

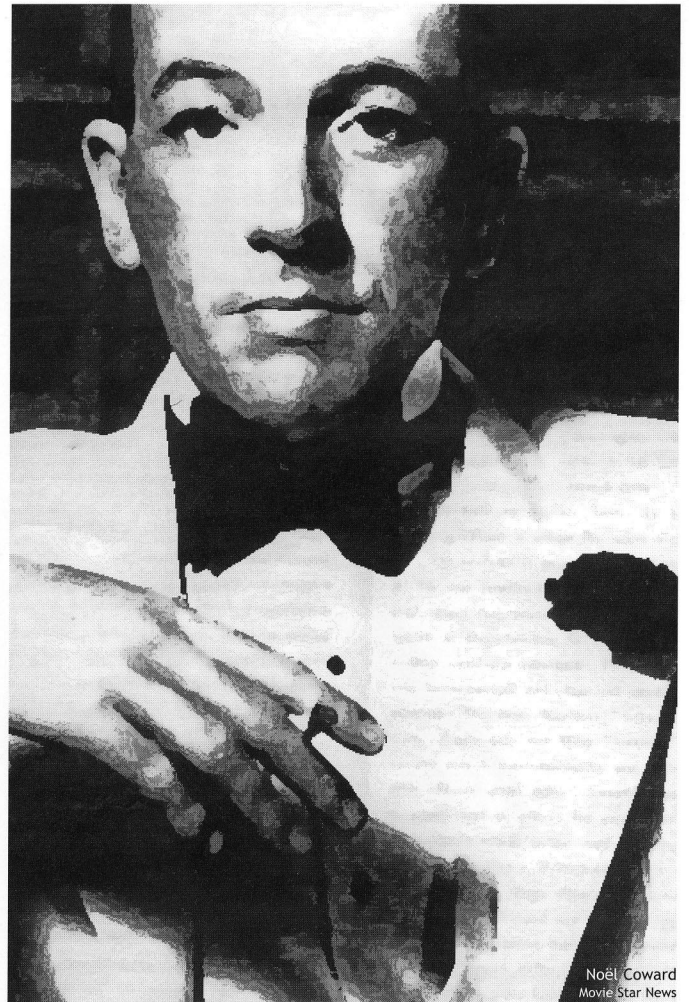
# UPSTAGE

A PUBLICATION OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
AT ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY MARCH 2001



**DESIGN FOR  
LIVING**

# MEETING COWARD HEAD ON



Noël Coward  
Movie Star News

## THOUGHTS ON DIRECTING DESIGN FOR LIVING BY JOE MANTELLO

*Let's live turbulently, turbulently, turbulently*

*Let's add something to the history of man,*

*Come what may*

*We'll be spectacular*

*And say "Hey! Hey!"*

*In the vernacular ...*

*Let's live boisterously, boisterously, boisterously*

*Let's lead moralists the devil of a dance ...*

- Noel Coward  
From the review *Words and Music*, written  
in the same year as *Design for Living*.

**When I first read** *Design for Living*, I was shocked at how modern it was. The story centers on three characters -- Otto, an aspiring artist, his best friend Leo, a suddenly successful playwright, and Otto's girlfriend Gilda, an aspiring interior designer. We first meet them in Otto and Gilda's bohemian flat in Paris, where we very quickly discover that Gilda and Leo have just slept together. But *Design*

*for Living* is not a plot-driven play. You're not sort of sitting in your seat thinking, "What's going to happen next?" Rather, the play compels you to fall in love with this unlikely trio. You become interested in seeing them pair off in every possible combination - Leo and Gilda, Otto and Gilda, Leo and Otto - and yet you feel that it's incomplete unless the three of them come together at the end.

**It's a tricky thing** to appreciate the deeper meaning of this play. My hope is that the sexuality in the play is not tension-laden, that the audience is not sitting there waiting for the two boys to kiss. I think that certainly there will be people who will come and find the idea of these three people in a relationship shocking and unconventional. And there will be others who will say, "oh, ho-hum, bisexuality or a ménage-à-trois - who cares?" But it's really about something much deeper and much more complicated than that. It's about the fact that these three people are truly unable to live life unless they're together. That includes sex, that includes emotional support, that includes everything. To me, that is actually a more complicated, shocking idea than they all sort of just want to have a roll in the hay. The trickiest thing is to understand what is really happening in the last moment of the play. The script says the three of them are laughing together as the curtain falls. What does that mean? How do you make that a satisfying ending? People have been arguing about that final laughter for a long time.

Some think they're laughing at the absurd conformity of the society around them. Others say they're laughing in giddy anticipation of the ménage-à-trois that we assume will happen after the curtain comes down. Coward has said they are laughing at themselves. I don't know if any of these are so. They are certainly not laughing in giddy anticipation, like "Oh, great! We all get to hop into bed now." I think that's really the least of their concerns at this point.

**Coward wrote** the play for himself and the famous stage couple Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, who were close friends of his and widely considered to be the greatest theatre artists of their day. Coward played Leo, who seems to be an autobiographical character for Coward. This is especially true in the second act when the play takes a sort of side trip from the emotional journey of this odd love triangle to talk about success and what it means to be famous. You're forgiven a great many things when you're a celebrity and it breeds a kind of selfishness. The shocking thing about this play is that it doesn't attempt to whitewash that darker side of fame. These characters are completely delightful while being completely selfish and self-absorbed. I think the way we have cast these three characters will give this production a particular edge. Alan Cumming, Jennifer Ehle and Dominic West are each celebrities in their own right and the chemistry between them is sensational. The three of them together lend something sort of contemporary and fresh to the play simply because of who they are. ■

## UPSTAGE

### CONTRIBUTORS

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#### ON THE COVER:

Jennifer Ehle

Photo: Henry Leutwyler, NYC

# Noël the Fortunate

*"I am England, and England is me," Noël Coward once said. He wasn't wrong. He was born on the eve of the twentieth century; as an actor, performer and songwriter, Coward lived to define his time. To imagine England without Coward is like imagining America without jazz. He gave it a pulse, a look, an attitude. His streamlined, deluxe persona - the cigarette holders, the silk dressing gowns, the crisp clipped diction, the amusing malice - was the first sighting of the contemporary notion of cool... He was The Beatles of his day - Britain's first modern megastar who understood the mass media and who was also a master of self-promotion... The name of Coward's game was dissimulation expressed as charm, which is both the subject and object of his plays.*

- John Lahr, introduction to *The Noël Coward Diaries*

# Noël the Brave

- ◆ Coward made his first stage appearance at 12 years old.
- ◆ Coward was only 19 years old when he first had a play produced.
- ◆ At 23 years old, Coward starred in his own play, *The Vortex*, and became a sensation.
- ◆ At 26 years old, he had the first two of twenty-five films produced, *Easy Virtue* and *The Vortex*.
- ◆ Every year from 1922 to 1936, he had at least one play produced either in Britain or America.
- ◆ His success streak picked up again after the war with a production of *Blithe Spirit* in 1941 and he continued writing new plays well into the 1960's.
- ◆ Over the course of his career, Coward wrote over three hundred songs, sixty plays, twenty-five films and two volumes of an autobiography.
- ◆ At 52 years old, Coward began performing as a cabaret singer, extending his performing career for another 15 years.
- ◆ In 1970, he was knighted by the Queen of England.

## NOËL COWARD'S BETTER KNOWN PLAYS INCLUDE:

*Hay Fever*

*The Vortex*

*Fallen Angels*

*Easy Virtue*

*Private Lives*

*Bitter-Sweet*

*The Marquis*

*Post Mortem*

*Design for Living*

*Cavalcade*

*Conversation Piece*

*Blithe Spirit*

*This Happy Breed*

*Present Laughter*

*Relative Values*

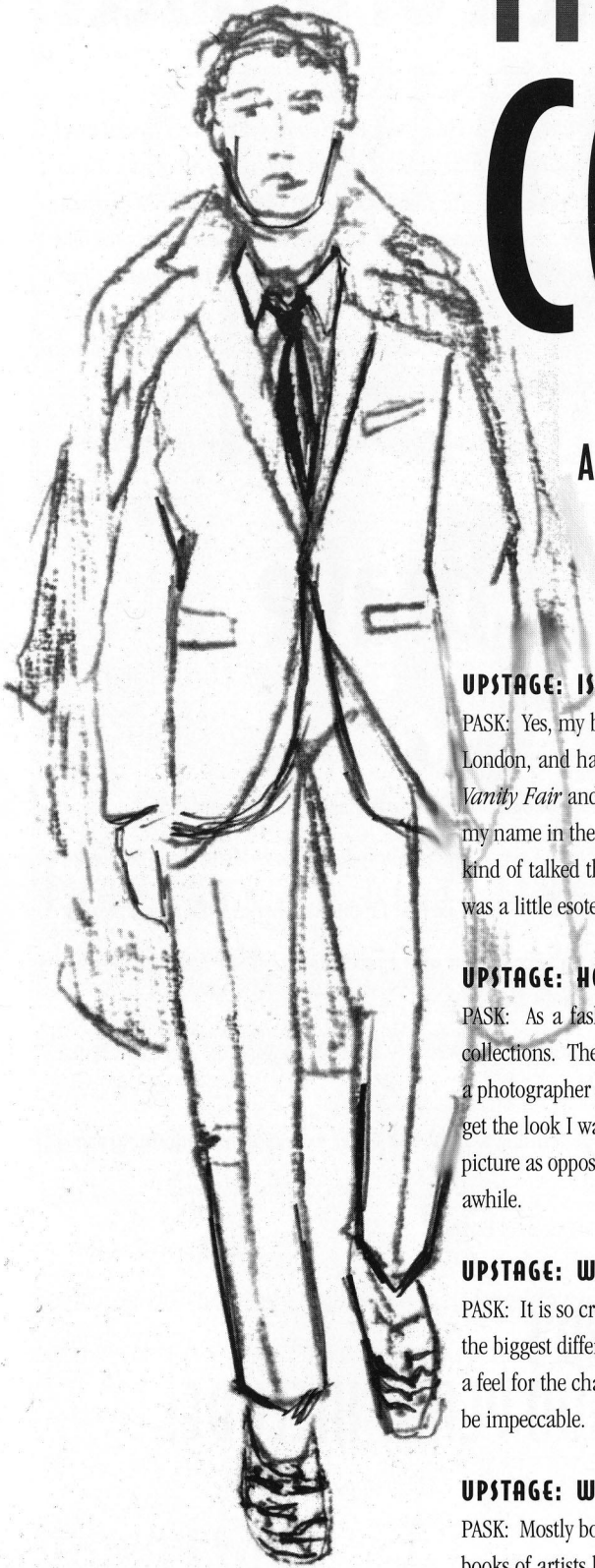
*Waiting in the Wings*

*Look After Lulu*

*A Suite in Three Keys*

# THE COUTURE OF COSTUMES

## A CONVERSATION WITH FASHION EDITOR-CUM COSTUME DESIGNER, BRUCE PASK



Costume sketch by Bobby Pearce,  
Associate Designer

### **UPSTAGE: IS THIS REALLY YOUR FIRST JOB AS A COSTUME DESIGNER?**

PASK: Yes, my brother says I slipped in Broadway's back door. He is a set designer and does a lot of work in New York and London, and has actually worked with Joe Mantello, the director for this production. Joe was looking through an issue of *Vanity Fair* and saw a shoot I had done with [photographer] Annie Liebovitz and he just liked how it looked. When he saw my name in the credits, he decided to contact me through my brother. After I read through the play a few times, we met and kind of talked through some general concepts. Since I'm not specifically trained in costume design, I think my approach was a little esoteric, and I think that that suited him. He was looking for something non-traditional.

### **UPSTAGE: HOW HAS YOUR WORK AS A FASHION EDITOR PREPARED YOU FOR THIS JOB?**

PASK: As a fashion editor, my job is to go to the fashion shows in Europe and cover the markets here to see the new collections. Then I develop visual story ideas for the magazines. According to what trends I see, I come up with ideas, pick a photographer and put the clothing together. I also serve as an art director on the shoot, working with the photographer to get the look I want. But I actually studied art history in college, so I was always interested in narrative constructs or the big picture as opposed to just putting outfits together. Designing costumes is something I had been thinking about pursuing for awhile.

### **UPSTAGE: WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE COSTUME DESIGNER'S JOB?**

PASK: It is so creative. Sometimes I feel like a kid on the first day of school with a box of crayons and a lot of ideas. I think the biggest difference, however, is in the research work that is required. I began by reading through the play just to develop a feel for the characters - how they looked in my mind's eye. But because it is essentially a period piece, the research had to be impeccable.

### **UPSTAGE: WHAT KIND OF RESEARCH DID YOU LOOK AT?**

PASK: Mostly books from the early thirties - books on movies and fashion of the time, social history books and photography books of artists like Edward Steichen who was a really big photographer of the time. I also kept an eye on today's fashions, looking for things that are current but could have some reference to the 20's or 30's. Although this play is a period piece, I certainly felt that a certain amount of artistic interpretation was necessary. These characters are very original, so just as you might see people wearing 70's retro today, their sense of fashion would not have been pinned down to a specific look from 1932.

## **UPSTAGE: HOW DO YOU ZERO IN ON EACH INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER AS FAR AS HOW WHAT THEY ARE WEARING REFLECTS WHO THEY ARE?**

PASK: You just really need to pay attention to what the play is telling you. For example, the first time we meet Gilda, she is living in an artist's studio in Paris. So I needed to consider a number of factors. First of all, I thought about the fact that Paris is a huge fashion capital and Parisian women have always had a fond and strict appreciation of fashion. Regardless of their economic status, the women of Paris have a designer sensibility. A woman of limited means may only have that one designer suit but she will also wear it into the ground. Even though Gilda is English, being in this bohemian type setting indicates that she has adopted this Parisian sensibility for style. Also, there is a strong bedroom quality about this play. The first scene takes place in the morning and Gilda has just gotten up after having an affair with Leo. It was quite obvious that she should be in a robe, but it wanted it to be a kind of graphic, beautiful robe that would reflect her vivacious personality. I found an example of one from a current designer catalogue that had strict foundations in the twenties, which made sense to me because it was something that would be too beautiful for her to afford unless she got it secondhand or has had it for ten years. So we've made it apparent that it's a holdover from the twenties by making it look a little worn out. From that one robe, hopefully the audience will be able to infer that she is someone who cares about how she looks even though she says she is insecure about her female identity.

In the next scene, its morning again, but this time she is in Leo's apartment in London. We talked about her wearing men's pajamas, and if we could make it clear that they are actually Leo's pajamas, it would be a way of saying that she is part of his life now, and very comfortable in it. We put him in a beautiful brocade robe with no pajamas underneath.

Normally, a man in his position would have been fully dressed with pajamas under his robe and maybe even an ascot around his neck. Also neither one of them is wearing slippers. They are just kind of walking around this beautiful apartment barefoot. So our choices are of the period and very luxurious, but still decadent and unconventional.

Then in the final scene in New York, Gilda has left both men and is living with Ernest, their very conventional friend, and Otto's art dealer. They have just come back from the opera and are hosting a cocktail party. The research tells us that society women of that period always wore very elegant evening gowns to the opera and at this point in her life, Gilda is trying to adopt this more refined, sedate lifestyle. So the dress we chose for her reflects that desire to conform.

If I've done my job well, you should be able to follow the emotional journey of these characters -- to what extent they are trying to conform or set themselves apart from the status quo -- by looking at the clothing they are wearing and noticing how it compares to the conventional styles you see on the other characters. Their clothing choices reflect their life choices - what they are thinking and feeling about their lives.

## **UPSTAGE: AND WHAT DOES THAT TELL US ABOUT THE DEEPER MEANING OF THIS PLAY?**

PASK: For me, the answer is in the title of the play. These three people are trying to craft a design for their own living. But it is an unconventional design. Doing this play now is so important because we are in a time when conformity and adherence to conservative cultural values is a high priority for many. But the standards of the status quo are not for everybody. They shouldn't be for everybody. *Design for Living* is an ironic title, but it is also dogmatic. I think Coward is saying that the kind of life chosen by these characters is not for everybody, but it works for them. ■

**Their clothing  
choices reflect  
their life choices  
- what they are  
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their lives.**

**-BRUCE PASK**



Alan Cumming  
Photo: Henry Leutwyler, NYC

# IT'S A LIVING

ANDREA J. TESTANI, PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER FOR DESIGN, DISCUSSES HER WORK

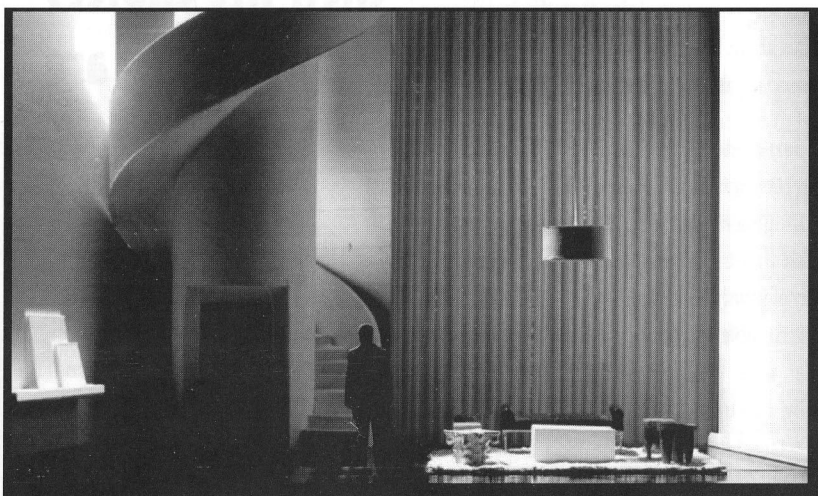
**WHEN** I was in high school, I didn't know how I would be involved, but I knew I wanted to be in theatre. I knew I didn't have the chops to be an actor, so in college I immediately started thinking about directing. I assisted the director on the first show and then he asked me if I wanted to be the stage manager. I had no idea what a stage manager was really, so I said, "Why not learn it?" and jumped into it. It wasn't long before I was stage managing all the shows in college, because there weren't a lot of people who wanted to do it.

I think it was a "fish to water" kind of thing, because I seemed to possess the most important skills for a stage manager to have, the first of which is people skills. I grew up with nine brothers and sisters, so I certainly knew how to deal with people. Being a middle child also helped I think, because I had the experience of listening to my elders while being able to boss around the younger ones.

**AS** a stage manager on Broadway, my job starts a few weeks before the first rehearsal of each new show I work on. I start on board and get the rehearsal room ready. I need to know about everything that is going to be on the stage -- the set pieces, all the props and all the costumes. I am the person that contacts the designers to get meetings together, and I contact the actors about all of their rehearsals. Once we start rehearsal I keep what is called the prompt book which records all of the movements of the actors, so, for example, if an actor crosses from the couch to the chair or exits to the kitchen, I write that

down. If someone enters with a certain prop in his or her hand, that goes in my book.

I act as the director's right hand man. The director is in charge of the show, and it is the director's choice as to what scene we want to rehearse, how long he wants to take with it. My job is to say that we have to break in ten minutes because the union says we are only allowed to go one hour and twenty minutes



A model of the set design of *Design for Living*, Act III

without a break. I'm in charge of how long the span of our day can be, what time we can start and what time we have to end. In rehearsal I focus on the technical things that are happening while the director pays attention to how the story is

## PICTURE YOURSELF...

As you sit in the theatre waiting for the curtain to go up, imagine what you would be doing if you were the stage manager. Here is an example of how it might occur:



At five minutes to curtain time, take a walk through the dressing rooms and ask the actors to

take their places.

▶▶ Go quickly up to the booth in the back of the theatre and put your headset on.

✓ Check in with everyone on crew to make sure they are also on headset and ready to go.

👂 Wait for the assistant stage manager to tell you when the actors are in place and get a go-ahead from the house manager.

🔊 Say, "Standby house lights to half, house lights out, light cues 2 through 5, deck cue 1,

sound cue A and B.



Turn on a few cue lights to warn the people backstage that are not on headset.



Turn on the "god mike" and read the pre-show announcement.



Don't forget to turn the god mike off before you say, "House lights to half, sound cue A go, house out, lights 2 go."



As the lights fade to black, hit a cue light for the curtain to go up.

evolving. For example, in Act One of this play, the stage is raked, so I have to pay attention to how the actors will be affected by certain movements they choose to make. I have to be concerned with what costumes they will be wearing as well, and will say things like, "She is going to be wearing a robe in this scene, so do we really want her to sit like that?" I also have to be aware of the choices the actors and director are making and why they are making them, because when we get into the run of the show I will have to rehearse the understudies.

like that the process is different with each director I work with. Sometimes a director will sit around the table for a week and work with the actors. Sometimes a director will get them right up on their feet. With this show, we are spending a lot of time within each scene exploring different ways to get through it and finding out what it is about; what the characters are saying to each other and what's going on between them underneath the lines. Some of it has to do with the director's way of working, but much more has to do with the particular requirements of each play.

find my job very gratifying when the show begins to come together in the final days of rehearsal, even when it's a hard production and there are a lot of problems getting it to come together. Once we get into the theatre, I start taking over a lot more. I call the light cues, the sound cues and anything that moves on the set. On the first couple of nights when everything has come together and I'm in charge of starting the show, my job starts to become incredibly rewarding, especially when I realize that there are 750 people sitting in the audience waiting for me to say curtain up. It's a lot of fun! But it is never more important than what is happening on stage. The work of the actors is what everyone is here to see. My job is to make it possible for that to happen. ■

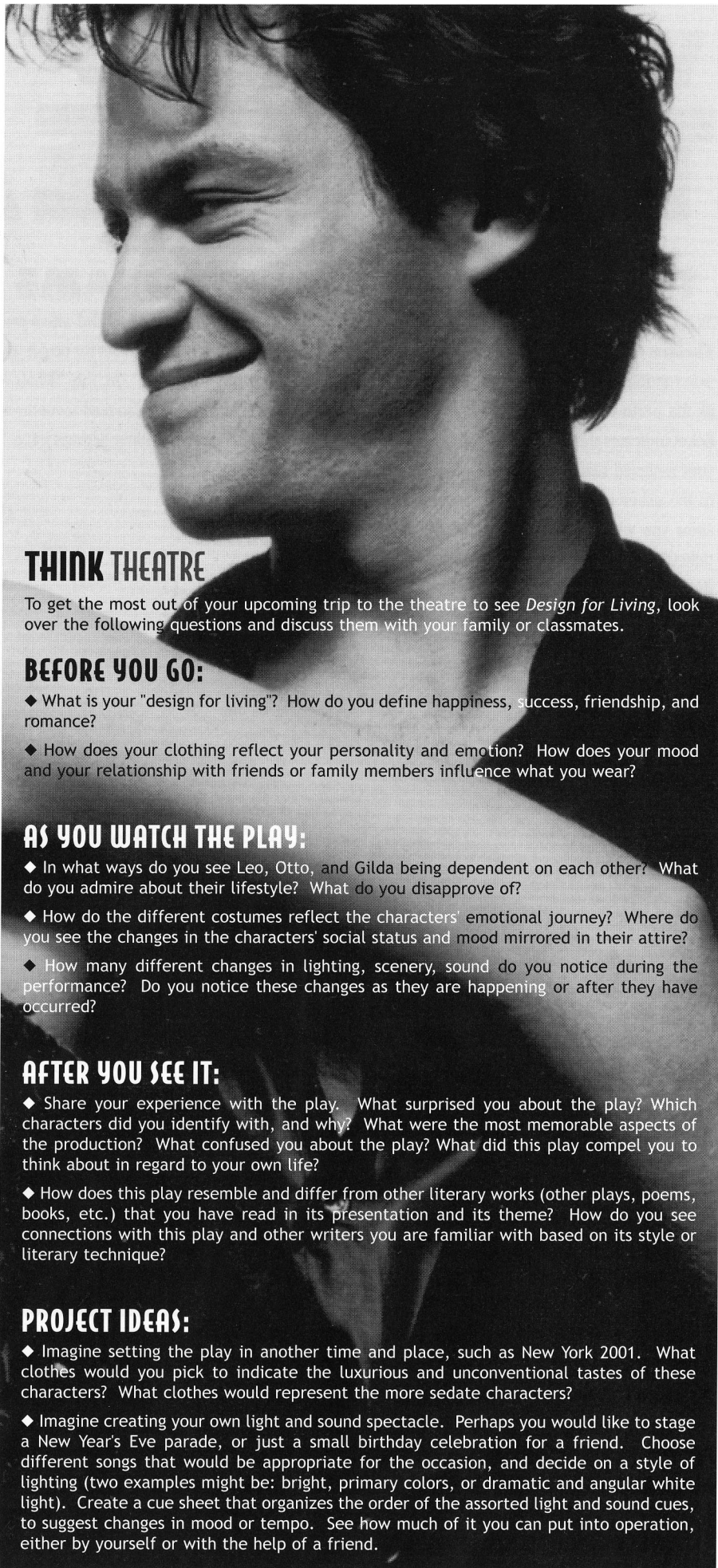
👁️ Watch on your infrared monitor for the curtain to rise to a certain point and say, "Lights 3 go."

🔊 As the curtain is going up the lights are coming up say "Lights 4, sound B, deck 1 go"

🔊 As the first actor enters the scene say, "Lights 5 go, standby deck 2, lights 6, sound C."

🔊 Continue calling cues for each change in light, sound or scenery that occurs as the play progresses...

👏 **CONGRATULATIONS**, you are running the show!



## THINK THEATRE

To get the most out of your upcoming trip to the theatre to see *Design for Living*, look over the following questions and discuss them with your family or classmates.

### BEFORE YOU GO:

- ◆ What is your "design for living"? How do you define happiness, success, friendship, and romance?
- ◆ How does your clothing reflect your personality and emotion? How does your mood and your relationship with friends or family members influence what you wear?

### AS YOU WATCH THE PLAY:

- ◆ In what ways do you see Leo, Otto, and Gilda being dependent on each other? What do you admire about their lifestyle? What do you disapprove of?
- ◆ How do the different costumes reflect the characters' emotional journey? Where do you see the changes in the characters' social status and mood mirrored in their attire?
- ◆ How many different changes in lighting, scenery, sound do you notice during the performance? Do you notice these changes as they are happening or after they have occurred?

### AFTER YOU SEE IT:

- ◆ Share your experience with the play. What surprised you about the play? Which characters did you identify with, and why? What were the most memorable aspects of the production? What confused you about the play? What did this play compel you to think about in regard to your own life?
- ◆ How does this play resemble and differ from other literary works (other plays, poems, books, etc.) that you have read in its presentation and its theme? How do you see connections with this play and other writers you are familiar with based on its style or literary technique?

### PROJECT IDEAS:

- ◆ Imagine setting the play in another time and place, such as New York 2001. What clothes would you pick to indicate the luxurious and unconventional tastes of these characters? What clothes would represent the more sedate characters?
- ◆ Imagine creating your own light and sound spectacle. Perhaps you would like to stage a New Year's Eve parade, or just a small birthday celebration for a friend. Choose different songs that would be appropriate for the occasion, and decide on a style of lighting (two examples might be: bright, primary colors, or dramatic and angular white light). Create a cue sheet that organizes the order of the assorted light and sound cues, to suggest changes in mood or tempo. See how much of it you can put into operation, either by yourself or with the help of a friend.

# WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

## TICKET POLICY

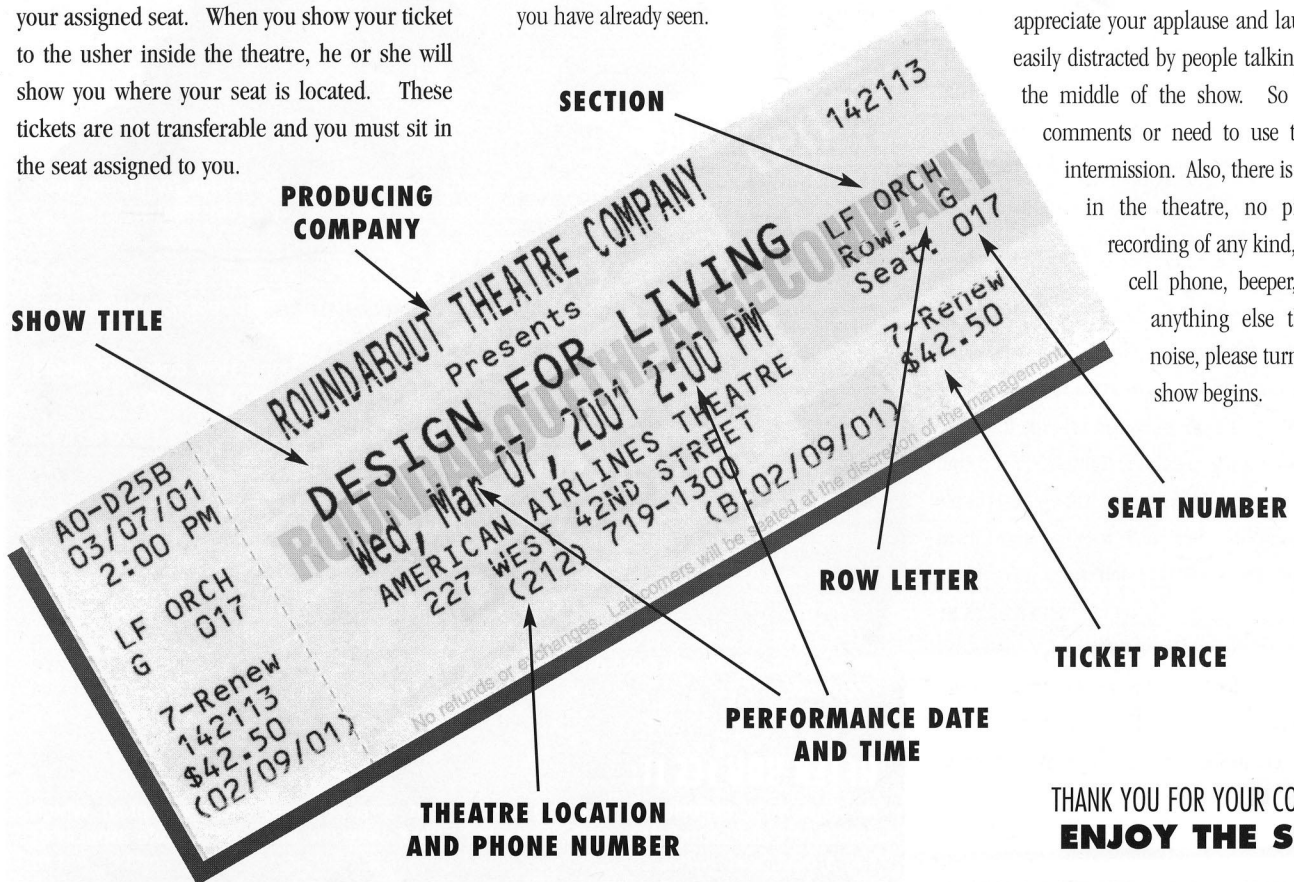
As a student participant in **Page To Stage** or **Theatre Access**, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside 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.

## PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films; perhaps some you have already seen.

## 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 cell phone, beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.  
**ENJOY THE SHOW!**

## ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF OUR EDUCATION PROGRAM:

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