

# UPSTAGE

A PUBLICATION OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AT ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY SPRING 2003



# "Master Fugard"

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAYWRIGHT

### UPSTAGE

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COVER: Artwork for the Roundabout Theatre Company production of "Master Harold".

ABOVE: Athol Fugard. New York Public Library Picture Collection

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**ATHOL FUGARD**, born in 1932, is a writer, actor and director. He has been since the 1950's. "Master Harold" ...and the Boys., which premiered in the USA at Yale Rep in 1982, is undoubtedly his most autobiographical play. It tells the story of the relationship between Hally, a seventeen-year-old boy with a crippled, alcoholic father, and Sam Semela, a black waiter who for many years worked for Fugard's mother in a café she ran in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Fugard was born Harold Athol Lannigan Fugard and his nickname, as in the play, was Hally. The other character is Willie Malopo, another waiter at the St. George's Park Tearoom, which is the setting for this play.

Although "Master Harold" ...and the Boys. is the true story about Fugard's coming of age, it is also a universal story about the moral dilemma of balancing personal values with a morally corrupted society. Though divided by 20 years in age and by race, Sam and Master Harold are intimate companions and confidants. Sam teaches Hally love. Hally often acts as Sam's teacher too, sharing his academic discoveries with the inquisitive waiter. Both ignore the strict rules of segregated South African society, but under the pressure of that society,

Hally turns against Sam. In the play's climactic scene, Hally spits at Sam - an act that has haunted Fugard and a scene Fugard purports was agonizing to write. The play operates on two levels: it is the story of a lacerating relationship between an uneducated black man and a white privileged child; and in common with most of Fugard's plays - it is also a powerful political statement against apartheid. \*

In his in-depth New Yorker profile of Fugard from the early 1980's, Mel Gussow had this to say about his work: "He is a humanitarian—a rare playwright, who could be a primary candidate for either the Nobel Prize in Literature or the Nobel Peace Prize. He sees apartheid as a national and an international tragedy but never forgets that it is also his personal tragedy. He wears his South African citizenship as a hair shirt, and each of his plays is a cry of "mea culpa."\*\*

He goes on to quote Fugard on the art of writing plays: "A play is written when the external specifics of a story run parallel to a very private need to make a personal statement. If you got a secret, you can create." UPSTAGE

\* **Apartheid** [(upärt'hlt) Afrik. = apartness]

system of racial segregation peculiar to the Republic of South Africa, the legal basis of which was largely repealed in 1991-92.

\*\* **Mea culpa** [mÄ-ä-, -'ku]-pÄ]

Latin = through my fault): a formal acknowledgment of personal fault or error.

# ... and the Director.

UPSTAGE SPOKE WITH LONNY PRICE TO LEARN HIS UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON ROUNABOUT'S REVIVAL OF "MASTER HAROLD" ...AND THE BOYS.

**UPSTAGE:** I understand that this is not your first experience with this play. In fact you played the character of Halley in the original Broadway production alongside Danny Glover as Willie and Zakes Mokae as Sam, the role that Mr. Glover is playing for this production. Can you tell us a little bit about that experience?

**LONNY PRICE:** It was such a gift to get to do this play. I certainly learned what it was to be an actor and do eight performances a week, but from Athol Fugard, I learned the about the sense of community that comes with being in the theatre. I learned a sense of family, a sense of caring about each other in a really personal way. I felt so honored to do the play that I wanted to do it well and never just walk through it. I only got sick once. I felt and still feel that it's a privilege to perform on the stage and I learned a lot of that from that show.

**UPSTAGE:** What's it like revisiting a play after twenty years?

**PRICE:** Oh well, it's fascinating in this particular case, because I was a young actor in it and now I'm the director for the piece. First of all, just going through the auditions and hearing the young men read the script, particularly the kite monologue, was surprisingly moving to me. I had not heard those words in over twenty years. There was something about hearing it out loud that was extraordinarily moving to me. I was flooded with so many memories of who I was at that time, Danny Glover at that time, of just that whole experience and Athol Fugard being so much a part of it. It's a little overwhelming to tell you the truth.

**UPSTAGE:** Do you think the power of the play will be affected by being produced in a different place in history?

**PRICE:** No, I personally don't because I think although the play's context is apartheid the themes are timeless. I think, certainly, in humanistic terms it's about how we can destroy the most important things in our lives because of societal pressures and family pressures. I believe the human story is universal and timeless. I do think that the 1986 production was very influential in this city and in this country for opening people's eyes to the problem of apartheid but I also believe the play is still very much relevant.

**When you're a kid you think this is right, this is wrong; we all have these grand ideas, but the older you get, the more gray you see. I think there's hope in that for Hally.**

**UPSTAGE:** Some of the themes that can be identified in this play are coming of age, racism, independence, surrogate fathers, parents, children, children of alcoholics, moving beyond one's family and limitations. Can you address these from your point of view? One thing that really popped out to me was the idea of Sam as a surrogate father.

**LONNY PRICE:** Oh, there's no question. Sam is the good father, the mentor. And the play is so much about fathers and sons and how we sometimes reject the most important relationships because of all these outside pressures. This is a perfect example really of mentorship. Hally has a father who is, for all intents and purposes, not teaching him how to be a man. He finds in another man, whose race is different than his, a real father, who teaches him about integrity and ethics and morality and how to mature into a man. That man is the father. His biological father has been no kind of father to him, has impeded his growth, if anything. I think often someone other than our father plays this role and we're able to discount, devalue, and not appreciate the influences that we get lucky enough to have from other people. What's interesting to me in those crazy cases when the mother puts the child in the oven, is that when they're taking the kid away from the mother the kid is screaming, "Mommy, mommy!" That's not a good mother, but we, as the children don't know that because we're conditioned to think, "Your mother is good, your father is good." Just because you're born in one place doesn't mean that's where you have to stay. All literature is really about leaving home. Hally has an opportunity to really 'leave home' with Sam and he winds up back where there is no hope for future maturity.

What I think is hopeful about it however, is that one of the last things Hally says at the end of the play is "I don't know anything anymore." It's as though he is

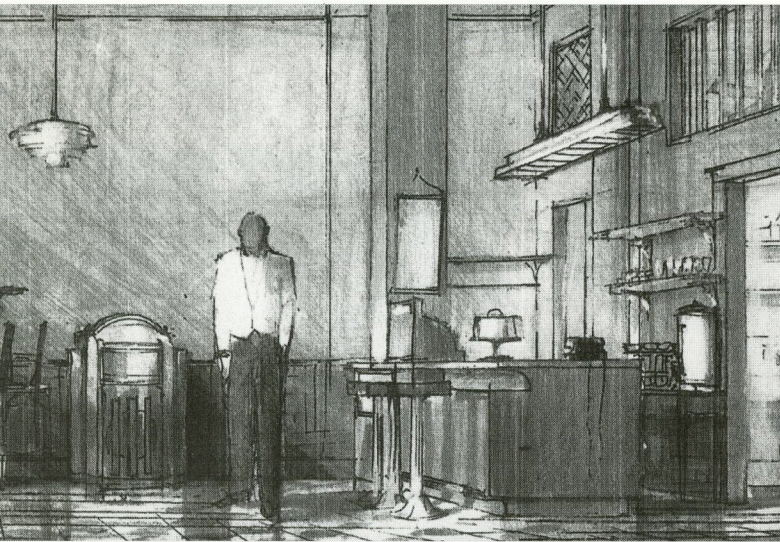


Capetown, South Africa New York Public Library Picture Collection

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# ... and the *Set Designer.*

UPSTAGE SPOKE WITH JOHN LEE BEATTY ON BRINGING SOUTH AFRICA TO THE BROADWAY STAGE.



Set design rendering for "Master Harold" ...and the Boys. by John Lee Beatty.

**UPSTAGE:** How did you prepare for working on this play?

I had seen the original production of this play, but I was surprised when I read the script for this production how much I didn't know about it. Today, it seems to stand more freely from the politics of apartheid, and I can see it much more as a play that has a very interesting dramatic arc to it. It's obviously about the horrible things that can happen to human beings in terms of race and culture, but I can see it now as a more general metaphor for the whole world, not just the political problem in South Africa.

**JOHN LEE BEATTY:** I'm also more conscious of making it look like 1950, as it was written to be. It makes it more relevant to me in terms of our own apartheid or segregation back then. I remember, in 1956, one of my father's childhood friends in the south came to visit him and he didn't come inside to say hello to him because he was black. It's an interesting parallel.

**UPSTAGE:** How do you grapple with the moral question around Hally sort of finding his manhood?

**BEATTY:** I see Hally and all of the characters in the play sort of as in a landscape. It's not really the set designer's job to act out the play - my take on it is a little more existential. There are these three people; all of them have issues to grapple with. Hally obviously is the most active one in terms of working out issues in front of us. These guys are kind of locked in a world together, in a box together.

It's one of the things I love about theatre, the fact that something can be two things at once. You can take the set, if you wish, as a realistic interior of a tearoom in South Africa and it can simultaneously be taken as a box where people are trapped like roaches or lab rats. So, a play can live on both levels at the same time in a way that a movie really can't.

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When I dutifully did my research on South Africa, I thought some of it looked awfully familiar. I realized that it looked a lot like my small hometown in Southern California in the 50's. Of course then I remembered a shop in the downtown area, and it was a lot easier to

imagine and get into the head of what the world of the play is like. I also noticed something significantly different when looking at my research. It isn't really until the last 20 years that so much slickness entered our lives in terms of going to a place like Subway to pick up your lunch, a place basically without a kitchen. We didn't have a logo approach to life in the 50's, which is something to keep in mind when designing the past.

**UPSTAGE:** What do you think this play has to offer us today?

**BEATTY:** Lonny and I asked, "What do we want the audiences to say about this play?" We want them to feel, "Isn't it curious how this play isn't just specifically relevant to apartheid but is still even more relevant to the human struggle? How is it relevant to the struggle with racism, the struggle with power that we have and have had. Isn't it interesting seeing this portrait of a certain struggle in that moment and what does that mean to us today?"

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# ... and the *Lighting Designer*.

UPSTAGE SPOKE WITH PETER KACZOROWSKI ON THE POWER OF LIGHT.

**UPSTAGE:** How do you find your way into a play?

**PETER KACZOROWSKI:** Besides reading it, I have several conversations with the director. I also speak with the set designer and discuss the work he or she has done so far, any kind of sketches they might have and the way they're going to approach the design. After that I think it happens in the rehearsal hall. I go and watch not only where the actors stand, but also what's important to them in terms of how they use the stage. That usually gives me some clues as to how I want to light it, what things I will want to highlight and what things I will try to hide.

**I am often struck by that idea of lighting design being a subtle art form - the idea of it being to influence the audience without really being noticed.**

**UPSTAGE:** Fugard has written that there is a storm occurring throughout the course of the play. How does that affect your design?

**KACZOROWSKI:** It creates a sense of unsettledness in the play... a foreboding. It makes the tea house sort of an outpost. Maybe people don't come to the tea house because the weather's bad. But I think people don't come to that place for other reasons. I think that if the weather were fine people would still not be there. It is a little bit like *Waiting for Godot* or *Groundhog's Day* where the same people play out the same scenario everyday. The kid comes there after school everyday ... waits there, lives there ...before he can go home to his own house. He's fed there, he gets nourished, he gets taught, and he has profound interactions. So I think it is a rather existential space.

**UPSTAGE:** What is this play about for you?

**KACZOROWSKI:** I think what's really important in the play is the father and son relationship, how the boy sort of projects onto Sam father-like attributes. Hally is acting out onto Sam the problems he has with his actual father whom we discover is an alcoholic. To me, it seems as if he's dealing with Sam as if he were his father because he wants somebody like that, who's smart and sensitive. But he's also angry with Sam because he is angry with his father. I think one of the interesting things about the end of the play is that we don't know whether or not

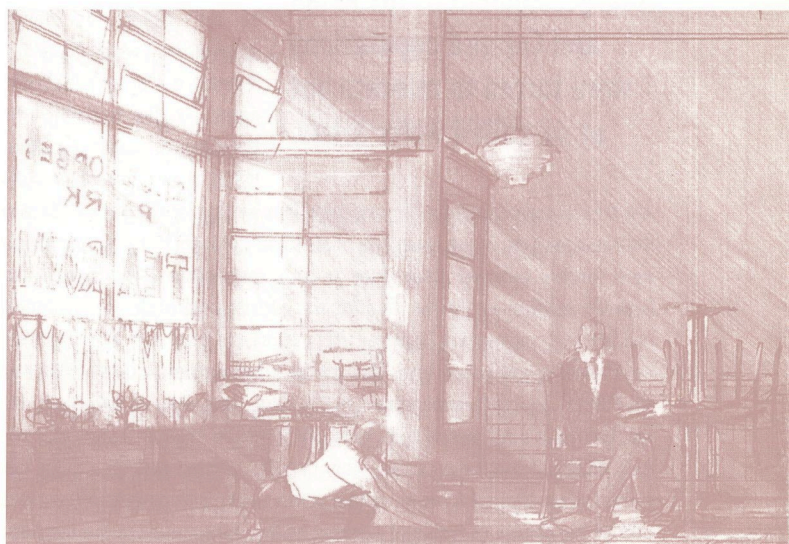
this will be the last time they see each other, or if Hally will stop in the next day after school and things will just be strange for a while. So to me, it's a play about growing up and having role models and having normal human interactions and learning about other people's issues and what's important to them.

**UPSTAGE:** What do you find special in Fugard's work? How will this affect your approach to the lighting design?

**KACZOROWSKI:** Athol Fugard's plays are very delicate pieces. They're very subtle, poetic evenings that grapple with moral fiber and ethical decision making. So I like this sort of existential approach that John has for the set. With my lighting design, what I would like to do is very subtly, possibly unnoticeably, certainly subliminally ... create a shifting kind of poetry of light inside the room.

I am often struck by that idea of lighting design being a subtle art form, the idea of it being to influence the audience without really being noticed.

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Set design rendering for "*Master Harold*"...and the Boys. by John Lee Beatty illustrates the effects of Peter Kaczorowski's lighting design.



# A Brief History of Apartheid

**RACIAL SEGREGATION AND THE SUPREMACY OF WHITES HAD BEEN TRADITIONALLY ACCEPTED IN SOUTH AFRICA PRIOR TO 1948,**

but in the general election of that year, Daniel F. Malan officially included the policy of apartheid in the Afrikaner Nationalist party platform, bringing his party to power for the first time. Although most whites acquiesced in the policy, there was bitter and sometimes bloody strife over the degree and stringency of its implementation.

The purpose of apartheid was separation of the races: not only of whites from nonwhites, but also of nonwhites from each other, and, among the Africans (called Bantu in South Africa), of one group from another. In addition to the Africans, who constitute about 75% of the total population, those regarded as nonwhite include those people known in the country as Colored (people of mixed

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black, Malayan, and white descent) and Asian (mainly of Indian ancestry) populations.

Initial emphasis was on restoring the separation of races within the urban areas. A large segment of the Asian and Colored populations were forced to relocate out of so-called white areas. African townships that had been overtaken by (white) urban sprawl were demolished

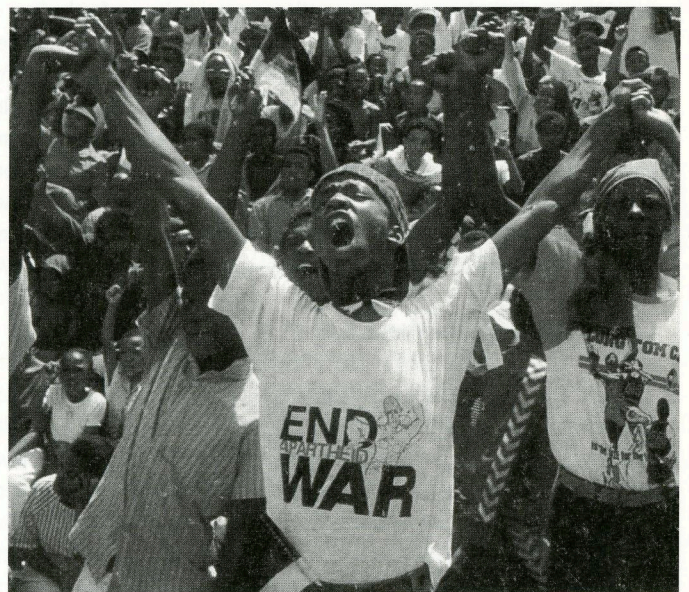
and their occupants removed to new townships well beyond city limits. Between the passage of the Group Areas Acts of 1950 and 1986, about 1.5 million Africans were forcibly removed from cities to rural reservations. Movement to and between other parts of the country was strictly regulated, the location of residence or employment (if permitted to work) was restricted, and blacks were not allowed to vote or own land. Thus African urban workers, including those who were third- or fourth-generation city dwellers, were seen as transients, their real homes in rural reservations from which they or their ancestors migrated. Only those holding the necessary labor permits, granted according to the labor market, were allowed to reside within urban areas. Such permits often did not include the spouse or family of a permit holder, contributing to the breakup of family life among many Africans.

Despite public demonstrations, UN resolutions, and opposition from international religious societies, apartheid was applied with increased rigor in the 1960s. In 1961 South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth of Nations rather than yield to pressure over its racial policies. Probably the most forceful pressures, both internal and external, eroding the barriers of apartheid were

economic. International sanctions severely affected the South African economy, raising the cost of necessities, cutting investment, even forcing many American corporations to disinvest, for example, or, under the Sullivan Rules, to employ without discrimination. In addition, the severe shortage of skilled labor led to lifting limits on African wages, and granting Africans the right to strike and organize unions. Unions, churches, and students organized protests throughout the 1970s and 80s. Moreover, the independent countries of sub-Saharan Africa exerted political, economic, and military pressures.

As a result of these pressures, many lesser apartheid laws—such as those banning interracial marriage and segregating facilities—were repealed or fell into disuse by 1990. In 1991 President de Klerk the repeal of the remaining apartheid laws and called for the drafting of a new constitution. In 1993 a multiracial, multiparty transitional government was approved, and fully free elections were held in 1994, which gave majority representation to the African National Congress, and the election of Nelson Mandella and South Africa's first black president.

UPSTAGE



Students in Soweto call for an end to apartheid.

William Campbell. New York Public Library Picture Collection

(Top) Police break up a 1960 demonstration in Durban, South Africa.

New York Public Library Picture Collection

*Director continued*

saying "I need to look at all of this again because I'm not certain with anything." And I think that's maybe the first step in growing up, to not be certain of anything. When you're a kid you think this is right, this is wrong; we all have these grand ideas, but the older you get, the more gray you see. I think there's hope in that for Hally.

**Part of the strength of the play is how unstintingly critical and honest Fugard is about himself. This is a man, who spent most of his life trying to battle apartheid, so to hear him say in this play 'this is where I began' is extremely brave.**

brave. And what's so interesting in playing the character of Hally is that you have to spit in a man's face and allow people to see that kind of ugliness knowing that Fugard had that within him. We all have that, when pushed. I think that this is a play about a kid who is trapped, and just as animals, when cornered, they will lash out with everything they've got. Hally winds up lashing out and destroying the one thing that he truly loves. I must also say that Sam is also not smart in that moment by letting things go on. He prods Hally a little bit and I think probably if Sam thought about it later, he would realize that was not the best way to diffuse the problem. I think he just keeps at Hally because he wants him to come to a new place.

**UPSTAGE:** What are the challenges of having an actor go from one role to another role within the same play?

**PRICE:** Danny Glover was so glorious as Willie in the original production; I think that it was maybe one of the best performances I've ever seen. And I was seeing it up close. He was staggeringly brilliant. He played a very simple minded man with great dignity, without any kind of condescension, with integrity, and never pandering or sentimentalizing. It was a towering performance.

I think Danny's going to be great having played the other role and experiencing the flip side, it's going to be fascinating for all of us. But there is no doubt that this will be a new experience. Both of us are going to be in the room again doing different things, new things, playing different roles. As a director, I always look at plays humanistically. I really look at relationships, personal desires, history; I tend to look at plays through the people that inhabit them as opposed to through the socio-economic perspective. I'm not of that school. To me it's a lot about making the moment-to-moment reality clear and truthful. **UPSTAGE**

**UPSTAGE:** How does this being Fugard's real story effect your understanding of the play?

**PRICE:** Part of the strength of the play is how unstintingly critical and honest Fugard is about himself. This is a man, who spent most of his life trying to battle apartheid, so to hear him say in this play 'this is where I began' is extremely

*Set Designer continued*

Young people today probably know more about sexuality and racial politics than Hally knows but he probably knew a lot more about table manners than we do. And he has issues that he's dealing with, behavior of the people of the time he lives in. So, we have to change our point of view a little bit when we judge him as to his maturity and to what his struggle is. This isn't one of those plays where you say, "Wasn't it horrible the way it was then." I think this is one where you say, "What about this boy is horrifically familiar to me?" What is familiar to us now is Hally's behavior with his parents and where his anger comes from and how it comes out. All of this is influenced for him and for us by race and class, status and lack of status, success and failure. **UPSTAGE**



Nelson Mandela is greeted by well-wishers in Soweto.

William Campbell. New York Public Library Picture Collection

*Lighting Designer continued*

**UPSTAGE:** What can I do as I watch the play to recognize the lighting design more fully?

**KACZOROWSKI:** If you are interested in the lighting, try to watch the play keeping in mind where you are looking onstage. Inevitably, where you're looking on stage is the result of the lighting designer making you look there. I've said before I think of it as if the audience gives me custody of their eyes for two hours and I kind of push them to look where they're supposed to look and also give what they are looking at an emotional context. I hope this one will be about expanding and contracting and focusing in and opening up.... breathing. If you begin to feel a slight shift, you should take note of that and see where it ends up and where you are looking because of it, and how you might feel inside. Lighting is a change of color or temperature, it reveals something slowly or quickly, it compels you subliminally to look at the play in a different way. So, be aware of where you're looking and why you're looking there, and you will see how the lighting design is working. **UPSTAGE**

# When you get to the theatre...

BELOW ARE SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR THEATRE-GOING EXPERIENCE MORE ENJOYABLE.

## 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.

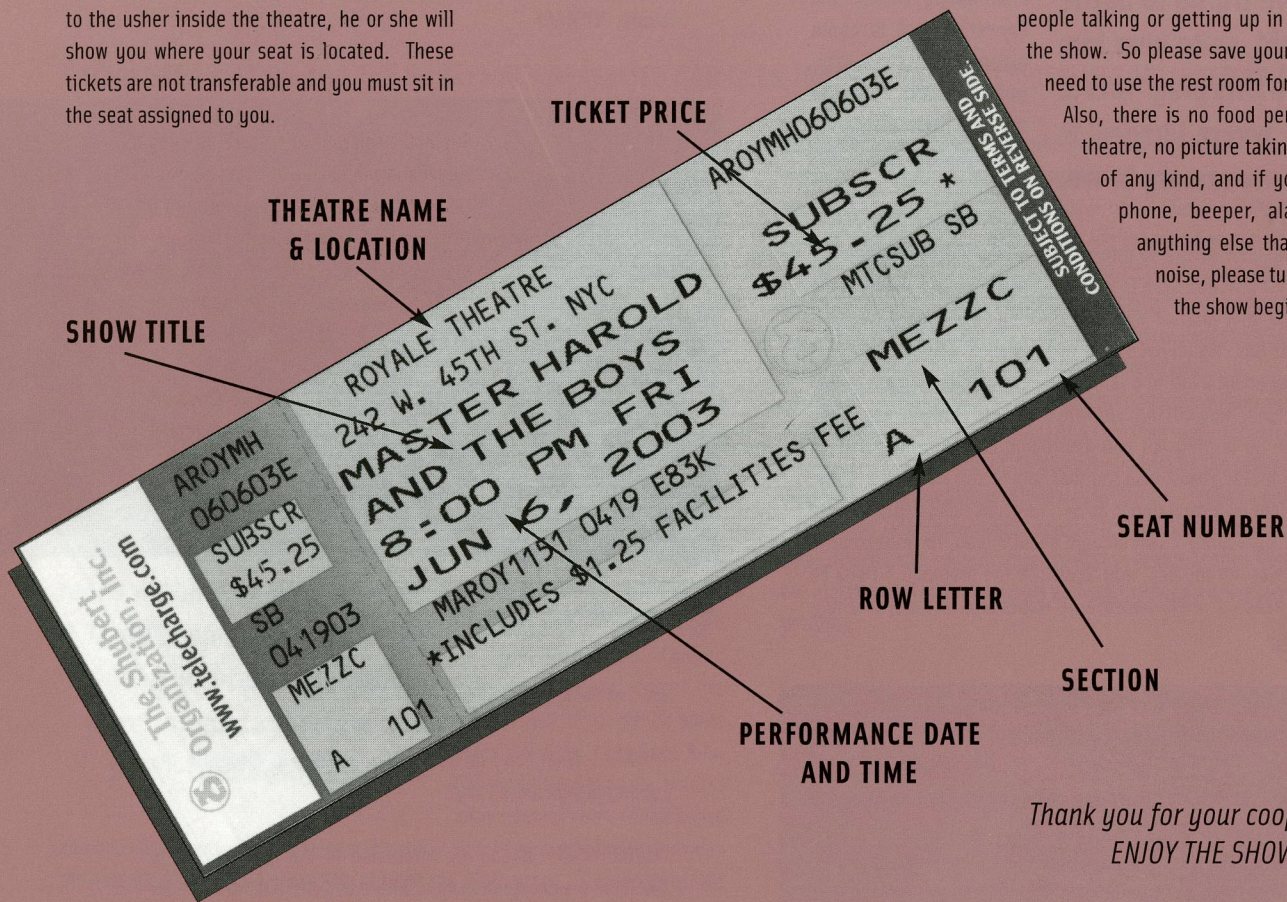
## PROGRAMS

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!*

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