



**DINNER
WITH
FRIENDS**

UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

Dinner with Friends

Ever since Karen and Gabe played matchmaker with their friends Beth and Tom, the two couples have been inseparable—going to the Vineyard every summer, raising their kids, and enjoying countless dinners together. But when one marriage unexpectedly crumbles, the couples' lives begin to veer in opposite directions. Can these four friends move on to the next chapter without moving apart, or have they changed beyond recognition?

a note from Artistic Director Todd Haines

What I love about *Dinner with Friends* is how very sneaky it is. On the surface, the premise is simple: two couples, one trying to break up and the other trying to stay together. They eat, they drink, they laugh, they cry. Some things will change, and some things will stay the same. End of story, right? Yes, on one level, these are the events of the play. But if that's all there is, then why do we leave the theatre feeling so deeply unsettled?

For me, that feeling is the result of how strongly playwright Donald Margulies taps into our deepest fears about relationships. Being in a relationship is inherently risky, as we put our hearts on the line with the very real possibility that they will be broken. It's scary, so we feel better and more confident about our own pairings when we see other couples going through the same things. From declarations of love, to marriage, to children, it's comforting to travel the path side by side with not only your own partner, but with a whole other parallel pair. We root for these characters to find their happiness, and we root passionately for them. We do this because they are so real, so incredibly accessible, and so terrifyingly close to us. To hope for their happy ending is to hope for our own.

when *The present and
twelve-and-a-half
years earlier*

who **Karen and Gabe**
and
Tom and Beth
Two couples in their forties.

where

Act One

**Scene One: Karen and Gabe's kitchen
in Connecticut**

Scene Two: Tom and Beth's bedroom

**Scene Three: Karen and Gabe's
living room**

Act Two

**Scene One: Karen and Gabe's house
in Martha's Vineyard**

**Scene Two: Karen and Gabe's patio
in Connecticut**

Scene Three: A bar in Manhattan

**Scene Four: Karen and Gabe's
bedroom in Martha's Vineyard**

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INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT DONALD MARGULIES

Roundabout's Education Dramaturg Ted Sod sat down with playwright Donald Margulies to discuss his experience working on *Dinner with Friends*.

Ted Sod: I was wondering if you'd tell us where you were born, where you were educated, and when you decided to become a playwright?

Donald Margulies: A baby-boomer born and raised in Brooklyn, I am the product of a middle-class, secular Jewish family and spent most of my childhood (between the ages of nine and 19) living in Trump Village, a high-rise, middle-income housing development in Coney Island. I was educated during the Golden Age of New York City's public school system and was in the first graduating class of John Dewey High School, then a highly-touted, "experimental" school that, thankfully for a kid like me, eschewed team sports but celebrated eclecticism and creativity. I had discovered, from a very early age, that I could draw and dazzle people with elaborate book report covers and posters. When it came time to go to college, I went to Pratt Institute, the art conservatory in downtown Brooklyn, because they gave me financial aid. I lived at home and commuted on the F and what used to be the GG trains to college. I always had an interest in reading and writing but, at Pratt, there were no mentors for me to talk to. I ended up transferring to SUNY Purchase, where I continued to be an art major but where I pursued my curiosity about playwriting with Julius Novick, who became my first champion in the theatre.

TS: Novick was a critic.

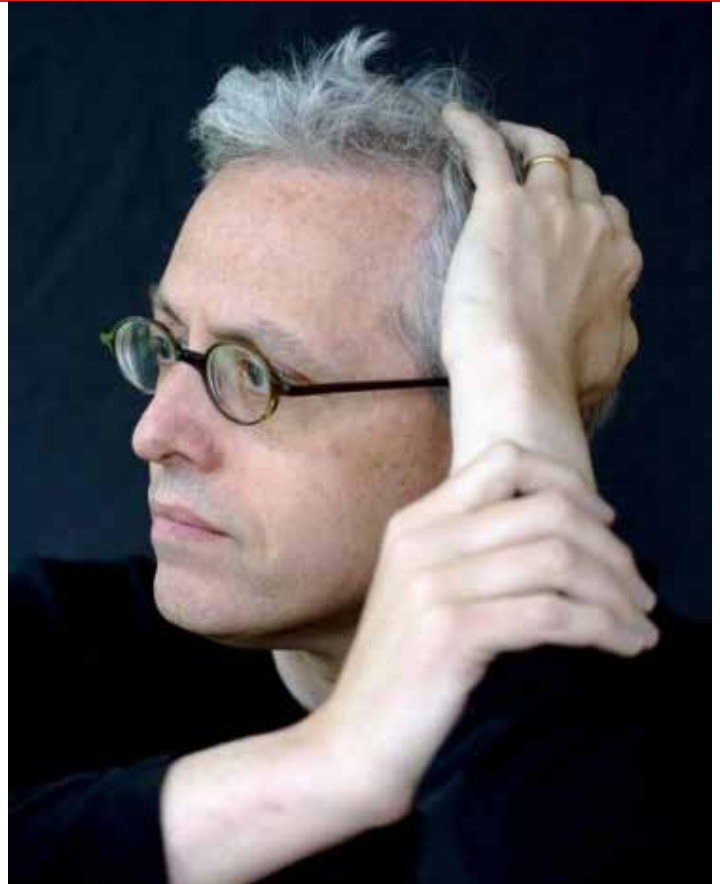
DM: For *The Village Voice*; his was a byline that I knew. I read his criticism, so when I met him I felt very privileged. I knocked on his office door and introduced myself as an art major who wanted to write plays and he said, "Have you ever written a play before?" I said, "No." And he said, "I would be delighted to work with you." It was as if I had suddenly been given permission to write plays.

TS: Did you get writing work after you finished college?

DM: I finished college in 1977 (with a BFA in Visual Art) and, the following year, was accepted into the MFA program in playwriting at Brooklyn College, which I left after eight weeks. While supporting myself as a freelance graphic designer in publishing, I joined a group being started by Jeffrey Sweet that came to be called The New York Writers' Bloc. We were a plucky band of playwrights, performers, and directors. We met in living rooms and, as we grew, in rented spaces, every Monday night for more than a decade. Among the members were Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara, who were at that time looking for a non-Writers Guild writer to work on a monthly program they were hosting on HBO. I wrote a spec script, was hired, and quit my day job as an art editor at Scholastic Magazines. That was 1980. I have earned a living as a writer ever since.

TS: Can you remember how the inspiration for *Dinner with Friends* came to you?

DM: I was going through a period of seeing relationships all around me implode. My wife and I have been married 26 years, we were together eight years before we married, and had our son years after that. There were relationships with friends that we took for granted



as always being part of our lives. At the time I created the play, in the late nineties, I found myself thinking about the phenomenon of people approaching middle-age who reevaluate their lives and end relationships. Friends of ours were going through aspects of what the foursome in *Dinner with Friends* go through, but my wife and I seemed to be the ones around whom the maelstrom was swirling.

TS: Do you relate to any of the characters more than others?

DM: It would be disingenuous for me to suggest that there are not aspects of me and my wife in those characters. However, I have to say that there is as much of me refracted in all four of the characters, both the men and the women.

TS: What were you looking for in the actors when you cast the play?

DM: In one of the first conversations I had with the director, Pam MacKinnon, we agreed that it was essential that we enjoy the company of these people for two hours. They are as flawed and impossible as the people we all know and love, who we call our friends. We must find plausible and be invested in not only the marriages between the men and women, but in the relationships of the same-sex friends, and between the couples.

TS: The women characters feel very honest and well observed. Do you sense that it is harder to write women?

DM: No, I have never felt that. Playwriting is all about empathy, getting inside the head of someone who is not you, to think like they think without judging them. People often tell me, "You write such great



women.” I don’t think about it, I just write characters as rigorously and as truthfully as I can and hope, no matter their gender, that their humanity comes through.

TS: Will you talk about what you look for in a director? What is important to you?

DM: I look for a collaborator who is going to help bring to life, on stage, in three dimensions, what is on the page. Choosing a director is like choosing a therapist—you want somebody who is going to be a step or two ahead of you, who can interpret and articulate your intentions better than you can, with the benefit of objectivity. I wouldn’t want a director who imposes conceits or distrusts the text or who has prejudged the characters.

TS: Will you be updating any of the script for this revival?

DM: Just references to technology (like DVD players) that now seem jarring. The play holds up remarkably well and seems fresh until those technological burps occur, that needlessly date the play. I’ve had to cut one of my favorite laughs, Beth’s line, “Thank God their slides aren’t back yet,” because who under the age of 30 would have any idea what she was talking about?

TS: Between *The Model Apartment* and the later plays it feels like there is a stylistic change—am I right about that?

DM: It is interesting for me to see the warm response to the recent New York revival of *The Model Apartment*, an admittedly dark play about Holocaust survivors and their troubled adult daughter. I wrote that when I was 29 years old, and it had a production history fraught with difficulties. What if it enjoyed this kind of response when I was 30, would it have changed the course of my career? I don’t know. Coming out of nowhere from a young writer, it may have been met with a lot of head-scratching; people might not have known what to make of it. In a way, I feel that the praise it received is in the context of the career I went on to have over the next three decades. But, more specifically, the plays that I write take the style and the form that those stories dictate. With *Sight Unseen*, for instance, we go back and forth in time. Plays that I wrote after that, like *Collected Stories* and *Time Stands Still*, are linear. The structure of *Dinner with Friends* initially presented itself to me as being in two triptychs. Maybe it harkens back to my visual arts background, but I do tend to see my plays in visual terms. The three scenes of Act One all take place within a few hours on a snowy night, and the three scenes in Act Two happen essentially within a day the following spring. When I reflected on the structure that I had come up with, I realized I had not permitted a scene in which all four characters

appear together. I decided there needed to be a centerpiece between those two triptychs. That became that flashback scene that takes place years earlier on Martha’s Vineyard when Gabe and Karen introduce Tom to Beth. In order for the play to have emotional resonance, I discovered, we needed to know what was lost, hence the scene in which we see the foursome at their youthful best.

TS: When you are inspired to write; what happens to you? How do you respond? Do you lock yourself up in your room?

DM: I like to flip through play scripts, not just my own; there is something exciting about seeing printed language on a page that triggers responses in me. Maybe it has to do with my love of typography? I also like to look at paintings and photographs in museums and go to the movies.

TS: Do you have to hibernate to write or do you do eight hour days? What is your process?

DM: It really does depend. This past summer, thanks to my friend Jenny Gersten, I was holed up for three glorious weeks as a playwright-in-residence at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, working on my new play set at

the Williamstown Theatre Festival. That was a wonderful gift where I turned everything else off and concentrated on whipping that play into shape, and left with a great sense of accomplishment. In my daily life, I teach one course each term at Yale and even one course is very time consuming. I meet with students, read their work, advise on senior projects, mentor in the Yale Playwrights’ Festival; it’s a lot of work and I love it. I love the students—they are remarkable, inspiring people. I would miss teaching if I stopped doing it. The kind of work I do is pretty diverse: I can cast a play, while doing a polish of a screenplay, while thinking about a new play, and revising another. In other words, the kind of work that I do during my work day is not just writing, yet it is all part of the job of being a playwright.

TS: What advice do you give to the young playwrights you teach?

DM: I tell young writers to not simply devote their energies to one single play. I have seen talented writers spend five years on a single play, and even if it is promising work that attracts some attention, it doesn’t necessarily mean it is going to be produced. It means that somebody in a literary office has paid attention to it and will say, “This is a talented writer.” If one play is all she has been working on for years, and they aren’t interested in it, they are going to tell her to come back when she has something new. •



Photo: Jeremy Daniel

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE?

“What was nebulous and non-committal is right out there in sharp focus: we’re married. We’re a married couple.”

What has caused divorce rates to jump from 3% to 17% in the past 150 years? Given our modern emphasis on passionate love and personal fulfillment, is a happy, enduring marriage possible in America?

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE IN THE OLD WORLD

For the majority of the 1.7 billion people who have lived and died on earth, the modern American idea of a marriage based on love would seem destined to fail. The word “matrimony” comes from a Latin phrase that means “the action of becoming a mother.” At its core, marriage ensures offspring and creates family ties between tribes or groups.

Ancient cultures varied widely in their marriage practices. An ancient marriage might be polygamous, arranged, involve a dowry, be part of a peace treaty or economic agreement, or demand that the bride give up legal and economic rights. But there was one common denominator: while an ancient bride and groom might be fond of each other, they certainly weren’t marrying because they were “in love.” The relationship of husband and wife was considered no closer or more important than their relationships with friends or blood relatives.

In Western Europe, the shift toward a “modern” understanding of marriage began in the Middle Ages. An eleventh century book of church law stipulated that the verbal consent of the bride and groom was required at the wedding, a shift away from forced marriages. In the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church declared marriage a religious sacrament, formalizing the idea that God was involved in marriage. Soon after, what Americans think of as “traditional vows” were published in the Church of England’s Book of Common Prayer: “...to have and to hold,

for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as you both shall live.”

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE IN EARLY AMERICA

At the time the American colonies were settled, people married within their social class and religion, with an eye toward compatibility and economic stability. Among the wealthy, marriages were often arranged; the less well-off had more say in the choice of a mate, but parental and community consent remained imperative. As in Europe, marriage took place only after a couple could afford to set up housekeeping, typically between the ages of 23 and 28. At marriage, women’s legal status was taken over by her husband: married colonial women could not own property, including bank accounts and land. Divorce was extremely rare, granted only after adultery or desertion was proven in court. This type of divorce, in which one party proves that the other is guilty, is known as a “fault divorce.”



After the American Revolution each of the states had the right to set their own laws regarding marriage and divorce, as well as the right to determine which other states’ court orders it would recognize. The result was a crazy web of regulations. Some states, like New York and South Carolina, forbade

divorce. Others, like Indiana, allowed people to sue for divorce for drunkenness, adultery, or desertion. If a divorce was granted, courts could issue an order dividing property or ordering the husband to provide for his children. These orders were notoriously difficult to enforce, particularly across state lines. Divorced women often ended up in poverty. Despite this, women made up the majority of plaintiffs in divorce cases: men could flee a bad marriage and start over in a new state, but their wives and children were left behind without financial resources and turned to the court.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE, 1867-1967

National statistics around marriage and divorce have been collected since 1867. From 1867 to 1967, the marriage



rate remained consistent at around 9.7 marriages per 1000 population. The lowest marriage rate was recorded at the height of the Great Depression in 1932 and the highest just after WWII in 1946. In 1900, the average age at marriage for men was 26 and for women was 22; by 1960, the average age for men was 23 and 20 for women.

During that same century, the rate of divorce increased by approximately 75% every 20 years. Legal changes accounted for some of the increase: the grounds on which one could sue for divorce were expanded to include mental cruelty, neglect, nonsupport, and indignities. Women's increasing financial independence contributed to the jump in divorce rates: they were no longer dependent on their husbands for support. Finally, scholars suggest that America's emphasis on the importance of self and personal happiness over the importance of community played a role in making divorce an acceptable choice. The reality of marriage may not match up with American ideals of "true love" and "soul mates."

There were two important developments in marriage and divorce in the 1960s.

Oral contraceptives (birth control pills) became available, making sex outside of marriage less risky. Additionally, a movement away from "fault divorce" and toward "no fault divorce" (in which both parties could agree that their marriage was over) took hold.

TODAY

Divorce rates peaked in the late 1970s at 22.6%. In 1980, roughly 50% of marriages ended in divorce. Since then, divorce rates have fallen to about 17%. The marriage rate has also fallen: in 2010, only 51% of adults were married, compared to 72% in 1960. The average age at first marriage has also risen, to 26.5 for brides and 28.7 for grooms.

In the 1960s, the most educated and least educated

Americans were equally likely to be married. Today, Americans with college degrees are significantly more likely to get married and stay married than those with some college or high school educations. Cohabitation (living together outside of marriage) has also risen dramatically in the past three decades. Currently, 39% of Americans report feeling that marriage is obsolete.

Racial differences in marriage and divorce rate have also become more pronounced. In 1960, 79% of white Americans, 72% of Hispanic Americans, and 61% of African Americans were married. Today, those figures are 55%, 48%, and 31%, respectively, though more detailed studies of Hispanic subgroups reveal wide differences between groups.

Over a million children will experience their parents' divorce this year. Approximately 25% of adults 18-34 were raised by divorced parents. Debate rages about the effects of divorce on children. Studies indicate that most children struggle in the short-term but suffer no major lasting effects. There is evidence suggesting that children

from divorced families may be more susceptible to mental and physical health problems later in life.

As the marriage rate declines and the cohabitation rate increases, a greater percentage of children are born to unmarried parents. Today, 29% of white children, 73% of African American children, and 53% of Hispanic children are born to unmarried parents.

Statistically, the couples portrayed in *Dinner with Friends* are among the least likely to divorce: white, well-educated, and waiting until they were in their early 30s to marry. Perhaps that's why the play disturbs and resonates with audiences. If Tom and Beth can't make it, who can? •



Jeremy Shamos and Marin Hinkle in *Dinner with Friends*

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR PAM MACKINNON

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod talked with Pam MacKinnon about her experiences with *Dinner with Friends* before rehearsals began.

Ted Sod: Will you tell us about yourself? Where were you born and educated? When did you decide you wanted to direct?

Pam MacKinnon: I was born in Evanston, Illinois where my father was pursuing a Ph.D. at Northwestern. Shortly after my birth, we moved to Toronto. My parents were Canadian, and my dad was offered several professorships, and one was in Canada. They decided to go back in June of 1968. Nine years later we moved to suburban Buffalo. In junior high and high school I acted a lot and also played the viola, and I directed a short play by Thornton Wilder, *Pullman Car Hiawatha*. In college I took a step away from theatre. I started to study political science and economics; really loved it and had great professors. I continued in that and got a double major and then went into a Ph.D. program for political science at UC-San Diego. This was right after undergrad. My second summer into grad school I was in Madrid doing some research and couldn't get into the union archives. At that point, I sent postcards (this was pre-email) to friends telling them I was through with political science and I wanted to direct theatre.

TS: So are you a doctor of political science?

PM: No, I dropped out. After the summer in Madrid, I returned to San Diego and came clean with my advisor, who encouraged me and also let me stay on for the year as a TA. I had a great transition year, directing in the UCSD cabaret spaces and parking lots, assisting student and professional directors. Two years later I moved to my childhood town of Toronto and did some directing and stage managing. I assisted on the musical *Tommy* and helped to put *Tommy* up in Germany. I then felt ready to move to New York, imagining I would direct Broadway musicals, of course. That was 18 years ago.

TS: You have a bit of history with *Dinner with Friends*—correct?

PM: It's a little complicated. I was hired by Dan Sullivan to assist him on what was supposed to be a North American tour of *Dinner with Friends* after it ran off-Broadway. He directed it at the Geffen Theatre. We hopped to Boston to the Wilbur Theatre, and then the national tour never happened.



Heather Burns and Darren Pettie in *Dinner with Friends*

Photo: Jeremy Daniel



TS: What made you want to revisit the material?

PM: I am 15 years older. I'm now the age of these characters. I think it is a great play, and as I march through time, it has become more relevant to me. I used to make the naive assumption that my closest friends would go through life as I am, always prioritizing what I hold dear. Like Gabe, I have been surprised.

TS: How did you respond to this script when you first worked on it 15 years ago, and how are you responding now?

PM: It's now just much closer to home. The story felt removed, a delightful remove, at age 30 that isn't there at age 45. The play makes me reflect not just on coupledom in general but more on my relationship.

TS: What would you say the play is about?

PM: It's about expectations. It's about defining and sorting through which ties bind and which ties don't.

TS: Your last two Broadway outings have been about marriage. *Clybourne Park* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* deal head on with the subject. Is this a subject you are interested in?

PM: It is so ripe for investigation. There is something about a vow that pressurizes a relationship for sure. It is inherently dramatic. Loving and supporting each other can turn to wounding each other. I am not married; I don't think I will ever get married. I have a wonderful long-

"IT'S ABOUT EXPECTATIONS. IT'S ABOUT DEFINING AND SORTING THROUGH WHICH TIES BIND AND WHICH TIES DON'T."



term relationship, and I am sure that in another era we would have been married by now, but we haven't chosen to do that.

TS: What qualities in the actors were you looking for when you cast the play?

PM: These are very smart people that Donald has written. These are very verbal people, so I really wanted true-blue stage actors who could bite into the language and could understand how using language can push an action forward. I also didn't want us to circle Beth or Tom and say, "Oh, oh, I get it, they are that kind of person" versus Gabe and Karen. I didn't want to over-determine the story; I really wanted these people to come across as real friends.

TS: How difficult is it to ask actors to go back in time to play their younger selves?

PM: We haven't started rehearsing, so I don't know yet. There is something so delicious about that flashback scene. If we had seen it in chronological order, we wouldn't pay attention to it. It is a great breath of fresh air. We get to play with nothing but potential, while the audience gets to see tiny seeds of destruction perhaps.

TS: Talk about how you are collaborating with your design team.

PM: I have had multiple meetings with the set designer, Allen Moyer, and we're very interested in the first act's snow storm. There is something about a snowstorm, especially outside a city, where all you want to do is cuddle up in your cozy sweater. That setting forces an intimacy, and sometimes conversations to happen that otherwise wouldn't. At the top of the second act, we also really want to experience a different point of view. We are not outside per se, but it is wide open. It is an emotional and psychologically open space. All this has also been translated through discussions with the sound designer and composer, Josh Schmidt, into the music. I am interested in what winter sounds like in Act One and where we go from there.

TS: The play keeps changing location, and that is always a challenge—correct?

PM: Absolutely. You want to get the sense that this is Gabe and Karen's house versus Tom and Beth's house. Who are these people and what have they accumulated? What is the snapshot of their respective places? The challenge becomes how do we complete the story in the kitchen, the bedroom, the living room, the patio, the bar, the two Vineyard scenes with just the essentials, so the focus remains on the people.

TS: I am curious about your collaboration with the playwright Donald Margulies—have you been meeting often?

PM: Yes, we've met several times. We've had several coffees to talk about the play. We naturally talked frequently as we cast the company. We've also attended a couple of ad meetings. We always use proscribed meetings as a jumping off point to then linger and talk about some aspect of the play. It's been a real treat thus far. He knows these characters so well.



Darren Pettie and Jeremy Shamos in *Dinner with Friends*

Photo: Jeremy Daniel

TS: When I interviewed Donald, he said he's wanted to collaborate with you for a while now.

PM: I am just thrilled to be working with him. He feels like a kid in a candy store and I feel the same way because I know this is such a good play. I know this is a play that works, and it's a satisfying play in front of an audience. I'm eager to have Donald in rehearsal with the actors for the first few days, when we are around a table, hearing the language and getting to know each other before it turns into walking and talking. I always think it's so great for actors to have the source at their disposal. Sometimes not even for what a playwright might say but how they might say it, an inflection, a turn of phrase, a smile can unlock a piece of the play as much as a fact.

TS: Will you talk about the things that inspire you as an artist? Do you like seeing other people's work?

PM: I see a lot of theatre. I enjoy that. I consider myself to have more catholic tastes than most of my friends. Some productions stay with me and others just slide off of me, but inevitably there is something that I say, "Whoa, what is that, who designed the lights?" There is nothing better than having zero expectations and saying, "Wow, I didn't know what was going to happen!" I also read fiction when I can. I have to read a lot of plays, but when I can put the plays down, I like reading fiction a lot.

TS: We will have some middle and high school students seeing the show. If one of them were to ask you what it takes to be a director, what would you say to them?

PM: Find a group—and that group can be two people—find people you respect and can spend time with—find your peer group. Make your own community. It will push you into making something and push you forward.

TS: Is there anything else you would like to add about *Dinner with Friends*?

PM: This is a very voyeuristic play. The audience should feel as if they are peeking through a keyhole. •

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR JEREMY SHAMOS

Before rehearsals began, actor Jeremy Shamos spoke with Education Dramaturg Ted Sod about his role as Gabe in *Dinner with Friends*.

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

Jeremy Shamos: I've been a fan of Donald Margulies for as long as I've been interested in the theatre, and though I didn't see the original production, I've been interested in this play since it was written. The combination of getting to do this play, with Pam MacKinnon who I collaborated with on Bruce Norris' *Clybourne Park*, is a rare and exciting opportunity. This is also the first time I've gotten to do a production at the Roundabout, and it is one of the city's most admired institutions. A perfect storm of opportunities.

TS: What kind of preparation or research do you have to do in order to play Gabe?

JS: Not a great deal of research, as he is a married man in his early 40s, as am I. I prepared for rehearsal by reading the play many times. I can feel myself getting more and more familiar with it. Not necessarily the words, but with the movement of the whole thing. It will be quite different when we read it out loud as a cast, and that is as it should be. Plays are written to be performed, spoken, and lived in.

TS: How is this character relevant to you? I realize the rehearsal process hasn't begun yet, but can you share some of your thoughts about what you find most challenging or exciting about this role?

JS: The character is relevant to me in the same way that I suspect it will be relevant to everyone who sees the play. He is a person in a marriage/partnership, who finds himself questioning his life's circumstances that have gone on a kind of autopilot; chaotic events around us often make us flee and isolate or cling and fuse. The challenge for me is that Gabe is essentially a "clinger/fuser" and I've struggled with my instinct of isolating. It will be interesting to play a person who, on the surface, is very much like me, but who fundamentally has a completely different coping system.

TS: What do you think the play is about? What was your first emotional response to the play?



Darren Pettie and Jeremy Shamos in *Dinner with Friends*

Photo: Jeremy Daniel



JS: The play seems to be contemplating relationships in two of their forms: marriage and friendship. The dynamics of couples. Sometimes one member of one couple is closer with one member of the other. Sometimes one person knows the other couple before they themselves become paired up. The play looks at the dynamics of old friends, allegiances, love, endurance, and what I spoke about before, the differences we all have when faced with crisis. Flee or fight? Seek comfort from another or seek solace in solitude? Blow things up and start over or rebuild what is broken?

TS: Can you tell us about the relationships between Gabe and Karen? Gabe and Tom? Gabe and Beth?

JS: My feeling (and it will all change when Marin Hinkle and I begin work on it next week) is that Gabe and Karen are very simpatico, have passionate shared interests, and are generally on the same page about everything from child rearing to taste in food and art. What they struggle with is what many couples struggle with, communication about deeper feelings. This seems not to be Gabe's specialty and Karen seems to be the mouthpiece for the couples' feelings, which is fine until the feelings are about themselves; then Gabe falls silent. The relationship between Gabe and Tom is the oldest relationship in the play. They have known each other the longest and have the most history. It is also between two people who feel very comfortable joking around but perhaps not discussing what is going on internally. As a result, in some ways this relationship is the one that has the most damage done to it by play's end. If one of the play's themes is (as I've suggested above ad nauseum) fleeing versus clinging, this relationship is that argument in human form. As for Gabe and Beth, there is

“THE PLAY LOOKS AT THE DYNAMICS OF OLD FRIENDS, ALLEGIANCES, LOVE, ENDURANCE AND WHAT I SPOKE ABOUT BEFORE, THE DIFFERENCES WE ALL HAVE WHEN FACED WITH CRISIS. FLEE OR FIGHT? SEEK COMFORT FROM ANOTHER OR SEEK SOLACE IN SOLITUDE? BLOW THINGS UP AND START OVER OR REBUILD WHAT IS BROKEN?”



probably a level of jealousy in this relationship, meaning that Gabe is jealous of Beth's relationship with Tom. There can sometimes be that weird edge with mates of best friends, which borders on “I know him/her better than you ever will” with the internal knowledge that they are a couple and share things that you are not privy to.

TS: How do you like to collaborate with a director?

JS: I like to have a very honest two-way relationship in which there are no egg shells on the ground. My work, their work, even the play is not precious during rehearsal and when everyone can put his/her ego aside and know that we are all working for the good of the play and the theatrical experience, that kind of collaboration is very fruitful. I feel lucky to have worked multiple times with multiple directors, as that kind of easy, honest relationship just gets stronger with each project. I'm very glad that Pam is directing this play. I'm looking forward to what she brings to the table and what we all bring: meshing, morphing, and becoming something that none of us brought to the table but all recognize as something we would've brought, if we could've made it ourselves.

TS: Where are you from? Where did you get your training?

JS: I was born in Manhattan but moved to Denver, Colorado at the age of two (actually my parents moved and they brought me). I came back to New York to attend NYU, where I got both a BFA and an MFA.

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

JS: In between college and Graduate school, I spent three years doing at least one play at all times and often two at a time, a play that took place at 8pm and one that took place at 11pm at various theatres, bars, and holes in the wall with a sign outside that said theatre. It was in those three years that I learned a great deal about working with



Marin Hinkle, Jeremy Shamos, and Heather Burns in *Dinner with Friends*

Photo: Jeremy Daniel

others, which is the key to success in the theatre. The circumstances were always far from ideal and so the spirit of putting on a play was more important than how will I come across? Or will this advance my career? This pure form of making art prepared me more than anything else for the next phase of my acting life, which was going to the graduate acting program at NYU and leaving there and working in the professional theatre.

During that time, I did whatever came to me. I did theatre that at times was very experimental, highly movement oriented, chaotic, highly organized, or rigorous. By working in all of these forms and being part of a team that was figuring it out, I learned to do so much, to take chances and try with all my might to fit into a director's vision. When I went to grad school and learned to do some of the things I do naturally with less effort, I was ready to work with the directors who had taught and inspired the directors I had previously worked with. The great thing is that now those young directors that I worked with influence new directors and inspire a whole new generation of theatre artists. •



Marin Hinkle and Jeremy Shamos in *Dinner with Friends*

Photo: Jeremy Daniel

MARRIAGE ON STAGE

Dinner with Friends offers an intimate view of two marriages and four friendships, examining the loyalties, fears, passions, and habits that keep couples and friends together. Marriage is a popular onstage subject, the backbone for many of the last century's most iconic plays. Domestic drama as we know it today may be traced back to Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play, *A Doll's House*. The play, which follows an unequal and eventually unsustainable marriage, was a radical critique of 19th-century marriage norms and set the stage for the realistic plays (many of them domestic) of the 20th century. Below are a few examples of notable marriage-centric plays from the last hundred years. Whether funny or heartbreaking, they are inherently, undoubtedly dramatic.

1930: *PRIVATE LIVES* BY NOËL COWARD

Five years after their divorce, Elyot and Amanda have moved on and married new partners. When the play begins, both couples are on honeymoon. They quickly realize they are staying in the same hotel—in rooms with an adjoining terrace. They rekindle their romance but soon fall into old patterns.



1962: *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?* BY EDWARD ALBEE

A middle-aged couple, George and Martha, come home drunk after a university faculty party. A younger couple, Nick and Honey, stop by for a late drink, and the night dissolves as George and Martha viciously argue, using their new acquaintances as weapons in their fight.

1963: *BAREFOOT IN THE PARK* BY NEIL SIMON

Corie and Paul Bratter have just gotten married and are moving in together for the first time. The comedy traces the first days in their new apartment as they renegotiate the balance of their relationship in suddenly close quarters.

1978: *BETRAYAL* BY HAROLD PINTER

In reverse-chronological order, the play follows the marriage of Emma and Robert and the long affair between Emma and Robert's friend, Jerry. Though Robert and Emma have spoken of the infidelity, Emma lets Jerry believe the affair is a secret.



Their relationship continues for years, with Emma deceiving her lover even as he believes he is deceiving her husband.

1982: *THE REAL THING* BY TOM STOPPARD

Life imitates art: Henry has just written a play about the breakup of a marriage that features his wife, Charlotte, as the leading actress. Meanwhile, in real life, Henry is having an affair with their mutual friend Annie, who is also married. When word gets out, Charlotte and Henry divorce, and Annie and Henry get married. Two years later, pettiness and infidelity have begun to plague Annie and Henry's relationship, and they must decide if their history of failed marriage will repeat itself.

1985: *THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO* BY CHRISTOPHER DURANG

A black comedy about, as titled, the marriage between Bette and Boo. The play begins with the couple's happy Catholic wedding, but Bette's series of miscarriages, Boo's descent into alcoholism, and the dramas of their eccentric family members threaten to pull the two apart.

2001: *THE LAST FIVE YEARS* BY JASON ROBERT BROWN

A musical about the relationship between Jamie, a writer, and Cathy, an actress. Jamie tells the story of their relationship in chronological order, beginning with their first meeting and ending with the last time they see each other. Cathy's perspective traces the arc in reverse chronological order, beginning with their last kiss and reviewing their relationship until their first meeting. The characters only interact onstage once, in a duet in which Jamie proposes marriage.



2006: *GOD OF CARNAGE* BY YASMINA REZA

Two upper-class couples get together to discuss an altercation between their school-aged children. Their evening progresses from civility to unsheathed hostility, and alliances between the four unexpectedly shift as the night wears on.

2010: *DETROIT* BY LISA D'AMOUR

Two neighboring couples from differing socio-economic strata get together for a friendly barbecue. Though they seem to be from different worlds, they soon recognize that the trials of economic recession have brought their outwardly opposite lives to an uncomfortably similar point.

FOOD IN OUR LIVES



Food is in the process of transitioning from being simply a tool of sustenance to becoming an aspect of individuals' identities. Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are now scattered with images of the best pork belly omelets or the most delicious local cronut. This utilization of our social media sources is one of the many ways that finding the next amazing hole-in-the-wall restaurant has become a seemingly easier task.

Gabe and Karen, one of the couples in *Dinner with Friends*, are food writers who start the play by recounting the food they experienced in Italy. They respond to not just the food, but to the specific details and emotions behind each step the woman teaching them took. Food no longer stands alone. Within the foodie world, people are looking for the food's story; where and how was it grown? How long did it take to cook? Gone are the days when food was simply titled as "lemon cake." Foods are now labeled as vegan, organic, fair-trade, gluten-free, dairy-free, locally grown, or even topped with gold flakes. Each of these labels has become part of our modern day individual identities. She's the "vegan girl" or they're the "lactose intolerant bunch."



Dinner with Friends expertly shows the combination of food as identity and as storytelling. Not only are foods or drinks mentioned in almost every scene, but the story of the food through the show highlights the complexity of flavors in a romantic relationship. Gabe and Karen's search for perfection in the taste and appearance of their food reflects their search for the ideal marriage. They are criticizing their own work when it doesn't reach the precision they sought. *Dinner with Friends* aligns the difficulties of food and relationships: what is the perfect spice, when do things become "overcooked" and how do you make things lighter? This search is ever present in day-to-day life but is only enhanced by foodies who will continue to try to find the next hole-in-the-wall, looking for that perfect hidden gem.

Gabe and Karen's Polenta Almond Lemon Cake Recipe

SERVES 10

INGREDIENTS

2 CUPS UNSALTED BUTTER, SOFTENED
2 CUPS CASTER SUGAR
2 CUPS GROUND ALMONDS
2 TEASPOONS VANILLA EXTRACT
6 EGGS
1 CUP POLENTA FLOUR
1 CUP LEMON ZEST
3 TABLESPOONS LEMON JUICE
1 ½ TEASPOON BAKING POWDER
¼ TEASPOON SALT

DIRECTIONS

1. PRE-HEAT OVEN TO 370°F
2. BEAT TOGETHER BUTTER AND SUGAR UNTIL PALE AND LIGHT
3. STIR IN GROUND ALMONDS AND VANILLA
4. BEAT IN EGGS, ONE AT A TIME
5. FOLD IN LEMON ZEST, LEMON JUICE, POLENTA FLOUR, BAKING POWDER, AND SALT
6. SPOON BATTER INTO A BUTTER AND FLOURED 12 INCH ROUND CAKE TIN
7. BAKE FOR 45-50 MINUTES OR UNTIL TOP IS DEEP GOLDEN BROWN

INTERVIEW WITH SET DESIGNER ALLEN MOYER

Ted Sod, *Education Dramaturg*, sat down with set designer Allen Moyer to discuss his designs for *Dinner with Friends*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? When did you decide to design scenery for the theatre?

Allen Moyer: I was born in Schuylkill Haven. It is close to Reading, right before the coal region begins in Pennsylvania. I was the kid that always drew and painted and made puppets. I started out at Albright College, where I studied biochemistry—then I changed majors. I decided I wanted to study directing or design, but Albright had no theatre department, so I went to Penn State and ended up focusing on design. Then I went to graduate school at NYU.

TS: Will you talk about what you look for in a director when you are meeting to discuss a play?

AM: I like someone who is able to think about the big picture and understands what is important thematically in a piece, while being able to speak in specific terms about practical ideas and requirements. What I have enjoyed about working with Pam MacKinnon is that she does those things really well. Pam is always clear about the things that are important to her, while at the same time giving me a sense of freedom to find a way to make an environment that can express our particular feelings or response to the piece.

TS: I love the *coup de théâtre* you designed for the set at the top of Act Two.

AM: Well, the whole design is based on that moment, really. I think this play is very cleverly structured. The beginning of Act Two really puts the whole play in focus. Often what interests me most when I am designing a piece is its structure.

TS: We don't want to give away too much, but you worked with an artist from Martha's Vineyard, where the top of Act Two takes place. How did you find her?

AM: I went onto Google and I typed "Martha's Vineyard Paintings," of course. There are hundreds of them, if not thousands. I picked a few that were in different styles and showed them to Pam. We kept being



drawn to several paintings by a woman named Page Railsback, which were not realistic. We liked the idea of an image that was much more abstract. I think we were both drawn to the energy and enthusiasm of the piece and the way it appeared to be so quickly painted. The colors were also so right for the feel of the scene, when these characters were younger and their relationships were still being defined. I contacted the artist through her website, and I explained how I was hoping to have her permission to use the image. The painting had been sold, but Page suggested she paint a similar one and to the exact proportions I needed. The painting was used by the scenic artists to paint the very large version we needed, and we hope to use it onstage as well, on the wall behind the bed in the very last scene of the show. The character of Beth is a painter, so I suppose if someone thinks this might be something she painted that weekend years before, it wouldn't be a bad thing, right?

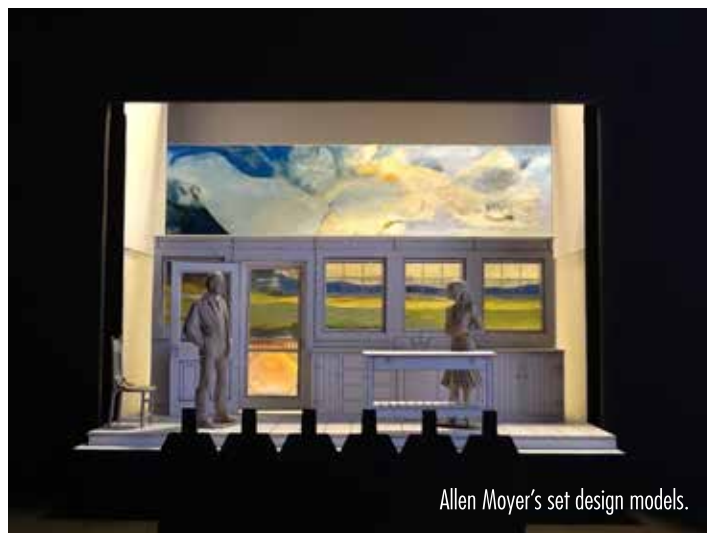
TS: When they did the original production, they used a turntable. Did you deliberately decide not to because they did it before?

AM: Not necessarily. I do think it is nice to do something different, but I don't think it valuable to just throw an idea out simply because it was done in another production. I don't think a turntable would work very well in the Laura Pels Theatre. Turntables can be predictable and limiting; you sit in the audience and the thing turns and you say, "Oh I get it." More importantly, we are able to surprise people at the beginning of Act Two in a way I wouldn't be able to do with a turntable. I wanted to figure out a way for the piece to move from scene to scene that could make for beautiful transitions to watch. In a way, the routine of changing the scenery for *Dinner with Friends* can



Photo: Jeremy Daniel

Daren Pettie, Heather Burns, Marin Hinkle, and Jeremy Shamos in *Dinner with Friends*



Allen Moyer's set design models.

mirror the routines of the characters' lives, but this way I am able to break it and to make the first scene in Act Two remarkably different. I like when the way we choose to get from one scene to another can add to the emotional event, no matter how subtle it may be.

TS: Do you remember your emotional response when you first read the play?

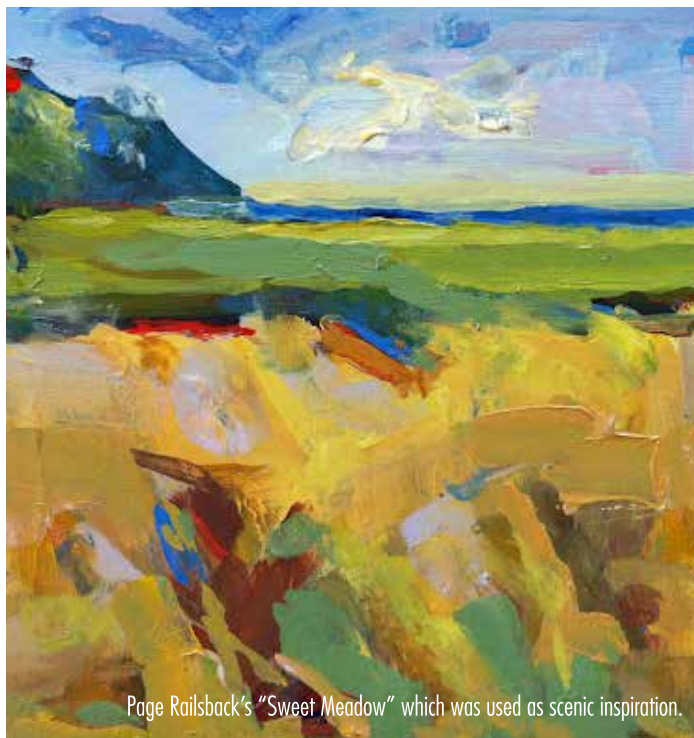
AM: I think for anybody in a long-term relationship, like I am lucky to be in, the play gives you something to think about. Is the routine of a long-term relationship a bad or a good thing? For Gabe and Karen, I think that is the point of the play. They learn that routine with the person that you love is a beautiful thing. Maybe Beth and Tom feel they need more excitement in their lives and that for them the routine is not a comfortable, warm, lovely sort of thing. I think Gabe and Karen—especially Gabe—realize that routine can be what defines a loving relationship and that it's a wonderful thing. I think I understand where Gabe is at emotionally and what his journey is. I have had that journey myself.

TS: Who or what inspires you as a set designer? Do you go see other productions?

AM: Sometimes, I am embarrassed how little theatre I see anymore. I

have to say I usually go to events that involve music—so I tend to see more opera. I really enjoy going to dance events as well, but it all seems to go in cycles. In six months I might say I only go to see a few plays. Plus, there are only 24 hours in a day and when a good deal of

my time is already spent sitting in a dark theatre, you get my point. Frankly, I'm not sure that, for a designer, looking to the theatre for inspiration is all that effective. Probably two hours in a museum, or a week in Rome, is likely to yield higher results. Or even a good conversation across the dinner table for that matter.



Page Railsback's "Sweet Meadow" which was used as scenic inspiration.

TS: What advice do you have for young people who might want to design scenery for the theatre?

AM: Read more plays. I feel young people start working in the theatre as directors, actors and designers without a firm enough base in dramatic literature and how to speak intelligently and confidently about it. I also think training for designers and directors should, initially, be exactly the same. Of course, you reach a point where you need to focus on

the very specific skills you must have, but I think the difficult part is the beginning of the process and finding your way through the world of the play together. The rest becomes so much less of a mystery, and a great deal more rewarding, when you know how to build the foundation of a production together. •

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT DEVELOP CONFLICT?

Dinner with Friends is a play about human relationships: there are no aliens, royals, or heroic soldiers. The conflict develops through realistic situations.

NOTE: If needed, supply students with a cartoon bubble-style dialogue writing worksheet.

ACTIVATE Create a tableau of a production photo from *Dinner with Friends*. What do you think is happening at this exact moment? Ask each character to improvise a line or two of dialogue.

WRITE Working independently or in pairs, ask students to write either two or four lines of dialogue for the characters in that moment, based on the improvised dialogue, if desired. When all students have finished, ask them to imagine what was happening five minutes before this photo was taken, and write several lines of dialogue for that moment. When all students have finished, ask them to imagine what was happening ten minutes before this photo was taken and write several lines of dialogue for that moment.

REFLECT Have students perform each other's dialogue, in chronological order, for the class. What was the conflict? How did it develop over time?

HOW DO CHARACTERS CONCEAL AND REVEAL THEIR FEELINGS IN THE SUBTEXT OF DIALOGUE?

The four characters in *Dinner with Friends* often seem to discuss everyday topics (ie, food), while secrets and feelings hide in subtext under this conversation. Subtext—implicit, unspoken meaning underneath the surface of dialogue—is a literary device used in many realistic plays. Explore how characters conceal (and reveal) subtext through this improvisation.

- ACTIVATE**
- Students work in pairs. Characters (A and B) are best friends.
 - B has a secret that A does not know. (Teacher assigns a high stakes secret: your boyfriend/girlfriend broke up with you last night and you haven't told anyone yet.)
 - The conversation takes place at lunch, and the surface dialogue focuses on the food.
 - A's objective is to find out what is happening with B, without asking outright. Try to keep the conversation casual and use subtext.
 - B can make suggestions and give hints, but try to keep the secret in the subtext.

Allow the improvisation to unfold for a few minutes, until it stops moving forward or until the secret is revealed.

WRITE The same situation can be explored in dialogue writing. In pairs or individually, students write a scene with two friends at lunch, talking about food. One has a secret, and the other is trying to find it out, keeping the real meaning in subtext.

REFLECT Why do playwrights and authors use subtext? How do we use subtext in real life? Why do we sometimes not directly say what we are thinking or feeling?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR
EDUCATORS



HOW DOES A SET DESIGNER USE SPECIFIC, MINIMAL DETAIL TO CREATE A SENSE OF PLACE?

In creating the *Dinner with Friends* set, designer Allen Moyer chose a small number of details from the primary setting, a suburban Connecticut home, to create the home on stage.

REFLECT In small groups, students should brainstorm a list of objects and visual details in one area of the school (or another location relevant to the curriculum): the classroom, the cafeteria, the hallway, etc. Groups should work on different locations.

ACTIVATE Working from their list, students should select three objects or visual details from their location that best convey that location to an audience. Groups should then create drawings or mock ups of each object or visual detail.

REFLECT Groups share their drawings with the class without revealing the location. What is the setting they are trying to convey? Do these objects capture the function or the space? Do these objects capture the mood or feel of the setting?

HOW DO OUTSIDE EXPECTATIONS CREATE INTERNAL CONFLICT IN A CHARACTER?

REFLECT Discuss the outside expectations faced by each of the four characters (Gabe, Karen, Tom, and Beth). What was expected from each of them? How was each character conflicted about meeting these expectations? What happened as a result of these expectations and conflicts?

WRITE Create a brief sketch for an original character who is conflicted about the expectations they must meet:

- Who is the character? (Name, age, gender, occupation)
- List 3 expectations the character must live up to. Each expectation comes from an outside person (ie a teacher, parent, friends).
- Imagine 1 thing the character can never do, because of these expectations.

ACTIVATE Students improvise in pairs. One student plays the conflicted character and the other plays her/his therapist. The Therapist's objective is to ask questions and learn about the conflict from the expectations. The Character's objective is to find a solution for the conflict.

GLOSSARY

POMODORO	Pasta with fresh tomatoes, basil, and olive oil <i>Karen and Gabe describe the amazing pomodoro they had in Italy.</i>
CHIANTI	A type of wine made in Central Tuscany <i>Chianti was used in cooking a dish.</i>
TREPIDATIOUS	Feeling apprehensive <i>Karen and Gabe discuss how they felt trepidatious about leaving their children while they traveled.</i>
DILETTANTE	An amateur <i>Tom insults Beth by calling her a dilettante.</i>
DUPLICITOUS	Deceitful <i>Karen asks to what extent Tom was being duplicitous.</i>
AMOROUS	Showing passion or lust <i>Karen feels amorous while Gabe is trying to cook dinner.</i>
ADAGIO	Slow <i>Tom and Beth's marriage is described as an adagio dance.</i>

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ABOUT ROUNABOUT



ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

Founded in 1965, Roundabout Theatre Company has grown from a small 150-seat theatre in a converted supermarket basement to become the nation's most influential not-for-profit theatre company, as well as one of New York City's leading cultural institutions. With five stages on and off Broadway, Roundabout now reaches over 700,000 theatergoers, students, educators and artists across the country and around the world every year.

We are committed to producing the highest quality theatre with the finest artists, sharing stories that endure, and providing accessibility to all audiences. A not-for-profit company, Roundabout fulfills its mission each season through the production of classic plays and musicals; development and production of new works by established and emerging writers; educational initiatives that enrich the lives of children and adults; and a subscription model and audience outreach programs that cultivate and engage all audiences.

2013-2014 SEASON



By
Terence Rattigan

Starring
Michael Cumpsty, Mary
Elizabeth Mastrantonio,
Alessandro Nivola,
Roger Rees

Directed by
Lindsay Posner



By
Sophie Treadwell

Starring
Rebecca Hall

Directed by
Lyndsey Turner



Book by Joe Masteroff
Music by John Kander
Lyrics by Fred Ebb

Starring Alan Cumming
and Michelle Williams

Co-directed and
choreographed by
Rob Marshall

Directed by Sam Mendes



By
Donald Margulies

Directed by
Pam MacKinnon



Music by Jeanine Tesori
Book and Lyrics
by Brian Crawley

Starring Sutton Foster,
Colin Donnell, and
Joshua Henry

Directed by
Leigh Silverman



By
Jim Dale

Directed by
Richard Maltby Jr.



By Joshua Harmon

Directed by
Daniel Aukin

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Find us on



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: BOBBY WOLF, HOUSE MANAGER

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated?

Bobby Wolf: I was born in Santa Barbara, California and studied Music and Theatre at Arizona State University after starting as an Architecture major and then Interior Design major. I miss the sunny winters!

TS: How would you describe the job of being house manager for the shows at the Steinberg Center?

BW: It's great because I love the shows we do at the Steinberg Center. We typically do new works, especially in the Black Box Theatre. The vibe from new shows is exciting and changing from minute to minute.

TS: What is it like when you are managing two shows running simultaneously? When do you get to see the shows?

BW: Managing two shows at the same time can make for a very busy work shift. Although the Black Box Theatre is much smaller, 62 seats, it is still another group of actors, stage managers, ushers, audience members. It doubles up the work for sure. After the first week of running

two shows I usually get into the groove of it as it becomes second nature. But it can be busy. Luckily, I have a great staff and assistant house manager who work very hard. I get to see the shows' dress rehearsal, the night before the first preview. Every now and then I will get to pop inside to watch scenes I love.

TS: What is the best part of your job? Any anecdotes or stories you'd like to share?

BW: The best part of my job is working in an environment that I love. Seeing a live performance is such a joy, and to be around it every day makes for a great experience every day. There are way too many stories to tell! I remember once during *Death Takes a Holiday*, a patron came to me at intermission, confused why there wasn't more tap dancing. I found out he had meant to see *Anything Goes* at the Stephen Sondheim Theatre. I'm happy to say he enjoyed the show!



WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

TICKET POLICY

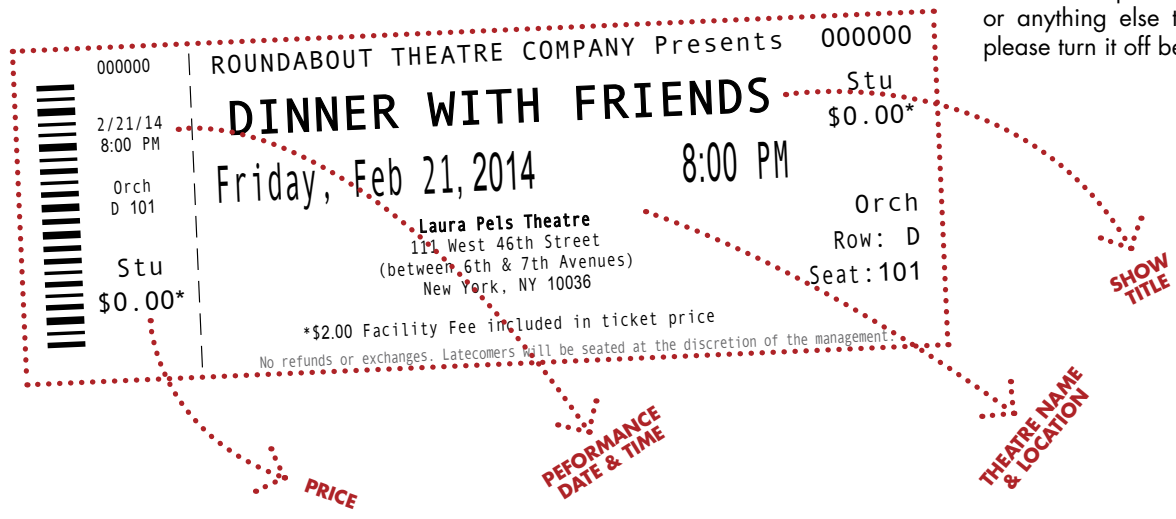
As a student participant in Producing Partners, Page To Stage or Theatre Access, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to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