

John Lithgow Stories by Heart

Featuring the work of P.G. Wodehouse

January 4 – February 13, 2011
Mark Taper Forum

John Lithgow. PHOTO BY NIGEL PARRY.

Welcome to Center Theatre Group and *Stories by Heart*. Armed with only an armchair and some yellowed pages, Tony Award® winner John Lithgow tells you not the story of his life, but the STORIES of his life.

INDELIBLE STORIES spun by the likes of P.G. Wodehouse. Stories lovingly—and expertly—dramatized by his parents and grandmother, handed down from generation to generation. In Lithgow's adroit hands, any story is its own theatrical masterpiece, brimming with peculiar characters, humor, plot twists and—most of all—Lithgow's inimitable charm, stagecraft and genuine affection for the tales and the storytellers who introduced them to him some 60 years ago.

Before we tell you more, take a moment and think about stories that have been important in your own life. Who told you the story? How did the story make you feel? Why did the story matter to you? Why have human beings needed to tell and to listen to stories throughout time? What is the power of a story?

Turn the page to explore *Stories by Heart* and the ways in which stories have shaped actor John Lithgow and his family. Reflect on the idea of stories and laughter as medicine. Discover the worlds of author P.G. Wodehouse and British humor. Ask yourself what it really means to do something “by heart”.

Theatre raises questions and challenges audience members to discover their own answers and perhaps, additional questions. See what questions this information raises for you and what questions and answers the performance provides. Thank you so much for joining us for *Stories by Heart*. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre!

“AND
THEN
ONE DAY...
...AS THEY SAY IN
A GOOD STORY.”

—John Lithgow, *Stories by Heart*

ABOUT
Stories by Heart



Among John Lithgow's many talents, he is an expert character actor.

He defies typecasting with his ability to play almost anyone — from a kindly transsexual in *The World According to Garp*, to a wacky space alien in *3rd Rock from the Sun*, to a terrifying serial killer in *Dexter*. In *Stories by Heart*, he does something completely different and unexpected — he plays himself.

WITH AN ARMCHAIR, a table, a standing lamp and a stool, wearing a simple black suit and button-up shirt, Lithgow shares with the audience a very personal story. His style is conversational, his dialogue improvised. Completely breaking through the “fourth wall,” he addresses the audience directly, often asking questions that he fully expects to hear answered.

He begins by giving a bit of family history. His father, Arthur Lithgow, had a life-long passion for telling stories that began in childhood. Lithgow describes a common scene from his father's childhood, in which toddler Arthur would gather with his siblings around their mother, Ina, devouring the poems she recited from memory night after night. During times of hardship, those stories were the children's salvation. Ina's storytelling planted in Arthur a deep respect for the art and power of a well-told story, a respect he would pass on to his children.

Lithgow describes his father's adult life as “restless and prolific.” A man completely committed to the theatre, particularly the works of Shakespeare, Arthur was drawn back and forth across the northeastern states establishing outdoor summer programs, such as the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival, which 50 years later is still one of the most respected theatre festivals in the country. Lithgow refers to

him as the “Johnny Appleseed” of theatre: a nomad who brought theatre to places that didn't have it, then moved on to the next place.

This did create a kind of rootlessness for his wife and four children. Moving often, being surrounded by new people and immersed in a world of theatre was, in many ways, a challenging environment for the children. But Lithgow remembers those times fondly, as adventures. His childhood, he says, “was wonderful...because of stories.” Arthur did for his children what Ina had done for hers — he told them tales they devoured.

LITHGOW SHARES WITH US HIS FAMILY LEGACY — THE DEEP, RICH, PASSIONATE RESPECT FOR A STORY, WELL TOLD.

Every night, he'd read to them from *Tellers of Tales*, a collection of 100 short stories from around the world. It didn't matter what city or state they found themselves in, their bedtime stories didn't change. Arthur could tell any one of those stories, play any of the characters, and every time the children would squeal with laughter. *Tellers of Tales* was their family bible. The pleasure and consistency they received from those stories, from that book, gave them roots.

After a lifetime of going wherever theatre called, Arthur retired with wife Sarah in Amherst, Massachusetts. In 2002,

at the age of 86, Arthur became ill and required surgery. Because Lithgow was, as he says, the only one of his siblings “between engagements” at the time, it fell on him to move in with his parents to help them through Arthur's recovery. What shocked Lithgow was not his father's physical frailty — that was to be expected at his age after a major surgery. Rather, he noticed immediately that his father's spirit was deflated; that Arthur, a normally vivacious man, had “fallen silent.” Arthur's depression naturally affected wife Sarah and both of them were fading.

Overwhelmed and desperate for inspiration, Lithgow happened upon a treasure: the original family copy of *Tellers of Tales*. Remembering the joy its stories gave him and his siblings, he brought it to his parents and asked what story they'd like to hear. They chose P.G. Wodehouse's *Uncle Fred Flits By*, a story that had been a childhood favorite but that Lithgow had completely forgotten until then. He opened the book and read, and as he did so, for the first time in ages, Arthur laughed. “A helpless, girly laugh,” Lithgow remembers. It was the most wonderful sound he'd ever heard and an unequivocal demonstration of the power and necessity of story. Uncle Fred revived Arthur's spirit and brought laughter to the last year of his life.

Taking *Tellers of Tales* in hand, Lithgow opens the book and begins to read “Uncle Fred Flits By.” He reads the story to us, as Arthur read it to him when he was a child, and in the spirit of Ina reciting poetry to Arthur when he was a child. In this way, Lithgow shares with us his family legacy — the deep, rich, passionate respect for a story, well told. ●

“Stories tell us of what we already knew and forgot, and remind us of what we haven't yet imagined.” —Anne Watson

A ONE-MAN SHOW

“You have to understand, my dears, that the shortest distance between truth and a human being is a story.”

—Anthony de Mello

“For me, working onstage is much more exhausting than all the other mediums, but it's also much more thrilling...There's nothing like spending an evening with an audience every night.” —John Lithgow, *Playbill.com*

THERE ARE MANY THINGS that make John Lithgow's *Stories by Heart* unique. It was created and developed by the actor we see performing it. The bulk of the text is a short story read verbatim, not “adapted” for the stage. And the actor is not playing a fictional character; he is playing himself.

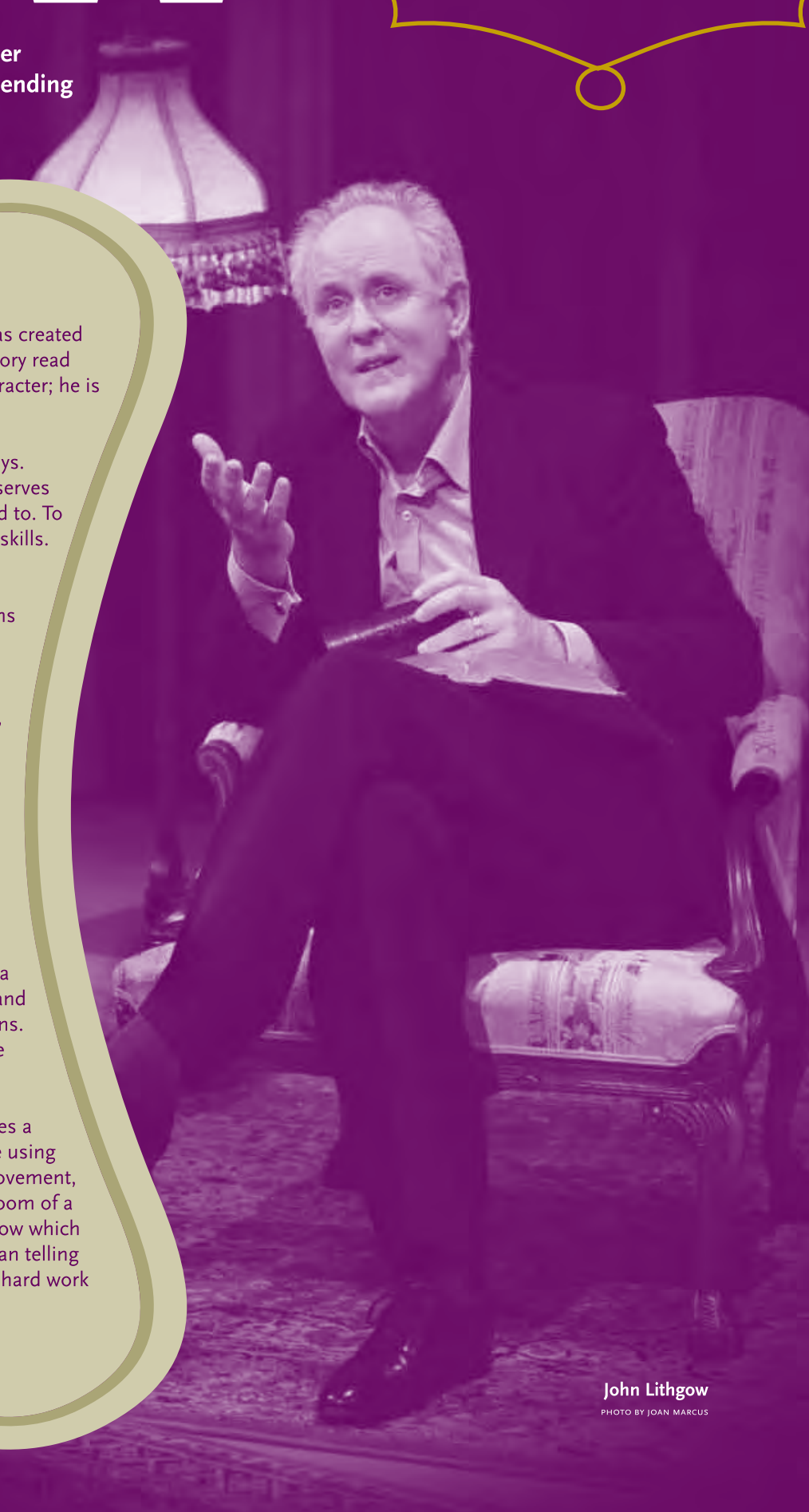
Those things alone make *Stories by Heart* different than most traditional plays. However, the way Lithgow has chosen to tell this story is significant and deserves a closer look. For the audience, it all appears so simple — and it's supposed to. To accomplish this, however, requires an impressive variety of techniques and skills.

Stories by Heart is a “one-man show” — just Lithgow, no other actors. It is similar to a monologue or aside — common theatrical conventions in which one character in a play speaks their private thoughts aloud for the audience. At times Lithgow's style of addressing the audience is reminiscent of stand-up comedy. The balance he maintains between memorized and improvised material gives the show a casual, spontaneous feel. And, like stand-up comedians, Lithgow speaks directly to the audience. His questions, however, are not rhetorical; he wants to hear the response.

In a more traditional play, the text and actor are not alone on stage. The audience sees and hears the actor delivering their lines on a set, wearing a costume and make-up. These visual cues help tell the story by reinforcing when, where and who the characters are.

In *Stories by Heart*, Lithgow is alone on an undressed stage with a chair, a stool, a table, a lamp and a book. For a “costume” he wears a dark suit and button-up shirt. Yet he manages to play eleven characters in four locations. It is an impressive feat and one that proves Lithgow's great skill; that the audience always knows who he's playing and where he is.

The tools Lithgow uses are his voice and body. For every character he creates a specific voice by combining accent, pitch and speed; and a specific body type using gesture, posture and facial expression. A great mime, with just speech and movement, Lithgow takes us from a stuffy gentlemen's club, to a rainstorm, to the living room of a suburban villa. His physical and vocal choices are so exact and consistent, we know which character he has become as soon as we see or hear them. It looks effortless: a man telling people a funny story from a book. That it seems simple is the art; that it requires hard work and great creativity is the truth. ●



John Lithgow
PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS

Discovery Guide

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THE WORLD OF P.G. WODEHOUSE

To be a humorist, one must see the world out of focus. —P. G. Wodehouse

Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse (OCT. 15, 1881 – FEB. 14, 1975), known as “Plum” to his friends, was perhaps one of the most prolific English writers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Over the course of 73 years he wrote 96 books (including novels and short story collections), 15 plays and the lyrics to more than 30 musical comedies. His subject was mainly the upper classes — both English and American — whose own eccentricities often cause their undoing.

He considered his work light-hearted fiction, but close reading reveals a comic genius that buried his characters under multiple layers of ridiculous complications before guiding them to the inevitable happy ending. Many of his works, including “Uncle Fred Flits By” (1935), feature friends or relatives who drag a character into precarious situations, often involving acts of impersonation and a good-natured disregard for the law. The situations

seem impossible to resolve without utter catastrophe, but Wodehouse always finds his way to a clever and comedic conclusion.

Wodehouse grew up and went to school in England, but spent most of his adult life in France and the United States. While living in France at the beginning of World War II, he was taken from his home by the Nazis and interned for a year. In camp, he used his comedic gifts to entertain fellow prisoners. The German government convinced him to develop them into a series of radio broadcasts, which led to accusations of treason from his native England. Ultimately, investigation by the British government concluded that he may have shown a naïve lapse in judgment, but he was not a traitor. Although exonerated, Wodehouse moved his family permanently to the United States and never stepped foot in his native England again. He died at the age of 94 in his home in Remsenburg, New York. ●



THE STORY WITHIN THE STORY: “UNCLE FRED FLITS BY”

SYNOPSIS

“Uncle Fred Flits By” marks the first appearance of two of P.G. Wodehouse’s most loved characters: Fredrick Altamont Cornwallis “Uncle Fred” Twistleton, 5th Earl of Ickenham, and his nephew Reginald “Pongo” Twistleton. Wodehouse would go on to feature the pair in four additional novels.

The story begins in the dining room of an exclusive club for London’s wealthiest gentlemen. A club member, referred to as Crumpet, and his guest observe a haggard, wild-eyed young man who, “If he had a mind, there was something on it.” Crumpet identifies Pongo Twistleton and offers his guest a very reasonable explanation for Pongo’s despair — the impending visit of his infamous Uncle Fred, who doesn’t come to town often, but when he does chaos inevitably ensues. As proof, Crumpet relates the details of Uncle Fred’s most recent visit.

On this occasion, Pongo is surprised and delighted when Uncle Fred proposes they visit a home in the suburbs — Mitching Hill — that used to belong to the family. Pongo agrees wholeheartedly, relieved not to be dragged to the dog races or any other such nefarious destination. After all, it’s the suburbs — what trouble could Uncle Fred possibly get into?

In Mitching Hill much of the day passes without incident, as Uncle Fred nostalgically points out the locations of his boyhood antics. All is peaceful, that is, until it begins to rain. Pongo and Uncle Fred seek shelter in a home’s doorway, which for Uncle Fred is clearly

not shelter enough. He rings the doorbell. Pretending to be a veterinarian called to clip the household parrot’s nails, Uncle Fred finesses his way past the servant and into the warm, dry home. At once, the shenanigans Pongo had been dreading all along begin.

Uncle Fred begins by convincing the servant he’s a veterinarian, but doesn’t stop there. When relatives drop by who have never previously met the owner of the house, Uncle Fred assumes that role. When face to face with the actual owner, he pretends to be a concerned neighbor. Uncle Fred effortlessly assumes new identities for each new situation, and likewise creates them for his nervous, powerless nephew. Pongo must pretend to be a veterinary anesthetist; the homeowner’s son; a deaf, mute parrot expert; and finally a lard and butter salesman, switching from one role to the next at head-spinning speeds.

In assuming these personas, ostensibly to avoid the rain, Uncle Fred inserts himself and Pongo into the extremely personal business of a family he is not a member of and has not, in fact, ever even met. Why go to all this trouble? An unexpected rainstorm started it all, but as Uncle Fred sees it, this is his way of making the world a better place. He explains, “On these visits of mine to the metropolis, my boy, I always make it my aim, if possible, to spread sweetness and light...I ask myself, how can I leave this foul hole a better and happier foul hole than I found it? And if I see a chance, I grab it.”

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

Crumpet, member of Drones Club

Guest, luncheon guest of Crumpet

Pongo Twistleton, nephew of Uncle Fred

IMPERSONATES: Mr. Walkinshaw, veterinary anesthetist Douglas Roddis, son of Mr. Roddis Percy Frensham, lard and butter importer

Uncle Fred, Earl of Ickenham, uncle of Pongo

IMPERSONATES: Local veterinarian Mr. Roddis, owner of The Cedars Mr. J.G. Bulstrode, neighbor to Mr. Roddis

Grey Parrot, Roddis family pet

Female Servant, Roddis family servant

Wilberforce Robinson, eel-jellier, fiancé to Julia

Connie Parker, sister of Mrs. Roddis, mother of Julia

Claude Parker, husband of Connie, father of Julia

Julia Parker, niece of the Roddises

Mr. Roddis, owner of The Cedars

Uncle Fred

Fredrick Altamont Cornwallis Twistleton, aka Lord Ickenham, aka Uncle Fred, lives fully, believes nothing is impossible and delights in causing mischief despite his age (62) and station to him as breathing. He particularly enjoys grand charades, impersonating both real people and fictional ones. In pursuit of fun, he frequently gets himself thrown out of establishments, if not arrested. He is also generous, charismatic and equitable. In the end, Uncle Fred is ultimately well meaning and doesn’t see his little schemes as cons; he sincerely believes he’s helping people (and often he does).

Pongo

Quite unlike his Uncle, Pongo Twistleton is sensitive, honest and unassuming. He sees rules as necessary and traditional conventions as essential to maintaining order. According to his friends, “Nobody is more of a whale on correctness and not doing what’s not done than Pongo.” Uncle Fred’s actions go against everything he believes in, and yet he does nothing to stop them. Lying causes him extreme mental stress but swept up by Uncle Fred’s boldness he doesn’t tell the truth despite many opportunities. He doesn’t even break character. Because for all his rigidity and caution, something bonds Pongo to his uncle and compels him to go along with whatever scheme Fred concocts — no matter how senseless, ridiculous or borderline criminal. ●

FRED OR PONGO?

Uncle Fred and his nephew Pongo represent two different approaches to life. Uncle Fred routinely breaks the rules, while Pongo tries his best to follow the rules.

► Do you have any relatives like Uncle Fred? Is there a “loopy” relative or friend that brings adventure or maybe even a little chaos, whenever they are around? Is there someone like Pongo in your life? Does this person help you follow the rules or make you want to break them?

► Do you consider yourself to be more of a Fred or a Pongo? What are the advantages to living life as Uncle Fred does? What are the pitfalls? How about for Pongo?

BRITISH COMEDY

COMEDY IS UNIVERSAL. Everyone likes to laugh, but not everyone laughs at the same things. In any crowd roaring with laughter, there can be heard a voice or two whispering, “I don’t see what’s so funny about that.” Humor is different from person to person; it can also be different across cultures.

There are subtle differences between American and British humor that can make it difficult for American audiences to “get” the jokes. The first and most obvious hurdle is linguistic. Both Americans and Brits technically speak the same language, and for the most part there is no need for translation; but unique slang, cultural references and accents make it likely that some of the comedy may go over Americans’ heads.

Also, some of the themes in British humor don’t have the same meaning to American audiences. A common target of British humorists — P.G. Wodehouse is no exception — is the stereotypically haughty and hypocritical upper-class. Granted, snobbery and classism are not uniquely British. What is, however, is the source of the elites’ power: England’s ancient and deeply entrenched class system.

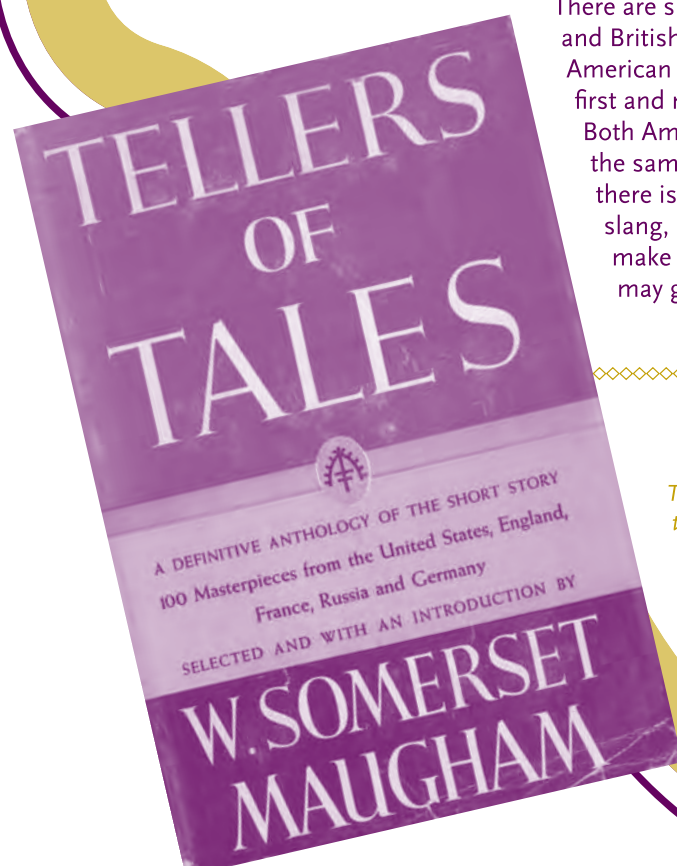
In America, the combination of democratic and capitalist philosophies make it possible for someone who comes from nothing to work their way to the top of the social ladder. England’s class structure, on the other hand, is based on centuries of family lineage. In the world of Wodehouse, the characters Connie and Claude Parker illustrate this perfectly. They are horrified by their daughter’s choice of husband — a young working class man who’s hoping to make it big someday, but for now makes his living as an eel-jellier. The Parkers fear what their relatives will say about such

a match. Hilarity ensues when Uncle Fred “knocks them down a peg” by revealing (or making up?) sordid details in the Parker family history and the source of their fortune. Characters like the Parkers — pompous and obsessed with ancestry — are again and again the butt of the English humorists’ jokes.

While poking fun at the upper classes, British humorists also mock the “Keep Calm and Carry On” cultural mentality: the British tendency to control one’s emotions no matter what happens. Pongo especially personifies this philosophy. What makes Uncle Fred extraordinary is how little he adheres to it. There is great comedy in their intersection — Uncle Fred creates chaos and Pongo internally fights hysteria while keeping a “stiff upper lip”. ●

“I know I was writing stories when I was five. I don’t know what I did before that. Just loafed I suppose.”

—P. G. Wodehouse



Tellers of Tales: 100 Short Stories from the United States, England, France, Russia, and Germany. Selected and with an Introduction by W. Somerset Maugham. Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.

“Why do all of us want to hear stories? Why do some of us want to tell them?”

—John Lithgow, *Stories by Heart*

► **Why do human beings need stories? What can a story give an individual, a family or a community? How do stories matter in your own life? Would you rather tell a story or listen to a story? What is your favorite way to receive a story? Do you prefer to listen, read or see the story? How do each of these shape your experience of the story?**



Arthur Lithgow reads with his children (from left to right) Robin, John, and David. COURTESY OF THE LITHGOW FAMILY.

FAMILY STORIES

FOR JOHN LITHGOW AND HIS FAMILY, stories traveled with them as they criss-crossed the country.

How can stories create a sense of home even if you have to leave home? Are there stories that have traveled with your family? Is there a story that has helped you better understand your family, your parents or your heritage?

The Lithgow family has a legacy of stories, words and theatre handed down from one generation to the next. Lithgow values and creates art because his father and grandmother told him stories.

Is there a legacy that has been passed down in your family and helped shape you? What would you say is most valued in your family? Music, food, faith, laughter, art, education, hard work, kindness....

What is a legacy that you would like to pass along — perhaps to a younger sibling, to a friend, to your own children?

What do you value that you would like to share today and with future generations? ●

“LISTENING

IS A MAGNETIC AND STRANGE THING, A CREATIVE FORCE. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand.”

—Brenda Ueland, American feminist and author (1891-1985)

► **What does it take to really listen? To a person? To a story? How do you know when someone is really listening to you?**



In West Africa, when a person in the village becomes sick, the Healer will ask, “When was the last time that you sang? When was the last time that you danced? When was the last time that you shared a story?” —Allison Wolf

Stories can be pure entertainment. They can also be life changing. In *Stories by Heart*, John Lithgow recalls a time when he used the art of storytelling to lift his father’s spirits after an operation. Have you ever told a story to another person in order for them to feel better? What was the story? Who did you tell it to?

Has anyone ever told you a story that made you feel better? What was the story? Who told it to you? How did it affect you?

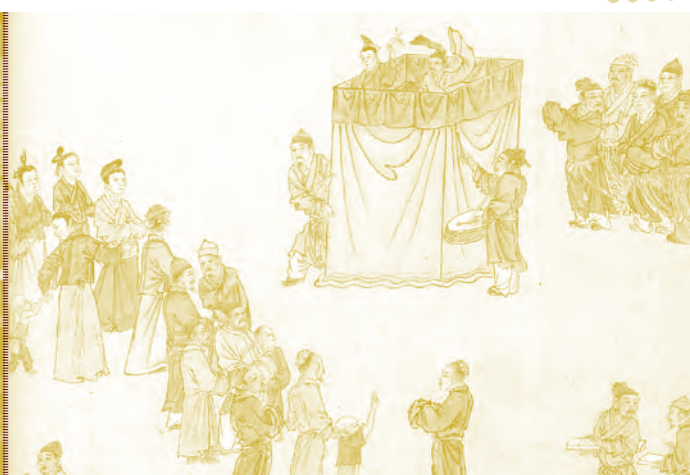
How can a story act as medicine in a person’s life? How are stories healing?



A storyteller at Jerusalem’s Citadel reciting from the *Arabian Nights*, 1911.



Albert Anker, *Der Grossvater erzählt eine Geschichte*, 1884.



Puppeteers draw a crowd, Yuan Dynasty, 14th century.



“There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you.”

—Maya Angelou

A CONVERSATION WITH John Lithgow

AND CENTER THEATRE GROUP TEACHING ARTIST Marcos Najera

Marcos Najera: *How would you describe your job as an actor to a young person?*

John Lithgow: What I do for a living answers a need that everybody has. Everybody needs to hear stories. I don’t know why. I don’t know what we all get out of it. But we can’t live without it. We have to have stories. We all have to have our televisions or our rock songs or our country music songs or favorite movies and videos. And I am at the opposite end of that. I’m the one who delivers that. The closest I can get to finding out what that is: I feel like it’s emotional exercise. I’m in the job of helping people to feel their feelings more deeply. And to live life a little bit more fully. Just through the excitement of hearing stories. And that’s kind of what my evening is about, I sort of welcome them into my own life, my own history with stories. I tell them about my father and how he used to tell stories to me and my sisters and my brother when we were little kids. I even carry a book [*Tellers of Tales*] out on stage, which is the very book he used to use to read short stories to us when we were little kids.

And I tell [the audience] a couple of stories about [my father]. Including the fact that when he was an old, old man and very depressed because his health was failing, I got the idea of reading bedtime stories to him. And I read some of the very stories to him that he had read to me when I was a boy. And that is what gave me the idea of doing this show. Because one of the big entertainments of the show is my favorite story from when I was a child. And I do it as a one-man show.

So, in a sense although it’s an entertainment, it’s really a conversation with the audience just about me, my own feelings and their feelings too — about life and about storytelling.

Were you nervous about sharing something that many people might think was a private family moment or private family stories?

It kind of developed in stages. The story we are talking about is this fantastically funny story, a P.G. Wodehouse story, called “Uncle Fred Flits By,” which I read to my father, which made him laugh when he most needed to laugh. My first impulse was simply: memorize this story and entertain people with it. And that’s what I did. I learned the story and I gathered together about 20 of my friends just to sort of test it. See whether it was as good as I thought it was as an entertainment and a one-man monologue. People loved the story. But they especially loved my little introduction to the story, which is when I told my own history with it. And that’s when I began to think, “Well, maybe I have a full evening piece of theatre here.”

I’m in the job of helping people to feel their feelings more deeply. And to live life a little bit more fully. Just through the excitement of hearing stories.

And yes. I was nervous about it. I didn’t know whether I was sort of sharing a confidence, in sort of, breaking my trust with my father in a sense. But, the more I sort of opened it up and performed it for people, the more I realized I was

sharing something very personal that touched them very deeply. And by now, I have great confidence with it and I even feel wonderful that I’m paying tribute to my father. And sort of bringing him back to life for people.

How did you know your father needed to laugh?

I don’t know. I was just trying anything. I was looking after him and my mom. And I knew unless he cheered up, he was just not going to survive. He was an old man. And he was not well. And you’ve got to fight to stay alive at that age and you’ve got to want to live. And I had to help him find something to live for. And I just sort of stumbled on this idea. And it just so worked with him.

You know, the thing you began with asking me what it is I do for a living, I feel like I was at my very best that night. You know (laughing), the night I read this story to him. It was the best use I ever made of my ability.

What do you hope students get from this experience?

Well, I would love it to expand their notion of what theatre is and what theatre can do. After all, it is just me on stage with a chair and a table and a stool. I like to think of it as a kind of a magic act. To create that whole room, and each one of those seven or eight or nine characters. I want them to actually see it. And I do think of it as kind of a Houdini magic act. And to show them just how little it takes to create a piece of theatre.

I intend to take them by surprise. Just by virtue of the fact that they do live in such an information technology era, I think this will almost be more unusual for them than it might have been for students 40 years ago. To simply sit and watch a person talk for an

hour? But it’s my job to hold their attention and bring this whole world to life. I think I can do it. It’s going to be great!

What draws you to telling stories to young people? I know along with performing for youth, you’ve also written many children’s books.

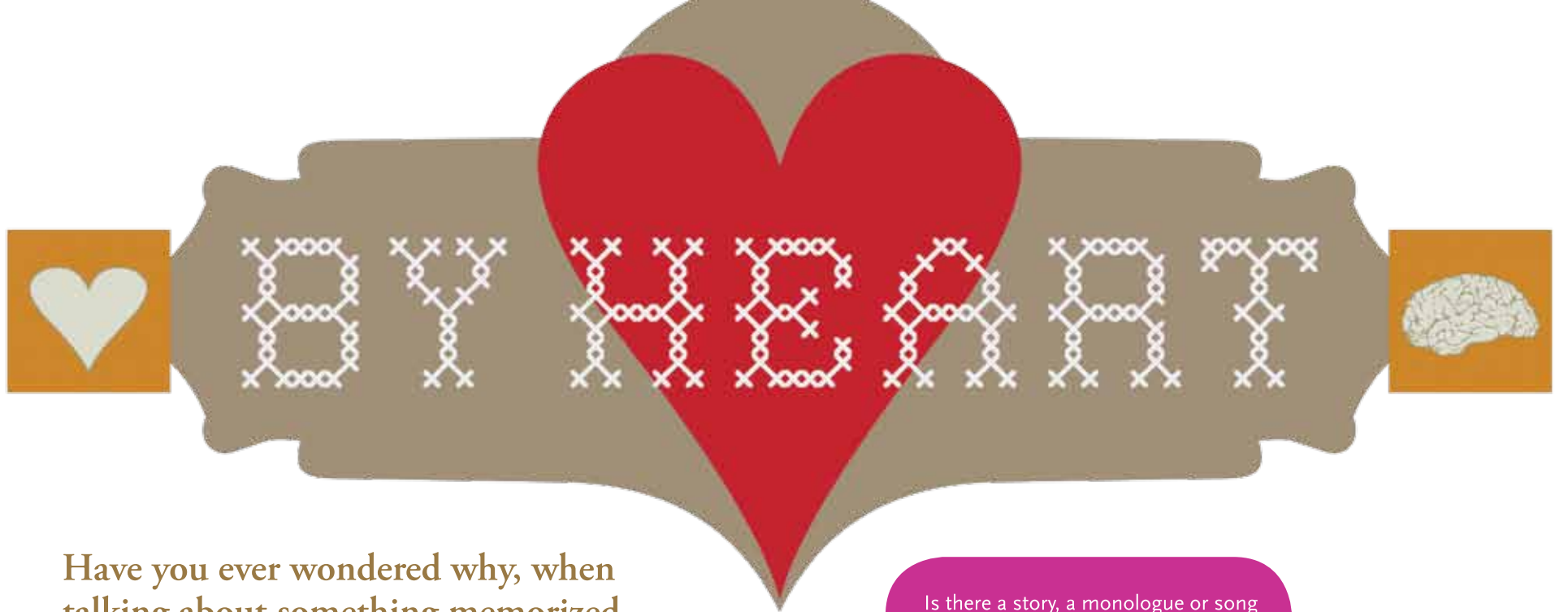
They are a fantastic audience. When you think about it, what an actor aspires to is a suspension. A willing suspension of disbelief. And with adults, you never quite achieve that. They always remember that they are sitting in a theatre and they are watching a piece of art, of artifice. They are watching something false, a false version of reality. Kids don’t have that problem. They go right into it, especially little kids. They just completely forget. They have no sense of irony or detachment. They will go with you all the way, and I just love that feeling.

Is there a story that you would like to be told if it was one of your last stories? What story would be your medicine that you would like to hear?

Oh boy, that’s a tough one. Oh gosh. Well, one of my favorite stories growing up was a scary story, “The Monkey’s Paw.” I refer to it in my piece, but of course I don’t perform it. And that’s a very scary story, I’m not sure why it is that we all like to be scared. But I guess that’s the one I’d love to go out with. I just remember it as a kid, being the most suspenseful and exciting story. Maybe the next edition of *Stories by Heart* I’ll memorize “The Monkey’s Paw!”

Thank you for your time. Is there anything you would like the students to know before they come to see your show?

Well, just tell them I can’t wait to meet them! ●



Have you ever wondered why, when talking about something memorized, you say you know it “by heart”?

The earliest recorded use of the phrase is in Geoffrey Chaucer’s 1374 poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*. We can assume people were using it in regular conversation before that. But where does the phrase come from, and what does it mean to us today?

Ancient Greek scientists considered the heart our most important organ. They assigned to it most of the functions we now know are the purview of the brain: intelligence, emotion and memory. In their view, when something was memorized, it was literally recorded in the heart. By the time the brain was discovered to be the seat of these functions, the phrase “by heart” was already part of the vernacular.

There may be another reason why we don’t say “by head” or “by brain.” Memories that have emotional significance are different from facts (like times tables or state capitals) in that we experience them with more than just our brains. We remember what happened, but we might also remember what the weather was like that day, if someone was cooking and if the smell made us hungry, or if someone important to us wasn’t there and we missed them. “By brain” may be the physiologically correct way to describe John Lithgow’s *Stories by Heart*, but upon seeing it we can’t help but feel how deeply these beloved memories reside in his heart. ●

Is there a story, a monologue or song that you have memorized “by heart”? Did that piece have an emotional or heart connection for you that made it easier to memorize?

Are there things other than memorization that we do “by heart”? What is something that you do or would like to do for yourself or for someone else “by heart”?

Do you know a person who lives “by heart”? What is it like to be around them? How would our world be different if more people lived from their hearts rather than from their heads?



About Us

Center Theatre Group’s mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

Education and Engagement

Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

Center Theatre Group’s education and community partnership programs advance the organization’s mission in three key ways:

Audiences: Inspiring current and future audiences to discover theatre and its connection to their lives;

Artists: Investing in the training, support and development of emerging, young artists and young arts professionals who are the future of our field; and

Arts Education Leadership: Contributing to the community-wide efforts to improve the quality and scope of arts education in Los Angeles.

Education and Community Partnerships

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Funder Credits

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