

STUDY GUIDE

GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

AVA

THE SECRET CONVERSATIONS

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AVA
THE SECRET CONVERSATIONS
04.04–05.07.2023
GIL CATES THEATER

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Brian Dunning, Amy Levinson, Olivia O'Connor, Paloma Nozicka

STUDY GUIDE COMPILED BY

Brian Allman

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ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

AVA

THE SECRET CONVERSATIONS

WRITTEN BY
ELIZABETH MCGOVERN

DIRECTED BY
MORITZ VON STUELPNAGEL

BASED ON THE BOOK *THE SECRET CONVERSATIONS* BY
PETER EVANS & AVA GARDNER

PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH
KARL SYDOW

SCENIC DESIGNER
DAVID MEYER

COSTUME DESIGNER
TONI-LESLIE JAMES

LIGHTING DESIGNER
AMITH CHANDRASHAKER

SOUND DESIGNER
CRICKET S. MYERS

PROJECTION DESIGNER
ALEX BASCO KOCH

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
RHONDA KOHL

DRAMATURG
OLIVIA O'CONNOR

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
JULIE ANN RENFRO

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
GABRIELLE J. BRUNO

CASTING DIRECTOR
PHYLLIS SCHURINGA, CSA

PRODUCED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE AVA GARDNER TRUST

CAST



AARON
COSTA GANIS
PETER EVANS



RYAN W.
GARCIA
ED VICTOR



ELIZABETH
MCGOVERN
AVA GARDNER

SYNOPSIS

"I either write the book or sell the jewels. I'm kinda sentimental about the jewels." So says legendary Hollywood icon Ava Gardner to her ghost writer Peter Evans as they begin work on her tell-all biography that will shock Tinseltown. But as Peter attempts to glean the juicy details about her life story, her marriages to Mickey Rooney, Artie Shaw, and Frank Sinatra, and her turbulent relationship to Howard Hughes, an altogether different and unexpected journey unfolds in this theatrical glimpse into the private life of Hollywood's original femme fatale.

RUNNING TIME 90 minutes, no intermission.

PRODUCTION NOTES Contains the smoking of herbal cigarettes, profanity, and discussions of sex and sexual harassment.

ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES



ELIZABETH MCGOVERN *Playwright*

Elizabeth McGovern's career spans theatre, film, television, and music. She recently starred as Lady Cora in the feature film adaptation of *Downton Abbey*, a role for which she was nominated for a Golden Globe and a Primetime Emmy, and won a SAG Award. Elizabeth recently played Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* at Theatre Royal Bath, and produced her first feature, *The Chaperone*, in which she starred. Previous film credits include *Ragtime*, for which she received Academy Award and Golden Globe nominations; Sergio Leone's classic *Once Upon a Time in America* with Robert De Niro; Curtis Hanson's *The Bedroom Window*; and John Hughes' *She's Having a Baby*. Elizabeth has performed in the theatre in America and the UK, winning the 2013 Will Award for her work in Shakespeare. Other theatre credits include *The Misanthrope* at the Young Vic, *Three Days of Rain* at Donmar Warehouse, *Time and the Conways* at Roundabout Theatre Company, and the West End premiere of Kenneth Lonergan's *Starry Messenger* with Matthew Broderick. With her band Sadie and the Hotheads, she has released five albums (including one as a solo release), and is at work on a sixth. Elizabeth would like to thank Karl Sydow.



MORITZ VON STUELPNAGEL *Director*

Broadway: Theresa Rebeck's *Bernhardt/Hamlet* starring Janet McTeer (two Tony nominations); Noël Coward's *Present Laughter* starring Kevin Kline (three Tony nominations including Best Revival of a Play); Robert Askins' *Hand to God* (five Tony nominations including Best New Play and Best Director). London's West End: Theresa Rebeck's *Mad House* starring David Harbour and Bill Pullman; *Hand to God* (Olivier nomination). Off-Broadway: Theresa Rebeck's *Seared* (MCC Theater); Larissa FastHorse's *The Thanksgiving Play* (Playwrights Horizons); Mike Lew's *Teenage Dick* (Ma-Yi Theater Company/The Public Theater); Nick Jones' *Important Hats of the Twentieth Century* (Manhattan Theatre Club); Nick Jones' *Verité* (Lincoln Center Theatre/LCT3); Mike Lew's *Bike America* (Ma-Yi Theater Company); Nick Jones' *Trevor* (Lesser America); Robert Askins' *Love Song of the Albanian Sous Chef* (Ensemble Studio Theatre); *Mel & El: Show and Tell* (Ars Nova); Michael Mitnick's *Spacebar: A Broadway Play by Kyle Sugarman* (Studio 42); and Adam Szymkowicz's *My Base and Scurvy Heart* (Studio 42). Regional: Alliance Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Huntington Theatre Company, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Pasadena Playhouse, and more. Upcoming: Michael Shayan's *avaaz* (South Coast Repertory). Moritz is the former artistic director of Studio 42, NYC's producer of "unproducible" plays. www.moritzvs.com

AVA GARDNER: RACE & POLITICS



PHOTO COURTESY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Ava Gardner was born in 1922, just two years after women officially gained the right to vote. While she never had to fight for women's suffrage, Ava made use of this hard-won right throughout her life and encouraged others to do so by using her own voice in the political arena. While Ava's star rose, she never forgot her humble beginnings in the rural, segregated communities of the Depression-era south, and she spent her life championing social and political causes near and dear to her heart. Ava used her influence to support racial equality, contributing her time, money, and celebrity status to stand up for friends and acquaintances in a multitude of ways. She openly campaigned for political candidates that embraced integration and gender parity at a time when those issues were polarizing the country.

In her 45-year career, Ava worked with many Black actors and performers including Clarence Muse, William Warfield, Ben Vereen, Cicely Tyson, and Richard Roundtree, just to name a few. A lifelong music lover, she counted artists like Roy Eldridge, Phil Moore, and Sammy Davis, Jr. among her friends. Two stars in particular, Dorothy Dandridge and Lena Horne, were her close personal friends and appeared in Hollywood films at roughly the

same time as Ava. Their careers were limited by the racial discrimination of the time while Ava's was not, but, despite societal challenges, these women were trailblazers, accomplishing much and giving acclaimed performances that have stood the test of time.

During the contract system, the studios controlled the public images of their stars. Because of potential negative reactions from Southern audiences in the age of segregation, it was viewed as improper for whites to socialize on equal footing with African Americans. Interracial friendships, even between people in the same profession, were underreported by media outlets and rarely photographed.

Dorothy Dandridge began her entertainment career in a song-and-dance act alongside her older sister Vivian. The group later morphed into The Dandridge Sisters, which included a third member, schoolmate Etta Jones. After a series of headlining performances at nightclubs like the Cotton Club, the group received offers from Hollywood. They were featured in a series of stand-alone performances in a series of films during the 1930s, including *The Big Broadcast of 1936* (1936) and *A Day at the Races* (1937).

THEMES & TOPICS

After The Dandridge Sisters went their separate ways, Dorothy continued singing and dancing on stage and appearing in small film roles throughout the 1940s. She received her first credited screen role in 1940's *Four Shall Die*. Her big Hollywood break came in 1952 when a scout for MGM saw her act at the Mocambo nightclub. The studio ultimately cast her in her first leading role, as Jane Richards in *Bright Road* (1953). The following year, she made a splash as the titular character in the 20th Century Fox release *Carmen Jones*. For this role, she was nominated for a Golden Globe and a BAFTA; she became the first Black woman featured on the cover of *LIFE* magazine; and she was the first African-American actress to receive an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress.

Sadly, although she continued to act in films and perform on stage throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Dandridge was never able to match the success of *Carmen Jones*. On the evening of September 8, 1965, Dandridge was found unresponsive in her hotel room. She died of an alleged accidental drug overdose at the young age of 42.

Like Dorothy Dandridge, Lena Horne got her start singing and dancing on the stage. After stints in notable New York nightclubs like Café Society and the Cotton Club, Lena made her way to Hollywood. When she inked a seven-year contract with MGM in 1942, she became the first Black actress in more than 25 years to sign a studio contract.

At the time, film censors in Southern states banned movies that depicted people of color in equal social situations with whites. A deeply principled person, Lena refused to play any role she considered demeaning or perpetuating negative stereotypes. After successfully starring in two all-Black musicals in 1943, MGM's *Cabin in the Sky* and *Stormy Weather* from 20th Century Fox, Horne was mainly relegated to stand-alone segments in musical films. These sequences showcased Lena's immense vocal talent and glamorous persona, but they were not critical to the storyline of these films. Regional distributors would remove these featured musical numbers before the films screened for Southern audiences.

In 1946, Horne was cast in MGM's *Till the Clouds Roll By*, a musical biopic loosely based on the life and career of Broadway composer Jerome Kern. The all-star cast featured some of MGM's top talent

of the time—including Judy Garland, Frank Sinatra, Tony Martin, Kathryn Grayson, and June Allyson. In a 15-minute segment highlighting Kern's most successful and ground-breaking stage production, *Show Boat*, Horne played her dream role of Julie LaVerne, singing the song "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man." Like her other musicals of this period, her numbers in *Till the Clouds Roll By* were edited out of the film when it hit theaters in the South. When MGM later decided to produce a lavish, Technicolor remake of *Show Boat* in 1951, Horne lobbied to reprise the role, but the studio was hesitant to cast a Black actress in the role for fear of Southern backlash, so they ultimately cast Ava Gardner instead.

Horne was a one-time neighbor and lifelong friend of Ava. She even contributed a chapter to Ava's autobiography, *Ava: My Story*. Addressing the issues around the casting of *Show Boat*, Horne wrote: "We talked about the nonsense about *Show Boat*, the fact that she was going to do it, and I wanted it... The [studio's] reasoning behind it made her angry, for my sake. 'Forget it', I'd said. We knew, we understood why it happened. So there was no friction about it. We were both very logical. It was a big laugh."

In her book *Living with Miss G*, Ava's long-time personal assistant Mearene (Rene) Jordan recalled Ava saying, "Of course, Lena should really have been given the part of Julie in the first place. She's already done a marvelous recording of *Show Boat* singing Julie's songs. She's perfect for it."

Ava Gardner's anger at the studio system's mistreatment of Lena Horne was one of many instances when she bristled at the racism of her own time. Ava was upset by racial injustice from the time she was a little girl. Growing up in the segregated South, Ava regularly broke the societal expectations of the Jim Crow system, sitting with her Black friends in the "colored" section of the movie theater. Early experiences and friendships across racial lines shaped Ava into someone with a lifelong commitment to advocating for equal rights. Throughout her film career, Ava used her influence to support equality via formal and informal means, contributing her time and money to support racial equality causes and standing up for her friends and acquaintances in more personal ways.

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In the 1948 presidential race, Ava supported the Progressive Party candidate, Henry Wallace. Wallace outspokenly supported [the] desegregation of public schools and racial and gender equality. He also refused to speak in front of segregated audiences while traveling across America in support of his campaign. During his campaign tour through North Carolina, Ava joined him on the dais at a luncheon in Raleigh at the Sir Walter Hotel and promised to support his campaign. This showing of political support threatened Ava's burgeoning film career. She recalled in a 1985 interview in the *New York Times*, "When I appeared for Henry Wallace when he ran for President in 1948 Louis B. Mayer called me in and told me I had to stop. He told me that Katharine Hepburn had ruined her career doing things like that."

In 1968, Ava became a life member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Her certificate of life membership reads: "This Certifies that Ava Gardner is a Life Member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, having paid the sum of Five Hundred Dollars into the Treasury of the National Office, testifying forever to her Faith in the Cause and Future of the Negro in the United States and in the Foundation Principles of the American Republic."

In 1969, Ava co-chaired a fundraising event for the Free Southern Theatre, a New Orleans-based organization that provided free theatre for mostly Black communities of the rural South. In a piece in *Jet* magazine in May 1969, the benefit was profiled in the article entitled, "Southern Theatre Brings Soul Food to Waldorf: Stars Pay \$100 Per Plate to Raise \$50,000 for FST." Ava co-chaired the event which was the first time the famed Waldorf hotel served soul food and attempted family-style service. It was also the first time Ava organized an event. The event was attended by some of the biggest stars of the day including Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Duke Ellington, Chico Hamilton, Lena Horne, Diana Sands, Brock Peters, Gregory Peck, Rosalind Russell, Soupy Sales, Lauren Bacall, Liza Minelli, and Muhammad Ali.

In addition to these formal shows of support for the cause of racial equality, Ava Gardner regularly flouted

social expectations of segregation in her personal life. Ava's personal assistant Rene Jordan was African American, and their working partnership quickly turned into a long-lasting friendship—with the two becoming as close as sisters over the course of their four-decade relationship. Ava said of her in her autobiography, *Ava: My Story*: "she was also as good a friend as I've ever had... we hit it off from the start and we've spent more years as close companions than I care to think about."

Rene said of Ava in a chapter she contributed to *Ava: My Story* "She was fun and very sharing. If I ever made her anything, from a cup of coffee to a martini, she'd say, "Well, where's yours?" She wasn't what we thought of as the stereotypical Southerner. We'd go to clubs during the time before integration, and if they threw me out, she'd leave too. So to keep her, they'd tolerate me."

Rene wrote her own book about her time with Ava called *Living with Miss G*. In it, she tells personal stories from her own perspective about her life alongside Ava Gardner. She says of first meeting Ava: "I liked Miss G from that very first moment. I suppose when my older sister said for me to go down there and look after that girl, I took that responsibility seriously. For the rest of her life, I took it seriously, and she did the same for me."

Rene described the first time she attended a whites-only club with Ava: "I'll never forget that first jazz joint she took me to in downtown L.A. She was known there and in a lot of other places too because Artie Shaw was rated as a species of saint in those quarters. We slipped in and sat in the back. The décor was a sort of black—you couldn't see much—and I hoped nobody could see me as I knew what would happen... Then the big, tough, tuxedoed waiter spotted me and started to beam in, and I thought, "Uh-oh!" ... He let his eyes talk: "Leave now or get thrown out." He gave my white sidekick a glance, saw it was female, and hesitated, especially as it was giving him a real hard look with a nasty glint from green eyes."

The waiter recognized Ava and apologized and Ava ordered drinks for her and Rene. Again and again, Ava would use her status to ensure Rene was allowed into the same spaces as herself, to stand up for Rene's inclusion, and to make Rene feel welcome.

SOURCE

Courtesy of The Ava Gardner Museum; www.johnstoncountync.org/ava-gardner/blog

USING THE FUTURE TO LEARN ABOUT THE PAST: THE GOLDEN AGE OF HOLLYWOOD

Hollywood has experienced a number of technological changes in the craft of storytelling over the past 100+ years of cinema. One of the newer technologies helping to create today's stories is the utilization of Artificial Intelligence, witnessed in special effects, in scriptwriting, and even now in directing. Likewise, venues are filled with cheering fans watching deceased artists like Buddy Holly, Marilyn Monroe, and Maria Callas, perform as living, moving, holograms.

Embracing the spirit of technology, the following article was created entirely by OpenAI's ChatGPT, meaning Artificial Intelligence wrote the words below based on a prompt. To learn more about chatbots and Artificial Intelligence, please refer to page 19 of the Study Guide.

PROMPT: 250-500 word article on "The Golden Age of Hollywood", acknowledging historical sexism and racism.

OPENAI'S CHATGPT GENERATED RESPONSE:

The Golden Age of Hollywood, which took place during the 1920s to the 1960s, was a time of great innovation and creativity in the film industry. During this period, Hollywood became the epicenter of the global film industry, and its movies became synonymous with American culture. Some of the most iconic and timeless films, such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Casablanca*, and *Singin' in the Rain*, were produced during this era.

However, despite its many contributions to the world of cinema, the Golden Age of Hollywood was not without its flaws. One of the most significant issues was the pervasive sexism and racism that characterized the era. The industry was dominated by white men, who held nearly all of the decision-making power. As a result, women and people of color were often relegated to secondary or stereotypical roles, and their contributions were often overlooked.

In the early days of Hollywood, women were often reduced to playing passive, one-dimensional characters, who existed primarily to support the male lead. They were often portrayed as weak and dependent, and their careers were often cut short by marriage or retirement. Women of color faced even greater

discrimination and were often excluded from lead roles altogether. African American actresses, for example, were frequently forced to play demeaning, stereotypical roles, such as maids or slaves.

Racism was also a major issue in Hollywood during the Golden Age. The film industry perpetuated damaging and offensive stereotypes about people of color, and many films portrayed them as inferior, criminal, or exotic. African American actors, in particular, were often given roles that reinforced negative racial prejudices and perpetuated damaging myths about black people. These portrayals helped to justify racial segregation and discrimination and had a lasting impact on American society.

Despite these issues, the Golden Age of Hollywood was an important period in the history of film, and it laid the foundation for many of the creative and technical innovations that continue to shape the film industry today. However, it is important to acknowledge the pervasive sexism and racism that characterized the era and to work to ensure that the industry is more inclusive and equitable in the future.

In conclusion, while the Golden Age of Hollywood is remembered for its many contributions to the world of film, it was also marked by significant issues of sexism and racism. It is important to acknowledge these problems and to work towards a more inclusive and equitable future for the film industry. By recognizing the past and working towards a better future, we can ensure that the spirit of innovation and creativity that defined the Golden Age of Hollywood continues to thrive in the years to come.

VAUDEVILLE'S INFLUENCE



AVA

"At University I studied the impact of vaudeville on American culture."

—Ava: *The Secret Conversations* (Act 1, Scene 1)

Vaudeville was more than an assembly of ragtime pantaloons, monologists, eccentric dancers, barrelhouse songbirds, ventriloquists, magicians, tumblers, and jugglers, more than a coast-to-coast network of once-gilded theaters now shambing into plaster dust. Vaudeville was a people's culture.

Some scholars have focused on France as the birthplace of vaudeville. The word itself is thought to derive from the Val-de-Vire, a river valley in Normandy, home to the 15th-century poet Oliver Basselin. He wrote popular songs, some say drinking songs, which he named *chansons du vau-de-Vire*, after his native valley. At agricultural fairs, around the close of the seventeenth century, these songs, refreshed with topical lyrics, were put together with sketches and called vaudevilles.

To say that vaudeville originated in Normandy or Paris does little to explain American vaudeville. The entrepreneurs who first labeled their entertainments *vaudeville* likely had no clear understanding of the word's origins. These men were street-smart promoters, not cultural anthropologists, and they were persuaded to call their offerings vaudeville because it sounded French, and if something were French, it was presumed classy, fancy, and lively.

Variety and vaudeville were unlike plays and operas because they brought together a series of unrelated acts on a single bill. There was no unifying theme or scheme, as was found in classic drama, melodrama, comic opera, operetta, and burlesque. The bills were a mixture of recitations, ballets and hornpipes, songs from the concert repertoire as well as lighter melodies, and dramatic and comedy sketches.

THEMES & TOPICS

[Editor's note: many of these acts featured performers, both black and white, appearing in blackface, as well as comedy and dance based on cruel and exaggerated ethnic stereotypes. The playwright Jeremy V. Morris has pointed out, "Everybody seems to know about Al Jolson, but not about Bert Williams. They don't know about Aida Overton, but they know about Fred Astaire. That's a crime, in and of itself. These were the brave heroes of the time and as far as what they faced and how they faced it—bravely and creatively. These performers were able to wield a social justice message and were able to comment upon the society and push it forward through entertainment".]

Vaudeville developed into a big business. Its growing popularity prompted the building of more and ever-larger theaters. Modern American show business had arrived. It was a by-product of a uniform system of railroads, the telegraph and telephones, willing bankers, aggressive lawyers, a popular daily press, and a nation expanding in size and opportunity. As more people with theatrical ambitions turned to vaudeville, they found talent was not enough. They had to have an act, and an act could only be developed through the experience of playing to vaudeville audiences to discover what they like and what they did not.

It is difficult to estimate the number of theaters that played vaudeville at any given time between the 1870s and the 1930s. There are approximately 800–1,200 big-time vaudeville houses that more or less maintained a two-(shows)-a-day policy. In addition to the recognized vaudeville chains and theaters, there were more than 1,000 other venues that booked vaudeville. On most weekend nights in the hundreds of small towns down south, on the Great Plains, and in the Rocky Mountain states, shows were put on in converted churches and grange halls, tents, auditoriums, or any space that could accommodate enough folks to make the venture pay.

There were four major factors at play in the decline of vaudeville: First was Hollywood. Silent films, already jostling vaudeville for popularity, added sound in 1926. A second factor affecting vaudeville's viability was radio. By the early 1930s, people were staying home to listen to Rudy Vallee, Amos 'n Andy, and Kate Smith. A third event was the stock market crash of 1929. What little money families could spend on entertainment went for a new radio or cheap movie tickets. There was another reason for vaudeville's slow eclipse, one that sometimes has been ignored or denied. Vaudeville, once the cheeky upstart of show business, had lost its novelty as it grew more polished with the decades. Critics and customers complained that it has become too homogenized, too predictable, complacent, hackneyed, and stale.

The institution of vaudeville was peculiar to its time and places and there will never again be vaudeville as the people of the USA once knew it: a vibrant branch of show business filling theaters coast to coast. In the last four decades of the twentieth century, however, a small-scale revival of the vaudeville spirit and skills began. Whether as street entertainers, fairground re-creators, or performance artists, the variety arts and new vaudevillians are heirs to thousands of years of traditional skills, and they restore vitality to old arts by adapting them to their own time and place.

SOURCE

A brief overview of the history of vaudeville, excerpted from *Vaudeville Old and New: An Encyclopedia of Variety Performances in America*, by Frank Cullen, Florence Hackman, and Donald McNeilly.

Courtesy of www.vermontvaudeville.com

MAKING CONNECTIONS



PHOTO COURTESY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The play *Ava: The Secret Conversations* written by Elizabeth McGovern is based on the book *The Secret Conversations* by Peter Evans and Ava Gardner.

PETER EVANS

Peter Evans was a columnist and foreign correspondent with the *Daily Express* (UK), and wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* and *Vogue*, as well as every major newspaper in Britain. His books include *Peter Sellers: The Man Behind the Mask* and *Nemesis*. He died in 2012.

AVA GARDNER

Ava Gardner was one of Hollywood's biggest and brightest stars during the 1940s and '50s, an Oscar-nominated leading lady who co-starred with Clark Gable, Burt Lancaster, and Humphrey Bogart, among others. But this riveting account of her storied life, including her marriage to Frank Sinatra, and career had to wait for publication until after her death—because Gardner feared it was too revealing.

SOURCE

Biographies courtesy of www.simonandschuster.com

"I either write the book or sell the jewels," Gardner told co-author Peter Evans, "and I'm kinda sentimental about the jewels." The legendary actress serves up plenty of gems in these pages, reflecting with delicious humor and cutting wit on a life that took her from rural North Carolina to the heights of Hollywood's Golden Age. Tell-all stories abound, especially when Gardner divulges on her three husbands: Mickey Rooney, a serial cheater so notorious that even his mother warned Gardner about him; bandleader Artie Shaw, whom Ava calls "a dominating son of a bitch... always putting me down;" and Frank Sinatra ("We were fighting all the time. Fighting and boozing. It was madness. But he was good in the feathers").

DID YOU KNOW?

- Ava Gardner played the part of Pandora in the film *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, filmed in Tossa de Mar, Spain. In 1998, sculptor Ció Abellí unveiled the statue of Gardner as Pandora, looking out to the sea (seen above).

SIX DEGREES OF AVA GARDNER

The play *Ava: The Secret Conversations* written by Elizabeth McGovern is based on the book *The Secret Conversations* by Peter Evans and Ava Gardner. In both works, many Hollywood stars, executives, and movies are mentioned, referenced, and discussed. Below is a list of the names and productions found in *Ava: The Secret Conversations*.

AVA GARDNER FILMS	WRITER OR DIRECTOR	CO-STAR
<i>Barefoot Contessa</i>	Joseph P. Mankiewicz	Humphrey Bogart
<i>Harem</i>		Omar Sharif
<i>The Sun Also Rises</i>	Ernest Hemingway	
<i>Mogambo</i>	John Ford	Clark Gable, Grace Kelly
<i>Show Boat</i>		
<i>The Killers</i>	Ernest Hemingway	

OTHER FILMS MENTIONED	WRITER OR DIRECTOR	CO-STAR
<i>The Graduate</i>	Mike Nichols	
<i>Bringing Up Baby</i>		Katherine Hepburn
<i>Strike Up the Band</i>		Mickey Rooney
<i>Charing Cross Road</i>		John Mills
<i>From Here to Eternity</i>		Burt Lancaster

STUDIO	STUDIO EXECUTIVES
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)	Louis B. Mayer, Marvin "Marvey" Schenk
Columbia Studios	Harry Cohn

ADDITIONAL WRITERS
John Steinbeck
Robert Graves
Lena Horne

ADDITIONAL DIRECTORS
Howard Hawks

FINANCIERS & BUSINESS
Howard Hughes
Johnny Meyer
Price Waterhouse

MUSICIAN / ACTORS
Frank Sinatra
Bing Crosby
Lena Horne

MUSICIANS
Artie Shaw
Maria Callas
Annette Henshaw

ACTORS
Marion Davies
Gerta Garbo
Cary Grant
Marlon Brando
Lana Turner
Dirk Bogarde
Bette Davis
Elizabeth Taylor

AN INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIA O'CONNOR



PHOTO BY SOPHIA SCHRANK

What is your position and how long have you been at the Geffen Playhouse?

Literary Manager & Dramaturg, since July 2022.

What educational, artistic, and professional experiences led to you working at the Geffen?

I discovered dramaturgy in middle school, participating in a young playwrights festival. Collaborating with a dramaturg as I revised my play, I realized that I loved those early-process conversations. I studied Dramaturgy at Carnegie Mellon University and have been working in artistic/literary offices ever since: first at Roundabout, then at Pittsburgh CLO, and now at the Geffen.

What are your primary responsibilities as Literary Manager & Dramaturg?

Managing script submissions, reading plays (alongside the artistic staff and a team of script readers), facilitating our Writers' Room program, producing in-house readings and workshops, and doing new play and/or production dramaturgy throughout the season.

What key skills and dispositions do Dramaturgs need to possess in this day and age?

Curiosity, empathy, and an open mind. Questions are at the center of this job. Also: a willingness to reject the notion of objectivity. Be conscious of the lens through which you encounter work, and be willing to question your own response in parallel to questioning the play. Finally: meet every play with generosity and on its own terms.

How important is a Literary Manager & Dramaturg to a theater company?

The job fills two functions: one, reading and relationship-building to generate a long list of people and projects that the theater can support or produce. And two, striving to make each play that comes through our doors the best that it can be, as both process and product. Ideally, a dramaturg celebrates and challenges each play—and fosters a space in which artists' capacity and creativity can grow.

Was there a pivotal moment when you realized you wanted a life in the arts or did it occur incrementally?

It was incrementally inevitable. I'm grateful to have had parents and teachers who were/are incredibly supportive of that life!

What do you find most challenging about your work?

Moving between tasks. Each element of the job requires a different level of energy and focus. Sometimes, you don't have the intellectual or emotional bandwidth for the next thing on your calendar, but you have to rally. Also, this job requires saying "no" a lot. It's always tough to pass on something, knowing how much that project means to the person on the other end of the rejection.

What do you find most rewarding?

Having a conversation that unlocks something new about a play. Dramaturgy happens in the space between people. It's not that you've written the smartest set of notes, or that you've come up with the most crucial piece of research. It's coming to a sense of shared understanding: arriving at an insight together that you couldn't have come to alone.

VETERANS WRITING & PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP



PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS!

The Veterans Cultural Identity Monologue Writing & Performance Workshop is an 8-week theater-making intensive, in which an ensemble of military veterans come together to create personal, original monologues and share their work in a performance at Geffen Playhouse in the Gil Cates Theater.

JUNE 10–JULY 31, 2023
SATURDAYS 9AM–1PM (PST) • IN PERSON

APPLICATION DEADLINE: MAY 12, 2023

QUESTIONS?

Visit geffenplayhouse.org/veterans for more information.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE



PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH

Going to the theater is a unique experience, and we all need to be mindful of “audience etiquette.”

THE AUDIENCE’S ROLE The audience plays an essential role during the performance of a play. Without an audience, the actors are only rehearsing. Audience members’ concentrated silence and responses, such as laughing and applauding, provide energy to the actors as they bring their performance to life.

BEHAVIORS TO AVOID Since the actors can hear the audience so clearly, it is important not to engage in behaviors that might disturb or distract them—and fellow audience members. These actions include:

- Talking
- Texting
- Allowing cell phones to ring
- Taking photographs or video
- Getting up to leave before intermission or the end of the show (unless it is a true emergency)
- Eating or drinking
- Unwrapping candy or cough drops.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA We appreciate you sharing your Geffen Playhouse experience via social media, but ask that you **do not do so inside the theater, where the use of electronic devices is prohibited.**

We recommend that you post your status in the lobby after the performance, and invite you to tag @GeffenPlayhouse and use #GeffenPlayhouse to share your experience and continue the conversation with us online.

AUDIENCE AWARENESS ACTIVITY Before going to the Geffen Playhouse for the first time, compare and contrast the experience of seeing a live play with:

- going to the movies
- attending a live sporting event
- watching television

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- If you were onstage performing in a play, how would you want to experience the audience?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH

Depending on the time available and your participants' interests, guide them to respond to questions selected from those 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. Ask for several volunteers to share their groups' answers with the larger group.

- Overall, how did you feel while watching this show? Engaged? Conflicted? Amused? Inspired? Provoked? Put off? What made you feel this way?
- Aaron Costa Ganis plays multiple roles. Did you follow along with these changes of characters?
- Would you have preferred more than one actor to play the parts of Sinatra, Shaw, and Rooney? If so, why?
- What did you enjoy most about the play? What did you find difficult to enjoy? Why? (Provide evidence from the production.)
- How would you describe the inner life of each character in the play? Are they conflicted? If so, how, and why?
- Did you identify or empathize with any of the characters? If so, which character(s) and why? If not, why not?
- How familiar were you with Ava Gardner before seeing this production?
- What did you find most moving about the play?
- What did you appreciate most about the performances by the actors?
- How did the set, props, costumes, and music contribute to the impact of the show?
- What is your reaction to the use of Artificial Intelligence? Would you have been able to tell anything about the article was different if not specifically mentioned? If so, how?
- Would you recommend this production of *Ava: The Secret Conversations* to other theatergoers? Why or why not?

RESOURCES

BE LIKE AVA and join the NAACP at www.naacp.org/join-naacp/become-member.

CALL the National Drug Hotline at **1-844-289-0879** if you or a family member needs help.

EDUCATE YOURSELF about Ava Gardner by watching *Ava Gardner Documentary: Grabtown Girl* on YouTube at youtu.be/uJGkz4I1r-4.

EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY and learn how to use Artificial Intelligence at www.openai.com.

KNOW about some strict rules Hollywood stars had to follow at www.tinyurl.com/ycy5umbk (Content Warning: Abuse).

LOCATE your local library to learn more about the movies of Ava Gardner, and the music of Artie Shaw and Frank Sinatra at www.lacountylibrary.org/library-locator.

REACH OUT to the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health if you are suffering from overwhelming grief or loss at dmh.lacounty.gov/resources/grief-loss.

SEE Ava Gardner in an old episode of What's My Line? on YouTube at youtu.be/TV8D3eeA4OE.

TEXT OR CALL "988" nationwide to connect directly to the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Watch a short video about the Golden Age of Hollywood on YouTube at youtu.be/6KfBNrHU_SY.

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