

# What's New on the Rialto?

## Interview with Jaclyn Sokol *The Death in the Juniper Grove*

By [Nick Orlando](#)

Newcomer Jaclyn Sokol was born and raised in New York. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and has studied acting at the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute. Well on her way, Sokol's theatre credits include New York Theatre Experiment's world premiere of *Fallen* and *The Life's Goodbye* at The Samuel French Original Short Play Festival. Also an accomplished singer, Sokol recently recorded a new song for composer Philip Springer. She can now be seen in, which is written and directed by Le Wilhelm.



**Jaclyn Sokol and Vito Cottone**

**Nick Orlando:** How did you become involved in this production of *The Death in the Juniper Grove*?

**Jaclyn Sokol:** I have been working on shows with the Etc. Theatre Company and Developing Acts Company for two years now, both sub-divisions of LoveCreek Productions. Each division of the company operates as its own theatre company with LoveCreek as the parent organization. In May 2005, Le Wilhelm (playwright, executive artistic director of LoveCreek) asked me to participate in a reading of his new play, *The Death in the Juniper Grove*. At the reading, the audience really responded to the characters and the material, which doesn't happen that often in a reading. When I found out it was going to be the company's main stage production the following year I was excited, figuring I would have an opportunity to audition. At the reading, I had read the character Maggie, but ended up cast as Mo.

**NO:** I understand that the story unfolds in an unpredictable manner. How do you intend on keeping the audience up to speed?

**JS:** It's important to tell the story moment to moment and in the time the scenes are happening. It's easy to play into the future because as an actor of course you know what is going to happen - but the audience doesn't. If you are living in a moment, hopefully the

audience is right there with you.

**NO:** How do you relate to your character?

**JS:** Mo is a small town girl with a large world mentality. I'm kind of like that. I like to know about everything that's out there for me. I don't like to limit myself, neither does Maureen.



**Jaclyn Sokol and Nancy  
McDaniel**

**NO:** What is interesting about *Juniper Grove*?

**JS:** The play has an element of everything in it - romance, comedy, tragedy, drama, mystery, and surprise. It's a bit of a whodunit kind of show, but there is so much other stuff going on, I wouldn't define it as that. We have a mature cast and a younger cast playing the same characters. It is interesting to see how the characters evolve over a passage of time.

**NO:** How do you prepare for a role?

**JS:** I try to think about how I am like and/or unlike the character I'm playing. I use the elements I have that are similar to the characters' and borrow elements from other people where I am not similar. I ask myself a lot of "whys." I need to understand where a character comes from and what experiences she had in the past that influence the way she behaves now. Usually, at some point after reading a script a few times I say, "Oh, I totally get her." And then

once I get deeper in rehearsals, I discover new things I only thought I understood before.

**NO:** I know you are also an accomplished singer. You recently recorded a new song for composer Philip Springer. Any plans on an album?

**JS:** Not right now. I'd love to in the future.

**NO:** Right after this play, you will begin rehearsing for another production with the New York Theatre Experiment, *Fallen*, which will begin performances in September.

**JS:** That's right. We actually started workshopping the production back in March.

**NO:** It's based on William Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies*. What is unusual about the way this show was created?

**JS:** The show, featuring an all-female cast, was created around a concept inspired by *Lord of the Flies*. When we started, only character descriptions and a rough plot outline were written out. Everything else was created by the actors during improvisations in rehearsals. We spent a lot of time on character development, which was wonderful. It's incredible how an actor in the moment can come up with stuff a playwright never would have thought to write. We would do a scene and then sometimes we would do "take two" with a completely different outcome. The only difficulty with this process was getting over the pressure of creating something "good." We had to allow room for failure - not everything was going to work or was going to work in the context of the show. The play was essentially written by reading/listening to hours of transcribed rehearsal tapes.

**NO:** In addition to acting, you also had a hand in producing. Tell us about your background as a producer.

**JS:** Actors (especially early in their careers) are usually in seemingly powerless positions - waiting for phones to ring, taking any opportunity handed regardless of the material. That's just the way it works because actors need experience. Frustrated with that, I decided if I wanted to be in a show with ideas, concepts, and characters that were personally important or relevant to me, I would have to create it. I figured if this stuff is important to me it must be important to other people somewhere and, if not, people would benefit from seeing something they might not have seen before. So I threw a concept out there of strong, complex, female characters. I ended up collaborating on a couple of projects with a wonderful playwright working towards her MFA, Megan Lohne. I discussed concepts and she wrote. We first created a show, *Beyond Venus*, blending some things she had already written with some new ideas of mine.

I learned from producing, first-hand, why shows have many, many incarnations. It was a learning process and often times you need a wide audience to decide what works or doesn't work in a show. In addition, producing [creates] a lot of things to worry about - directors, casting, advertising, rehearsal space, etc. After doing all the leg work myself, I really respect everyone's role in the business. It's nice just to focus on one thing sometimes.

**NO:** Anything else in the works?

**JS:** Only time will tell. Right now I'm focused on these two projects. I can't think too far in advance - that's the way my life is at the moment. Things change on a dime, but it's exciting and after all, that's why I chose this business.

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*The Death in the Juniper Grove* runs Tuesdays through Fridays at 7:30 pm, Saturdays at 2:30 pm and 7:30 pm and Sundays at 2:30 pm and 7:30 pm (except Sunday September 3rd when there will be a 2:30 pm matinee only) through September 3rd at Theater C, 59E59 Theaters. For reservations and information please call (212) 279-4200 or visit [www.ticketcentral.com](http://www.ticketcentral.com) or [www.59E59.org](http://www.59E59.org).

*Photos: Dennis Martin*

About the author: Drawing on his diversified experience in radio and television, which ranges from programming to production to reporting, Nick Orlando has recently formed NICO Productions, Inc., an entertainment production company. Nick has worked for SIRIUS Satellite Radio, WCBS-TV, Cox Radio, Saturday Night Live, and Live with Regis and Kelly.

Currently, Nick resides in New York and is working in television programming. In addition, he serves as Entertainment Reporter and Producer for radio, television, and various publications. Nick would like to thank his Producers/Editors Michael Pagnotta and Snezhana Valdman who work behind the scenes making each interview/package possible. He is a member of the International Radio & Television Society Foundation, Inc. (IRTS), New York Press Club, and was recently accepted into the American Theatre Critics Association (ATCA).

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