



VIOLET

UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

Violet

With a score of show-stopping anthems ranging from American-roots to folk to gospel, *Violet* tells the story of a young woman's quest for beauty amidst the image-obsessed landscape of the 1960s. Facially disfigured in a childhood accident, Violet dreams of a miraculous transformation through the power of faith. Convinced that a televangelist in Oklahoma can heal her, she hops a Greyhound bus and starts the journey of a lifetime. Along the way, Violet forms unlikely friendships with her fellow riders, who teach her about beauty, love, courage and what it means to be an outsider.

a note from Artistic Director Todd Haines

Bringing *Violet* to Broadway 17 years after its premiere gives us a chance to reexamine the show's message of self-acceptance in a new light. It's easy to think that believing in ourselves is just a cliché, but it's a lesson that many people find impossible to learn. The character of Violet is haunted each and every day by the scar on her face (which is left to the audience's imagination). Her journey is driven by the need to fix herself and attain the physical perfection that has eluded her. For Violet, the only choice is to seek out a faith healer, but today our options are endless, and so is the pursuit of them. Between surgeries and injections and creams and dyes and workouts, the pressure to "fix" ourselves physically is stronger than ever. It makes Violet's journey all the more powerful now, when the temptation to trade self-acceptance in for self-improvement is all around us.

when 1964

who

Violet- Caucasian woman,
late 20s
Flick- African-American
solider, late 20s
Monty- Caucasian solider,
mid 20s
Young Violet- Early teens
Father- Caucasian man,
late 30s

where

Spruce Pine, North Carolina
Kingsport, Tennessee
Nashville, Tennessee
Memphis, Tennessee
Tulsa, Oklahoma
Fort Smith, Arkansas

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INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR LEIGH SILVERMAN

Roundabout's Education Dramaturg, Ted Sod, spoke with Director Leigh Silverman about the process of working on *Violet*.

Ted Sod: Will you start by giving us some information about yourself?

Leigh Silverman: I was born in Rockville, Maryland, went to High School in Washington, D.C., and I went to college at Carnegie Mellon University. I was an undergrad in directing and a grad student in playwriting. I did those degrees simultaneously because I was really interested in working on new plays and there were no clear opportunities for me to get in a room with a playwright while I was in the directing program, and so the only way to really learn was to be a writer myself. I moved to New York 18 years ago and have been directing mostly new plays ever since.

TS: Because you've been directing new plays, what was it like to make the decision to direct this revival of a musical?

LS: Last summer Jeanine Tesori, the composer, called me and asked me to do a concert reading of her first musical, *Violet*, for the new Encores! summer program. She said, "I really want you to reinvent *Violet*. I want to see what your ideas might be." She and Brian [Crawley, librettist and lyricist] were both open to my thoughts and my suggestions. I met with Sutton and she said, "Oh, I love this music so much, but I don't know if this is the right part for me." I told her, "No problem! This is just a one-night-only concert for Encores!" After the concert it was clear we had all fallen in love with the material, and we began the process of trying to bring the piece to Broadway. Happily, the Roundabout was the perfect home for us.

One of the really amazing things about this production, although it is a revival, is that after 17 years Jeanine and Brian are going back to work on it. There are rewrites. We're reinventing the form and condensing the whole thing into a one-act. I think the heart and the guts of the piece are what's being revived, and what's being reexamined is the form. It certainly doesn't feel like a revival in the strictest sense of the word.



Joshua Henry and Colin Donnell having a laugh in the rehearsal room



Leigh Silverman in rehearsal

TS: How will the one-act version differ from the two-act version?

LS: I think what's exciting in the one-act version is that *Violet*'s whole journey is streamlined and the dramatic arc feels more urgent.

TS: Can you remember your emotional response to *Violet* when you first encountered it?

LS: I had heard different people sing songs from the score in auditions and loved them. A couple years ago, I was at a benefit for Playwrights Horizons and there was an excerpt from the father's song. I was in the middle of eating a piece of fish or something, and I just started crying. I had always been a super fan of Jeanine's—I love *Caroline or Change* and can sing every word from that amazing score. So when Jeanine asked me to do the Encores! concert version this summer, I went to Lincoln Center Performing Arts Library and watched the original production. I really responded to this story of a woman trying to find herself and learning to be brave. I think it's also a piece about acceptance and forgiveness. *Violet* is about going through hell and finding yourself on the other side. It is a profound story, an important story, a moving and poignant piece of theatre. It is a gorgeous, lyrical score, and I am so honored to hear that music every day.

TS: What kind of research did you have to do to enter the world of this play? Did you watch the movie version or read the short story?

LS: I did read the short story. I looked at pictures from the early '60s in the South. I'm not familiar with that part of the country; I'm not familiar with the world of televised church healings. I've spent a lot of time with

“I REALLY RESPONDED TO THIS STORY OF A WOMAN TRYING TO FIND HERSELF AND LEARNING TO BE BRAVE. I THINK IT’S ALSO A PIECE ABOUT ACCEPTANCE AND FORGIVENESS. *VIOLET* IS ABOUT GOING THROUGH HELL AND FINDING YOURSELF ON THE OTHER SIDE.”



my designers delving into that world and figuring out which parts we want to put on stage. I feel like it has been my task to simultaneously understand everything about where Violet goes on her trip and then find the most theatrical and exciting ways to represent those places. I am trying to understand the politics, the place, and the people. We’re not looking to have a lot of scenery, we’re not looking to literally represent the bus, but instead to allude to most everything—to find the clearest and most theatrical choices.

TS: Can you tell us what you were looking for in casting the show?

LS: I was looking to cast people who felt authentic to both time and place and could inhabit Violet’s world. But most importantly we needed people who could sing their guts out. Jeanine’s music is so complicated and beautiful. We really wanted the group to find the right sound. There’s a lot of big group numbers, and so it was about being able to find people who have not only the right sound but the right soul.

TS: How hard was it to find an actor to play the younger Sutton Foster? Was that difficult?

LS: We auditioned many, many young girls and when Emerson Steele walked in, we thought, “Oh my God, she’s a young Sutton Foster!” She just looks and sounds so much like her. Of course Sutton is Emerson’s idol, so it’s an incredible fit.

TS: What do you make of the relationships between Violet and Flick and between Violet and Monty? Do you see it as a love triangle, or is it something different?

LS: I think in its most simplistic form it is a love triangle, but I also feel the two men are each looking to get their needs met in different ways, and Violet is looking to get her needs met, too. I think that they are negotiating their own anxieties as well as trying to negotiate with each other. They find that they need each other and how that changes during the course of the evening is where the drama comes from. They don’t realize how much they all have to learn from each other, and they’re all at very high-stakes places in their lives.

TS: They seem to bond over playing poker. Are you a poker player?

LS: I have played poker. I’m not very good at it. We have started playing in rehearsal, and Emerson is a real card shark.

TS: I love the flashbacks to Violet’s younger self and her father. How do you view that aspect of the show?

LS: The relationship between a young girl who’s lost her mother and a father who wants the best for her but doesn’t quite know how to do it hits very close to home for me. Young Vi and her father are struggling to understand each other. They are trying their best, but they have many missed connections. We watch those two characters struggle with blame and guilt. This is what makes *Violet* so universal—we all struggle with wanting to be understood, wanting to be seen, and forgiven for our mistakes.

TS: Do you have any advice for young people who might want to have a career as a director in the theatre?



Sutton Foster in rehearsal

LS: I think directing takes a huge amount of patience and is very rigorous. You need a really thick skin, and you need to be willing to work really hard and juggle many projects, many personalities, and many different elements all at once. But I think the most important thing about being a director is you have to make your own opportunities and be able to be proactive. Particularly when you’re starting out as a young director, no one’s going to just hand it to you. You have to work really hard to show people that you’re smart, that you can be in charge, and that you can be a good leader. It takes a huge amount of determination and ambition and energy to do that.

TS: Are you finding that things are changing for women who direct, or do you feel like gender doesn’t have anything to do with it?

LS: When I directed my first Broadway show, which was in 2006, there was an article that came out about how I was only the seventh woman to have ever directed a Broadway play. And it was shocking to me that there had been so few. And last year alone, more than seven women directed on Broadway, so there has already been a massive shift. I think the place where it’s shifted the most is off-Broadway. Off-Broadway is ruled by incredible women directors. It’s changing on Broadway, slowly but surely. People are starting to consider gender parity a real priority. •

AMERICA IN 1964: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE SOUTH

It's September 4, 1964 when Violet Karl boards a bus in Spruce Pine, North Carolina, bound for Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her journey will take her across the American South during the cultural revolution of the 1960s. By 1970, civil rights, Vietnam, women's liberation, and rock and roll youth culture will have reshaped society.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

President John F. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 dominated the start of 1964. Lyndon Baines Johnson, sworn into office at Kennedy's death, was committed to pushing Kennedy's civil rights legislation and social welfare policies forward.

President Kennedy had called for a new civil rights act in June of 1963, and behind-the-scenes efforts to obtain the congressional votes for its passage began soon after. In August 1963, The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom drew enormous crowds who rallied for civil rights and economic justice for African-Americans, and during which Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, putting civil rights in the national spotlight.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed the House of Representatives in February of that year. The legislation prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment and housing. It outlawed segregation in places of public accommodation (such as buses) and businesses. This attempted to protect voting rights and encouraged school desegregation through changes to federal funding. It was deeply unpopular with southerners, including Alabama Governor George Wallace, who ran a pro-segregation presidential campaign against Johnson, despite being in the same party.

When the act reached the Senate, southern senators, primarily Democrats, held a 54-day filibuster in an attempt to kill the act. Finally, a bipartisan group of senators introduced a modified version of the legislation. This gathered enough support to pass the Senate and was signed into law by Johnson on July 2.

The Civil Rights Act was law on September 4, 1964, but challenges to its enforcement, and to entrenched segregation and racism, remained.

FREEDOM SUMMER

While the Civil Rights Act was filibustered in the Senate, a

Iconic Image of Martin Luther King Jr. at the March on Washington, where he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech



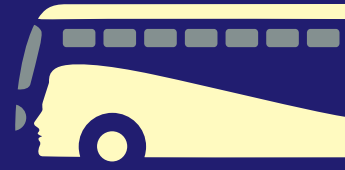
group of 1,000 volunteers, mostly white college students, poured into Mississippi in a highly-publicized attempt to register voters and end disenfranchisement of African-Americans. Known as Freedom Summer, it was run by a group of local civil rights organizations known as the Council of Federated Organizations. Volunteers were regularly harassed, threatened, arrested, and beaten—often by members of the Mississippi law enforcement community. Just days after the work began, three volunteers, two white and one black, went missing. They were found murdered weeks later.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 protected women from discrimination based on gender in employment. Prior to this, women were effectively shut out of many professions and sometimes prevented from certain courses of study in universities. In 1960, 37% of women worked outside the home, and they earned about 60% of what men earned. With just a high school diploma, Violet's options for work in Spruce Pine, a mining town, would have been limited.

Women were marrying very young in 1964, at an average of 20.5 years old.

Birth control pills, which allowed women, not men, to control their fertility, became available in 1960. By 1963, 2.3 million American women were taking birth control pills. Despite this advance, laws against contraception remained in eight states.



Mug shot of Freedom Riders who were arrested after going into a whites-only waiting room and refusing to move on when asked to do so by police

Written by and aimed at the educated, upper-middle class suburban homemaker, the book probably would seem irrelevant to the poor, rural, and single Violet Karl.

THE VIETNAM WAR

During the Cold War, the United States attempted to prevent Soviet communism from spreading further, particularly into Southeast Asia. The United States had engaged in the Korean War in the 1950s to prevent Soviet-backed North Korean forces from taking over pro-Western South Korea. The Korean War ended in stalemate (the region remains divided into North and South Korea). It did, however, give African-American soldiers in the newly-integrated military the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities.

After the Korean War, the United States maintained a military presence in the waters off the Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese coasts. On August 2, 1964, the Destroyer USS Maddox exchanged fire with three North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. President Johnson responded by authorizing an air attack on North Vietnamese gunboats and support facilities. On August 7, Congress authorized a joint resolution, known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, that gave Johnson the power to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression" without having to seek the approval of Congress. This began a new stage in the Vietnam War.

In 1964 it was possible to be drafted into military service, though large numbers of men were not being called up

The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan's landmark book on women's identity in post-war America, was published in 1963. In it, Friedan argued that the image of women as happy, fulfilled housewives was created by men and was detrimental to women's self-actualization.

regularly. The first draft card burning actually took place in May of 1964, before the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. In subsequent years, as more young men were drafted into an increasingly unpopular war, draft protests would become common.

1964: THE WORLD OUTSIDE OF VIOLET

The British Invasion

1964 marked the start of the "British Invasion," which refers to the extreme popularity of British rock and pop music in America. The Beatles performed on "The Ed Sullivan Show" in February, kicking off Beatlemania. In June, The Rolling Stones performed their first concert in the U.S. at a high school in Lynn, Massachusetts.

Race Riots

In Harlem, the police shooting of a 15-year-old African-American boy with a knife led to massive protests that quickly turned into riots. Similar riots, driven by anger about discrimination, poverty, and police brutality, happened in Rochester and North Philadelphia in the summer of 1964.

Sidney Poitier

On April 13, 1964 Sidney Poitier became the first Bahamian-American man to win the Best Actor Oscar, for his role in *Lilies of the Field*.

Anti-miscegenation Laws

In 1964, it was illegal for a black person to marry a white person in all of the states Violet travels through. It would take the landmark Loving Case, in which Mildred and Richard Loving, an interracial married couple with three children, sued for the right to live as a married couple in their home state of Virginia, to begin to turn over these laws.

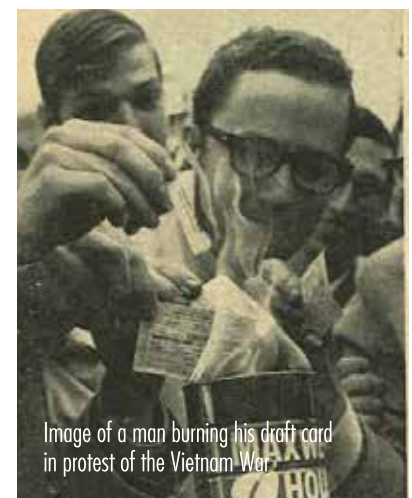


Image of a man burning his draft card in protest of the Vietnam War

Smoking

In 1964 the United States Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health linked smoking to lung cancer for the first time. •

INTERVIEW WITH COMPOSER JEANINE TESORI

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod asked composer Jeanine Tesori about the process of creating *Violet*.

Ted Sod: Will you tell us where you were born, where you were educated, and how you came to be a composer?

Jeanine Tesori: I was born on Long Island in Manhasset and grew up in Port Washington. I went to the public school system there. I started playing piano at three and started writing songs at five. I played classically until age 14 and then I gave it up for a while and played sports during high school. I went to Barnard College and started studying premed. I switched over to the music course at Columbia because Barnard didn't have a music major, and I graduated in 1983. During that time, I rediscovered music and theatre, which I really knew very little about. I started conducting, did some dance arrangements and played for dance rehearsals and auditions. I pretty much left conducting in order to write *Violet*. This is the first show that I wrote as a full-time writer.

TS: You first encountered the source material for *Violet* as a film—correct?

JT: Yes, Showtime broadcast a short live-action film version of it. It was directed by Shelley Levinson and won an Academy Award®. It must have been around '85 that I saw it. They were running it and Didi Conn was in it. I remember thinking, "That's interesting, I've never seen that before," and then I just kept it in the back of my mind. Later on, when I was looking for something to write, I researched the source material with my business/producing partner at the time, Buryl Red. We found the short story and then found Doris Betts, the author, and the pieces fell into place.

TS: When you approached Doris Betts, was she open to your idea?

JT: Oh, no, not at all. She didn't have any anger or attitude about musicals, but she just didn't see this piece becoming a musical, and I saw it so clearly. So it took a little bit of doing and finagling to get her to agree.

TS: What made you think that these characters should sing?

JT: I love quest stories, and they're hard to pull off on stage. I love the character of Violet. I love how she's described in the short story. It was really the short story that convinced me that it should be a musical—her internal life and the way that she thought was so unusual.

TS: I read that you did a lot of research about different types of music in order to compose the score.

JT: I think there's a bit of a musicologist in me. I just love knowing how cultures make music. I went to Beale Street in Memphis, went through their archives, went to a lot of healing services, talked to people who were snake handlers. I spent a lot of time with the musicians down in Nashville, and we threw ideas around about how things might sound—a lot of those people were my friends anyway, so it wasn't a stretch.

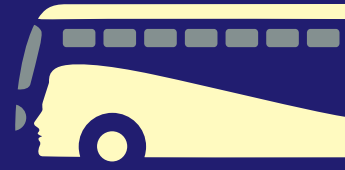


TS: Didn't you have to make substantial changes to the short story when you musicalized it?

JT: We weren't intent on making changes. In fact, we were trying to honor the short story. As we were writing it, Brian and I noticed that it was veering in a different way, so that *Violet* was ending up with Flick instead of Monty. But that was not our original intent. Doris was very nervous about it, but when she came up to see it, she said it made complete sense to her. That has been my experience with writers who are alive when you adapt their material. They feel very protective of their material, as protective as I would be of my own. Alison Bechdel, who is the author of the source material for *Fun Home*, was looking at some things on stage and she said, "I don't know if that happened but it could have." She didn't know what the truth was and what the fiction was, because she thought we had burrowed so deeply inside the psychology of her family that it could have happened. And I think that's what happened with Doris. She thanked us and said, "When you're fleshing out the story with singing, it absolutely makes sense for *Violet* to end up with Flick."

TS: You truly have covered so many musical theatre styles in your work. The difference among *Fun Home*, *Caroline or Change*, *Violet*, *Shrek*, and *Thoroughly Modern Mille*—it's as if you are five different people. What happens to you when you start to write?

JT: I try to understand what's logical for the character, for the people assembled onstage, what their world sounds like, what their soundscape is like. I think different people have different styles. Mine is to go to them and figure out what part of me I can access that is the same as what they have inside them. There are things that I just



wouldn't be able to write because I can't find myself in it. My training is so unbelievably eclectic. My first teacher, Richard Benda, introduced me to all different types of music, and then I studied world music for years: I traveled to China, I studied African percussion. I went into the deep listening mode of producing world music, which means I had to mix them layer by layer, track by track. I worked with pop players, gospel players, jazz players, front-porch players, players from Ghana, Mexico, and Peru. I got this unbelievable graduate lesson in how and why these players make music. What the history of their music was. I think the combination of the classical teaching, playing a lot of different types of music, creating lead sheets in all different types of keys, plus the world music producing, gave me the ability and desire to write in a certain kind of way.

TS: Do you remember the most challenging part of writing *Violet*?

JT: I think the most challenging part was that I had really never done anything like it before. I'd written a variety show and one other show based on Galileo. I had very little to draw upon in my own experience. It was hard to not know how the system worked in New York City as a composer. Not knowing about the way the show would travel or not travel was challenging. Now I know that anything can happen or not happen. It's usually not on the timeline that you think it's going to be on, and you just have to keep working. The writing of *Violet* was not as much of a challenge as not understanding the journey of it.

TS: How did you decide that it would play better as a one-act?

JT: When Brian Crawley, the librettist and lyricist, and I were first writing, it was a one-act, and it was always intended to be a one-act, which is why I was really happy to return to the form. We always felt like the journey should just keep going. Leigh Silverman, the director, said we should do this in one act and I thought, "Ugh, are you sure?" And she said, "Trust me, this will be great," and it worked beautifully.

TS: What do you look for in a director?

JT: I've been really lucky to work with great directors. I have a lot to learn from them. I'm really a perpetual student. I want to learn more about the piece I'm working on than I already know. I want to be pushed musically. I don't work well without deadlines so I really need someone to sort of be a whip cracker and someone who really loves the process.

TS: And what do you look for in your musical director?

JT: I think because I music directed for so many years, I need someone who understands that I like getting in there sometimes. It's easier for me to come in and talk to the cast and coach them. So I look for someone who isn't tightly wound in that way. I want a real team player who is strict with the players and the singers for diction and all of that stuff because it's their show after the rest of us leave.

TS: How many people will be playing in the orchestra, and what is the instrumentation?

JT: It's keyboard players, guitarists, bass, drums, violin and cello. So there are nine players.

TS: What traits do you feel the actors need for this particular piece?

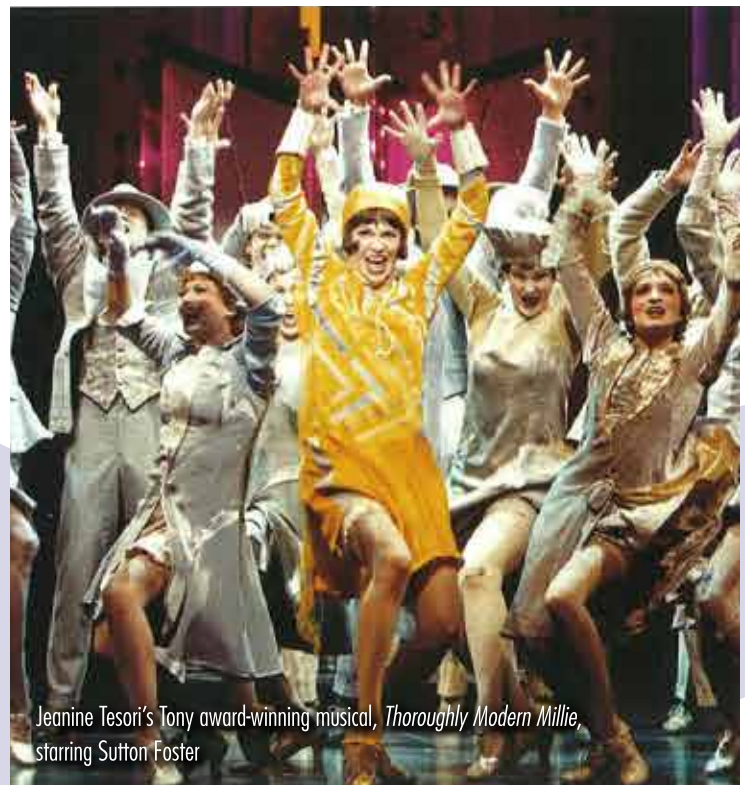
JT: The trait that any actor needs for any piece is the ability to know when to step forward and when to step back. They need to know how to use the process and how to ask great questions. I love actors who ask really great questions about why something is happening or why something was written when it doesn't feel quite right.

TS: If I were to ask you what is the musical *Violet* about, how would you answer?

JT: I think that's a tough question because it's very hard to reduce something without diminishing it. There are great pieces that are not just about one thing. It's about many things: beauty, the journey of life, looking at life as a bus ride whether you're driving or you're a passenger. I write a lot of father-daughter stories. *Violet* is one of those and *Fun Home* was one. That relationship is very interesting to me, as my own relationship with my dad was very complicated, and I keep trying to figure it out by writing stories about it.

TS: What advice do you have for a young person who wants to compose for the theatre?

JT: I think the hardest thing is to literally sit down, write in long form, gather other people, and do it. And that's also the most important thing. As Buryl Red said to me many times, "Talking about writing is not writing!" That was something that took me a while to learn; I had to learn to write consistently because I'm a consistently inconsistent person. I would advise choosing things that are just out of reach so that you need to stand on your tippy toes in order to write it. •



Jeanine Tesori's Tony award-winning musical, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, starring Sutton Foster

FROM SHORT STORY TO STAGE

Doris Betts, born Doris June Waugh in Statesville, North Carolina in 1932, was a celebrated author, professor, and lifelong southerner. She started writing as a teenager, reporting for Statesville's local paper, and began writing fiction while attending the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She won the prestigious Mademoiselle College Fiction Contest (other winners include Sylvia Plath and Joyce Carol Oates) for one of her student pieces. The award would prove to be the first of many for Betts, who went on to become a Guggenheim Fellow and a finalist for the National Book Award and to win, among other prizes, the North Carolina Award for Literature and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Medal of Merit. After working as both a fiction writer and a journalist, Betts took up a post at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, where she remained a beloved professor for 32 years.

In her April 2012 obituary, the *New York Times* described Betts as a writer "whose characters grappled with religious faith, freedom, captivity and original sin in tales steeped in the Southern literary tradition."

Of these tales, a short story titled "The Ugliest Pilgrim" is Betts's best-known work, thanks to its adaptation as an Academy Award®-winning 1982 short film and, of course, a 1997 musical, both titled *Violet*. The story, like much of Betts's work, is imbued with the sensory world of the south and the literary hallmarks of Southern Gothic writing: ambiguous morality and lost innocence, deadpan observations, offbeat humor, grotesque events, and outcast characters.

Doris Betts's writing is commonly categorized as Southern Gothic. Author Flannery O'Connor, another Southern Gothic-style writer, explains that this type of writing is often categorized by faith-driven storylines. Betts's own relationship to faith does pervade her work. Her first impulse to write, she said, came from Biblical stories, which "[make] you feel that the ordinary is not ordinary." In Betts's fiction, the ordinary is also hopeful, and this optimism is richly maintained in *Violet*. •

ONE SCENE, TWO WAYS

Below, passages from "The Ugliest Pilgrim" text and the *Violet* script are compared side by side, illustrating Brian Crawley's and Jeanine Tesori's insistence on capturing not only the spirit but the style of Betts's original story.

From "The Ugliest Pilgrim" by Doris Betts

"I sit in the bus station, nipping chocolate peel off a Mounds candy bar with my teeth, then pasting the coconut filling to the roof of my mouth. The lump will dissolve there slowly and seep into me the way dew seeps into flowers.

I like to separate flavors that way. Always I lick the salt off cracker tops before taking my first bite. Somebody sees me with my suitcase, paper sack, and a ticket in my lap. 'You going someplace, Violet?' Stupid. People in Spruce Pine are dumb and, since I look dumb, say dumb things to me. I turn up my face as if to count those dead flies piled under the light bulb. He walks away—a fat man, could be anybody. I stick out my tongue at his back; the candy oozes down. If I could stop swallowing, it would drip into my lung and I could breathe vanilla.

Whoever it was, he won't glance back. People in Spruce Pine don't like to look at me, full face."

From the musical *Violet*

LEROY EVANS

You going someplace, Violet?

Violet turns to glower at the man; he avoids eye contact. Perhaps, as Violet turns, a shaft of sunlight cuts across her face. Young Vi has disappeared. Instead of answering the man, Violet takes a lollipop out of her mouth, then sticks her tongue out at the man when he turns to pursue his dog. She looks at her luggage and sings sarcastically:

VIOLET

Is this a suitcase—is it mine?
Am I sittin' by the candy stand,
Beneath the Greyhound Station sign?
Have I got a ticket in my hand?
Stupid.
The people of Spruce Pine are stupid.

Lord, I'll call the whole trip off
If Leroy Evans looks me in the face
Nope, I win, he's terrorized
This town is a superstitious place—
Points at Leroy Evans' disappearing form.
Next week, won't they be surprised

SONGS OF THE SOUTH



The diverse musical landscape of the southern United States is a major influence on the score of *Violet*. Country, bluegrass, blues, and gospel music are all evident throughout the production. Violet's Appalachian upbringing is heard in her bluegrass twang; Monty has more of a country western influence; Flick has traces of both gospel and blues threaded through his songs. All four varieties are seamlessly woven into an undeniably theatrical score. But the history of these musical forms is reflective of the worlds the characters are coming from, divided by race and class, to get to September 1964.

Bluegrass music is often referred to as a truly American art form, and like most American inventions, bluegrass has roots from all over the world. As settlers came across the ocean and settled in the Appalachian Mountains, their many cultures melded in this remote land. Rural dance songs and traditional fiddle playing of poor Irish and English immigrants had a heavy influence on the music being passed from generation to generation. However, the signature bluegrass instrument, the banjo, actually has roots in Western Africa, having been brought over by slaves in the early 1600s. As these many styles and instruments converged over the years, a unique sound was born by combining the guitar with rapid banjo and fiddle playing, tight harmonies, and a lilt that derives from the yodeling tradition. This music was created by the community, for the community. It wasn't until the turn of the 20th Century, with the invention of the phonograph and radio, that bluegrass was heard beyond its mountain home. The sense of the folk community in bluegrass music continues today with musicians picking away on the porch with friends and neighbors and at the incredibly popular bluegrass festivals all over the southeastern states.

The country sound of Western Americans was born as an escape from the harsh realities of the Great Depression and the devastation of the Dust Bowl. With its loping guitar lines and slow mosey of a tempo, country western music came east with the help of the popular live radio show "The Grand Ole Opry," broadcast from Nashville. At first a platform for amateur musicians to promote their local tours, "The Grand Ole Opry" soon became a national launchpad for musicians like Gene Autry, Patsy Cline, and Dolly Parton, all the way to Carrie Underwood. This fixture has helped to establish Nashville as the country music capital of the world.

Southern Gospel is music directly derived from the spirituals



song by slaves in the south. Slaves could sing about freedom, hope, and faith in songs masked by stories and characters from the Bible. After slavery was abolished, educators at Fisk University, the first African-American college in the U.S., put together a group of men to sing the spiritual songs they grew up with, touring all over world and raising money and awareness. In church, together with their community, these spirituals incorporated more of the African culture that had been banned during slavery, including stamping, clapping, and jubilant shouting.

The Blues also originated in the fields of southern plantations. Slaves sang these songs to commiserate and to empower their community when religion wasn't enough to raise their spirits. Technically, the blues has a strict form with endless possible variances. There is even a specific scale of notes used in the blues, and these are referred to as "blue notes." As the blues spread from its southern home in the Mississippi Delta, many different forms developed, including Boogie-woogie, Jump Blues, Chicago Blues, Memphis Blues, and many more. Beale Street was the center of the Memphis Blues movement, with predominantly African-American clubs pouring music into the street. The tradition of Beale Street lives on in modern-day Memphis.

Violet incorporates these and other musical styles to create the world that the character of Violet sets off into in search of a miracle. These musical styles are woven into the history of the communities they come from and add a layer of recognition and authenticity. Perhaps the effect is subliminal, but when you hear the twang of a guitar or a harmonica play, the sense of where you are is immediately clear. This is just another theatrical tool of the trade, and it is ingeniously incorporated in *Violet*. •

INTERVIEW WITH LIBRETTIST AND LYRICIST BRIAN CRAWLEY

Librettist and lyricist Brian Crawley spoke with Education Dramaturg Ted Sod about his experience developing *Violet*.

Ted Sod: When and where were you born? Where were you educated? When did you decide to write for the musical theatre and why?

Brian Crawley: I was born in Iowa City in 1962. I was so little when I left Iowa that I remember nothing about it. I was raised for the most part in a suburb of Cincinnati, but for three years lived in England, in the equivalent of the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. This was to be a very useful experience in reading and explaining the Harry Potter series to my children.

I loved the rigor of the English school I attended and looked for something to match it in a college. I chose Yale over other possibilities for trivial reasons—the architecture reminded me of my grammar school in England—but instinct in this case served me well. A diverse group of talented theatre artists happened to choose the same school at about the same time. Most of us tried our hands at everything, too; most of us acted; most of us directed; many of us wrote. I did five shows a year, played rugby in the fall and spring, and somehow kept my grades up. I wish I had that kind of energy now!

I wrote my first play at American Conservatory Theatre as part of the process of getting an MFA degree. Writing was agreeable. When I moved to New York, it was to be an actor, but the writing gradually took precedence. I had also always wanted to play guitar—so I found a teacher in the Village Voice, Dave Van Ronk, a remarkable man who has been in the news of late, as the inspiration for the movie *Inside Llewyn Davis*. I never became a great guitar player, but I was really hungry to write songs. Whenever I learned a new riff or picking pattern, I'd write a new song with it. Eventually I put some songs into a play I was writing. I heard (from other Yalies) that BMI offered a musical theatre workshop, which was free, which was key at the time.

TS: How did you and Jeanine Tesori get involved with writing *Violet*? What inspired you to musicalize Doris Betts's "The Ugliest Pilgrim"?

BC: Both Jeanine and I were in the first year of the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop, which was led by Skip Kennon. Through the year he would pair up composers with lyricists, so you never worked with the same person twice. It was very interesting to see how differently a dozen teams would approach the same song assignment. I was never assigned to work with Jeanine, but I liked her writing and always found her critical comments close in spirit to mine. When we were allowed to choose a partner for a final project, I asked Jeanine to write with me.

The ten-minute musical we wrote together had maybe four songs in it. We both found the process congenial. I liked how we started, which was always with: "What makes this person sing?" In a good musical the singing comes when the pressure of the moment lifts what a character needs to say above the humdrum exchanges that tend to fill our lives. A musical exists in a heightened reality; people don't really start singing their feelings when those feelings get intense, but writers have to find a way to make the theatrical transition into song feel both natural and necessary.



After we wrote that piece, Jeanine mentioned she had found a story that could sing, she thought, and wondered if I would be interested. I read it and loved it. Every now and then a project will come along that feels tailor-made to an artist, and this was one for me. Not only was I captivated by the story, but I knew the musical milieu more than any musical theatre lyricist I knew. While I was in the BMI workshop, Van Ronk had introduced me to Jack Hardy, who ran a folk music collective called Fast Folk. I was writing songs every week for a songwriter's circle Jack held at his apartment and recorded several songs for his Fast Folk CD/magazine, whose catalogue is now held by the Smithsonian. So between the two workshops, I was awash in both musical theatre songs and folk and popular music songs. "The Ugliest Pilgrim" starts in the mountains of North Carolina, where a folk song tradition was kept very much alive through performers like Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley, who were rediscovered by young men like Van Ronk in the '60s, which led directly to the folk revival and the careers of performers like Bob Dylan. The first song you hear in the piece is a song we based in that folk tradition. *Violet*'s bus travels across the country, through Nashville and Memphis, two other national centers of very different kinds of music; it occurred to us early on that the piece could travel through these musical styles as it traversed the locations. *Violet* sings a country song in Nashville; there are both R&B and the blues featured in the Memphis sequence, as well as a simple country waltz. These were all music styles in the air in America circa 1964.

In Cincinnati, much more than New York, you have to drive to get places. You can't rely on public transport. No subway! We would

"IN A GOOD MUSICAL THE SINGING COMES WHEN THE PRESSURE OF THE MOMENT LIFTS WHAT A CHARACTER NEEDS TO SAY ABOVE THE HUMDRUM EXCHANGES THAT TEND TO FILL OUR LIVES."



drive 6 hours to Detroit to my grandmother's place every Thanksgiving. Another grandmother lived in Florida, a 1.5-hour drive. Even longer drives took us on vacation to a lake we loved in Minnesota, or to the mountains in Colorado. My first Greyhound trips were in high school, to Georgia, to go deer hunting with my uncle. And what passed the time, for my family? Conversation, and the radio. We'd take turns on who got to set the station. For me, travel is intimately bound up with the musical tastes that shift through space.

TS: What kind of research did you have to do in order to write this musical? Will you give us some insight into your process?

BC: A wonderful book came out as we were beginning, *Autobiography of a Face*, by Lucy Grealy. In it the writer talks about the challenges she faced as a young woman coming to terms with her disfiguring bout with cancer of the jaw. A book like that relays an emotional experience, which gave us as writers insight into our character.

In the story Violet never gets to meet the Preacher (whom I believe Doris Betts modeled on Oral Roberts). For the first year we were writing, we did not plan to portray the Preacher. Once we decided we wanted to include him, we watched a lot of videos of different televangelists and went to see some modern healers. The most useful thing for me was an audio tape found by Jeanine's business partner, Buryl Red.

Reverend A.A. Allen was a lesser-known televangelist in the '60s. You can find video links on YouTube now, but that resource didn't exist when we were writing. All I had was the audio tape. Allen's preaching was closely bound up with a gospel choir. For him this music was scripturally justified; what was delicious for me was the model of using a choir to get a congregation worked up and ready for healing. He also, like several other but not all evangelists of his era, was ahead of the cultural curve in welcoming an integrated audience. African-Americans appeared on television in his choir and congregation, which was unusual for the time.

But many things in the piece come from our personal experience, too. Here are a few examples. One thing important to me was that the Preacher not be an outright fraud. He's a showman, but he believes. My mother's foster parents were part of an Ohio fundamentalist church, whose values are not mine, but which I knew to be sincere. The uncle I deer-hunted with had moved to Georgia years before to race Norton motorcycles professionally, so he deepened my understanding of Monty's character. When my father served, his drill sergeant was an African-American man who was battlefield promoted to captain in Korea and busted back to sergeant on his return to the U.S., because of the lack of a college education. My father was deeply impressed by this man, and that had a profound impact on his politics and beliefs.

TS: What was the most challenging part of writing the book and lyrics for *Violet*? What part was the most fun?

BC: What is challenging is what is fun, so I'm not sure the two parts of the question are separate for me. The original story is a first-person narrative. When you read it, you have a very strong impression of who Violet is. All the other characters who appear onstage had to be filled

out in the writing of the book; that was what I had to work on most. Some I made up as needed. Flick, Monty, the Father, the Preacher all feature in the story, but a lot of who they are now comes from work I had to do.

I'm always delighted by things that almost write themselves. There is a little scene-change number, "M&Ms," whose lyric wrote itself in my head while I was riding a stationary cycle at the gym. The challenge there was getting home in time to write it down before forgetting it. I had to shush my wife when I came in the door, which she wasn't pleased with, at the time, although she laughs about it now.

TS: What advice would you give to a young person who wants to write for the musical theatre?

BC: It's hard work to finish a bad musical, let alone write a good one. Nothing is more useful than knowing the literature. Get yourself into musicals. Even in a small role, you'll absorb how the piece is written through repeatedly listening to it rehearsed and performed. Start writing by finding a song you love and trying to equal it. Everybody does it, so there's no shame in it. What you write by imitation will eventually embarrass you and be hidden away in the attic, but while you're doing it, your skills and taste will be honed, and you'll get an inkling of what you might be capable of doing. Write every day. And good luck! •

Sutton Foster
in rehearsal



INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR JOSHUA HENRY

Actor Joshua Henry spoke with Education Dramaturg Ted Sod to discuss his role as Flick before starting rehearsals for *Violet*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born? Where were you educated? When did you decide you wanted to become an actor?

Joshua Henry: I was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba in Canada. I left when I was three. My parents went to Miami, and that's where I grew up. I attended the University of Miami, where I studied musical theatre—it was the only school I auditioned for, which probably wasn't the smartest thing, but I got in, and I knew after the first day of being there that this is what I could do until I was old and gray. I was obsessed with acting, singing, and dancing. It's funny that I'm doing this production now because the first school production I was involved in was *Violet*. Michael McElroy, who was the original Flick off-Broadway back in '97, directed me in the role that he played years earlier. That was my first real performing experience in college. That experience gave me many tools. Michael, who I look up to, showed me what it took to be a professional in musical theatre.

TS: I'm curious about what you make of Flick and the relationship he has with Violet. For a story set in the South in 1964, it's rather fascinating.

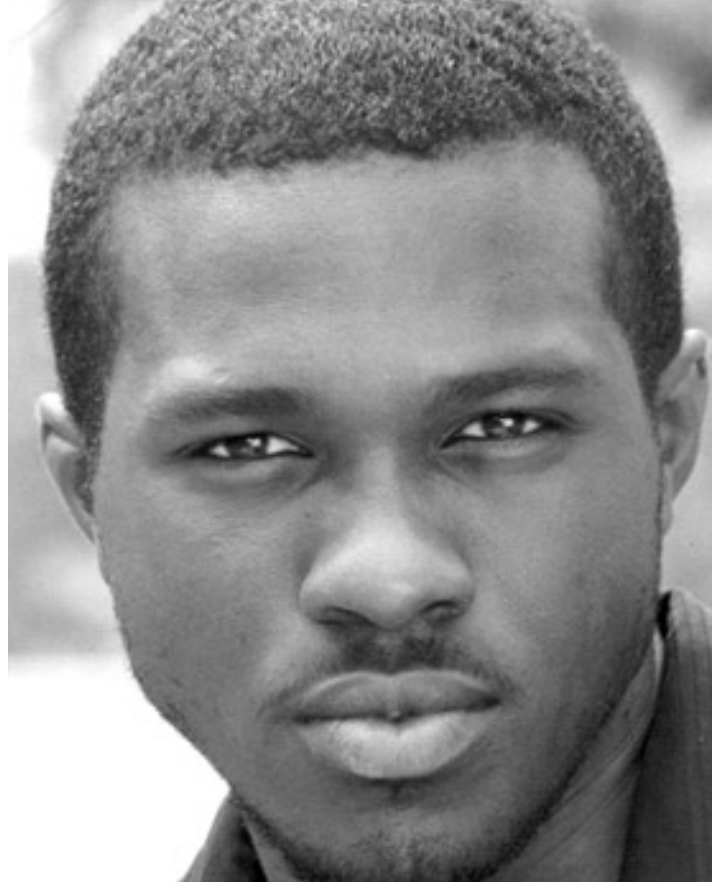
JH: I think Flick is a man of character. We find out that his mother bestowed on him some great qualities. Qualities like: even when it's not popular, you can be yourself; you can have a voice; what you have to offer is very important. Those are the things that Flick is built on that were contrary thoughts to many concerning African-Americans in the south in the 1960s. For him to be advising a white woman, whom he finds an attraction to, takes bravery. He decides he's going to give advice to this girl, and he ends up seeing things in her that he truly admires. It's such a unique relationship, and I think we don't know what happens after the piece is over. But we do see that they are willing to take a very courageous stand at that time.

TS: What do you think he sees in Violet?

JH: He sees somebody who's not happy with herself and is seeking outside sources to find happiness. I think what Flick has learned throughout his life as an African-American in the sixties is that if you always look outside of yourself to find happiness, you're in for a world of trouble. That's something that I happen to believe. Happiness is important, but I think Flick knows happiness is something you find inside of yourself. There's a beautiful lyric that he sings: "You have to give yourself a reason to rejoice. The music you make counts for everything." I think he sees in Violet someone who has not really gotten ahold of that. What's attractive about her is that she doesn't seem to care who he is. I think he is overwhelmed by her passion later on, and he realizes the strength that she has. And I think that really piques his interest.

TS: There's a moment in the two-act version where Violet casually uses the n-word and Flick moves away from her and Monty. What do you sense is going on there?

JH: I'm not sure it's Violet that uses that word in this version, but there is definitely a moment where she offends him racially. I think that's a very



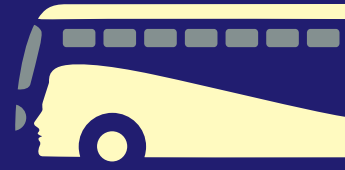
deep burn for Flick because *Violet* has piqued his interest at this point. It's a big moment where Flick has to swallow his pride and really go back to what his mother told him: "It doesn't matter what people say. You are very important. It doesn't matter what people think about you. You are a unique individual." It's a moment for him to count from one to ten, so to speak. We do see him actually get back in the fold quickly—which is a testament to how thick-skinned he (like Violet) has had to be.

TS: What do you make of the relationship between Flick and Monty?

JH: It's such a big brother/little brother dynamic because Monty is just reckless. Monty is literally a kid who Flick cares about. They're both soldiers, and that relationship is also unique because as black and white soldiers, they're in this thing together. They need each other, and all of a sudden they end up competing over this girl, Violet. So when you have a big brother/little brother relationship and there's a little bit of a rivalry in there as well, it's a very touchy thing. Because you get the whole "guy" code being messed around with.

TS: What kind of research do you do as an actor to enter the world of the play?

JH: I've researched a lot of the Civil Rights Movement. I just did a reading of *My Dream*, which is the story of Martin Luther King, and I played Dr. King, so I had to research a lot of that time period. That's a time period that is very important to me. It's filled with people who had so much hope. I think that's what I take from that moment—hope. And I don't know if the people at that time knew how big it was going to be. I think about, what is Flick sitting on? How much is he aware of that time period which he's in? How does he have the confidence to approach



Joshua Henry getting into character in rehearsal

someone like Violet in the way that he does?

TS: Can you tell us what it was like doing the reading at Encores! this past summer?

JH: It was like a rock concert. It felt like it was the return of a cult classic. And that was a great thing to be a part of. We only did two performances of it, but the audience's response was tremendous. I've never experienced anything like it in my seven years of performing onstage in

New York. The subject matter deals with things that we all have to deal with at some point. The themes in *Violet* are universal: accepting yourself with all of your flaws, moving on, and the forgiveness and freedom that comes along with that. You know, we all have issues in our lives that need to be addressed and that we have to move past, and I think audiences really connect with that. And when you have that with a phenomenal score as well, I think you've got yourself a great musical.

TS: What do you look for in a director?

JH: I think it's nice when you come into the room and the director has a plan, a vision of exactly what he or she wants the piece to be. Because when that happens, then you feel safe. You feel safe to make choices and to do something big and just fly because there's a structure around you. I like directors who come ready to challenge you to ask the right questions about your character and I know that directors appreciate that in actors as well. I look for someone who's going to make you feel that you're a part of the decision-making. Clearly the director has the final say, but any director who makes you feel like your input matters, that's someone you want to work with, because it is a collaborative art form.

TS: Did you find major differences between the two-act and one-act versions?

JH: When we did the ninety-minute version, it felt so right. I didn't feel like I was missing anything because the action moved forward naturally. There are a couple of differences, but nothing that I felt, "Oh, wow, the audience is really going to miss that," or "the audience won't get the point of the story if we don't put this back in."

TS: Do you have any advice for a young person who wants to enter the profession of acting?

JH: I think you have to treat yourself like the actor you'd like to be. And by that, I mean, if you are in the ensemble, and that's where you want to be, carry yourself like an amazing ensemble person. Be responsible,

be professional, and be on time. I always wanted to take on big roles, so even when I was in the ensemble, I thought I should treat my part as if there were 1500 people watching me. It doesn't matter if you are way upstage and three levels up. Treat it like all eyes are on you. You have to realize when you're approaching work and auditions that there are so many people who want to do what you're doing. There are people who would literally bleed to do it. So when you get a job, give it your all. Because I think that less than two percent of all actors are working at any one time. And there are a lot of actors.

TS: Is there a question you wish I had asked you that I didn't?

JH: I have to talk about Sutton Foster because I've been a big fan of hers since I began studying theatre. I came up to New York to do *The Wiz*, and after that production, she Facebooked me, and I was like: "What? Sutton Foster Facebooking me? Let me just relax and read this message." She wrote: "You really were incredible on that stage; I couldn't get my eyes off of you." Sutton's so sweet. And you know, I joke around all the time with my wife because I've always had a crush on her. She's just one of those actresses that a lot of great things happen to, and you feel like she deserves it. She's so talented, and this role is going to show audiences Sutton Foster in a way that they've never seen her before. I really have a lot of respect for her, and I'm thrilled to be working with her again on *Violet*. •

(From left to right) Colin Donnell (Monty), Sutton Foster (Violet), and Joshua Henry (Flick)



TELEVANGELISM: A SERVICE OR A SHOW?

Violet's ability to see a Preacher from Tulsa on television in North Carolina is a result of a rise in religious broadcasting in the early 1960s. The term "televangelism" was first coined by *Time* magazine to describe the American fusion of television and evangelical Christianity. Hallmarks of evangelicalism include an emphasis on conversions and born-again, activist spreading of the gospel, strict adherence to the Bible, and a stress on Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In 1960, a new ruling by the Federal Communications Commission allowed independent preachers access to more network airtime than previously permitted, and evangelicals seized upon the new technology to spread their word.

Televangelism has roots in the late 19th century urban revival movement. To reach an industrialized, urban society, independent ministers employed emotional preaching styles, along with music and displays of faith healing, to attract converts. Billy Sunday, one of the most popular preachers of the early 20th century, infused his services with showmanship and amusement; he also built one of the most profitable independent religious organizations in his day.

With the advent of radio in the 1920s, evangelists saw the ability to reach more followers. Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the Church of the Foursquare Gospel, used the radio to spread "the story of hope, the words of joy, of comfort, of salvation." In 1937, "The Old Fashioned Revival Hour" with Baptist Charles E. Fuller reached around 10 million listeners on 30 nationwide stations. When mainline Protestant organizations took steps to limit the predominance of evangelicals on the air, the National Religious



Aimee Semple McPherson during one of her services

Broadcasters formed in 1944 to advocate for evangelicals' access to both paid and free airtime.

Television sets became household items by the early 1950s, and the so-called "first televangelist" appeared

in 1951. The religious program "Life Is Worth Living" with Catholic priest Fulton J. Sheen ran until 1957 and reached approximately 30 million viewers each week. In 1952, Rex Humbard built the Cathedral of Tomorrow in Akron, Ohio to accommodate equipment, a crew, a chorus, and seating for 5,000. Humbard declared that God wished preachers to use television to spread the Christian Gospel throughout the United States, and religious television soon became the domain of evangelicals.

Oral Roberts, whose Healing Waters ministry was based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was one of the most famous televangelists of the 20th century. Roberts claimed to have been cured of tuberculosis at age 17 at a tent revival meeting. He began preaching and faith healing in tents before going on radio and then on television in 1955 with his show "Your Faith is Power." Unlike his contemporaries Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson, Roberts did not promote political views on his pulpit and spread a universal message of hope, combined with promises of health, happiness, and prosperity.

Most televangelists preach the "prosperity gospel," which holds that God rewards the faithful with material success. Critics point at the wealth acquired by these entrepreneurial preachers and a wave of corruption scandals to question the purity of their acts. Televangelists say their "electronic church" is a medium to spread the Gospel to modern American society, offering a clear message that anyone can understand. However one views the phenomenon, televangelism today is a billion-dollar industry that attracts 16 million viewers, nearly 8% of the television viewing audience. •



Oral Roberts in his office

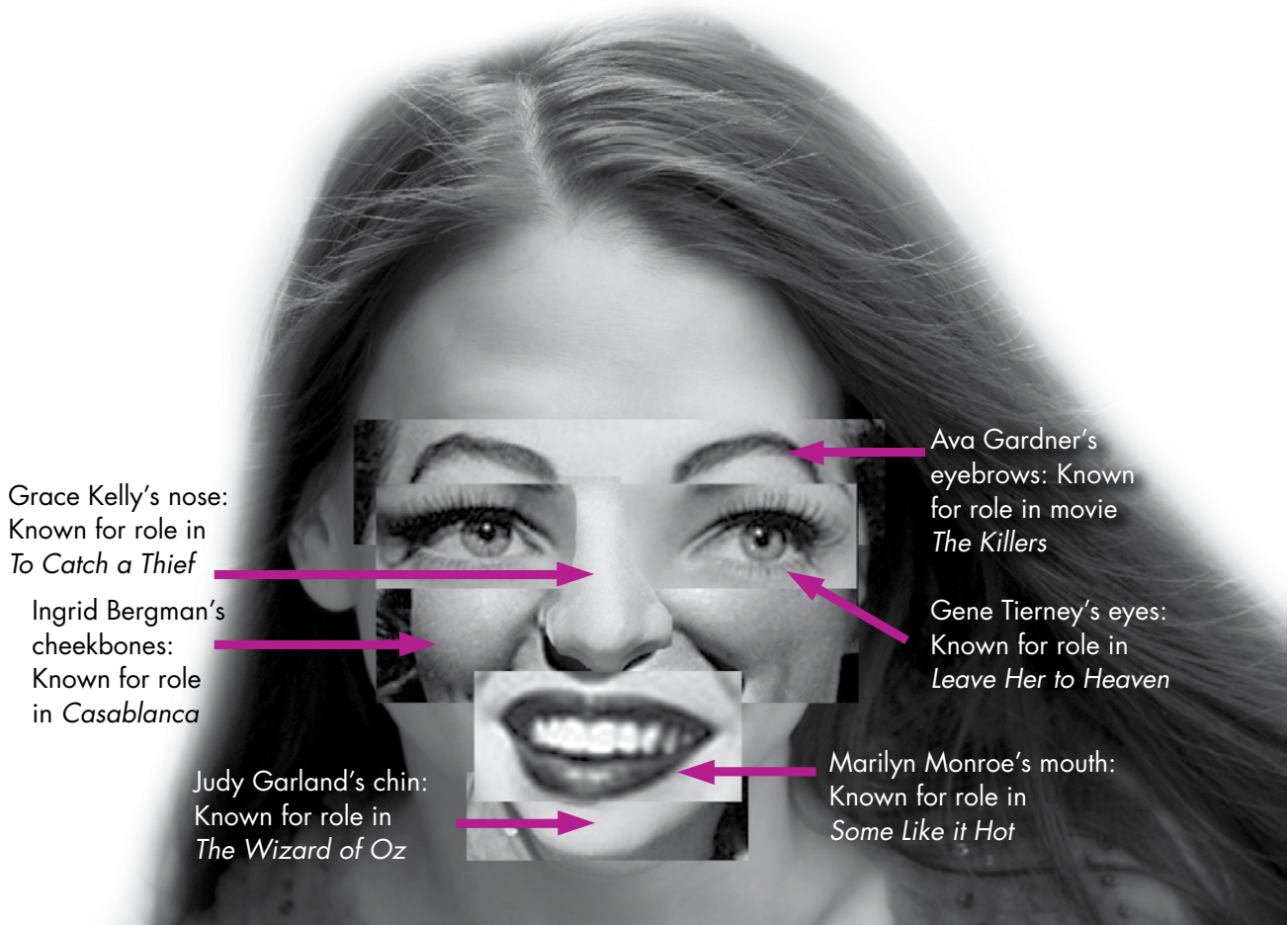
VIOLET'S IDEAL BEAUTY



Violet sings about wanting to look different, lusting for the facial features of various celebrities. She specifically mentions several well-known pin-up models and actresses. Below is Violet's desired self-portrait.

*I'd like a pair of Gene Tierney eyes
And Ava Gardner's eyebrows
And anybody's cheekbones
A different mouth
Beneath a new
And better nose—
And please, the eyes—
But God, give me something!
Something of my own,
Something mine
So I won't
Be ashamed
When I find a man*

*Give me just a minute though
To pillage my portfolio
Borrow Elke Sommers' hair
And Judy Garland's pretty chin
Put Grace Kelly's little nose
With Rita Hayworth's skin
But Ava Gardner for the eyebrows
Bergman cheekbones
Under gypsy eyes*



Grace Kelly's nose:
Known for role in
To Catch a Thief

Ingrid Bergman's
cheekbones:
Known for role
in *Casablanca*

Judy Garland's chin:
Known for role in
The Wizard of Oz

Ava Gardner's
eyebrows: Known
for role in movie
The Killers

Gene Tierney's eyes:
Known for role in
Leave Her to Heaven

Marilyn Monroe's mouth:
Known for role in
Some Like it Hot

DESIGNER STATEMENTS

DAVID ZINN – SETTING

We wanted to make a space that did a bunch of things, hopefully seamlessly: we wanted to maintain the simplicity of the past summer's concert production at Encores! and, like that production, make a place for the music right in the middle of our world. We wanted a place that feels real without being literal—that captures the textures of the many places in the story and feels true to the spirit of all of them. And we wanted to make a place that could be permeated and keep looping back to Violet's memory and the woods of Spruce Pine. We looked at bus stations, at vernacular architecture, places where people gather to wait or to hear music, and photographs of the era. It's really a background for Violet and the people on her journey, and it hopefully makes the air around them feel, and sound, like they fit together.

LEON ROTHENBERG – SOUND

One of the fun things about a musical is that the process itself informs the design choices as you work through it. I always enjoy learning what the design is going to be by listening to what the show is telling me. This show is no different—it's very exciting to have the band and ensemble right there together. As such, the goal of the sound design for *Violet* is to celebrate that energy. With the band center stage, I wanted the audience to feel connected to the music and the people playing and singing it. The sound will be

very transparent, present, and rockin' when it needs to be, but also subtle and nuanced.

MARK BARTON – LIGHTING

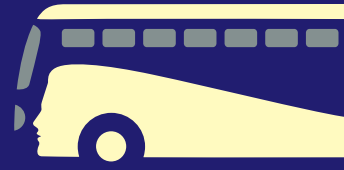
I have found it really helpful to think of *Violet* not as a musical, but as a play with music, or even more, a story told through music. A tricky balance must be found and held in the lighting: acknowledging that there is a physical, temporal space that the characters inhabit that affects their actions, and simultaneously embracing the deep, emotional musical world that suffuses everything they do. It is exciting as a lighting designer to attempt to maintain that balance.

Part of my work involves making sure that the audience knows when and where we are onstage. These visual cues change over time, mirroring and (I hope) supporting the story of Violet's changes as well. Music of course allows another visual vocabulary to enter, one that is more immediate and expressive. At the same time, I don't want to beat the audience over the head about what they should feel; we must draw our own emotional conclusions about the choices Violet makes.

Hopefully, what I can help create is an evocative visual frame that helps the audience see these characters fully—flawed, human, and thus beautiful.

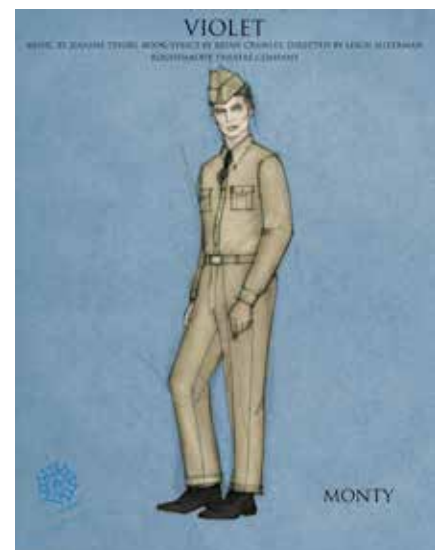
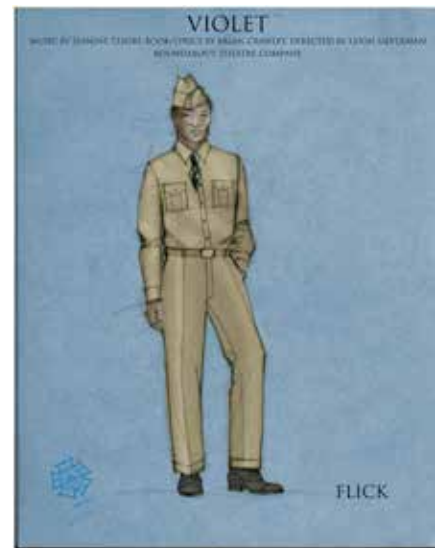
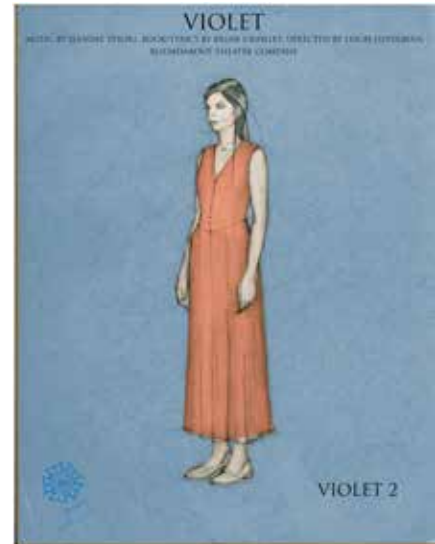


Violet set model by David Zinn



CLINT RAMOS – COSTUMES

In designing the costumes for *Violet*, I started with the source material—the short story “The Ugliest Pilgrim” by Doris Betts. I wanted to place myself in Jeanine and Brian’s brains at that point of the musical’s inception and wanted to understand what they saw prior to adapting the piece to a musical. I got a sense of the milieu in a deeper way, but I was also moved at how direct and simple the first-person narrative was—this simplicity ultimately became a driving force as I proceeded with the design. I listened to the music and read the book and even worked on the concert version of it last summer. Having gone through all of these, and taking Leigh’s idea of presenting the piece in the most succinct and direct way, I proceeded to do research for the show and then sketched. With the narrative deeply set in the mid-1960s, I knew that the most important question was how to present these characters as viable and believable human beings in this musical and period framework. I did a lot of research of the time and locations—from fashion magazines to journalistic photos to old family albums. I picked references that resonated the most, especially period photos where the subjects (despite the period clothing they were wearing) appeared unadorned, simple, colloquial, familiar—almost contemporary. Although *Violet* is a deeply intimate story about a young woman’s journey guided by faith, we also don’t want to lose awareness of what was happening in the greater world during this time: the struggle for civil rights, the escalating Vietnam war, etc., which all make their way into the musical. But, ultimately, the goal was to present believable characters wearing believable clothes.



Some of Clint Ramos’s costume renderings

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

HOW DOES A COMPOSER USE SONG TO REVEAL A CHARACTER'S INNER LIFE?

Songs in musical theatre typically either move the action of the scene forward or reveal a character's thoughts and emotions.

MATERIALS: Paper, pencils, script excerpt. Print excerpt at www.roundabouttheatre.org/violetsript.

READ Read the scene between Violet, Monty, and Flick from early in the musical. How does each character feel? What feelings are they hiding from each other?

ACTIVATE Choose one character. Write a six line song about this scene from that character's point of view. Think about writing a poem if writing lyrics feels too difficult.

REFLECT Read songs or poems out loud without revealing which character they were written for. Which character do you think could sing this song? Why? When do librettists/composers/lyricists use song, and when do they use dialogue? Why?

HOW DO ACTORS HELP THE AUDIENCE USE THEIR IMAGINATIONS FOR THE NONLITERAL STAGING IN VIOLET?

Key to the experience of *Violet* is the staging choice to NOT represent the lead character's facial scar literally, with make-up. This improvisation activity will help students prepare for the nonliteral staging of this production.

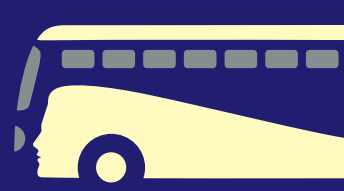
Begin by having a discussion of the differences between literal and nonliteral meaning. In theatre, it's often more powerful to represent an idea with a nonliteral choice. Students will have a chance to see this in *Violet*.

ACTIVATE Students work in pairs or trios. Start by deciding given circumstances for an improvisation: Who are the characters, and what is their relationship? Where are they? What conflict are they experiencing? Next, choose one member of each group and instruct that this character has a large scar across their face. Challenge students to help the audience "see" the scar. They can discuss and refer to the scar without saying the word "scar" and without any make-up effects. Allow each team a few minutes to improvise a scene around this scenario.

REFLECT What did the actors do in this scene to help us imagine the scar (i.e., facial expressions, euphemisms, questions, physical choices, etc.)? How do actors help us see something that isn't literally on stage? Why would a director and playwright choose to have the audience imagine the scar rather than showing it in a literal way?

WRITE As a follow-up, students can write a short scene in which one character has a physical impediment and talks to another character about it. Ask them to consider how actors could play the scene if this impediment were not shown in a literal way.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES



HOW DOES VIOLET USE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE TO EXPLORE IDENTITY?

In *Violet*, Flick’s skin color and Violet’s scar are repeatedly brought into comparison. What does that comparison reveal about the themes of the musical?

MATERIALS: Paper, pencils, images printed or projected

REFLECT Lead an open class discussion. How are Flick’s skin color and Violet’s scar similar? How are they different? Is it a fair comparison to make?

WRITE Give each student one of the following images. Ask students to imagine first that Flick walks into the room, and write down a short conversation they imagine they would overhear. Repeat, imagining instead that Violet walked in the room.

ACTIVATE Read selected overheard conversations out loud.

REFLECT Repeat the opening questions. How are Flick’s skin color and Violet’s scar similar? How are they different? Is it a fair comparison to make? Did anyone change their mind? Why or why not? If Flick or Violet walked in the room now and you’d never met them, how would the class react?

RECOMMENDED IMAGES (ALL CREATIVE COMMONS):

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/100288576@N04/9517849150/sizes/l/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/100288576@N04/9515167717/sizes/l/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/8667914364/sizes/l/>

HOW DO THE CREATORS OF A MUSICAL SELECT SONGS TO TELL THE STORY?

REFLECT The composer and lyricist of *Violet* carefully selected the songs and the musical styles to tell the story and express characters’ feelings. What styles of music did you hear in *Violet*? Why do you think the composer chose those styles? What did you know notice about how different characters sang in different styles of music? (Compare Violet to the Preacher) For more insight into how songs can express character and tell a story, students can read the interview with composer Jeanine Tesori on pages 8-9 and “Songs of the South” on page 11 of this UPSTAGE Guide.

WRITE Follow these steps to create a score for a short play, using existing songs.

1. Start with a short story idea: Two characters are attracted to each other but are forbidden to be together by an external obstacle. Who are the characters? How do they know each other? What obstacle keeps them from being together? (For example, Violet and Flick have the obstacle of society’s disapproval of interracial relationships in the early 1960s.)
2. Ask students to choose a distinct musical style for each of their characters (Pop, Rap, rock, folk, etc.).
3. Next, choose three songs, in the appropriate style(s), to tell a story about these characters and their relationships. Each character gets one solo song to express themselves, and together the couple sings one duet. These songs can go in any order, and students should consider how that order will impact the story.

ACTIVATE Students share their story and songs in several ways: a simple “pitch” in which they tell the story, which songs they would use, and why. Depending on the available technology in the class, students could create a playlist on iTunes to play their songs to the class, and, with more time, create short performances of their plays using the recorded music. Be sure to ask students to explain their choices of songs and styles for this story.

GLOSSARY

CLEFT PALATE	A birth defect when there is a split in the roof of someone's mouth; often associated with cleft lip. <i>The Old Lady tells Violet that her mailman has a cleft palate but even so, he couldn't be any sweeter.</i>
FORD	To cross a river or stream. <i>The cast sings that the Jordan River is where you'll find them and that Jordan River is not too wide to ford.</i>
HEMLOCK	A poisonous plant. <i>Violet offers to pick hemlock all day and do other such chores rather than attend school.</i>
GALAX	An evergreen plant of the southeastern U.S.; also known as beetleweed. <i>Violet's father asks Young Vi how much money she's saved from picking galax.</i>
CATECHISM	A book that informs about Christianity through a series of questions and answers. <i>When Violet's father asks what she has in her hands, Violet tells him that it's her mother's catechism.</i>
GOPHERWOOD	The wood of a tree said to be used to build Noah's Ark. <i>Violet writes about her idea to make dye from gopherwood in her journal.</i>
KINFOLK	Relatives. <i>Flick asks Violet if her kinfolk even know she is coming to visit.</i>
ANISE	A plant cultivated for its aromatic seed. <i>Monty asks Violet what that smell is, and she answers that it's anise, to keep her dreams sweet.</i>

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ABOUT ROUNDABOUT



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 theatregoers, 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 Joshua Harmon
Directed by
Daniel Aukin



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 Crowley
Starring Sutton Foster,
Colin Donnell,
Alexander Gemignani
and Joshua Henry
Directed by
Leigh Silverman



Written and Performed
by Jim Dale
Directed by
Richard Maltby Jr.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: SENIOR CASTING DIRECTOR, CARRIE GARDNER

Ted Sod: Who works in the casting office? How long have you been part of the Roundabout staff? What made you decide to work in casting?

Carrie Gardner: Jim Carnahan, Stephen Kopel, Jillian Cimini, Lain Kunin, Alexandre Bleau and myself. I always knew that I wanted to work in theatre and that if I did it would be "behind the scenes." In high school I used to talk with my friend for hours on the phone about who we thought should be cast in our school plays. I also watched a documentary that interviewed a casting director and decided then and there that that was the job for me. I had no idea how unprepared I was for the job. I learned a lot in a short amount of time but loved every second of it.

TS: What is entailed in the work of the casting office?

CG: One of the fantastic things about this job is that it's different every day. Some of the things we have to do are making lists of actors that we think could be right for the role, checking actor availabilities for projects, writing character breakdowns, cutting sides. Anything and everything that goes into setting up auditions: booking space, readers, and pianists. Calling out audition appointments, organizing creative team schedules, gathering pictures and resumes, and the list goes on.

TS: What is the first thing the casting office has to do before casting a musical like *Violet*? What have been the most challenging casting assignments this season? What has been the most fun?

CG: We typically start with a meeting with the creative team so that we can make sure that we understand what they are looking for in each role. We often go over lists of actors that we made and discuss whether there is someone exciting that they know they want to offer the role to or if there are groups of people that they definitely want to audition. I think all the shows bring their own challenges, which keep the job exciting and us on our toes. Some of the challenges this season have been finding actors who can play specific instruments, finding actors who have a strong sense of the time period, putting together a group of actors who feel like a true ensemble together and can handle the language of Sophie Treadwell. The challenges are always the most rewarding though.

TS: Which performers do you feel you helped to discover and/or introduce to Broadway?

CG: This is a really tough question. You can never really know how much of a hand you have in this, and ultimately it's the performers' own talent that has gotten them their jobs. I can say I have had the great pleasure of calling up many actors to tell them they were going to make their Broadway debut. That is, without a doubt, the most exciting part of our jobs. •

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org

Find us on    



WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

TICKET POLICY

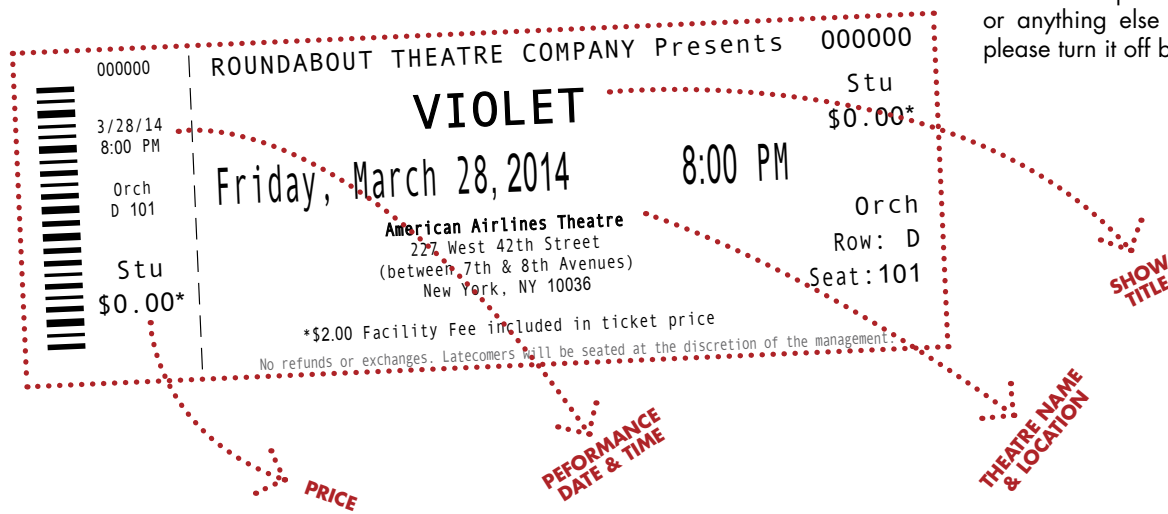
As a student participant in Producing Partners, Page To Stage or Theatre Access, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to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



Roundabout Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges the following for their generous support of Education at Roundabout during the 2013-2014 school year:

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Kiendl and John Gordon
Jill and Jimmy Haber
The Heckscher Foundation for Children
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Mr. Mark J. Manoff
Anita and David Massengill
Josie Maynard and Jim Kelly
Sara Miller McCune
The McGraw-Hill Companies
Mellam Family Foundation
National Endowment for the Arts
Neuberger Berman LLC
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
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Fern and Lenard Tessler
Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund
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We also express deepest gratitude to all our donors who are not listed due to space limitations.

Education programs at Roundabout are supported, in part, with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and the New York State Council on the Arts, celebrating 50 years of building strong, creative communities in New York's 62 counties. This program is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Art Works.

