

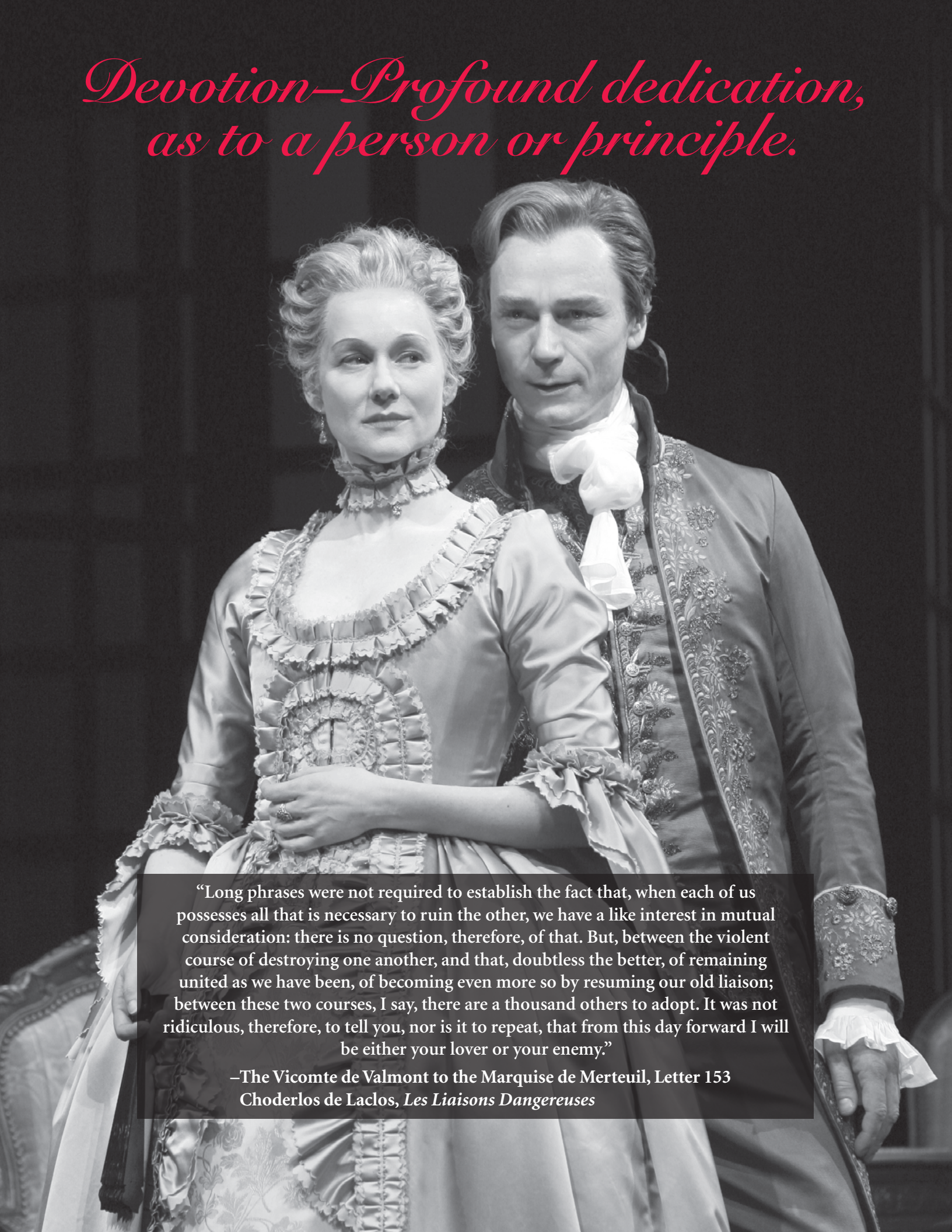
*Les Liaisons  
Dangerieuses*

**UPSTAGE**

A PUBLICATION OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AT **ROUNDABOUTTHEATRECOMPANY**  SPRING 2008



*Devotion—Profound dedication,  
as to a person or principle.*



“Long phrases were not required to establish the fact that, when each of us possesses all that is necessary to ruin the other, we have a like interest in mutual consideration: there is no question, therefore, of that. But, between the violent course of destroying one another, and that, doubtless the better, of remaining united as we have been, of becoming even more so by resuming our old liaison; between these two courses, I say, there are a thousand others to adopt. It was not ridiculous, therefore, to tell you, nor is it to repeat, that from this day forward I will be either your lover or your enemy.”

—The Vicomte de Valmont to the Marquise de Merteuil, Letter 153  
Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*

# Les Liaisons Dangereuses



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Rufus Norris



*Devotion* to Acting:  
Laura Linney



*Devotion* to History:  
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*Devotion* to Design:  
Katrina Lindsay



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Rick Sordelet



*Devotion* to Language:  
Christopher Hampton and the  
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**education**  
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# Devotion to Directing

UPSTAGE RECENTLY INTERVIEWED DIRECTOR RUFUS NORRIS REGARDING HIS DEVOTION TO *LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES* AND THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS.

## Why did you want to direct this play?

Todd Haimes approached me about it a while ago, and, at first, I thought well, I don't know, but I'll read it. It was one of those things. I read it, and it did that 'thing.' It did that thing because it's personal and it's completely timely. It's timely in that it speaks to all ages, really. It deals with obsessions such as greed, lust, power, wealth, and perversity. It's a parable for our age as well because underneath it all there is a love story. For me, the play isn't just about corrupt, nasty, rich people. It's about what people do when they don't get what they want or what they need, and also what happens when society will not allow you to be vulnerable. There was pressure on you to be "cool" or fashionable. We certainly know what that means in our society today. It felt and still feels pertinent.

## How did you prepare yourself to enter the world of pre-revolutionary France?

I have a pretty thorough grasp of European history and classical music. It's great fun and doesn't feel like work when you're researching that stuff. Usually, there's always a strong way into a particular work for me. I like to listen to all the composers of the period. That immediately got me researching some of the costume stuff. It's actually opened my eyes to something. They are so physically restricted in what they're wearing; it's like if you squeeze something, it comes out more forcedly and that is all they have because everything else is so restricted. They can't express themselves physically in what we consider to be a normal way. Their small gestures then become sharper and have great significance. It's interesting you use the phrase "the world." When you go see a piece of theatre, it's about creating a complete world, which the audience comes into and the world includes spoken word, visual language, and music.

## What do you look for in the collaborators for a production?

It is very specific to the demands of the play. It is a fantastically difficult text, so you need stage actors who are really comfortable on stage. It's so different. They have to have breath control and project because it's not a small theatre. They have to fire it to the back of the theatre so that everybody can hear every word. That

is a huge skill, and it's a skill which some actors have more than others. Beyond that, it depends on the part and what you look for in an actor. It's very important to me that they are nice people. People should be nice and have a good time. I don't have time for conflict in the work. I'm a complete believer in being productive. If you empower people then they'll get vulnerable for you, which is what you want. You want them to open up. So, that's what I want: actors who are incredibly skilled and who are nice.

## What about designers?

Most good designers are very flexible. It's about relationships, and sometimes, it's a gamble if you are to work with someone new. I knew Scott's work from London, and I've seen two or three of his shows. He answered the phone and said yes right then and there, so that was very quick. I've only worked with about two set designers in the last ten years. It's almost always been the same two in England, so to work with someone completely new was scary. That's partly why I was so keen to have Katrina on board as costume designer, because I've worked on 18 or 19 shows with her. To me, that's the perfect balance: to have somebody who is obviously excellent but you haven't worked with before, and to have somebody who is excellent and have had a long relationship with. She's also a wonderful costume designer, and to have a European costume designer on a distinctly European show makes a certain amount of sense. Everyone can look in a book, but she has got slightly her own view of it.

## Did you read Laclos' book or see any of the movie adaptations? Were they valuable to you?

Actually, I've only read the book recently, and I had never seen the play. I think the show was cast before I even saw the movie adaptation of the play. I had seen no version of it until I had already done a whole load of preparation. I've had *Cruel Intentions* sitting on my desk at home meaning to watch it but somehow I never have. I kind of trust those things. If you don't get around to something, there's usually a reason why. It just keeps you clear. I'm glad I saw the film because there are actually one or two ideas which are nice to pinch. I have no shame about stealing stuff.

**Is the idea that the book and play might be about a cultural decadence important to you or to this production?**

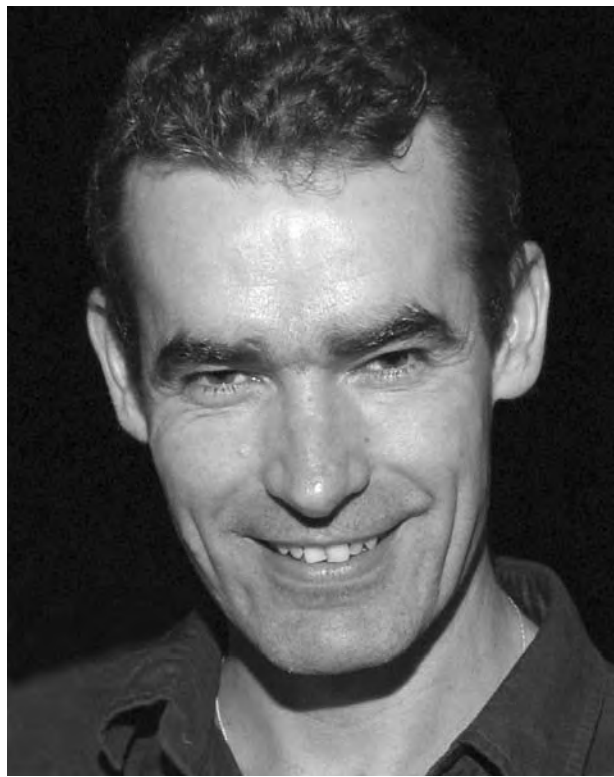
Absolutely, to understand the decadence of that culture and the perils of vanity and greed is essential. There should be the sense at the end that their time is up. Their society is heading to the chop. It's about to collapse. It's important as a warning of extreme human behavior that's about to be cut off.

**Do you see a parallel between the play and contemporary times?**

There is a separation from the effects that your actions have on other people, and the extreme racism, which was more extreme because they believed in the blue blood connection to God and the royal family. In that society, the vast majority of people were poor. In the United States, that's not true. There are reasons why people go, "yeah, well, whatever." It's because it's not actually hitting them in such a way. It's not making their lives worse. There are places in the states where people are affected, like New Orleans. Of course it will. It's just the power isn't there. It's the same in Britain. We can complain and march about, "Don't go to war." Unless they've been affected on a personal level, they get back to business the next day or even later the same day.

**You talked about this being a love story. Do you see Merteuil and Valmont as being in love?**

They're not in love in with each other. She's in love with him, and he's in love with himself. It goes wrong when he falls in love with Trouvel. This is why Merteuil destroys him. While he's in love with himself, she can control him, even if she can't have him. However, when he falls in love with someone else, that's not acceptable to Merteuil. She destroys both he and Trouvel in the process. The fact that these people just did it for pure fun is not interesting to me and it's not what Chris Hampton has written. I don't know to what degree he's invented the love story but it's definitely in there. People behave terribly, but in their own eyes it's justified. They find a way of justifying it. I think my job as a storyteller is to absolutely sympathize with every character in the piece. Otherwise we would be just painting Merteuil as the Cruella de Ville. Well, it's more than that, and our actress is much more than that. Valmont has to be just more than some devil. He's a seducer. How do you



seduce? You seduce by charming. How do you charm? By making people feel alive when you're with them. He makes people feel alive. Chris Hampton has made it more of a human story, and I'm not intending for a second to back away from that. You need to watch what they're doing and understand their relish whilst you despise. You need to laugh and then go, "Oh no, why did I find that funny?"

**What advice would you give to a young person who is considering becoming a director?**

It's very different these days from when I started. I'd say be aware of two things: one is that everything you do in the theatre is related to it. When I was a kid, I operated the follow spot which means that as a director, I understand what a follow spot operator does. That means that I get along with them, so they spot better for me. You can use everything that you've done or learned, so do and learn different things. It will all relate. The second good thing is that you cannot blame anyone, ever. It's always your fault. That is a terrifically liberating thing. The first thing to do is to get used to that. Just start working. You can do that in lots of different ways. Don't wait for the big job that millions of people are applying for. Sure, apply for them, but you want to make your mistakes in small places. You want to continually learn. I was blessed and I found a little fringe theatre where I did a few shows there before any national papers came anywhere near me. The first time I got a national review in a paper I had already done several shows. It's hard. You've got to have time. You've got to have time to think, get together with your mates and somehow start doing it. Assisting is useful up to a certain point, but you learn how to direct by directing and not by watching other people direct. &

# Devotion to *Acting*

THREE-TIME ACADEMY AWARD NOMINEE LAURA LINNEY DEVOTED SOME TIME WITH UPSTAGE TO TALK ABOUT THE ART OF ACTING THROUGH DIFFERENT STYLES AND MEDIUMS.

## **I wanted to start by asking you why you wanted this role.**

It wasn't that I wanted to play the role: it's that I wanted to be in the play. I've always loved this play. I had seen the famous fantastic first production by Howie Davies which I believe was in 1984, and it had a huge impact on everyone who saw it. It's always been in my consciousness of what I think is great theatre.

## **The play obviously has resonance for you. Is that personal resonance?**

No, I'm just more impressed with it as a piece of drama more than anything. I'm most impressed with the language and the architecture of the play, Christopher Hampton's adaptation and all of his work, and the challenge that it takes to pull it off.

## **Did you find reading the novel helpful in your preparations for this production?**

Sure, absolutely. Primary resources are always a good thing. You have to sort of leave it, but you can use it for reference or maybe to find a clue here and there.

## **Can we talk a little bit about process, what is the first thing you do?**

Read the play. A lot. Read it and read it and read it.

## **Is it complicated doing a play with language like this after doing contemporary work? Do you have to shift gears somehow?**

It certainly is different technically. Fortunately, I've had experience with something like this before, but it does require a certain understanding of language, how it works and the most effective way to use it. You have to be able to decipher what the script and playwright are telling you through the use of language concerning thought, intention, behavior and physicality.

## **Why does the Marquise behave the way she does?**

I'm still figuring it out. I hesitate to say one thing or another because tomorrow I might change my mind

completely. She is wonderfully complicated. Even as devious, calculating and punishing as she is, you can easily see why a woman of this time period would behave in such a way. Let's just say that she would be a terrific woman now. She'd be a CEO of a company or something.

## **Can we talk a little bit about what you look for in a director?**

Hopefully they look for me. My job is to help them realize their production. It's not the other way around. A director is a director and it's their production and I'm there to help them put that production up. It's not all about me. I enjoy working with different directors because they challenge and work you in different ways. Directors are insulated beings; they don't work with each other. They are sort of their own country unto themselves, and when you work with different people you collect different ways of working. It's good to stretch and push yourself. Some directors are far more intellectual, some are purely instinctive, some are emotional, some are theatrical, and some are realistic. It's always fun because you never know what's around the corner.

## **Can we talk a little bit about the difference between working onstage and in film?**

Sure, there is a huge difference. Your job is different. It took me a while to figure out what my job was in film because I had grown up in the theatre and understood this world. I realized that it was unfair of me to try to apply the rules of theatre onto the world of film. I think a lot of people can fall into that trap thinking, "this is what theatre is, this is what drama is, this is what acting is, and now I'm going to apply it to the world of film." That's not fair because the world of film is its own thing. You have to adapt and figure out what you can take from theatre that is useful to you in film. At times you have to completely jettison because it will just get you in trouble. I think of it as though they are both sports, but it's like tennis and swimming.

**Different muscles.**

Completely.

**Film is usually out of sequence too. Do you have to be sure of where you are at in the film?**

Yes, absolutely. What theatre has that makes the experience so meaningful is time. There are certain things that you cannot force: you can't create what time provides between people or your own relationship with the play. Those relationships deepen and your comfort with the language becomes more intense as time goes by. You cannot rush that process. That's something that you just earn. In film you don't have that. In film, you do a scene and then it's over and bye-bye. You never do it again. It's immediate. But there's something about the wonderful stewing, the hibernation of thought and feeling and how week after week after week goes by, things become more meaningful.

**Do you have a preference?**

No, not anymore. I used to. The theatre is the theatre. I love them both and I'm very relieved and I believe that film work makes theatre work better and theatre work makes film work better.

**What advice would you give to a young person who wants to pursue a career in acting?**

It's different for everybody. You have to be very honest about what you want so that you don't waste time. It can change, and you also need to give yourself the permission to change it. For me, I was very lucky because I knew what I wanted quite early. I wanted a life in the theatre and I also knew, thankfully, that I needed to be trained to do that. So I went to school for a long, long time. I went to college and was a theatre arts major in college and then went on and was trained at Julliard, which was a four year program. So I didn't get out of school until I was 26.



**Were you inspired by your father being a playwright?**

I'm sure that had something to do with it. But I also feel like it's very much mine. It certainly helped introduce me to the theatre, without a doubt, and he's fantastic to use as a resource to go and ask questions about a certain playwright or what is dramatic within a scene. However, on the whole really I feel like it's my own life, although the fact that they're connected is nice. &

# Devotion to History

## *Eighteenth Century Pre-Revolutionary France*

The 18th century is credited as the Age of the Enlightenment, the time when thinkers began to contemplate the responsibilities of the individual as he or she relates to society, the state, and the world. The roles of the individual were considered through reason and logic. The Age of the Enlightenment received its name because it was considered to be the first time since the Renaissance that reason, logic, and creativity were reborn after generations of dormancy. Popular ideals such as socialism, democracy, and capitalism arose during this time providing a proper state of mind for revolution.



### **Louis XIV, Louis XV, and the growing frustrations of the lower class :**

The Enlightenment had a political impact as early as Louis XIV's reign, when the feudal system began to weaken, and his system of a centralized state of absolute monarchy was replaced. As royalty spending increased, so did taxation and land reform, angering peasantry. Under the reign, Louis XV attempts to rectify problems with taxation, land, and the growing divide between the rich and poor proved inadequate, too little, and too late. Additionally, his failed wars with Austria, Poland, Britain, and Canada compounded debt exponentially.

Louis XV's efforts at being perceived as the gentle monarch failed as well. Influenced by a movement called Enlightened Despotism, Louis XV tried to both reinforce the power of the monarchy and provide reform for the growing discontent of the lower class. In the end, Louis XV's attempts failed due to the power of the aristocracy, which blocked his attempts at reform (Economic Origins of the French Revolution). Even moderates such as Jacques Necker, the finance director to the Louis XVI, were met with opposition while promoting reform. These events eventually resulted in his dismissal. His writings, particularly on the expenditures of the monarchy, brought their private extravagance under public scrutiny. The nobility's unwillingness to communicate and the festering frustration of the plebian made the revolution an inevitable occurrence.



**1715** Louis XIV, the Sun King, dies. During his reign, much of the aristocracy of France gain power and prestige through his efforts at creating a centralized government. He also instates the absolute monarchy, which serves as a catalyst to both the Enlightenment and the French Revolution almost 100 years later. Louis XV, his great-grandson, is his successor.

**1763** The Treaty of Paris is signed, ending the seven years war between France, Prussia, Britain, Austria, and their colonies. As a result, France loses much of its colonial power and ends up amassing debt.

**1774** Louis XV dies after an unpopular reign. His expensive wars heighten the debt, resulting in higher taxes, which angers the French middle and lower classes. His grandson, Louis XVI, becomes the next king of France.



**1781** Jacques Necker, the previous finance director to the king, publishes the *Compte Rendu au Roi* (Report to the King) which highlights royal expenditures. For the first time in French history, the lower classes begin to take interest in government finance and the extravagance of the French aristocracy.



## Choderlos de Laclos and the trajectory of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*:

In 1782, when Choderlos de Laclos published his epistolary novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, French society was at a crossroads. Years of taxation and growing debt angered the middle and lower French classes while the aristocracy sat comfortably at the top. Their boredom, decadence, and perversion are showcased throughout the original material.

Choderlos de Laclos was born on October 18, 1741, in Amiens, France. He wrote a single novel and only a handful of poems and essays, including an unpublished essay on educating women. His family had modest wealth, due to his father's role as a government official. While ennobled, his father did not have a title. His life was mainly comprised of military roles which began at the age of 19 when he became a pupil at the Royal Corps of Artillery. In 1763, when the Seven Years War had ended, Laclos lived in North-Eastern France where he had his first poem published.

It is believed that in 1778 or 1779 Laclos began writing *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, an epistolary novel, meaning it tells the story through a correspondence of letters.

In April 1782, Laclos had 2000 copies of his novel published which sold out immediately and caused controversy throughout the French elite. While often viewed as a diatribe on aristocratic decadence and wealth, his relationships with the titled Duc d'Orleans, the cousin to Louis XVI, contests this claim. During the reign of terror started by Robespierre, he was arrested due to political fighting in 1793. Although expected to be guillotined, he was set free the following year. The next few years were spent unknown until 1800 when he was appointed artillery general under Napoleon Bonaparte. After spending another three years in the military, he died on September 5, 1803 in Italy.



### The War Begins :

In the wake of the French Revolution, several additional events took place which added wood to the proverbial fire that was growing among the middle and lower classes. When King Louis XVI called together the Estates General, the first two estates, which only represented 15% of the population, received an equal share of votes as the third estate, which was made up the remaining 85%. This unfair representation of the Third Estate greatly angered the lower class. The third estate was eventually granted two votes due to their continued protests. As time went on, the third estate eventually separated from the Estates-General and renamed their estate the National Assembly. Almost one month later, the storming of the Bastille served as a symbolic act against the French monarchy which prompted following events such as the beheading of Marie Antionette and Louis XVI, as well as the creation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. &

**24 January 1789** The Estates-General, comprised of three sections (the clergy, the nobility, and the lower class) is summoned for the first time in almost 200 years in order to approve a new tax plan. During this time, the growing contempt of the lower class towards the aristocracy becomes very apparent.



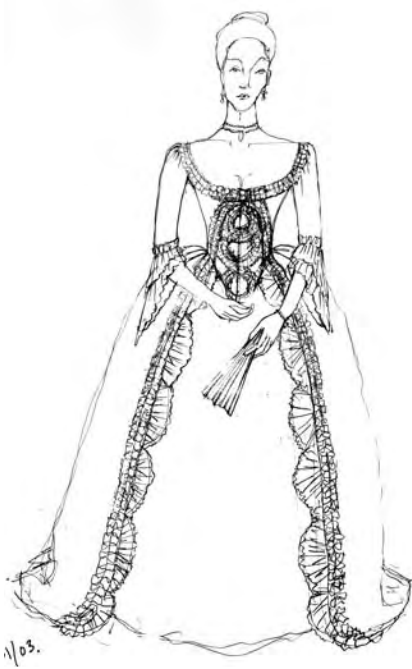
**June 1789** The Third Estate, also known as the commons, meets separately from the clergy and nobility and names themselves the **National Assembly**. This act of revolution causes them to be locked out of their chamber by royal decree. They meet in a nearby tennis court where they take the **Tennis Court Oath**, swearing that the Assembly will not dissolve due to royal decree. This is a revolutionary and brazen act against the king.

**14 July 1789** The fall of the Bastille and the Start of the French Revolution. Although only seven people were housed in this jail, its capture is a significant symbol and action against the French monarchy and signals the start of the French Revolution.

**26 August 1789** The Declaration of the Rights of Man is approved by the National Assembly. This is the first step at a democratic state and constitution by the people of France.

# Devotion to Design

COSTUME DESIGNER KATRINA LINDSAY TALKED TO UPSTAGE ABOUT THE CREATIVE CHALLENGES OF *LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES* AND HER DEVOTION TO THE DESIGN PROCESS.



## How do you approach this play as a designer?

Well, it's definitely about keeping it within the period. It's quite an elaborate period, so you have to find ways of scaling that down so that it becomes manageable. Also you need to have some sort of world to it that is united. It's different than if you were doing a film where you can constantly change costumes and set. You have to find a common language that works as well on stage. I've had to pare it down to a certain amount of costumes and create a logic to that. My solution has been to make it about silhouettes and about a very clean palette of color. I've tried to keep that taut and not too fussy. That was my approach to the piece.

## When you talk about colors, do you mean simple colors?

18th Century colors: golds, purples and blues. They're all quite similar. There's not a huge contrast, although within the piece we get slightly more expressionistic as the façade begins to fall away from the people. Then we go with slightly stronger colors.

## What kind of research about the period did you have to do, seeing as how this occurs right before the French Revolution?

The 18th Century is a wonderful period to do but it goes through quite a few different silhouettes, getting narrower in the 1780's. I've mixed it a bit, but I'm using the narrower silhouette that you get just before the Revolution, which then went into the high-waisted shape.

## Is that uncomfortable for actors to wear?

Only if you're not used to wearing a corset. It's great to be able to wear it during rehearsal in order to get your body acquainted with what you can and can't do. The women have to be careful about how they negotiate sitting because of the hoop pannier and some backbones.

## Are the fashions influenced by Marie Antoinette and her husband?

The court was a great influence, especially for the aristocratic, the rich, and the wealthier people. A lot of the fashion was based on court dress. Then again, towards the end of the century it starts to become



simpler. They started using smaller prints rather than going for the big fabrics. As industrial products started changing, they were plating different types of fabrics. Stripes started coming through a bit more, as well.

**Were the French at the vanguard of fashion at this point, or were they influenced by other cultures?**

France was definitely a very fashionable place. England was much plainer with more cotton fabrics as opposed to the French with the silks.

**How do you collaborate with a director?**

We read the script, had our thoughts on it, and talked about the world of it as well as the way the production might develop. Then we went through it literally scene by scene. We gave plots for each character and talked about where they would possibly change or where there might be a bridge. There are also a lot of layers to the clothes and quick changes have to be looked at carefully. In the 18th century, it could take them up to four hours to prepare for the day with all their underpinnings, corsets and powdered wigs, yet we have to change items within minutes in the theatre. That was a huge part of the daily life of these people and it takes time to work this out on stage.

**You're working with Paul Huntley on the wigs, how do you collaborate with him and the other designers in terms of how it's going to look?**

We've talked about the kinds of wigs we're thinking of using. It's not going to be the massive, big ones. They're much more human, but slightly powdered so it still has the right sense of period. The style of wigs was getting smaller at this point as well. Then, we'll choose color, make it up and work through that.



**And lighting will become an important issue, as well.**

Yes. It will change everything! And there is a reflective surface.

**Could you tell us about where you studied?**

I went to Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design and studied theatre design there. A lot of the time when I am in Britain I do both set and costume. That's how it works there.

**What advice do you give to someone who says, "I want to be a costumer?"**

I think it's really important with costumes that you understand character and enjoy the actor's process. They're the people who have got to wear it. If they're awkward in something that you create, it's not going to work at all for anybody. I think there has to be a basic love of storytelling and character and then for how you express that visually. I think that should be a starting point. Obviously, if you love clothes and the detail of period costumes that's an extra bonus. &

# Devotion to *Combat*

UPSTAGE RECENTLY SAT DOWN WITH FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER RICK SORDELET TO DISCUSS THE ART OF STAGE COMBAT AND HIS DEVOTION TO THE CRAFT.

**Can you tell me a little bit about how you begin to approach the work that you need to do on this particular show.**

The key thing is to talk to the director because everything that happens will come from the director's vision. I read the play, then I have a conversation with the director, and then the director and I will go through everything. I'll learn what his ideas are and what he wants the tonality of the piece to be, psychologically where are we, what's going on with the characters, and why they have chosen to fight. In the case of *Les Liaisons*, they're living in a world where it was appropriate to actually have a duel.

**At the time, was this common for two men to duel over a woman?**

Well, it's not as simple as just a woman: it's also honor. Valmont and the Marquise have been manipulating everybody, and it has gotten to the point where no one can tolerate this behavior anymore. So now this young man has said "You have besmirched my character and my honor and this woman's character and her honor, and we're going to fight."

**Was it expected as part of a young man's training to learn to fence?**

It's very difficult in some ways for an audience to wrap their head around what was considered appropriate during that day. 200 years from now, people will probably look at our lifestyle and become completely aghast at how barbaric we were. However, during that day and age it was appropriate for a young man to learn dancing as well as fencing because it helped him move in social circles. The more refined you were, the more you could move within those social circles. The poor people couldn't learn dancing or fencing because they were too busy working. The rich didn't want the poor to learn dancing or fencing because then they would be elevated to their circle. I guess nowadays, it would be considered like a country club.

**Does the director determine how long the fight will last?**

You know, I never plan how long a fight is going to take. I've had directors say, "I want the fight to be exactly

twenty-three seconds," or, "I want the fight to be two minutes and thirty-two seconds." And you're like, "Okay. Why?" They'll say, "Well that's how much time I have in the play and that's how much time I'll give you." To me, the fight needs to last as long as long as it takes. It's like a good scene or good dialogue. No playwright sits down and says, "I will write a play that is exactly 2 hours long." You might cut things or add things to reach two hours, but you don't start off with that. With the fight, we'll have one that's just as long as it needs to be in order to tell the story. Rufus is the kind of director who is very comfortable and confident within himself, and he is not under any kind of pressure to have the fight be any more or less than what the story needs.

**So tell me something about these two gentlemen that you'll be working with, do they have any training with this?**

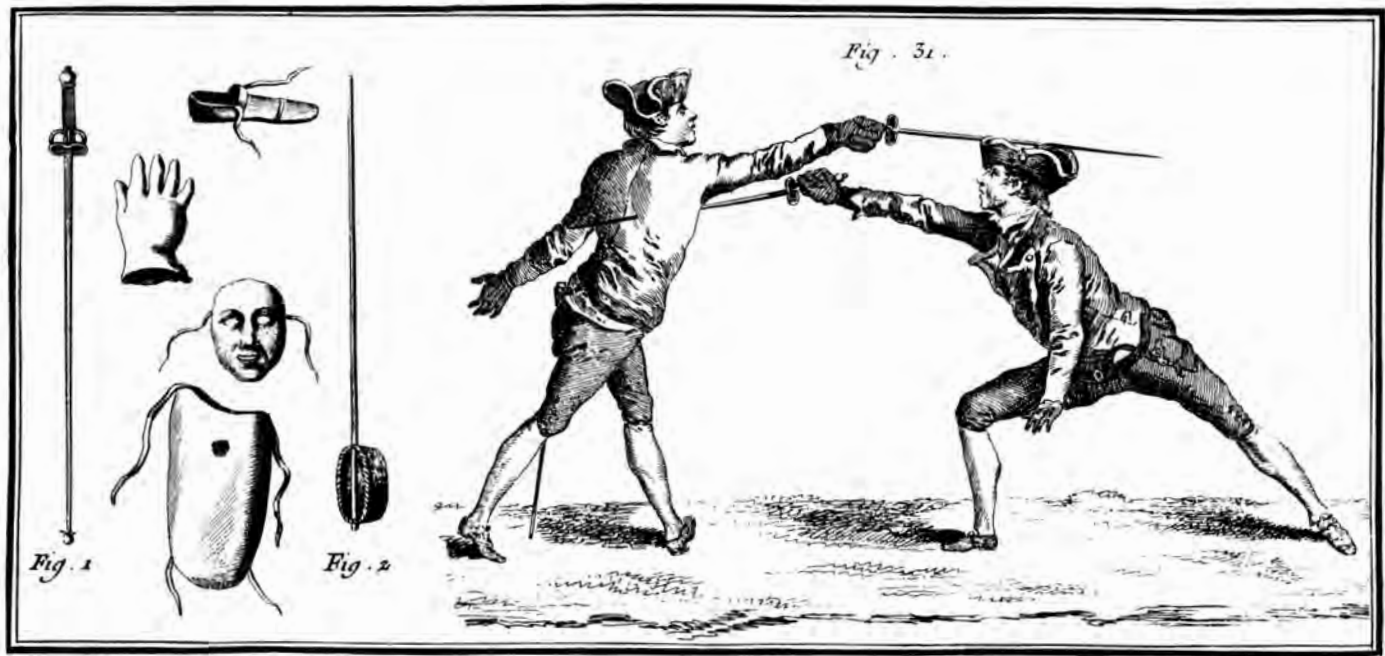
Holy mackerel! I am so happy. It's really rare that a fight director gets fighters who know how to fight. Ben, the American - we called them Ben A. (the American) and Ben B. (the Brit) - is a fellow that I worked with at Williamstown a few years ago and he played Mercutio. He was fantastic. He is one of the top Mercutios I have ever worked with, and I've done seventy-one so far. He is a fantastic actor. Coupled together, you get a great storyteller who knows how to fight.

**Is he Danceny or Valmont?**

Danceny. We've also got Valmont who came in, picked up the sword and just went to it like a duck to water. When I was teaching him sword fighting, he asked a very important question: "When would I carry?" That means to block the other man's sword. He said, "I don't think I would carry this until I know for sure he's going to cut." What that told me was, here is an actor who really understands his craft. He knows that a swordfight looks best when it looks like it's happening for the first time, and so already, at the very first lesson, he started working like that, which usually doesn't happen.

**How much time do you spend with them?**

We try to spend about an hour or so, and they're learning what we're calling the "vocabulary" now. The particular sword we're using is called a small sword. It was developed after the invention of gunpowder, so it's



a very light sword. It looks like a fencing epee, and it's all about point work. It has a needle sharp point and it's designed for really just thrusting or poking your partner in the chest. There are really no cuts involved in this. It's the closest relative to modern day fencing.

**When you engage in a duel the goal is to kill the opponent, right?**

It depends on the rules that you set up. If I were offended by somebody, I might say to them, "Well, we will fight to first blood, and first blood will receive satisfaction." I might stab him in the arm or stab him in the thigh and because I drew first blood, I received my satisfaction. I did not need his life to be taken. If the argument or the question of honor is very intense, one of the fellows might say, "Well, you know first blood is not enough. It has to be to the death." And so they would fence to the death. You would show up with what are called "seconds." My best friend would come with me and his best friend would come with him, and their job is to keep other people out so that nobody can join in. If I was stabbed and couldn't stand up anymore, my second would come over and say "Rick is grievously wounded and can no longer fight. Will you accept the fact that he can no longer fight and will your honor be satisfied?" In which case he might say "Yes my honor is satisfied and we're done," or he might say, "No. When he is recovered, if he recovers, we will continue." Then the duel would continue when the other partner was recovered and could stand and fight again. That might take years.

**How would you advise a student who was interested in doing this as a career?**

The very first thing is to learn how to tell a story with your mouth, your body, and your mind. It's not a job

that you go apply for; it's a job you have to cultivate and create. It takes a lot of work to do it and I've had many experiences which enable me to do this work. I come to this work as a classically trained actor from Rutgers University with William Esper. I have an extensive background in martial arts, and I fenced for Wisconsin for four years on their fencing team. There is also a great deal of dance in my background. You also have to approach a show saying, "Okay, what I want to do is tell the story that the director has created." For instance, if we were doing *Hamlet* and the director has a particular concept that he wants to follow, it would be inappropriate of me to try and do the *Hamlet* that I had done before. My advice is, if you want to be a carpenter or a maker of fine furniture, the first step you better take is learn how to construct things so they don't fall down.

**Anything else you want to say about the play or your work?**

The thing that is so exciting about this particular play is that it shows a period of time where this was considered an art. Everything was done unfortunately in precept; you lived on your reputation and so your reputation was what you fought for. If someone called you a liar, and then you did nothing about it, then you were considered a liar. That's why it is so important to defend your reputation during that time period, and that's why it makes it such an interesting era because you were on your own. You had no army of public relations people working for you: someone like Paris Hilton could never have survived back then the way she has to survive now. &

# Devotion to Language



Christopher Hampton, born January 26, 1946, is a world-renowned playwright and screen writer. As a young child, Hampton moved around a lot, as his father worked with a British telecommunication company. After his birth in the Azores, he later moved to Aden and Egypt and eventually made his way back to England where he ended up studying. At the Lancing School where he lived, he studied with Tim Rice and David Hare. His vacations brought him to foreign locations such as Zanzibar and Hong Kong. His first play, *When Did You Last See My Mother?*, was produced when he was in Oxford at the Royal Court Theatre, where he would be resident playwright for two years in the late sixties. After studying at New College, Oxford as a Sacher Scholar studying German and French, Hampton became the youngest playwright to ever be produced on the West End in 1966.

Christopher Hampton has had a long relationship with *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and had it in mind several years before it was finally produced. He says, “I got the idea to make a play of it [in 1976] when the National was moving into its new home on the South Bank. I proposed *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. In the end, they didn’t want it, and I ended up doing *Tales from the Vienna Woods*. Then in 1984 the RSC (Royal Shakespeare Company) asked me to do a play, and so I offered *Liaisons* to them. Howard Davies [the director] started reading the book and couldn’t get through it! But we ended up doing it all the same” (*An Old Liaison*).

His plays include *Total Eclipse* (1967), *The Philanthropist* (1969), *Savages* (1974), *Treats* (1975), *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1985) and the book to the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Sunset Boulevard* (1994), for which he won a Tony award. Hampton has also had a distinguished screenwriting career spanning over 35 years. His screenplays include *A Doll’s House* (1973), *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), for which he won an Oscar, *Mary Reilly* (1996), *The Secret Agent* (1996), *The Quiet American* (2002), and most recently was Oscar-nominated for his screenplay *Atonement* (2007).

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## VOCABULARY



### French Pronunciation:

**Les Liaisons Dangereuses** (ley lee AY zohng dahng zheh ruuz)

**Cholderlos de Laclos** (SHOLL der loh duu laa KLOH)

**Madame de Volanges** (muh DAM duu voh LAHNGZH)

**Cecile de Volanges** ( suh SEEL duu voh LAHNGZH)

**Madame de Rosemonde** ( muh DAM duu ROSE MOND)

**Madame de Tourvel** (muh DAM duu toor VELL)

**Azolan** (AAZ oh LAN)

**Emilie** (EHH mih lee)



### French Titles:

**Le Vicomte de Valmont** (loo VEE kohng duu val MAHNG): Member of the French European nobility, about the English equivalent of a Count

**La Marquise de Merteuil** (lah mar KEEZ duu mer TOY): Member of the French European nobility, directly below a duchess

**Chevalier Danceny** (shuh VAHL yay DAHN suh nee): Member of the French European nobility, the English equivalent of a knight

**Major-domo** (MAY jer DOH moh ): The highest (major) of the household staff (domo)

**Chasseur** (shaa SURR): French term for hunter given to light infantry divisions

**Valet de chamber** (vaa LEY duu SHAHMbr): A personal attendant to his or her employer

**Monsieur** (m'SYERRR): Originally meant “my lord,” but now generally means mister or sir.

**Madamemoiselle** (MAD mwah ZELL) : French equivalent of Miss, usually for young ladies

### Other Vocabulary heard in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*

**Lugubrious:** sorrowful, gloomy

**Paradox:** a contradictory statement

**Chivalry:** gallantry, often associated with knights who would honor women

**Depravity:** wickedness and corruption

**Sadism:** the act of deriving pleasure from the pain of others

**Languor:** lack of energy, fatigue

**Decadence:** luxurious self indulgence leading to deterioration or decay

**Libertine:** one who acts without moral or sexual restraint

**Reticent:** quiet, reserved

**Libertinism:** the belief of acting without moral or sexual restraint

**Dilatory:** procrastinating or delay

**Mawkish:** sickly sentimental, sappy, or maudlin




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## RESOURCES

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# When you get to the theatre...

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

## TICKET POLICY

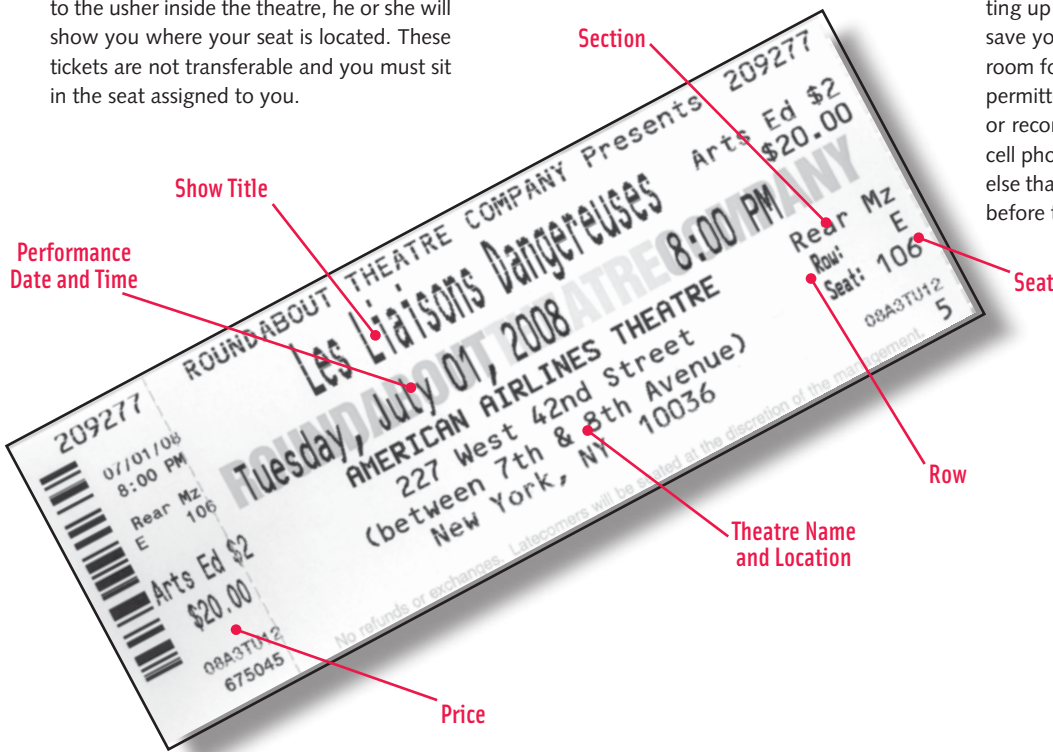
As a student participant in Producing Partners, Page To Stage or Theatre Access, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to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



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Books of Wonder  
The Center for Arts Education  
CIT  
Citi Foundation  
Con Edison  
The Council of the City of New York  
The Samuel and Rae Eckman Charitable Foundation

The Heckscher Foundation for Children  
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The New York Times Company Foundation  
The George A. Ohl, Jr. Trust  
One World Fund  
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