

"MAY I HELP YOU?"

OUT PLAYWRIGHT **ADAM BOCK** WORKS THE FRONT DESK IN *THE RECEPTIONIST* AT MTC



Adam Bock,
photo: Henry Leutwyler

Few playwrights can claim to have found their life's calling after being traumatized by an Oompa Loompa, but Adam Bock remembers the fourth grade casting slight like it was yesterday. "These girls in my class were doing a production of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and they made me an Oompa Loompa," Bock says, aghast yet obviously amused at not being asked to play the lead. "Naturally, I was upset so I went home and rewrote *James and the Giant Peach* and cast myself as James! I directed it and staged it for the class, and it was the start of my theater career," he recalls, laughing. Other adaptations quickly followed, such as Bock's revelatory site-specific production of *Harriet the Spy* ("Our whole class tramped over to someone's backyard to watch it...") and gradually, he started writing plays whenever he was assigned to write a story or a poem. As it turns out, Bock's gotten the last laugh on both the Oompa Loompas and that clique of ignorant grade-school girls by becoming one of the most acclaimed young playwrights of his generation.

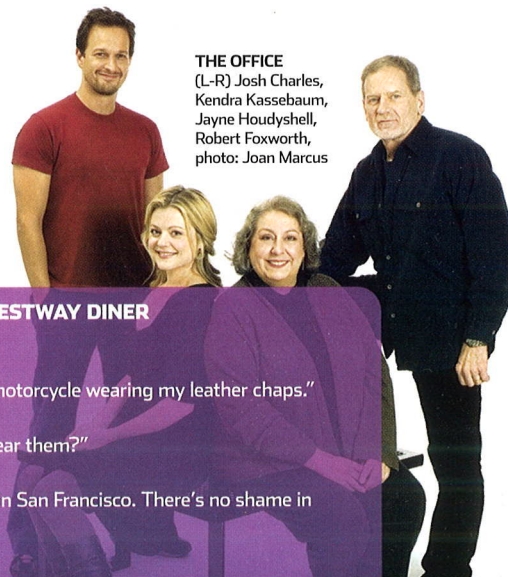
Following early success with *The Typographer's Dream* at Clubbed Thumb and *Five Flights* at Rattlestick, Bock's stature grew considerably in 2005 with high-profile productions of *The Shaker Chair* at The Humana Festival and his critically acclaimed *Swimming in the Shallows* at 2econd Stage's summer series. Last season he won an Obie for his fiendishly off-kilter play *The Thugs*, about dysfunctional temps in a law office. With two major New York premieres planned for this season—*The Receptionist*, starring Jayne Houdyshell (*Well*) at Manhattan Theater Club and *The Drunken City*,

starring Barrett Foa (*Avenue Q* and *...Spelling Bee*) and Maria Dizzia (*Eurydice*) next March at Playwrights Horizons—Bock's moment has arrived. That he's also unapologetically, delightfully gay makes him even more fabulous.

"I'm really interested in language," Bock says, taking a break from a *Receptionist* rehearsal, which began previews last week and opens October 30 under the watchful eye of out director Joe Mantello. "I was actually a receptionist at a temp agency and then at a design firm while I was living in San Francisco. What's interesting about receptionists is that they're totally powerful and yet they have no power. They're similar to gay men, actually," he says reflectively. "Where we can be totally powerful as men, somebody can yell, 'you're a fag' and then, suddenly, [we] have no power." At least, not for that moment.

Blessed with a wonderful rehearsal with Mantello, whom Bock credits with being an amazing dramaturg, and the brilliant set designer David Korins, with whom he worked on *Swimming* ("...I'm so lucky; he's very, very talented!"), Bock seems to be on top of the world. "I'm always interested in which voice isn't on stage," he says. "That's what I think about. I think about older women. I think about gay men. I think about lesbians. I think about the people who normally don't get portrayed. That's who I want to write about." ■

The Receptionist is in previews now and opens October 30 at NY Center Stage I (131 W 55th St, 212-399-3030). Visit mtc-nyc.org for more info.



THE OFFICE
(L-R) Josh Charles,
Kendra Kassebaum,
Jayne Houdyshell,
Robert Foxworth,
photo: Joan Marcus

BEHIND THE BOCK

■ **CURRENTLY READING: *SEXTROLOGY: ASTROLOGY OF SEX AND THE SEXES***

[Laughing] "I shouldn't say that because it will make me look terrible. But it's got gay turn-ons for all the star signs..."

■ **CURRENTLY LISTING TO: ANNIE LENNOX**

"I'm listing to *Bare* again, preparing myself for *Songs of Mass Destruction*."

■ **CURRENTLY WATCHING: *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN***

"I just watched it again and cried—again. It's so, so good."

■ **FAVORITE PLACE FOR LUNCH: THE WESTWAY DINER**

"Cheap, easy and delicious. Just like me!"

■ **FAVORITE HANGOUT: THE EAGLE**

"I like to shock people when I ride up on my motorcycle wearing my leather chaps."

■ **BOXERS OR BRIEFS:**

"Boxer-briefs, of course. Doesn't everyone wear them?"

■ **BOTTOM OR BOTTOM:**

"[Laughing]...a bottom. It's a proud position in San Francisco. There's no shame in being a bottom."