

SIGNIFICANT OTHER

BY
JOSHUA HARMON
DIRECTED BY
TRIP CULLMAN



UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

Significant Other

Jordan Berman would love to be in love, but that's easier said than done. So until he meets Mr. Right, he wards off lonely nights with his trio of close-knit girlfriends. But as singles' nights turn into bachelorette parties, Jordan finds that supporting the ones you love can be just as impossible as finding love itself.

a note from Artistic Director Todd Haines

On the surface, *Significant Other* is about a young gay man looking for love, but the play examines so much more than that. It lets us see through the eyes of Jordan Berman, a character who is absolutely terrified that, as each of his dearest friends finds happiness, he is moving incrementally closer to the fate of being utterly alone. In a society in which close friends are increasingly as important as biological family, especially in a city like New York, it's a very real fear. As Jordan tells his grandmother, her friends may literally be dying off, but it feels a lot like the same thing is happening to his. Watching Jordan transition from life of the party to the one left on the sidelines, it's a heartbreaking shift.

Inspired by playwright Wendy Wasserstein and her work that examined the question of "having it all," Josh has taken this idea into the present day, moving the gay man who is often the ladies' sidekick in these stories directly to center stage. And he poses an emotional question that Wasserstein's characters may have encountered but never articulated: It may be hard not to know what you want, but isn't it worse to know exactly what you want from life and feel incredibly far from getting it?

when Now

where New York City

who

Jordan Berman - late 20s. Gay, Jewish male looking for love.

Laura - late 20s. Jordan's best girlfriend.

Vanessa - late 20s. One of Jordan's closest friends.

Kiki - late 20s. One of Jordan's closest friends.

Helene Berman - 80s. Jordan's grandmother.

Will - late 20s. Potential love interest for Jordan.

Conrad - Kiki's love interest.

Roger - Vanessa's love interest.

Tony - Laura's love interest.

Gideon - late 20s. Potential love interest for Jordan.

Evan - Kiki and Jordan's flamboyant co-worker.

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INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT JOSHUA HARMON

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod interviews *Significant Other* playwright Joshua Harmon about his work.

TED SOD: Will you give us some background information on yourself: Where are you from? Where were you educated? When did you decide to become a playwright and why?

Joshua Harmon: I was born in New York and raised in the suburbs. I went to Northwestern for college, Carnegie Mellon for grad school, and am just finishing up a third year in the Playwrights Program at Juilliard. I have been writing since I was very young, so becoming a playwright never felt like a decision. It was something I was always doing.

TS: What inspired you to write *Significant Other*? What do you feel the play is about? *Significant Other* seems like a very personal play. Did you have to do any research in order to write it?

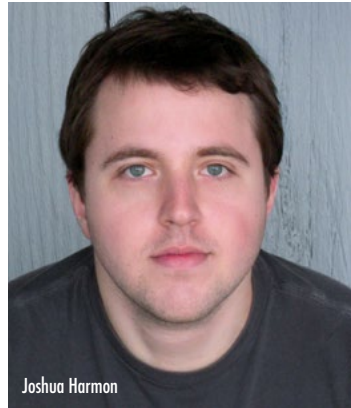
JH: I started writing the play four years ago during a residency at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. In July. It was very hot. I wore lots of bug spray. I went there to work with Annie Baker. She asked us to write nine short scenes which could be performed in any order. I wrote about a guy talking to his therapist about one of his co-workers, whom he had a huge crush on/was mildly obsessed with and who he was trying to ask out on a date to see a documentary about The Franco-Prussian War. Those scenes made me want to write a crazy, sweeping, epic play about unrequited love, which is a theme I come back to in my writing again and again. That's where it began.

In the year following that residency, I got a crazy job and then quit that job and then got a different temp job and then the Roundabout decided to produce *Bad Jews*, and even though I was mostly thrilled, I also freaked out. I worried that if the production went badly, I might become so traumatized that I'd never write again. So I told myself I had to write a new play before I went into rehearsals for *Bad Jews*, so that no matter what, I would have something to keep working on. The first draft of the play was 176 pages long. That's long for most plays. About 1/3 of the play took place in therapy, there were readings of Emily Dickinson poems, and a live band... all of that is gone now. First drafts can be unwieldy. But over time, with more drafts and workshops and readings, the play found its way.

One of the things that excites me about the play is that it feels simultaneously epic and very intimate. Seven actors play more than 10 characters over an almost three year period in many different locations. And yet, at its core, the play is an intimate look at a group of friends whose lives change and priorities shift as they begin to couple up and settle down. They begin to face the real beginning of adulthood, and they all feel differently as they stand on the edge of that precipice.

The play also puts a character front and center who is ordinarily relegated to the sidelines. Much like Daphna in *Bad Jews*, Jordan Berman isn't a prototypical protagonist. I guess I'm interested in seeing what happens when someone we don't ordinarily look twice at is situated at the center of the story.

The play is also examining wedding culture, which is something I have a lot of questions about. In so many respects, I think people



my age are more secular than ever before, and yet their weddings are so much more lavish; it's as if there's an inverse relationship between a collective moving away from religious ceremonies and a moving toward extensive and expensive bridal showers, bachelorette parties, rehearsal dinners, destination weddings, etc. My parents didn't go to any destination weddings. Their parents probably didn't even know what a destina-

tion wedding was. They certainly never had to go to destination bachelorette parties (I'm sorry, but when did that become socially acceptable? I can't). But then, despite everything, at most weddings I almost always end up crying. So, I wanted a chance to examine how something could compel and repel in equal measure.

When Joni Mitchell made *Blue*, she said, "I felt like a cellophane wrapper on a pack of cigarettes." I don't think she meant the album was autobiography, but there was an emotional transparency in the work that cannot be denied, and I guess I'm striving for something like that in this play. Not autobiography — but a willingness to examine questions and concerns and fears which are my own, and if they are my own, then I must believe they are not unique only to me. Watching my friends date, seeing some of my friends get married while others remain single (both happily and begrudgingly), seeing how people's lives change once they get married, watching friendships change — all contributed to this play. But ultimately, whatever ideas I had before writing, the play made its own demands, so I had to be willing to bend toward the play and allow it to become what it wanted to become.

TS: The play is about many things, but a large part of it is about turning 30 and how friendships endure when one of the friends gets married. Do you think friendships can endure when one of the friends takes on a life partner?

JH: I think they can endure, but they change, and for those who find change terrifying, that can be a real shock to the system. Two single friends facing the world together are going to have a very different relationship when one of those friends falls wildly, madly in love.

Today, people are getting married later and later. The average age for a first marriage for women is 27, for men, 29. In 1990, the average age for women was 23 and for men, 26. And in 1960, the average age for women was 20, and for men, 22. If a woman used to get married at 20, and now she waits until 27, what is she doing in those seven years to find intimacy and love and connection? Perhaps she has boyfriends, but I've observed that a lot of those non-romantic needs get fulfilled in friendships. So a person often enters a marriage with a group of friends who have served in so many ways as surrogate platonic lovers. Those friendships can be intense and powerful and deeply meaningful. A romantic connection outside the friendship necessarily ruptures that relationship. It's a tricky balancing act: how to

"JORDAN BERMAN ISN'T A PROTOTYPICAL PROTAGONIST. I GUESS I'M INTERESTED IN SEEING WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE WE DON'T ORDINARILY LOOK TWICE AT IS SITUATED AT THE CENTER OF THE STORY."

be happy for a friend, even when you know, in some respects, you are losing them, and often when you need them most.

Friendship is the bridge between the families we are born into and the families we create when we find romantic partners of our own. When we're children, before we become romantic beings, we learn how to be friends. Friends are the first people we develop feelings of love for outside the boundaries of our families. I'm writing this as if I know anything about the psychology behind this stuff. I don't. But it does seem apparent that friendship comes before romance, and yet, when romance happens, it re-prioritizes a person's life. Ideally, one marries one's best friend. But wasn't there a best friend before the new best friend? What happens to him?

So yes. I think friendships can endure—I know they can—but there's also no question that they change. And with change, if something is gained, then something must necessarily be lost. This play stares down that feeling of loss. It sounds much more dire than it is. But I think people who were 20 in 1960 and got married had all the same needs for intimacy and connection that a single 20-year-old has today. And if that 20-year-old isn't getting married for another seven years, then chances are, they're finding that connection with a friend.

TS: There is an intergenerational relationship that the subscribers are sure to love between the character of Jordan and his grandmother – will you tell us about the genesis of that?

JH: The scenes between Jordan and Helene are the very heart of the play. Those are the moments when he's his most vulnerable and honest. Each time he visits his grandmother, she asks him the same question, "How's your social life?" and as his social life becomes lonelier and less fulfilling, he finds himself needing to answer the question more honestly, and that honesty gets increasingly painful.

They're both also grappling with their loneliness. He's lonely because he isn't sure he will ever find someone to share his life with, and she is lonely because she has to learn to live without the person with whom she shared her life for so long. They sit on opposite ends of it all, and yet, their day-to-day experiences are similar. They're both awake, late at night, watching TV alone. They're both standing up in the kitchen, eating meals alone. They're both spending a lot of time in their minds, remembering, imagining, daydreaming. So there's a great connection there, a deep sense of unspoken understanding.

I was also interested in looking at how Jordan comes to understand his place in his family. Helene likes to look at photographs of her parents, her husband, her grandparents, and to share these stories with Jordan. But the unspoken question he is asking in those moments is, what am I going to do with this information? Who am I going to pass this along to? Her place in the history of the family is secure, but his is not, and he's being entrusted to carry on stories and a legacy at the exact moment when he feels most vulnerable about what the future has in store for him.



TS: How did your collaboration with director Trip Cullman come about? Can you describe what you look for in a director? And what you both looked for in casting actors for this production?

JH: Trip is a director whom I've admired for many years. He read the play and seemed to immediately understand what it was about and what pitfalls would have to be avoided in a production of it. I think we were both excited to work with each other.

I want a director who on the one hand has a visceral, deep connection to what's on the page, but also who maybe sees the world a little differently than I do, someone whose approach to work and maybe even to life is a little different from my own. Those differences can rub up against each other in a way that can be very fruitful in a collaboration.

As for actors, they have to be great comedians but also able to tap into tremendous vulnerability. The play is (I hope!) funny, but it also traverses some rocky emotional terrain. Comedy can often be a defense mechanism, a shield to combat or protect people who feel vulnerable. We had to find actors who knew how to use the shield, but then knew how to put it down and drop all pretenses. I think we've

found some remarkable actors for this production. I couldn't be more excited about this cast.

TS: Do you anticipate the script changing during rehearsals? Is there something specific you look for during rehearsals when deciding on rewrites? Do you try to tailor the script to the strengths of the actors who are cast?

JH: I do anticipate the script changing. A good actor will teach you so much about what works and what doesn't—and we have seven great actors. So I plan to stay open and learn from them. At the same time, I'm going into this rehearsal knowing that there are certain foundational elements or moments, without which this play would not be this play. So you leave those things alone. Those are the tent poles.

TS: When I last interviewed you for UPSTAGE, you said your favorite playwright was Wendy Wasserstein – will you be seeing the Broadway revival of her play *The Heidi Chronicles*? How does seeing the work of someone you admire affect your work?

JH: I have seen the revival, which features the remarkable Tracee Chimo. It was a powerful experience. Wasserstein was a very brave writer—unafraid to examine herself. She was asking questions a lot of us ask ourselves, alone, or quietly among friends. The difference is she had the courage to ask them out loud in front of everyone and found new, fresh ways of articulating those questions. For me, she is the master of the holy trinity of playwriting—personal, funny, and emotional. You can't really ask for more than that.

Seeing the work of someone you admire—seeing good work in general—reminds you of why you wanted to do this to begin with. A great play makes you feel something deeply, and so you're reminded that that's even possible in the theatre, and to keep striving

to give that experience to someone else.

TS: You quote a line of Janie Blumberg's about "having it all" from Wendy's play *Isn't It Romantic* as the introduction to your play. Why do you think so many New Yorkers try to have it all – is it even possible?

JH: Sadly, no. No one can have it all. Time is finite. Energy is finite. And so we all have to make choices about how we spend our time. There's just no way you can be terrific at your job, be a perfect partner to your spouse, a perfect child to your parents, a wonderful friend, work out regularly, keep up with the news, go to see all the plays and movies and concerts and exhibits and lectures you should, read a good book, keep up with TV shows, prepare a home-cooked meal, keep your house clean, vote, volunteer, recycle, travel the world, and on and on and on...

So you have to make choices. I think part of why the idea of "having it all" is so appealing is because it means you didn't have to make any choices. Nothing was sacrificed. But what strikes me so much about

this quote is the dream we have about our romantic lives when we're young. Janie Blumberg is someone who has a very clear sense of what she wants from love. I think Jordan Berman shares that trait with her. And so then the question becomes, how do you walk around knowing what you want and not being able to get it? Jordan wants to be in love. But wanting cannot make it so. And so he's not standing on very solid ground, because he has to come to peace with his current life even though it's not the life he wants to be living.

TS: What are you working on now besides this production of *Significant Other*?

JH: I am working on two more plays, one of which is a commission for the Roundabout. I just finished working on the *New York Spring Spectacular*, at Radio City. But right now, I'm just focused on this play. A new play is an inherently risky undertaking, so I feel very grateful to have this opportunity to see it produced, and I just plan to work as hard as I can to be worthy of that risk. •

VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF WENDY WASSERSTEIN



As a young man, Joshua Harmon found inspiration in the plays of Wendy Wasserstein. Not only did her work help him imagine a future as a playwright living in New York City, but one play in particular, *Isn't It Romantic*, offered the seed of an idea Harmon would develop in *Significant Other*.

Born in Brooklyn in 1950, Wasserstein studied at Mount

Holyoke and the Yale School of Drama and had her first breakthrough production in 1977 with *Uncommon Women and Others*. She is best known for the Tony- and Pulitzer-winning *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988) and *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992). Sadly, Wasserstein died of lymphoma in 2006.

Drawing from her own experience, Wasserstein often wrote about well-educated, urbane women trying to balance the desire for independence and achievement with true love and companionship. She used wit and comedy to show the challenges and sacrifices faced by independent women of the baby boom generation. Her plays are considered accessible and entertaining, allowing a wide audience to consider her perspectives on feminism.

Isn't it Romantic opened in New York at Playwrights Horizons in December 1983. The play focuses on two single 20-somethings, Janie and Harriet, who are recently out of college and living in New York City. Artistic Janie meets Jewish doctor Marty, who

"When I'm twenty-eight, I'm going to get married and be very much in love with someone who is poor and fascinating until he's thirty and then fabulously wealthy and very secure after that. And we're going to have children who wear overalls and flannel shirts and are kind and independent, with curly blond hair. And we'll have great sex and still hold hands when we travel to China when we're sixty."

—JANIE BLUMBERG IN *ISN'T IT ROMANTIC*
BY WENDY WASSERSTEIN

wants a traditional stay-at-home wife, while Harriet climbs the corporate ladder and has an affair with her married boss. Early in the play Harriet states, "no matter how lonely you get or how many birth announcements you receive the trick is not to get frightened. There's nothing wrong with being alone." But as Janie and Harriet confront the difficulties of balancing a personal life with their careers, they sense it may not be possible to "have it all." This brings up the fear of loneliness and of what happens when your best friend's choices leave you behind.

A generation later, Harmon's play looks at the joys and heartbreaks of close friendships amongst 20-somethings: in this case, a young gay man and his three best girlfriends. As friends find mates and drift away, the feelings of being left behind are as potent as ever. *Significant Other* offers a uniquely contemporary variation on Wasserstein's themes. •

THE G.B.F.: SIGN OF THE TIMES? OR FASHION ACCESSORY?

Beloved for his constant wit, his sassy dating advice, and his impeccable sense of style, the Gay Best Friend, or G.B.F., has become a popular character in movies and television. The rise of the on-screen G.B.F. corresponds to a growing acceptance of LGBTQ people in the wider culture, especially over the past two decades. But does this character type still serve to promote the contributions of gay people to society, or have the last 15 years reduced him to mere cliché?

In 1997, the *LA Times* recognized Rupert Everett's breakout portrayal in *My Best Friend's Wedding* as a "small step forward" for gay characters in Hollywood. Everett received fourth billing as George, the witty gay pal to Julia Roberts, but test audiences were so enthusiastic about his character that the producers shot additional scenes to boost his role. *Newsweek's* David Ansen wrote: "the friendship between a straight woman and a gay man...has the nuances and depths of a good marriage."

One year later, NBC put a spotlight on this friendship with their comedy hit, *Will and Grace*. Vice President Joe Biden claimed the show did "more to educate the American public than almost anything anybody has ever done." The public embraced Will and his outrageous friend Jack for eight years, and the show may have helped bolster support for gay rights and marriage equality. It also evoked critiques that Eric McCormack's Will was rarely shown in romantic or sexual situations, while Jack (Sean Hayes) was stereotypically flamboyant.

1998 also saw the premiere of *Sex and the City*, featuring Willie Garson as Stanford Blatch, described by HBO as Carrie's "gay galpal" and confidante. Stanford's bad luck with dating qualified him to advise and comfort Carrie, always to comic effect. Fast forward to HBO's current hit *Girls*, where Andrew Rannells' unbridled Elijah constantly provokes Hannah's wild side. In the movies (briefly), the 2013 comedy *G.B.F.* focused on social warfare among three popular high school girls competing for possession of a young man who has just been outed.

The rise of the G.B.F. in media reflects a real-life trend. A 2013 study published in the journal *Evolutionary Psychology* found that straight women and gay men were more likely to trust each other for "mating advice" than either straight men or lesbians.



Scene between Julianne and George in *My Best Friend's Wedding*



Stanford at a wedding in *Sex and the City*

The researchers hypothesized that the bond occurs because both groups are attracted to men, but they aren't competing for mates.

As support for LGBTQ rights continues to grow among much of American society, it may be time to look at media images of G.B.F.s through a critical lens. The "style and sass" stereotype promotes a narrow interpretation of personalities. Additionally, narratives that keep gay characters in supporting roles promote a long tradition of marginalizing LGBTQ people. In *Significant Other*, Joshua Harmon refocuses the perspective by putting G.B.F. Jordan at the center of the play. Jordan may owe a debt to his G.B.F. predecessors, but the play transcends stereotypes and offers a complex view of the friendships between young gay men and their straight women friends today. •

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR TRIP CULLMAN

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod talks with director Trip Cullman about his time with *Significant Other*.

TED SOD: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? When and how did you realize you wanted to become a theatre director? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

TRIP CULLMAN: I am a native New Yorker. The only times I haven't lived in New York were when I was at college and then drama school — both at Yale. I knew from an early age that I wanted to make a life for myself in the theatre. My parents took me to plays and musicals all the time growing up, and the onstage worlds that I was exposed to seemed to me the most wondrous, magical places. I wanted to be a part of them so badly. My fourth grade teacher was also a playwright; his name was Ronald Bazarini. To this day he was the most influential person in my development as a theatre artist. He was truly the greatest teacher. He wrote and directed our fourth grade play, which was about the founding of Rome. In an all-boys school, I was cast as the mother of Romulus and Remus. I borrowed two of my sister's Cabbage Patch dolls to portray the twin babies and wept during the performance as I left them on the banks of the Tiber. I was hooked. My senior year of high school was my first directing experience. My drama teacher selected a group of us to direct an evening of one acts. The rest of the kids decided to do these sweet, charming little plays. I decided to do Sam Shepard and Patti Smith's *Cowboy Mouth*. The drama teacher had to put my play at the end of the evening and make an announcement before it ran that anyone easily offended by strong sexual content and foul language should feel free to leave. It was thrilling. Through college and for a few years afterward, I continued to act. But I got frustrated being directed by people who I felt didn't know what they were doing. I remember thinking, "I could do a better job than them." Furthermore, as it turns out, I was a spectacularly mediocre actor. There were many people who could do a better job than me in that field. So I decided to concentrate on directing exclusively.

TS: You have directed a lot of new plays. Why did you choose to direct *Significant Other*? How do you collaborate with a playwright on a world premiere?

TC: I saw Joshua Harmon's *Bad Jews* here at the Roundabout a few years ago and was blown away by it. When I was offered *Significant Other*, I leapt at the chance to work with him. I pretty much can tell instinctively from the first read of a script whether I want to direct the play or not. I remember sitting on my couch and laughing out loud and then crying as I read *Significant Other* for the first time. I had just gone through a really bad break-up, and the play's evocation of loneliness



and its yearning, aching heart moved me deeply. Early in the play the main character Jordan says to his best friend Laura: "I know life is supposed to be this great mystery, but I actually think it's pretty simple: find someone to go through it with. That's it. That's the, whatever, the secret. And so then that's the hardest part. Walking around knowing what the point is, but not being able to live it, and not knowing how to get it, or if I ever even will..." The simple, painful truth of that shattered me. I knew I had to direct the play. The collaboration between a playwright and a director on a new play is extremely intimate. The playwright is entrusting a director to bring to three dimensional life no less than the deepest expression of his or her soul. It's an awesome responsibility. There has to be enormous trust. If the playwright is the author of the text, the director is the author of the production. And for the production to be cohesive, the communication between director and playwright is crucial.

TS: What do you think *Significant Other* is about? How do you see the relationship between Jordan and Laura?

TC: *Significant Other* is a contemporary play about loneliness. It also — radically, I think — examines the nature of friendship between gay guys and their best girl friends. Too often on television and in film and also on stage we see a stereotypical, two dimensional representation of this friendship. I can't think of another piece of art that examines this topic with more unflinching honesty than Joshua's play. The majority of my closest friends are women, and *Significant Other* rather perfectly reflects the complexity of those friendships in my own life. The intimacy of Jordan and Laura's friendship evolves over the course of the play. As Jordan remains single and Laura finds her soul mate, this is inevitable, and really rather heartbreaking. Jordan says to Laura, "We were best friends when we lived together or when we spent every weekend together, or when

“WRITING A PLAY IS A LONELY BUSINESS,
AND DIRECTING A PLAY IS THE OPPOSITE –
IT IS ALL ABOUT COLLABORATION.”

we talked multiple times every single day and we don't do that anymore, not even close. You wake up next to Tony and you fall asleep next to Tony and when your Mom pisses you off you call Tony and when you're sad you turn to Tony. But I haven't found someone to replace you...All the things you got from our friendship, you get from Tony now. Which is great. But all the things I got, things I really need – I'm not getting them from anyone, and then you tell me I'm your best friend but it's so different, it's so, so different and I feel so alone, Laura...” The honesty of that passage just kills me.

TS: Can you share a bit about your process: How do you prepare for directing a new work? Do you have to do any research about the world of the play?

TC: The process of preparing to direct a new play is different for each piece I work on, but there are some constants. I always create a playlist of songs that for me help evoke the feeling of the play. The songs more often than not don't find their way into the production, but they help me feel what I eventually will want the audience to feel when watching the play. I also read and reread the play hundreds of times, and take notes for myself in the margins when ideas spring to mind – a staging idea, an image, a thought about design, an observation about theme. I look at a lot of art as well. I was an art history major in college, so visual art is a really useful tool for me. For example, there is a Diane Arbus photograph of an older lady sitting in her house with these billowing gauzy curtains behind her – and this image was the basis for the character of Helene in *Significant Other*: her costuming, the set design of her home. I also meet many, many times with the playwright and get a good sense of his or her vibe, asking the playwright a million questions and really trying to get inside his or her head. Writing a play is a lonely business, and directing a play is the opposite – it is all about collaboration. So in fact preparing to work on a play is a lot about conversations – with the playwright, the designers, the actors, the producers, the casting director, the marketing people, the technical director, etc. It's my job to get us all on the same page.

TS: What did you look for in casting the actors? What traits did you need?



Director Trip Cullman in rehearsal with actors Barbara Barrie and Gideon Glick

TC: The adage that directing is 90% casting is in fact true. Other than the relationship with the playwright, the collaboration between director and actor is the most intense, the most intimate. I need to find actors I can trust, who I feel will be brilliant, and fun, and hardworking collaborators. Actors who will reveal things about the characters that would have never occurred to me otherwise. This to me is a million times more important than the superficial requirements of how they look or their “star power,” etc. In the case of *Significant Other*, it was vital first and foremost to find an actor who could confidently handle the role of Jordan: someone who could make you laugh hysterically one second and then break your heart the next. Jordan is a huge, huge role. The character is alarmingly verbal and he has these massive, bravura arias—cascades of language really. The trick was to find someone who can handle the character's verbosity with ease and whom the audience will root for unequivocally. Gideon Glick is more than up to that challenge. It was important to me to cast his best girlfriends—Laura,

Vanessa, and Kiki—in a way where the audience truly believed that they could all be close friends. And to distinguish the three characters in as specific a way as possible. Laura is the heart of the play, Vanessa is the intellect, Kiki the fun. Laura is the friend you call to come over and eat ice cream on the couch with as you get over a heartbreak. Vanessa is who you have deep conversations about art or politics with. Kiki is who you call when you want to go out and get drunk. Lindsay Mendez, Carra Patterson, and Sas Goldberg will delight in these roles. Luke Smith and John Behlmann are tasked with portraying several characters in the play. Their skills at transformation, as well as their inherent humor and charm, will add immeasurably to the fabric of the production. Finally, the great Barbara Barrie will essay the role of Helene. Helene is Jordan's “Bubbe” – his beloved grandma – and their relationship is perhaps the most touching in the play. I have been a great admirer of Barbara's since *Private Benjamin* and *Breaking Away*, and I am so lucky to be able to work with her.

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

TC: *Significant Other* is a challenging play to design. There are many, many scenes in many, many different locales — but having scenic transitions would be death. As Joshua writes in the forward, “The scenes of this play should bleed into each other. Because love bleeds. Ugh.” So the major task of the design was to allow the world to transform magically and in a split second — without a turntable, without flying scenery, without automation — all of which would slow down the way the “scenes bleed into each other.” Mark Wendland is a brilliant set designer. This is our sixth collaboration, with several more planned in the coming years. He has become one of the most important partners in my artistic life. I always say that designers make the best dramaturges, and Mark is the sine qua non of deep readers of play texts. The dark, mercurial, abstract world that he has made for *Significant Other* is evocative of the play’s lonely, fragile heart. It feels like the contemporary equivalent of the original set for Williams’s *Glass Menagerie* — where the memories and isolation of the main character become three dimensionalized in the sceneography. Japhy Weidman, who collaborated with Mark and me on Simon Stephens’s *Punk Rock* earlier this year, is an extraordinary artist. I can think of no other lighting designer working today who can evoke mood as brilliantly as he. This is my first time working with Kaye Voyce, whose costume designs I have always been a huge fan of in other productions I have seen. She has her work cut out for her on *Significant Other*, with its series of lightning fast quick changes. She is more than up to the task. Dan Kluger is a magnificent sound designer, whose work with me earlier this year on Halley Feiffer’s *I’m Gonna Pray For You So Hard* was impressive in its rigor and exactitude. I think *Significant Other* will have an almost continual soundscape — the paradoxical sound of being alone in a city of millions of people. Joni Mitchell has a lyric, “But when he’s gone me and the lonesome blues collide/ The bed’s too big, the frying pan’s too wide.” The design of *Significant Other* will evoke this notion of being alone in a world meant for couples, the pain of a single person moving through that world.

TS: Was turning 30 a traumatic event for you and — if you haven’t reached that age yet — do you expect it to be?

TC: Haha — ugh! I just turned 40 this year so turning 30 was like an eternity ago. Jordan says in the play, “I know I’m still young, I know twenty-nine is not thirty-nine, but...” I died a little when I read that line. Jordan would think I am an old man! But I do remember the anxiety and apprehension of approaching my thirties. Will I find love? Will I make a name for myself in my career? What will it be like to become a full-on adult with, like, responsibilities?

TS: How do keep yourself inspired as an artist? Do you see the work of your peers? Travel? Read? Go to museums?

TC: I love seeing the work of my peers. My generation of fellow theatre directors is an impressive bunch, and I think our aesthetic sensibilities are quite radically different from those of the generation above us. I think we bring a more downtown, experimental sensibility to the work we do. I always learn something from seeing the work of Leigh Silverman, Annie Kauffman, Daniel Aukin, Alex Timbers, Liesl Tommy, and Sam Gold among many others. I do love to travel and read, and try to do so as much as I can when I am not in production. But my favorite thing is to cook and do hot yoga. I am obsessed with both and try to bring my full creative self to those pursuits in the same all-consuming way I tackle a directing job.

TS: What other projects are you working on besides *Significant Other*?

TC: Right after I open *Significant Other* I travel to New York Stage and Film to workshop a new musical by Stephen Trask, Peter Yanowitz, and Rick Elice. I then go straight to the Williamstown Theater Festival, where I direct the world premiere of the musical *Unknown Soldier*, by Michael Friedman and Danny Goldstein. I then have the opportunity to direct Bess Wohl’s *Barcelona* at the Geffen in L.A., and Halley Feiffer’s amazingly titled *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Gynecologic Oncology Unit At Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center Of New York* at MCC. I’m also working with my frequent collaborator Leslye Headland on her new play *The Layover* and developing a new musical by Adam Bock and Justin Levine called *Halfway Home* for MTC.

TS: Do you have any advice for young people who want to be stage directors?

TC: Becoming a professional stage director is a long and bewildering path. If you want to be an actor, you can at least audition for things. If you want to be a playwright, you can write a play and send it to people. There is a hideous catch-22 for directors, however. No one will hire you to direct a play unless they have seen your work, but no one will see your work unless you are hired to direct a play. So there are several ways around this. One is to take a DIY approach, and start your own theater company — and if your work is good it will get you the attention of the bigger institutional theatres. Another route is to work “within the system.” Identify directors whose work you admire and assist them. Go to Williamstown and be a directing apprentice. Go to grad school. Go and sit in the library at New Dramatists and read a million plays, and then leave love letters in the mailboxes of the playwrights whose work you admire. Through all this, develop and cultivate your own, unique theatrical sensibility. What turns you on creatively? What do you despise when you see other people’s work? Who are your heroes in any art form and why? What is the list of the ten plays you would cut off your right arm for the privilege of directing? •

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR GIDEON GLICK



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod speaks with actor Gideon Glick about his role as Jordan in *Significant Other*.

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? When and how did you realize you wanted to become an actor? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

Gideon Glick: I was born in a suburb outside of Philadelphia called Lower Merion. After taking many leaves of absence, I just received my BA from NYU in Art History. I initially gravitated towards singing. Acting sort of sprang out of that as a means to participate in musicals. Growing up, I had a singing teacher who was an amazing champion of mine who helped build up my confidence, and I also count my therapist as one of the best teachers that I've ever had.

TS: Why did you choose to play the role of Jordan in *Significant Other*? How do you collaborate with a playwright and director on a world premiere?

GG: It's always the role that initially excites me most about a play. The character is my first way of entry. This is the first time in almost a decade that I'm playing a character that is close to my age. Because of that, and because of my similarities to Jordan, I feel very close to this character instinctually, which is exciting. In terms of collaboration, working on a new piece is always thrilling, as I'm sure most people would say, because the playwright is in the room and the piece itself evolves in response to what is happening in the room. It's a lucky circumstance when you get to usher in new work, because you are able to ask the playwright and the director (who in a new work is always in dialogue with the playwright) an unlimited amount of questions.

TS: What do you think *Significant Other* is about? Does the play have personal resonance for you and, if so, how?

GG: The show follows Jordan as he begins to feel left behind by his friends as they mature into adult relationships with their respective partners. Consequently, the play reflects on the fears of living alone, dying alone, and being forgotten. Josh has written a very believable and contemporary character that I identify with, and I believe others will, too. As a gay, neurotic Jew in his late 20s, I feel pretty akin to Jordan and what he is going through.

TS: I realize rehearsals haven't begun yet, but how do you see the relationships between Jordan and the four women in his life: Laura, Vanessa, Kiki, and Helene? Do you think Jordan gets different needs met from each woman?

GG: Jordan relates to his three gal pals in different ways, ergo he gets different needs met through each friend. Since Helene is his grandmother, it's hard to compare their bond to that of his friends. However, all four women are integral in how Jordan defines his life, either through comparison, or the feedback that he so greatly relies on.

TS: Do you think there is a special connection between gay men and straight women?

GG: I do. I can't think of many reasons as to why, but gay men and straight women both share an inherent attraction to men, and attraction informs a large part of human nature.

TS: Can you share a bit about your process: How do you prepare for acting in a new work? When the play is contemporary, do you have to do any research?

GG: With this play, in particular, I had to do a lot of memorization before rehearsals began. Every work brings new and different challenges. Research is always helpful, regardless of whether the play is contemporary or not. However, empathy is the greatest tool for preparation.

TS: Your character, Jordan, is on the precipice of being 30 and seems to have strong feelings about what that means. Will turning 30 be a traumatic event for you? Do you expect it to be?

GG: I relish it. I've always believed with age comes wisdom. And I find salt and pepper hair to be very attractive.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist? Do you see the work of your peers? Travel? Read? Go to museums?

GG: All of the above! I try to see as much as I can. I think it's very important to support your friends and to stay current with what's happening. I always try to have a book on hand, traveling is an excellent way of providing perspective, and studying Art History has made going to art museums way more fun than you can imagine.

TS: What other projects are you working on besides *Significant Other*? Do you aspire to direct or write? Or is acting enough for you?

GG: I'm currently just working on this show. Sometimes I write, but once it's done, I usually find my writing to be so bad that I hide it somewhere and never look at it again.

TS: Do you have any advice for young people who want to be actors?

GG: Keep evolving. Keep reading plays, doing plays, but also be sure to expand your horizons as much as possible. You only have yourself to bring to your work. You are your palette, so give yourself as many colors as possible to paint with. •

WEDDINGS: A LOOK INTO THEN AND NOW

Over time, American weddings have changed dramatically, and not just with regards to fashion. Some of the traditions that Jordan's grandmother, Helene, had before, after, or at her wedding would not be seen today, and vice versa.

HELENE (c. 1950s)

"HELENE: And here's me and Pop-Pop, at our wedding.

JORDAN: How old were you there? HELENE: Twenty-one."

- A bachelor party was a black-tie dinner hosted by the groom's father.

Bachelorette parties did not exist until the sexual revolution of the 1960s and were not popular until the mid-1980s.

- Wedding dresses were modest. Most had long sleeves, lace, and a ballerina-length hem. All were white.

The sweetheart neckline was first introduced in the 1950s, and many dresses from the latter half of the decade were modeled after Grace Kelly's 1956 wedding gown.

- There was a heavy focus on elegant decorations. Everything gave off the image of purity: whites and silvers for colors, silk and glass for flair, and only the best china for table settings.
- The median age of marriage was 22.8 for men and 20.3 for women.
- Interracial marriage was illegal.

Interracial marriage was not made legal until the 1967 Supreme Court Case *Loving vs. Virginia*.

- Wedding cakes often had many tiers and were decorated with popular symbols of the time. Bouquets were simple, white floral arrangements.

The most popular cake decoration was a poodle, and the most common flower for bouquets was a calla lily.

- The bride's family paid for all of the wedding expenses.

This arrangement came from times when the bride's family had to pay a dowry (some form of property or money) in order for her suitor to agree to marry her.

- Marriages mostly took place in houses of worship.

JORDAN (c. Now)

"JORDAN: It doesn't matter anymore. I went to a wedding where there were female groomsmen, you can do whatever you want."

- The most popular destination for bachelor and bachelorette parties is Las Vegas. These parties now take on more of a "crazy night out" form.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, bachelor parties used to be called "stag parties" and bachelorette parties were "hen parties."

- Brides and grooms can, and do, wear whatever they desire at the altar. Adding a "pop of color" is common.
- Engagement parties, a bridal shower, and a bachelorette party are all very typical among brides-to-be.
- The average age of marriage is 29 for men and 27 for women.

The marriage age has steadily increased over the last five decades. Some see this as a by-product of the introduction of birth control pills and the Feminist Movement of the 1960s.

- Gay marriage is legal in thirty-six states, the District of Columbia, and twenty-two Native American tribal jurisdictions. It is also recognized by the federal government. Out of all marriages, 8.4% are interracial.
- Cupcakes are being used in place of a traditional wedding cake and some brides do not use real flowers in their bouquets.

Brides are using paper flowers instead.

- The number of mixed gender bridesmaids and groomsmen is increasing. For example, a male friend of the bride could be asked to be in the bridal party and can attend the pre-wedding festivities traditionally intended for women only.
- Destination weddings have increased in popularity.

The most prominent locations for destination weddings include: Mexico, the Caribbean, Hawaii, Italy, and Las Vegas.



Helene and Jordan in *Significant Other*

THE COST OF MARRIAGE

“...I guess ‘the budget’ you’re supposedly on doesn’t apply to your friends, so fucking Jessica flew in from Chicago, and Marcelle flew in from San Francisco and Amy came up from Washington and fucking Iris flew in from LONDON— people are spending thousands of dollars to throw you a bachelorette party whose purpose I couldn’t articulate even if I wanted to. And then the weekend you have for your wedding, an entire fucking WEEKEND Laura, where we have to all somehow get to North Carolina, which means flying, and renting cars, and getting hotel rooms for THREE FUCKING NIGHTS because your rehearsal dinner is on Friday and the wedding’s not til Sunday so I’m basically spending like \$2500 which I don’t really have right now, for something I don’t even believe in and you don’t either...”

– JORDAN TO LAURA, SIGNIFICANT OTHER

A wedding is a hefty investment — for the happy couple, the wedding party, and even the guests. In 2014, the average cost of a wedding in the United States (honeymoon not included) was \$31,213. Of course, this number is weighted by a small percentage of uncommonly expensive celebrations. When we look at the median cost of a US wedding, the number goes down: in 2012, the median cost was \$18,086 (meaning half of all weddings were cheaper, and half were more expensive).

In New York, the numbers are quite a bit higher. In 2012, the average cost of an NYC wedding was \$76,687 (and the median cost a whopping \$55,104). Compare this to the cost of a wedding in Alaska (\$15,504 average; \$8,440 median) and a destination wedding may start to sound downright thrifty.

So who pays the price? In 2014, the parents of the bride were shelling out as much as the happy couple (each ponying up 43% of costs), and the groom’s parents chipped in for 12% of expenses.

But those lucky few in the wedding party (bridesmaids, groomsmen, best men, maids of honor, and everything in between) are usually on their own, stuck paying for everything from celebratory brunches to specialty undergarments on their own. Here, an itemized bill of some of the most common costs. •



BY THE NUMBERS:

Some (Average) 2014 Wedding Costs

Dress: **\$1,357**

Engagement ring: **\$5,600**

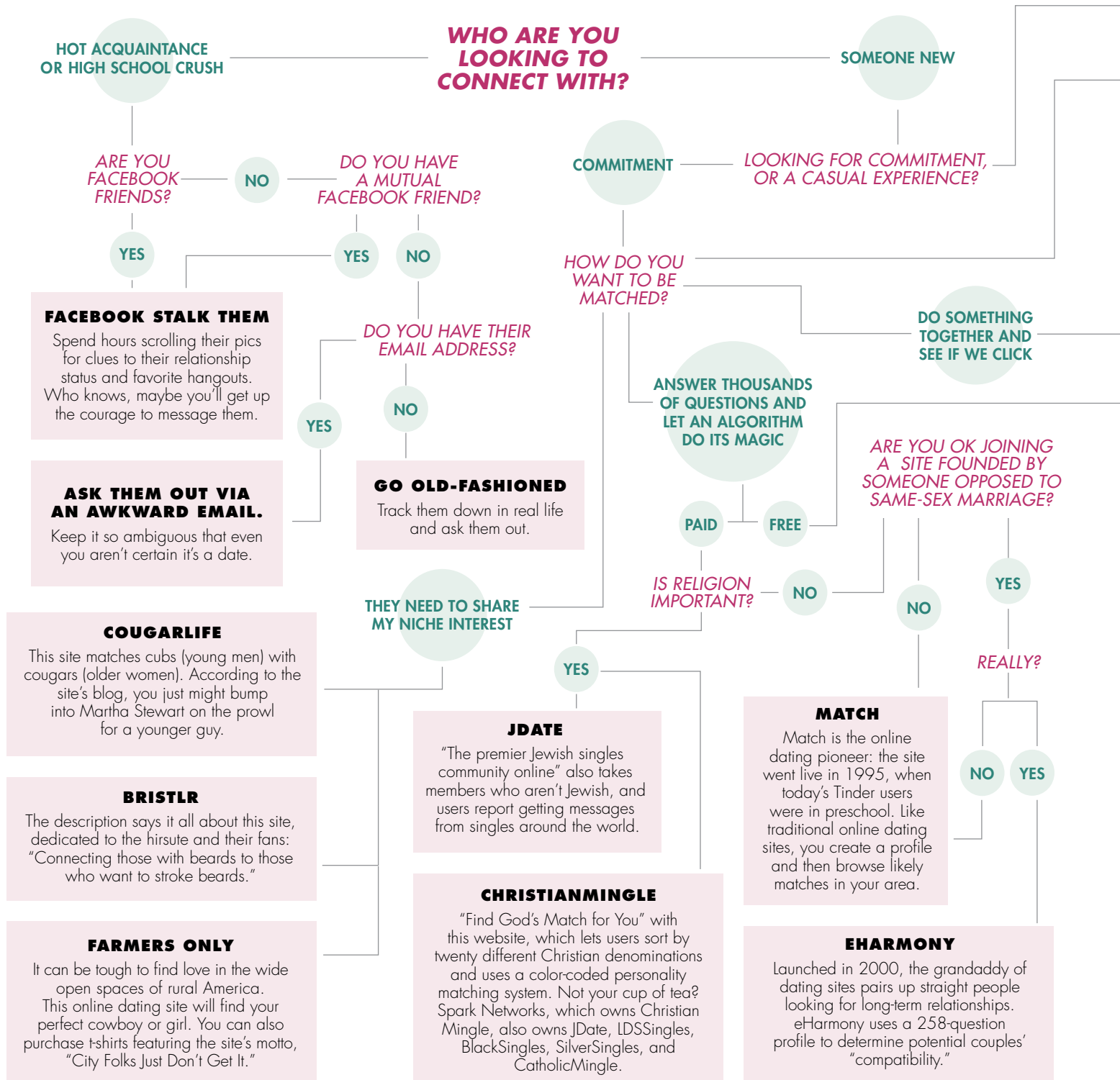
Wedding ring (band): **\$500-600**

Invitations: **\$443**

THE ONLINE DATING GAME

Jordan Berman is in his late twenties and looking for love—or, as his grandmother Helene says, his “bashert.” But it’s not as easy for Jordan as it was for Helene. He must navigate the complex world of dating in the internet age: asking someone out in an email, Facebook-stalking an old friend, and using all the mobile applications and websites dedicated to matchmaking.

Twenty-two percent of American 24- to 35-year-olds have used online dating sites or apps, so it’s likely that you, or someone you know, is already looking for love online. Tinder, Grindr, Blendr, eHarmony, Match, Plenty Of Fish, OKCupid, Happn, HowAboutWe, JDate, Scissr, ChristianMingle, Bristlr: the list of options is endless. This handy chart will help you figure out which site is right for you—and may even help you find Mr. or Ms. Right. After all, five percent of all American marriages or committed relationships began online.





CASUAL EXPERIENCE

CURRENTLY IN A RELATIONSHIP?

YES, BUT MY PARTNER DOESN'T KNOW I'M DOING THIS FLOWCHART.

ASHLEY MADISON

This website, which requires paid membership, connects those looking to have an affair. Their tag line? "Life is short. Have an affair." It's banned in Singapore.

NO...THAT'S WHY I'M READING THIS

DO YOU WANT A FRIEND OF A FRIEND, OR SOMEONE NEARBY NOW?

SWIPE IF I LIKE THEIR FACE

SOMEONE NEARBY NOW

SCISSR

One of the newest apps on the scene, Scissr was created by Allison Ullrich after she struggled to meet other lesbians in her new city. Like Grindr, it uses your phone's GPS to let you know when other Scissr members are nearby.

FRIEND OF A FRIEND

LADIES

HAPPN

One of the newer dating apps, this uses your phone's GPS capabilities to show you a map of when and where you've physically crossed paths with potential matches.

LGBT OR STRAIGHT?

LGBT

SCRUFF

Like Grindr, Scruff connects gay men with others nearby, making it easy to find friends and identify gay hot spots in foreign cities.

HOWABOUTWE

Users post details of dates they'd like to go on starting with the phrase "How about we..." Like their idea? Connect with them through the app and head out to meet each other and have that date.

GENTS

GRINDR

The largest and most popular dating app for gay men, Grindr has been around since 2009. It's super-simple: download the app, make a profile, and the app uses your phone's GPS to let you know when other Grindr users are nearby.

OKCUPID

Sign up for this free dating website (which has an app as well) and you'll find yourself paired with someone based on your answers to a random selection of questions and how important you rate a potential mate's answer to the same question. There's serious math involved.

STRAIGHT

COFFEE MEETS BAGEL

This app, developed by three sisters, also uses Facebook contacts to connect friends of friends. One potential match, or "bagel," is presented each day. If both users like the match, the app connects them—and sends a discount on a suggested first date activity.

DOWN

DOWN uses Facebook data to connect you with friends and their wider social networks. The twist? For each potential match, you can select "Get Down" or "Get Date," making it very clear what you're interested in.

TINDER

Currently the buzziest app, Tinder uses your Facebook information to create a first-name-and-photos-only profile, then shows you nearby matches. If you like them, swipe right. If not, swipe left.

PLENTY OF FISH

With three million daily users, Plenty of Fish is the largest free dating site in the world. But not all fish are ones you want to find on your line. The site has struggled with encouraging its male users to behave like gentlemen.

HINGE

Hinge uses your Facebook contacts to show you profiles of friends of friends, and friends of friends of friends. Two people are "introduced" only after they've favorited each other.

BLENDR

The straight folks version of Grindr. It's never been as popular.

INTERVIEW WITH ACTRESSES LINDSAY MENDEZ, CARRA PATTERSON, AND SAS GOLDBERG

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod and Education Apprentice Emily Ruderman talk with three actresses in *Significant Other* about the play, their lives, and how they're similar.

Ted Sod: How do you personally define the term "significant other"?

Lindsay Mendez: The person you want to go through your life with, to be there for you during the good and the bad times.

Sas Goldberg: Your partner in life. Sometimes I think it doesn't have to be a romantic relationship. It can just be your pal.

Carra Patterson: That main partner in your life, be it boyfriend, husband, girlfriend. The person that you love. Your best friend. That's what it means to me. At first glance, I saw this play as being about these characters who are tired of being twenty-something singles in New York and who are ready for that life partner.

LM: It's interesting. I have family in the Midwest and when I was visiting I told them what the play was called and they said, "Oh, is it about gay people?"

SG: Really?

LM: Yes. Immediately.

SG: I would never have even thought that...

LM: Me either! "Is it what I think it's about?" That's what my boyfriend's grandmother said.

TS: In terms of your characters, is Jordan your significant other in this play?

LM: Yes, he's definitely my significant other. Until I find another one. But, to me, he is still my significant other in a way. He's my significant other and then I meet my husband.

SG: I don't think my character, Kiki, is Jordan's significant other. I think Kiki is on the hunt to find a man. That's how this play starts, she talks about how she's looking for someone to define her and she finds Conrad.

TS: You said Kiki wants to find someone to "define herself." Do you think that women still think that way in the era of feminism?

SG: I know so many women who are self-sufficient, but there still is this weird checklist that exists in their heads. You have to find the guy and get married and have kids before it's too late. I consider myself a relatively young person, and my doctor recently said, "Soon you're going to be high-risk for pregnancy," and I thought: What? When did that happen?

LM: For most women, there's still this nagging thing inside that says this is what you're supposed to do. I think that's so relevant for all three of our characters. None of us really think of marriage

as the thing we were going to do. We don't see each other having the quintessential wedding and doing the cookie cutter thing. We think it's BS until we're in the middle of it, and then all of a sudden we're 100% on board.

TS: Do you feel like there is a special connection between gay men and straight women?

SG: Yes.

LM: For sure.

CP: Absolutely.

TS: Do you think that's because you all work in the theatre?

SG: When I was growing up, my mom, who was not in the theatre, had a lot of gay friends. I had so many "uncles" around our house.

LM: I think there's something comforting about a male energy that's nonthreatening. You can totally be yourself around a man who you're not worried wants to sleep with you. It's nice to be with a male energy as opposed to a female energy. It's very different. Gay men are still men. There's also, for me, something about being picked as a gay man's favorite that still feels like you've been chosen. You want a man to choose you, no matter what. That's validating in some way.

SG: There could sometimes be a competitive nature that exists between two women. For instance, if one of your friends gets pregnant and you don't. That doesn't exist with a gay man.

CP: For me, the first phrase that popped into my head was "kindred spirit." I just feel like we get each other and the journey. I think gay men represent everything we're missing in our straight male relationships. You get companionship, understanding and sensitivity. Not that straight men aren't emotional. It just flows. You get each other in a way that sometimes your girlfriends don't — so it's nice to be with a gay man. My best friend in college was gay, and he was the one who bought me my first pair of black pumps.

TS: Did you feel like that was a mentor relationship?

CP: It was! I was in college and trying to figure out what kind of woman I wanted to be, and he was really integral in helping me. I remember him saying, "Now whatever you decide to do, you're going to be classy and look your best."



Sas Goldberg



TS: Have you two had somebody like that in your lives?

LM: A million.

SG: Oh, yeah. And everyone is still in my life now. “Kindred spirits” is really a great definition for the gay man/straight woman connection. I wouldn’t say every gay man and straight woman are bound to connect, but when you do find that person, it can be great.

TS: Do you feel like you have to invest in a relationship like that or does it “just flow” as Carra said?

SG: There’s a certain level of investment in any relationship. You need to choose to listen and care about each other, remember things. But that’s in a mother-daughter relationship, too. Every relationship takes an investment.

LM: I agree. But, we’re around gay men all the time. I don’t think that everyone gets the chance to have the sort of relationships we get to cultivate. I do think television has really fantasized it to the point where now everyone wants a gay best friend.



Carra Patterson

SG: A G.B.F.

TS: Because of shows like *Will & Grace*?

LM: And *Modern Family* and all the Bravo TV shows.

TS: This play is about finding your significant other in New York City — is that difficult?

CP: It is and it isn’t. I think there are a lot of beautiful, attractive, great people here, a lot of young professionals, which is the blessing and the curse.

LM: I don’t think people come here looking for love, they move here because they want to be successful.

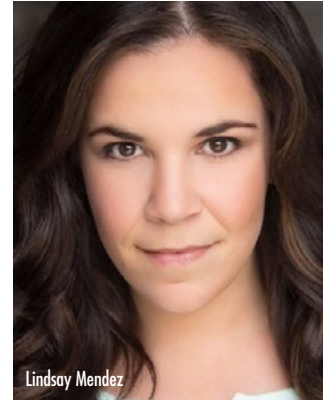
CP: So it’s hard for people to slow down and see each other. There’s a lot of dating, but, when you’re ready for that real connection, that’s when you can find yourself getting lonely. If you’re ready for your significant other, that can be a bit harder in New York City because everything moves so fast.

SG: My experience is different because I met my husband in college. I moved to New York with a boyfriend and got engaged when I was 26, so I never experienced that part of the city. I have so many friends who are single, and I know it’s tough. New York can be very lonely. But that feeling can exist anywhere. This play is

a comedy, but it’s also very real and brings up a lot of emotions.

LM: I think that’s what’s so great about Josh’s writing. It goes to a place that is so scary and honest that it makes your skin crawl a little bit. As an actor, that’s so thrilling to get to explore.

Emily Ruderman: Where do you think your characters’ friendship with Jordan will be in five years?



Lindsay Mendez

CP: I think that Vanessa will probably be divorced and will be very close to Jordan. I feel like they might cling to each other the most in five years. She’s totally a divorcée. Jordan is her best friend, and they will be able to relate to each other.

LM: Laura will have children, and he’ll be an “uncle” to them. They’ll still be in each other’s lives. There will be some things to be worked out, but they’ll be really close.

SG: I think Kiki moves to the South and has tons of kids. We decided that she’s from New York City, but her husband is from Kentucky, so she fantasizes about this house with cherry blossoms and she moves. I think what Jordan says in Act II is true, he’s like the court jester. He’ll come and visit and she’ll parade her kids around him, but I don’t think they’ll be as close. I think she gets very wrapped up in her own life.

TS: Jordan has this great relationship with his grandmother. Do any of you have that kind of relationship with your grandmother?

SG: I do have a grandmother, she is where I get some of my feistiness from, but I wish she lived close by like Jordan’s grandmother in the play. A few of my grandparents passed away when I was younger and, honestly, I look back now and wish I knew them better.

CP: Both of my grandmothers passed away, but I was particularly close with my father’s mother. I spent a lot of time with her because my parents were in high school during the day. She was really badass. I was in love with her. I hate to sound cliché, but she is very close to me even still. I think of her often, and a lot of times she ends up being an inspiration for any character I play. She was just a fascinating woman.

LM: Both of my grandmas have passed away, but I’m close to my boyfriend’s grandma. I feel grandparents call your parents out on their bullshit, which feels really good as a kid. They are an ally in that way. The relationship Jordan has with his grandmother in this play totally tears me up because it makes me miss mine so much. •

DESIGNER STATEMENTS

MARK WENDLAND SET DESIGN

The author of *Significant Other*, Joshua Harmon, makes a very simple-seeming but important demand of the scenery for his play: move the action from scene to scene and locale to locale as effortlessly as possible. The text even states on the “Cast of Characters” page: “The scenes of this play should bleed into each other.”



Director Trip Cullman and I wanted to find a visual and directorial vocabulary that could make the most out of that “bleed;” to take the audience by the hand, introduce them to our ensemble of characters, but most importantly, provide them with the opportunity to see the world from our hero, Jordan’s, perspective. The play is a fantastic chance to not only tell his story as he looks for love in contemporary Manhattan, but to experience the story from his point of view. He never leaves the stage, so as the stakes heighten, he is set upon from all sides. We wanted the action to seamlessly “materialize” around him while simultaneously capturing what he sees and how he sees it.

To those ends we split the stage into two halves: The simple downstage space is non-narrative; only providing a place to sit when needed, and a scattering of some essential

props. The upstage space, behind a big black scrim, allows characters and images to “bleed” in and out of view as needed. Hopefully the ever-shifting picture provides a little visual context as we follow Jordan.

The play offers us a chance to slip under Jordan’s skin for a little while. The design endeavors to help us feel his feelings, experience his experiences, and see through his eyes.

JAPHY WEIDEMAN LIGHTING DESIGN

When approaching the lighting design for a new play such as this one, I attempt to begin by having zero preconceived notions of the visual style. I always begin with the text, simply reading the play to get a sense of the story, its essence, and its arc of meaning prior to meeting with the director or other designers. For any designer, it’s imperative to develop one’s own perspective before being influenced by the other collaborators in order to have the most fruitful design process.

In the role of lighting designer, we often enter into a design collaboration after the set design has been developed. This is the case in *Significant Other*. Working closely with the director and scenic designer, we mapped out possible blocking for each scene and discussed the environment, mood, and visual quality we hoped to achieve with each scene. The information I derive from these discussions informs my decisions about the types of lights we will use and where we will position them in the theatre. Also, the set designer incorporated various practical lamps for each of the scenes (i.e. overhead fluorescents for the office and self-illuminating white walls for MOMA, etc.) into the scenic design to help establish the various locations.

It’s important to know that while a lighting design can be pre-planned on paper, that is only the beginning of the lighting design process. After the lights are placed in the theatre, they could be used in an infinite number of ways to solve a problem. The bulk of my process happens during technical rehearsals in the theatre, as I will try various lighting ideas while working with the director and set designer in order to find the right quality for each scene. As I write this, the process



for *Significant Other* is currently in the preliminary phase. Exactly how the lighting will look and behave will be a discovery in the weeks to come...

KAYE VOYCE COSTUME DESIGN

The costume design for *Significant Other* developed out of three things: conversations with the director, Trip Cullman, observation of the clothes 20-something New Yorkers wear, and the considerable technical demands of the show.

DANIEL KLUGER SOUND DESIGN

The first time I read *Significant Other*, I was struck by how much of it takes place in public places (bars, museums, parties, weddings). These environments have a distinctive paradoxical effect on human behavior: they make you loosen up, and they also make it hard to have a conversation.

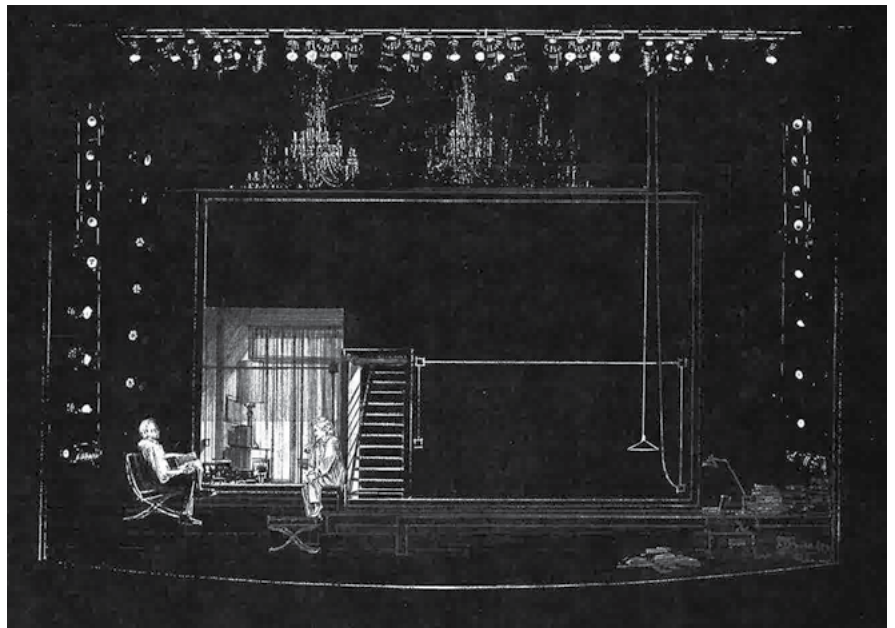
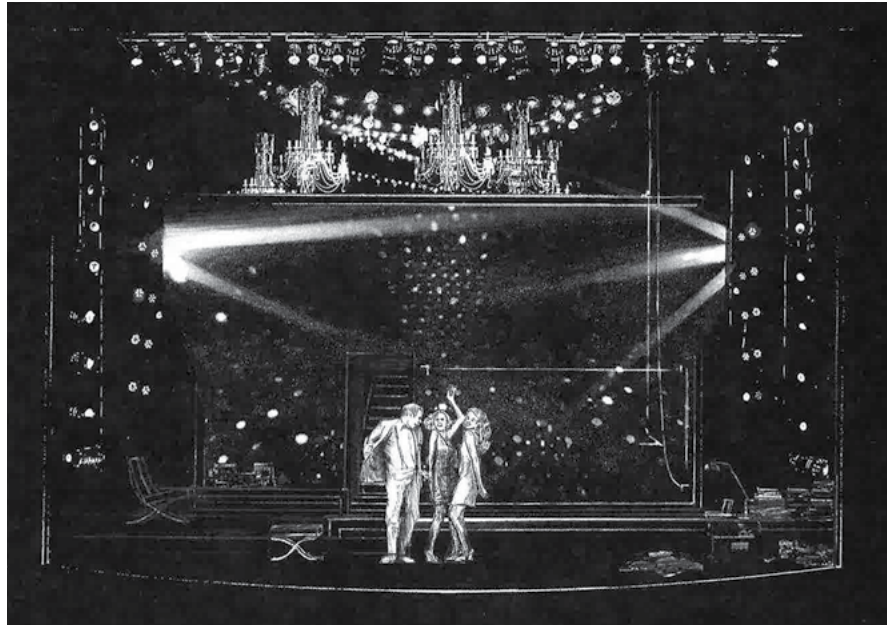
I knew that the sound design would need to create richly evocative public environments that created a realistic tension to conversation and also evoked the exciting and enticing feelings of being out at night drinking and dancing.

Sound environments are more than simply aural “backdrops.” The ideal environment creates the right tension between obstacle and intrigue. The tension should naturally induce actors to behave in a way that fits the scene’s location and feeling.

In *Significant Other*, the vividness of public experience is matched by the vividness of Jordan’s personal experience and perception of social encounters, as well as his memory, his fantasies, and his imagination.

One of the most striking features of the play is how fluidly it moves between extremely public situations and extremely private experiences, and weaves them together intricately to create Jordan’s unique perspective.

Mark Wendland’s set design creates a wonderful theatrical system in which the audience moves through Jordan’s journey. In working on the sound design, I’m following Mark’s scenic logic, attempting to articulate Jordan’s public and private experiences and make their juxtaposition as dynamic and varied as the play itself. •



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

HOW DOES A WRITER USE HUMOR TO EXPLORE DIFFICULT EMOTIONAL SITUATIONS?

In his interview on page 5, playwright Joshua Harmon says: “The play is (I hope!) funny, but it also traverses some rocky emotional terrain. Comedy can often be a defense mechanism, a shield to combat or protect people who feel vulnerable.”

DISCUSS Discuss the playwright’s quote, and ask students for examples of comedies they have seen on stage, film, or TV in which “a rocky emotional” situation is portrayed humorously. Generate a list of emotionally rocky, personal situations they might write about. (Examples: a fight between friends, a breakup, a conflict with a teacher.)

WRITE Have students work in pairs to write a short, humorous scene in which 2 characters are going through a difficult situation together. Have them write dialogue and also stage directions to describe actions. Challenge students to address the emotional difficulty of the situation AND use humor.

ACTIVATE Ask for volunteers to act out their scene in front of the class. Invite students to reflect on how the writer(s) used humor and what feelings were evoked in the audience as they watched the scenes.

HOW DOES A COSTUME DESIGNER CREATE CLOTHING THAT COMMUNICATES A CHARACTER’S PERSONALITY?

Significant Other focuses on four friends in their late twenties, an age when many people get married. Weddings reflect the tastes and personalities of the bride and groom, in particular the dress or suit he or she chooses to wear.

KIKI
“And then one morning, I woke up and I was just like, I’m amazing. I’m gorgeous. I’m a genius. I like basically like fell in love with myself...And then one night, I was looking in the mirror, like, hey foxy lady, what do you want? And I was like, I want an amazing dinner, so I took myself to Jean Georges, like, I just took myself there, because no one else was gonna take me, I have the money, sort of, and I want to go, so I went, and that’s when...”

JORDAN
“He’s talking about his mom, we’re sitting at the bar and I realize, our legs are touching. When did this happen. I don’t remember when this happened. We’d been having such a good time, laughing, and he’s telling me all these funny stories about people from our internship but I couldn’t remember when we started to touch.”

LAURA
“I mean, we thought about having it in New York for half a second, but Tony and I both felt like — and, I mean, I loved your wedding, this has nothing to do with your wedding but for us — For us, we just wanted to get people out of the city for a weekend, cause then people can really go to know each other, and when we found the vineyard on the ocean it was just, like...”

TONY
“I forgot my phone charger. No but I pretended I did. I need to ask you a question. I’m just wondering has Laura ever said anything to you? About *(he taps his ring finger)* Anything she’s always wanted, or...like round or square or...”

VANESSA
“And by the age of like, seven, I understood that this whole idea of happiness was a Hallmark manufactured event that could only take place sociologically after we all stopped farming and the industrial revolution swept in and created this little thing called leisure time. But, it’s real, you know? It’s not just a greeting card idea....and like, I suddenly get why everyone is obsessed with flowers.”

WRITE Read the five character descriptions on the callboard (pg 2) and example quotes above. Choose one character. What is his or her personality? Choose three adjectives that describe how the character would want to look on their wedding

ACTIVATE Using the costume design template found here (<http://www.roundabouttheatre.org/Roundabout/media/Roundabout/PDF/UPSTAGE/Man-and-Woman-forms.PDF>), design the wedding attire for the character you have chosen. Consider

REFLECT Display the costume designs around the classroom without revealing the characters’ names. Which costumes were designed for Kiki? For Vanessa? What choices did the designer make that let you know that?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

HOW DO ACTORS USE IMPROVISATION TO EXPLORE THE AFTERMATH OF *SIGNIFICANT OTHER*?

You've seen how Jordan watched his best friends Laura, Kiki, and Vanessa find husbands, but at the end of the play, Jordan has still not met his own "significant other."

DISCUSS Facilitate a discussion in which students review the end of the play and predict what each of the characters might be doing 5 years later. Encourage students to imagine: how are the marriages holding up? Who has children? What is Jordan doing? Has he found someone?

ACTIVATE Have students work in pairs. Each pair picks any two characters (Jordan, Kiki, Vanessa, Laura, Tony, or Will) and creates an improvisation of the characters 5 years after the play. Before sharing their improvising, decide:

- Where does the scene take place?
- What does your character want NOW?
- How have you changed in the last 5 years?

REFLECT Do you think this character is happy with her/his life in 5 years? How do you think they change? What did you interpret in the character or the play that informs your prediction? Check out the interview with the actresses that play Kiki, Vanessa, and Laura on page 17 to see where they think these characters will be in 5 years.

HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT USE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE TO CREATE A SCENE?

In *Significant Other*, Jordan discusses his love life with Helene, his grandmother. Though things have changed since Helene's youth, her experiences give her wisdom and perspective on Jordan's struggles.

DISCUSS Generate a list, through class discussion or through submission of anonymous index cards, of things today's teenagers struggle with. Topics might include dating, friendship, getting along with parents, bullying, etc.

WRITE Ask students to imagine what advice a grandparent or older community member might say when asked for advice about one of the problems on the list. Have students write the scene. How would the younger character explain the issue? What advice would the grandparents give?

REFLECT Read a few volunteers' scenes out loud. What changed when you thought about the problem from an older person's perspective? What do you think made Jordan and Helene's relationship so open and strong?

GLOSSARY

ANACHRONISTIC	something that does not fit the present time <i>Jordan suggests that his future child should have an anachronistic name.</i>
ASININE	utterly foolish or stupid <i>Jordan explains to Laura that a story Conrad was telling was extremely asinine.</i>
BASHERT	Yiddish word meaning destiny or “meant to be” <i>Helene tells Jordan that he needs to find his bashert.</i>
CONUNDRUM	a problem that is difficult or confusing <i>Will’s conundrum is whether to stay in New York City or go back to Maine.</i>
DOCILE	easily controlled; submissive <i>Jordan claims that Laura will be a docile wife.</i>
FORTUITOUS	lucky; happening by chance <i>Jordan notes that Kiki’s wedding was a fortuitous event for Vanessa.</i>
GLOWERING	looking at something or someone in an angry manner <i>Laura calls Jordan out for glaring at her.</i>
ICONOCLAST	someone who opposes widely accepted practices <i>Jordan jokes that he thought Vanessa was an iconoclast.</i>
INEPT	extremely lacking ability <i>When it comes to cooking, Laura says she’s inept.</i>
PLEISTOCENE ERA	a period of time that began about 1.8 million years ago and ended roughly 11,000 years ago <i>For effect, Jordan says he hasn’t been touched since the Pleistocene Era.</i>

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ABOUT ROUNDABOUT

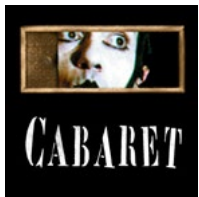


ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

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.

2014-2015 SEASON



Book by Joe Masteroff
Music by John Kander
Lyrics by Fred Ebb
Starring Alan Cumming
and Sienna Miller
Co-directed and
choreographed by
Rob Marshall
Directed by Sam Mendes



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
Choreographed by
Warren Carlyle
Directed by Scott Ellis



By Jeff Augustin
Directed by
Giovanna Sardelli



By Joshua Harmon
Directed by
Trip Cullman

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH GRAPHIC DESIGNER, DARREN MELCHIORRE

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the marketing department's Graphic Designer?

Darren Melchiorre: I was born in Bloomfield, New Jersey and have lived in the New York City area for most of my life. I got my undergrad B.A. in Theater Scenic Design from Muhlenberg College and my M.F.A in Design from the School of Visual Arts in NYC.

I started out wanting to be a set designer. I loved creating new worlds on stage. After college, set design didn't turn out the way I wanted, but I always enjoyed the collaboration and soon started to work in marketing. I've always loved seeing the new theatre show posters go up each season. They were my first connection to a show, and the art brought me into their world before I even bought a ticket. Seeing how people react to a poster (and a design overall) fascinates me! A friend heard that Roundabout was looking for a new graphic designer. I applied, and I got the job. The whole experience happened really fast, and it's been a dream come true.

TS: Describe your job at RTC. What are your responsibilities?

DM: Every day is so different. I design everything from simple fliers and signage to more elaborate projects like souvenir programs, in-venue displays, and the theatre digital marquees. I also design

for the various in-house departments, supporting their initiatives. The graphics can be the first thing that a person experiences about us or our show, so my designs are an important extension of Roundabout's vision. Overall, I am in charge of making sure all of the graphics are the best representation of Roundabout and our mission as can be.

TS: What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?

DM: The best part of my job is working with so many talented and creative people. I try to learn as much as I can from all of them because their knowledge can only make for better designs. The hardest part is keeping up with the design needs of the entire company. I am the only graphic designer in-house. Taking a break is a challenge!

TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

DM: In life, I never do anything small. It's just not in my nature. I set my goals high. I always wanted to work with the best and most creative people in my industry. With this, there are three major theatres I've always wanted to be a part of: Lincoln Center, The Public, and Roundabout. Roundabout is truly the best all around: talent, creativity, vision...Roundabout has it all. •

WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR EDUCATORS

TICKET POLICY

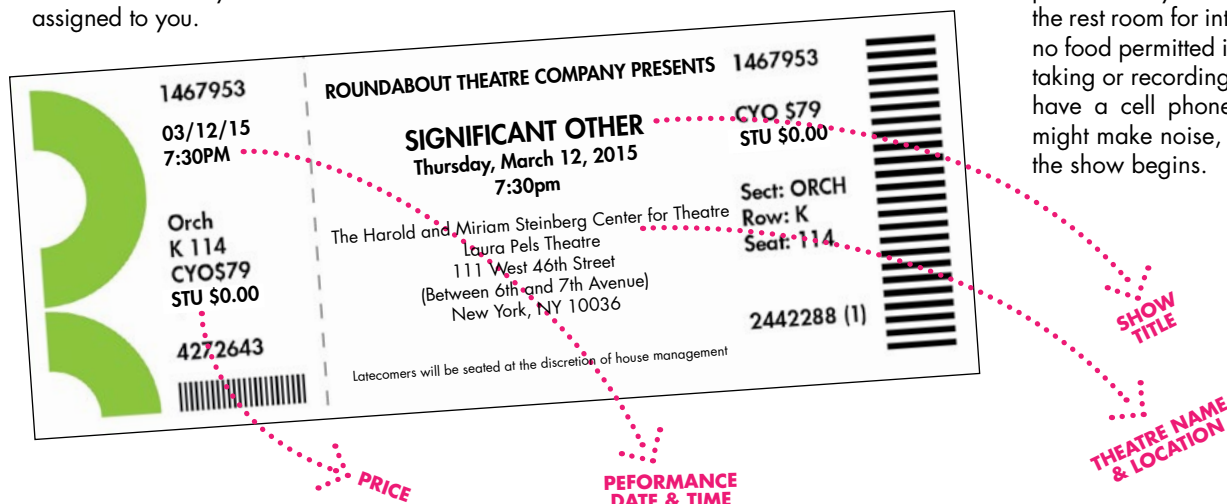
As a student, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat 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 or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



Roundabout's work with new and emerging playwrights and directors, as well as development of new work, is made possible by Katheryn Patterson and Tom Kempner.

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