

Local Actor Sid Shier returns to Atlanta theater scene after years in L.A.

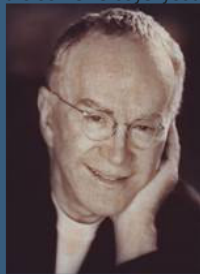
Timing is everything for an actor.

For character actor Sid Shier, deciding to produce a play about the late Tennessee Williams coincided perfectly with the 100th anniversary of the famed Southern playwright's birth. "Confessions of a Nightingale" opens March 24, at the 14th Street Playhouse.

It's just one example of the 74-year-old actor's ability to seize the moment.

"I've become successful [making life decisions] on the spur of the moment," said Shier. "I always listened to my gut instinct."

Shier is a native of Macon, Ga., where he became a bar mitzvah at Congregation Sha'arey Israel and was a member of AZA, the Jewish's boys' youth group. He settled in Atlanta after living in New York and performing as a dancer on the 1950s Arthur Murray Party television variety show, and a brief stay in Miami decorating houses. Shier, an interior designer by trade – longtime Atlantans will recall Sid Shier Interiors – became well-known to Atlanta theater-goers. He performed at the Alliance and Academy Theaters, Theatre Atlanta, Upstairs at Gene and Gabe's and with Phil Erickson's Wits End Players, among other professional-level theaters. He has also directed and designed costumes, sets and lighting for productions.



"I'm a creative spirit. Without outlets for my creative spirit, I'd be dead," said Shier. "Acting has always been my avocation. Design is my vocation."

Shier is equally comfortable playing comedy or drama. "It's all about timing," he said. Some of his favorite dramatic roles were King Henry in "Beckett" and the Common Man in "A Man For All Seasons." Yet performing with the popular Wits End Players comedy troupe was "a wonderful thing," Shier said. "I never loved anything as much."

Through Atlanta friends who had become successful in show business in Los Angeles, and a family connection to a television director, Shier had built up an interior design clientele in Los Angeles. After a brief run as a restaurateur with Sid's Restaurant at 15th and West Peachtree Streets, Shier took another leap of faith and moved to Los Angeles in 1988.

"I took my chances and said this could be something big," he said. As it turned out, "My life changed in LA," Shier added. "I traveled for interior work [and] had no time to take [acting] roles. I did one show in 13 years."

Despite a hectic work schedule, Shier found time to volunteer with emotional support groups for men with AIDS. "It was the most profound five years of my life. There is nothing better than helping others," he said.

By the mid-2000s, "Friends started passing away," Shier said. "The forces were telling me, 'Go back to where my family is.'" He returned to Atlanta in 2006 to be closer to his two daughters (his son lives in Dallas), sister, cousins and former wife.

Even his former apartment, which he had bought and decorated in 1981 and sold in 1988 when he moved to LA, was waiting for his return.

"An old friend told me the apartment was up for sale. It took me less than a week to sign a contract. I just picked up where I left off," said Shier, who has redecorated the apartment once again.

Continuing his design work, Shier also wanted to act again but found that things had changed. "I left Atlanta a well-known actor, and when I came back [people said], 'what's your name again?'"

Shier decided to produce a play, and fate – and the search for a one- or two-man show -- led him to "Confessions of a Nightingale." Created by Ray Stricklyn and Charlotte Chandler, "Confessions" is based on Chandler's original interviews with Tennessee Williams for her book "The Ultimate Seduction." It takes place toward the end of

Williams' life in 1983, and provides an intimate look at the prolific playwright and his many vulnerabilities.

"At first I thought it was too long," said Shier. "Then I started to speak the lines and felt his voice. [Playing] Tennessee Williams, I get to share with the audience his successes, his failures, his descent into alcohol and drugs – and his delicious humor that surfaced at the most inopportune times. He was passionate, complex and though extremely shy, with friends his personality exploded. He was an openly gay man in an era when the closet door was shut tight. That took courage. He understood and related to the outcast, just as he understood himself, finding poetry and pathos in their pain and suffering."

"Confessions" will be directed by Patrick McColery of the Alliance Theatre. Shier's daughters, Lynn Hasset and Robyn Shier, will serve as stage manager and house manager, respectively. Other relatives will help with advertising. "I need to feel protected," said Shier. Because I'll be alone on the stage, I'll only have to worry about doing my job."

Robyn Shier's perspective on her father has shifted since her childhood. "[Now] I know him as my friend," she said. "It's going to be a pleasure [working with him]. The most important thing is he's doing what he loves. I'm happy that he can find himself renewed every day. He's a go-getter."

And he doesn't second-guess. "I'm the kind of man – what happened yesterday is done. Stick with today," Shier said. "I feel I have been fortunate in this life to have been able to pursue my passions and have the family I have. I do something big every 25 years – I'm starting to plan for my 100th birthday. Life has to have beginnings no matter how old you are."

"Confessions of a Nightingale" runs March 24 to April 24 at the 14th Street Playhouse, Stage 3. 8 p.m. Thursdays to Saturdays; 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sundays. Ticket prices from \$23.50 to \$26.00. (404) 733-4738 or www.14thstplayhouse.org

By Fran Memberg exclusively for www.AtlantaJewishNews.com

or [to post comments](#)

