

# Harvey

ORIGINALLY  
PUBLISHED  
IN 2012



# UPSTAGE

# UPSTAGE Callboard

Golden Globe and Emmy Award® winner Jim Parsons ("The Big Bang Theory", *The Normal Heart*), Tony® and Emmy Award nominee Charles Kimbrough (*The Merchant of Venice*) and Tony Award nominee Jessica Hecht (*A View from the Bridge*) return to Broadway in Mary Chase's Pulitzer Prize-winning comedy, *Harvey*.

Parsons stars as one of modern theatre's most lovable characters, Elwood P. Dowd. Charming and kind, Elwood has only one character flaw: an unwavering friendship with a six-foot-three-and-a-half-inches-tall, invisible white rabbit named Harvey. In order to save the family's social reputation, Elwood's sister Veta (Jessica Hecht) takes Elwood to the local sanitarium. But when Dr. William Chumley (Charles Kimbrough) mistakenly commits the anxiety-ridden Veta, Elwood—and Harvey—slip out of the hospital unbothered, setting off a hilarious whirlwind of confusion and chaos as everyone in town tries to catch a man and his invisible rabbit.

Tony and Emmy Award nominee Scott Ellis (Roundabout's *Twelve Angry Men*) directs this classic comedy about losing your mind and finding your real, and imaginary, true friends.

## A NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES:

“The play has a lot to say about imagination, faith, and the value of being able to step back from the chaos of life and not take things too seriously for a minute. In our overly plugged-in time, I think it's a message we need to hear, and one that this play gets across in a simple, charming, and funny way.”

## WHEN

1944

## WHERE

The Dowd family library and the sanitarium, Chumley's Rest

## WHO

### Elwood P. Dowd

A friendly eccentric who spends most of his time with his invisible best friend Harvey

### Harvey

Elwood's best friend, a six-foot-three-and-a-half-inches-tall rabbit

### Veta Louise Simmons

Elwood's younger sister, who is constantly in a state of nervousness about the appearance of Harvey in her family's life

### Myrtle Mae Simmons

Veta's daughter, who is eager to find a suitor but finds it increasingly difficult with the presence of Harvey

### William R. Chumley, M.D.

An esteemed psychiatrist who runs the sanitarium, Chumley's Rest

### Ruth Kelly, R.N.

An attractive young nurse at the sanitarium who has a big heart and a soft spot for Elwood

### Duane Wilson

A devoted orderly of the sanitarium who is responsible for making patients comply with orders

### Lyman Sanderson, M.D.

A young psychiatrist who works for Dr. Chumley

### Judge Omar Gaffney

An old friend of the Dowd family, who accepts Elwood and Harvey's friendship

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# The Not-So-Imaginary Story of Acting

## INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR JIM PARSONS

Before rehearsals began, Education Dramaturg Ted Sod sat down with Actor Jim Parsons to discuss his role in *Harvey*.

**Ted Sod:** Can you tell us about yourself? Where were you born and educated? When did you decide to become an actor?

**Jim Parsons:** I was born in Houston, Texas and I lived there until I was about 27 or so. I went to undergrad at the University of Houston. I did a lot of theatre in Houston in addition to being at the university. Looking back, it's fun to see how important that was to me. I learned a lot in class but I learned much more by having to get out there and perform. I was very fortunate. There is a Shakespeare festival that the university had an affiliation with and although it wouldn't guarantee a part, it certainly guaranteed that the students would be involved. So I was a part of this Shakespeare festival as well as a children's theatre festival. There was a company of actors and writers, really a company of misfits in a way, that I had the opportunity to work with. We got to do all sorts of work, everything from Beckett to *Guys and Dolls*, so I had a wide and varied playground in Houston.

**TS:** Did you go to graduate school?

**JP:** I decided I really wanted to go to New York or LA and I knew that I needed a reason to leave. So I auditioned for grad schools and I spent two-and-a-half-years in San Diego at the Old Globe Theatre in their Master's program. It was a lot of work because you understudy many roles in the Old Globe season while you're also taking classes. There were three separate productions that I actually had to go on for. It was a little unusual. I don't think many students had the chance to go on, and it was really an adrenaline rush when one of us did.

Understudying those roles at the Old Globe was one of the most informative things that has ever happened to me. I've always felt pretty strongly about any role that I approach based on what I see on the page. As an understudy, you're paired with another actor, and as far as making decisions, their opinion is more important to the production, but you get to bounce ideas directly off that person. Sometimes I disagreed with the choices the actor made and that was as informative as anything. One of the most challenging things about understudying is figuring out how another actor came to a particular choice, and sometimes you would come to see their way and sometimes you wouldn't. That gave me strength and confidence.

**TS:** You ultimately came to New York, didn't you?

**JP:** When we were graduating from the Old Globe, we did a showcase in LA in 2001 and not very many agents attended but when we did it in New York, it was highly attended. I had different meetings that I went on with different agencies, and that is still to this day the single most fortunate thing that has ever happened to me as an actor. I struggle when actors ask me about getting an agent. For me, there was some luck involved or at least some good fortune as far as the people who were attending these showcases. The right person attended for me and it was a good match.

**TS:** Did you get work right away?

**JP:** As soon as I moved to New York in November of 2001, I went on my very first audition which was for this version of Kafka's *The Castle* at Manhattan

Jim Parsons in *Harvey*  
Photo by Joan Marcus



Ensemble Theatre. It was very little money, but it was hugely important to me to be thrust into a working environment and to meet so many working actors. It made me feel like I was on the right path and running in the right company. From there my career started moving into different directions: I started doing commercials and I did a couple of regional theatre shows at La Jolla Playhouse and did a couple of smaller parts in independent movies. One of them was *Garden State*, which was seen by a lot of people and, again, that was just fortunate. Then I started booking a lot of pilots for television and some didn't get picked up and then one of them did, and that brings us to today.

**TS:** You were on Broadway in *The Normal Heart* last summer – correct?

**JP:** I get summers off from working on "The Big Bang Theory." Last summer, I thought I hit the jackpot. *The Normal Heart* was running in the exact time that I was going to be away from "Big Bang." It had a creative team, mostly George Wolfe, who said, "I'm okay with him only arriving in New York six days before the preview." That was kind of a head-over-heels experience for me; it exceeded my wildest expectations. I used to say when we were doing *The Normal Heart* that it was exactly what I wanted to be a part of when I was a young actor. It was a real ensemble effort, a team. You're part of a group of people passionately committed to telling this story the most



honest way they can, and passionately committed to the vision of the director.

**TS: How did you respond to *Harvey* when you first read it?**

**JP:** In my mind, the story of the play is not hard to follow, but it has the possibility of going much deeper into the heart of an audience. That is very exciting and I am thrilled to get to be a part of it.

**TS: I'm curious about your take on Elwood. It seems like everyone loves him and yet he needs this imaginary friend. Do you have an opinion on that?**

**JP:** I can see why you would think that he seems to need this friend, but I think a choice has been made. Elwood says a few things that imply that. There's this line that he has, "I wrestled with reality for years, and I'm happy to say I finally won out over it," and another line is, "For years I was smart, I recommend pleasant." His mother would always say, "You need to be very smart or very pleasant." It seems to me that there's this switch that happened for Elwood. It's not explicit, and I'm certainly not married to the idea, but it seems like Harvey appeared soon after the death of Elwood's mother. Someone says, "He always took things so easily, he took change so easily, the appearance of the white rabbit he took so easily." There is something so lovely that this pooka appeared and he stepped into the opportunity and this is where it's led him.

You don't hear a lot of the other characters talk about Elwood being unpleasant. They say that they liked him, but it seems to me that he must not have been as happy in the past as he is in his current state. If there is one thing that you can say for sure, it's that he is very happy. He's in no hurry, why would he be? If you're in too much of a hurry, then you don't enjoy the people around you, you don't really take them in. There's nothing that is anxiously driving Elwood. The only thing driving him is to make these connections with people, with strangers. This is something that I think intrigued me as much as anything about doing this role. I love the chance to step into this character. He takes opportunities to spend time with others and to discover other people's dreams, their hurts, their worries, their whatever, and, in the process, he doesn't really state any of his own. He doesn't seem to have any. Of course, it's possible that once we start rehearsal, I'll find that he does have all of the above, but I don't see that right now.

**TS: I think you have a very cogent understanding of Elwood. Some people might say he's just a happy drunk, but I think what's motivating him is bigger than that. I think that's one of the reasons this play won the Pulitzer Prize in 1945 and is still so popular. It seems to hit a chord in people about the way we're living. It seems to say that there is a simpler, gentler way for us all to live.**

**JP:** I think it's one of the reasons it's such a good play for right now. I won't pretend to know the social implications of why. I speak more from a general buzz of a feeling than anything else. After reading this script and thinking about it for a moment and letting it have an effect on you, you feel a hint of something. That's why I feel Elwood has made a choice. If you don't want to miss out on certain things in this world, if you want to experience this world in a certain way, you have to make that choice. I don't know if he's gotten off the train as it were, but he's certainly protected himself.

**TS: One of the things I love, and I guess you could call it a *deus ex machina*, is when the cab driver comes in at the end and says, "Lady, after this, he'll be a perfectly normal human being and you know what bastards they are!" I think that has a lot to say.**

**JP:** I think you're absolutely right. This idea of yes, you can change Elwood and you can make him more aware of all the things in the world that you want him to be aware of, but you need to understand that he won't be the same. For any embarrassment or awkwardness he's bringing to your life, there's a good chance that if you take that away, you will also take away the joy and lightness that he brings to your life at the same time.

**TS: Elwood's really an amazing creation. The audience falls in love with him because he's unconventional and yet, people still have issues with those who are different.**

**JP:** There have been huge societal changes that have happened from 100 years ago and even 50 years ago, but it doesn't seem to ever stop. It's one of those ongoing, organic things; there's always going to be differences between people. There's always going to be another way of doing things that rattles your own and that needs further investigating on your part and, ideally, acceptance. I think that's another reason this story survived so well—that conflict is forever. There's always a battle for acceptance going on.

**TS: Is there anything else you would like to add about the play or Elwood?**

**JP:** I feel like there's a wealth of interpretations as to what's going on in this play. I feel that everyone will have their own take on what it is that they are or are not seeing. I don't think the audience will be able to pinpoint the why of everything that they see. That's the beautiful thing about this play and something I'm drawn to. I'm excited about making specific choices and I'm equally excited about the idea of working with Harvey. My greatest hope is that he is made clear to the audience.

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*There is something so lovely that this pooka appeared and he stepped into the opportunity and this is where it's led him.*

”

# The Magic of fairies, sprites, and pookas

## MAGICAL CHARACTERS IN THEATRE

*“Pooka. From old Celtic mythology. A fairy spirit in animal form. Always very large. The pooka appears here and there, now and then, to this one and that one at his own caprice. A wise but mischievous creature. Very fond of rum-pots, crackpots...”*

—Wilson

The definition of a “pooka” read in the play brings to mind the kind of magical, mischievous characters from Shakespeare’s comedies: the fairies of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* who use potions to manipulate young lovers, or the sprite Ariel who enchants the island castaways of *The Tempest*. Characters like Puck and Ariel are visible to an audience, but not to the mortal characters with whom they intervene, and this allows for hilarious comic situations. On a metaphorical level, they may represent irrational human forces – the intoxication of love or the delusionary influence of power. How might we understand the magical but invisible presence of the pooka Harvey?

*“Could I ever possibly write anything that might make this woman laugh again?”*

—Harvey Author Mary Chase

*“Einstein has overcome time and space. Harvey has overcome not only time and space— but any objections.”*

—Elwood

Two things inspired Mary Chase to write *Harvey*: first, a dream about a psychiatrist being chased by a giant rabbit, and second, a widowed neighbor who had recently lost her only son in World War II. Thinking about this woman and the many Americans who lost loved ones in the massive war, Chase wanted to write a play that would help people laugh again.

Along with the impact of the war, the original audience for *Harvey* experienced technological changes unlike any generation before. By the mid-1940s, Americans had become accustomed to relatively new innovations like the telephone, the automobile, and the airplane. In Hollywood, the technology of cinema had already taken audiences to technicolor, fantasy worlds like *The Wizard of Oz*. Around the world, industrial production was being used on a greater scale than ever before – and in Europe, it was being used towards vastly destructive ends. Chase was creating a magical character for the American stage in a modern age.



Jim Parsons in *Harvey*  
Photo by Joan Marcus

*“I wrestled with reality for forty years, and I am happy to state that I finally won out over it.”* —Elwood



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While at one level the play appeals as a piece of escapist entertainment, it also offers a nuanced critique of the modern response to magic and the miraculous. Modernism, the prevailing art form for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, embraces ambiguity and questions authority. The magical character Harvey remains invisible to the audience; in fact, we mostly “see” Harvey through Elwood’s descriptions of and interactions with him. We also see that Elwood’s befriending of Harvey represents a choice to live differently from everyone around him. Elwood takes time to pick the flowers and befriend strangers. He chooses to be “pleasant” rather than to be “smart.” Such choices may seem simple, but for an adult living in the modern world, they represent a strong break from the status quo. By committing to Harvey, Elwood refuses to conform to the reality of those around him – a choice that makes him a more joyful person as a result.

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*“It’s a slap in the face to everything we’ve stood for in this community the way Elwood is acting now.” —Veta*

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The people around Elwood – his sister Veta, niece Myrtle, Dr. Chumley and Dr. Sanderson – respond to Harvey with confusion, consternation, and even outrage. High comedy has been said to “arouse thoughtful laughter by exhibiting the inconsistencies and incongruities of human nature and by displaying the follies of social manners.” This is exactly how the play finds humor in the characters’ preoccupation with appearances. We are invited to laugh at social pretensions, the shortcomings of the psychiatry profession, and the follies of society as a whole as we watch the characters struggle with Harvey’s presence.

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*“An element of conflict in any discussion is a good thing. It means everybody is taking part and nobody is left out.” —Elwood*

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*“I’ve been spending my life among fly-specks while miracles have been leaning on lamp-posts on 18th and Fairfax.” —Chumley*

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At the conclusion of Shakespeare’s comedies, all conflicts are resolved and the magical characters leave to live apart from the humans. These endings reflect the Elizabethan concern with order and hierarchy. Harvey is a magical character for the modern stage and thus invites us to question his role and interpret his meanings. Why did Elwood meet Harvey in the first place (or why did Harvey choose Elwood)? How will Harvey continue to interact with Elwood and his family? Harvey may bring to light our preoccupations with social status, our fixations on the “truth” and the limitations we each impose on our frame of reality. Harvey might ask us: if miracles happened around us today, would we be able to see them?

## — POOKAS —

Harvey is a pooka that takes the shape of a six foot white rabbit that is unlike any other friend of Elwood’s. He is not seen by anyone else but can communicate and interact with any human he wants to – they only need to believe in the power of Harvey.

A pooka is a mischievous fairy creature that comes from Irish mythology; it is both feared and revered by those who believe in it. According to mythology, the pooka is a skillful shape shifter that can change into a horse, rabbit, goat, goblin or dog and has the ability to speak to humans.

There are many different tales of how the pooka can bring a village great fortune or great destruction. In some areas of Ireland after the harvest is complete, the farmers leave a share of the crop behind called the “pooka’s share” in order to give the pooka respect. If the pooka does not feel respected, it will revert to ruining crops, tormenting humans, and scattering livestock. The folklorist Douglas Hyde spoke of a pooka that “emerged from a hill and which spoke in a human voice to the people there on the first day of November. It was accustomed to give intelligent and proper answers to those who consulted it concerning all that would befall them until November the next year. And the people used to leave gifts and presents at the hill.” Although the pooka has the ability to wreak havoc on village people, more often than not the pooka wants to lead humans away from harm.



# The Not-So-Imaginary Story of Playwriting

## PLAYWRIGHT BIO—MARY CHASE

**Tracee Chimo,  
Jessica Hecht and  
Larry Bryggman  
in *Harvey*.  
Photo by  
Joan Marcus.**



Harvey, the invisible rabbit at the center of Mary Chase's *Harvey*, is a pooka from Celtic mythology, plopped into the middle of an American family's struggle to fit into society. Chase, like many first-generation Americans, wove the folklore of her family's homeland into tales set in her own time and place.

Mary Coyle Chase was born on February 25, 1906, in Denver, Colorado. Her mother, Mary McDonough, emigrated from Londonderry, Ireland at the age of sixteen, following four older brothers to Colorado's gold rush. McDonough later married Frank Coyle. Chase was the last of their four children, born nine years after her nearest sibling. The Coyle family was poor but stable, making a life in the working class, immigrant neighborhoods of Denver.

Chase's childhood world revolved around the fairies, pookas, and spirits of Irish folktales told by her mother and uncles. Celtic legend also influenced young Chase's understanding of mental illness. She quoted her mother as saying, "Never be unkind or indifferent to a person others say is crazy. Often they have deep wisdom. We pay them great respect in the old country, and we call them fairy people, and it could be they are sometimes."

In the years before television or radio, theatre-going was a popular and more affordable pastime. Denver, a city of about 250,000 during Chase's childhood, supported seven major theaters. Chase's first theatrical experience was a production of *Macbeth* at the Denham Theatre. From then on, she regularly skipped school to see plays.

Chase graduated from West High School in 1921, at the age of fifteen. She enrolled at the University of Denver and later transferred to the University of Colorado, but left without graduating after a summer job writing for the *Denver Times* turned into full time work. Chase was just seventeen. She was first assigned to the society pages, but worked her way up to writing features and captions for a flapper-era comic strip, "Charlie and Mary."

Chase was a determined reporter who let nothing stand in the way of getting the story. She hitched rides on the sides of trucks, rode the back of her photographer's motorcycle, and sometimes dressed as a man to get the scoop. In 1928, she wooed and married fellow reporter Robert Chase. In 1931, she left the newspaper to raise a family and pursue freelance writing projects.

Chase gave birth to three sons between 1932 and 1937. By her own account, her family life was fulfilling and her husband deeply supportive of her writing work.

In 1936, Chase's first full-length play, *Me Third*, was produced in Works Progress Administration theaters across the west, to rave reviews. The 1937 Broadway transfer, retitled *Now You've Done It*, flopped, but established Chase's relationship with producer Brock Pemberton and producer-director Antoinette Perry.



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In the late 1930s and into the early years of WWII, Chase wrote several plays that were staged in the Denver area and one that RKO Pictures turned into the successful film *Sorority House*. Chase was inspired to write *Harvey* during the war. She described the genesis of the play in her final interview:

***“As I was leaving home every morning at 8:15 with my boys, a woman would emerge from the door of the apartment house and go in the opposite direction, to the bus to go downtown to work...I didn’t know the woman, but I heard that she was a widow with one son who was...a bombardier in the Pacific. One day, I heard that her son was lost. Things like that were happening to so many people then, that wasn’t what jolted me so much as the fact that in a week or 10 days, I saw the woman leaving the apartment house, going a little more slowly, to catch the bus to go back to her old job. I couldn’t endure it. She began to haunt me. And the question began to haunt me. Could I ever think of anything to make that woman laugh again?”***

Chase thought about the woman day and night, working through idea after idea for a new script. Then, early one morning, she had a vision of a psychiatrist walking across her bedroom floor, pursued by a large white rabbit. *Harvey* was born.

Once the script (originally titled *The Pooka*, a nod to Harvey’s roots in Celtic folklore) was complete, Chase contacted Pemberton and Perry, who immediately agreed to produce it. The play opened on November 1, 1944, directed by Perry and starring Frank Fay and Josephine Hull. It was an instant sensation. War-weary audiences, many of whom had lost someone on the front, laughed with abandon again.

Chase later recalled overhearing an audience member remark that it was the first time his mother had laughed “since Joe was killed.” At that moment, Chase knew she had succeeded. Additionally, the play was presented on the fronts during the closing months of WWII.

Mary Coyle Chase won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1945 for *Harvey*. She was the fourth woman, and remains the only Coloradoan, to do so.

The success of *Harvey* left Chase financially well-off for the first time in her life. The play ran on Broadway for five years, and in 1950 Universal Studios paid Chase one million dollars for the screenplay. The strain of Chase’s sudden fame and financial success proved difficult for her. She increasingly turned to drinking and realized that she struggled with alcohol use disorder. In 1955, she founded House of Hope in Denver, a non-profit that provided support to women with alcohol use disorder.

Chase’s subsequent three plays, *The Next Half Hour* (1945), *Bernadine* (1952), and the children’s play *Mrs. McThing* (1954), opened on Broadway with some success, but nothing came close to *Harvey*. In 1961, Chase’s play *Midgie Purvis*, starring Tallulah Bankhead, flopped on Broadway, but a 1970 revival of *Harvey* starring Jimmy Stewart and Helen Hayes ran for 79 performances. Chase wrote numerous children’s stories during this time.

In 1981, after years of urging, Chase allowed *Harvey* to be adapted into a musical, titled *Say Hello to Harvey*. Chase flew to Toronto for the process. Critical response was negative, and the show closed after six weeks. Chase returned to Denver, where she suffered a heart attack in her home and died on October 20, 1981. She was survived by her husband, three sons, and eleven grandchildren.



# The Not-So-Imaginary Story of Directing

## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR SCOTT ELLIS

Before rehearsals began, Education Dramaturg Ted Sod sat down with Director Scott Ellis to discuss his thoughts on *Harvey*.

**Ted Sod:** How did the idea of doing *Harvey* with Jim Parsons come about?

**Scott Ellis:** The production was my idea. It was a play that had been sent to me to look at and I was taken by it. I think I'm drawn to anything that has not been done often. I just thought it was a lovely story and I realized a lot of people didn't know it. When we were thinking about casting and who we could cast as Elwood, Jim Parsons's name came up and we went out to Los Angeles and did a reading with him. I thought he was wonderful and brought the qualities I was looking for in that role. That's how it all came together.

**TS:** Can you talk about the qualities you needed from the actor playing Elwood? Does it harken back to another time period?

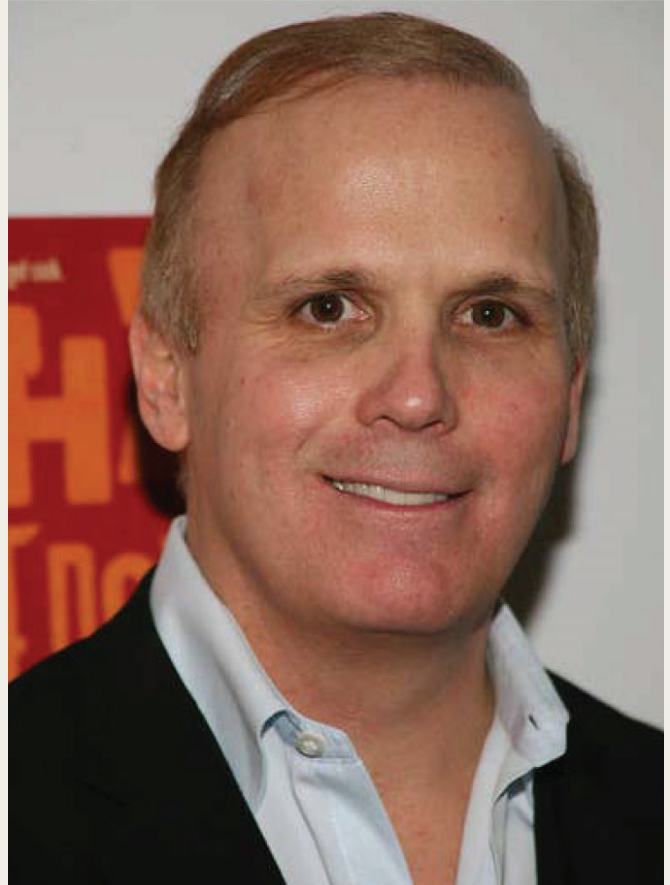
**SE:** This is one of those roles that I find fascinating but some actors find challenging. The character really doesn't change. It's not an active journey as far as theatrical journeys go. Elwood just stays who he is from the beginning until the end. It's everybody around him that does the changing; he stays the same. I think you have to have a really interesting actor and someone who brings a very unique and special quality to Elwood, and Jim does that. You've got to believe that this gentleman has a friend who's a six-foot-tall rabbit. He's not insane and, by the end, the audience will hopefully say, "Okay, you know what, I'm going to go with that. If that's what he says is true, I'm going to believe that." There's a special quality that you have to have for an audience to believe that you have an invisible friend like Harvey. Jim has this innate, off-kilter thing that he brings to this role that allows you to say, "I believe this guy."

**TS:** What traits did you need from the other actors?

**SE:** The other characters have a much stronger through line. They're all trying to change Elwood to make him better. They're trying to help him in a way. For example, Veta, his sister, loves Elwood and would do anything for him. You have to believe that she might do something drastic because she cares so much about him.

**TS:** Do you find the character of the taxi driver interesting?

**SE:** Oh, definitely. It's really the common man. He's probably the only taxi driver in town. He shuttles people around all year. He's the one that ultimately sees something in the human race that is very simple, but very real. And that's what he brings to the plot. He tells people the truth, and it's interesting that the person who does it isn't part of the story until the very end.



**TS:** Do you view Elwood as an alcoholic?

**SE:** Here's what's important to keep in mind about that idea. Elwood drinks at the beginning of the play but he is not a raging alcoholic. Yes, he does spend time in the bar, but it's important to know that that is not why he sees Harvey. He's not a drunk who sees an imaginary friend. It was never written or ever played that way. If you were to play it that way, it would be a dead end. On first reading, you might think, well, this guy's just an alcoholic. But after repeated readings, you realize if the play is to work, the audience has to begin by thinking Elwood is the crazy one and the rest of the characters are sane. And then by the end of the play, the audience's realization is the other way around. Elwood is the sane one and all the others are crazy. Elwood's life is fairly straightforward. I'm not going to pretend that the guy doesn't sit at a bar and have a couple of drinks now and then, because he does, but a lot of people can sit at a bar and have a drink or two and not be labeled as an alcoholic. I don't think Mary Chase ever wrote it that way and based on the versions I've seen, it's not played that way. None of the well-known productions ever played Elwood as a drunk.



**TS: The bar he invites people to is like his office.**

**SE:** Yes, exactly. He finds interesting people and he's able to talk with them and open up to them. Maybe a drink or cocktail frees him up a bit and allows him and his guests to open up to each other.

**TS: Did you have to do research in order to direct this play?**

**SE:** Yes, I've done a lot. I've read all the other versions of the script. I went to the library and saw a revival production on tape that was produced on Broadway in the '70s with Jimmy Stewart repeating his famous film role. Helen Hayes played his sister Veta in that version. It was fascinating. I also found out that there had been a live production of it on television in the '50s with Art Carney. And so I tracked down a tape of it and that's been terrific to watch. We're taking pieces of dialogue from all of these different versions of the script and playing around with them. Don Gregory, who governs the estate, is allowing us to add certain lines that were used in the various incarnations of the text. Mary Chase was very involved in that Art Carney production on television and there are some things in it that are really quite lovely.

**TS: Who plays Veta in the Art Carney version?**

**SE:** Marion Lorne.

**TS: Can you talk about working with the design team?**

**SE:** I was so thrilled that David Rockwell said yes because I know he is very busy as a set designer and an architect and, well, is he really going to want to design a set that is basically two rooms? Because that's what it is. It takes place in two places: the house and the sanitarium. David was really taken by the play and it took us a long, long time to settle on a concept. It's so funny. When you're working on room sets, or one room like *Twelve Angry Men* for instance, it looks simple, but it's actually very difficult and it took us quite a long time to find the right design. Because of all the entrances and exits the script is asking for and what real estate you have, it's actually a very difficult challenge. We worked with a lot of research, keeping it very much in the time period it was written in. There will be no updating the time frame, nothing like that.

**TS: What does the play mean to you?**

**SE:** Eighty per cent of the people I've mentioned the title to have never heard of *Harvey*. No one from the younger generation seems to know it. A certain age group knows it from the 1950 Jimmy Stewart movie. It's not a play that's done a lot. What's so interesting is when you read it, you think, what was it like when it was first performed? It must have been fascinating when people first took in this story. The way in which Mary Chase has structured the play is really sort of genius. You hear about Elwood and then you hear that he has a "friend"; that's it, just a "friend." Then you're introduced to Elwood who then brings in his friend and you realize that he's an imaginary friend, not a real friend. And then later on you find out he's a rabbit, a pooka. I'm hoping that the audience really doesn't know the whole journey and people will take the journey like they did the first time the play was produced. And, also, Jim Parsons is very important to this enterprise. You need an actor who can make the role of Elwood his own. After a few minutes you want the audience members who only know the movie version to think, oh, I'm not imagining Jimmy Stewart in this anymore. I think that's what Jim will be able to bring to it.

**TS: I sense this play deals with convention and how people get treated when they are different.**

**SE:** Yes, exactly. I think it's so amazing to be working on this play now. Bullying and judgment are part of the national conversation. How are we to treat people who are different, who don't fit into the norm so to speak? And why do we try to change them? Why can't we embrace them? Why can't we embrace those people in the world who aren't a reflection of ourselves? Why can't we embrace the individuality of everybody? That's what finally happens to some of the characters at the end of the play. They get a better understanding of who Elwood and his friend Harvey are. I truly think everyone would really like to have a Harvey in their lives.

*“On first reading, you might think, well, this guy's just an alcoholic. But after repeated readings, you realize if the play is to work, the audience has to begin by thinking Elwood is the crazy one and the rest of the characters are sane. And then by the end of the play, the audience's realization is the other way around. Elwood is the sane one and all the others are crazy.”*

# *The Not-So-Imaginary Story of Harvey*

## PRODUCTION HISTORY OF HARVEY

Though *Harvey* was written over sixty years ago, it speaks to us just as strongly now as it did back then. Since its premiere, two Broadway productions, a classic film, and three television productions have guaranteed *Harvey's* place in the theatrical canon and in our collective consciousness.

*Harvey* first opened on Broadway at the 48th Street Theatre in 1944 to great commercial and artistic success. Directed by Antoinette Perry (famous as the namesake of the Tony Awards), the original production starred Frank Fay as Elwood and Josephine Hull as Veta and ran for nearly five years. Mary Chase won that year's Pulitzer Prize for Drama. In 1949, a successful production followed at the Price of Wales Theatre on London's West End.

In 1950, James Stewart starred in the film version of *Harvey*, forever preserving the play and bringing it to a wider audience. Josephine Hull reprised the role she made famous on Broadway. This version expanded the play into the "real" world, adding scenes on the street and at Charley's Place, the character Elwood's favorite bar. 1958 saw a live television broadcast starring Art Carney, with Elizabeth Montgomery as Miss Kelly and Larry Blyden as Dr. Sanderson. As a live telecast, it returned to the play's original structure and streamlined it for length.

James Stewart returned to the role of Elwood in a 1970 Broadway revival with Helen Hayes as Veta; she won a Tony Award, and he a Drama Desk. Stewart reprised his role yet again in 1972 along with Hayes in a

television movie, this time with Madeline Kahn as Miss Kelly. Another television movie was produced in 1996 starring Harry Anderson as Elwood, Swoosie Kurtz as Veta, Leslie Nielsen as Dr. Chumley, and Jessica Hecht as Miss Kelly. And now in 2012, Ms. Hecht returns to the play, this time in the role of Veta, alongside Jim Parsons as Elwood.

What is it about this play that has inspired so many stage and film productions over the years? And what makes so many incredible performers want to be a part of it, often multiple times?

The answer lies in the very substance of the play. One of the major motivations people have for coming to the theatre or seeing films is to escape. Yes, we look for strong characters, intellectual engagement, social interaction, and many other things when we go out to see a show. But very often, we simply want to spend time in another world and be entertained.

*Harvey* is escapism at its best, overflowing with charm, humor, and even a bit of magic. The play explores the joys of living simply, of making friends, and of finding happiness through taking a leap of faith. *Harvey* tells a story in which one man tries to be the best person he can be, and watching his journey is sweet, funny, and utterly uplifting. Perhaps that's why this play continues to delight – we get to see a man befriend his own happiness incarnate, in the form of a six-foot-tall rabbit. What could be better than that?



*Charles Kimbrough, Jessica Hecht  
and Jim Parsons in Harvey*  
Photo by Joan Marcus



# The Not-So-Imaginary Story of Set Design

## INTERVIEW WITH SET DESIGNER DAVID ROCKWELL

Before rehearsals began, Education Dramaturg Ted Sod sat down with Set Designer David Rockwell to discuss his thoughts on *Harvey*.

**Ted Sod:** Will you tell us a bit about yourself? How did you become interested in the theatre?

**David Rockwell:** I was born in Chicago and then my family moved to the Jersey Shore. It was amazingly impactful as a kid to be in this wonderful, manicured community with lots of big private homes. My mom had been a dancer in vaudeville and she helped start a community theatre there called the Dual Players, which in retrospect, I now see was right out of *Waiting for Guffman*.

I was very interested in making things from the earliest age. I would make spook houses and carnivals and I would take stuff from the world around me—doors, buckets—and create these contraptions. In the theatre, I was able to see how design, storytelling and music came together, and I was excited by that. When I was twelve my family decided to move pretty suddenly to Guadalajara, Mexico. My dad sold his business and retired. And before we went down there, we came to New York for my first real day in the city. I did two things that were seared into my memory and became seminal events for me: I went to lunch at Schraffts, which was the place to go before a matinee. Having four older brothers, I wasn't used to dining being anything other than a competitive art form, so I was kind of amazed by how this room became a community; there's this sense of community that happens in a public space. Then we went to the Imperial Theatre to see *Fiddler on the Roof* and I became obsessed with the visual language and began to research Boris Aronson.

**TS:** Did living in Mexico have an effect on your sense of design?

**DR:** It was all public space: market places, bull rings, mariachi squares. I guess my interest in theatre morphed into an interest in public space.

**TS:** Where did you go to college? Did you study architecture or theatre?

**DR:** I went to study architecture at Syracuse University and continued this interest I had in the inner life of buildings. I also did a lot of research on theatre. A lot of the projects I did as an architect were theatre related. In fact, when I was nineteen, I contacted Jules Fisher. I was at Syracuse University, and I was researching a theatre he had done. He was very nice and friendly. I took a year abroad in London at the Architectural Association, which reignited my interest and love for theatre because it was so accessible there and inexpensive. So I think I fell back in love with the notion of theatre. I came to New York and worked that summer for Roger Morgan, who was a Broadway lighting designer. I'd seen the show *Dracula* with Edward Gorey's designs and Frank Langella. And I cold called Roger the next day and said, "I'd love to come work for you for a week or two and if it works out, I'll stick around." I ended up taking a semester off and worked for Roger as a theatre consultant and got immersed into the world of theatre. I continued studying architecture and set design as well, graduated and came to New York, and began doing a bunch of different jobs. I ended up designing a restaurant that launched my career and opened up a studio in '84. I was well on my way as an architect and was an avid theatregoer. I still go two or three times a week. I knew many people in the theatre and was in conversation with Jules Fisher, who's remained



Holley Fain, Charles Kimbrough  
and Morgan Spector in *Harvey*  
Photo by Joan Marcus

a close friend, and he encouraged me to take the leap and to start talking to directors about designing for the theatre. So there was a four or five year period where I was just meeting with directors and sketching and working on things and trying to understand the relationship between architecture and theatre.

**TS:** What do you look for from a director when you discuss a play that you're about to create the environments for?

**DR:** The key is to have a director who really wants to engage in telling a story and give you as much information as they can about how they want to tell the story, collaborate with you on how to physicalize it, but not prescribe the solution. I think the real thrill with the director is the back and forth and the sense of real-time collaboration. It's very different than any other art form I know where you know you're telling that story together. So I look for a director who is open, who is passionate and really is interested in evolving something together and doesn't lead with knowing what they want it to look like. I think both in architecture and theatre, starting the design process with what you want it to look like is a good way to end the creative process. It's why I'd always been interested in working with Scott Ellis. We've known each other for a long time and he is just such a strong

# The Not-So-Imaginary Story of Set Design ctd.

## INTERVIEW WITH SET DESIGNER DAVID ROCKWELL

storyteller. From the beginning, we really focused on how to present this piece true to its period from the '40's, but hopefully also in a fresh way. And there are many, many specific tasks that the design has to solve here including lots of entrances. So there's comedy with five or six entrances moving in and out quickly. Doing that in a way that didn't feel predictable was one of our concerns.

**TS: How much does the space that you have at Studio 54 dictate what you can and cannot do? That's rather important, isn't it?**

**DR:** Totally important. At Studio 54 you can't go down and you can't really go up. What's great about Studio 54 is a sense of environment. We wanted to push the action as far downstage as we could. We wanted to take advantage of the rake so you can really see the floor. It's a theatre in which you can really look at what's happening on multiple levels. And *Harvey* takes place in two locations essentially, the sanitarium and this Victorian-era mansion. The set takes up a lot of depth so when we go from location to location we're able to do that in front of the audience, hoping that will be a thrilling transition.

**Ted Sod: Where do you go to start your research?**

**DR:** Now of course it's much easier to do research online. But I did go to the library, and one of the things we looked at is houses from that period, particularly the west. We looked at libraries and entrance halls. It's a play where there's not a huge amount of sitting down so there's not a lot of need for big pieces of furniture. The way we're telling the story is on three turntables. A big center turntable and two side turntables and the transitions involve all three of those. So we looked for places that had a sense of grandeur, affluence but also felt like they had been through many lives. We looked at some of the Far West houses of Pasadena that Greene and Greene did. We looked for eccentric details, because clearly everyone in this play is pretty eccentric, so we didn't want to be kind of on the nose. For the sanitarium we did a lot of research, and that was surprising because what I thought we were going to find is something that was quite institutional, but the sanitarium the Dowd family would have gone to was quite opulent and hotel-like. And in the '30's and '40's there was no hint of anything clinical about them. It was like a spa. So they're two lush interiors, very different in color scheme, but both using the same staircase in the center. So you can have a transition where someone is going up the stair, out of the mansion and then appearing down the stairs into the sanitarium.

**TS: What do you think *Harvey* is about? Is there a particular character you relate to? What was it about this play that intrigued you?**

**DR:** I've never done anything like *Harvey* before. I love the movie and my kids love the movie. *Harvey* is about this very eccentric man who dances to a very different drummer than the majority of people. Underneath all of that, there's a sense of magic and good will. And I do think it's about accepting everyone for what we are, including rabbits. The other reason I wanted to do this is I had worked with Jim Parsons before in *The Normal Heart*, which was an extraordinary experience and he was amazing. I feel like he's from a more interesting, smarter, better planet.

**TS: How do you collaborate with the other designers?**

**DR:** Couple of ways. And you know it's really the director that sets the tone for that. We met with Scott once a week for many, many weeks. We looked at sketch models and started with research of course. After that, given an agreed-upon direction, we started to bring in some of the other players from the design team. The lighting designer is critical for a bunch of reasons, including what we're doing with having an environment that rotates in front of the audience, and some of the windows to the outside will be windows and some will be light boxes. So there's a very tricky matching that we have to do on that. And we've worked with Ken Posner a lot. The other thing the lighting designer will do is look at colors and make sure that we're providing a color range that they can work with. The key is to get those designers involved early enough that they can make a difference in terms of research on fabrics so the walls can offset them.

**TS: Can you talk about other projects you're working on now and what inspires you?**

**DR:** I recently gave a talk at Pratt to a bunch of students and then worked with them afterwards. Students are very inspiring because they're all about saying, "What if?" They haven't learned to say "no" yet. I think that, at the end of the day, what inspires me is working on projects with people who are not trying to replicate something we did before. We just renovated many of the public spaces in the Hotel Bel-Air, Los Angeles, one of which was a restaurant with Wolfgang Puck. The Bel-Air is a hotel that's incredibly well known, so I was inspired by the legendary character of the place, and the gardens and the homes around it. So we tried to make the renovations of the hotel even more Bel-Air-like than it was originally. And the same holds true for a children's hospital I'm doing on Long Island. We're bringing in fifteen or twenty artists to each create a custom installation piece in and around the kids' rooms. I think continuing to be curious and continuing to look outside your own boundaries is really the key for being inspired. Having said that, there's so much inspiring design on Broadway: I saw *Once* off-Broadway and I was so moved by Natasha Katz's lighting and Bob Crowley's design and the simplicity of someone moving downstage and then being represented in all those beautiful mirrors in the set—just a simple moment like that is inspiring.

**TS: Any advice for a young person who wants to design scenery?**

**DR:** Yes, and it would be the same for someone who wants to design scenery or who wants to design buildings. My advice is the first thing to do is figure out what you're really passionate about and don't let your own eccentric edges be rubbed off by trying to be like someone else. I think that's really been the gift in my career. I've figured out how to take the things that I'm most passionate about and interested in and weave those into the work that I do. You've got to find your own unique voice. The other thing I would advise someone just learning to design is to go to as much as you can, ask as many questions as you can and carry a tape measure with you. New York is the most wonderful training ground for designers in the world.

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New York State Assemblyman Herman D. Farrell,  
Jr.  
Barbara Lee and Alston Gardner  
Jodi Glucksman  
Jeanne and Tom Hagerty  
The Heckscher Foundation for Children  
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Weinstein  
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Education programs at Roundabout are made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council; the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Governor Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

