

GEFFEN
PLAYHOUSE

STUDY GUIDE

NOISES OFF

A vibrant, collage-style image on a bright pink background. The central focus is a hand with blue-painted fingernails, adorned with several ornate rings featuring various gemstones like rubies, emeralds, and diamonds. The hand is surrounded by numerous fish, likely salmon or trout, which are arranged in a way that they appear to be interacting with the hand and the jewelry. The fish have silvery scales and prominent reddish-orange eyes. The overall aesthetic is bold and artistic, combining elements of nature with fashion and performance art.

NOISES OFF

1.29–3.02.2025

GIL CATES THEATER

THANK YOU

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ACCESSIBILITY AT GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

The theater has wheelchair and scooter-accessible locations where patrons can remain in their wheelchairs or transfer to theater seats.

OC OPEN CAPTION PERFORMANCE

Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025, 3:00pm — An LED sign will display the text of the live production in sync with the performance.

AD AUDIO DESCRIBED PERFORMANCE

Sunday, Feb. 16 2025, 2:00pm — A performance audio describer will give live, verbal descriptions of actions, costumes, scenery, and other visual elements of the production.

ASL AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETED PERFORMANCE

Sunday, Feb. 23 2025 at 2:00 pm — An ASL interpreter will be present in the house left.





FRANCIS GUINAN, AMANDA FINK, JAMES
VINCENT MEREDITH, MAX STEWART, VANEH
ASSADOURIAN, AUDREY FRANCIS
PHOTO BY MICHAEL BROSILOW
COURTESY OF STEPPENWOLF THEATER COMPANY

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NOISES OFF

WRITTEN BY
**MICHAEL
FRAYN**

DIRECTED BY
**ANNA D.
SHAPIRO**

A CO-PRODUCTION WITH
**STEPPENWOLF
THEATRE COMPANY**

SCENIC DESIGNER
TODD ROSENTHAL

COSTUME DESIGNER
IZUMI INABA

LIGHTING DESIGNER
JOSH EPSTEIN

SOUND DESIGNER
CRICKET S. MEYERS

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
NIKKI DILORETO

DIALECT & VOICE COACH
KATE DEVORE

VIOLENCE DESIGN
R&D CHOREOGRAPHY

INTIMACY CONSULTANT
KRISTINA FLUTY

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
SAM ALLEN

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
COLLEEN DANAHER

CASTING BY
**JC CLEMENTZ, CSA &
PHYLLIS SCHURINGA, CSA**

CAST



**VANEH
ASSADOURIAN**
POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR



**AMANDA
FINK**
BROOK ASHTON /
VICKI



**AUDREY
FRANCIS**
BELINDA BLAIR /
FLAVIA BRENT



**FRANCIS
GUINAN**
SELSDON MOWBRAY /
BURGLAR



**RICK
HOLMES**
LLOYD DALLAS



**ORA
JONES**
DOTTY OTLEY /
MRS. CLACKETT



**DAVID
LIND**
GARY LEJEUNE /
ROGER TRAMPLEMAIN



**JAMES VINCENT
MEREDITH**
FREDERICK FELLOWES /
PHILLIP BRENT



**MAX
STEWART**
TIM ALLGOOD



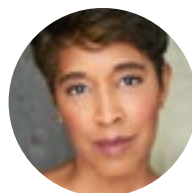
**BETH
HAWKES**
U/S BELINDA BLAIR, U/S
POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR



**AL'JALEEL
MCGHEE**
U/S FREDERICK
FELLOWES



**ANNA
MINTZER**
U/S BROOK ASHTON



**FELICE HEATHER
MONTEITH**
U/S DOTTY OTLEY



**JEREMY
RADIN**
U/S LLOYD DALLAS, U/S
SELSDON MOWBRAY



**RICKI
ROMANO**
U/S GARY LEJEUNE, U/S
TIM ALLGOOD

ABOUT THE PLAY

OVERVIEW: Doors slam, sardines fly, and trousers drop in Michael Frayn’s side-splitting British farce about a theater company desperately trying to get their act together. Both onstage and backstage, chaos reigns for a troupe of floundering actors whose forgotten lines, misplaced props, and steamy romantic entanglements make it nearly impossible for the show to go on. An uproarious love letter to the theater, *Noises Off* is a peek behind the curtain—where everything that can go wrong, does!

SETTING: On stage of a touring production in Great Britain.

RUNNING TIME: 2 hours and 30 minutes, including two intermissions.

AGE RECOMMENDATION: 12+

CONTENT ADVISORY: This production contains sexual content.

TIME/SETTING

The comedic farce *Noises Off* is split into three acts, set around the play-within-the-play, *Nothing On*.

Act I: *January 14, Final Dress Rehearsal.* **Location:** Grand Theatre in Weston-super-mare, Great Britain. The Final Dress Rehearsal is the last run-through with costumes, light, and sound to get everything “just right”.

Act II: *February 13, One Month into Tour.* **Location:** Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne. The show is officially on tour playing to a public audience.

Act III: *April 6, Three Months into Tour.* **Location:** Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees. One would assume that after 3 months on tour, all the kinks and bugs of the touring show would be worked out... one would assume.

ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES



MICHAEL FRAYN *Playwright (he/him)*

Michael Frayn was born in London in 1933. He began his career as a reporter for *The Guardian* and later *The Observer*. After leaving *The Observer* he continued to write as a columnist as well as publishing novels and plays for television and stage. His plays for stage include *Copenhagen*, *Afterlife*, *The Two of Us*, *Alphabetical Order*, *Donkeys’ Years*, *Clouds*, *Balmoral* (Liberty Hall), *Make and Break*, *Noises Off*, *Benefactors*, *Alarms and Excursions*, *Look Look*, and *Here*. Other translations include four full-length Chekhov plays (*The Cherry Orchard*, *Three Sisters*, *The Seagull*, and *Uncle Vanya*) and four one-act plays (*On the Evils of Tobacco*, *Swan Song*, *The Bear*, and *The Proposal*). Mr. Frayn is married to the biographer and critic Claire Tomalin.



ANNA D. SHAPIRO *Director (she/her)*

Anna D. Shapiro is a Tony Award-winning director and served as Artistic Director of Steppenwolf Theatre Company from 2015 to 2021, where she remains an ensemble member. She joined the Steppenwolf ensemble in 2005 and was awarded the 2008 Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play for *August: Osage County* (Steppenwolf, Broadway, London). She was nominated in 2011 in the same category for *The Motherf**ker with the Hat* (The Public Theater, LAByrinth Theater Company). Other Steppenwolf directing credits include the world premiere production of *The Minutes* (also on Broadway); *The Unmentionables* (also at Yale Repertory Theatre), *The Pain and the Itch* (also in New York), *Purple Heart* (also in Galway, Ireland) and *This Is Our Youth* (which transferred to Broadway). Additional Broadway credits include *Of Mice and Men* and *Fish in the Dark*, and off-Broadway *Domesticated* (Lincoln Center Theater). She directed the premiere of the Broadway musical *The Devil Wears Prada* with music by Sir Elton John, lyrics by Shaina Taub and book by Kate Wetherhead. Shapiro is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and Columbia. She is a professor in Northwestern University’s Department of Theatre.

WHO'S WHO? A NOISES OFF CHARACTER MAP

Each of the three acts of *Noises Off* shows a different date of a performance of a play within the play: a sex farce called *Nothing On*. The audience sees both what happens onstage and what happens to the characters off-stage. Most of the real actors in *Noises Off* are pulling double duty in playing their characters, but also the characters of the play within the play. Here is a character breakdown of all the "characters" in the show.

DOTTY OTLEY (*NOISES OFF*)

A television star who is not only the top-billed star, but also one of the play's principal investors. Dating another actor, Garry.

MRS. CLACKETT (*NOTHING ON*)

The Cockney housekeeper for the Brents' home. A hospitable, though slow-witted and slow-moving, chatterbox.

BELINDA BLAIR (*NOISES OFF*)

Cheerful and sensible, a reliable actress and the company's de facto peacemaker. Something of a gossip.

FLAVIA BRENT (*NOTHING ON*)

Philip Brent's wife. She is dependable, though not one for household duties.



FREDERICK "FREDDIE" FELLOWES (*NOISES OFF*)

Has a serious fear of violence and blood, both of which give him nosebleeds. Well-meaning, but lacks confidence and is rather dim-witted.

PHILLIP BRENT (*NOTHING ON*)

Lives out of the country with his wife Flavia to avoid paying taxes and is on a secret visit.

THE SHEIKH (*NOTHING ON*)

A man interested in renting the Brents' house. The title of "Sheikh" is an honorific title in the Arabic language, literally meaning "elder". It commonly designates a tribal chief or a Muslim scholar.



BROOKE ASHTON (*NOISES OFF*)

An inexperienced actress who persists in her role as scripted regardless of any interruption or mayhem. She is always losing her contact lenses. Lloyd is in love with her.

VICKI (*NOTHING ON*)

A girl Roger is attempting to seduce. Works for the tax authorities.

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

SELSDON MOWBRAY (*NOISES OFF*) A "pro" actor with a long, storied career and a drinking problem. If he is not in sight while rehearsing, the stage crew must find him before he finds anything alcoholic.

BURGLAR (*NOTHING ON*)
A man breaking into the Brents' house.

GARRY LEJEUNE (*NOISES OFF*)
The play's leading man, a solid actor Dating Dotty, and prone to jealousy.

ROGER TRAMPLEMAIN (*NOTHING ON*)
A real estate agent looking to let Flavia's and Philip's house.

TIM ALLGOOD (*NOISES OFF*)
The over-worked Stage Manager, who must understudy, fix the set and run Lloyd's errands on top of his usual production duties.

UNDERSTUDY (*NOTHING ON*)

LLOYD DALLAS (*NOISES OFF*)
The director of the play-within-the-play, *Nothing On*. Temperamental, exacting and sarcastic. Involved with both Brooke and Poppy.

POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR (*NOISES OFF*)
Assistant Stage Manager and understudy to the female roles. Emotional, skittish and over-sensitive. In love with Lloyd.

UNDERSTUDY (*NOTHING ON*)

CLOCKWISE: ORA JONES, AUDREY FRANCIS, FRANCIS GUINAN, MAX STEWART, VANEH ASSADOURIAN, RICK HOLMES, AMANDA FINK, JAMES VINCENT MEREDITH, PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BROSILOW COURTESY OF STEPPENWOLF THEATER COMPANY



SCENERY MOVES IT'S KINETIC, IT HAS A LIFE

AN INTERVIEW WITH NOISES OFF SET DESIGNER TODD ROSENTHAL

BY MARK JACOB CHAITIN, GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE
MANAGER OF EDUCATION

Award-winning designer Todd Rosenthal and Geffen Playhouse Manager of Education Mark Jacob Chaitin met on Jan. 22, 2025 to chat about Todd's work on *Noises Off* and his career designing for the theater. *NOTE: This interview has been edited for length and clarity*

MARK JACOB CHAITIN: How did you get your start in set design?

TODD ROSENTHAL: I went to college to play basketball. That was my passion. I went to a very small liberal arts school in Gambier, Ohio called Kenyon because I wanted to be a journalist. After my freshman year, I took a year off...and my mother was on the board of a theatre in Massachusetts called Stage West. I had a lot of experience in carpentry: I framed houses, I knew how to build things. So I walked into the shop [at Stage West], and I walked up to Daniel Culhane, the Technical Director, and said, "I'd like a job". He said, "Do you know what a flat is?" I said, "No". And he said, "Then you're hired." I actually bring that philosophy to recruiting students: the people that have no preconceptions about what [theater] is supposed to be...sometimes that's an asset. After I graduated, I went down to Philadelphia and worked at the Walnut Street Theater as a carpenter and a welder and took art classes at night. Then I moved to New Haven, Connecticut, and I went to art school in New York City. Then I went to Yale, and then I came to Chicago, where it all happened.

MJC: In the early stages of working on a show, when you first get a script, what is your process? What kind of research do you do?

TR: The first thing I do is I buy books, because books are more scholarly. Books have better quality imagery. I try to introduce myself to new artists on every production, somebody that I'm not familiar with. I find my early inspiration from books, and then I can start to supplement that with the inter-



SET DESIGNER, TODD ROSENTHAL
PHOTO BY MICHAEL BROSILOW

net. I also have a kind of mental library of stuff. I think the older you get as a designer, the more you rely upon your experiences. I still do research, but not as extensively as I used to. I also draw upon artists that I've already explored.

Some directors are very much involved in the early stages of design and the blue sky parts, while some are much less prescriptive and react to what I give them. I work with directors in Europe who send me ground plans and I find that really helpful. Other directors have storyboards, so there's less flexibility, but then I'm empowered to make choices. What I do like about being at this stage in my career is that I can explore an idea that may not work. The only way you innovate is by doing something that you feel uncomfortable doing. Coming up with an idea and - maybe that idea is terrible - but the terrible ideas often fertilize the good ideas. You can't be afraid to show that stuff. You really have to be comfortable not knowing, because you spend most of the time not knowing what something is. I always say to my students, "Date an idea, don't marry it." It's a transitory relationship with that idea. Ultimately that idea might lead to a better one, it might even be a really good idea

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

for something else, or it will get revised because of budgetary restrictions. You have to revise, and 90% of the time, it turns out to be better.

MJC: *Noises Off* is kind of a love letter to theater-making. What do you love most about working in theater?

TR: What I love most about working with theater, at the end of the day, is the people that I work with. I get to work on all these different productions with all these different directors and designers from all over the world. It's like every day is something completely different. I work with so many directors who are vastly different. I love that we're working with different materials. We're taking chances on things.

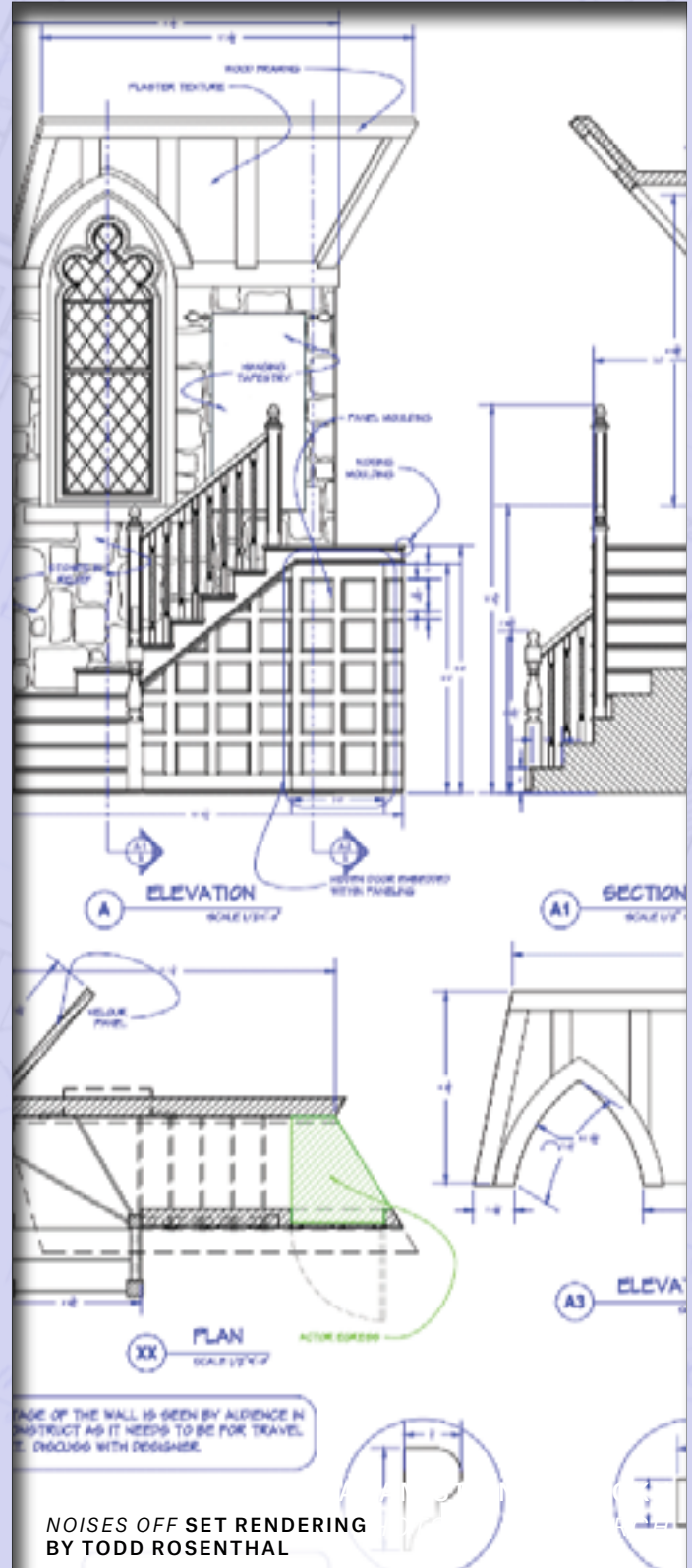
MJC: The actors have to be very interactive with this set, so it's almost like an additional character in the show, adding to the chaos between the cast. Director Anna D. Shapiro said of working on *Noises Off*, "It was about designing a space that really helped create all of that collision..." How did that help shape your design process for this show?

TR: A driving idea behind the design was to show off the directing, the acting, and the physicality & precision of the choreography. Anna thought we needed a rug. I said, "You're going to cut the rug." She goes, "What do you mean I will cut the rug?" "Because there's so much physicality and it's like you can't have anything more on stage than you really need."

This is the third time I've done this show, and one thing I do know is that you can't mess with the ground plan. Michael Frayn has a very specific ground plan in mind. It doesn't make any logical architectural sense, because there's rooms upstairs, and yet downstairs you look out over the English countryside...but you have to go with it and start with that. Fitting that many doors in that tiny little space was challenging. The set also has to rotate so you can't have fully furnished rooms up there because when it spins around, what do you do with all that stuff? We're in the theater. If you see some theater convention, if you see some things backstage, that's all part of the experience of this show. Anna said "I want this to show off the craft of making theater."

The plays I've been doing recently have been very didactic and very serious, set in a trailer park and some type of hovel of a motel room, things like that, where it's all very realistic. So this was a real, palate cleanser, and I think some people just want to have a good time.

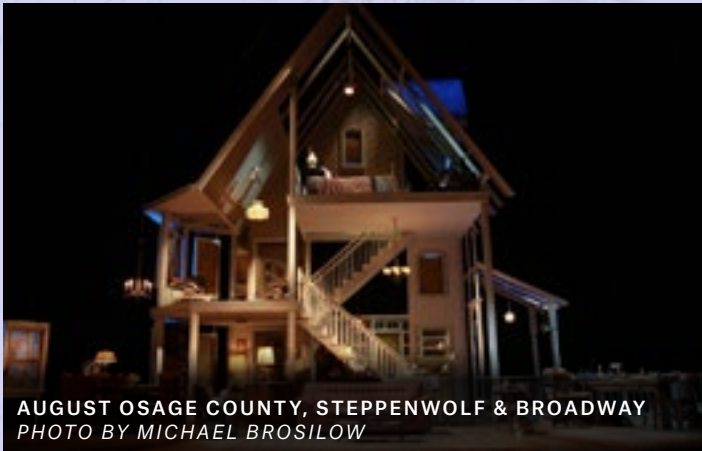
The real challenge for *Noises Off* is do you want the set to look really good, or do you want the set [*Nothing On*] to look like it's falling apart and not so great? I've done both in previous productions, but I finally said, "Listen. It should look good.", because otherwise, [laughs] it reflects poorly on the designer. So our idea was that it was a well-designed set that travels. We had a lot of fun with it.



ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

MJC: The actual set has to travel as well. It started in Chicago and is now in Los Angeles. How did you approach designing a set that would be used in two very different spaces?

TR: Ultimately we designed it to fit in the Geffen: the shape of that set is dictated from the Gil Cates stage, more than it is from Steppenwolf. When Anna [Shapiro] saw the Broadway production, she felt the set looked too grand, so we came up with what I call “retroactive dramaturgy”, where we had to make the set smaller to fit at the Geffen, but we were able to justify it, because ultimately we wanted the set to look like it was a touring production.



AUGUST OSAGE COUNTY, STEPPENWOLF & BROADWAY
PHOTO BY MICHAEL BROSILOW

For *Noises Off* we thought many times about: “Do we feature the spinning of the set, or do we just sneak it in there during intermission?” There’s something really fantastical about turntables. They’re surprising, and if people don’t expect them, they can be just a delightful transition. Featuring it helps the audience realize you’re changing your perspective and you’re going backstage; it’s a wonderful transition.

When I first started designing, I had no idea about transitions. I did another show with Anna on Broadway called *The Motherf*cker with the Hat*. We did it with Chris Rock and Bobby Cannavale, and Anna taught me the importance of transitions. We wanted the transitions to feel like a game of 3-Card Monte, like, “You think I’m going to do this, but [instead] I’m going to do this.” So the whole set was a kind of kinetic toy that changed and altered, and I thought, wow, the way something moves needs to be thematically in keeping with the overarching design. The idea that scenery moves was just a huge eye-opener for me. It’s kinetic. It has a life. Like characters, scenery has an arc.

It’s amazing to me that Michael Frayn also wrote the play *Copenhagen*. I mean, what an incredible breadth of and diversity of work he’s had.

MJC: I could say the same about you!

TR: [Laughs] Well, thank you.

MJC: You have designed a lot of really beautiful sets on Broadway, and all over the world. What was the set that was the most fun to work on?

TR: I recently just did a production with [director] Mary Zimmerman. It’s a scaled-down version of *The Magic Flute* that I had a wonderful time doing. That kind of baroque theater technology is right up my alley. I love that. There’s a theater outside of Prague called Český Krumlov. It’s in a castle, and it’s this old Baroque theater. It’s all hand-painted perspective from Italian opera designers and imagineers. I find it enchanting and fantastic.

But I think my favorite set was... I was one of the founding members of the Notre Dame Summer Shakespeare Festival. When they started, they had massive budgets. They had no idea what things were supposed to cost in the theater, because it was a very well-funded university [laughs]. So the first three or four years were like honeymoon years, and I did a production of *Romeo and Juliet* with William Brown, and it was this very simple set that accommodated all the different scenes. We had a staircase that went out of the audience, so it felt like the plaza of a street, and it became a church, it became the crypt... the color of it and the shape of it, and the proportions of the room... I know people would be looking at it like, what’s the big deal with this? But I just loved that set. I think it’s the only set I ever did where I didn’t want to change anything from the design.

MJC: What advice do you have for anyone who wants to pursue a career in set design?

TR: I think it’s a combination of persistence, and I think there’s a bit of luck involved. I recommend targeting directors and other collaborators. What I did as a young designer was I just saw everything, and then I reached out to directors and said, “Hey, listen, I just saw a production you did, and I would love to talk to you about it and show you my work.” I think targeting people as opposed to targeting buildings, that’s what I did.

As a young designer, you also need to figure out what to do with your downtime, because at some point you’re going to have some periods where you’re not working, and you need to enjoy them because when it hits and you start working and building momentum, it never stops.

Sketch your own ideas for *Noises Off* on p. 28-29

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

TODD ROSENTHAL *Designer (he/him)*

Todd Rosenthal is a Chicago based set designer and educator. Broadway credits include: *August Osage: County* (Tony and Olivier Awards for Best Set Design of a Play), *The Motherf*cker with the Hat* (Outer Critic's Circle Award nomination and Tony Award nomination for Best Set Design of a Play), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Tony Award for Best Revival), *Of Mice and Men* (filmed by National Theatre Live), *This is Our Youth*, *Fish in the Dark*, *Straight White Men*, *Linda Vista* and the upcoming *Eureka Day and Purpose*. Off-Broadway World Premieres: *Red Light Winter* (Barrow Street Theatre. American Theater Wing Henry Hewes Award Nomination); *Clean* (Atlantic Theatre Company); *Domesticated* (Lincoln Center); *Close Up Space* and *King James* (Manhattan Theatre Club); *The Qualms and Downstate* (Playwrights Horizons) and *Swingstate* (Amazon Audible at the Minetta Lane Theatre). Set designer for *The Big Apple Circus* (Lincoln Center and Tour) for six years. International credits: *August: Osage County* (National Theatre of Great Britain, London and Sydney Theatre Company, Australia); *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Waterford, Ireland); *True West* (Galway International Arts Festival, Ireland); *Madama Butterfly* (Irish National Opera, Dublin/Cork); *Nice Fish* (London's West End); *Downstate* (National Theatre of Great Britain; London) and *Life After* (Toronto). Todd designs for theaters nationwide including Steppenwolf Theatre Company (34 productions), The Goodman Theatre (30 productions. Artistic Partner), Guthrie Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, American Repertory Theatre, Arena Stage, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Alliance Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, The Old Globe, The Kennedy Center and many others. Todd started the exhibition design firm XL Scenic with designer Kevin Depinet. Museum exhibitions include *Mythbusters: The Explosive Exhibition*, *The International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes*, and *Victoria the T-Rex*. He has received many other accolades including the Laurence Olivier Award (first American set designer), the Helen Hayes Award, the LA Stage Alliance Ovation Award, the Backstage Garland Award, multiple Suzi Bass Awards, multiple Joseph Jefferson Awards (21 nominations), the Bay Area Theater Critics Circle Award, the 2019 USITT Distinguished Achievement Award and the 2009 Michael Merritt Award for Excellence in Design and Collaboration. He has been nominated for 4 American Theater Wing Henry Hewes Design Awards for best set design. He exhibited at the Prague Quadrennial in 2007 and 2019. He was on the selection committee for the 2023 US Prague exhibition. Todd is the Jaharis Family Foundation Endowed Professor of Theater at Northwestern University and a graduate of the Yale School of Drama. <https://www.toddrosenthalstudio.com>

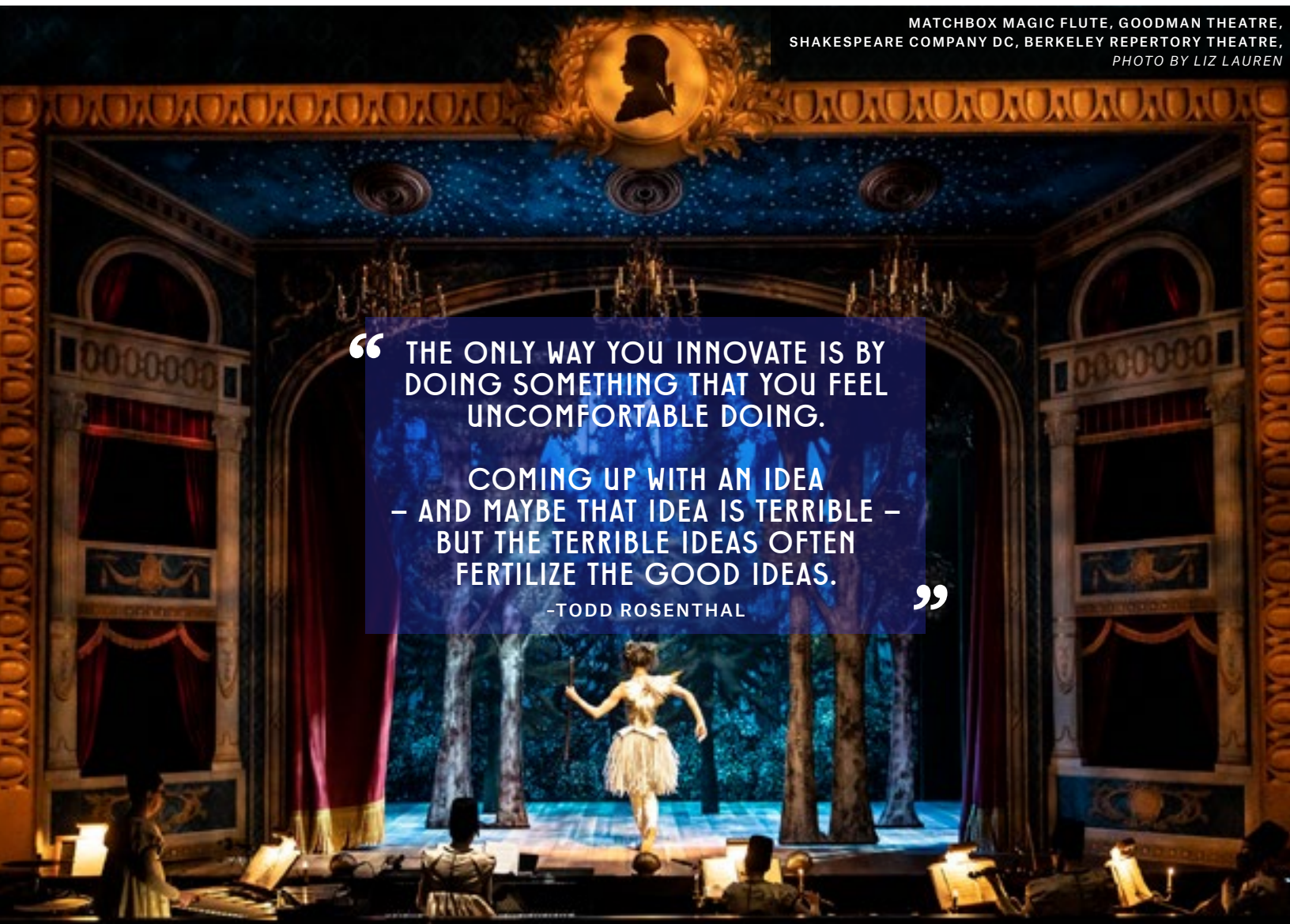
MATCHBOX MAGIC FLUTE, GOODMAN THEATRE,
SHAKESPEARE COMPANY DC, BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE,
PHOTO BY LIZ LAUREN

“ THE ONLY WAY YOU INNOVATE IS BY
DOING SOMETHING THAT YOU FEEL
UNCOMFORTABLE DOING.

COMING UP WITH AN IDEA
— AND MAYBE THAT IDEA IS TERRIBLE —
BUT THE TERRIBLE IDEAS OFTEN
FERTILIZE THE GOOD IDEAS.

—TODD ROSENTHAL

”



“THAT’S WHAT IT’S ALL ABOUT.
DOORS AND SARDINES...

...THAT’S FARCE.
THAT’S THE THEATRE.
THAT’S LIFE.”

– LLOYD, NOISES OFF



FRANCIS GUINAN
PHOTO BY MICHAEL BROSILOW
COURTESY OF STEPPENWOLF THEATER COMPANY

ALL ABOUT SARDINES?

Sardine is a common name for various species of small, oily forage fish in the herring suborder *Clupeoidei*. There are more than 20 species of sardine worldwide, including the European North Atlantic pilchard (*Sardina pilchardus*), which is fished from the Mediterranean up to the coast of Cornwall, England.



The manner in which sardines can be packed in a can has led to the popular English language saying "packed like sardines", which is used metaphorically to describe situations where people or objects are crowded closely together.

These naturally tasty fish are high in protein and a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are naturally anti-inflammatory and play a role in protecting heart health. Sardines are delicious mashed straight out of the tin on buttered toast or barbecued fresh.

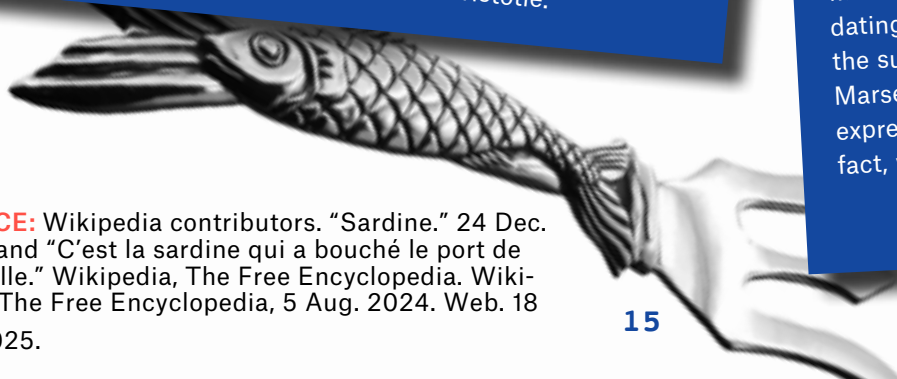


The flesh of some sardines or pilchards is a reddish-brown colour similar to some varieties of red sardonyx or sardine stone; this word derives from *σαρδῖον* (*sardῖon*) with a root meaning 'red' and possibly cognate with Sardis, the capital of ancient Lydia (now western Turkey) where it was obtained. However, the name may refer to the reddish-pink colour of the gemstone sard (or carnelian) known to the ancients.

The word 'sardine' first appeared in English in the 15th century. Athenaios quotes a fragmentary passage from Aristotle mentioning the fish *σαρδῖνος* (*sardῖnos*), referring to the sardine or pilchard.[10] However, Sardinia is over 1000 km from Athens, so it seems "hardly probable that the Greeks would have obtained fish from so far as Sardinia at a time relatively so early as that of Aristotle."

"C'est la sardine qui a bouché le port de Marseille" ("The sardine that choked the port of Marseille") is a French popular expression dating back to the 18th century, and denoting the supposed tendency of the inhabitants of Marseille to exaggerate their discourse. The expression actually originates in a historical fact, when a ship named Sartine sank in the mouth of the harbour.

SOURCE: Wikipedia contributors. "Sardine." 24 Dec. 2024, and "C'est la sardine qui a bouché le port de Marseille." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 5 Aug. 2024. Web. 18 Jan. 2025.





A "HYSTORICAL" TIMELINE OF

COMEDY

IN WESTERN ENTERTAINMENT

GREECE & ROME 550 BCE - 476 CE

Athenian comedy is divided into three periods: Old, Middle, and New Comedy. Old Comedy can be seen in the 11 surviving plays of Aristophanes. With their pungent political satire and abundance of sexual and scatological innuendo his plays lampooned the most important personalities and institutions of his day. Such as the buffoonish portrayal of Socrates in *The Clouds*, and in the racy anti-war farce *Lysistrata*. Middle Comedy is largely lost, but New Comedy (323 BCE -260 BCE), from playwrights Menander, Philemon, and Diphilus, is comparable to modern day sitcom, and the portrayal of everyday life.

The Romans continued Greek traditions, but added slapstick and physical humor. Playwrights like Plautus and Terence wrote comedies that were more focused on mistaken identities and silly misunderstanding, still common in the farce we see today.



500 BCE

1500

MEDIEVAL EUROPE 500-1500

After the fall of the Roman Empire, theater took on a more religious tone with morality plays. Traveling players kept the theater alive as theater buildings were not permitted throughout Europe during medieval times. The performers created a stage by raising a simple platform wherever they performed: in halls, market places and at festivals. The Feast of Fools was an especially important festival, allowing the performers to ridicule their superiors and the routine of church life. Court jesters were employed to entertain guests during royal court. Also known as jokers or fools, they used comedy, music, storytelling, acrobatics, juggling, telling jokes (such as puns, stereotypes, and imitation), and even performed magic tricks.



Commedia dell'arte, popular in the 16th and 18th centuries was an Italian form of theatre. Commedia's key plot points and characters' entrances and exits were scripted, but the actors improvised new gags on stage. Some elements of commedia include: stock characters (like the foolish servant or the boastful soldier), distinct costumes that helps the audience understand who the character is, maschere or masks, and physical lazzi or jokes. Many of these elements can be seen influencing comedy today. In commedia dell'arte, female roles were played by women (documented as early as the 1560s), making them the first known professional actresses in Europe since antiquity.

By the early 17th century, comedies were moving from pure improvisational street performances to specified and clearly delineated acts and the construction of permanent theaters, signaled a major turning point allowing for more sophisticated staging.

COMMEDIA CHARACTERS
PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER RICHARDSON



SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE THEATRE

PHOTO BY DIEGO DELSO

RENAISSANCE 1400-1600

The Renaissance's departure from the Middle Ages brought a new focus on humanity and created a new-found freedom for artists, writers, and philosophers to be inquisitive about the world around them. The Renaissance's intellectual basis was founded in its version of humanism, derived from the concept of Roman *humanitas* (Latin for Latin noun meaning human nature, civilization, and kindness) and the rediscovery of classical Greek philosophy

SHAKESPEARE 1589-1613

Shakespeare was born toward the end of the broader Europe-wide Renaissance period, just as it was peaking in England. He was one of the first playwrights to bring the Renaissance's core values to the theater. He used witty wordplay, satire, and physical comedy in his comedies, which often involved love, mistaken identities, and happy endings and weddings. His comedies like *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night* and *A Comedy of Errors*, are still often performed today, or their plots are adapted in television or film. *10 Things I Hate About You*, *She's the Man*, *Kiss Me Kate*, & *Juliet, Fat Ham* and *Anyone But You* are all inspired by his plays.



ADETOMIWA EDUN AND ELLIE KENDRICK IN ROMEO & JULIET, SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE THEATRE, 2009. PHOTO BY GERAINT LEWIS

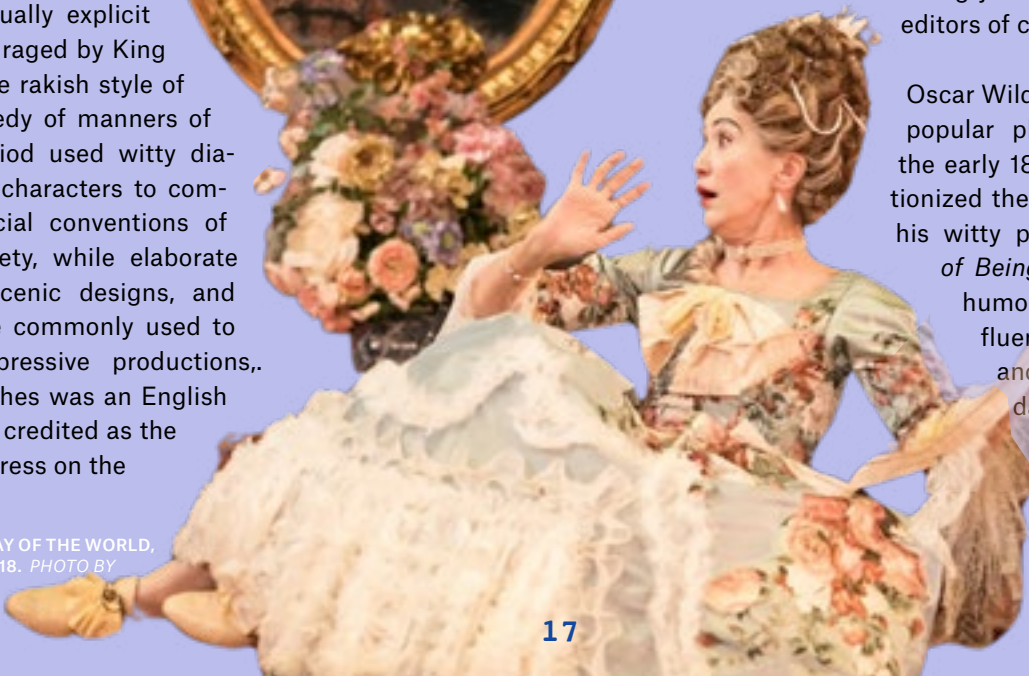
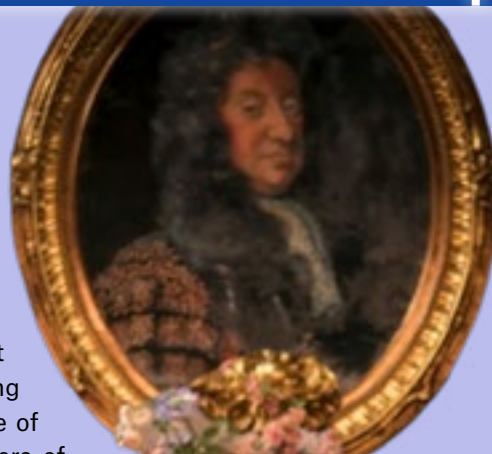
1600

1700

1800

RESTORATION 1660-1714

In 1642, just after the First English Civil War had begun, Parliament closed all theaters to prevent public disorder. The theaters reopened in 1660 marking a period of growth for English drama. Sexually explicit language was encouraged by King Charles II and by the rakish style of his court. The comedy of manners of the Restoration period used witty dialogue and comedic characters to comment upon the social conventions of "sophisticated" society, while elaborate stage machinery, scenic designs, and special effects were commonly used to create visually impressive productions. Margaret "Peg" Hughes was an English actress who is often credited as the first professional actress on the English stage.



HAYDN GWYNNE IN THE WAY OF THE WORLD, THE DONMAR, LONDON, 2018. PHOTO BY JOHAN PERSSON

VICTORIAN 1837-1901

With innovations from the industrial revolution many theaters were enlarged & new playhouses were built in London and throughout England. Electric stage lighting was introduced in 1881. Melodrama and burlesque, with their short scenes and musical accompaniment, became extremely popular at this time. A small community of Victorian humorists also managed to earn a living by writing jokes and selling them to the editors of comic magazines.

Oscar Wilde became one of the most popular playwrights in London in the early 1890s. Oscar Wilde revolutionized the comedy of manners with his witty plays like *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Wilde blended humor with social critique, influencing future playwrights and remaining relevant today. His own controversial life added depth to his exploration of the tension between individual expression and societal expectations in Victorian England.

VAUDEVILLE 1880-1930

At its height Vaudeville employed more than 50,000 people in 5,000 venues all over the country. A typical North American vaudeville performance was made up of a series of separate, unrelated acts grouped together on a common bill: , singers, dancers, popular & classical musicians comedians, trained animals, magicians, ventriloquists, strongmen, acrobats, clowns, illustrated songs, jugglers, one-act plays or scenes from plays, athletes, lecturing celebrities, minstrels, and films. The entertainment we enjoy today has deep roots in vaudeville. Elements of Vaudeville can still be seen in musical theater, sitcoms, stand up & television variety shows.



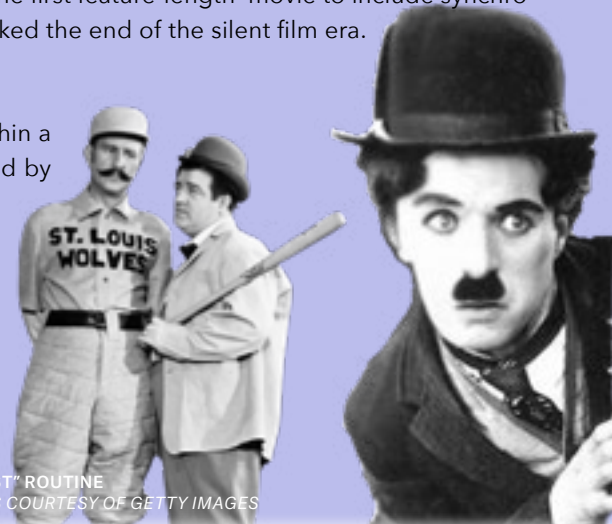
VAUDEVILLE PERFORMER
AIDA OVERTON WALKER, 1910
PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIPEDIA

SILENT FILM 1910-1920

As the film industry began, Silent Films relied on visual comedy like: slapstick, exaggerated facial expressions, and pratfalls since there was no sound. Vaudeville performer Charlie Chaplin, with his physical comedy, became a huge star, innovator and pivotal film maker for silent films. In 1927, *The Jazz Singer*, was the first feature-length movie to include synchronized dialogue. It was a major hit and marked the end of the silent film era.

RADIO PLAYS 1930-1950

Radio drama achieved widespread popularity within a decade of its initial development in the 1920s and by the 1940s, it was a leading international popular entertainment, broadcast into homes across America. These shows often featured sketch comedy, stand-up, and duos, like Abbott and Costello and their classic skit "Who's on First?". With the advent of television in the 1950s, radio drama began losing its audience.



BUD ABBOTT AND LOU COSTELLO, "WHO'S ON FIRST" ROUTINE
CHARLIE CHAPLIN IN 1921 MOVIE 'THE KID', PHOTOS COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES

1900

THE GOLDEN AGE OF TV SITCOMS 1950s & 1960s

Television soon replaced radio, and sitcoms (situational comedies) and variety shows took off. *I Love Lucy* was a comedy phenomenon with its use of physical comedy and humorous situations. Talk and variety shows like *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* and *The Carol Burnett Show* earned comedy a place as an important and respected form of entertainment throughout the 50s and 60s.

SATIRE & SOCIAL COMMENTARY 1960s & 1970s

Toward the end of the 60s and into the 70s, much like the music of the era, comedy began to address social and political concerns. Comedians like Lenny Bruce, satirical TV shows like *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* pushed boundaries with controversial material, using humor to critique politics, war, and society. Comedy clubs also exploded across the country, where legends like George Carlin and Richard Pryor brought raw, unfiltered, and often autobiographical humor to the stage, dealing with issues like race, class, and personal struggles. *Saturday Night Live (SNL)*, premiered in 1975, and revolutionized TV sketch comedy with its live, edgy humor and political satire, becoming a platform for emerging stand-up comedians.



LEFT: THE CAST FROM SEASON TWO OF SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE: (FROM LEFT) GARRETT MORRIS, JANE CURTIN, BILL MURRAY, LARAINNE NEWMAN, DAN AYKROYD, GILDA RADNER, AND JOHN BELUSHI. PHOTO COURTESY OF NBC UNIVERSAL; ABOVE: LUCILLE BALL AND VIVIAN VANCE IN I LOVE LUCY, PHOTO COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT

THE 90S SITCOMS 1990-2000

The 1990s was another golden era for television sitcoms, with shows like “Living Single,” “Seinfeld,” and “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air” dominating the airwaves. Iconic ‘90s sitcoms not only entertained audiences, but also had a profound influence on today’s comedy landscape by introducing a more naturalistic approach to comedy. TV broke new ground by the growth of new broadcast networks which led to a new era of comedies starring and created by Black artists. TV Shows like Will & Grace paved the way for LGBTQ representation on screen. While the television landscape began to challenge industry biases and stereotypes prevalent in earlier sitcoms, there still was a long way to go.

Sticking to more universal themes of interpersonal relationships and the unwritten rules of society. These sitcoms relied on witty banter, clever wordplay, and relatable situations to generate laughs. They embraced a more conversational style that resonated with viewers and paved the way for the modern comedies of the 2000s like “Parks and Recreation” and “Brooklyn Nine-Nine.” that returned to the 70’s style of comedy as social commentary.

ERIKA ALEXANDER QUEEN LATIFAH, KIM FIELDS, KIM COLES IN LIVING SINGLE
PHOTOS COURTESY OF EVERETT COLLECTION



SEAN HAYES
IN WILL & GRACE
PHOTOS COURTESY
OF NBC UNIVERSAL

2000

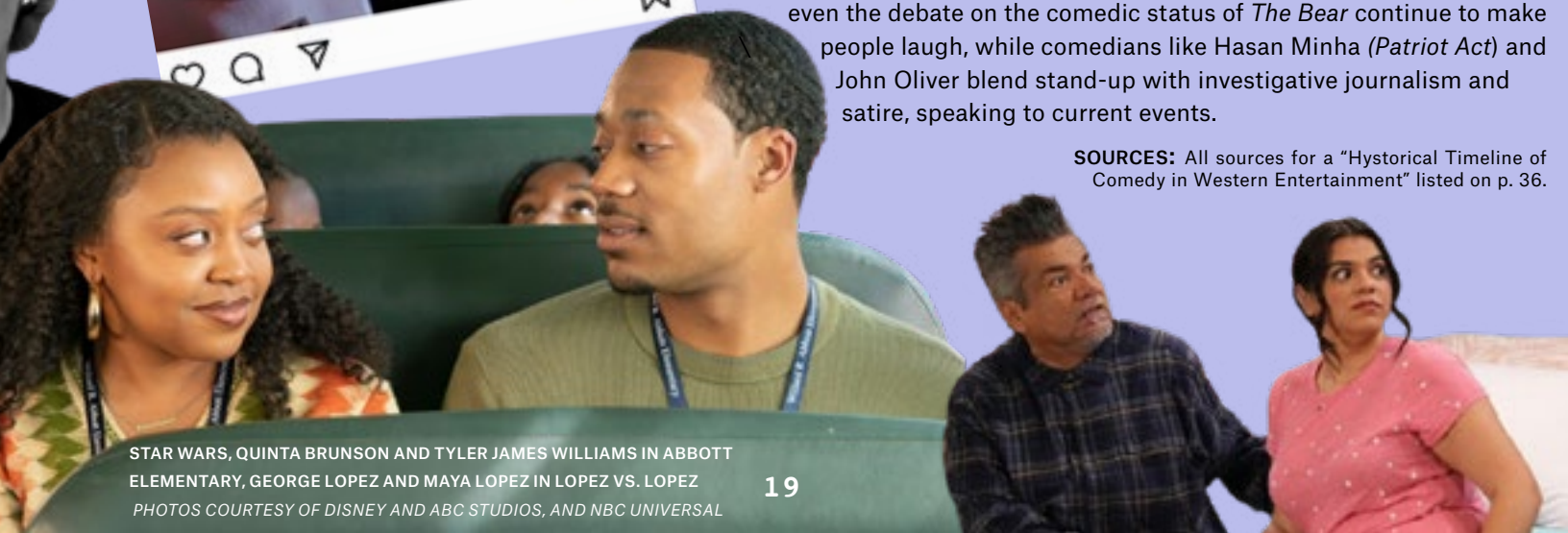
INTERNET COMEDY 2000-2020

With the rise of the internet, comedy is now often driven by online culture, where memes, TikTok videos, and viral trends define what’s funny. A “morpheme” is the smallest part of a word that still has its own independent meaning. The term “meme” was originally introduced by Richard Dawkins in 1972 to describe the concept of cultural transmission of ideas, but the terms gained popularity in the early 2000s.

STREAMING TELEVISION 2020

Shows on streaming platforms like Netflix and Hulu have taken over from traditional TV. Sitcoms continue to combine situational humor with sharp social commentary. Shows like *Abbott Elementary*, *Lopez vs. Lopez*, and even the debate on the comedic status of *The Bear* continue to make people laugh, while comedians like Hasan Minhaj (*Patriot Act*) and John Oliver blend stand-up with investigative journalism and satire, speaking to current events.

SOURCES: All sources for a “Historical Timeline of Comedy in Western Entertainment” listed on p. 36.



STAR WARS, QUINTA BRUNSON AND TYLER JAMES WILLIAMS IN ABBOTT ELEMENTARY, GEORGE LOPEZ AND MAYA LOPEZ IN LOPEZ VS. LOPEZ
PHOTOS COURTESY OF DISNEY AND ABC STUDIOS, AND NBC UNIVERSAL

TYPES OF COMEDY

Noises Off is a 1982 farce by the English playwright Michael Frayn. **FARCE** is a style of comedy that seeks to entertain an audience through situations that are highly exaggerated, extravagant, ridiculous, absurd, and improbable. Farce relies on ridiculous over-the-top situations and exaggerated characters and usually involves chaotic, physical comedy, slapstick humor, and misunderstandings. There are many styles of comedy found in media, literature, and entertainment. Each style has its own unique way of making people laugh, and often, comedians or shows blend multiple types together!

SATIRE uses humor to cleverly criticize society, politics, or other institutions. Satire can be lighthearted or harsh, depending on the topic and the writer's intent. Some examples of satirical TV shows that poke fun at social issues, government policies, or trends in pop culture are *The Simpsons* and *South Park*. *Dr. Strangelove* is a satire about the Cold War and nuclear weapons, mocking the absurdity of the arms race. *Animal Farm* by George Orwell is a famous satirical book that uses the dystopian genre to explore the consequences of totalitarian governments.

PARODY is a type of comedy where someone takes a well-known story, genre, or work and exaggerates or twists its elements to make it funny. The goal of parody is to imitate something in a way that highlights its tropes. Parody can be affectionate, making fun of something while still showing love for it, or it can be more critical. The *Scary Movie* franchise parodies popular horror films like *Scream* and *The Exorcist*, while artists like Weird Al Yankovic is well-known for his parody songs on popular music. *Saturday Night Live* often uses parody in its sketches.

SLAPSTICK is a type of physical comedy that relies on exaggerated actions, often involving pratfalls, clumsy mistakes, or physical mishaps, like characters getting hit with objects or tripping over things. Farce and many types of comedy use slapstick as a tool. Classic silent film comedians like Charlie Chaplin or *The Three Stooges* are masters of this style.

DARK COMEDY (BLACK COMEDY) is a style of humor that finds comedy in topics that are normally serious, taboo, or morbid, like death, war, or tragedy. It often makes the audience feel a mix of amusement and discomfort. *JoJo Rabbit* and *Fargo* are great examples of dark comedy.

SURREAL OR ABSURDIST COMEDY emphasizes the ridiculousness and illogical nature of situations. It often challenges the idea of what's "normal" and revels in the nonsensical or bizarre. TV shows like *Monty Python's Flying Circus* or *The Mighty Boosh* fit this category.

DEADPAN (DRY HUMOR) comes from delivering lines in a completely serious, emotionless manner. The contrast between the content and the delivery creates the humor. Actors like Aubrey Plaza and Bill Murray often employ deadpan humor in their performances.

STAND-UP COMEDY is a live-performance where a comedian tells jokes, stories, and performs routines directly to an audience. It often includes observational humor, with witty commentary about everyday life or social norms.

ROMANTIC COMEDY (Rom-Com) focuses on love and relationships, often with humorous misunderstandings, awkward situations, and lighthearted conflict, usually ending on a positive note. Movies like *When Harry Met Sally* or *10 Things I Hate About You* are classic rom-coms and *Crazy Rich Asians*, *Anyone But You*, *Red, White & Royal Blue* and *Always Be My Maybe* are rom-coms in recent years.

SITUATIONAL COMEDY (Sitcom) is a form of television comedy where the humor arises from the situations in which characters find themselves. Sitcoms often revolve around a fixed group of characters, like a family or workplace, dealing with everyday life.

IMPROV COMEDY (short form & long form) is unscripted where performers react in real-time to create spontaneous comedic scenarios. Shows like *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* are famous for improv comedy. Many T.V. actors got their start in improv at places like Second City, UCB or iO.

BLUE COMEDY is a type of comedy that is typically more vulgar, using profane, explicit, or offensive humor.

SOURCE: Cyrus Henry Hoy. 2014. "Comedy | Literature and Performance." In Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/art/comedy>.

"10 Comedy Terms Every Actor Should Know." 2017. Backstage.com. March 14, 2017. <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/comedy-terms-every-actor-know-5682/>.

Wikipedia Contributors. 2018. "Comedy." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. November 30, 2018. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy>.

IS LAUGHTER THE BEST MEDICINE?

Did you know that you're 30 times more likely to laugh if you're with somebody else than if you're alone?

SCAN THE QR CODES to the right to watch these TED videos that explore the science of why we laugh! Cognitive neuroscientist Sophie Scott shares surprising facts about laughter in a fast-paced, action-packed and, yes, hilarious dash through the science of the topic, and Sasha Winkler discusses the science behind laughter.



WHAT IS COMEDY? ACCORDING TO SIGMUND FREUD

Sigmund Freud, the famous psychologist, had an interesting theory about where comedy comes from in the mind, or psyche. He believed that laughter and humor come from deep, hidden parts of our emotions and thoughts, which he called the *unconscious mind*. Here's a breakdown of his ideas in simple terms:

RELIEF THEORY: Freud thought that humor is a way for our minds to release built-up tension or stress. When we laugh at something, it's like our brain is letting out pressure, kind of like when you release steam from a boiling pot. This release of tension feels good, which is why we enjoy comedy.

UNCONSCIOUS DESIRES: According to Freud, sometimes we have thoughts or feelings that are considered socially unacceptable or too uncomfortable to express openly. Comedy allows these hidden desires or feelings to come out in a safe way. For example, making jokes about serious topics (like death, taboo subjects, or authority figures) might help us deal with our uncomfortable emotions around them.

THE SUPEREGO, EGO, AND ID: Freud thought that our minds are made up of three parts:

- **THE ID** is the part of us that wants immediate pleasure & doesn't care about rules or consequences.
- **THE SUPEREGO** is like our inner rulebook, reminding us what's right & wrong and what society expects from us.
- **THE EGO** is the middle part that tries to balance the Id's desires with the Superego's rules.

Freud believed that humor often happens when the Ego finds a clever way to let the Id express itself. For example, when someone makes a joke, they might be letting out a thought or desire that the Superego would normally reject, but because it's framed as a joke, the Superego lets it slide.

INAPPROPRIATE OR TABOO HUMOR: Freud also talked about how we sometimes find humor in things that are usually considered inappropriate or off-limits to talk about. By joking about these things, we release the tension that comes from repressing those thoughts. For instance, jokes about awkward or taboo subjects allow us to address them without directly breaking societal rules.

A SIMPLE EXAMPLE:

Imagine you're stressed out about a big test. Your friend might make a joke like, "Well, if I fail, I'll just drop out and become a TikTok star!" On the surface, this joke is funny because it's an over-the-top reaction. But according to Freud, it's also your mind's way of releasing stress about the test. Your Id might actually be worried about failing, but instead of letting that anxiety overwhelm you, the Ego turns it into a joke, making it easier to handle.

In short, Freud thought comedy helps us release inner pressure, deal with hidden desires, and balance the different parts of our mind. It's like our brain's way of making tough situations or uncomfortable feelings easier to handle through laughter.

SOURCE: Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton, 1960.

OpenAI. ChatGPT. Conversation with Brian Allman. November 26th, 2024.

Wikipedia Contributors. 2018. "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. November 1, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jokes_and_their_Relation_to_the_Unconscious.





ORA JONES, JAMES VINCENT MEREDITH,
AUDREY FRANCIS
PHOTO BY MICHAEL BROSILOW
COURTESY OF STEPPENWOLF THEATER COMPANY

THE RULE OF THREE

The rule of three is common structure in writing, which suggests that a trio of entities such as events or characters is more humorous, satisfying, or effective than other numbers. Audiences are satisfied with things that have a beginning, a middle and an end. The audience is also thereby more likely to remember the information conveyed because having three entities combines both brevity and rhythm with having the smallest amount of information to create a pattern.

In comedy, the rule of three is often called “a triple”. The structure of the pattern is: the *first time* establishes the idea, the *second time* repeats that form, establishing the pattern. And the *third time* puts a twist on it, subverting that pattern to create an effect of surprise with the audience, and is frequently the punch line of the joke.



Just like most comedic writing, the rule of threes in comedy relies on building tension to a comedic release. Tension is built with the first two items in the pattern and then released with the final item, which should be the funniest of the three. The comedic rule of three is often paired with quick timing, ensuring that viewers have less time to catch on to the pattern before the punch line hits. While most triples are short in length, often only two or three sentences, the rule can also be implemented effectively at longer length spaced throughout a show as long as base formula is still followed. One quick witty example comes from *The Dick Van Dyke Show* – “Can I get you anything? Cup of coffee? Doughnut? Toupee?” This structure can be seen in many different variations. Some of the most famous character relationships of all-time are rooted in threes, primed to set up conflict between characters. The rule of three can also be used in visual cues, or in layout in photography.

We know *Noises Off* has one example already : it’s three act structure. What is the pattern for the acts, and how does Act III switch that up? As you watch *Noises Off*, what other examples of the rule of three do you notice in this production?

SOURCE: Wikipedia contributors. “Rule of three (writing).” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 15 Nov. 2024. Heckman, Chris. “What is the Rule of Three — A Literary Device for Writers” for StudioBinder.com. “<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-the-rule-of-three-definition/#:~:text=The%20rule%20of%20three%20is%20a%20storytelling%20principle%20that%20suggests,sentences%2C%20situations%2C%20and%20stories.> 17 Mar. 2024.



JOURNAL EXERCISE: COMEDY CHARACTER STUDY

Who is the funniest person you know in real life? Set a timer for 10 minutes and then brainstorm in your journal about that person. You can also think about a character on tv or in film that you find funny. Why are they funny? Write down the details of a specific time they made you laugh? How would you describe their sense of humor? What patterns do you see in their behavior, delivery or storytelling?

SCAN THE QR CODE to the right to watch the video: *The Rule of 3 Explained — Why Three is Key to Comedy, Storytelling, and Character* by Studio Binder.
#FilmTheory #VideoEssay
#Filmmaking



ACTIVITY:

ACTOR WARM-UPS

ACTIVITY TIME: Up to 30 minutes. *Warm-up routines do not need to take too much time, and they can be done solo or with other actors.*

In *Noises Off*, Belinda and Freddie are backstage doing warm-up exercises to get ready for their performance. Warm-up routines, physical warm-ups, and warm-up games are full-body physical, facial, and vocal exercises that help actors relax, will help get rid of any anxieties, and will make an actor more limber in preparation for the physical demands of a performance.

Here are some exercises from Masterclass.com for you to do before a performance, or a public speaking event.

7 PHYSICAL WARMUPS FOR ACTORS

1. Roll your neck around forward, side to side, backward. Begin in one direction, then the other.
2. Shrug your shoulders up, down, then roll them forward and backward.
3. Swing your arms in a circle in one direction, then the other, then in opposite directions.
4. Stretch your ribs by raising your arms above your head, then leaning to one side, feeling the tension release on your ribcage. Hold for a beat, then return to the upright position and lean to the other side.
5. Inhale deeply and slowly through your nose. Exhale slowly and deliberately through your mouth. Repeat.
6. Slowly bend forward at the waist, dropping your head, with arms extended down, holding for 10. Then slowly come back up all the way. Repeat.
7. Shake everything out! Start shaking your hands, then your arms, then your entire body to release any lingering tension. You can even shake each limb 10 times, counting out loud and repeating the process, counting down each time until you only have one shake per limb!

3 FACIAL WARMUPS FOR ACTORS

Warming up the facial muscles can allow you to be more expressive.

1. Massage. Begin your facial warmups by massaging your face in slow, circular motions.
2. Use the "lion/mouse" technique. Stretch all your facial muscles. Open your mouth wide, like a lion roaring. Then scrunch your face into a meek, small, expression, like a mouse. Switch back and forth.
3. Stretch your tongue. Pull your tongue out, pull it down as far as you can, then up, then side to side. This will help you move your mouth and to articulate.

6 VOCAL WARMUPS FOR ACTORS

Your voice is your instrument of expression, and warming up your vocal chords will help maintain a healthy instrument and help with you articulate words.

1. The "Hum." Exhale slowly, humming until you have exhaled all of your air. Repeat approximately five times.
2. The "Ha." Stand and place your hand on your abdomen. Breathe in by expanding your stomach outward; you are now breathing from your diaphragm. Exhale slowly, uttering, "ha ha ha ha." Repeat.
3. Lip trills and flutters. Roll your tongue on the roof of your mouth to make the "rr" sound, or flutter your lips.
4. Descending nasal consonants. Say the word "onion," stretching the "ny" sound and voice it downward in pitch.
5. Tongue twisters. Memorize a few of tongue twisters, like "red leather yellow leather" and repeat them to get your mouth loosened up. Or use a line from the play.
6. Yawn and sigh. Open your mouth as if to yawn and let your voice sigh loudly from the top of your register down to its lowest note.



Scan the QR Code to the left to watch:
"An Actor's Warm Up" - a short warm-up
led by Jeannette Nelson from the National Theater.

These exercises offer actors techniques to prepare their voice ahead of rehearsals and performances, featuring exercises on breathing, resonance, projection and articulation.

AUDREY FRANCIS, JAMES VINCENT MEREDITH
PHOTO BY MICHAEL BROSILOW
COURTESY OF STEPPENWOLF THEATER
COMPANY



ACTIVITY: NOISES OFF VOCAB CROSSWORD

INSTRUCTIONS: The witty word play of *Noises Off* includes phrases used in theater productions as well as some specific British terms. Use the clues below to fill in the words in the crossword on the opposite page. Here are a few of them for you to learn and follow along when you watch the show!

ACTIVITY TIME: Up to 30 minutes. Can be done before you see the play. Then see how many of these terms you can catch when you attend the performance! *Answer Key on page 36.*

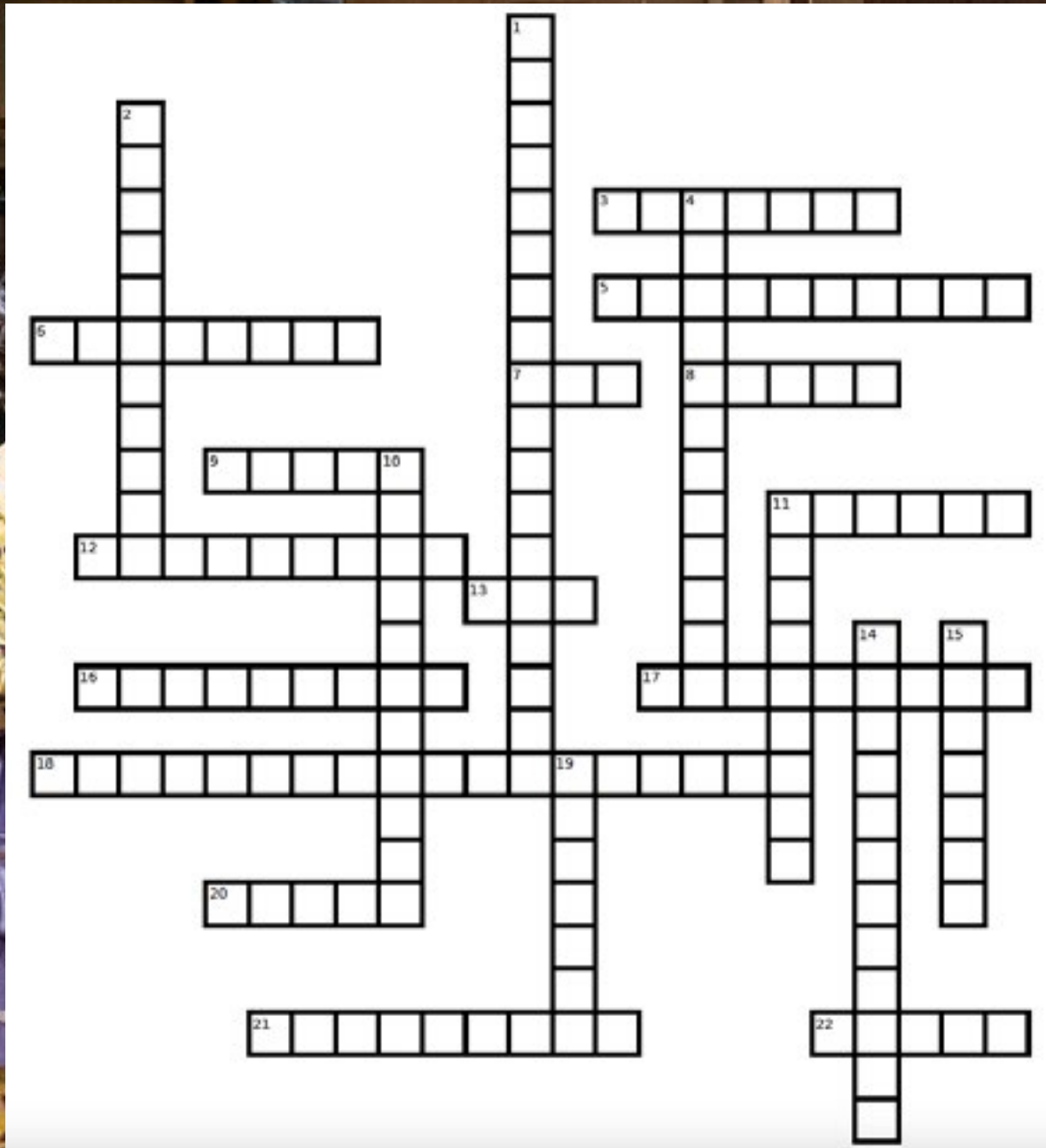
DOWN

1. Also known as “tech”, is a rehearsal where the cast, crew, and director work together to integrate all the technical elements of the show.
2. The most prominent spot onstage.
4. The hardest job in show business, responsible for coordinating every aspect of the production from scheduling to calling all of the cues during a performance to maintaining the director’s artistic vision of the show once performances have begun.
10. Another term for the scenery shop, where sets and props are built and stored.
11. The left side of the stage when facing the audience
14. *(British)* A coin-operated gaming machine that generates random combinations of symbols, typically representing fruit, on a dial, certain combinations winning varying amounts of money for the player, also known as a slot machine in the U.S.
15. A group of actors, performers, and associated personnel working together to produce a theatrical performance, essentially meaning a theatrical troupe; it signifies the collective body involved in a play, including the cast and crew.
19. In British English, it can refer to a noisy argument. In both the United States and British English it is an informal term for a noisy party or event, especially a large, energetic celebration. Its etymological origin is uncertain, but it may be based on the word shindy, meaning “quarrel” or “commotion” (or “party”). Shindy comes from shinty, meaning “a noisy dispute”, originally referring to a game kind of like field hockey club called “Shinny”.
20. An honorific title in the Arabic language, literally meaning “elder”. It commonly designates a tribal chief or a Muslim scholar.
21. The closest part to the audience when onstage.
22. The area immediately offstage, where actors stand to wait for their cues. The term comes from the use of sets of flats, which the actors hide behind.

ACROSS

3. *(British)* Another term for argument or fight, also a breakup.
5. The right side of the stage when facing the audience
6. A professional in the theatre field who oversees and orchestrates the mounting of a theatre production
7. *(British)* A slang term for bathroom
8. *(British)* A shortened term for Electrical engineers; also known as sound, lighting, rigging operators for the theatre.
9. Announcements by the stage manager, letting the actors know when the play will audience begin, and the notifications to patrons letting them know to find their seats, and giving actors the number of minutes until the curtain goes up.
11. *(British)* The lower private balcony seats closest to the stage. In the U.S. they are called “Boxes”.
12. *(British)* Someone who would be receiving government-supported income assistance (a pension).
13. A broad consumption value added tax assessed on the value added to goods and services as they move through the supply chain.
16. *(British)* The actors who open the play, or appear on stage first. In the U.K., the stage manager calls this five minutes before curtain, while in the U.S., the phrase “Places, please!” is used.
17. A room set aside for actor to spend time before going on stage and when they are not onstage during the show. Historically walls and ceiling were painted green and the lighting kept subdued.
18. *(British)* An after dinner nap.

ACTIVITY: NOISES OFF VOocab CROSSWORD



JAMES VINCENT MERÉDITH, ORA JONES, RICK HOLMES, VANEH ASSADOURIAN
PHOTO BY MICHAEL BROSILOW
COURTESY OF STEPPENWOLF THEATER COMPANY



ACTIVITY: DESIGN A SET

ACTIVITY TIME: up to 60 minutes, which can be completed before or after you've seen the play.

In the interview on P. 6, *Noises Off* Set Designer Todd Rosenthal mentions the specificity of the groundplan in the play. The setting of a play helps support and shape how the audience experiences a story and understand the world of the play, and gives the actors a great playground to perform in. In this activity, you will use the playwright Michael Frayn's description from the script of *Noises Off* to design & sketch the setting of Act I, or you can build a diorama of the set! Analyze the text below and come up with a preliminary design: incorporating all the necessary elements, plus the time and period of the story and the genre of the show, plus your own creative ideas! How many doors do you count in the description below?

FROM THE SCRIPT

ACT I

The living room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.

(Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare, Monday January 14.)

From the estate agent's description of the property: A delightful 16th-century posset mil, 52 miles from London. Lovingly converted, old-world atmosphere, many period features. Fully equipped with every aid to modern living, and beautifully furnished throughout by owner now resident abroad. Ideal for overseas company seeking perfect English setting to house senior executive. Minimum three months let. Apply sole agents: Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

The accommodation comprises: an open-plan living area, with a staircase leading to a gallery. A notable feature is the extensive range of entrances and exits provided. On the ground floor the front door gives access to the mature garden and delightful village beyond. Another door leads to the elegant paneled study, and a third to the light and airy modern service quarters. A fourth door opens into a luxurious bathroom/WC suite, and a full-length south-facing window affords extensive views. On the gallery level is the door to the master bedroom, and another to a small but well-proportioned linen cupboard. A corridor gives access to all the other rooms in the upper parts of the house. Another beautifully equipped bathroom/WC suite opens off the landing halfway up the stairs.


Al in all, a superb example of the traditional English set-builder's craft - a place where the discerning theatregoer will feel instantly at home.


(Introductory music. As the curtain rises, the award-winning modern telephone is ringing.


Enter from the service quarters MRS. CLACKETT, a housekeeper of character. She is carrying an imposing plate of sardines.)

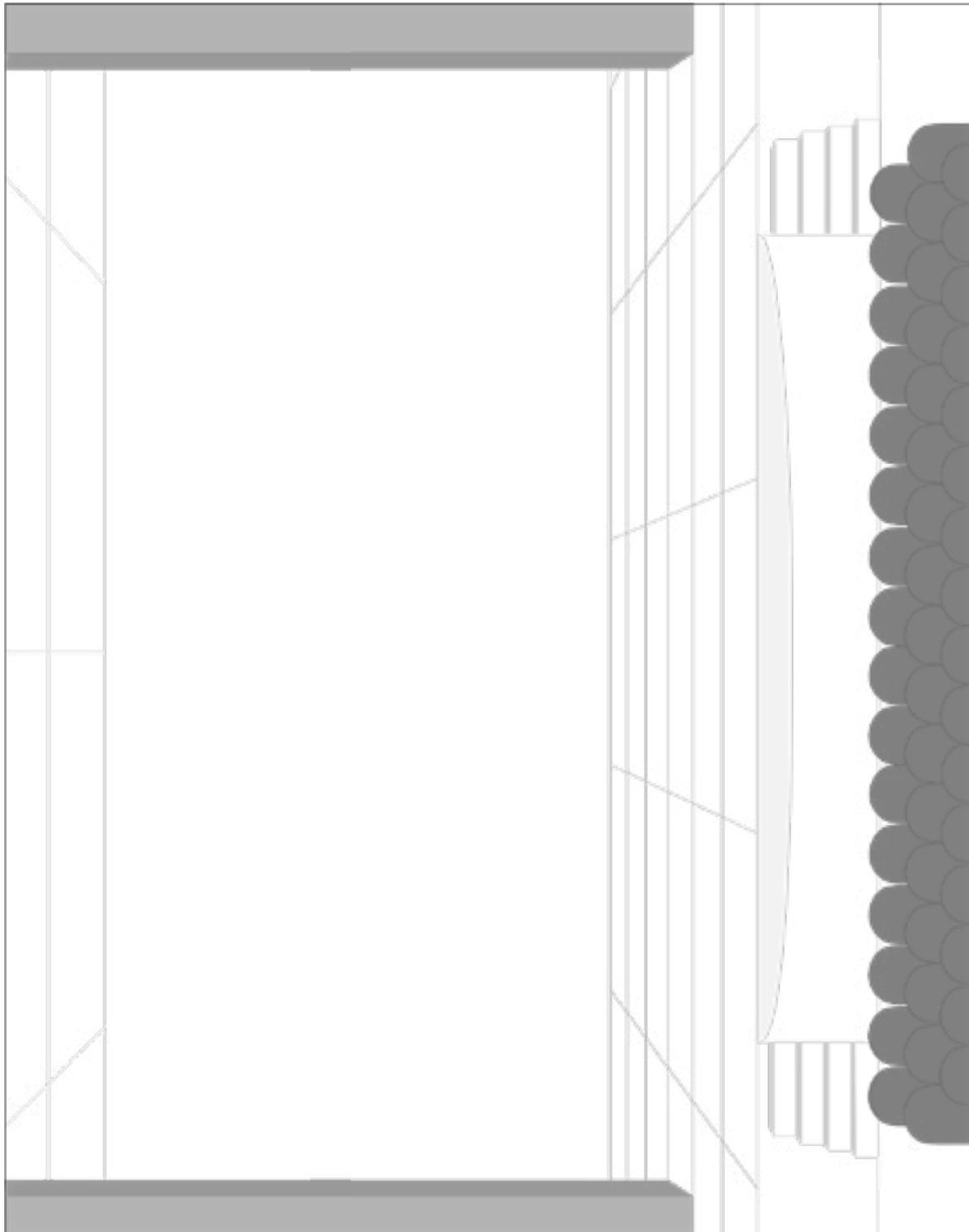
ACTIVITY: DESIGN A SET

CREATE YOUR DESIGN

 **CONSIDER:** What tools will you use to sketch? (Pencil, marker or snap a pic of this page to make your design digitally.) What research can you do to help inform your design? What needs to happen on stage during the action of the play?

 **SKETCH:** Use the area below sketch your preliminary design.

 **BUILD:** Scan the QR code to the right to see how to build a 3-D Shoebox diorama of your set!



SHOW: NOISES OFF
DESIGNED BY:





TARA RICASA AND SARA PORKALOB AND STUDENTS
AT DRAGON LADY STUDENT MATINEE AT GEFEN PLAYHOUSE
PHOTO BY ISAAK BERLINER

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Depending on the time available and your participants' interests, guide them to respond to the suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate, and respect 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.

- What images and moments from the performance stood out or resonated with you? What was meaningful, stimulating, surprising, evocative, memorable, interesting, exciting, striking, touching, challenging, compelling, delightful, different, and unique?
- Overall, how did you feel while watching this show? Engaged? Amused? Inspired? Provoked? Uncomfortable? What made you feel this way?
- How familiar were you with the comedic style of farce before seeing *Noises Off*? What elements did you see in the show that make this a farce? What is your favorite style of comedy and why?
- How would you describe each character's inner life in the show? What is their conflict and how does that affect their emotional states throughout the show?
- Which character/s do you identify with or empathize with and why?
- Which characters remind you of someone in your life?
- What do you think is more difficult to perform, Drama or Comedy, and why?
- Describe the design elements from the show: set, props, costumes, music. Be specific as possible: what did you see, hear, feel and experience? How did the set, props, costumes, and music contribute to the impact of the show? How do these design elements inform the storytelling and how do they make you feel as an audience member? (*Refer to the interview with Set Designer Todd Rosenthal on p.6!*)
- What are the elements of a successful comedic bit/joke? How did "The Rule of Three" discussed on p. 24 show up in the show?
- Think about your childhood and youth. Who were your comedy influences, both professional and in your own life? What/who inspired you or introduced you to humor? What were those early experiences with comedy like?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BE educated on different types of jokes for all ages at <https://tinyurl.com/3yrhuh6h>

DISCOVER more about writing sketch comedy at <https://tinyurl.com/ybwafys9>

LEARN more at the ultimate guide to Improv with 101 tips, strategies, and tools at <https://tinyurl.com/yf37evu2>

FOLLOW the steps to writing a joke at <https://tinyurl.com/5bwm98s3>

KNOW how to write a joke at <https://tinyurl.com/ytspcjyd>

READ about the hidden formula behind almost every joke on Late Night at <https://tinyurl.com/528jxxh>.

SEE the 50 best comedy sketches of the previous decade at <https://tinyurl.com/5n9x43sw>

TEXT or **CALL "988"** nationwide to connect directly to the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

UNDERSTAND the 10 comedy terms that every actor should know at <https://tinyurl.com/ytmxwm>

VISIT the Los Angeles Public Library to find and read more plays. Find your local library at <https://lapl.org>

WATCH the film version *Noises Off* starring Carol Burnett, Michael Caine and Christopher Reeve on your favorite streaming service. *Noises Off* (1992) on IMDb: <https://tinyurl.com/r5ab696p>

GET LIT: WAITING FOR GODOT

Geffen Playhouse Education & Community Engagement has partnered with the Los Angeles-based nonprofit Get Lit. Get Lit ignites student engagement, literacy, and young voices around the globe using the power of spoken word, technology, and community. Get Lit - Words Ignite is striving to change LA's literacy rate & arts scene into a grassroots wonderland, one teen poet at a time. Through classic and slam poetry, the power of spoken word, technology, and community they ignite a love of words and introduce teens to great works of literature. They respond with their own original poems and perform them all over the world.

Ultimately, Get Lit's goal is to improve students' writing and speaking skills. Through their program they also develop self-confidence and unbreakable friendships and collaborations.

Each study guide this season will spotlight written response pieces to Geffen Playhouse productions, crafted by students enrolled in Get Lit Players literacy programs. Get Lit receives complimentary tickets to all Geffen Playhouse Gil Cates Theater shows as part of our Lights Up & Access Community Engagement Programs.

The poems *Beneath the Tree* by Naomi Farkas & *hoW liFe is* by Marvin Rivera on the following page were written in response to the Geffen Playhouse's production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, presented Nov. 6th - Dec. 15th, 2024.



RAINN WILSON & AASIF MANDVI IN *WAITING FOR GODOT*
PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH



NAOMI FARKAS, poet (*she/they*)

Naomi is a student and aspiring storyteller. She has had her poetry published in multiple places including the *Los Angeles Press*, *Stone Soup Magazine*, *Gaia Lit* and *Unum E Pluribus: An Anthology of Youth Poems*. They've performed in the 2019 Get Lit Gala and had their work included in the Queer Permeable Poetry hotline. They're a current member of the youth poetry team the Get Lit Players. They are a writer and critic for the online publication *Gia On the Move*. They are a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community, advocate for mental health, and trauma survivor. You can find her wandering the aisles of your local library, procrastinating and daydreaming.



MARVIN RIVERA, poet (*he/him*)

Marvin Rivera, is a Get Lit Creative Lab Performance Pathway alumni and student at California State University - Los Angeles. Marvin is currently studying Mechanical Engineering, but at heart, is a creative that loves poetry, theatre, and writing.

The next Get Lit written response will be to Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* and will be shared in the study guide for Geffen's upcoming show: a.k. payne's *Furlough's Paradise*, presented April 16th - May 18th, 2025.

GETLIT



SCAN the QR code to the left to see Get Lit's performances, interviews and behind-the-scenes tomfoolery at their Youtube page.

Beneath the Tree

By Naomi Farkas

The tears of the world are a constant quantity.
For each one who begins to weep somewhere else
another stops.
The same is true of the laugh.

- **Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot***

When your laugh peters out
someone, somewhere, on the other side of the world
has begun to chuckle.

When you feel gripped with sudden sadness
someone, somewhere has forgotten to mourn.

The most certain thing we know as humans is that
nothing is certain.

We, creatures of flesh and bone and nerve endings,
neural tissue firing synapses to convince us of the
delusion of our existence.

We're just overgrown spoonfuls of cosmic soup, rotting
inside ourselves.
There is comedy in tragedy, and tragedy in everything.

When a tree is cut open, we count its rings,
quantifying its age by the years spent soaking sunlight
through soil.
Maybe life can only be truly measured after it's over.

It's lonely, living like this,
Carving meaning from stone with only your fingernails,
bracing yourself against the harsh winds of time.

We are united in our loneliness, significant in our
collective insignificance.
There's hope in the utter hopelessness that is this cold
cold world.

We are, all of us, waiting for Godot to come.

hoW liFe is

By Marvin Rivera

A travesty, a tragedy
A bit of absurdity,
And a lot of uncertainty
But that is unfortunately
How life is spent
Waiting for it
To come
To an end.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE & CASTING DIRECTOR, PHYLLIS SCHURINGA

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

I am an Artistic Associate and Casting Director at the Geffen. I've worked here since May, 2001.

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

Most specifically, I was the Casting Director at Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago before moving to LA. I started there as an intern with a lot of opportunity to get to know all aspects of that very young theater company. I read plays for Jeff Perry, the Artistic Director at the time, I worked Front of House and in the Box Office, I directed *Cowboy Mouth* a late night show with the second company, I was Terry Kinney's Assistant Director for *Fool for Love* with Billy Peterson and Rondi Reed. When Randy Arney became the Artistic Director he asked me to be his assistant.

What are your primary responsibilities as the Casting Director?

As the Casting Director I'm responsible for guiding the process, mostly working with a director and a playwright, offering suggestions, getting information on prospects, helping to clarify needs/requirements. Every day I feel the responsibility of casting actors who are collaborative and kind as well as talented.

What key skills and disposition are important to have as a Casting Director?

Every Casting Director has their own way of working. I make suggestions, but the director defines the needs of each role and chooses the actor who will be the most successful in this specific production under their direction. So I must understand a director's way of working. I need a reliable memory



for actors I've met and seen over the years. I need to be able to evaluate an actors work, to define strengths and weaknesses.

Was there a pivotal moment when you realized you wanted a life in the arts?

When I was a high school teacher directing the school plays, I felt the most joy when those young actors stood in front of their audiences and felt the success of truthful storytelling. That and seeing John Malkovich and Jeff Perry in *TRUE WEST* at Steppenwolf. I had no idea acting could be that immediate and powerful and creative and funny and shocking. I wanted to be part of that.

What do you find most challenging about your work?

Getting to know actors well enough. So often we only see a sliver of what actors can do. I need to be able to identify potential, to honestly evaluate every performance.

What do you find most rewarding?

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Seeing the final product. When the work of the actors combines with the work of the playwright, designers and the director and the relationship between the actors on stage blossoms into something far greater than any individual. This does not always happen. In fact, it rarely happens, but when it does, a play can change your life.

What was one of your favorite shows to work on?

This is difficult, there have been so many. Maybe it's *The Inheritance Part 1 And Part 2* by Matthew Lopez. There was something special about that story, about what one generation of gay men leaves to the next. The play had already run in London and New York and at the Geffen, we had Stephen Daldry's production, but with Mike Donohue directing. Our cast was unique to the Geffen. We started casting and then the pandemic put everything on hold. After a few false starts, we put together a cast of 14 wonderful actors, 8 equally wonderful understudies and 15 amazing extras and together we navigated our work in this post-pandemic world. The work of this team at this time was something I'll never forget.



SCAN this QR code to watch videos from American Theatre Wing's Masterclass series on different jobs in American Theater. Stage Managers, Wig Makers, Scenic Designers, Front of House staff, Marketing Directors and many other people work behind the scenes to bring a show to life! If you are interested in a career in the arts and work behind the scenes, learn more here. #theater #jobs #alifeinthearts #getintotheatre #americantheatrewing #career #behindthescenes

A CO-PRODUCTION WITH STEPPENWOLF



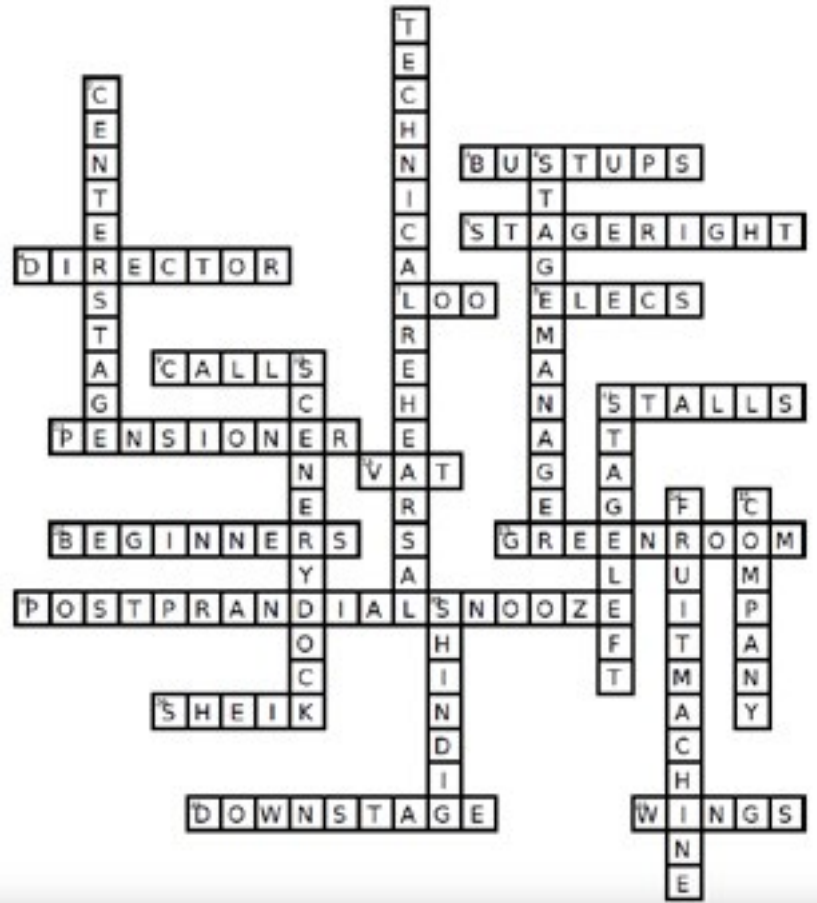
This production of *Noises Off* is a Co-Production with Steppenwolf Theater Company in Chicago. The cast and creative team rehearsed and performed the show in the fall of 2024 in Chicago, before bringing the show to Los Angeles. The cast includes Steppenwolf Ensemble members: Audrey Francis, Francis Guinan, Ora Jones and James Vincent Meredith. Geffen Artistic Director Tarell Alvin McCraney is also an ensemble member at Steppenwolf, with past productions of his plays: *Choir Boy*, *Head of Passes*, *In the Red and Brown Water*, *MS. BLAKK FOR PRESIDENT*, *The Brother/Sister Plays*, and *The Brothers Size*. Artistic Associate, Phyllis Schuringa was the Casting Director at Steppenwolf before moving to LA.

The Steppenwolf ensemble first began performing in the mid-1970s in the basement of a Highland Park, IL church, the ambitious brainchild of three high school and college friends: Jeff Perry, Terry Kinney and Gary Sinise. Fast forward nearly 50 years and the Steppenwolf Theatre Company has become the nation's premier ensemble theatre with 49 members who are among the top actors, playwrights and directors in the field.

Today, the company's artistic force remains rooted in the original vision of its founders: an artist-driven theatre, whose vitality is defined by its appetite for bold and innovative work. Every aspect of Steppenwolf is rooted in its Ensemble ethos, from the intergenerational artistic programming to the multi-genre performance series *LookOut*, to the nationally recognized work of Steppenwolf Education and Engagement which serves nearly 15,000 teens annually. While grounded in the Chicago community, more than 40 original Steppenwolf productions have enjoyed success nationally and internationally, including Broadway, Off-Broadway, London, Sydney, Galway and Dublin. Steppenwolf also holds accolades that include the National Medal of Arts, 12 Tony Awards, and more. Led by Artistic Directors Glenn Davis and Audrey Francis, Executive Director Brooke Flanagan and Board of Trustees Chair, Keating Crown — Steppenwolf continually redefines the landscape of acting and performance.



A NOISES OFF VOCAB CROSSWORD ANSWER KEY



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MAX STEWART, RICK HOLMES, AMANDA FINK
PHOTO BY MICHAEL BROSILOW
COURTESY OF STEPPENWOLF THEATER COMPANY

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APPLY BY APRIL 4, 2025—SPACE IS LIMITED!

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Geffen Playhouse is offering a **FREE** six-week, creative writing workshop for artists ages 18 to 24 who seek to grow as writers and theater makers. Guided by two Geffen Education Teaching Artists, participants will develop their voice through writing, revising, and receiving critical feedback.

The 12 participants will meet at the theater for weekly sessions to create their own short composition. These pieces will be shared in a live presentation for invited friends & family at Geffen Playhouse on Saturday, May 10th, 2025, at 1pm.



NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS
APPLY BY MARCH 7, 2025 – SPACE IS LIMITED!

To apply and for more information, visit geffenplayhouse.org/storytelling

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