

# **YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU**



# UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

## You Can't Take It With You

a note from Artistic Director Todd Haines

*You Can't Take It With You* goes deeper than many comedies of its time. Audiences were looking for escapism in popular entertainment, taking them away from the economic troubles of the day. This play manages to provide that needed escape through laughter and through the familiar plot of a supposedly "normal" family meeting a family of eccentrics for the first time. But it also slyly asks questions about class and makes us ponder the value of the pursuit of wealth versus the pursuit of happiness. It's a wonderful lesson in deploying the comfort of comedy to discuss real, uncomfortable issues, and many a dramatist is indebted to Kaufman and Hart for paving the way.

when 1937

where

Just around the corner from  
Columbia University, New York City

### who

#### The Sycamore Family

**Grandpa Martin Vanderhof:** Father of Penny, grandfather of Alice and Essie

**Penny Sycamore:** Daughter of Martin, wife of Paul, mother of Alice and Essie

**Paul Sycamore:** Husband of Penny, father of Alice and Essie

**Alice Sycamore:** Daughter of Penny and Paul, engaged to Tony

**Essie Sycamore Carmichael:** Daughter of Penny and Paul, wife of Ed

**Ed Carmichael:** Husband of Essie

#### The Kirby Family

**Anthony W. Kirby:** Married to Miriam, father of Tony

**Miriam Kirby:** Married to Anthony, mother of Tony

**Tony Kirby:** Son of Anthony and Miriam, engaged to Alice

#### Friends and Visitors

**Rheba:** Maid and cook to Sycamore family, dating Donald

**Donald:** Handyman, dating Rheba

**Mr. De Pinna:** Sycamore family friend

**Wilbur C. Henderson:** IRS Employee

**Boris Kolenkhov:** Russian, Essie's ballet instructor

**The Grand Duchess Olga Katrina:** Formerly a grand duchess of Russia, now works as a waitress

**Gay Wellington:** Actress

**The Man, Jim, and Mac:** IRS agents investigating Grandpa

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# INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR JAMES EARL JONES

**Mitch Mattson, Assistant Director of Education, spoke with James Earl Jones about his role as Martin Vanderhof.**

**Mitch Mattson:** I'm fascinated with the beginning of your career. I worked at Arena Stage in D.C. recently, and you are just loved there because of the work you did that transferred to Broadway.

**James Earl Jones:** That was *The Great White Hope*. I also did an Athol Fugard play there called *Blood Knot*. It was a good place to work, and I'm sure it still is. We were able to create a great piece of theatre there that we then took to Broadway, and then later it was made into a film. I'm glad we got it on record.

**MM:** I read that you had a profound stutter as a child. How did you overcome it?

**JEJ:** I didn't overcome it. I think once you're a stutterer, you are always a stutterer. You learn how to work with it and work around it. I suppose that people who are dyslexic have the same problem. People who have Tourette's syndrome have a similar problem caused by the same source: synapses in the brain. Mine started very early. My uncle also stuttered, and I always thought that I might have become a stutterer because I mimicked him.

**MM:** Who influenced you in your decision to become an actor?

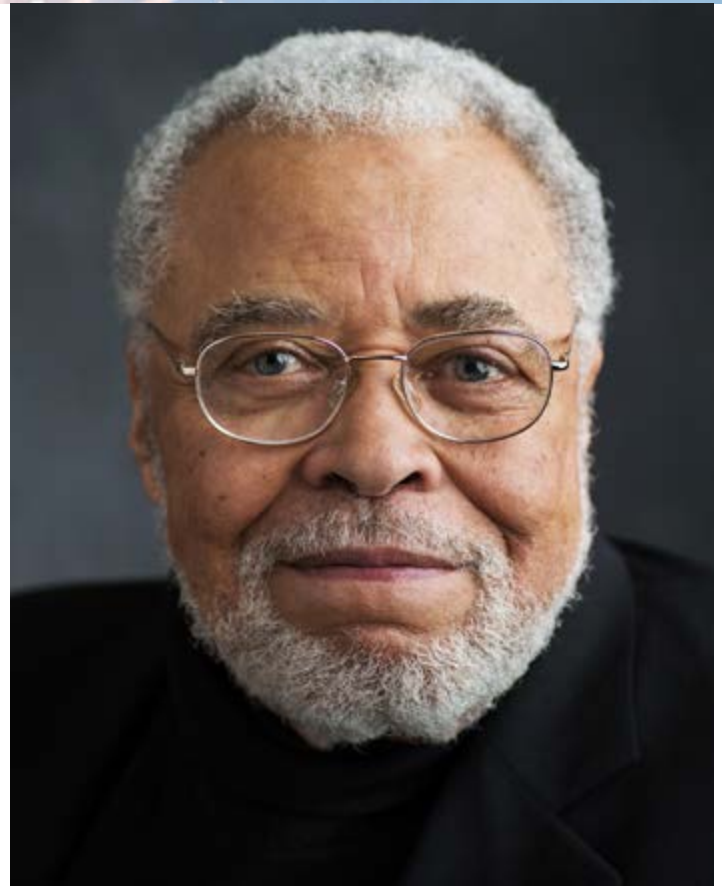
**JEJ:** Everybody! But mainly myself. My high school teacher, Donald Crouch, was also an influence.

**MM:** How did your love of Shakespeare come about?

**JEJ:** I don't know if I do love Shakespeare. Some Shakespeare I don't get along with at all. I did a production of *Timon of Athens* that was this total train wreck. I just got out of *Much Ado About Nothing* in London. Total train wreck. That's Shakespeare. You walk in a room, and you get your ass kicked, you know? I had a much better experience when I played *King Lear*, which was a role I understood.



Rose Byrne, James Earl Jones, and Annaleigh Ashford



**MM:** Your portrayal of King Lear was acclaimed.

**JEJ:** I don't read reviews, so I don't know that.

**MM:** The director of that production was Ed Sherin—correct?

**JEJ:** Yes, one of my favorite directors. We worked together on several plays.

**MM:** Why did you choose to do the play *You Can't Take It With You* and the role of Martin Vanderhof/Grandpa?

**JEJ:** I love Broadway!

**MM:** How did this production come about?

**JEJ:** Jeffrey Richards, the producer, tends to find a play that has an older male character and an older female character. He cast me as Grandpa, the older man, and he cast Elizabeth Ashley as the older woman, Olga Katrina. Elizabeth and I worked together before in Gore Vidal's *The Best Man* on Broadway. A great, great production. Jeffrey's done this type of casting twice now, and I love it.

**MM:** Do you see this as non-traditional casting?

**JEJ:** I don't know. I can't answer that question because I don't really know what that means. It probably means a lot of different things to different people. Nobody in our production explains why Grandpa is a black guy. But there is one key secret: Grandma doesn't appear, so you've got to assume she was a very, very pale lady because our daughter looks Caucasian. Our children, and my grandchildren, all look Caucasian. Let's put it this way: I will not promise the audience

## GRANDPA IS A GREAT ROLE MODEL. WITH HIS FRIENDS HE SAYS, "LIFE'S GREATEST STRUGGLE IS TO JUST RELAX."

anything in terms of what they will see about race. I do expect a good exercise of their imagination. What they will see, however, is a battle of the classes.

### MM: Will you share your initial thoughts about the play after you read it?

JEJ: Comedy's not my thing, but I have to say that there is something about this play that I find to be very entertaining. It's a good story about a very interesting family, but I am still solving the mystery of it all. We just started working on it, and we're at the beginning of the process of finding out.

### MM: What kind of preparation or research have you done in order to play this role?

JEJ: The play is set in 1937, right after the Great Depression. There are references to tax revolt, discussions about mysticism, and other things that were going on in that period that we have to research as actors, so we know what we're talking about. I find it very interesting. The best part of being an actor is that you get to become a student: a role that you play can deal with history and other disciplines that you may not be aware of.

### MM: You were alive during the Great Depression—does that come into your own preparation or reflection on the work?

JEJ: Absolutely. This play is about a household of individuals who have become one big family. The whole family has dinner together twice in this play. The two black characters, Donald and Rheba, are servants, but they end up at the table, too. I think that is really kind of neat. Kaufman and Hart didn't write Grandpa as a black guy, but they did write two black characters—characters that I have never seen in theatre writing before. Their job is to answer the door and to do the cooking and cleaning and to feed the snakes. Donald is actually Rheba's boyfriend, and he helps serve at the table and all that. But they are also treated as equals. Other members of the household are not genetic members of the family either. They come one day to the house, and they stay for years. There's an open door policy in this family, which makes me think of the Great Depression. Mr. De Pinna—who came one day to deliver ice—discovers that my son-in-law, Paul, is making bombs in the basement, so he decides to stay and work with Paul making bombs. It's really fireworks, but I like to say bombs because it makes it sound more interesting.

### MM: Can you share some of your thoughts about Grandpa and his world view?

JEJ: In every comedy, every character has something silly about them. And it's quite clear with most of the characters in the play. I've not yet figured out what's silly about Grandpa. I know I'm not going to get anywhere taking this character too seriously, so I am trying to figure out what his quirks are. How nuts or screwy is he? Walking into this play, I'll bet you there are several of us, including myself, who are in the process of just figuring out who these characters are. We're all asking ourselves questions. The one I'm working on right now is just how silly Grandpa is. And is he wrapped in a shroud of good will?

### MM: Grandpa's dropped out of the establishment—correct?

JEJ: He really has figured out how to relax. It's hard to define him. I can't really define him politically. He's not a Libertarian exactly, but he believes in paying taxes only if the money is used for something sensible. I've met people like that all over the world. I knew someone in Europe who was telling me he didn't mind paying taxes in Holland because of all the flowers.

### MM: How do you think Grandpa learned to relax?

JEJ: It's just something that struck him one day. "Just relax and wait," he says. He says things that make sense most of the time. Grandpa is a great role model. With his friends he says, "Life's greatest struggle is to just relax." He becomes the champion of the two lovers. The young man, Tony, who comes from a very rich family and is expected to go into the family business on Wall Street, is very conflicted. Grandpa becomes his champion. The young man is being pulled away from my granddaughter, Alice, by his father and mother, and Grandpa takes sides.

### MM: He's the center of the family. He's the anchor holding it together.

JEJ: He's like the sun with the planets and their orbits. He's been the center of this family for many years. And he doesn't want to be in charge anymore. He wants the place to run by itself. He wants the family to operate the same way they have been at every dinner, even if he isn't there. It's like the blessing he says over the food: "We've been getting on pretty good. We thank you very much. And we leave the rest up to you."

### MM: Do you think *You Can't Take It With You* is about being true to yourself?

JEJ: It probably is. I don't know if the nature of this play is to give the audience a message, or a theme, or a philosophy. I don't think so. I think a great play shows us human experience, and you have to build your own message from it.

### MM: What do you look for in a director?

JEJ: I need him to make decisions. I'll come up with the questions and look to him for answers. Right now my question is: How imperfect is Grandpa? And I know that Scott is not going to want me to make him too silly, not make Grandpa too imperfect, because somebody's got to lead this band. And there's no better person to do it than Grandpa.

### MM: Public school students are going to read this interview, and they will want to know what it takes to become a tremendously successful actor. What advice can you offer?

JEJ: I don't know if you can set out to be "a successful actor." You can try to learn how to act, but it's a long process. I'm still learning, and I'm 83 years old. I've been at this for, what, 60 years? Almost 60 years and most of that time has been spent trying to learn how to do it. You are learning something every time you go into a new production. It's like combat. There's no combat or military action that's predictable or that you are going to be able to second guess. •

# KAUFMAN & HART'S COLLABORATION

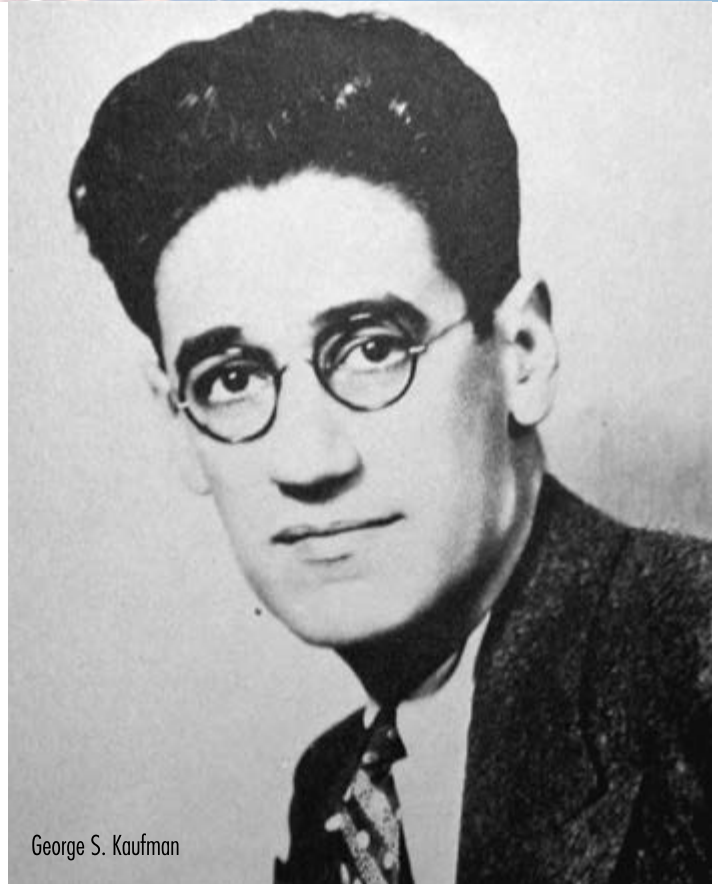
George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart were Broadway's comedic dream team of the 1930s. The two co-wrote seven Broadway plays and one musical, including *You Can't Take It With You*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1937. Their other works include *Once in a Lifetime*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, and *The American Way*. The pair also wrote *Merrily We Roll Along*, the basis for Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's musical.

Before working with Hart, Kaufman was an established Broadway playwright. Yet Kaufman wrote only one play alone: *The Butter and Egg Man* in 1925. He was known as "The Great Collaborator," having worked with sixteen writers, including Marc Connelly, Edna Ferber, Morrie Ryskind, and Ring Lardner. Kaufman's biggest success before his collaboration with Hart was *Of Thee I Sing*, written with Morrie Ryskind and Ira Gershwin. *Of Thee I Sing* was the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize. Kaufman was also part of the Algonquin Round Table (also known as "The Vicious Circle"), a group of novelists, playwrights, journalists, and editors who were the epicenter of New York's literary culture.

Hart, on the other hand, was not an established playwright before his collaboration with Kaufman. After an impoverished upbringing in New York City, Hart struggled to find success. His credits consisted of several failed plays and work with amateur theatre groups. Then, in 1929, Hart wrote a draft of *Once in a Lifetime*. The play caught the attention of Broadway producer Sam Harris, who suggested that Hart collaborate with Kaufman to mount the production.

*Once in a Lifetime* was an immediate success, catapulting Hart out of poverty and into Broadway's inner circle. The production ran for 406 performances. Kaufman directed and played the role of bumbling playwright Lawrence Vail. The play received rave reviews, with the *New York Times* calling it "a hard, swift satire – fantastic and deadly, and full of highly charged comedy lines."

The success of *Once in a Lifetime* set the stage for Kaufman and Hart's string of hits and began their life-long friendship. Kaufman, 15 years older than Hart, became Hart's professional and social mentor. Despite his collaborations with other playwrights, Kaufman's collaboration with Hart is regarded as his most important. Kaufman respected Hart and regarded him as an equal. He gave Hart top billing on many of their productions, including *You Can't Take It*



George S. Kaufman



Moss Hart



*With You*, because it was his rule to credit the originator of each play's concept.

Hart also held Kaufman in high esteem. *Act One*, Hart's memoir, is largely a tribute to their friendship. The pair connected over comedy, their Jewish upbringings, and their similar personalities.

In 1940, Hart decided to break from Kaufman. He wanted to prove to himself that he could be successful without a collaborator. The split was amicable, and the two remained close friends. In 1941, Hart wrote the book for the musical comedy *Lady in the Dark*. He went on to author a number of other plays, including *Winged Victory* in 1943, *Christopher Blake* in 1947, and *Light Up the Sky* in 1949. None of Hart's solo efforts achieved the success of his work with Kaufman. Kaufman went on to success as a director, winning a Tony Award for *Guys and Dolls* in 1950.

Kaufman and Hart died in the same year, 1961, Kaufman at

Kaufman and Hart collaborating on a new work



age 71 and Hart at only 57. Hart famously gave the eulogy at Kaufman's funeral, and he dedicated much of *Act One* to Kaufman's role in launching his career.

Kaufman and Hart are an important part of the tradition of 20th century Broadway collaborators, which began with Rodgers and Hart, and continued with pairs like Lerner and Lowe, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and Kander and Ebb. •

## THE MYTH OF THE LONE GENIUS

The concept of a "lone genius" dates to the emergence of the "Renaissance Men," individuals like Leonardo Da Vinci who excelled in many areas and made major innovations working alone. So-called "lone geniuses" have been celebrated throughout Western history: examples include Queen Elizabeth, Thomas Edison, and John Lennon.

"The Myth of the Lone Genius" is the theory that *collaboration*, not individual genius, is the key to innovation. The careers of George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart support this hypothesis. Kaufman knew early that he produced his best work in collaboration and that his style was improved by each collaborator. Hart, on the other hand, felt the need to prove himself a "lone genius" after his success with Kaufman—though he never found the same success working alone. Collaboration was essential to Kaufman and Hart's reign as Broadway's comedic champions.

# INTERVIEW WITH MOSS HART'S SON CHRISTOPHER HART

**Education Dramaturg, Ted Sod, sat down with Christopher Hart to discuss his father's work.**

**Ted Sod:** Your father, Moss Hart, was a distinguished playwright/screenwriter/director/producer who died when you were 12. You are a director and a producer as well. What have you learned about working in the theatre from him or his legacy?

**Christopher Hart:** As a young man with celebrity parents, I yearned to ignore my heritage (or, more precisely, have other people ignore my famous parents) and "make it" in my chosen career entirely on my own merit (which of course never happens, you're always found out). After I got over that delusion, I had the good fortune to direct my first professional production with one of my Dad's masterpieces, *The Man Who Came To Dinner*. What it taught me was how beautifully the Kaufman and Hart plays are constructed: with economy, and wit, and warmth, and a sensibility, and heart/Hart that appeals to every stripe of theatregoers. It was a gift that can't be underestimated.

**TS:** *You Can't Take It with You*, which he co-wrote with frequent collaborator George S. Kaufman, had a run of over 800 performances on Broadway in 1936-38. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. A film version was directed by Frank Capra in 1938. It is constantly produced by theatres all over the world. Why do you think the play has been so successful?

**CH:** There have been two previous Broadway revivals: one in 1962, when Ellis Rabb directed the Association of Producing Artists production with Rosemary Harris playing Alice, and then again in 1982-83, when Rabb directed Jason Robards playing Grandpa. That revival ran almost two years. The Capra movie, which won an Academy Award for Best Picture in 1938, was a completely different animal from the Kaufman and Hart play. Capra, using the same characters, turned it into one of his populist political potboilers about the corporate evil-doers trying to take advantage of the little guy. His movie was really more about Mr. Kirby and his relationship with his son than about Grandpa Vanderhof and his family of eccentrics, who've found the secret of enjoying the simple pleasures in life. *You Can't Take It With You*, the play, was written in the Depression and has a lot to say about our current travails left by our "Great Recession." The success of the play rests with the universality of the themes of familial love and the idea that riches don't buy happiness.

**TS:** What are the challenges of producing and directing *You Can't Take It With You*? How difficult a play is it to cast?

**CH:** Not difficult at all. What makes *You Can't Take It With You* so popular and a perennial favorite with student and amateur productions (it continues to be one of the top 10 best-selling plays year after year) is the breadth of characters and personalities on display: in age, race, gender, social status, a true cross section of society when the play was written and also true today in terms of the reality of the humanity on display.

**TS:** Were any of the characters in *You Can't Take It With You* based on real life prototypes?

**CH:** As far as I know, no one in the Kaufman or Hart clan was the basis

for anyone in the play. I think we all wish we had a Grandpa, Penny, and Mr. De Pinna in our families.

**TS:** The current Broadway revival will be directed by Scott Ellis with James Earl Jones starring as Martin Vanderhof/Grandpa. Where did the idea of color-blind casting come from?

**CH:** A couple of years ago, my friend and business partner Jeffrey Richards was doing the Gore Vidal play *The Best Man*, starring James Earl Jones. I asked Jeffrey out to lunch and asked him what he thought of James playing Grandpa in *You Can't Take It With You*. Jeffrey thought it was a fabulous idea and so did James.

**TS:** Do you personally relate to any of the characters in the play and, if so, which ones and why?

**CH:** As a younger person I think I thought of myself as a Tony, struggling with the legacy of my famous parents. As a grown younger person (I'm 66), I think I identify with Alice, who sees both sides of the play's problem and struggles the hardest to deal with both her love of Tony and her love of her family.

**TS:** How do contemporary audiences relate to your father's play? What do you feel resonates for people when they see a modern production?

**CH:** Even though the play was written a long time ago, the characters seem modern, and their struggles to make ends meet and to "have a little fun along the way" have a very contemporary feel. The similarity between the The Great Depression and The Great Recession—as well as the gulf between the super-rich and the ordinary Joe—still rings a bell. One of the things this production accentuates is how beautifully Grandpa and his family accept all kinds of people—rich or poor, black or white—and the best thing that can happen to you is to be part of a loving family. •



Moss Hart, right, with son, Christopher Hart



# THE SUCCESS OF *YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU*

When *You Can't Take It With You* opened at the Booth Theatre in December of 1936, the play struck a chord of delight with critics and audiences. Richard Lockridge of the *New York Sun* wrote of the premiere, "There is not a fleck of satire in *You Can't Take It With You*, but only gargantuan absurdity, hilariously preposterous antics and the rumble of friendly laughter, with madly comic people." Brooks Atkinson of the *New York Times* gave writers George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart similar praise. He deemed *Once in a Lifetime*, one of the duo's prior collaborations, "a machine gun barrage of low comedy satire." By comparison, *You Can't Take It With You* was a gentler and "more spontaneous" comedy, "written with a dash of affection to season the humor." Atkinson also noted the production's appropriateness for a New York winter, embracing the cast of Sycamores as a bevy of "agreeable folks to sit before during a gusty evening."

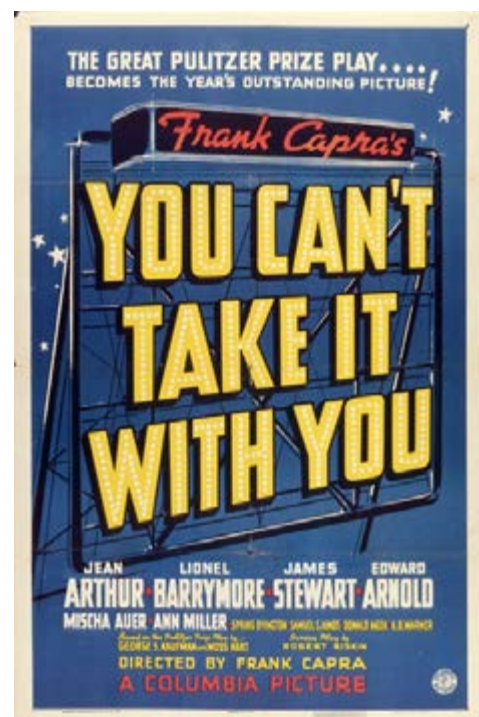
*You Can't Take It With You* also offered a figurative warmth. When the comedy opened, the United States was more than six years deep into the Great Depression, the economic downturn that, by 1932, had left about 25 percent of the American workforce jobless. Even under the federal oversight of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, which offered jobs and relief through new government institutions, legal reforms, and aid programs, the unemployment rate never fell below 14 percent. (By comparison, the U.S. unemployment rate as of July 2014 is roughly six percent.) In this period of national hardship, audiences were eager to forget their troubles. The result was a swath of "escapist" or "screwball" comedies on both stage and screen—or, very often, on both. *Dinner at Eight*, *Bringing Up Baby*, and *Twentieth Century* (among others) transitioned from stage to screen within a space of one to two years. The film version of *You Can't Take It With You* premiered at Radio City Music Hall while the Broadway production was still playing just five blocks away. Though the 1930s also saw the premieres of darker plays of political and social criticism (like the work of Clifford Odets), escapist comedies were, on a national level, the popular entertainment of the day.

Today, popular comedies are often perceived to be a lowbrow art form, but in the 1930s, screwball was celebrated. *You Can't Take It With You* was awarded the 1937 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and the film version of the play received Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Director (and was nominated in five other categories). Some



Times Square in 1938

scholars have pointed out that the success of the play and film is evidence of a deeper resonance in the madcap story. The Sycamores, within their zaniness, are also a tight-knit family, and Grandpa, within his anti-government extremism, is also a symbol of the power of the individual against (in the words of late professor Charles Kaplan) "impersonal and powerful economic forces." Standing firm and loony, the Sycamore family offered audiences both laughs and the hope that a family could be happy within a struggling city. •



The poster for the 1938 film of *You Can't Take It With You*

# 1937: RELAXING IN A CRAZY WORLD

GRANDPA: The world's not so crazy...It's the people in it. Life's pretty simple if you just relax.

KOLENKHOV: How can you relax in times like these?

GRANDPA: Well, if they'd relax, there wouldn't be times like these.

Despite the timeless appeal of *You Can't Take It With You*, the conversations that transpire in the Vanderhof home reveal the specific attitudes and questions of the play's time. 1937 was a difficult year for many Americans, and in addition to entertaining their audience, Kaufman and Hart offered an optimistic vision of how to thrive in "a crazy world."

Following the 1929 stock market crash, most Americans saw their living standards decrease. When Grandpa Vanderhof asks Mr. Kirby if he believes the country is out of the Depression, he echoes concerns held by the original audience. The Sycamores live in Morningside Heights, which was a distinctly middle-class neighborhood; a casual walk through this neighborhood might not reveal obvious signs of the Depression. Still, from 1929 to 1932, the average American family income fell by 40%. Most middle class households were living paycheck-to-paycheck, without financial security. In 1934, around 15% of New York City's population was unemployed and living on public relief. While the Sycamores may enjoy dining on corn flakes, canned salmon, and frankfurters, not everyone could afford to eat well. Many families lost their homes and moved to shantytowns or shelters and sought food from breadlines and soup kitchens.

With the introduction of Roosevelt's New Deal in 1933, expanded relief and jobs programs helped millions of Americans. But in 1937, the economic recovery took a scary downturn. Unemployment rates rose, and the gross domestic product, an important indicator of economic health, fell by more than five percent. Stock market values dropped between 25 and 50 percent. The causes of this "recession within the Depression" were subject to debate. One certain result was a diminished confidence in Roosevelt's domestic policies, not only from his opponents but also from within his own Democratic Party.

References to Penny's "war play" and to events in Russia reveal shifting views on America's relationship to the larger world. The devastation of World War I caused U.S. foreign policy to favor isolationism: deliberate non-involvement in

## THE RUSSIANS WHO CAME TO DINNER

In *You Can't Take It With You*, the Sycamores enjoy constant visits from Russian artists and royalty, and events in Russia are often discussed. The population of Russian immigrants in the United States grew rapidly after 1917. The overthrow of the czarist Russian Empire by socialist revolutionaries came with massive violence and social turmoil. More than two million Russians fled the new Soviet Union, and over 30,000 of them came to America. In the 1930s, fears of a new European war spurred several thousand additional Russians to come to America.

Unlike the peasants and farmers who emigrated in the 19th century, the new immigrants were prominent citizens of the former Russian society, now perceived as "enemies" by the Soviet Union. "White Russians" was the term given to former aristocrats, professionals, and officers to distinguish them from communist "Red Russians." Although welcomed by the American government, the White Russians had to find ways to support themselves. Like the Duchess Olga and her sister Natasha, many people had to work manual labor and service jobs for the first time in their lives. In New York, the sight of Russian aristocrats working as waiters, store clerks, and elevator operators was an everyday reality.

American attitudes about Russians and communism were mixed. On the one hand, accounts of the tyranny and oppression of Stalin's regime, as relayed by Kolenkhov in the play, provoked widespread anti-Soviet sentiment. Russian immigrants were often suspected of being communist spies or anarchists. On the other hand, communist philosophy had a subtle but significant influence on American life during the Depression. From the New Deal's expansion of government services, to the progressive theatre of Clifford Odets and the Group Theatre, America's heightened awareness of class and economic power was influenced, in part, by communism abroad.

international politics. Reluctance to intervene in foreign affairs deepened as a result of the Depression; however, by 1937 it was becoming impossible to ignore problems overseas. Roosevelt pointed to Hitler's actions in Europe and escalating conflicts between Japan and China to argue that America could no longer isolate itself from the larger world. Although it would be four more years before the U.S. would commit, the first scent of a new international war was in the air.

The world outside the Sycamore home was in turmoil: Americans were losing hope and questioning the fundamental values of our country. But Grandpa Vanderhof and his idiosyncratic family demonstrate another way to cope with challenges. The play proposes that by following our bliss and living for love, we can find happiness even in the hardest of times. •



Bowery men waiting in a bread line in NYC



FDR signs the Social Security of 1935, a legislation in the New Deal

## THE RICH

The presence of the upper class Kirby family demonstrates that some people were fortunate enough to avoid the worst of the Depression; indeed, the wealthiest New Yorkers continued to live good lives. The Waldorf Astoria Hotel opened in 1931, and here socialite Elsa Maxwell threw extravagant parties for high society. In 1935 she transformed the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf for a Circus Ball, which included acrobats, a ring leader, and live elephants. Barbara Hutton, heiress to the Woolworth family, came out to society in a debutante ball that cost \$60,000. But even successful Wall Street brokers like Mr. Kirby had to work hard to maintain their lifestyle.

## INCOME TAX IN THE UNITED STATES

Martin Vanderhof, patriarch of *You Can't Take It With You*, refuses to pay income tax because he "doesn't believe in it." He doesn't see how paying taxes—money used for interstate highways, the military, and other public works—benefits him.

In 1862, the first federal income tax in the United States was enacted to help pay for the Civil War. This tax, like those we have today, was a progressive income tax: the more you earned, the higher percentage of your earnings you paid. This tax was repealed ten years later.

In the late nineteenth century, most government revenue came from taxing imported and exported goods. Concerned that this put the tax burden on only a small number of individuals and businesses, Congress passed the 16th Amendment in 1913. This gave the federal government the power to tax individual incomes and removed the requirement that all federal taxes be tied to state population.



# INTERVIEW WITH COMPOSER JASON ROBERT BROWN

**Ted Sod, Education Dramaturg, spoke with composer Jason Robert Brown about his original music for *You Can't Take It With You*.**

**Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? What made you decide to write music and lyrics for the theatre?**

**Jason Robert Brown:** I was born in Tarrytown, NY and grew up in Rockland County. I spent two festive, if not entirely fruitful, years at the Eastman School of Music before dropping out to teach in Miami. I started writing music when I was seven or eight years old, and from the outset my work always tended toward the dramatic. Writing for the theatre was a natural outgrowth of the kind of music I was writing anyway, which I suppose had been influenced equally by Billy Joel and Carole King on the one side and Leonard Bernstein and George Gershwin on the other.

**TS: How did you get involved writing original music for *You Can't Take It With You*? Does the play have personal resonance for you, and if so, how?**

**JRB:** When I saw the announcement that this production was going to happen, I did something entirely uncharacteristic of me: I wrote Scott Ellis an email and told him how much I loved this play and wanted to be a part of it. Apparently, everyone involved thought this would be a good idea, so here I am. I have a deep affection for the work of Kaufman and Hart, and *You Can't Take It With You* in particular. The cringeworthy fact is that I played Donald, the boyfriend of the maid, Rheba, who was played in that production by future animation voiceover superstar Nika Futterman. As good liberal East Coast Jews, Nika and I of course felt uncomfortable pretending to be black people, so in a fit of inspiration we decided that we would instead play Donald and Rheba as Mexicans. I reiterate that I was thirteen years old and this kind of logic is not inconsistent with the mind of a thirteen-year-old boy. I don't know what excuse Nika will have. Tragically, I don't think we got many laughs either, but that may have been because of the incomprehensibility of our ludicrous Castilian accents.

**TS: What is the first thing you have to do in order to write original music for a play? What kind of research do you have to do in order to write it? Can you give us some insight into your process?**

**JRB:** So much about writing music is intuitive for me. Once I know who the characters are and the setting of the piece, a sound has already emerged in my head. In this case, the Depression-era New York setting and the loving and anarchic sensibilities of the Vanderhofs immediately suggested the music of Raymond Scott. (Most folks will probably associate him with "Powerhouse" and other songs used ad nauseam in Bugs Bunny cartoons). One of my favorite recordings on earth is a CD by Don Byron called "Bug Music," where he and a group of otherworldly musicians recreated—and elaborated on—original Raymond Scott recordings, as well as some Duke Ellington and John Kirby. That music is imprinted on my brain, so I'm just playing with music in that style for this production.

**TS: Having written both music and lyrics for musicals on Broadway, what is the most challenging part of writing original music for an existing play? What part is the most fun?**

**JRB:** The most fun for me of any process is always getting the musicians



together. For this show, I'm assembling a group of amazing jazz players who are going to show up in a studio for a couple of hours and blow their brains out, and I get to play with them. Nothing's better than that as far as I'm concerned. Everything leading up to that is a kind of torture, especially writing orchestrations, which I do with the relative speed and enthusiasm of ritual slaughter. But it's all worth it for the chance to make music with musicians I love and respect.

**TS: How will you be collaborating with director Scott Ellis?**

**JRB:** Scott and I had a meeting a couple of weeks ago to discuss where he thought music should happen in the play and what the basic feel of that music should be. Once I have my themes and cues written, I'll wander over to rehearsal and show them to him, and then we'll just bounce ideas off of each other and shave off time in some places and add time in others. Jon Weston, our sound designer, will also have a part in the process, since he'll help edit the recordings and determine the volume and exact placement of the cues.

**TS: Will your score for *You Can't Take It With You* be played live or recorded? What kind of instrumentation will there be?**

**JRB:** As of this writing things are still somewhat in flux, but I'm pretty sure there's an eight-piece band: piano, bass, guitar, drums, clarinet, sax, trumpet, and maybe accordion. Nothing would make me happier than to have the score performed live every night, but alas, that is a very expensive proposition and it ain't my money. So sometime before tech starts, all the musicians will gather in some hovel in midtown Manhattan and record the score. That's what the audience will hear every night. •

# YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU THROUGH THE YEARS



Al Hirschfeld cartoon of Broadway's 1983 revival of *You Can't Take It With You*, featuring Jason Robards, Colleen Dewhurst, James Coco, and Elizabeth Wilson



The original production Playbill of *You Can't Take It With You*



A signed cast/crew photo from 1938's film *You Can't Take It With You*



Lionel Barrymore, Jimmy Stewart, Jean Arthur, and Edward Arnold in 1938's film *You Can't Take It With You*

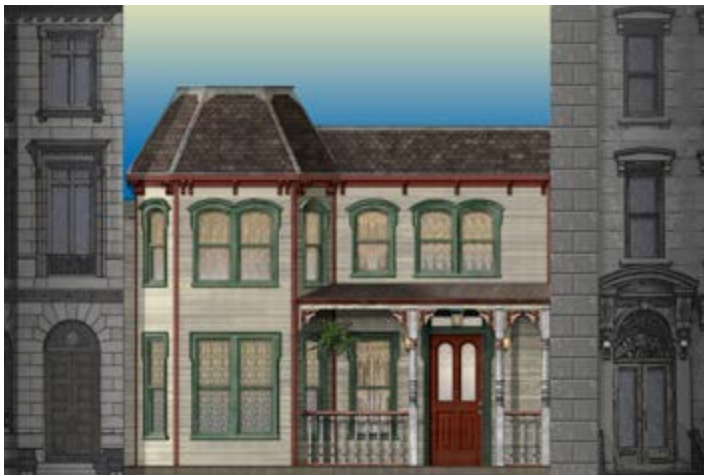


# DESIGNER STATEMENTS

## DAVID ROCKWELL—SET DESIGN

Central to the comic plot of *You Can't Take It With You* are the eccentricities of the Sycamore family. The entire three-act play takes place in the house where this extended family lives in upper Manhattan. We wanted the audience to get the sense that this family doesn't quite conform to their surroundings from the moment they enter the theatre, so, rather than a standard show curtain, they see the front porch of a fully three-dimensional, faintly Victorian, turn-of-the-century house, flanked on each side by renderings of two relatively modern apartment buildings from the 1930s. Inspired by architectural "holdouts" that are sprinkled throughout New York City, this image creates a stark contrast between the Sycamore house and the prevailing aesthetic of the rest of the neighborhood – playfully hinting at the quirky family that the audience is about to meet.

The family's eccentricities are further evoked when the two apartment buildings move off into the wings and the house is rotated 140 degrees to reveal the interior of the family's parlor floor. Influenced by the Sir John Soane Museum in London – a former residence that is tightly packed with art, architectural models, and antiquities – the dusty red-hued walls are covered with an array of odd artifacts, paintings, and curios. Shelves are filled chock-a-block with books, art, and objects. To accommodate all 18 actors who will eventually inhabit the set during the course of the play, we designed a grand staircase with a balcony that creates a second level. As each act concludes, the action continues and eventually fades away as the house revolves back to its grey façade, flanked on either side by those imposing apartment buildings.



*You Can't Take It With You* exterior set



*You Can't Take It With You* interior set with furniture



*You Can't Take It With You* side view of set



*You Can't Take It With You* interior set



## DONALD HOLDER—LIGHTING DESIGN

The principal objective of my design for *You Can't Take It With You* is to fill the world of the play with a living, highly sculptural light that provides the proper visual context for the audience (in other words, how should we feel about what we're seeing and hearing?) and communicates the essentials of the storytelling. Light is the principal device for indicating passage of time. We move through afternoon into twilight and late evening during the course of the play, and these changes are articulated by subtle (and not so subtle) shifts in angle, color, and intensity. The sunlight, moonlight, and streetlight that pierce into the room through the bay windows of David Rockwell's set must be closely related to the light on the sky drop that encircles the space and suggests the greater world beyond. *You Can't Take It With You* is at

its essence a bright, spirited evening in the theatre, so it's crucial that the light add ample doses of sparkle and kinetic energy to the proceedings.

The process of creating the lighting began with a careful reading of the script, followed by preparation of a scene-by-scene analysis from a lighting perspective, and a meeting with my collaborators to discuss intention and overall approach. I then developed a list of lighting ideas I would use to bring the world to life and created technical documents that the electricians referenced when installing the lighting equipment. I created the actual light "cues" or stage pictures during technical rehearsals and then shaped and refined my work during the preview period.



Costume sketch of the character of Grandpa



Costume sketch of the character of Mr. De Pinna



Costume sketch of the character of Penelope

## JANE GREENWOOD—COSTUME DESIGN

It's wonderful to be working on *You Can't Take It With You* for many reasons: I am working with director Scott Ellis again and with James Earl Jones, who is playing Grandpa, of course. I am also thrilled to be working with David Rockwell again – we had a very successful venture with *Harvey*. He is designing the set and all of the accoutrements of this rather mad household, and I am taking off from his approach. I really love working with all of these talented people because designing a show is such a collaborative art

form. Also, the fact that I just finished designing James Lapine's play version of the Moss Hart autobiography *Act One* at Lincoln Center and am now going on to design a later play by Kaufman and Hart – it is really a tremendous experience. I especially enjoy the way the characters are written, how they are portrayed so clearly. Kaufman and Hart tell me as the costume designer so much about the characters. I am trying to make the costumes as realistic as possible for the period and style we are working in.

# ECCENTRIC FAMILIES OF STAGE AND SCREEN

Have you seen this one before? A couple meet. They fall in love. Then: it's time to meet the family. But the family is eccentric, to put it mildly. The ensuing culture clash threatens to derail the union. How will the couple make it work?

*You Can't Take It With You* is a top-notch execution of this common plot: a crazy or difficult (but ultimately lovable) family threatens to derail a marriage. Most adaptations are comedies and end with the obstacles overcome and a wedding celebrated. But the popularity of this story hints at a deeper insecurity: Can two people ever really come together?

The earliest example of this "crazy family" plot is likely *Dyskolos*, which is translated most often as *The Grouch*, but also as *The Bad Tempered Man*. *Dyskolos* was written by Menander, one of the most well-known of the classical Greek playwrights, around 316 B.C. It's considered Greek New Comedy—essentially the ancient version of a sitcom.

The "bad-tempered man" of the title, Knemon, is a peasant farmer fond of railing about how there are too many people in the world. Knemon has a beautiful daughter who has caught the eye of the rich Sostratos. Knemon's stepson concocts a plot to help Sostratos win Knemon's approval. Sostratos is disguised as a poor farmer (Knemon hates the rich) and put through an exhausting round of manual labor (the stepson secretly hopes Sostratos will get tired and give up). But then Knemon falls down a well and is rescued by his stepson and Sostratos. The play ends with a wedding feast. Cantankerous old Knemon is dragged from his bed and forced to join the dancing.

## EXCERPT FROM *DYSKOLOS*

KNEMON: What do you want, you terrible people?

GETAS: No, you get on your feet with us. You're a country bumpkin.

KNEMON: No, by the gods!

GETAS: Then shall we carry you in now.

KNEMON: What will I do?

GETAS: Dance now, you too.

KNEMON: Carry me. It's better perhaps to endure the things in there.

GETAS: You've got some sense. We win.

By the 1920s and 1930s, variations on the "crazy family" plot were everywhere. *The Royal Family*, a play co-written by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, opened on Broadway in 1927. Loosely based on the Barrymores, the play deals with two gentlemen marrying into the Cavendish family, all of whom are over-the-top actors. *Danger—Love at Work* is a 1937 film featuring a crazy southern family and a New York attorney (played by Jack Haley, who would go on to Tin-Man fame in *The Wizard of Oz*) who is sent south to get their signatures on a land deed. He falls for the daughter, and she falls for him. Screwball hijinks and misunderstandings follow as the couple struggles against her family's wackiness to get together.

Perhaps the most famous eccentric family debuted in 1938: *The Addams Family*. Originally a one-page panel comic in *The New Yorker*, Charles Addams' macabre but lovable family spawned four television shows, three movies, three books, five video games, a branded pinball machine, and a stage musical. In the 2010 musical, Wednesday Addams



*The Addams Family* cartoon from the *New Yorker* Magazine

and her “normal” boyfriend bring their families together for a dinner party. They plan to announce their engagement. Chaos ensues, leaving Wednesday fearing that she and her boyfriend are too different to marry. But in the end, love triumphs.

#### EXCERPT FROM *THE ADDAMS FAMILY*

WEDNESDAY: Put this apple on your head and go stand against the tree.

LUCAS: Wait—you’re gonna—?

WEDNESDAY: Uh-huh.

LUCAS: You’re crazy.

WEDNESDAY: And you’re not crazy enough. That’s the problem.

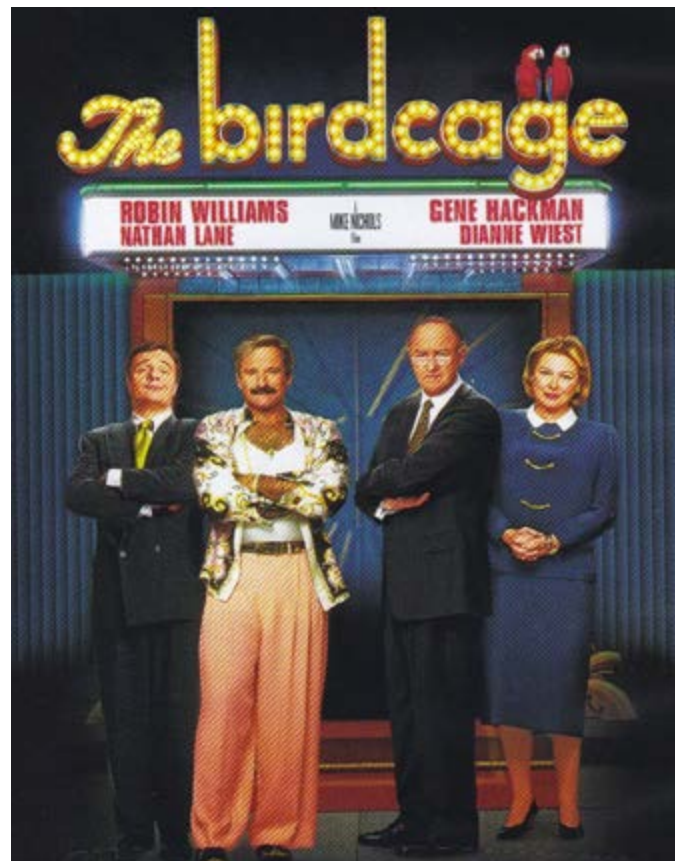
Twenty-first century big-screen adaptations of the “crazy family” story include the screwball *Meet the Fockers*, *The Birdcage* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. In *Meet the Fockers*, both sets of parents are unusual, but chaos still ensues when the soon-to-be in-laws meet for the first time. *The Birdcage*, an American adaptation of *La Cage aux Folles*, revolves around the marriage of the daughter of a Republican senator and the son of a gay, Jewish drag-club owner.



*My Big Fat Greek Wedding* depicts a family whose eccentricity lies in their devotion to Greek culture. This presents an obstacle when their daughter announces her engagement to a non-Greek man. *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* is the highest grossing romantic comedy of all time—clear proof of the “crazy family” plot’s popularity.

Stories about the challenges of interracial relationships, such as *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* and *Guess Who*, use elements of the “crazy family” plot. Otherwise-normal parents react irrationally to their child marrying an outsider, or cultural differences lead to misunderstandings and strife. *Two Days in New York*, a 2012 film by Julie Delpy, tells the story of a wacky and somewhat racist French family’s visit to the New York apartment of their daughter and her African-American boyfriend.

From the ancient Greeks to *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the challenges of two families coming together continue to entertain audiences. As long as people fall in love, there will be variations on the “crazy family” plot that delight, mortify, and ultimately reassure audiences that love will triumph over obstacles. •





# PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

## HOW DO WE CREATE TABLEAUX TO SHOW FAMILY VALUES?

In *You Can't Take It With You*, you will meet a family whose values are different from those of the society around them.

MATERIALS: Open space

**ACTIVATE 1** Ask students to stand on an "Agree" or "Disagree" side of the classroom, based on their response to each of these 3 prompts. Prompts should be given one at a time.

1. It is important to make money.
  2. It is important to have fun in life.
  3. It is important to work hard at something you love doing.
- After each prompt, ask a few students to articulate their position.

**ACTIVATE 2** Create tableaux, showing families in which everyone holds one of these statements as a core value. Assign students to small groups and ask each group to create a frozen stage picture showing a family in which everyone agrees with the statement. Allow students to present their tableaux *without* telling the audience their statement. Viewers guess what each family's shared value is.

**REFLECT** How did each character in the tableaux demonstrate her/his agreement with the statement? Why do families share values? What happens when people within a family don't agree on values?

**WRITE (EXTENSION)** Mix students from different family groups, so characters hold different values. Students can collaborate to write an exchange of dialogue in which their characters debate values and try to persuade each other why their way is the best.

## HOW DOES AN ENSEMBLE COLLABORATE TO CREATE COMEDY ON STAGE?

The nineteen cast members of *You Can't Take It With You* work together to create moments of physical comedy throughout the show. Often, actors rely on one another to set up a joke or help the audience know where to look. What skills do actors need to do this?

MATERIALS: Open space

**ACTIVATE:** Gather students into a circle. Have one person, the "it," begin in the center of the circle. The objective of the game is to stay out of, or get out of, of the center of the circle. There are several ways to do this, all of which rely on quick reaction time. "It" may use any of the options.

**1. Bippity-Bop:** The person who is "it" points to and looks at a target and says "Bippity-Bop." If the target says "Bop" before "it" finishes saying "Bippity-Bop," the target stays where they are. If "it" reaches the end of "Bippity-Bop" before the target says "Bop," the target is now "it."

**2. Bop:** The person who is "it" points to and looks at a target and says "Bop." If the target speaks, they have lost and they are now "it."

**3. Essie Carmichael:** The person who is "it" points to and looks at a target and says "Essie Carmichael" and begins to count to five. The target person, AND the people on either side of him/her must take on the posture of a trio of classical ballet dancers. The person in the middle should rise on their toes and lift their arms into fifth position, a circle over their head. Those on either side should pivot toward the target and hold their arms in third position, one arched

overhead and one at chest level. (Perfection in dance poses is not important—students should go for a big, stereotypical ballet look.) If the trio makes it to the ballet position before "it" gets to five, they win and remain where they are. If they do not make it into the ballet position, the target becomes "it."

**4. IRS Agents:** The person who is "it" points to and looks at a target and says "IRS Agents" and begins counting to five. The target person AND the people on either side of him/her must take on the posture of a trio of IRS agents looking through binoculars at Grandpa Vanderhof, who has never paid income taxes. If the trio makes it to the "IRS Agents" position before "it" gets to five, they win and remain where they are. If they do not make it into the position, the target becomes "it."

**5. Mr. De Pinna:** The person who is "it" points to and looks at a target and says "Mr. De Pinna." The target person must hold his/her hands on their head and wiggle their fingers (as if the fingers are fire) and say "AHHHH!" The people on either side of the target use their arms and hands to make a firework gesture and say "BOOM!" If the trio makes it to the "Mr. De Pinna" position before "it" gets to five, they win and remain where they are. If they do not make it into the position, the target becomes "it."

# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR  
EDUCATORS

## HOW DO INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS OF A PRODUCTION COME TOGETHER TO CREATE A COHERENT WHOLE?

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In a family, each member's interests and personality contribute to the family's identity as a whole. Similarly, each element of a production—set, lights, actors, stage management, costumes, music, etc—contributes to the overall show.

**MATERIALS:** Blank paper, tape or glue, scissors, magazines

**WRITE** Who is in your family? Students may focus on a close group of friends, rather than a traditional family, if desired. Create a list of family members, and brainstorm a short list of words connected to each family member. Words can be descriptors or notes about their interests.

**ACTIVATE** Create a collage that includes visual representations of each family member. Do not divide the paper into different sections—let the elements overlap and run into each other.

**REFLECT** Display completed collages around the room. What do you see in each collage? How would you describe this family as a whole? Why? How do the individual elements of the collage contribute to your sense of the family?

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## HOW DO WE EXPLORE COMEDY THROUGH IMPROVISED SCENES?

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**REFLECT** You've seen the comic situation that occurs when the Kirbys unexpectedly show up for dinner on the wrong night. Take a few minutes to analyze the scene: Why is it funny? Why is it an important moment in the play? How did Kaufman and Hart create complications to make the scene more hilarious?

**ACTIVATE** Improvise variations on the unexpected guest scenario. To begin, the group can generate two lists of prompts. Keep the categories A and B in two separate piles.  
List A: Activities a person could be doing (e.g., feeding snakes, making fireworks)  
List B: Jobs/positions people have (e.g., a ballet instructor, a Wall Street businessman, a Russian Princess)

Students work in pairs or trios. Student A draws an activity and plays a character doing the given activity. Student B draws a job/role and becomes the unexpected guest. Give a few minutes for the students to plan a scene, thinking about the potential for comedy in this situation. Students should decide an objective for each character. Then, allow a few minutes for each pair to improvise in front of the class.

Note: Encourage a "Yes, and" approach to keep the scene moving and building.

**WRITE** The improvisations move into playwriting. Students work in pairs or individually to further explore these situations in written dialogue and stage directions. Consider how the situation could become more complicated and comedic.

# GLOSSARY

## MONASTERY

A place inhabited by monks or individuals who have taken religious vows  
*Penny tells Essie about her play, explaining that she can't seem to write herself out of the location of a monastery.*

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE

Any moving of people or goods across national or international borders  
*Grandpa does not understand why he needs to pay income tax for Interstate Commerce or why there is a need for Interstate Commerce at all.*

## EMPIRE

Of the style exhibited in the first French Empire  
*Alice explains to Tony that her family's kitchen was either going to be designed in the Empire or Neo-Grecian style.*

## NEO-GRECIAN

Of the Greek revival style and exhibited in the second French Empire  
*Alice explains to Tony that her family's kitchen was either going to be designed in the Empire or Neo-Grecian style.*

## PAVLOVA

The name of a famous Russian dancer  
*Boris Kolenkhov affectionately calls Essie his Pavlova in her dance lessons.*

## ENTRECHAT

A ballet term that refers to a leap where the dancer crosses her legs repeatedly  
*Boris Kolenkhov instructs Essie to perform an entrechat in her dance lessons*

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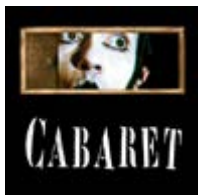
# ABOUT ROUNABOUT

## 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 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.

## 2014-2015 SEASON



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 Moss Hart and  
George S. Kaufman  
Directed by  
Scott Ellis



By Tom Stoppard  
Directed by  
Carey Perloff



By Tom Stoppard  
Starring  
Ewan McGregor,  
Maggie Gyllenhaal,  
Josh Hamilton  
and Cynthia Nixon  
Directed by  
Sam Gold



Music & Lyrics by  
Stephen Sondheim  
Book by James Lapine  
Reimagined by Fiasco  
Theater  
Directed by Noah Brady  
and Ben Steinfeld



Book & Lyrics by  
Betty Comden  
& Adolph Green  
Music by Cy Coleman  
Based on plays by  
Ben Hecht, Charles  
MacArthur and Bruce  
Mullholland  
Original Broadway  
production directed by  
Harold Prince  
Choreographed by  
Warren Carlyle  
Directed by Scott Ellis



By Jeff Augustin  
Directed by  
Giovanna Sardelli

Learn more at [roundabouttheatre.org](http://roundabouttheatre.org). Find us on:



# WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

## TICKET POLICY

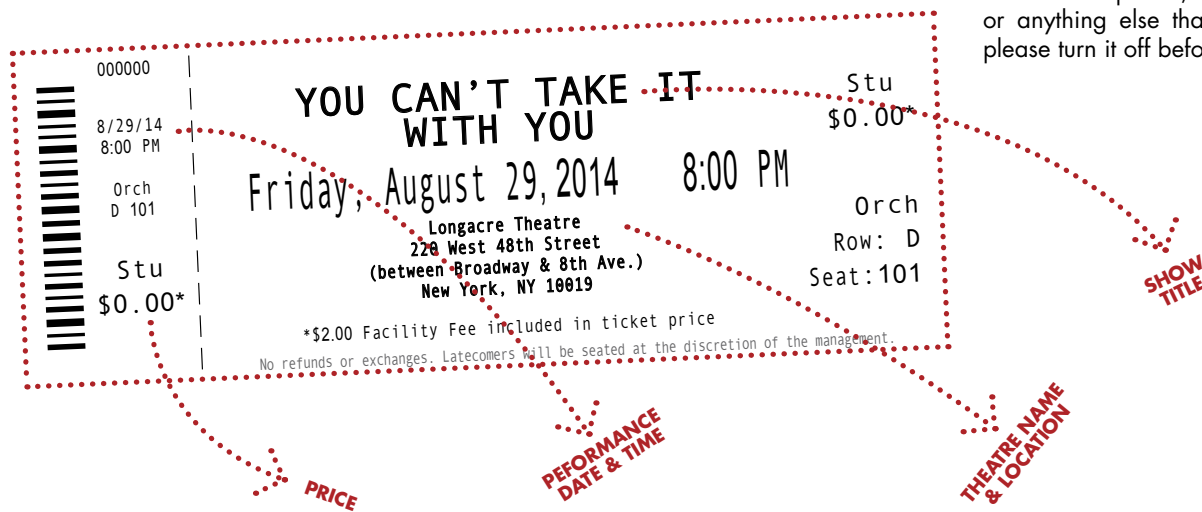
As a student participant in Producing Partners, Page To Stage or Theatre Access, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to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



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