

WAIT UNTIL DARK

STUDY
GUIDE

GEFFEN
PLAYHOUSE

WAIT UNTIL DARK

WORLD PREMIERE ADAPTATION IN THE
GIL CATES THEATER AT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

OCTOBER 8 – NOVEMBER 17, 2013

SPECIAL THANKS TO

**Randall Arney, Amy Levinson, Matthew Carleton, Brian Dunning,
Shannon Noel, Kristen Smith and Ellen Catania**

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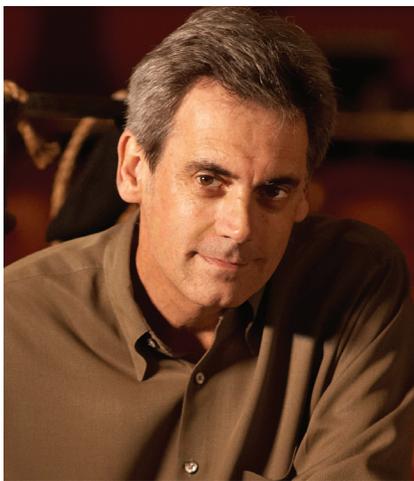
SECTION 1

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION



ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S COMMENT

RANDALL ARNEY



Welcome to *Wait Until Dark*. Our excitement for this play is two-fold. First, producing a thriller is, well, thrilling. The inherent design, directorial and performance demands are somehow different from any other genre as they must be intimately integrated to create suspense. Second, taking a classic thriller set in 1966 and reimagining it in 1944 makes the play feel entirely new.

Tonight's drama, while rooted in a classic, has taken on a new life of its own. Having produced Jeffrey Hatcher's *A Picasso* in 2007, we are so pleased that he accepted our commission to take a fresh look at Frederick Knott's original script. In tonight's adaptation Jeffrey has adjusted language, time, space and character without losing either the center of Knott's original plucky protagonist or the suspense the play has instilled in audiences since its premiere in New York in 1966. One of the most endearing endorsements of Jeffrey's new version has come from Mr. Knott's daughter, Ann Knott. We are grateful for her permission to re-imagine her late father's classic and for her enthusiasm to see her father's work from a renewed perspective.

Director Matt Shakman has assembled and guided an excellent ensemble of actors and an artful team of designers. Alison Pill, who thoroughly embodies Susan, a recently blind woman plunged into darkness and dire circumstances, leads the cast of like professionals, each creating a vivid character to enhance the evening. Every detail of the design has been carefully chosen to illuminate the storytelling, heighten the suspense and quicken the pulse.

PLAY SYNOPSIS & SETTING

SYNOPSIS

Susan and Sam Hendrix, a young, married couple, live in an apartment in a small building in New York City. Hidden within is “an object of value” for which thieves and con artists would kill. Employing disguises and deception, three newly acquainted crooks – Roat, Carlino and Talman – try to retrieve the item by convincing Susan that her husband has stashed it somewhere in their apartment. When the con starts to fall apart, the men become desperate and menacing. Susan, who is blind and on her own because Sam has been called away by the con men, must rely on her wits and the help of Gloria, her twelve-year-old neighbor, as the chilling conclusion plays out in the dark.

TIME/SETTING

The action takes place in October, 1944 in a basement apartment of an old brownstone in Greenwich Village.

RUNNING TIME

Approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes.

ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES

FREDERICK KNOTT (Playwright)

Frederick Knott wrote *Dial M For Murder* and *Wait Until Dark* – two of the most celebrated suspense plays in modern theatrical history. Born in Hankow, China in 1916 to Quaker missionaries, he went to Cambridge University and then served in the Royal Artillery during the entirety of World War II. After, he retreated to a cottage adjacent to his parents’ home in Sussex, spending eighteen months in near seclusion writing *Dial M For Murder*. After seven London producers turned it down, the BBC presented it in 1952 as a 90-minute television play, followed by successful West End and Broadway productions, thirty international productions and the now classic 1954 Alfred Hitchcock film which is now one of the AFI’s Top Ten Mystery Films. Notoriously unprolific, his 1961 Broadway play *Write Me a Murder* starred Denholm Elliot and Kim Hunter. *Wait Until Dark* opened on Broadway in February 1966 starring Lee Remick, followed by a two-year London run starring Honor Blackman. Audrey Hepburn, Alan Arkin, and Richard Crenna starred in the film version. Knott died in 2002.

JEFFREY HATCHER (Adaptor)

Broadway: *Never Gonna Dance* (book). Off-Broadway: *Three Viewings* and *A Picasso* at Manhattan Theatre Club; *Scotland Road* and *The Turn of the Screw* at Primary Stages; *Tuesdays with Morrie* (with Mitch Albom) at The Minetta Lane; *Murder by Poe*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Spy* at The Acting Company; *Neddy* at American Place and *Fellow Travelers* at Manhattan Punchline. Also *Ten Chimneys*, *Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of the Suicide Club*, *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, *The Killing of Sister George*, *Mrs. Mannerly*, *Murderers*, *Ella*, *Mercy of a Storm*, *Smash*, *Armada*, *Korczak’s Children*, *To Fool the Eye*, *The Falls*, *A Piece of the Rope*, *Louder Faster*, *What’s the Word For*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Pillars of Society*, *All the Way with LBJ*, *The Government Inspector*, *Cousin Bette*, *The Good Soldier*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and at The Guthrie, Old Globe, Yale Rep, The Geffen, Seattle Rep, South Coast Rep, and Actors Theater of Louisville, among others. Film/TV: *Stage Beauty*, *Casanova*, *The Duchess* and episodes of *Columbo*.

MATT SHAKMAN (Director)

Matt Shakman returns to the Geffen Playhouse having directed David Lindsay-Abair’s *Good People* starring Jane Kaczmarek and Jon Tenney (eight Ovation nominations, including Best Director). He is the founder and artistic director of the Black Dahlia Theatre, named by American Theatre magazine as “one of a dozen young American companies you need to know” and by Los Angeles Magazine as Best Small Theatre. Some of his work at the Dahlia includes *Hey, Morgan!*, David Schulner’s *Forgiveness*, Jonathan Tolins’ *Secrets of the Trade* starring John Glover (Ovation Award, Direction; GLAAD Award); Austin Pendleton’s *Orson’s Shadow*, Richard Kramer’s *Theater District* (LADCC Award, Direction) and Adam Rapp’s *Nocturne*. Matt recently helmed *Secrets of the Trade* off-Broadway at Primary Stages. TV directing credits include: *Mad Men*, *The Good Wife*, *Six Feet Under*, *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and *House*. He received the LA Drama Critics Circle Milton Katselas Award for career achievement in direction. He just directed his debut feature film *Cut Bank* starring John Malkovich, Liam Hemsworth, Billy Bob Thornton and Bruce Dern.

SECTION 2

THEMES & TOPICS

DARKNESS & LIGHT

SOURCES

tinyurl.com/Dark-LightSymbolism

PHOTO CREDIT

Photo courtesy
photos-public-domain.com



In *Wait Until Dark*, the interplay of darkness and light occurs in real and symbolic ways. Susan and Sam live in a basement apartment that receives very little outside light. Sam is a photographer, who, on occasion, turns their apartment into a darkroom, complete with blackout drapes. Moments of affection between the couple serve as a bright counterpoint to the gloom.

In Western culture, light and dark often represent the clash of two opposing forces, such as goodness and evil and life and death. As the trusting heroine of the story, Susan is a point of light, surrounded by villains, who embody darkness. At first she believes the scenario into which the thieves have lured her. Once she is onto the con, she uses the darkness of the apartment and her husband's lighting equipment to her advantage, as she battles for her life.

DISCUSSION POINT

Being “in the dark” is sometimes used as a metaphor for lacking knowledge or judgment. Why does knowledge equal power? How does understanding people and situations as clearly as possible serve us?

BLINDNESS



Blindness is the inability to see – the complex process, involving our eyes and brain, through which we perceive the world around us. Causes of blindness include conditions that affect different parts of the eye: cataracts cloud the lenses; a detached retina can limit sight, as can damage to the optic nerve. Accidents or attacks that cause injuries to the eyes or brain can also lead to blindness. Some with impaired vision cannot see clearly, are blind in one eye, or can only sense light. Total blindness is a complete lack of vision.

After losing her eyesight in a car accident a year before, Susan is learning how to function independently. As is often the case when one sense is lost, her other senses have grown stronger. Knowing where she is in the space helps her walk around the apartment – as long as furniture is kept in the same place. She finds dropped objects by following the sounds when they hit the floor, and identifies people by the noise their shoes make. In a scene with a visitor, we learn that her sense of smell is particularly sharp.

SUSAN gets most of the laundry back into the basket. A sock hasn't made it, and MIKE notices. Without telling her, he picks it up and drops it into the basket quietly so as not to let her know.

SUSAN

I missed that one, huh?
(by way of explanation)
A brush of air and the scent of bleach.

MIKE

Impressive.

SOURCES

tinyurl.com/BlindCause

tinyurl.com/WikiBlindness

PHOTO CREDIT

Clipart courtesy Moini from
openclipart.org

CON ARTISTRY

SCAM

A dishonest way to make money by deceiving people.
merriam-webster.com

SOURCES

tinyurl.com/CommonFraud

tinyurl.com/SeniorFraud

tinyurl.com/ImmigrantFraud

Con artists – also known as confidence men and women – take advantage of their “marks,” or victims, by exploiting their naiveté, greed, fear or compassion to deceive and steal from them.

In addition to working in small groups and impersonating characters in elaborate scenarios – as happens in *Wait Until Dark* – con artists perpetrate many scams over the telephone or through the Internet. They offer payoffs from huge financial transactions in exchange for money up front, share hard-luck stories and promise to pay their benefactors back and send requests, supposedly from banks, for personal financial information, which they use to steal identities or access bank accounts.

Con artists make millions of dollars a year targeting senior citizens. Scams include having seniors work from home as “payment processors” for a business enterprise, when they are, in fact, engaged in money laundering, and intimidating them into paying for non-existent delinquent loans by posing as law enforcement officers. They are often enticed or pressured into pouring money into phony lotteries and sweepstakes and shady investments.

Immigrants seeking Green Cards or citizenship are conned into paying for forms they can get for free or giving fees to individuals who claim to have special knowledge about how to navigate the federal bureaucracy.



DISCUSSION POINT

How can con artists' exploitation of seniors and those seeking citizenship be prevented?

LIFE IN 1944

SOURCES

tinyurl.com/WW1944

tinyurl.com/VillageHistory

PHOTO CREDITS

Public Domain: France 6/6/1944
by Chief Photographer's Mate
Robert F. Sargent

Public Domain: Patchin Place
by Noah Bulgaria



Wait Until Dark, as originally written by Frederick Knott, was set in the 1960s. In this newly adapted version, playwright Jeffrey Hatcher has envisioned the play as taking place in 1944.

WORLD WAR II

During 1944, the big four allied powers – the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and France – were close to liberating Western Europe. Major advances included:

- Entering Germany
- Capturing Rome, Florence and Pisa, in Italy
- Launching D-Day on the beaches of Normandy, France
- Freeing Paris and other parts of France.

Soldiers who serve together often have a special bond. In *Wait Until Dark*, the character of Mike attests to this by claiming, as he drops in on Susan unannounced, that he wanted to look Sam up because they were in the same military unit in Italy.

NEW YORK CITY / GREENWICH VILLAGE

Greenwich Village, where Susan and Sam live, has had a colorful history. In the 1700s it was a “pastoral suburb” north of the city that was centered in the lower tip of Manhattan. Citizens fleeing cholera epidemics in the city settled permanently there in the early 1800s, which spurred economic growth and the building of the elegant brownstones and brick townhouses that line its streets to this day. In the 19th century, waves of European immigrants moved into the area; as some older residences were razed and tenements were erected, the upper classes moved north. Artists and bohemians from all over the United States began flocking to the Village, seeking its affordable rents and acceptance of nonconformity. By the 1940s, actors, playwrights, dancers, visual artists and writers had created a vibrant arts scene in the ethnically diverse neighborhood.

LIFE IN 1944

PHOTO CREDIT

Kornelia und Hartmut Häfele
Courtesy Wikimedia Commons



TELEPHONES

In 1944, people used rotary telephones that were plugged into the walls of their homes or were available in telephone booths on the streets of their cities. There were no push-button phones, answering machines, cell phones, voicemail, or small computers known as smart phones, with which to call, text or email.

In *Wait Until Dark*, the characters cannot connect instantly to others as we do in this day and age through personal electronic devices. To communicate, the con artists route calls through a telephone booth just outside Susan's apartment and send signals by opening and closing the blinds that cover the apartment's windows.

DISCUSSION POINT

How have electronic devices, such as computers and smart phones, enhanced or harmed person-to-person communication?

PROTAGONIST VS. ANTAGONIST

PLOT

The main events of a play, novel, movie, or similar work, devised and presented by the writer as an interrelated sequence.

google.com

SOURCES

Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting, by Robert McKee (ReganBooks, 1997)

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protagonist

Thrillers like *Wait Until Dark* keep us on the edge of our seats by pitting main characters against powerful villains.

In classical story structure, which has its origins in ancient Greek drama, the main character, or protagonist, is opposed by the antagonist, which can be a person, a group of people or an institution. As the antagonist creates obstacles the protagonist must overcome, tension arises around who will triumph. The plot usually climaxes in a final encounter then is resolved, often leaving the protagonist profoundly changed.

As Robert McKee, an expert on story structure, notes, “True character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure – the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation...”

In *Wait Until Dark*, we witness Susan’s strength as she goes up against the thieves.

ROAT

The doll’s in the safe, yes?

No reply from SUSAN.

ROAT (CONT’D)

We have time. Sam is just arriving at St. Vincent’s Hospital about now. When his train got in – he was on the 6:05, by the way – he was given an urgent message that you’d been hit by a milk truck trying to cross 6th Avenue. By the time he’s gone around to every doctor and nurse in the place, “Where’s Susan? Where’s my poor blind Susan?” you and I will have finished.

SUSAN

I won’t give it to you.

DISCUSSION POINT

As the protagonists in our own lives, how do we respond when obstacles are placed in our paths? What aspects of our nature are revealed when we struggle to overcome adversity?

SECTION 3

PERSONNEL PROFILE

AN INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW CARLETON

What is your official title at the Geffen Playhouse and what are your primary responsibilities?

I am the Technical Director. I facilitate communication between the designers that usually come from outside and the departments at the Geffen that create the physical production. I also interpret what designers envision and enable the heads of the lighting, sound, properties and costume departments to realize the designs. This involves building models so we are sure we are all on the same page; providing resource materials, tools, and funds; establishing a schedule; and helping our department heads solve problems.

How did you get into this line of work?

My father taught technical theater for twenty years. Some boys have “football Dads,” who support their interest in that sport. I had a “tech Dad,” with whom I worked side-by-side. I got my undergraduate degree at Eastern Washington State University and my Masters in Fine Arts for Design and Technology, with an emphasis in Technical Direction, from the University of Arizona in Tucson.

What are your goals, in terms of what the audience experiences?

If the design gets noticed, it's fine, but if the technical aspects grab the audience's attention, it might take them out the story, which we don't want.

What has been most challenging about your work at the Geffen?

Transitioning into doing an automated show with computers. We did it first with *Farragut North* (in 2009) and had to learn the software and troubleshoot the equipment in a relatively short amount of time. Nowadays, we anticipate what the set and acting will require well ahead of time to solve any equipment issues.



What are the benefits of automation?

Our most recent production, *Rapture, Blister, Burn*, was a big show technically. We had what we called “ten axes of automation,” with motorized winches changing the scenery and moving sets and actors on and off the stage. How these movements were timed contributed to what was being expressed in the play. Complex set changes that are automated, especially when coordinated with automated lighting and sound cues, make the timing consistent for each show. It's very hard for human beings to move sets and run lights and sound with exact timing, show after show, which, ultimately, can affect the artistic impact of the play.

What is something playgoers might not know about the technical side of theater?

Everything we use in theater has been “stolen” from another industry – and we're usually about twenty years behind! For example, the winches we use to move scenery have been taken from sailing and aircraft technology.

What do you find most satisfying about your work?

Most of us go into this business because we enjoy solving problems, and every play has its own set of unique challenges. With each production, I get to work with interesting personalities, who have their own ways of communicating and working. If the artistic team is satisfied and we are running a fiscally responsible show, if I can go home at night and not get a call, then I am satisfied, too. ■

SECTION 4

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Depending on the time available and members' interests, guide your group to respond to the questions suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate, while having respect for differing opinions. Individuals can share their thoughts with a partner or in a small group. Then, ask for a volunteer to share their group's answers with the larger group.

- What was the most surprising moment in the production?
Describe it in detail.
- Overall, how did you feel while watching the play? Engaged? Provoked? Put off? Tense? Bored? Frightened? Entertained? What made you feel this way?
- How would you describe Susan's experience as a protagonist? What obstacles did she face? How did she attempt to overcome them?
- How did the play climax then come to a resolution?
- How did the actor portraying Susan make you believe she could not see?
- How did the actors playing the con artists create a sense of danger?
- How did the scenery, lighting, and props contribute to the sense of suspense in the play?
- How would you describe in 2-3 sentences what the play is about, without giving the plot away?

NOTES



SECTION 5

RESOURCES

LEARN ABOUT the experience of being blind at nfb.org/frequently-asked-questions.

LEARN ABOUT accomplished musicians, writers, and artists with impaired vision at tinyurl.com/FamousBlind.

WATCH AND LISTEN to legendary composer and singer Stevie Wonder at www.youtube.com/artist/stevie-wonder.

VISIT the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to view the work of Impressionist Claude Monet, whose vision problems are thought to have had an impact on his distinctive style. Read about this at tinyurl.com/Vision-Monet.

LEARN ABOUT New York City in the 1940s, by viewing maps and images at www.1940snewyork.com.

LEARN ABOUT key events in World War II at tinyurl.com/TimelineofWWII.

LEARN ABOUT how to protect yourself from fraud at www.stopfraud.gov/protect.html.

WATCH a video on how to spot scams against immigrants and get legitimate help at tinyurl.com/ImmigrantScams.

LEARN ABOUT theatre vocabulary in a glossary available through the California Department of Education at tinyurl.com/TheatreGlossary.

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Skirball Foundation
Sondheimer Foundation
Sony Pictures Entertainment
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