam Teaney Thomas, Lyn and Ray Tysdal and Mo Zimney.

All cast and crew teamed up to create a beautiful tribute and a most memorable celebration!