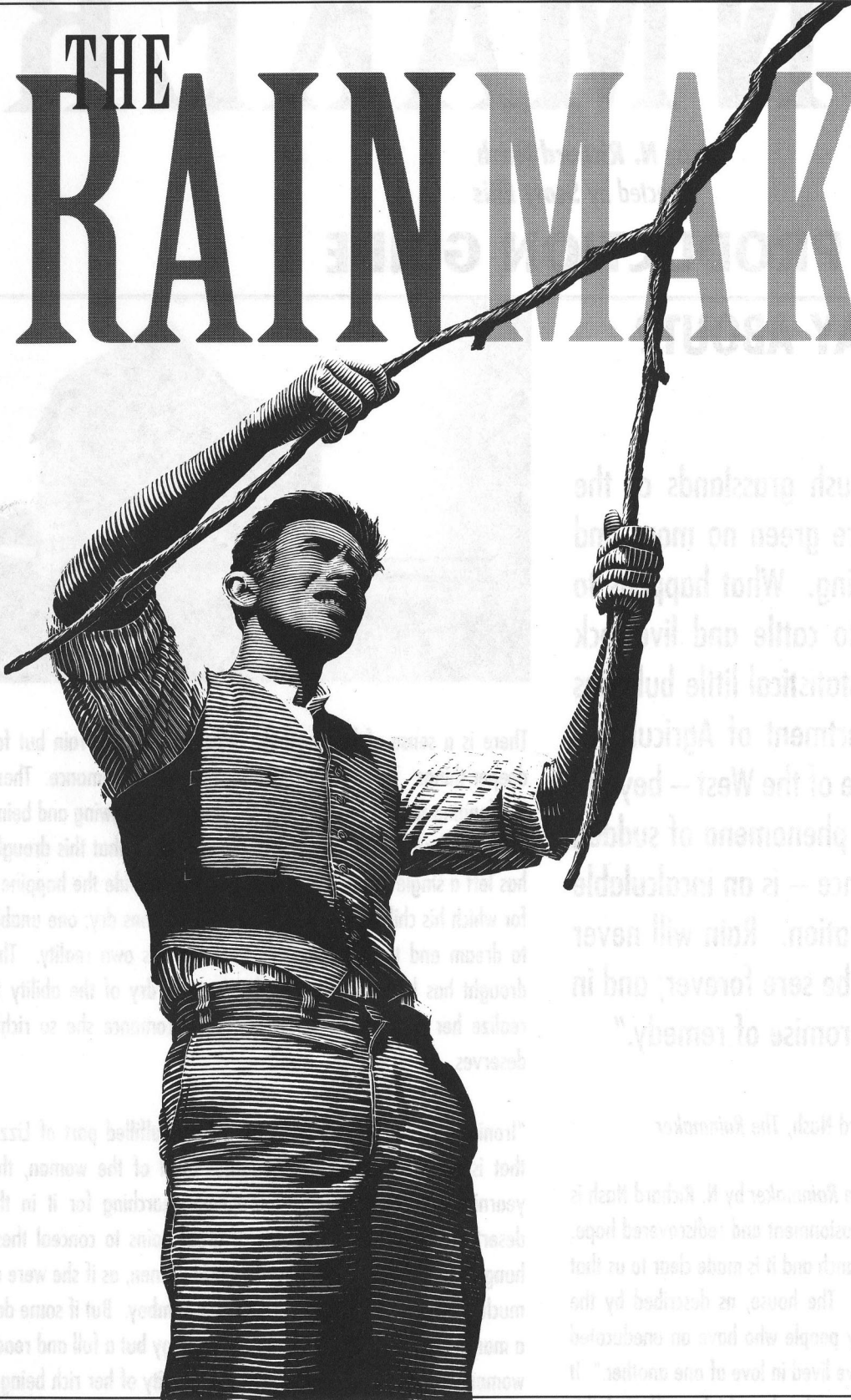


Roundabout Theatre Company

THE RAINMAKER



Page To Stage Production Guide

THE RAINMAKER

by *N. Richard Nash*
directed by *Scott Ellis*

PRODUCTION GUIDE

WHAT IS THE PLAY ABOUT?

"When drought hits the lush grasslands of the richly fertile West, they are green no more and the dying is a palpable thing. What happens to verdure and vegetation, to cattle and livestock can be read in the coldly statistical little bulletins freely issued by the Department of Agriculture. What happens to the people of the West — beyond the calculable and terrible phenomena of sudden poverty and loss of substance — is an incalculable and febrile kind of desperation. Rain will never come again; the earth will be sere forever; and in all of heaven there is no promise of remedy."

- N. Richard Nash, *The Rainmaker*

Set in the West at a time of drought, *The Rainmaker* by N. Richard Nash is a quintessential American story of disillusionment and rediscovered hope. At rise we are introduced to the Curry ranch and it is made clear to us that it had once been a prosperous home. The house, as described by the author, is "a place where gentle, kindly people who have an uneducated but profoundly true sense of beauty have lived in love of one another." It is not long, however, before we see how the drought has affected this family. It soon becomes clear that the loss of crops and livestock is mirrored by an inner drought — one that has perhaps persisted longer than the weather.



There is a sense of longing here — not just for the rain but for deeper things. There is a longing for beauty and romance. There is a longing for the fulfillment that comes with knowing and being your true and complete self. We discover early that this drought has left a single father dry of the ability to provide the happiness for which his children desire. It has left two sons dry; one unable to dream and the other unable to create his own reality. This drought has left the daughter dry as well, dry of the ability to realize her own beauty and possess the romance she so richly deserves.

"Ironically," states Nash, "it is this one unfulfilled part of Lizzie that is the most potentially beautiful facet of the woman, this yearning for romance, this courageous searching for it in the desert of her existence. She is at great pains to conceal these hungers by behaving, in a western world of men, as if she were as much a man as any of them. Lizzie, the Tomboy. But if some day a man should find her, he will find no tomboy but a full and ready woman, willing to give herself with the totality of her rich being."

It is into this dry and dusty existence that the rainmaker blows. Like a leaf sailing on a breeze, he lands at the Curry's doorstep as

Continued on the next page.



A rainmaker gives this farm community hope.

if an unseen force has summoned him there. According to Nash, "he carries a short hickory stick — it is his weapon, his magic wand, his pride of manhood."

He is a braggart, a swashbuckling confidence man, spouting optimism and glib fast-talk. With him, he brings the promise of rain and the promise of dreams fulfilled.

In some ways, the play was ahead of its time, featuring as it does an independent woman who finds acceptance as an equal and achieves her goals without compromising her beliefs. At its heart, *The Rainmaker* is a romantic comedy very much of its era. Reminiscent of Inge's *Picnic*, it exploits common trends of the day such as the visit to a staid community of an upsetting vagabond and the romanticizing of an inarticulate people who acquire a poetic sense of language on the stage.

Of the original production, Walter Kerr of the *NY Herald Tribune* wrote, "What is most fantastic about this bolt of moonshine is that an impressive amount of it strikes home. This is partly due to a slightly skeptical grin that author and characters persist in keeping on their faces. Nobody believes in the rainmaker. Nobody pretends that the girl of the house is really pretty. Nobody strives to kid the audience into anything they're not ready to believe on their own. As a result, a lot of long-standing guards go quickly down; there's room for jubilant nonsense, and moonlit sadness, to slip through."

In watching *The Rainmaker* we are ultimately witness to the power of love, whether it is romantic love or love of family and friends. We are compelled, as Nash asks us in his forward, to "focus closely, but through a romantically gauzed lens, on the face of Lizzie's loneliness and on her hope," because, "life can be seen deeply through small lenses. And truthfully even through gauze."

Conceived by Mr. Nash after a trip through the drought-ridden Southwest during the summer of 1950, *The Rainmaker* first opened on Broadway on October 1954 at the Court Theatre starring Geraldine Page as Lizzie and Darren McGaven as Starbuck. The classic 1956 film of the play starred Katherine Hepburn and Burt Lancaster.



Cooperative harvesting and threshing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

N. RICHARD NASH

After a brief stint of professional boxing, N. Richard Nash settled down to being a teacher of philosophy, and then — he calls this a natural progression — of drama. He has taught at Bryn Mawr College, Haverford, Brandeis, the University of Pennsylvania, and has lectured at Yale and Princeton.

Nash has written with distinction in a number of media —the theatre, television, film, the musical stage, poetry and fiction. Best known for his work in the theatre, he has had many plays produced on and off Broadway, and throughout the world. Certainly his most famous play is *The Rainmaker*, which is now regarded as a classic. It has been translated into nearly forty languages, including an African tongue which has no written form; the actors learned their translated lines by rote. Nash wrote the screenplay for *Porgy and Bess*, and the libretti for *The Happy Time* and *110 in the Shade*. Among his novels, which have won admiring reviews, two have been best sellers: *East Wind, Rain* and *The Last Magic*.

In television, he is one of that select half-dozen writers associated with the period in media history known as "The Golden Age of Television": Nash, Gore Vidal, Paddy Chayefsky, Robert Alan Aurthur, Horton Foote and Rod Serling.

Nash has had an honored career, and has won a great number of American and international awards, among them The American Dramatists Award, the Maxwell Anderson Verse Drama Award, The Orbeal Prize, the Wilhelm Gosse Award, the Cannes Prize for Literature and Drama, the Geraldine Dodge Award and the New American Play Award.

He is currently at work on a nonfiction book about creativity and criticism, and has just completed a new novel, *The Wildwood*.

(Reprinted with permission from N. Richard Nash, *Selected Plays*; Greenhouse and Kirby, Publishers, 1996)

PRINCIPLE WORKS

Novels

East Wind, Rain; The Last Magic; Dragonfly; Cry Macho; Radiance; Aphrodite's Cave; Behold the Man; The Wildwood

Non-Fiction

The Wounds of Sparta; The Athenian Spirit ; Memoir (verse); Thespian Verses

Plays

See the Jaguar; Handful of Fire; Echoes; Girls of Summer; The Rainmaker; The Young and Fair; Second Best Bed; Everybody, Smile!; Breaking the Tie; Alchemy; Bluebird of Happiness; The Green Clown; Trial and Error

Under the Pseudonym "John Roc"

Winter Blood (a novel); Fire! (a play); The Loss of D-Natural (a play)

Libretti

110 in the Shade; Wildcat; The Happy Time; Yes, Tom, Yes!; Cleopatra

Winds, Weather, and Work: The Challenges of Prairie Farming

"Those who labor the earth are the chosen people of God." — Thomas Jefferson

The plains and prairie lands of the American Midwest have been a vital farming area for generations. European immigrants settled the region during the nineteenth century, and from 1860-1910, over half a billion acres were converted to farmland— that's an area larger than Western Europe and Great Britain combined. The farmers were attracted to this section of the country because ancient glaciers had leveled the land and left the soil rich in nutrients. Though several crops have been grown in this area, it is known as the Corn Belt.

The climate of the region has proven particularly challenging for farmers. A small increase of rain during a critical growing period in July can greatly multiply the production of corn. Weather

changes in the area can be rather extreme, however. The plains and the prairies, distant from the moderating effects of the Great Lakes, can experience sweltering hot summers and frigid, snow-heavy winters. Some areas in the plains are notorious for strong, unending winds. Areas of Kansas and Oklahoma have been dubbed "Tornado Alley" due to the many storms spawned from the clash of air currents in the expanse of flat land.

"Laboring the earth" in this area during the early part of this century was a hard, solitary life style. The farmers put in long days, rising before sunrise to begin their duties of tending to the livestock and maintaining their crops. These prairie folk had to be adept at several jobs. In addition to knowing about agriculture and animal husbandry, farmers had to sink their own wells, set up their own fences, and repair their own equipment. Economics and pest management were also major concerns, since infestations of

grasshoppers or rabbits could wipe out an entire crop. Due to the great demands of the job, farmers rarely enjoyed any days without work. Of course, all of the farmwork had to be accomplished while taking care of the household chores of cooking and cleaning. Though some farmers were able to hire a few assistants, or "hands," generally the responsibility of operating the farm fell to the family. This interdependence led to a division of labor, with the men generally working in the fields, while the women usually worked in and around the home. In addition, farm families had to be self-reliant because they might be several miles from their nearest neighbors. Often, the only direct connection these farms might have with the outside world was a radio and a telephone. Though this isolated lifestyle could be lonely for some people, it could serve also to strengthen family ties.



During the 1930s—the period in which *The Rainmaker* takes place—the economic hardships brought on by the Great Depression were compounded by a severe drought. Areas of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas were so dry that millions of tons of topsoil simply blew

away in the great dust storms, or "black blizzards." During this period, known as the Dust Bowl, farmers were driven to desperation, and hundreds of thousands left their farms for work elsewhere. In his novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck recounts the tale of one of these families and their travels to California.

Whether it was facing the changeable weather, a large task load, or an isolated existence, the life of the prairie farmer has been one of trials and challenges. Despite these great demands, farming is a way of life that many people do not want to give up. As one young prairie farmer said recently, "If I have to move to town, I really truthfully don't know what I'll do. There's just something about it, when you're on the farm you're your own boss. It's been a good life for us." This contemporary farmer's statement echoes Thomas Jefferson's sentiment from two centuries ago by suggesting that the people who face the demands and challenges of farming life are "the chosen people of God."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

H.C. Curry (played by Jerry Hardin) is a single father. He is a capable and good man. His prosaic efficiency is balanced by a deep-seeded imagination.

Noah Curry (played by John Bedford Lloyd) is the oldest son. A somewhat self-righteous man, he is rigidly opinionated and seems to have only inherited his father's prosaic side.

Jim Curry (played by David Aaron Baker) is the youngest of the family. On the surface he's a strong and competent man, but once he opens his mouth it is clear that he's still a child.

Lizzie Curry (played by Jayne Atkinson) is the middle child and only daughter. She has had to step into her mother's shoes from an early age. It is clear that the men of her family are deeply respectful and protective of her. No man outside the family has ever loved her or found her beautiful.

File (played by Randy Mell) is the deputy sheriff and Lizzie's would-be suitor. A reticent and intelligent man, he possesses a touch of bitterness that is leavened by a mischievous humor.

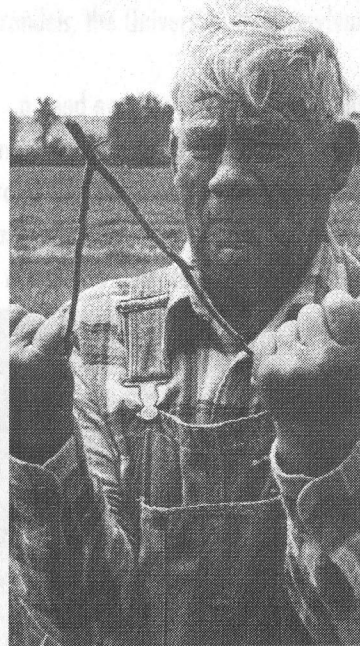
Bill Starbuck (played by Woody Harrelson) is the rainmaker; a loud braggart and gentle dreamer who floats into town on a breeze.

Sheriff Thomas (played by Bernie McInerney) is File's boss and the foil for his sarcastic wit.

PRODUCTION GUIDE FOR THE RAINMAKER

Margaret Salvante, Education Director
Philip A. Alexander, Education Associate
Malanna Carey, Marketing Assistant

RAINMAKERS: SHAMANS OR CON-MEN?



"I've been a diviner for fifty years. I've doodle-bugged for oil in Kansas, found water in Arizona and minerals in California. I've also looked for archeological sites, lost people and lost aeroplanes. Ninety percent of the time I find them."

--Self-Described Diviner

The role of the rainmaker has its roots in several rituals and practices. European immigrants imported the practice of water-witching, in which a V-shaped branch from a peach or willow tree is used to determine the location of underground water. Also known as "divining" or "dowsing," this procedure—still practiced to this day—is quite mysterious and people are divided as to whether it's a legitimate technique or just a trick. The Hopi people of the Southwest also developed a ceremony called the "Snake Dance" with the intent of creating rain. At the conclusion of a nine-day ritual, Hopi men dance with snakes in their mouths with the belief that the reptiles entreat spirits to send rain. By the mid-twentieth century, scientists and independent inventors were experimenting with techniques to coax rain from the skies. Their methods might include shooting silver iodide into the air from airplanes or from small cannons on the ground. Some daring entrepreneurs combined these assorted techniques and beliefs surrounding rainmaking, and played on farmers' need for water while utilizing the marketing savvy of a traveling salesman. Since these rainmakers made grand claims and didn't stay in one community very long, they quickly developed the reputation of being con-men or "hucksters." Though the task of finding water or making rain has developed in different ways in different cultures, rainmakers seem destined to share one trait: their work will always be surrounded by an aura of mystery and suspicion.

ACTIVITIES:

BEFORE THE PLAY:

Think about a time when someone taught you something important, something that changed how you thought about the world or how you thought about yourself. Perhaps this other person was a close friend or a teacher. If you can't think of an example like this for yourself, talk with your family and friends. Perhaps someone several years older than you might have some interesting stories. Here are a few questions to get your conversation started:

- What was an important lesson you learned about yourself?
- Who was the person who helped you learn this lesson?
- Why was that person the best person to help you in that situation?

DURING THE PLAY:

As you watch *The Rainmaker*, pay attention to the characters' journeys of self-discovery. More than one character learns an important lesson about himself or herself, and these characters are greatly affected by what the other characters do and say. Some ideas to keep in mind as you watch the performance are:

- How does this character feel about herself or himself?
- What different techniques do the other characters use to persuade this character: Do they bully, flatter, or appeal to the character's imagination?
- Why does the character change?

AFTER THE PLAY:

Write a play or short story about a person on a journey of self-discovery. Perhaps another character helps them learn a valuable lesson. Some examples could be a parent helping a child, a teacher helping a student, or a coach helping an athlete. You could also emulate N. Richard Nash's technique in *The Rainmaker*, and write about a stranger helping an entire family. As you create your story or play, some important elements you will need to look at are:

- What does the main character need to learn about himself or herself?
- Why doesn't the main character know this already? What are the barriers she or he faces? Are these internal/emotional barriers, or are they external/physical barriers?
- How does another character help the main character? Does the helper say something important, or does the helper demonstrate an important idea through a particular set of actions?

Send your finished piece to Roundabout and we'll share it with those who are involved in the production of *The Rainmaker* (We may even post it on our website!) Send it to the attention of:

Margaret Salvante, Education Director, Roundabout Theatre Company

231 West 39th Street, Suite 1200, New York, NY 10018

or send an E-MAIL to: Margies@roundabouttheatre.org

WEBSITE: www.roundabouttheatre.org

Be sure to check out Roundabout's website for more information on this production, the rest of our season and all of Roundabout's activities.

WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

What To Look For

The Brooks Atkinson Theatre has several resources for your convenience. Restrooms are located on the mezzanine (upper) level. Also on the mezzanine is a refreshment counter where you can buy soda or a snack, but please remember that you will not be permitted to take these items into the theatre with you.

Ticket Policy

As a student participant in *Page To Stage* or *Theatre Access*, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

Audience Etiquette

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.

*Thank You For Your Cooperation
And Enjoy The Show!*

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