

# A Lone Star

Holland Taylor plays the Lone Star State's feistiest female, the late governor Ann Richards, in her one-woman show

by Harry Haun

**Y**ou know, it wasn't really a decision," Holland Taylor insists steadfastly about *Ann*, the feisty little showpiece she has cooked up about the late, legendary governor of Texas, Ann Richards. It's the first play she ever wrote, and it gives her permission to roam the cavernous Vivian Beaumont Theatre, a true Lone Star shining to her heart's content for nearly two hours.

"One of the things I really hoped people wouldn't think—although why *wouldn't* they?—was 'actress writes play for self,' that I felt I had to create something so I would have work. The truth is I always have work, and, if I were going to do a one-person show, I'd have done one two decades ago. It's a tremendous amount of work. I actually feel like I was shanghai'd by Ann Richards after she died," she contends helplessly.

"I was so mysteriously compelled after she died, which I had no business feeling since I didn't know her. I thought, 'What the hell is this?' For months, I was very mournful, and, whenever you're full of feeling, you want to do something creative about it. It's just a natural impulse. If I were a painter, I'd have painted a portrait of her. I had all these feelings about what she represented to me."

Her big eureka moment sandbagged her one day while driving to work on CBS's *Two and a Half Men*, and raking in four Emmy nominations for it, since its 2003 premiere.

"It really hit me like Saul on the road to Damascus—the thought that *it should be a play*. I pulled over, I was so startled by this idea, and sat there with my eyes staring off into the distance as the four or five major aesthetic constructs of this play came into my head in the first 15 minutes. It was really like a visitation. The four basic ideas are what drive the play. Everything about this

play in terms of the importance of how it's written came to me in that 15 minutes."

It was all over, except the writing and research. Four years of it, in the end—raiding the Austin archives; meeting with Richards's friends, family, and political foes; and getting a sense of her.

There's actually only one degree of separation between Richards and Taylor. The two met by chance in New York at Le Cirque through their mutual friend, columnist Liz Smith.

"I was intimidated,"

Taylor recalls. "Of course, Ann quickly put my fears to rest. She was one of those classic people who make you feel you're the one person in the entire universe. I told her two jokes, and she was on the floor laughing. I totally lost my shyness, but I never thought she'd give a hoot in Hades if she ever saw me again so I never said to Lizzie, 'Oh, I'd love to be friends with her.' People later said she'd have loved knowing me. Now, the only way we can have our friendship is [through] this play." ♦



Holland Taylor