2019/20 SEASON
FIRST SEASON PRODUCTION
A PLAY IS A POEM
By Ethan Coen
Directed by Neil Pepe
World Premiere
Sep 11 – Oct 13, 2019

SECOND SEASON PRODUCTION
LATIN HISTORY FOR MORONS
Written by & Starring John Leguizamo
Directed by Tony Taccone
Sep 5 – Oct 20, 2019
Presented at the Ahmanson Theatre

OR
THE NEW ONE
Written & Performed by Mike Birbiglia
Directed by Seth Barrish
Oct 23 – Nov 24, 2019
Presented at the Ahmanson Theatre

THIRD SEASON PRODUCTION
AUGUST WILSON’S JITNEY
Directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson
Nov 22 – Dec 29, 2019

FOURTH SEASON PRODUCTION
WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MEANS TO ME
By Heidi Schreck
Directed by Oliver Butler
Jan 12 – Feb 16, 2020

FIFTH SEASON PRODUCTION
THE ANTIPODES
By Annie Baker
Directed by Lila Neugebauer
Mar 25 – Apr 26, 2020

SIXTH SEASON PRODUCTION
KING JAMES
By Rajiv Joseph
Directed by Anna D. Shapiro
World Premiere Production
Jul 29 – Aug 30, 2020
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Presents the World premiere of

A Play is A POEM

By Ethan Coen

Presented in association with Atlantic Theater Company

With

Ro Boddie         Max Casella
Peter Jacobson    Miriam Silverman
Saul Rubinek      CJ Wilson
Sam Vartholomeos  Nellie McKay

Original Music

Nellie McKay

Scenic Design

Riccardo Hernández

Hair & Wig Design

Charles G. LaPointe

Associate Artistic Director

Kelley Kirkpatrick

Costume Design

Sarah Laux

Fight Direction

Steve Rankin

Production Stage Manager

David S. Franklin

Lighting Design

Tyler Micoleau

Sound Design

Leon Rothenberg

Casting

Telsey + Company

William Cantler, CSA

Karyn Casl, CSA

Directed by

Neil Pepe

SEPTEMBER 11 – OCTOBER 13, 2019  MARK TAPER FORUM

PERFORMANCES MAGAZINE P3
CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

THE REDEEMERS
Cal.................................................................MAX CASELLA
Wes.............................................................JOEY SLOTNICK
Gary Allen................................................CJ WILSON

A TOUGH CASE
Ed Curtin.......................................................JOEY SLOTNICK
Don Baines................................................CJ WILSON
Arthur Threadgill..........................................SAUL RUBINEK
Lindy..........................................................MICAELA DIAMOND
LuAnne.......................................................NELLIE MCKAY
Johnny Branco............................................PETER JACOBSON

AT THE GAZEBO
Carter..........................................................SAM VARTHOLOMEOS
Dorothy.........................................................MICAELA DIAMOND
Gadsden......................................................RO BODDIE

THE URBANES
Cabbie........................................................MAX CASELLA
The Wife.....................................................MIRIAM SILVERMAN
Joey Falcone................................................JOEY SLOTNICK
Steve Tudik..................................................RO BODDIE

INSIDE TALK
Movie Executive............................................PETER JACOBSON
Lou Wald.....................................................JASON KRAVITS
Jerry Sterling...............................................SAUL RUBINEK
The Writer....................................................SAM VARTHOLOMEOS

UNDERSTUDIES
Understudies never substitute for a listed performer unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance.

STAGE MANAGERS
Michelle Blair
Katherine Shea

INTERMISSION
A Play Is a Poem will be performed without an intermission.

Please turn off all electronic devices such as cellular phones and watch alarms. The use of any recording device, either audio or video, and the taking of photographs, with or without flash, is strictly prohibited.
FROM APPALACHIA TO HOLLYWOOD, drama to comedy, *A Play Is a Poem* is a cross-country cross-section of American theatrical history. Consisting of five short plays of disparate settings and genres, the fundamental connection these pieces share doesn’t begin onstage. Rather, it all starts with over a decade’s worth of collaboration between playwright Ethan Coen and director Neil Pepe.

The roots of the duo’s collaboration go back to the mid-2000s, when Ethan and his brother, Joel Coen, co-wrote a radio play that was staged in New York. “I’ve always loved not only the richness of their writing but the surprise of their storytelling,” said Pepe. “I was intrigued that they were getting into something near playwriting.” Connected by mutual friends for a lunch meeting, Coen later shared some one-act plays he had been working on with Pepe, who was instantly smitten: “I read them and I loved them. They were incredibly funny and irreverent, just sort of bite-sized pieces of the brilliance of Ethan’s writing for film but applied to a theatrical form, which was exciting to me.”
Three of those one-acts eventually turned into 2008’s *Almost an Evening* at Atlantic Theater Company, where Pepe, who directed, is Artistic Director. Pepe and Coen quickly followed up their first collaboration with 2009’s *Offices* and 2011’s *Happy Hour* (also evenings of three plays). Now on their fourth collaboration with *A Play Is a Poem*, the duo have developed a comfortable rhythm together.

“Neil has a hyper-developed ear for what’s working, what’s not working, and a perfect touch with the actors, a way to show them how they can make it go better, keep the hoop rolling,” said Coen of the rehearsal process. “I’ve spent hours and hours over the years in a rehearsal room with him, and I still don’t know how he does it.”

Pepe, for his part, feels the same. “He’s so used to working with actors and has such an inherent understanding of story and dramaturgy, it feels completely collaborative—where the writer begins and the director stops,” said Pepe of Coen. They are also in basic agreement about the format and subject of *A Play Is a Poem*. “This play is five different stories, five little jaunts, the scenery different in each, the setting different—Neil and I haven’t talked about what ties them together, I don’t think either of us thinks about it,” explained Coen. “The aim is to get the play to that point, where it’s become a great big joyride for actors and audience. Neil knows how to get it there, but it’s an elusive place.”

Pepe offered a hint of how he sees that journey. “There’s something inherently iconic about the plays in an American way,” said Pepe. “But I think the thing that is of course surprising and deeply funny is Ethan’s take on it. So in a certain way it’s both his take on these stories and America, but also a take on some of the forms that these stories have taken over the years.”

They both prefer to keep the work uncategorizable. “It doesn’t matter where you put the play on that spectrum, high or low, tragedy or comedy—Neil cares about that as little as I do,” said Coen. “We’ve never even talked about that, over the course of many years of working together—whether what we’re working on is a comedy or not. Or what the play is in any generic sense. It’s a play, and it’s either working or not working, either going or not going.”

One asset they have in getting the play going is a robust ensemble that includes many actors who have worked with both Pepe and Coen previously in both theatre and film. “Doing one-acts with a great ensemble of actors, I feel like it’s where I come from—having come of age in a theatre company with a closely knit acting ensemble,” said Pepe. “I think Ethan also comes from a background and aesthetic of great ensemble actors, and that’s how we approach these.”

But of course theatre has its limitations as well, which just might be part of the appeal. “In my mind, in theatre there’s an essential truth and simplicity to the form, which allows the words to kind of spark the imagination as opposed to having the capacity to show and realize everything, which I think you can really do very effectively in film,” said Pepe. “There’s something about poetry and language and the essential nature of a poem and the essential nature of a short play that is exciting in its economy.”

With all of that in mind, for both collaborators, at the end of the day, the crux of the piece—or any piece—is trying to coax out the essence of theatre; the thing that keeps an audience engaged with the art. Coen describes it as “the mad state that joins actors and audience when the play’s working; a mad thing that makes sense in the moment but nobody can describe it afterward.”

Or, as Pepe put it: “We do the best we can with the words that we have and we hope everybody enjoys the evening.”
**WHO'S WHO**

**RO BODDIE** (Gadsden, Steve Tudik) is thrilled to be making his Mark Taper Forum debut. Off-Broadway credits: The Public Theater (Socrates), Summer Shorts at 59E59 Theaters (Appomattox), Regional credits: La Jolla Playhouse (Blueprints to Freedom), Old Globe (Skeletor Crew-tour), Cleveland Play House (The Mountainsiders), Milwaukee Repertory Theater (The Whipping Man), Baltimore Center Stage (Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom), Studio Theatre (Dirt, Three Sisters, No Sisters), Round House Theatre (Master Harold and the Boys), Cygnet Theatre (Every Brilliant Thing, Seven Guitars, King Hedley II), Black Bottom (Student, Season 2), Section 8 (Nurse Jackie, Straw Dogs), Sisters (Pardon My French), The Good Wife (recurring), No More (recurring). TV credits: The Public Theater (Shakespeare in the Park), Obie Award-winning June Moon, and Waiting for Lefty. TV: Dr. Taub on House, Proxy Snyder on Colony, and recurring roles on Fear the Walking Dead, NCIS: L.A., The Americans, Ray Donovan, Law & Order, SVU, and Law & Order, as well as Billions, Peeples, It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia, Genius, Madam Secretary, and Chicago PD. Film: White House Down, Good Night and Good Luck, and upcoming, The Goldfinch, Joyful, Before You Know It, and Violet. Peter is from Chicago.

**MAX CASELLA** (Cal, Cabbie) is the third-time Max has worked with Ethan Coen—previously appearing in Relatively Speaking on Broadway and Inside Llewyn Davis. Other film credits include Late Night, Night Comes On, Live by Night, and Live by Night. TV: he started his career dedicated to the development of over 50 Canadian plays. Saul’s work in television and features spans four decades including Frasier, Warehouse 13, upcoming Amazon series The Hunt with Al Pacino, Clint Eastwood’s Oscar-winning Unforgiven, Tony Scott and Quentin Tarantino’s True Romance, and Joel and Ethan Coen’s The Ballad of Buster Scruggs. His play Terrible Advice (starring Scott Bakula and Sharon Horgan) premiered in London in 2011. Saul directed Paramount/Showtime’s Club Land (starring Steven Weber and Alan Alda), Jerry and Tom (Sundance 1998, starring Joe Mantegna and Sam Rockwell), and the award-winning independent No One’s New Queens—The latter two produced by his wife and partner Elinor Reid. Saul also produced an award-winning documentary, So Many Miracles, chronicling his parents’ reunion with the people who saved their lives during the Holocaust. Saul is one of the few first-generation American families on Broadway, and is a proud first-generation American. He is a graduate of LaGuardia H.S. of Music & Art and Performing Arts in New York. Favorite roles include Louis in Gypsy and Sally Bowles in Cabaret.

**PETER JACOBSON** (Johnny Branco, Movie Executive, Atlantic Theater Company). The Water Engine and Once in a Lifetime. Off-Broadway: original New York productions of Steve Martin’s Picasso at the Lapin Agile, Four Dogs and a Bone (John Patrick Shanley dir.), The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged), Taming of the Shrew, and Comedy of Errors (Public Theater’s Shakespeare in the Park); Obie Award-winning June Moon, and Waiting for Lefty. TV: Dr. Taub on House, Proxy Snyder on Colony, and recurring roles on Fear the Walking Dead, NCIS: L.A., The Americans, Ray Donovan, Law & Order, SVU, and Law & Order, as well as Billions, Peeples, It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia, Genius, Madam Secretary, and Chicago PD. Film: White House Down, Good Night and Good Luck, and upcoming, The Goldfinch, Joyful, Before You Know It, and Violet. Peter is from Chicago.

**JASON KRAVITS** (Lou Wald) last appeared at Center Theatre Group in the pre-Broadway run of The Drowsy Chaperone. Other Broadway credits include Relatively Speaking (by Ethan Coen, Elaine May, and Woody Allen) and Sly Fox. Recent TV credits include The Kominsky Method, Big Bang Theory, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt, Young Sheldon, and The Deuce, as well as upcoming episodes of The Undoing and The Hunt. Other favorite appearances include The Practice (ADA Richard Bay), Curb Your Enthusiasm, Grey’s Anatomy, Gilmore Girls, Ray Donovan, and The New Normal. His TV credits include the Harry Hill Show, Modern Family, and The Good Wife. Saul also produced an award-winning documentary, So Many Miracles, chronicling his parents’ reunion with the people who saved their lives during the Holocaust.

**MICAELA DIAMOND** (Lindy, Dorothy) made her Broadway debut as Babe—the youngest Cher—in The Cher Show, a role she auditioned for just weeks after graduating high school. She made her television debut in NBC’s Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert, appearing in the ensemble and understudying for Sara Bareilles. Diamond grew up in New York City and is a graduate of LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts in New York. Favorite roles include Louise in Gypsy and Sally Bowles in Cabaret.

**NELLIE MCKAY** (Original Music, LuAnne, Musician) has released seven critically acclaimed albums, with a new EP, Bagatelles, coming in October. Broadway Theatre World Award for Polly Peachum in The Threepenny Opera, co-created/starred in Off-Broadway’s Old Hats, created musical biographies of Barbara Graham, Rachel Carson, Joan Rivers, and Billy Tipton (Best Concerts of the Year—the New York Times). Film roles in P.S. I Love You and Downtown Express, music for Hunter Has It, Monster—in-Law, Last Holiday, Get Smart, and Private Life TV appearances on David Letterman, Conan O’Brien, Craig Ferguson, The View, and Jimmy Dore. Music heard on Mad Men, Boardwalk Empire, Weeds, Grey’s Anatomy, NCIS, Nurse Jackie. A recipient of PETA’s Humanitarian Award for dedication to animal rights, and an annoyingly vocal critic of endless war, capitalism, and the two-party system that sustains it.

**SAUL RUBINEN** (Arthur Threap znal), Jerry Sterling started his career dedicated to the development of over 50 Canadian plays. Saul’s work in television and features spans four decades including Frasier, Warehouse 13, upcoming Amazon series The Hunt with Al Pacino, Clint Eastwood’s Oscar-winning Unforgiven, Tony Scott and Quentin Tarantino’s True Romance, and Joel and Ethan Coen’s The Ballad of Buster Scruggs. His play Terrible Advice (starring Scott Bakula and Sharon Horgan) premiered in London in 2011. Saul directed Paramount/Showtime’s Club Land (starring Steven Weber and Alan Alda), Jerry and Tom (Sundance 1998, starring Joe Mantegna and Sam Rockwell), and the award-winning independent No One’s New Queens—The latter two produced by his wife and partner Elinor Reid. Saul also produced an award-winning documentary, So Many Miracles, chronicling his parents’ reunion with the people who saved their lives during the Holocaust.

**MIRIAM SILVERMAN** (The Wife). Broadway: Junk, Off-Broadway: Piano (Clubbied Thumb), Finks (Drama Desk nomination, EST); Tiny Beautiful Things, Hamlet (The Public), A Delicate Ship (Playwrights Realm); You Got Older (Page 73); Everything You Touch (Rattlestick); The Witch of Edmonton (Red Bull Theatre). Regional: Mary Jane, The Moons (Yale Repertory Theatre), The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window (Jeff nom, Goodman); Measure for Measure, All’s Well That Ends Well, As You Like It, The Dog in the Manger (Shakespeare Theatre Company). Peer Gynt ( Guthrie Theater), Awake and Sing! (Arena Stage). Firm: Bad Education (upcoming), Sand Manna, Better Days Ahead. TV: The Village, NOS4A2, Elementary, Pan Am, Law & Order: Criminal Intent. Education: BA and MFA, Brown University.

**SAM VARTHLOMEO** (Carte, The Writer) was born and raised in New York, a proud first-generation American. He is a graduate of LaGuardia H.S. of Music & Art and Performing Arts, and made his Off-Broadway debut in John Patrick Shanley’s Prodigal Son at Manhattan Theatre Club. TV/film credits include: Law & Order: SVU, Bull, The Following, Truth Slash Fiction, and as Ensign DanbyConnor on Star Trek: Discovery. Sam holds degrees in psychology and philosophy from the City College of New York.

**JOEY SLOTNICK** (Wes, Ed Curtis, Joey Falcone). Broadway: Junk, The Front Page, The Big Knife, Off-Broadway: Dying for It, Happy Hour, The New York Idea, Offices, Almost an Evening (Atlantic), The Altruists (Vineyard), Tchaikovsky (Signature). Regional: Chapter Two (Bucks County); Animal Crackers (WilliamsTown and The Goodman); Arabian Nights, Up Against It, Master & Margarita, Great Men of Science. Our Town, Watts & Needs (Lookingglass); Romance (Bay Street). TV: Boston Public (series regular); The Single Guy (series regular); Marvelous Mrs. Maisel (recurring); The Good Wife (recurring); Nip/Tuck (recurring); The Goldberg’s, Murphy Brown, Blue Bloods, Psych; Boston Legal. The Office, Medium; Curb Your Enthusiasm, Law & Order: SVU, Family Guy, Entourage. Firm: Pirates of Silicon Valley, The Cobbler, Humor Me, T.S. Eliot, the Secret Life of Walter Mitty, Brief Interviews with Hideous Men, Blast from the Past, Hollow Man, Twister, A League of Their Own.

THE SUBJECT WAS ROSES (Center Theatre Group); Zinnie (Off-Broadway credits include John A Life in the Theatre.

Tom Donaghy’s The Beginning of August (Theatre Group, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Wilma. Film: Music Live!

Hands on a Hardbody Speed-the-Plow and Mamet’s Driver Has the Right of Way The Day the World Ends Dubuque

Quantico

Additional credits: Refuge Repertory, Atlantic); and Eric Bogosian’s Red Angel

Further Than the Furthest Thing Warehouse, Celebration Guare’s Parlour Song Ethan Coen’s Offices, War Games


CHARLES G. LEPONTI (Hair & Wig Designer) Numerous Broadway, touring, West End, and international productions, including Michael Cera Show (Drama Desk Award), The Band’s Visit, Beautiful. Ain’t Too Proud, Beetlejuice, The Lifespan of a fact, Spoon/Bo bogSquarepants (Drama Desk Award); Jersey Boys, Motown, Memphisto, On Your Feet; A Gentleman’s Guide to Love & Murder, The Color Purple—Obie Award: Obie Television; The Wiz Live! (Emmy Award nomination); Jesus Christ Superstar Live! (Emmy Award nomination and Make-Up Artists & Hair Stylist Guild Award); Hairspray.


Telsey + Company (Casting) Broadway/tours: West Side Story, Tina, The Sound Inside, Linda Vista, Freestyle Love Supreme, Beetlejuice, Oklahoma!, To Kill a Mockingbird, Mean Gits, Follies, Croen From Away, Waitress, Hamilton, Wicked, My Fair Lady, Once on This Island, Hello, Dolly, An Americanin China and the Chocolate Factory; Off-Broadway: Atlantic theatre company, Classic Stage company, MCC theater, New group, Park Avenue Armory, Second Stage theatre. Film: The Kitchen, Mary Poppins Returns, Ben Is Back, The Greatest Showman, Into the Woods, Rachel Getting Married, TV. Tales of the City, Fosse/Verdon, NOS4A2, This Is Us, NCIS: New Orleans, One Day at a Time, Rent, commercials. telseyandco.com


Michele Blair (Stage Manager, L.A.) has worked on over 30 productions for Center theatre Group. Some highlights include lackawanna Blues, Linda Vista, Sweat, Water by the Spoonful, Head of Passes, Heisenberg, Archduke, Zoot Suit, Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, Bent, The Sunshine Boys, Joe Turner’s Come and Gone, Red, Leap of Faith, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, Paradise Lost, Los Angeles Opera, the los Angeles Philharmonic, Henry V with Shakespeare Center los Angeles, The Pee-wee Herman Show at Club Nokie, and Jersey Boys in las Vegas. Graduate of the University of Southern California and the University of Amsterdam. Mom to 11-year-old Liam and 7-year-old Imogen.

ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY (Neil Pepe, Artistic Director; J effery Lawson, Managing Director) At Atlantic, our aim is singular—to empower simple and honest storytelling that fosters greater understanding of our shared world. We are a family of artists dedicated to exploring essential truths onstage, be it a show at Atlantic Theater Company or a class at Atlantic Acting School. Founded as an ensemble of impassioned artists in 1985, Atlantic Theater Company has grown into a powerhouse Off-Broadway company, premiersing 200+ works from new and established writers. From our Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning productions to our community-based education programs, we are committed to uncovering and celebrating the stories of our varied human existence. For more information, visit atlantictheater.org.

CENTER THEATRE GROUP

MICHAEL RITCHIE (Artistic Director) is in his 15th season as Center Theatre Group’s Artistic Director, and has led over 200 productions at the Ahmanson Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, and Kirk Douglas Theatre, many of which have gone on to future lives on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and beyond. In addition to producing shows across Center Theatre Group’s three stages, he has had the privilege of collaborating with numerous local and national artists to commission and develop new works.

NAUSICA STERGIU (General Manager) has worked supporting artists in theatres of all shapes, sizes, and locales including Center Theatre Group as General Manager and, previously, as Audience Development Director. She oversees productions at the Taper and Douglas, as well as new play commissions and developmental productions. Nausica has taught at USC’s School of Dramatic Arts and works with local nonprofits including Hollywood Orchard.

GORDON DAVIDSON (Founding Artistic Director) led the Taper throughout its first 38 seasons, guiding over 300 productions to its stage and winning countless awards for himself and the theatre—including the Tony Award for theatrical excellence, Margo Jones Award, The Governor’s Award for the Arts, and a Guggenheim fellowship. The Kentucky Cycle and Angels in America (Part One) won the Pulitzer in consecutive years, and, in 1994, three of the four plays nominated for the Tony Award for Best Play were from the Taper (Angels in America won). In 1989, Gordon took over the Ahmanson and, in 2004, he produced the inaugural season in the Kirk Douglas Theatre.

DOUGLAS C. BAKER (Producing Director) is now in his 30th season at Center Theatre Group. He is an active member of the Broadway League, the Independent Presenters Network, and is a proud member of the Association of Theatrical Press Agents and Managers. In May 2013, Doug received the Broadway League’s prestigious Outstanding Achievement in Presenter Management Award.

KELLEY KIRKPATRICK (Associate Artistic Director). Since arriving at Center Theatre Group in 2005, Kelley has produced over 60 productions at the Ahmanson Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, and Kirk Douglas Theatre, many of which have gone on to future lives on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and beyond. In addition to producing shows across Center Theatre Group’s three stages, he has had the privilege of collaborating with numerous local and national artists to commission and develop new works.

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ADDITIONAL STAFF FOR A PLAY IS A POEM

Assistant Director...............................................................Sky Smith
Dialect Coach...............................................................Kate Wilson
Los Angeles Casting.................................................Michael Donovan Casting
Associate Scenic Designer.............................................Rw Rakitchun
Assistant Costume Designer, N.Y.................................Jacob A. Climer
Stitcher........................................................................Cosmo Martineili
Resident Assistant Lighting Designer.........................Zachary Heffner
Assistant Sound Designer.............................................Anna Grossman
Prop Carpenter..............................................................Ryan Howard
Rehearsal Prep Coordinator, N.Y.................................Kate Stack
Production Assistant, N.Y...........................................Lauren Fitzgerald
Vet Production Assistant, L.A......................................Liv Scott

CREDITS

Scenery constructed by F&D Scene Changes, Ltd. Scenery designs printed by Rose Brand. Costumes provided by the Center Theatre Group Costume Shop. Additional costumes for Ms. McKay and Ms. Diamond provided by Thronte, Inc. Piano rental provided by Keyboard Concepts. Additional musical instrument rental provided by L.A. Percussion Rentals. Production photography by Craig Schwartz.

MUSIC CREDITS


Music Supervision by Duotone Audio Group:
Music Supervisor................................................................David Leinhardt
Music Coordinator..................................................................Daris Hom

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Cameron Parker, Associate General Manager at the Atlantic Theater Company.

A Play Is a Poem was rehearsed at Manhattan Theatre Club’s Creative Center.