**The Belle of Amherst**

**By William Luce**

Based on the life of poet Emily Dickinson from 1830 to 1886, and set in her Amherst, Massachusetts home, the 1976 play makes use of her work, diaries, and letters to recollect her encounters with the significant people in her life – family, close friends, and acquaintances. It balances the agony of her seclusion with the brief bright moments when she was able to experience some joy.

After one preview, the original Broadway production, directed by Charles Nelson Reilly and starring Julie Harris, opened on April 28, 1976 at the Longacre Theatre, where it ran for 116 performances. The Wall Street Journal reviewer wrote "With her technical ability and her emotional range, Miss Harris can convey profound inner turmoil at the same time that she displays irrepressible gaiety of spirit."

Harris, who portrayed fifteen different characters in the play, won the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play, earned a Drama Desk Award nomination for Unique Theatrical Experience, and won a Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word Recording. She appeared in a televised PBS production and extensively toured the country with the play for a number of years.

The Spanish translation of the play was done by Argentinean poet Silvina Ocampo for the Buenos Aires premiere starring China Zorrilla on January 1981. The production ran for more than 500 performances and Zorrilla embarked on a Latin American tour that ended at New York's Hunter College in 1983 and Washington's Kennedy Center. With Emily, the Uruguayan actress made a triumphant comeback to her country after 10 years of proscription for political reasons.