

North by Northwest Theatre Company started in 2006 as a way to serve audiences and theater artists alike with production opportunities outside Austin's downtown core. But for the current production, NXNW Theatre heads to the City Theatre, where the company is presenting Noel Coward's Classic British drawing room farce, "Hay Fever." NXNW tapped a veteran Austin actress for the lead role: British-born Bernadette Nason, who plays the matriarch of the Bliss family, whose histrionic antics hilariously horrify their house guests during a weekend in the country. We talked with Nason via e-mail recently.

Austin American-Statesman: With all the work you've done in Austin theater, why is it important that a company like NXNW emerges outside the downtown core?

Bernadette Nason: I tend to be a supporter of theaters wherever they appear. Whether it's well-put-together community theater or high-profile professional theater. If it entertains and

gets people thinking, I'm for it. I think it should be said that genuine theater lovers will go wherever they need to go. - good theater is good theater, wherever it's performed.

Having worked at established theaters in downtown Austin, South Austin and East Austin, and having stuck labels on a lot of envelopes for snail-mail shots over the past 16 years, I can tell you first-hand that an enormous number of theater supporters live in the North Austin demographic. I live in North Austin, and it can take an hour to reach southerly or easterly theater destinations. I certainly don't resent driving to perform (I can always run lines in my car) but, from a selfish point of view, a theater near my house would be an easy luxury! Why not?

What appeals to you the play 'Hay Fever' in particular?

I've always loved Noel Coward's plays. I suppose that, being English, Noel Coward is part of our national experience, so I was brought up with his plays.

We read them at school, my mother had copies of them at home. A 2002 touring production of "Hay Fever" at the Theatre Royal in my home town (Winchester, England) by the Oxford Stage Company really convinced me that I'd like some day to be in it. Two reasons: It's really clever and really funny.

I laughed so hard, I cried. As an actor myself, I could see the actors on stage having to slow down, waiting for laughs to subside; while trying to maintain the show's momentum. It was artfully done and a sheer joy to watch. And they were obviously having a blast at the same time.

— Jeanne Claire van Ryzin

'Hay Fever'

When: 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, through June 7

Where: City Theatre, 3823 Airport Blvd.

Cost: \$20 (\$18 students, seniors, military)

Information: 328-3836, www.nxnwtheatre.org