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*Dramatic Publishing*



**The Kennedy Center**  
**American College Theatre Festival**

# Best Student One Acts

Volume 4

**Edited by Lauren Friesen**



# The Kennedy Center

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS  
AMERICAN COLLEGE THEATRE FESTIVAL

## Best Student One Acts Volume 4

This collection edited by Lauren Friesen presents the winners of the 1998 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival one-act play competition, selected from the eight ACTF designated regions of the country.

Jon McGovern's *Alter Egos* gives us one man, nine crazy characters and "alotta laughs."

Virginia Coates' *Julia*, two men are in a hospital waiting room—one has just learned that his baby has died, the other is waiting for his to be born.

Tom Gannon's *Good Business*, set in Detroit, is a delightful comedy about crime gone wrong.

Alison's Fields' *April*, Eve struggles to find commitment within her love relationships.

James Hilburn's *Upright* shows us two homeless, small-time drug dealers who become entangled in a web of betrayal and violence.

Graham Gordy's *Adult American Males*, four All-American, hard-drinking, tough-talking guys have a surprising discovery.

Leonora B. Rianda's *All Things Being Equal*, a writer has a life-changing conversation with a man she has just killed.

Walter Wykes' *The Father Clock*, two actors and a stage manager are abandoned by their aging director. Now, as the auditorium begins to fill and the lights dim, they desperately attempt to pull the show together with the help of two items the director left behind: a promptbook that is cryptic and vague and a grandfather clock without hands.

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# Best Student One Acts

## Volume 4

Winners of the 1998  
KENNEDY CENTER AMERICAN COLLEGE THEATER FESTIVAL  
One-Act Play Competition



## The Kennedy Center

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20566-0001

James A. Johnson, Chairman  
Lawrence J. Wilker, President  
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Edited  
by Lauren Friesen  
University of Michigan-Flint



## *Dramatic Publishing*

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## Introduction

The publication of volume 4 of *Best Student One Acts* by Dramatic Publishing marks a new beginning for this series. The three previous editions were published under the auspices of the Kennedy Center and the American College Theatre Festival. The plays in these four volumes are all winners in regional competitions sponsored by the American College Theatre Festival. Prior to the publication of this series, the winning one-act plays received very little recognition unless they were selected for performance at the Kennedy Center.

The Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival's Michael Kanin Playwriting Awards Program began in 1974. The list of national winners contains a number of notable playwrights including Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paula Vogel who won the 1977 national competition with *Meg*; Lee Blessing with *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*; and James Leonard Jr., with *The Diviners*. These names are now associated with the vibrant and divergent world of contemporary theatre.

Whereas the national winners have received considerable attention, the regional winners were largely ignored for many years. As a result, many significant works were unavailable for additional exposure. Maybe the most glaring example of a play which won a regional award but not the national is George C. Wolfe's *Up for Grabs*. The publication of volume 1 in this series of *Best Student One Acts* altered the landscape for the students who won their regional competitions. The initial vision for these antholo-



gies came from Jeffery Scott Elwell, who also edited the first volume, with the endorsement and support from the Michael Kanin Playwriting Awards Committee. This anthology series then emerged from the efforts of Harlene Marley, chair of that committee, to put the vision into action. Dramatic Publishing's release of this and future editions marks a significant departure from the previous volumes. The publishing idea that germinated a number of years ago has now reached full maturity with the assistance of a major publishing house.

The publication of this series is one small effort to bring new works to the attention of interested directors, actors, playwrights and scholars. The variety of institutions represented in the series is significant in a national publication. The 32 playwrights represent 24 different schools located in 21 states. This anthology is in fact the only nationwide publication for student playwrights because it includes plays from the eight national regions within the American College Theatre Festival. The size and nature of the theatre program varies greatly. Some of the authors are undergraduate students from colleges in small-town America while others are pursuing graduate degrees at large, urban universities.

Geography alone is not the only means by which difference can be observed. The sense of a national portraiture is also reflected in the diversity of subject matter. These plays explore themes from a variety of ethnic, religious and social perspectives. Included are history plays, autobiographical explorations, poetic worlds and styles that include an example from nearly every age in theatre history. There are overtones of tragedy, surrealism, comedy, farce, epic and so forth. The value of each work is not limited to

its command of form and style. Instead, each play opens another window on American identity from the perspective of a student playwright. Some playwrights open that window to a tragic landscape, while others show us humor, absurdity, or pathos that is rooted in careful observation. Each work reflects a desire to participate in the process of creating a work of art that is an expression to a unique voice. Some of those voices shout from housetops, whereas others explore the hidden chambers of the soul. The assortment of themes, styles and values reflected in these works serves as a mirror to the diversity of America's academic institutions and society itself.

Each play represents a personal journey from the blank page to the stage while also symbolically representing a narrative larger than the play itself. Actors, directors, designers, classmates and supportive faculty from many institutions have guided these playwrights to this stage of development. These collaborative teams deserve commendation and gratitude for their willingness to work with original plays.

This volume represents one dimension of the Kennedy Center's multifaceted initiative for student playwrights. The Michael Kanin Playwriting Awards Program sponsors a variety of national student playwriting awards. Some include publication for the winning playwright and an opportunity for the playwright to participate in play development workshops. The Jean Kennedy Smith Award is given for the best play on the theme of disability. For the best play on World Peace and Disarmament, the Fourth Freedom Foundation provides first- and second-place awards. Anchorage Press offers the Theatre for Youth Playwriting Award. Dramatic Publishing will continue to publish the

Lorraine Hansberry Award for the best play that explores African or African-American themes, and will be publishing several awards recently established, including: The David Mark Cohen Playwriting Award, open to all playwrights; the National AIDS Fund/CFDA-Vogue Initiative Award for the best play that deals with AIDS/HIV; The Mark Twain Comedy Playwriting Award; and the Sí TV Playwriting Award, created to stimulate the voices of young Latino playwrights in America. The John Cauble Award is given for the best student short play. The Musical Theatre Award is available to student lyricists, composers or book authors. The workshop opportunities for the winning playwrights include Sundance Theatre Laboratory, the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

These anthologies could not exist without the untold hours that regional playwriting committee chairs have devoted to developing original plays within each region. Regional chairs Kate Snodgrass, Gary Garrison, Steve Sarra-tore, Jim Epperson, Clyde Ruffin, Ray Paolino, Bryan Willis and Judith Royer have assisted with the development and implementation of this volume while also serving as a guide and advocate for the other playwriting awards. I also wish to express my gratitude to Jeffery Scott Elwell for his initial vision for the series, to Harlene Marley for unwavering advocacy for student playwrights, to Kenneth Robbins for his commitment to award and publication venues for student plays, to Jeff Koep for his support in sustaining and developing the programs within the Playwriting Award Committee, to Derek Gordon and his innovative leadership at the Kennedy Center, to John Lion and his discerning eye for new plays and playwriting op-

portunities, and to Susan Shaffer and her effective management of American College Theatre Festival. Finally, I want to thank my colleagues at the University of Michigan-Flint for their assistance and encouragement. The theatre department, under the guidance of Carolyn Gillespie, has demonstrated an exceptional level of commitment to student playwriting and creative theatrical ventures.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as editor of this volume.



**ALTER EGOS**  
**So Many Characters. So Little Time.**

**Jon McGovern**  
**New York University**

# ALTER EGOS

## So Many Characters. So Little Time.

**PRE-SHOW:** The stage empty except for a coat stand in a small pool of light. It is covered in various shirts and jackets and bags and props—the things of Alter Egos waiting to be brought to life.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ZARZUFFA

*(Pumping Arabic Techno music plays and disco lights flash as Zarzuffa, the “randomly foreign” pampered, arrogant and completely fabulous playboy, runs in through the audience and onto the stage wearing a designer outfit (with huge designer logos all over it), sunglasses and carrying a cell phone. He strikes a pose center stage, with his back to the audience. The front of the stage lights up like a fashion runway and he turns and works it—checking out the audience, sneering, growling, cooing, then jumps to the center of the stage.)*

Everyone stop what you’re doing!

*(Lights flash up to full and music stops.)*

Stop your eating! Stop your drinking! Stop your petty conversations! I am here, the one you want to see, the one you want to talk about, the one you want to be! So now that I am here ... go ahead eat, drink, dance be merry ... come on! PARTY!

*(Sings.)*

Be my lover! Be my lover! Be my lover! Lover! Lover!

## 2 BEST STUDENT ONE ACTS

*(Stops, sees an audience member.)*

Oh, hello...we have not met yet, my name is Zarzuffa. Don't be fooled, I'm not trying to pick you up, it's just my accent, it makes everything sound sexy! Do you like my outfit? It costs more than your apartment... D&G, Gucci, Armani, Versace, Prada...retail price \$15,000. You know why? Because of the *logos*. I only wear clothes with gigantic designer logos on them! It lets you know they're expensive—if I could wear a price tag, I would! But...I can afford it, my father is richer than...well...than *God!* Ha ha! It's true though, ah, it's true! He sent me here to America to get a good western education—you know at first I say No! No! No! Zarzuffa says NO! But then—I come here, I go to disco dancing, go to Gucci store, get my limo, see beautiful American women... I say, Yes! Yes! I never want to go back... Never! Never! Never! Zarzuffa says NEVER!

*(Reconsidering.)*

Well, maybe to Europe—once I conquer all of U.S.A., I go to Europe. But, oh no, I know what your thinking, then America will become slow and boring. People will say “Zarzuffa! Zarzuffa—where are you? Oh Zarzuffa! Zuffa, Zoofy, oh my Zarzuffini!”

*(Pauses his feigned crying, looks at audience, smiles.)*

Ah...Don't worry, U.S.A.! I only take one class a semester, so it will take me at least ten years to get my degree. Yes! There are so many other things to do—shopping for clothes, going to bars and going to workout! I belong to ten health clubs. That's ten personal trainers! Two hundred fifty dollars an hour each! Five times a week! You do the math... I must work for the perfect body: #1 legs, #1 chest, #1 abs, #1 butt, #1 biceps...



*(Looks at biceps.)*

Well, maybe not yet #1 biceps. Maybe one point five or #2... But never mind! Zarzuffa is number one at so many things... I don't want to hog them all! But I must look good, for I am looking for a wife. My father has told me if I want to rule the family empire, I must have a wife. He told me if I do not have a wife before I am thirty he will cut me off.

*(Looks around, confiding in the audience.)*

I am 29 and three-quarters right now! He says to me, "Enough sowing your oats!" I say, "Zarzuffa is a wild stallion, he must sow oats!" He says, "No money for you without a wife" I say, "Yes, Father." So, now I need a woman! But she is hard to find! She must be perfect. She must be—by ancient family law: stylish—to decorate our mansions, gorgeous—to make all other men drool with envy, tall—to make sure our children can be supermodels, smart—to run the empire with me, ambitious—to crush other empires, and blonde—just a personal fetish. But, oh I look and look and look, but I do not find her—I try out thousands of women which I enjoy, but it is labor-intensive! And also so many almost fit but something is wrong—too tall, not blonde, not smart, cannot wear stiletto heels, too much flatulence.

*(Cell phone rings, he answers it.)*

Hello? Yes, I'll be there at nine o'clock, I'll pick you up, I can't talk now, I am talkin' to people...

*(Looks to audience.)*

I'm talkin' to you...

*(Getting angrier.)*

Look! I'll be there! Nine o'clock!

*(To audience.)*

Excuse me one moment...

*(Turns away, starts raging in a broken, foreign dialect.)*  
Asanseer mishkyaiss! Ya habrr be arabaya khalas!! Allah!  
Ill mish khedda! Iowa asanseer ya beek! I'll be there!  
Don't talk to me that way! I am Zarzuffa! Don't talk to  
Zarzuffa that way! I am Zarzuffa! Zarzuffa!

*(Disconnects the line and turns to audience, again a charmer.)*

Sorry 'bout that... But speaking of the phone... If you know anyone who could be my wife please tell them to call my 1-900 number! It's 2.99 per minute—a small investment in what could lead to so much more. Please tell them to call 1-900-ZARZUFFA-I-WANT-TO-BE-YOUR-QUEEN. I wanted to call it 1-900-ZARZUFFA-I-WANT-TO-BE-YOUR-QUEEN-you-hot-burning-stud-of-love-I-c an't-get-enough-of-your-love-oh-Zarzuffazarzuffazarzuffa—but they say it is too long. I also put ads in newspaper, magazines, billboards, my God... even skywriting!! For I must find MY QUEEN!! *(Blackout.)*

*(Old-time gospel music plays as The Actor goes back to the coat stand, transforms into Aunt Bertha. She wears reading glasses and a lacy white shawl as she calls out to one of her "kids.")*

## AUNT BERTHA'S LE PETITE PROBLEM

*(Entering—calling offstage to a child who doesn't seem to be able to finish his goodbye.)*

Now, Lamar—you hold your brother's hand, you hear? All right! Oh-oh-oh-OK. All right! Al-oh-all-ri-oo-oh-oh-OK!!

All right! Bye, buh-bye buh-bye bye bye baby— You tell your mama Aunt Bertha said hi! Buh-bye bye bye OK yes kissy kiss OK all right bye bye bye bye.

*(Sits in her chair.)*

Lord, I hope that child doesn't grow up to be a freak...

*(Sighs, then notices the audience.)*

Oh! Hiiiiii! Y'all are sorta new around here, right? 'Cause I know everybody ...

*(Puts on her glasses and checks out the audience.)*

Hmmmmmm. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Hm. Hm. Hmm. Well ...I'm Aunt Bertha! Oh, everybody calls me that! 'Cept my husband, Earl, he calls me baby—and that's the way I like it! Unless he gets that ova-fifty husband disease.

*(To audience member.)*

You know the one I mean, girl—when his butt gets glued to the chair and he wants me to get him somethin', then he calls me—“Berth-AAAA!”

*(Lets out her Aunt Bertha-cackle.)*

You get it?

*(Still laughing.)*

He's sittin', and the chair... BERTHAAA!!

*(More Aunt Bertha cackling.)*

Oh, but seriously, child, I like it when people call me *Aunt Bertha*. Ya know ... I did have some people come around here once and say, “Bertha! Ya can't let people keep callin' you *Aunt Bertha*, that makes people think of *Aunt Jemimah*, and that sets us back thirty years!” I thought about that...but, hell, I'm not on a syrup bottle, I don't have a rag tied around my head and I'm certainly not servin' up pancakes to the world! I just like *Aunt Bertha*. It's more familiar—it's mainly for the neighborhood kids.

Makes 'em feel more comfortable. Makes 'em feel like they got an auntie watching out for them. I like watching folks,

*(To audience member.)*

not in the dirty, video kinda way! You naughty!! But seeing the goings on— Oh! I watch kids, babies, mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, pregnant girls who drop out of school, hoes cheatin' on their men, punks in leather who turn out to be drag queens—you know, regular folks. I give advice, too. Good advice. The people who take my advice— Weeeeeell...things always turn out all right for them. That's usually the people on my side of the street who I'm closer to—who know me.

*(Pause.)*

The people who don't take my advice, usually the people on the other side of the street, weeeeellll, they end up on daytime trash TV. Really, chile, sometimes it's like looking across the street at the *TV Guide*! Like... Oooh! Kanita on *Ricki* at one, FaNita on *Montel* at two, BaSita on *Sally Jessy* at three, Manifa on *Jerry Springer* at four, hell, even Missy Thang Lontresse at the end of the street on *Oprah* at five. You know I always thought I should have my own talk show—*The Aunt Bertha Show*—ooooohhh—it would be beautiful! I wouldn't have one of those synthesizer theme songs like everybody else... NO, I'd have Linette from church belt out "Bertha's Theme" while my cousin Kiki played the B-3 organ and I would do the Aunt Bertha dance.

*(She jumps up doing a funky hands-in-the-air dance, a cross between getting the spirit in church, Saturday night fever and the roboto, while singing.)*

Here comes Aunt Bertha! Hey! Hey! Here comes Aunt Bertha! Hey! Hey! Ooooooooooh!! I'd do it every week until it became a national craze like the macarena or the twist or ooh like my favorite—the electric slide!

*(Does the electric slide.)*

Huh! It's electric! Huh!! Aunt Bertha!

*(Cackles.)*

Oh, I'd get all the good topics too—

*(Pointing to a different audience member with each topic.)*

How to keep a man, how to keep a woman, how to cook a spicy corn bread chicken, in-depth study on how to achieve peace in Guatemala, gossip 'bout the stars, the cost of nuclear missile disarmament—but most of all—how to be happy with who you are and love yo'self! I'm just plain ol' sick of those fashion magazines—*Vogue* and *W*, and...Hoochies ago-go...and those runway models for Gucci and Calvin and Latiesha-whoever, lookin' all anorexic, forcin' some beautiful, big-boned, full-figured women to feel bad about themselves!!

*(Pause, then seriously.)*

Now...I'm a big woman. I've always been a big woman! My mama, granmama, great-granmama and probably my ancestors aaalll the way back in Cleveland...were big women too, and I know they were some hot mamas! Shakin' it here, shakin' it there, lookin' good bein' our size! None of that starvin' yo'self.

*(To audience member.)*

You hear me, girl? Eat what you like—love yo'self! That's the motto for my restaurant! AUNT BERTHA'S FAT-ASS CAFE! I was sick of people usin' fat ass as a negative—so when I opened the cafe I figured I'd take away its

power—so FAT ASS it is. You know, I did try to think of other terms—Voluptuous Behind, Large Bottom, Comfy Seat Cafe, but, honey, FAT ASS says it all—with pride!

*(Getting up.)*

Girl! Boy! if you got a fat ass, show it off! Wear a bikini—show it to the world! Touch it! Rub it around! Let it roll around in the wind! If you need to hop a flight to Brazil, for Carnivaal, wearin' a hot pink g-string and get up on the float and go...

*(Moves into a rhythmic shake.)*

Boom-bida-boom-bida—I like my ass—Boom-biba-boom-bida—I like my ass!

*(Stops.)*

You do whatchu gotta do! That's what makes me mad! All these skinny-ass people tryin' to dictate what's pretty and what's not and what people gotta eat and not eat. For example what's goin' on now! It's those Le Petit Cafe people—ooh they make me so mad! Whoo! I'm gettin' hot just thinkin' about it!

*(Fans herself.)*

You know, at Aunt Bertha's we serve collard greens with bacon, home fries, chitlins, all the good rich stuff! Everybody in my neighborhood eats there and loves it. We've been a great success! But you know, where there's success and money there's jealousy...so the bigwigs at a chain of so-called "health food" restaurants called Le Petite Cafe aka skinny-ass cafe—where their specialty is celery—let me tell you I don't remember celery ever curin' any colds like some chicken and dumplin' soup!

*(To audience member.)*

Do you, girl? Me neitha! Well, they heard about my success and thought of the dollars they could make by ex-

ploiting everybody's fear of fat! They decided to come into my neighborhood—which is fine, variety is good—but they started a negative ad campaign against my restaurant! Put up all these signs sayin' things like, "'Tis the season to get chubby—so don't... eat at Aunt Bertha's..."

*(Pause, she realizes something is not quite right about that.)*

...or somethin' like that! All I know is, they rhyme, there are a lot of them, and they made me mad! And ya know, I still don't know what to do! They're still up there! I tried to talk to them, but Monsieur Petite wouldn't even take my calls! I thought about law suits, you know, 1-800 L-A-W-Y-E-R and things like that, but that will take forever...

*(In jest.)*

You know if I had my *Aunt Bertha Show*, I could call up some publicity, start a debate and can a public apology fast as can be!

*(Pause.)*

OOOooooh. OOOOOh. Oooh. Oooh. OoooooooOh. That's a good idea! On the cable channel...right after BET...is a public access channel and Jamal, Linette's son, works there! He could get me on...and I could star the real...one-time only...VERY SPECIAL EPISODE OF...THE AUNT BERTHA SHOW! *(Blackout.)*

*(Girlie country music plays as The Actor returns to the coat stand and removes Bertha and straightens up, the hips jut out, hand on the hip...puts on a red-and-white checked Daisy Dukes-style shirt, tied at the waist, grabs a big ugly handbag with a sunflower on it and poses in pure wannabe glamour style as Lerlene.)*

## LERLENE ESCAPES THE BUBBAS

*(Lights flash up as she turns and runs breathlessly downstage.)*

Ohmigod! I just had this—*epiphany*—I think that’s the word—it was like a flash of just knowin’—I had to get out! So, I just ran out of my trailer fast as I could—I only took my Merry-go-Round handbag and my two little dogs. I had to get out! The Bubbas were drivin’ me crazy! When I say the Bubbas I mean my boyfriend Bubba and his two kids.

*(Pause as the emotion builds inside of her.)*

Bubba

*(On the pouty verge of tears.)*

and Bubba—the man named his two sons the same thing—which woulda been fine if they hadn’t been twins! Oh those kids! Always wantin’ somethin’—attention... Food! Water! I can’t be bothered with that—especially not durin’ my soap-opera slash talk-show hours! First of all...

*(Her voice moves into her seductive range.)*

I’m gonna be an actress. So soap operas are like crucial actin’ lessons for me...

*(A sudden switch back to the loud Lerlene we’ve met before.)*

...and, second, I need to see the talk shows ’cause sometimes that’s the only way I get to see my family! I mean, last week I missed my cousins BaSita and FaNita on *Jerry Springer!* Anyway, the main reason I left is... ’cause... well...

*(Does a Wonder Woman-style twirl.)*

I’m gon’ be famous! ...a supermodel/singer/actress—triple threat! and I need to be in a situation with a man who is



going to support me in my career! 'Cause I'm on my way...I'm in training, I practice like, um, runway walkin' here in the trailer park...it's like... watch...

*(Runs upstage and strikes her starting pose, then begins to walk.)*

One-two-work-bitch one-two and look and look and look and look... I do *Vogue* covers, it's like...chick chick

*(She poses.)*

Chick chick

*(Another awful pose halfway between a cheerleading pose and a porno still.)*

I'm ready... ready to be... discovered.

*(She throws one hand in the air in a glamorous pose, but then breaks down.)*

But Bubba, Bubba and Bubba didn't want to let me go! Old Bubba just wanted us to get married and for me to get fat and pregnant! Now first of all, if I'm gonna be a super-model I can't be fat, I gotta make sure to stay thin. I sometimes eat nuthin' but Slim Fast for days—fried Slim Fast, Slim Fast fricassee, baked Slim Fast, Slim Fast ice cream, Slim Fast muffins—you know, 'cause I know that Naomi Campbell don't have no cellulite so I better not neither!

*(Slaps her butt.)*

I work out too! I don't have 'nuff money to join no gym so I do my workout anywhere I can. I love doing that Stairmaster but I can't get on them big-ass machines, so I just do the low-cost Stairmaster. I go to a really tall building and I just run up and down the stairs...

*(Starts feigning her workout.)*

...till I've burned at least a thousand calories and then I just drop!