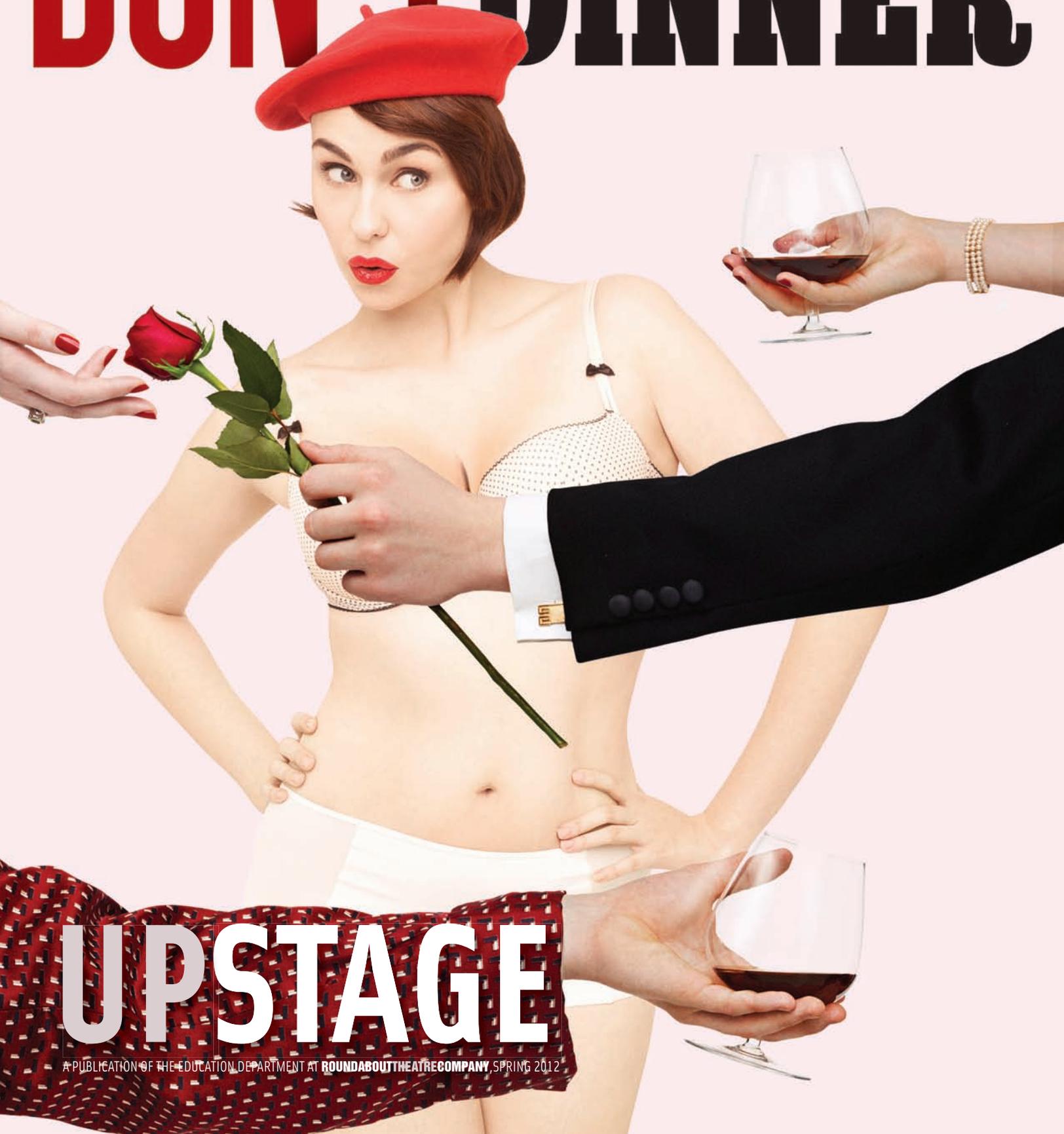


# DON'T DRESS FOR DINNER



# UPSTAGE

A PUBLICATION OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AT [ROUNDABOUTTHEATRECOMPANY](http://www.roundabouttheatrecompany.com) SPRING 2012

# UPSTAGE Callboard

*Don't Dress for Dinner*, the wildly funny comedy by Marc Camoletti (*Boeing-Boeing*), is coming to Roundabout Theatre Company and it's going to be an affair—or three!—to remember.

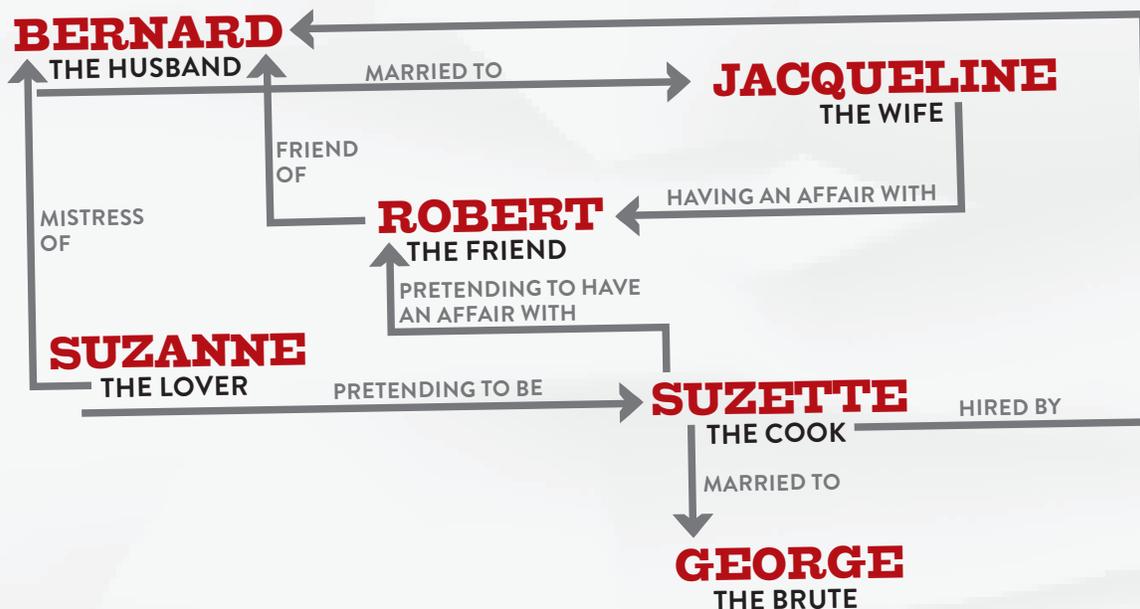
Bernard's plans for a romantic rendezvous with his mistress are complete with a gourmet caterer and an alibi courtesy of his friend, Robert. But when Bernard's wife learns that Robert will be visiting for the weekend, she decides to stay in town for a surprise tryst of her own... setting the stage for a collision course of assumed identities and outrageous infidelities.

The cook is Suzette, the lover is Suzanne, the friend is bewildered, the wife is suspicious, the husband is losing his mind and everyone is guaranteed a good time at this hilarious romp through the French countryside. Tony Award® nominee John Tillingier directs.

## A NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES:

*This farce is more than just slamming doors and costume changes (though we have plenty of those!). It's got a lot of heart, and I think you'll be pleasantly surprised to find that you actually care a great deal about these characters and will really understand why they go to such ridiculous extremes to protect the relationships they hold dear.*

**WHEN:** 1960      **WHERE:** A COUNTRY HOME NORTHWEST OF PARIS      **WHO:**



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# A Recipe for Acting

## INTERVIEW WITH ACTRESS SPENCER KAYDEN

Just before rehearsals began, Ted Sod, Roundabout's Education Dramaturg, sat down with actress Spencer Kayden to discuss her role in *Don't Dress for Dinner*.

**Ted Sod:** Why did you choose to do this play and this role?

**Spencer Kayden:** To me, farce is pure joy. There is nothing deep or pretentious about it. It's just finely-tuned silliness.

**TS:** What kind of preparation or research did you have to do in order to play Suzette? Do you use an accent?

**SK:** Suzette is French and I suppose the accent comes easily from having watched Peter Sellers in so many *Pink Panther* movies when I was younger.

**TS:** I know you've played the role before in a previous production. How is this character relevant to you? Can you share some of your thoughts about Suzette with us? What do you find most challenging or exciting about this role?

**SK:** When I first read the play, I was delighted by Suzette's ability to turn everything to her advantage, even in the midst of so much confusion. She is so unassuming at first, and then the situation demands more and more of her and she really rises to the occasion. One of my favorite things about playing this role in Chicago was that I would purposefully try not to get any laughs for as long as possible. The play has plenty of frenzy from the get-go and I think it serves



the play best for me to just be honest and simple at first. Suzette gets to have an extreme amount of fun later on, and I wanted that side of her to be unexpected.

**TS:** What do you think the play is about?

**SK:** Oh come now, it's not about anything. It's a really funny sex farce.

**TS:** What is it like to perform in a farce like *Don't Dress for Dinner*? Is the audience's response vital?

**SK:** Performing farce is one of the most enjoyable



things I can think of. The characters in this play get put in such ridiculous situations and for it to work, we all have to take it extremely seriously. The less we play for laughs, the funnier it is. The audience's response is certainly vital. Actors always feed off of their energy. It is so deeply satisfying to hear an audience belly-laughing.

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

**SK:** I enjoy it when a director has me on a really long leash, reigning me in when necessary. In Chicago, Joey (John Tillinger) was great about letting us play and explore to our heart's content. He didn't have any pre-conceived notions about how the play was supposed to be performed. In fact, if he ever had me on a leash at all, he ended up taking it off entirely. He gave me such freedom. It was delightful. That happened partly because Joey decided to make my character French, making it necessary to rewrite many of my lines to make them authentic for a French-speaker whose English is not perfect.

**TS:** Where did you get your training? Did you have any great teachers who influenced you?

**SK:** I've been performing since I was 8 years old when I tagged along with my brother to an audition for *The Hobbit* at the local community center. I was cast as the Elfen Queen and my minions were all much taller than I was. (I have a photograph from that show up on the wall in my house. It still cracks me up.) I acted in the Young People's Conservatory at South Coast Repertory. I did drama all through high school and then went to theater school at Northwestern. There was a moment when I was about to go to Berkeley and major in classical languages, then I woke up and realized that I would be denying myself what I like best – theater.

**TS:** Public school students will read this interview and will want to know what it takes to be a successful actor—what advice can you give young people who want to act?

**SK:** Being a successful actor requires great patience. There is so much in this business that is out of our control. A lot of people are finding success from creating their own material. I would highly recommend finding like-minded people and doing whatever it is that makes you happy, whether it's starting a theater company, making web videos, writing plays, etc.

“ To me, farce is pure joy. There is nothing deep or pretentious about it. It's just finely-tuned silliness. ”

# A Recipe for Playwriting

## MARC CAMOLETTI'S BIOGRAPHY

Type "Marc Camoletti" into any internet search engine and discover thousands of productions of his plays, staged everywhere from dinner theaters in Lubbock, Texas to the Měšt'anská beseda v Kopeckého in Pilsen, Czech Republic.

The international reach of Camoletti's work—his forty plays have been translated into 18 languages and performed professionally in fifty-five countries—mirrors Camoletti's personal background. He was a French citizen, born on November 16, 1923 in Geneva, Switzerland to a family of Italian background.

Camoletti's paternal grandfather, also named Marc Camoletti, was a prominent architect who designed Victoria Hall, a concert venue named in honor of Queen Victoria and eventually donated to the city of Geneva by its owner. The elder Camoletti also designed the Geneva Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, and the Hôtel des Postes du Mont-Blanc, all in Geneva. Camoletti's great uncle and cousins were also successful architects.

Camoletti initially trained as a painter. But by the early 1950s he was living and writing in Paris, the city that would embrace his work and that he would call home for most of his life. In 1955, he adapted and directed a play titled *Isabella and the Pelican* at the Edward VII Theatre. In 1958, at the advanced (for a beginner playwright) age of 35, he wrote his first play, *La Bonne Anna* (*The Good Anna* or *Anna the Maid*). It was produced at the Théâtre des Capucines by a company affiliated with Camoletti's wife, the theatrical designer Germaine Camoletti. The production was a smash hit and ran for 1300 performances.



## A RECIPE FOR MARC CAMOLETTI'S SUCCESS

Marc Camoletti's most successful play was *Boeing-Boeing*, which ran for 19 years in Paris. There have been 14 film and television adaptations of his plays, including the 1965 film version of *Boeing-Boeing* starring Jerry Lewis, Tony Curtis, and Thelma Ritter. Camoletti directed 1 movie, a 1979 adaptation of his play *Duos sur canapé*. It's estimated that 20 million people have seen his plays live and 500 million people have seen a recorded version.



*La Bonne Anna*, like all of Camoletti's forty plays, was a light comedy dealing with themes of sex, relationships, and secrets. His work is often characterized as "boulevard theatre," a genre characterized by middlebrow sex comedies and named for Paris's Boulevard du Temple, location of many theaters. Georges Feydeau is the most notable playwright of the style.

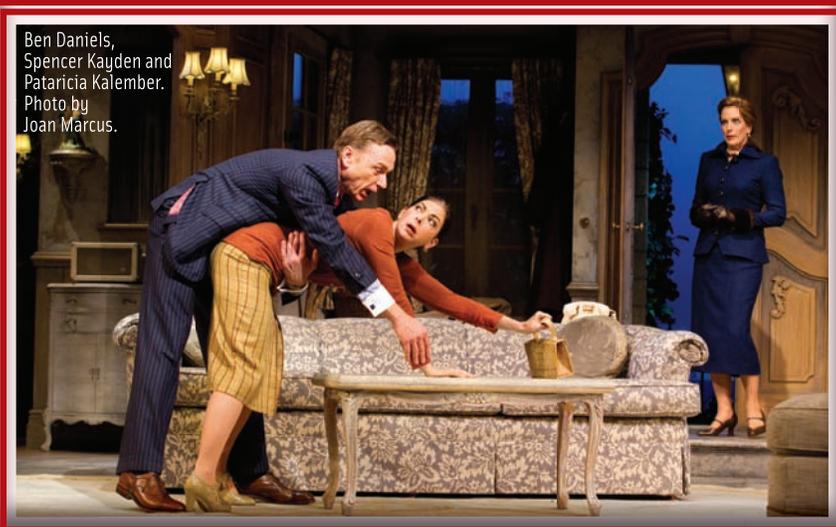
Camoletti's second—and most famous—play, *Boeing-Boeing*, opened in Paris on December 10, 1960, and ran for 19 years. The English translation opened in London in 1962 and ran for seven years. The farce initially held less appeal for American audiences—the original Broadway production lasted just 23 performances in 1965. But the 2008 Broadway revival starring Mark Rylance and Christine Baranski fared better, running for 279 performances, earning six Tony nominations and two Tony awards. *Boeing-Boeing* now regularly appears at regional theaters across the country.

Camoletti followed up *Boeing-Boeing* with a string of successful shows, including *Sémiramis* in 1963, *Secretissimo* in 1965, *La Bonne Adresse* in 1966, and *L'Amour propre* in 1968. In 1972, Camoletti and his wife took over management of Théâtre Michel, on Paris's Rue des Mathurins.

Camoletti would produce and often direct his own work at Théâtre Michel, beginning with *Duos sur canape* in 1974. *Bon Anniversaire* followed in 1976, *On dînera au lit* in 1980, and *Le Bluffeur* in 1984. In 1987, *Pyjama pour six*, a sequel to *Boeing-Boeing*, opened at the Theatre Michel. The English translation, retitled *Don't Dress for Dinner*, opened in London in 1991 and ran for six years. (The German translation, *Snutensnack un Lögenpack*, has also proven popular.)

Camoletti continued to write, produce, and direct at the Théâtre Michel throughout the 1980s and 1990s. He was made a Knight of the Legion of Honor, one of France's highest honors.

Camoletti passed away on July 18, 2003. He is buried with his wife, who passed away in 1994, in the Montmartre Cemetery in Paris. From the time of Camoletti's death in 2003 through 2008, Camoletti's son Jean Christophe and daughter-in-law Arianne managed Théâtre Michel.



Ben Daniels,  
Spencer Kayden and  
Pataricia Kalemer.  
Photo by  
Joan Marcus.

# A Recipe for Directing

## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JOHN TILLINGER

Ted Sod, Education Dramaturg, interviewed director John Tillinger about his thoughts on *Don't Dress for Dinner*.

**Ted Sod:** You've directed *Don't Dress for Dinner* before, correct?

**John Tillinger:** Yes, I did.

**TS:** Is that where Artistic Director Todd Haimes saw it, or did you bring the project to him?

**JT:** Todd saw it in Chicago when I directed it there in 2008.

**TS:** What attracted you to the play and what made you decide to direct it again?

**JT:** Comedy is hard, in my opinion, and not everybody realizes that. At any rate, I had enjoyed *Boeing-Boeing* quite a lot—the recent Broadway revival that Matthew Warchus directed and Mark Rylance starred in. And this play, which is also written by Marc Camoletti, is almost the same. It's in the same genre. It's very challenging to get it right. Certain elements have to be correct for it to really fly. So that was one of the reasons.

I always wanted to do a play in Chicago and when I first directed it, it was around the time of the last presidential election—a very exciting city to be in. It was just a good project for me to do at that time. And what happened was that despite some misgivings initially, it took off almost immediately after the second or third preview, and the audience was screaming with laughter. There's nothing I like more than laughter in the theatre or in life. So I was really pleasantly surprised by that and it seemed to work. When there was talk of it being done in New York at Roundabout, I was very pleased.

**TS:** It's perfect timing for our season because we've had a dramatic first half.

**JT:** Exactly. I do think people need to laugh from time to time. I think that goes for any difficult period in our lives. I am very pleased to be able to do it again.

**TS:** This play has had very long runs in France and England.

**JT:** *Don't Dress for Dinner* is in the tradition of a Georges Feydeau farce. It ran in London for seven years, which is really a long time. I think the initial production of *Boeing-Boeing* ran in London for about four or five years. That's an enormously long run.

**TS:** Why do you think this play is so popular?

**JT:** Some people like to go to the theatre and have a good time after they've had a hard day at work. A couple of drinks and a good laugh and you go home feeling terrific. It's not illuminating about infidelity and so on. It's just fun. It's silly and fun.

**TS:** Would you describe this play as a comedy or farce?

**JT:** It's very hard to define in this particular case because usually farce is about doors slamming and so forth, but this play is more about misidentification. There are a lot of farcical elements in this play, people chasing around and being hit and smacked and falling over and all that. So, it is more a combo of farce and comedy. If you call Feydeau a farce, then it's a farce. If you call Feydeau a comedy, then this is a comedy. *Don't Dress for Dinner* is a bit of a hybrid.



**TS:** The best definition of farce I've ever heard is when somebody should call the police and they don't.

**JT:** That's pretty good. One tries to keep it as real as possible. Two things have to be real: the setting and the characters. It's the situation that goes out of control. Or, conversely, the situation and the setting are real and the people are out of control. This play is quite funny. The circumstances get out of control and everybody behaves in a crazy way, which can sometimes happen in life I think.

**TS:** You've been at your craft for a long time; did you have to do any research to do this kind of play?

**JT:** Not really. The research is really what I've learned by working. The revivals of Joe Orton's plays I've directed were very big hits for me. I just responded to Orton's work the first time I encountered it. I thought so much of the writing when I read *Loot* without even seeing a production. In fact, I never saw a production until I directed it. I just respond to that kind of humor. Orton's plays have a very specific language. I call it Ortonese. This has more ordinary language, not the sort of ornate, witty language that Orton uses. I learned how to make it work. I study the script as much as I can. For me, most productions are a thing of discovery. I like actors to explore things and we work it out together rather than me dictating it. Some directors have it all worked out before the first day of rehearsal and that's great, but it doesn't work for me.

**TS:** John Lee Beatty, the set designer, tells me it's now happening before the women's movement – was that a conscious decision?

**JT:** Well, you know it is a French farce. Marc Camoletti, the playwright, was French despite his name. The attitude toward sex in France is very different than in America. We live in a puritanical society. People seem to think that we live in a very open society, but one minute there are people talking about their penises and orgasms on television and the next minute we've got people getting very hot under the collar because somebody said the f-word or whatever. The women's movement has nothing to do with this play really because the women do what they want to do and the men do what they want to do. It's about sexual conundrums.



**TS:** What were you looking for in casting the actors? What traits did you need?

**JT:** People who were adept at comedy. Somebody like Jennifer Tilly who I think is probably the best-known here in the states. I've never directed these particular English actors before, but they know how to do this kind of material. One of them auditioned on tape and it was exactly what I was looking for. When you have to try and explain why something's funny to the cast then you're in trouble. I needed to have performers who understood how to play the material. It's all about the rhythms.

**TS:** How are you collaborating with your extraordinary design team and how will the play manifest itself visually?

**JT:** We're setting this play earlier than it was written because the designers and I thought that it would look better. And it has to be set in a time period before cell phones, because if cell phones existed, none of the plot would have happened. We're just going back to the old conventions. I've worked with all these people before, which is why I was so glad that they responded and that they wanted to work with me again. John Lee Beatty is doing the set, which is gorgeous. I've seen the drawings of it. And then we have William Ivey Long designing Balenciaga-like costumes. People will come to the theatre and see people who live the kind of life that we don't live anymore. I think one of the major attractions of "Downton Abbey", whatever you may think of it, is that there are elegant people dressing up and behaving in a very studied manner.

**TS:** It's a return to an elegant lifestyle.

**JT:** A return to major elegance, yes.

**TS:** Is there a particular character in the play that you relate to?

**JT:** To all of them, really. I like all of them.

**TS:** I rather like the character of the cook.

**JT:** She is the linch pin of the whole plot because she is caught in the middle of this thing and she is working it for all it's worth. You know, the whole point of it is naughtiness. It's an old fashioned word, but it is naughty fun. In the end, the two couples go off and the cook and her husband go off together. Everybody goes to bed with the person they're supposed to go to bed with.

**TS:** Are you still inspired by certain people's work or by going to museums or traveling?

**JT:** I am. Peters Hall and Brook and then Mike Nichols influenced me. When you see a really great actor or actress, it's just thrilling. I may be 900-years-

old but I still get thrilled and it's wonderful. Working with Julie Harris was very inspiring. I was feeling a bit disillusioned when I directed her and she was so great, so dedicated, it put me right back on track. Same goes for many others: George C. Scott, Stockard Channing, Nathan Lane and Eileen Atkins. Recently, I saw Alan Rickman in *Seminar* and he was spectacular, effortless. I also read a lot and I go to museums. I am very much dedicated to being stimulated by visual things. I think that one of the reasons I like being a director is I get to be stimulated by everything, not just the literary aspects of a play, but the visual as well.

**TS:** Did you have any great teachers who inspired you?

**JT:** I worked in the English theatre. I'm not English, but I grew up there. I just consider myself very lucky that I grew up when there were all these really great actors working. I saw Gielgud, Richardson, Olivier, Scofield and Guinness when I was eleven or twelve, and it knocked me sideways. So they were my teachers. I thought, "I want to be part of that." Initially, I had wanted to direct Fred Astaire movies but then I changed course and worked in the theatre. That's where I learned my craft, by the doing of it rather than from teachers.

**TS:** What advice would you give a young person who would like to direct?

**JT:** I think one of the great things you can do is to work with other directors. You know, I've had one or two assistants who've gone on to win Tony Awards. I'm not saying that I was a huge influence on them, but I think that's the way you learn, to watch and to work with a director you admire. You learn that way, even if it is how not to direct a play. See as much as you can and then direct. I think it's much better to dirty your hands.

**TS:** How did John become "Joey"?

**JT:** Joey became John, I'm afraid. My real name is Joachim and nobody seems to be able to pronounce it, so people called me "Jo", and after a while people said, "You can't call yourself 'Jo'." So my agent persuaded me that John would be better and I regret it, but there we are. I wish I just left it Jo. Joey is the name everybody knows me by. It's also very useful to me because if someone comes up to me and calls me "Joey", I realize I know them.

**TS:** Is there anything else you want to say about the play or your work?

**JT:** I want people to have a good time and not examine the play for its social value or whatever. I love Ibsen and Chekhov too, but sometimes a part of theatre-going is to have a good time and relax and have a laugh and go home. It's not an earnest examination of infidelity and the trouble you can get into. It's about foibles of the heart and "what fools these mortals be."

Some people like to go to the theatre and have a good time after they've had a hard day at work. A couple of drinks and a good laugh and you go home feeling terrific. It's not illuminating about infidelity and so on. It's just fun. It's silly and fun.

# A Recipe for Farce

**FOR OVERTWO MILLENNIA**, the recipe for farce has called for a few essential ingredients. Start with a set of stock characters in an everyday setting and introduce some romantic or sexual intrigue. Toss in at least one case of mistaken identity. Blend in absurd plot twists, unexpected characters, and escalating complications. Include enough slamming or swinging doors for all the entrances and exits necessary to keep the action flying. Place everything under intense time pressure and allow events to boil into a chase-like speed, until the situation reaches a state of near anarchy. Just when everything is nearly out-of-control, restore order and avert disaster. Serve it fast and furious—enjoy!

These formal elements help to distinguish farce from high comedy and satire, but in fact the differences are not hard and fast, and some of the greatest stage comedies, such as Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, mix all three categories. Farce differs from high comedy with an emphasis on physical activity and absurd situations over character-based humor and verbal wit. And while satire uses humor to make social commentary, the goal of pure farce is entertainment for its own sake.

The situations and dramatis personae of farce have been in play since Aristophanes used outrageous physicality, broad characters, and ridiculous situations in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, the playwright Plautus entertained the Romans with a stock of character types—fathers and sons, domineering wives, courtesans, crafty servants, and braggart warriors—dealing with love affairs and mistaken identities.

The commedia dell'arte of the 16<sup>th</sup> century brought farce from ancient times to the modern world. Though its origins were in Italy, commedia troupes travelled across Europe. Commedia was built on *lazzi*, comedic physical business. Actors used improvised scenarios rather than scripts, portraying a set group of characters (including the crafty Pantalone and the hapless servant Arlecchino) and shuffling through a series of ridiculous situations.



Jennifer Tilly and  
Ben Daniels.  
Photo by  
Joan Marcus.





A century later in France, Molière built upon characters and situations from commedia. His earlier plays, *The Flying Doctor* and *The Imaginary Invalid*, are highly physical and farcical; later, he would turn his emphasis to character and satire.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, farce thrived in the popular theatres of Germany and France. Perhaps the greatest farceur of this period was Parisian Georges Feydeau, who tweaked the intricate plot machinery of Eugene Scribe's well-made play for outrageously comedic purposes. Feydeau took situations to extremes in order to push the bounds of conventional taste; for his characters, reputations and respectability were at stake. He was of the first farceurs to set scenes in the bedroom, where he found a myriad of comic uses for a bed—everything except sex. Feydeau's plays flew with intense speed; a director from the Comedie Francaise said that an actor must be able to run a mile in the course of the evening to perform a Feydeau play. Feydeau also had a dark side: Playwright John Mortimer notes that "the story *Othello* and Feydeau's *A Flea in Her Ear* have a striking similarity." Their key difference is that "farce is tragedy played at about 120 revolutions a minute."

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Eugene Ionesco transformed farce for the Theatre of the Absurd. Joe Orton manipulated it for black comedy, and Alan Ayckbourn has used farce elements in many of his comedies. Stephen Sondheim's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* drew on several plotlines and situations from Plautus. On film, Buster Keaton and the Marx Brothers mastered broad physical comedy. In the 1960's, Peter Sellers's bumbling Inspector Clouseau in the popular *Pink Panther* films continued the farce tradition on screen.

In 1960, with his first hit *Boeing-Boeing*, Marc Camoletti picked up the farce baton and ran all the way to the Guinness Book of World Records by writing the most-performed French play in the world. Camoletti's sequel, *Pajamas Pour Six*, opened in Paris in 1987 and in London in 1991 under the title *Don't Dress for Dinner*. Camoletti and his English-language adaptor Robin Hawdon provide a fresh take on the classic recipe, using time-honored character types and situations to serve a zesty new feast.



Jennifer Tilly, Spencer Kayden, Patricia Kalember and David Aron Damane.  
Photo by Joan Marcus.

# A Recipe for Set Design

## INTERVIEW WITH SET DESIGNER JOHN LEE BEATTY



Ted Sod, Education Dramaturg, interviewed set designer John Lee Beatty about his thoughts on *Don't Dress for Dinner*.

**Ted Sod:** Tell us about how you worked with John (Joey) Tillinger, the director, to come up with the set design for *Don't Dress For Dinner*.

**John Lee Beatty:** Joey and I have done a lot of plays together. Especially Joe Orton's plays. Basically, it's a fairly straightforward process. It's a comedy, and you have to make the sculpture of the comedy work first rather than the visual. Since someone's not just standing still and having a beautiful setting behind them, it's more about where does everyone exit and enter from? And where do they go to and what do they have to fall over and what has to be pointing in which direction for it to all work. A lot of nuts and bolts have to be discussed with the director. In some ways, comedy is a bit of a machine. In this case, it's a glamorous machine, but a machine nonetheless.

**TS:** Do you see this more as a comedy or as a farce?

**JLB:** It's a farce, you're right.

**TS:** It seems to me that in a farce, doors are really important. Is that true in this setting?

**JLB:** Yes it is. However, this is a play about entrances and exits more than it is about slamming a particular door. Entrances and exits are very important. And I have to say, if you follow the theories of comedy, if you want to be literal about it, sightlines are very important. There

can't be mysterious nooks and crannies to make it all seem confusing. The joke is that the logic of the world is turned upside down.

**TS:** What kind of research did you have to do before you did your sketches?

**JLB:** Oh! French country houses. That's a pleasure.

**TS:** Where are those country houses located?

**JLB:** I'm saying that we are in northwestern France, so I'm putting it in Brittany. I'm an addict of House Hunters International on HGTV so I am remembering some houses they were showing us in Brittany.

**TS:** Is that a specific kind of architecture?

**JLB:** Oh sure, but more importantly this French country house probably started as a barn and was made into a house. It was probably started in the 18th Century and then perhaps had something done to it in the 19th Century and then had something else remodeled in the 20th Century. So it's gone from being an animal abode to an upscale country retreat.

**TS:** Who was responsible for the decor? Is it the wife? Do you see her being the one who decorated the house?

**JLB:** That's a good question. I actually think they've done it together. They obviously have aesthetic taste. They're both quite chic. It's very upper class French.

**TS:** In French movies, the characters always seem to know how to decorate, how to dress and how to eat.

**JLB:** As we were working together, Joey wanted the characters to be elegant and so we decided to set it circa the late '50s. It started with Balenciaga and all those wonderful clothing designers of the period and thinking about people who were dressed like that.

**TS:** So it's not happening in present day France?

**JLB:** No, no, no. It's in 1959. Originally it was done in the '80s and we pushed it back.

**TS:** It makes it more of a period piece.

**JLB:** Right, and we're trying to conjure up *Capucine* and *The Pink Panther* and all those wonderful movies where the ladies are so lovely and the scenery is high bourgeois. It's quite a lot of fun. And it makes it internationally attractive.

**TS:** Did you watch any film besides *The Pink Panther* for ideas?

**JLB:** I'm an Audrey Hepburn fan so I don't need to watch movies. They're burned into my head.

**TS:** Will you be working closely with the lighting designer?

**JLB:** Oh sure, we always collaborate. I've worked with Ken Billington many times. I've done comedies and musicals with him. One of the things we know is that the actors are going to be completely lit. There's just enough requisite theatre lighting for a comedy. We can't go in for mood lighting in this show.

**TS:** By putting it in another time period, it becomes less about sex and more about sensuality?

**JLB:** Perhaps. This time period is before the sexual revolution. It's a comedy of form. Come on, this isn't quite reality. Men are men and women are women and men are shaped like men and women are shaped like women and you move the chess pieces around, you know?

**TS:** It seems like the smartest character in the play is the cook. Do you agree?

**JLB:** Oh my God, yes. She's a riot. In most comedies, the whole first act is all setup and then the comedy kicks in in the second act. In this play it's almost immediate. Within a few pages you're into the middle of it, which is wonderful.

**TS:** The playwright doesn't waste any time getting to the complications of having a mistress or boy toy.

**JLB:** Right.

**TS:** What do you think the play is about?

**JLB:** It's basically a comedy about sex, so obviously nobody actually ever goes to bed with anybody. It goes without saying if it's a comedy about sex, no one's ever actually going to get in bed.

**TS:** Especially with the person they want to be in bed with. How did you all choose the specific year to set the play in?

**JLB:** I instinctually went to '59. I was in love with a Balenciaga dress Kay Kendall wore in a movie and I researched the year that was from and 1959 popped up. We all know '59.

**TS:** It's right before Jackie Kennedy took over the White House and she brought a French influence to Washington.

**JLB:** Yes, absolutely. That is the period where French is French. I used to read my sister's *Vogue* magazine from that period, so I know what it is about.



Adam James and  
Ben Daniels. Photo  
by Joan Marcus.

# A Recipe for Set Design

## INTERVIEW WITH SET DESIGNER JOHN LEE BEATTY, *CONTINUED*

**TS:** I think it's really smart to make the play a period piece.

**JLB:** Well, there's this whole plot point about a fur coat. And we were talking about the fur coat and I was saying, "Well, you know, I remember how my great aunt, who was well-to-do, thought it was horrible that my mother didn't have a mink." But nowadays, who would ever think that everybody had to have a fur? In that day and age, it was a symbol of prestige and every woman had to have a fur. And the fact that the cook ends up with it makes much more sense in a period piece than it would if it were set in modern times.

**TS:** Who were your role models when you started in this business?

**JLB:** I've been designing scenery since I was a little boy, to be honest. But, I was an English major at Brown University and then I went to Yale School of Drama for three years.

**TS:** Were there people there who influenced you?

**JLB:** Well, my teacher at Yale was Ming Cho Lee. I was affected by Ben Edwards and his wonderful designs of stage interiors.

**TS:** Ben was married to Jane Greenwood.

**JLB:** To Jane, right. And I remember I went to a play that Jane and Ben designed entitled *Finishing Touches* and I thought it was so well designed, scenery and costumes both.

**TS:** What kind of advice would you give to a young person who wants to design scenery for the theatre?

**JLB:** Do it. Designing scenery is such a collaborative experience. I've worked with Ken Billington and William Ivey Long and John Tillinger many, many times and worked for the Roundabout many times. So,

you learn a lot about designing by doing it with people. I know it sounds flip, but it's also kind of profound, you have to just do it.

**TS:** Training was important?

**JLB:** Training's important, absolutely! But learning how to talk to your collaborators is very important also. Learning just to be in a room with people is really important.

**TS:** You had an artistic home for years at Circle Rep. Was that valuable?

**JLB:** Because I'm a shy guy, yes, tremendously. If you watch my resume closely, I'm doing my nineteenth year of Encores! at City Center. And I first worked with Manhattan Theatre Club in the winter of '73, and I'm still working with them. It's scary out there when you're just doing one-offs in high-level commercial theatre. And often times with collaboration too, the first time with people is sometimes a lot harder than the second, and third, and fourth and fifth and sixth and seventh times. So getting experience is great, any kind of experience. Making scenery in college is a good experience. Upholstering a chair. All those things. All of it counts. Everything counts—even if you just help somebody who needs assistance and it's just two days, one thing leads to another and you get exposure to people and you meet people and you see how things are put together.

**TS:** What I hear you saying is that it's a business of relationships and those relationships are really important.

**JLB:** Yes, but it's not like climbing the corporate ladder as much as everyone's jumping into the deep end of the pool together and trying not to sink.

“In some ways, comedy is a bit of a machine. In this case, it's a glamorous machine, but a machine nonetheless.”

# Glossary

<b>KUALA LUMPUR</b>	is the federal capital of Malaysia <i>Robert has just returned from Kuala Lumpur in the opening scene.</i>
<b>CORDON BLEU</b>	is translated as "Blue Ribbon" and is the name of the culinary institute in Paris <i>Suzette is a highly qualified cook to be a Cordon Bleu.</i>
<b>ROGER</b>	a slang word meaning "to have sexual intercourse with" <i>Jacqueline says that Robert can roger whomever he wants.</i>
<b>FOLIES BERGERE</b>	is a music hall in Paris, France <i>Jacqueline says Robert can sleep with half of the audience that fills up Folies Bergere.</i>
<b>LIAISONS DANGEREUSES</b>	translated from French to English as "dangerous liaisons" <i>Suzette refers to the affair between Bernard and Suzanne as Liaisons Dangereuses.</i>
<b>BULLY</b>	a slang word meaning an expression of encouragement like "Hurrah" <i>Jacqueline says bully sarcastically about the sleeping arrangements of Robert and Suzette.</i>
<b>BELA LUGOSI</b>	the common name for Hungarian actor Bela Ferenc Dezo Blasko, most famous for his role as Count Dracula <i>Jacqueline compares Count Dracula with Suzette's acting skills by asking if Bela Lugosi coached her.</i>
<b>LOOPED</b>	drunk <i>Bernard hopes to get Jacqueline looped so that she won't wake up when he sneaks off to visit Suzanne.</i>
<b>SAVOIR FAIRE</b>	translates literally as "to know what to do" and describes the knowledgeable instinct someone might possess <i>Suzette tells Suzanne that she might require a certain savoir faire while in the kitchen.</i>

# 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

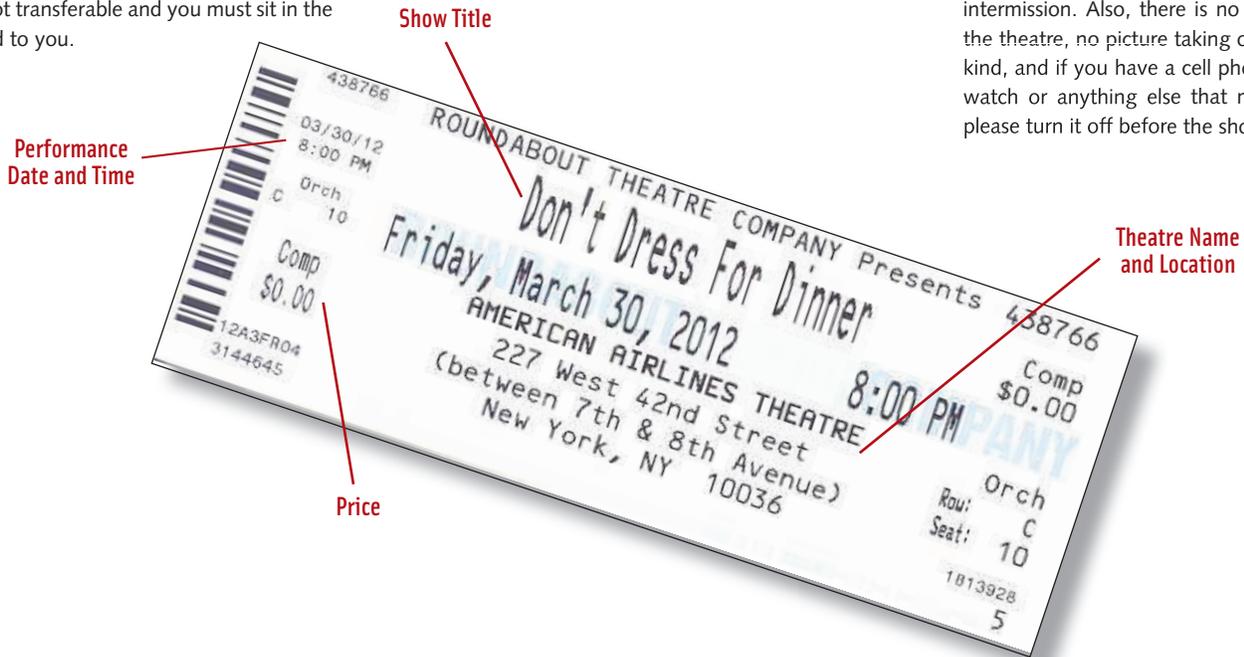
As a student participant in Producing Partners, Page To Stage or Theatre Access, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to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