You’re going to see one of the most celebrated plays originated in the city of Los Angeles—one that had its World premiere at the Taper in 1978 before becoming the first Chicana/o play ever to run on Broadway. Told from the perspective of Henry Reyna, a wrongfully imprisoned youth, and his personified conscience El Pachuco, Zoot Suit draws from the American immigrant experience during World War II, the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial of 1942, and the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. Henry and the other members of the 38th Street gang must navigate a landscape of racial intolerance, unjust law enforcement, and a discriminatory legal system as they are wrongly accused and convicted of murder. The story of their fight for freedom is a powerful example of cultural pride, creative spirit, and self-determination.

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE PLAY YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE IS A CONSTRUCT OF FACT AND FANTASY.”

—El Pachuco, Zoot Suit

ZOOT SUIT

Written And Directed By LUIS VALDEZ
THE PRESS HAS ALREADY TRIED AND CONVICTED US.

—HENRY, ZOOT SUIT

HOT OFF THE PRESS!

The job of a journalist has always been to report the truth and nothing but the truth, but journalists also have to sell newspapers (or, in the case of today’s digital journalists, get clicks and page views). In the 1890s, two rival newspaper companies began battling for readers with more and more sensational headlines, beginning a type of journalism that persists today called “yellow journalism.”

THE FASHION

The creation of the zoot suit has been traced to Harlem in the mid- to late-1930s. Its major characteristics include a “drape shape” where the dress jacket has a large collar, the jacket is oversized with broad shoulders, and in some cases, the hem reaches the wearer’s knees and even to the ankles. A full zoot suit includes a long chain extending to the knee and a fedora hat, sometimes with a feather attached.

What are some of the ways clothes define a person’s identity in today’s society?

Do you think it is fair to judge people based on their dress? Why or why not?

Have you ever had to change what you wear to feel safe or like you belong?

THE LANGUAGE

Zoot Suit uses many languages to communicate its story: the two main languages in the play are English and Spanish, but the play also uses a dialect known as Caló that originated in the Southwestern U.S. and borrows from English and Spanish as well as other indigenous languages. As with fashion, young people stitched different traditions together to form a new way of communicating that was uniquely and authentically pachucos' Caló survives today as a form of slang used primarily by Chicano/a youth. Listen for some of these words and others throughout the play.

YOUR VOCABULARY IS JUST FINE. BETTER THAN MOST.

—ALICE, ZOOT SUIT

THE STORY COMES HOME

EL TEATRO CAMPESINO

From its founding in 1965, El Teatro Campesino blazed the trail for today's Chicano/a theatrical productions in the United States. El Teatro Campesino’s mission is to create popular art in order to present a more authentic and accurate account of history, culture and reality. The company is known for a political style of theatre that uses overt, short political plays, plays based on Mexican and Mayan history and myths, and comedies, Mexican ballads that recount history from the common people’s perspective. Zoot Suit incorporates elements of all three of these forms to bring Chicano/a theatre to a wider audience.

Written by Guillermo Aviles-Rodriguez

LUIS VALDEZ

Luis Miguel Valdez is an American playwright, actor, writer, and film director. Born on June 26, 1940, in Dolores, California, he was the second oldest of 10 children born to migrant farm workers Francisco and Armanda Valdez. Valdez was raised in worker camps across California and started helping his parents pick crops in the fields at age six. In 1963, farm workers in Delano walked off of the grape fields in protest of low wages in what became the Delano grape strike led by César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, and Richard Chavez of the National Farmworkers Association. Valdez co-founded El Teatro Campesino on the picket lines to demonstrate the power of farm workers’ fight for equality. He is also known for both his play and film adaptation of Zoot Suit and his movie La Bamba.
WELCOME TO THE THEATRE!

Founded in 1967, Center Theatre Group, a nonprofit organization, is one of the largest and most active theatre companies in the nation, programming shows year-round at the Ahmanson Theatre and Mark Taper Forum in Downtown Los Angeles and the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Downtown Culver City.

WHERE will you be going the day of the show?
Zoot Suit will be performed in the Mark Taper Forum at The Music Center of Los Angeles, one of the largest performing arts centers in the country. Every seat is a fantastic seat at the Taper. Built with the sound quality and intimacy of ancient Greek theatres, even the back of the 736-seat house makes you feel like a part of the show.

WHY THEATRE?
At Center Theatre Group, we believe theatre creates an extraordinary connection between artists and audiences that only starts on our stages. Theatre creates the energy that feeds a city, a culture, and a society. Theatre reflects the community it serves.

Center Theatre Group is excited to share the power of live theatre with you. It is an art form that embodies all of the arts: performance, visual, creative movement, writing, music, video, and technology. Theatre weaves all of the arts together to tell stories about what it means to be a human being.

WHO will you meet and whose work will you see?
Theatre is a collaborative art form; it’s a team sport.

- The creative team: playwright, director, actors, designers (for the stage, sets, lights, costumes)
- The crew: stage manager, crew members (who run the lights and sound and move the set pieces), dressers/costumers, make-up artists
- The house: house manager, ushers, maintenance staff
- Theatre company: producers, educators, administrative staff

WHAT will happen once you arrive at the Mark Taper Forum?
When you arrive at the venue, Center Theatre Group staff will greet you.

Once you’re inside and seated, you’ll receive a brief introduction to the event before the house lights dim and the show begins. After the show, you will have the opportunity to discuss what excited and resonated with you about the play.

YOU ARE PART OF OUR COMMUNITY.

“If the last 50 years have taught us anything, it is that THEATRE IS A CREATOR OF COMMUNITY, and that community is the creator of theatre.”
—Luis Valdez

Special Thanks

A special thanks to Macy’s for its generous contribution to support the Student Matinee performances of Zoot Suit.

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