

**ROUNABOUT
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UPSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of **EDUCATION AT
ROUNABOUT**

UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

Noises Off By Michael Frayn
Directed by Jeremy Kerrin

The opening night performance of the farce *Nothing On* is just hours away, and as the cast stumbles through their final dress rehearsals, things couldn't be going any worse. With lines being forgotten, love triangles unraveling and sardines flying everywhere, it's complete pandemonium... and we haven't even reached intermission! Can the cast pull their act together on the stage even if they can't behind the scenes?

a note from Artistic Director Todd Haines

What I think is the greatest innovation of Michael's wonderful play is the way that it plays with our notions of theatre itself. The story of *Noises Off* is that of a group of actors putting on a play called *Nothing On*. While *Noises Off* is a great play, it's safe to say that *Nothing On* is not. And while the performers you will see on stage are the best comedic stage actors of today, the actors they are playing definitely are not. In other words, you have the best of the best pretending to be somewhat terrible, working on a great play while pretending to be working on a terrible one. The layers of all this are simply delicious, and it all works so beautifully because Michael treats his characters with such great love and affection. These characters may not be great actors, but they certainly exhibit great bravery, as the adage that "the show must go on" is put to the ultimate test as the play goes on. You can feel Michael's admiration for their rare breed of showmen in every hilarious line.

when & where

Act I
Monday, January 14th
The Grand Theatre in
Weston-super-Mare

Act II
Wednesday, February 13th
Theatre Royal in
Ashton-under-Lyne

Act III
Saturday, April 6th
Municipal Theatre in
Stockton-on-Tees

who





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Playwright Michael Frayn Page 4-5

Who’s Who?..... Page 6-7

Interview with Director Jeremy Herrin..... Page 8-9

That’s Farce. That’s Theatre. That’s Life. Page 10

Interview with Actor Andrea Martin Page 11

Interview with Comedy Stunt Coordinator Lorenzo Pisoni Page 12-13

Touring Theatre in England Page 14

Behind the Scenes Page 15

Noises Off, Mishaps On! Page 16

Play-Within-a-Play Page 17

Designer Statements Page 18-19

Pre-Show Activities Page 20

Post-Show Activities Page 21

Glossary and Resources..... Page 22

About Roundabout Page 23

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INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT MICHAEL FRAYN

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod interviewed playwright Michael Frayn about his life with *Noises Off*.

Ted Sod: Will you give us some background information on yourself: When were you born? Where were you educated? Did you have any teachers who had a profound effect on you?

Michael Frayn: I was born in 1933, in the north-western suburbs of London, and brought up in the south-western suburbs. My father was a rep for a firm that made asbestos building materials. I wrote a memoir of him a few years ago (*My Father's Fortune*), and began to understand for the first time what problems he'd been set in life, and how courageously he had dealt with them.

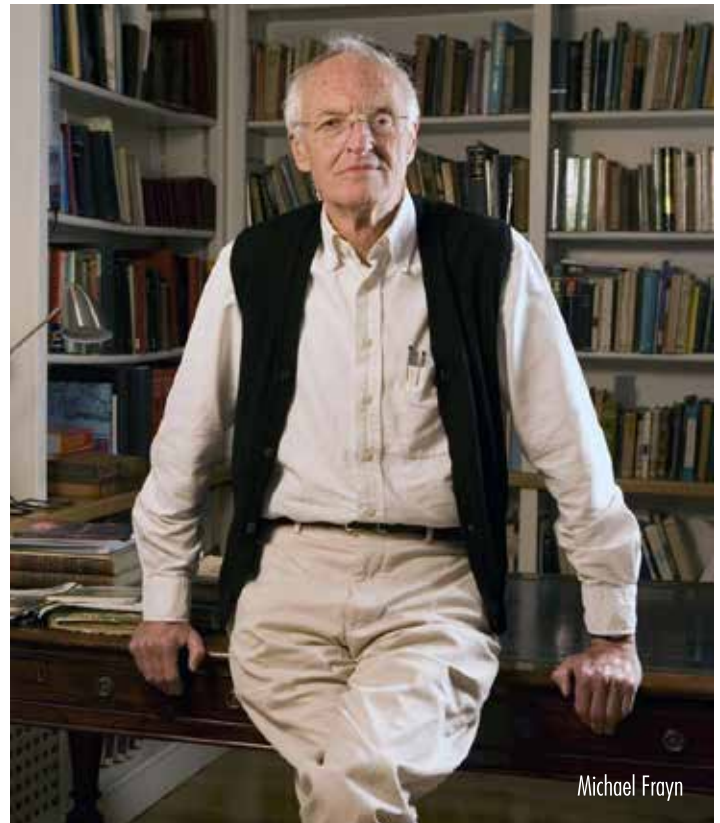
One of the difficulties was the death of his wife, my mother, when I was twelve. In the subsequent turmoil I went through a rather bad patch, from which I was rescued by a remarkable English teacher at my grammar (high) school, and a remarkable friend. It's all there in *My Father's Fortune*.

Thereafter nothing but good luck. Even military service was a blessing, because I was sent to train as a Russian interpreter on a course run by Cambridge University. After which I was back in Cambridge as an undergraduate, reading Moral Sciences. You don't know what Moral Sciences are? Of course you don't. No one outside the Moral Sciences Department knew, which veiled the subject in a certain awe-inspiring mystery, like the clouds gathered around a mountain peak. It's since become the Philosophy Department. Every university has a philosophy department, and the veil has been rent. In my last year I was taught by Jonathan Bennett, who has subsequently become a distinguished philosopher, and who has remained a friend. I caught him in his first year of teaching, when he had time, energy, and youthful aggression enough to give full rein to his natural argumentativeness—sometimes not just for the prescribed hour's personal tuition each week, but for another three, four, or five hours. He wouldn't agree about anything, even whether it was raining or not. It was a good way to learn philosophy.

TS: I read you were inspired to write *Noises Off* after seeing a farce you'd written entitled *The Two of Us* being performed from the perspective of backstage. What was the first thing you did once you had the idea?

MF: I wrote a fifteen-minute version of the idea for a theatrical charity evening. Michael Codron, the great London producer who has done the first productions of most of my plays over the years, then commissioned a full-length version—the only commission I have ever taken for an original play. In the short version you had to take in everything, onstage and backstage, before, during, and after, simultaneously. Watching it I realized that it would be better to take it one stage at a time, in three acts.

TS: *Noises Off* features a play-within-a-play entitled *Nothing On*—what was your inspiration for the characters and plot of that play? Were you satirizing aspects of your own play, *Donkeys' Years*?



Michael Frayn

MF: Good God—I hope *Donkeys' Years* is a cut above *Nothing On*! The play-within-the-play I originally wrote was a pastiche of Feydeau. It's particularly enjoyable pastiching Feydeau, because he's so good, but I reluctantly decided that the piece my wretched company was dragging around the country was more likely to be an English sex farce. I'd never actually seen one, so that was my research—watching a few English sex farces. Grim work.

TS: What was the most challenging part of writing *Noises Off*? What part was the most fun?

MF: I found it all pretty grueling. Everything front stage is interconnected with everything backstage. Everything in each of the three different performances of *Nothing On* is interconnected. The whole thing is a bit like one of the turbulent systems studied in chaos theory, where the slightest change affects everything else. I was also undermined by doubt about whether actors could ever learn the long wordless pantomime backstage (and it is in fact very difficult)—also whether actors would be prepared to perform a substantial proportion of the play not to the audience but to the back wall of the theatre, which was unlikely to reward their efforts with much sign of appreciation. I became more and more certain as I worked that the play would never be performed. I just went on with it so that I could put the typescript on the shelf, forget about it, and move on to something else.

“EVERYTHING IN EACH OF THE THREE DIFFERENT PERFORMANCES OF *NOTHING ON IS* INTERCONNECTED. THE WHOLE THING IS A BIT LIKE ONE OF THE TURBULENT SYSTEMS STUDIED IN CHAOS THEORY, WHERE THE SLIGHTEST CHANGE AFFECTS EVERYTHING ELSE.”

TS: What do you look for in a director? How do you collaborate with a director? What are the most important traits the actors need for a successful production of *Noises Off*?

MF: The first productions of most of my plays have been done by Michael Blakemore. This is the real test of a director—the first production of a new piece, when no one knows whether it’s going to work or not. (A test which Jeremy Herrin has passed triumphantly on a number of occasions, incidentally.) Michael and I go through the text together line by line, and he asks stupid questions (always the best questions to ask). In the case of *Noises Off* he made many suggestions for both clarifying and developing the action, and he deserves a great deal of the credit for getting the play to work. As for the actors...the more I have worked with actors the more I have come to admire them, and the less I have understood how they have not only the skill but the courage to do whatever they do. Including physical courage, in the case of *Noises Off*. Slamming doors and precipitous staircases make for the kind of dangerous environment that would be outlawed by health and safety legislation in a factory, and a lot of actors have got hurt over the years. Many sprains and bruises, and I have twice seen blood rather copiously spilt on stage.

TS: I understand the 2000 version of the script is different from the one written in 1982. What made you decide to revise a highly successful script? Will there be any changes to the script for Roundabout’s production? Will you participate in rehearsals?

MF: The more often you see a play performed the more your fingers itch to improve it, particularly by means of the delete key. One of the bigger reforms for the production in 2000 was finding a way to suppress the second interval. It’s plainly a three-act play, as many plays were in those far-off days when I wrote it. Difficult now, though, to persuade audiences to go back into battle in the bar twice in one evening. For this production I have made only two small further cuts. I think that the most useful contribution an author can make in the rehearsal room is to stay out of it.

TS: If you were an actor, which role would you want to play in *Noises Off/Nothing On*?

MF: I’d like to be an actor whose agent had managed to get him a part in something else instead. Preferably one with armchairs to sit in.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist? Do you read? Travel? Go to museums, see theatre? What feeds your imagination?

MF: Ideas come—or don’t—from entirely unpredictable sources and in entirely unpredictable circumstances. My wife insists that holidays help. It may be true. I can certainly recall getting the idea for one of my novels as we drove through the San Gabriel Mountains on our way into LA, and a huge bird (which I immediately identified, thrillingly but almost certainly wrongly, as an American bald eagle, and which I decided on mature reflection had probably been a condor) took off from the road just in front of the car. The project that instantaneously flashed into my head at that moment, I should say, had nothing whatsoever to do with

eagles, or condors, or birds of any sort, or for that matter with the San Gabriels, or Los Angeles, or driving, or America.

TS: What advice would you give to a young person who wants to write for the theatre? I understand you once said: “Just do it.” Is that really all it takes to be a working writer?

MF: How do you get up in the morning? You just do it. Or not, as the case may be. Whatever training or preparation you put yourself through to write something, likewise, in the end you’re going to have to...well, yes...just do it. Or, again, not. Writers are the ones who manage to, non-writers are the ones who don’t. This still of course leaves open the question of whether the result, if there is one, is going to be any good. But that’s another matter altogether.

TS: What are you writing now?

MF: Interviews like this one, mostly, and introductions to reissues, etc. After-sales service, mopping-up operations. Meanwhile, of course, half hoping, half fearing, that there may yet be another condor round the next bend in the road. •



Jeremy Shamos, Kate Jennings Grant,
David Furr and Andrea Martin in *Noises Off*

WHO'S WHO?

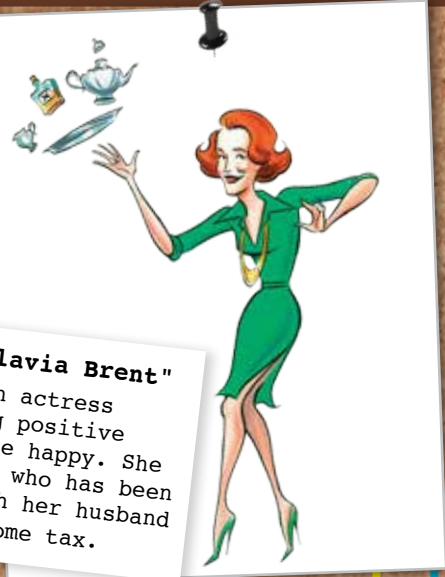
Noises Off connections

Nothing On connections

Philip is married to Flavia.

Belinda Blair/"Flavia Brent"

Belinda Blair is an actress hellbent on staying positive and keeping everyone happy. She plays Flavia Brent, who has been living in Spain with her husband to avoid paying income tax.



Dotty Otley/"Mrs. Clackett"

Dotty Otley is an older, established actress who is producing the *Nothing On* tour in hopes of setting herself up for a comfortable retirement. In the show she plays Mrs. Clackett, housekeeper for the Brent family.

Mrs. Clackett is the housekeeper for Flavia and Philip Brent.

Belinda may have feelings for Freddie. She's also trying to keep Selsdon from drinking.

Dotty and Freddie have a flirtation. Garry is incensed at Freddie's flirtation with Dotty.

Dotty and Selsdon have known each other since they did weekly rep in *Peebles*.

The Burglar breaks into Flavia and Philip Brent's home.

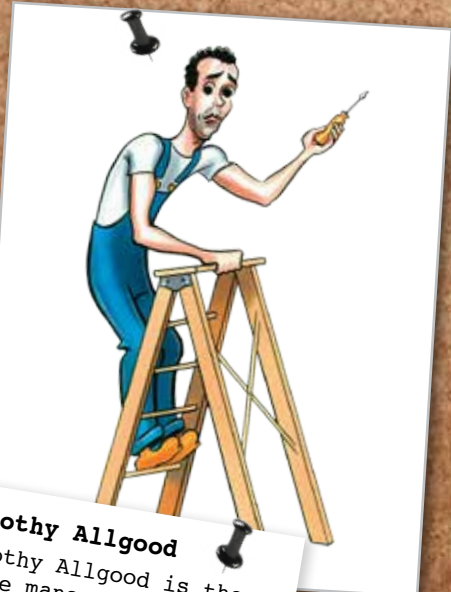


Frederick Fellowes/"Philip Brent"/"Sheikh"

Frederick Fellowes is an actor who faints at the sight (or sound) of blood. His wife has just left him. He plays both Philip Brent, a writer living in Spain to avoid paying income tax, and a visiting sheikh in *Nothing On*.

Tim is Freddie's double and understudy.

The Sheikh is looking to rent Philip's home.



Timothy Allgood

Timothy Allgood is the stage manager and male understudy of *Nothing On*.

Tim understudies Selsdon.



Selsdon Mowbray/"Burglar"

Selsdon Mowbray is an older actor who had (and may still have) a drinking problem. He can't hear well.



Lloyd Dallas

Lloyd Dallas is the temperamental director of *Nothing On*. After opening, he's off to direct *Richard III* at a regional playhouse.

Lloyd and Brooke are sleeping together.

Dotty and Garry are dating.

Freddie needs Lloyd to explain his character's every line and move.

Lloyd and Poppy are sleeping together.



Poppy Norton-Taylor

Poppy Norton-Taylor is the harried assistant stage manager and female understudy of *Nothing On*.

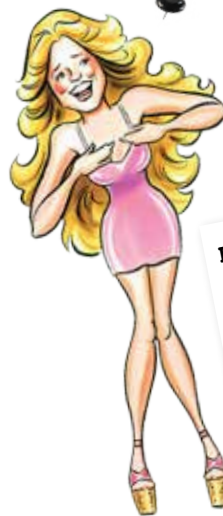
Poppy understudies Brooke.



Garry Lejeune/"Roger"

Garry Lejeune is an actor who has difficulty finishing his own sentences. Despite this, he never drops a line as Roger, a real estate agent who enjoys access to the Brents' unoccupied home.

Roger brings Vicki to the Brents' home for romance. Vicki thinks Roger owns the Brents' home.



Brooke Ashton/"Vicki"

Brooke Ashton is a beautiful actress who is new to wearing contact lenses. She plays Vicki, an Inland Revenue employee having an affair with Roger.

Philip and Flavia can't be seen by Vicki, who works for Inland Revenue.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JEREMY HERRIN



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke to director Jeremy Herrin about the joys and challenges of directing *Noises Off*.

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? When did you decide you wanted to become a theatre director?

Jeremy Herrin: I was born in New York City, at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, benefiting from some revolutionary hematological procedure that saved myself and my mother's life. That I'm now down the road directing a play seems miraculous to me, and I'm very grateful. My English parents returned home to the UK when I was two, and we lived in rural Northumberland—one of England's most beautiful and sparsely populated areas. The Royal Shakespeare Company took their repertory on tour to the nearest city, Newcastle, every year, and as my mother was (and still is) a determined theatre-goer, I was exposed to lots of Shakespeare plays at an impressionable age. I knew I wanted to direct when an enlightened teacher encouraged me to choose a play to direct in school: I chose *Woyzeck* by Georg Buchner—the most difficult play I could find. I directed a meaningfully dark version of the play, and I felt like myself for the first time. If my 17-year-old self knew he'd direct *Noises Off* on Broadway, he'd be delighted I'm sure. I'm grateful to have had a rewarding career so far doing jobs like this and running one of the UK's best theatre companies in Headlong. Check www.headlong.co.uk if you're interested.

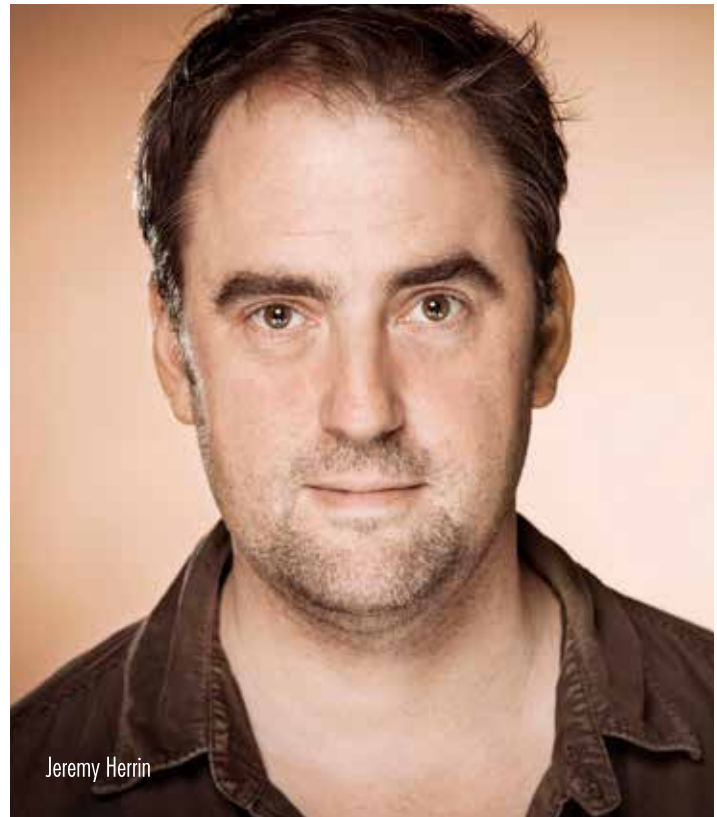
TS: Why did you choose to direct *Noises Off*? *Noises Off* features a group of theatre practitioners rehearsing a play entitled *Nothing On*. What are the challenges in directing a play within a play?

JH: I had a great time directing Michael's version of *Uncle Vanya*, and got to know him through that. Todd Haimes and I were looking for a project, and I'd never done a farce, so *Noises Off* suggested itself. It's important for me to stretch myself and do something new. I've always had an instinct for comedy, but I have never addressed the specific demands of a farce, so I hope that it's an enjoyable way to develop my practice as a director. As far as it being a play within a play, that's part of the cleverness and charm of Michael's play, and how it transcends its form.

TS: For a while it seemed West End audiences were enthralled by sex farces. What accounted for this phenomenon in your opinion? Do you believe Michael Frayn, the author of *Noises Off*, is satirizing that style of playwrighting and its popularity?

JH: Maybe, a bit, but he's probably more likely to be using it as a launch pad into comic territory, which I suppose is how this group of not particularly good actors in this not particularly good play cope with the mayhem that engulfs them. There's something about the repression of sexuality that leads to trouble, and that genre was probably an expression of British society's fear of sex and an everyday sexism that went unchallenged in almost every walk of British life.

TS: What type of research and/or preparation did you have to do in order to direct *Noises Off*? The best definition of a farce I have ever



Jeremy Herrin

heard is, "When someone should call the police and they don't." Would you define *Noises Off* as that type of farce?

JH: I suppose that working in the theatre is a good way of preparing for a show like this. Knowing the English "types" might be an advantage, although I suppose actors are pretty similar the world over, and my American colleagues will have no problems identifying the truth of their characters. Otherwise it's been a case of planning the business and the pacing and the events and the stunts as rigorously as possible so that we are clear about each of the moments and what we need from them for this beautiful comic mechanism to click into life. And I hope no one feels the need to call the police after seeing our production.

TS: This will be the third Broadway production of *Noises Off*. American audiences obviously love the play—why do you think that is?

JH: It's a great play, and everybody can understand the fundamental edict: "the show must go on." I think audiences love to see their actors work hard, and *Noises Off* puts them through their paces. I think ultimately though, the play is about endurance and persistence in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, and that's a narrative that always resonates. What brilliant and foolish creatures we are, and what nobility there can be in our stupidity.

TS: What did you look for in casting the actors? What traits did you need? Do you sense it will be very different working with American rather than English actors on an intrinsically British play? Will it be necessary to have a dialect coach at rehearsals?

"I THINK ULTIMATELY THOUGH, THE PLAY IS ABOUT ENDURANCE AND PERSISTENCE IN THE FACE OF SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS, AND THAT'S A NARRATIVE THAT ALWAYS RESONATES."

JH: Liz Smith is doing our dialogue, and that will be very helpful, as the rhythms and the sensibility within the dialogue is different enough to make sure we do it properly. I haven't started work with the company yet (I write this a week before rehearsals) but I sense there will be some interesting differences, but I'm predicting a lot more common ground. There is more that connects us than divides us. I'm interested in further exploration of what makes this an English play. Why wouldn't these problems necessarily happen in America? But I have a team of brilliant actors to work with—the cream of the American theatre—and I feel like it's going to be a heady and thrilling process to work with a cast of complete thoroughbreds. I feel very lucky to have an expert in charge of each of the characters.

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

JH: I feel that there's little room for interpretive maneuver in *Noises Off*. The play is designed to function in production. In the

stage directions, Michael has done all he can to be specific and helpful, so our job is to make that happen. No one is interested in a ground-breaking thematic interpretation of *Noises Off*. So my ambitions are all about how effective it is, how satisfying, and how much we can make the audience ache.

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

JH: Take a good look at Lloyd Dallas, the director of *Nothing On* (played by Campbell Scott) and take heed. Theatre directing can be bad for your health. Having done that, read everything, see everything, and get good at listening and watching. You get better at directing the more you direct, so keep going despite the industry's inevitable indifference. •



Andrea Martin, Campbell Scott, Megan Hilty, Jeremy Shamos, David Furr and Kate Jennings Grant in *Noises Off*

THAT'S FARCE. THAT'S THEATRE. THAT'S LIFE.

Noises Off is a meta-theatrical comedy: a farce about the production of a farce titled *Nothing On*. But what's a farce?

Farce is a style of comedy that places exaggerated stock characters into absurd high-pressure situations, resulting in fast, almost-violent slapstick. There's often a case of mistaken identity, a romantic entanglement or two, and several slamming doors. Audiences delight in farce because it allows us to laugh at human faults and the chaotic, uncontrollable nature of life.

The term farce comes from the Latin term *farcire*, which means *to stuff* or *to gorge oneself*. In the Middle Ages it was associated with a savory stuffing added to meat dishes, and from there came to mean the short comic interludes added to performances of decidedly unfunny morality plays. Silly moments were "stuffed" into the serious religious works.

Though the word emerged in the fourteenth century, the style of farce has been around since Greek and Roman times. The genre was the common person's counterpoint to serious plays about gods, kings, and wars. Stock characters were amplified versions of the people encountered in everyday life: the old lecher, the innocent lovers, the nosy mother, the big-talking soldier. These characters struggled through preposterous versions of relatable events: a meeting with future in-laws goes horribly awry, for example.

Commedia dell'arte, which began in Renaissance Italy, developed from these older comedies. Because it was performed in noisy, outdoor locations, it relied on physical action to tell the (usually improvised) story. Character types moved in a recognizable way. Acrobatic stunts were incorporated. One character smacked his victim's behinds with a "slapstick," a paddle made of two pieces of wood that created a loud sound when struck against something.

Commedia-style performances spread to France, and writers began scripting plays for it. Molière, for example, built upon characters and situations from commedia. His early plays, *The Flying Doctor* and *The Imaginary Invalid*, are highly physical and farcical.

Playwright Georges Feydeau brought farce into the twentieth century. He tweaked the intricate plot machinery of the popular "well-made play"—a suspenseful plot, coincidences, a secret only some of the characters know, a finally-triumphant hero—for outrageously comedic purposes.

Feydeau took situations to extremes in order to push the bounds of conventional taste; for his characters, reputations and respectability were at stake. He was one of the first farceurs to set scenes in the bedroom, where he found a myriad of comic uses for a bed—everything except sex.

Michael Frayn had the idea for *Noises Off* in 1970 after watching a performance of his play *The Two of Us*, also a farce, from the wings. Observing actors Richard Briers and Lynn Redgrave struggle with silent quick-changes and rapid entrances and exits, he realized that "it was funnier from behind than in front." Frayn discovered that the workings of the theatre make great farce. Actors simply must keep going, no matter how badly they screw up, no matter what happens offstage. And audiences, perhaps identifying with the characters' determination to carry on in a world gone mad, laugh uproariously at every joke. •



The stock characters of Commedia dell'arte



INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR ANDREA MARTIN

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod interviewed actress Andrea Martin about her role as Dotty in *Noises Off*.

Ted Sod: Why did you choose to do the role of Dotty/Mrs. Clackett in Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*?

Andrea Martin: How could I pass up the opportunity to star in a Roundabout Theatre production of *Noises Off* in one of the greatest (if not the greatest) farces ever written and be directed by the visionary director of *Wolf Hall*, Jeremy Herrin, and share the stage with this company of hand-picked, stellar actors? Then, you top it off with the hysterical parts of Dotty, an actress past her prime, and Mrs. Clackett, a housekeeper of "character"—and you throw in physical comedy and inspired stage business and hilarious lines and relationships, all of which keeps an audience laughing from start to finish. It's a joyous evening of theatre...I'd be a fool to say no. Honestly, I was honored and insanely excited to be asked.

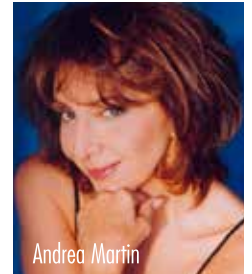
TS: What kind of preparation or research do you have to do in order to play Dotty/Mrs. Clackett? How do you get ready to play two roles in a play?

AM: Since both characters are British, the first thing I did was sign up with a dialect coach. Dotty speaks with a standard British accent (think Helen Mirren), and Mrs. Clackett is working class, Cockney. Once I was introduced to the differences in sounds, I started to learn my lines. This was in July. The first thing to tackle, in a farce, is being off book as much as possible before rehearsals begin. There is so much physicality in the play, carrying the script in rehearsals and referring to lines just slows down the process of being IN the play. I've also watched many British films and '70s British television shows as reference material for my characters. Jeremy has done extensive work in locating specific British television shows and YouTube clips to aid us in discovering other elements for our characters. I have dialect tapes on my iPhone and listen to them all the time. I ask friends to run lines with me. I bribe them with Levain cookies. I carry my script with me everywhere I go and refer to it, as I'm sipping on my Starbucks French roast. I research characters by looking at photos from the '70s, as *Noises Off* is set in that period. I like starting externally with a character. How she walks, stands, what her hair looks like, how she's dressed, what shoes she wears. I begin to inhabit the character after I imagine how she will look.

TS: How is this character relevant to you? The rehearsal process hasn't begun yet, but can you share some of your preliminary thoughts about the characters of Dotty and Mrs. Clackett with us?

AM: Dotty certainly is relevant to me as she is a woman of a "certain" age, a working actress, doing HER best to stay relevant and make a modest living. As she says in the play: "I'm not trying to make my fortune, I just want to put a little something by." However, her memory is failing, just a bit...so learning lines is a challenge. Holding on to her youth and a man is a challenge. Being on the road with the play is a challenge. And performing the play nightly is exhausting, and that's a challenge. But Dotty is a survivor, and acting is in her blood. She lives to act. I can relate to all of the above. As far as Mrs. Clackett is concerned, she is the classic comic housekeeper.

I can't read her lines without laughing out loud. I'm going to have to be more disciplined once rehearsals start.



TS: The best definition of a farce I have ever heard is, "When someone should call the police and they don't." Would you define *Noises Off* as that type of farce?

AM: I don't know if I would use that definition. Sounds more like an episode of *CSI*: yellow tape to mark the dead body, and the killer is still in the house. *Noises Off* is a hilarious comedy because the stakes are high and everything that can go wrong, does. It's an innocent comedic romp.

TS: This will be the third Broadway production of *Noises Off*. American audiences obviously love the play—why do you think that is?

AM: Great comedy doesn't date itself. This play is about the behavior of eccentric characters and how they communicate through physical comedy in heightened situations. It's a bedroom farce or English sex farce. There's some slapstick, mime, and pratfalls. Audiences identify with the stock characters—the frustrated director, the flustered leading man, the bumbling supporting actor, the sexy ingenue, etc. Audiences know what to expect, and yet still are surprised and delighted in the execution. Watching and performing this play is a collaborative experience between the actors and the audience.

TS: What do you look for from a director when rehearsing a role?

AM: Line Readings.

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

AM: I studied with Jacques Le Coq in Paris for two years. I pray my mime training will finally pay off. I graduated from Emerson College with a degree in Speech and Theatre. I studied and acted with the legendary sketch comedy troupe Second City for seven years. Bernie Sahlins, the founder of Second City, told me something that I have never forgotten: "Never talk down to your audience. Always speak to their higher intelligence." Although *Noises Off* is a farce, it is my desire to make Dotty and Mrs. Clackett into sympathetic characters. I want to humanize them, not comment on them. I will try and find every characteristic that drives them, motivates them. I will try and explore every facet of their personality. It's through unwavering commitment and intention that comedy excels.

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

AM: Take nothing personally, it's a business. Don't blame others. Look for your part in it and change yourself. Delight yourself when you act. Make yourself laugh. Then you won't be disappointed when no one else is. •

INTERVIEW WITH COMEDY STUNT COORDINATOR LORENZO PISONI

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod talked to Lorenzo Pisoni about his role as comedy stunt coordinator for *Noises Off*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated?

Lorenzo Pisoni: I was born in San Francisco, CA. My parents met in The San Francisco Mime Troupe, where my mother was the set designer and my father was teaching circus arts to the Troupe. My father taught my mother to juggle and quickly they started a juggling act and then a circus. My mother says to this day, "It takes a village to raise a kid? It's takes a circus to raise a kid." And while I grew up in a very artsy, alternative, progressive community, an education was always important to my parents and all my extended aunts and uncles for that matter. I learned from everyone in my parents' company or from anyone who would teach me hand-balancing or juggling, trapeze or whatever. To rebel from my vagabond childhood, I went to Vassar College but I never studied theatre or acting.

TS: You started your career as a clown as part of the Pickle Family Circus—correct?

LP: Yes, I started performing the ring when I was 2 years old. My parents couldn't get me to stop. Bill Irwin, one of my father's clown partners at the time, had given me maybe a cane, and I had grabbed a busted up top hat from my dad, and one day I went into the ring during intermission and performed my version of the show never cracking a smile—deadpan the entire time. Eventually my parents had to put me into the show because I was taking too much focus. So I began learning acrobatics (at first I was just thrown around—I was little and light!), eventually juggling, aerial acrobatics, clowning and all the rest. When I was 6 years old, my father wrote a clown act for me to do with him and I became his clown partner. Keeping the deadpan.

TS: When and why did you decide to become an actor and physical comedy choreographer?

LP: I was working for Cirque Du Soleil after college and had been a circus performer for 20 years already when Erica Schmidt (a theatre director) called me up and said she was doing a production of *Romeo and Juliet* in New York and would I like to come be a part of it. She could pay me only a metro-card. I had never done a Shakespeare play professionally, had always loved it though, and I said yes. Just like that I "retired" from circus. I didn't really think much of it at the time which makes me think I was ready to be done with that part of me life. I told my family I was leaving circus, they were all supportive, though I think they were worried to hear I was leaving it to be an actor. Once I got to New York I fell in love with theatre and acting in general. The physical comedy stuff fell into my lap, honestly. I was minding my own business when I got a call to help out with a play years ago—someone knew my background and was going to take advantage. But I did enjoy teaching or sculpting a theatrical moment using those falling down skills. I do it very rarely, however. I've worked with some amazing people but I feel very protective of it and only say yes when the material is great or the people I will be working with will be inspiring—such as *Noises Off*.



Lorenzo Pisoni

TS: Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

LP: As I said earlier, I grew up in what I think of as an extraordinary environment, so I have many teachers that have influenced me—my father of course, my mother, my sister as well, Bill Irwin, Geoff Hoyle. I don't think they realized or I realized how much they influenced me until later in life when I came to New York. I've seen footage of stuff I've done on stage and can see them all so clearly. I feel almost guilty. On the other hand I was lucky enough to have a classic apprenticeship-style education and the longer I work, the more the skills become truly my own and I hope it rubs off on someone else who will then in turn make it their own.

TS: Why did you choose work to as the physical comedy choreographer and understudy on *Noises Off*?

LP: Well, I was working with David Furr—we were playing rivals in the comedy *The Explorers Club* a couple of years ago, and he mentioned this production and I told him that my father had choreographed Garry's stair fall for a production of *Noises Off* at the Marin Theatre Company in the '80s. My father had brought me to those rehearsals to watch, or to be his guinea-pig depending on who's story you believe. Furr knew I had done a lot of stair falls in a play called *Humor Abuse* and apparently when The Roundabout asked if there was anything he might need for this production he asked if I'd be able to help him out. Needless to say I was flattered, and after speaking with Jeremy Herrin I thought it'd be



great to be in this room with all these actors—many of whom I’ve known for years—so why not?!

TS: What will your job entail?

LP: I will be in there to set the big physical comedy moments, keep the actors safe, make the moments redoable—anyone can fall down the stairs once, it’s the getting up after that’s tricky. And also help Jeremy work out all the lesser, smaller moments because there are A LOT of them in this play. Basically, I’m there to help bring those physical moments to life and make them...well, funny.

TS: What kind of preparation or research did you have to do in order to do the job you’ll be doing on *Noises Off*?

LP: I’ve read and re-read the play many times already. I’ve drawn out diagrams—almost like a football coach with X’s and O’s just to keep track of who is where when and what door they’ve gone through. I’ve gone to Lincoln Center Archives to watch previous productions. And I’ve also watched a fair amount of silent movies—looking for inspiration.

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

LP: Well, for the big moments, the stair falls, and other obvious physical comedy moments that need to be staged and rehearsed, I sit down with Jeremy and discuss what he wants out of them—what story they need to tell. Then I sit down with Derek McLane to discuss his set design and see what’s possible and what fun we can have with his beautiful set. Then I go away and work out what I think the actors can do physically 8 times per week. Safely. Once I have a road map, we get some padding for the actors and work through each stage of the falls or other moments. Slowly. Eventually we bring it up to show speed. Of course through of all this Jeremy will have ideas, the actors will have inspirations and it’s my job, I believe, to incorporate all those influences into the moments of physical comedy.

TS: What was your initial response to the play when you read it? What do you think the play *Noises Off* is about?

LP: The first time I read this play, I was laughing out loud. Which isn’t usually what happens when I read a play by myself in my apartment. The second act is difficult to read because of course Frayn has two plays going on at once on the page. But the more I read it the more I just was in love with the care with which he constructed the impossible situations he put these actors in. It’s just marvelous. And then to read how he came to resolve the characters’ journeys in act three is so satisfying. For me this play is about the care and vulnerability one has to expose oneself in order to work closely with others. A life in the theatre is a perfect vehicle for this exploration but I doubt that it’s different in any other profession. I believe that is in part why so many people can laugh at these characters and their situations because no matter what you do or where you do it, you’ve been in these situations and can relate.

TS: When I interviewed Michael Frayn, the author of *Noises Off*, he said he has seen some physical action go wrong during productions of his play—how do you go about insuring that the actors are safe when doing physical comedy?

LP: Well, that’s the trick isn’t it? Buster Keaton said, “think fast, act slow.” For a play like this, which is so reliant on pace, I feel Keaton’s adage is so applicable. Also it’s the actor’s job to be really honest if something is not working in rehearsal—if what is being asked is not doable 8 times per week and it’s partly my job to assess what I think they aren’t telling me because we actors always want to please. Technically, the actors will go through the physical moments before each performance to remind themselves of the tricky beats and to check in with each other before all the adrenaline is pumping in performance. But to be totally honest, there is no way to insure one hundred percent that everything will go perfectly each time. That’s where the actors’ skills, and my help to set moments that have some spectrum of safety, come into play.

TS: Public school students will read this interview and will want to know what it takes to be a successful actor/physical comedy choreographer—what advice can you give young people who want to do the kind of work you are doing?

LP: I’m not sure what a successful physical comedy choreographer looks like or even if that is a thing to aspire to—there aren’t that many chances to do it, frankly, only so many productions of *Noises Off* in any one year. But as with anything—acting, dance, medicine, business—read as much as you can, see as much as you can see, reach out and talk to those doing it. Now with social media and the internet, that is easier to do than ever before. Slowly but surely you can find your way into whatever world you envision. Know that it takes so much persistence and self-motivation but I also believe that it’s truly satisfying when you know have forged your own path. •



David Furr, Andrea Martin and Jeremy Shamos in *Noises Off*

TOURING THEATRE IN ENGLAND

Noises Off introduces us to a touring theatre troupe of subpar talent and stretched means: the actors barely know their lines, the curtain rarely rises on time, and most of the behind-the-scenes staff is forced to play a role or two when an actor goes missing or gets drunk.

Today, touring theatre in England is doing well, thanks to refurbished regional theatres, a wide variety of touring productions, and generous tax breaks to touring companies. But in the era of *Noises Off*, touring theatre was not for the faint of heart. In a 2011 article in the Independent, Andrew Speed, the company stage manager of the National Theatre, recalled, "When I first started touring in 1985, some of [the regional theatres] resembled urban scenes of devastation." In the same piece, Rachel Tackley, the director of the English Touring Theatre, described the audiences of touring theatre of the past decades as "two men and a dog who might have heard of Shakespeare but still don't know Ibsen." Faced with these prospects—crumbling theatres and unsophisticated patrons—it's no wonder the touring company presenting *Nothing On* can't attract the best talent in the business. But the touring theatre of today (which often brings West End shows—original casts intact—to theatres across the UK) isn't simply an improvement on the recent past... it's actually a return to touring theatre's previous, thriving heyday.

In its earliest days, touring theatre was nearly private, held in the homes of wealthy courtiers and aristocrats throughout the 1600s. In the 1700s, the touring circuit became a public affair; hundreds of playhouses were built throughout England, and companies began to streamline their designs (creating quickly erected, quickly dismantled stock scenery) in order to more easily travel from town to town. After a lull in the early 19th century (as the Industrial Revolution lured rural populations to urban centers), touring theatre took off at the turn of the 20th century (England's Edwardian period), thanks to newly expanded road and rail lines across the

country. Ease of transportation allowed companies (usually led by actor-managers, who both performed in productions and handled logistics and finances) to travel with larger casts and more elaborate sets. In the early 1900s, as today, entire West End productions (in addition to productions by companies solely devoted to touring) traveled England and Scotland, unpacking their sets in a flourishing number of "receiving houses," or theatrical venues. This period also marked the earliest form of the "out of town tryout" New York theatregoers know so well; West End-bound shows would premiere in a regional theatre to gauge their potential for success before a London opening.

Through the early decades of the 20th century, most touring companies stopped in a town for only two nights (usually one night to perform a melodrama and one night to perform a farce, though musical comedies, revues, and Shakespeare also popped up from time to time). In towns without a permanent theatre space, a "fit-up" company might adapt its performances to a public space like a hall, or a "portable" company might build its own pop-up space and stay for a longer period of time—from two weeks to a full season. Even briefer than the usual two-night engagements were "flying matinees," the term coined for an afternoon performance by a company that had traveled into town for only the day—and would travel back to London (and perform) that night. Today, as both the

resources and the audiences for touring theatre have grown, companies often settle in for longer stays—from a week to two full months.

While Roundabout's production of *Noises Off* will be enjoying a stationary engagement at the American AirlinesSM Theatre, it is worth noting that the play has been a hit on the UK touring circuit, most recently in a 2013 production by The Old Vic. A touring play within a play within a play on tour? That's a farce all its own. •



The Grand Theatre Weston-super-Mare is the fictional theatre that marks the first stop on the tour of *Nothing On*



BEHIND THE SCENES

PRODUCER

The individual(s) or company responsible for the financial aspects of a production. Responsibilities include choosing the play and hiring the artists.

Nothing On is produced by Otstar Productions LTD
(the name Dotty Otley is using for her production company!)

PLAYWRIGHT

Person responsible for writing the script.

Nothing On is written by Robin Housemonger, who has chosen not to attend the rehearsals or performances seen in *Noises Off*.

DIRECTOR

Individual responsible for the artistic vision of the production; collaborates with the cast and creative team, who bring this vision to life. Lloyd Dallas is the director of *Nothing On*.

MANAGEMENT

A wide range of departments responsible for the personnel, financial, and administrative aspects of a production.

For Otstar Productions, Tim Allgood multitasks as Stage Manager and Company Manager.

DESIGN TEAM

Responsible for the visual and audio elements of a production: scenery, lighting, costumes, sound, makeup and hair/wigs, properties, projection/video, and special effects. Frayn does not show us the *Nothing On* designers, but normally they would be in the theatre for technical and dress rehearsals.

ACTORS

Performers who portray characters in the production. They are responsible for knowing their lines and blocking, interpreting their roles, and collaborating with the director. The cast of *Nothing On* includes: Dotty, Garry, Brooke, Frederick, Belinda, and Selsdon.

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS/PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS

Junior members of Stage Management team, who often help running sets and props during the performance. Poppy is the ASM for *Nothing On*.

DESIGN ASSISTANTS

Designers for large productions usually employ assistants for drawing, sketches, and research tasks. No design assistants are mentioned for *Nothing On*.

BACKSTAGE LINGO:

Before peeking into the backstage operations of a British theatre company, here are some theatre terms to keep you in the know.

Beginners: Cue for actors to be ready to start the performance. (This call is given as "Places" in the U.S.)

Book: (short for "prompt book") The stage manager's script with all the actors' lines and movement, as well as the technical cues during the performance. "On book" means to call the cues for that performance.

Calls: Announcements made by the stage manager during a performance, including beginners (or places) to actors, and announcements for the cues on headset. In some theatres, the stage manager tells the audience when the show will start through "front-of-house calls." "Call" may be used a verb, as in "Poppy called a sloppy show today."

Dress Rehearsal: Usually the last rehearsal before previews or opening, incorporating all the technical elements. Ideally, it happens after the technical rehearsal.

Elecs: Short for "electrics," the department responsible for lighting. During the show, lighting cues are sometimes called as "LX" cues.

Front of House: Refers to any part of the theatre in front of the proscenium arch, including the auditorium, lobbies, and box office area.

Scenery Dock: A high-ceilinged area near the stage, where scenery is built and stored.

Quick change: Fast costume change made by an actor during the performance, usually coordinated with the dresser, close to the stage.

Stalls: The audience seating area at the front of the auditorium (called orchestra seats in the U.S.).

Tab: (Short for "tableaux curtain") The large curtain furthest downstage, which separates the audience from the stage. Tabs can open horizontally from center or "fly" out vertically from above.

Technical: (Also known as "technical rehearsal" or "tech") The rehearsal that incorporates lights and sound on the set of the stage. Costumes may or may not be worn in the tech rehearsal. Often a slow, lengthy process.

VAT: (Abbreviation for value-added tax) European tax on some goods and services like food. Theatre tickets are not charged VAT, but theatre companies are still responsible for accounting their receipts and reporting the VAT paid by the company for supplies and services.

NOISES OFF, MISHAPS ON!



What makes theatre different from film and television? It's live! Each and every performance onstage is unique, with myriad factors affecting how things go. The audience may be very loud or very quiet; a cell phone might ring in the middle of an important speech; an actor might have a cold or be stressed out about an audition. Then again, something a bit more complicated might go awry, as we see with the bloody noses, falls down the stairs, and squashed sardines of *Noises Off*.

In fact, *Noises Off* playwright Michael Frayn may have been inspired to write this mishap-laden play thanks to a memorable onstage disaster in his own youth. While a member of England's National Service, Frayn studied Russian and was recruited to play a servant in a Russian-

language production of Nikolai Gogol's *The Inspector General*. The reluctant actor said his only lines in the show and tried to exit, but then it all went terribly wrong: "I pulled instead of pushed at the door, it jammed in the frame, and there was no other way off. So I waited for what seemed like many, many hours while stagehands fought with crowbars on the other side and the audience started to slow-handclap. I've never been on the stage since."

Here are some other memorable tales of the kinds of onstage mishaps that can happen to anyone, from future playwrights like Frayn to Roundabout staff members to Broadway performers! •

"There's a legendary college story about a performance of *Othello* where the deck crew forgot to preset the dagger Othello used to kill himself. So, stranded without a weapon, Othello snapped his own neck!" — Elise LeBreton, Actor

"Anna Manahan fell off the Atlantic Theater stage into the laps of the front row audience members during a scene change of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. Twice." — Christian Parker, Director/Dramaturg

"First scene of *King Lear*, Lear enters, goes up on his lines, forgets to divide the kingdom, exits." — Christian Durso, Actor/Playwright

"As I was entering with one of the Bad Idea Bears in *Avenue Q*, I caught his eye on the set and it popped off his face and rolled to the ground. I had to do the whole scene with a cyclops puppet, while trying desperately not to break out in hysterical laughter with my scene partner!" — Jed Resnick, Actor

"I slid off the stage dancing hard in *Movin' Out* into an empty seat in the front row, and a critic said Twyla Tharp was brilliant for 'breaking the fourth wall.'" — Lorin Latarro, Actor/Choreographer

"I was in a show once where my character was passed out onstage for about 5 minutes during a scene. One night during that scene a ROACH crawled onto my FACE. I decided that I could sort of do a groggy swipe of my face with a hand to try to get it off, but apparently I actually just flailed and totally broke character." — Melanie Hopkins, Actor/Producer

"There's a story about Josephine Hull in *Arsenic and Old Lace*—she was playing a scene with the ingénue when the phone rang and it wasn't supposed to. Both actors looked at each other quizzically—Hull walked over to the phone, picked it up and said 'Hello?' She then turned to the ingénue and said 'It's for you!'" — Ted Sod, Roundabout Education Dramaturg

"I saw a performance of *Legally Blonde*, and the girl playing Elle Woods was doing the 'Bend and Snap.' She snapped so hard her wig came off!" — Sari Stifelman, Roundabout Apprentice

PLAY-WITHIN-A-PLAY

One of the great comedic and theatrical joys of *Noises Off* lies within its structure: the format of a play-within-a-play. While *Noises Off* takes inventive, inside-out liberties with the premise (showing us three separate perspectives: a dress rehearsal onstage, a performance from backstage, and a performance onstage), the play-within-a-play format has been delighting audiences for centuries. The first example of a play-within-a-play dates back to Thomas Kyd's 1587 *The Spanish Tragedy*. Kyd's play is often cited as the influence for William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which itself includes one of the most iconic plays-within-a-play ever put onstage: *The Murder of Gonzago*. Prince Hamlet asks a troupe of actors to perform the play so that he can watch his uncle Claudius's reaction to the plot (which exactly mirrors Claudius's murder of Hamlet's father).

The play-within-a-play of *Hamlet* is an example of one of the trope's originating terms: the French *mise en abyme*, which literally means "placed into abyss." The term is rooted in the language of heraldry, since European coats of arms often include a replica of a smaller crest within them. Author André Gide, who coined the phrase, used it to reference a certain duplication technique within art, in which an internal element of a painting, novel, or play in some way echoes and clarifies the themes of the overarching artwork.

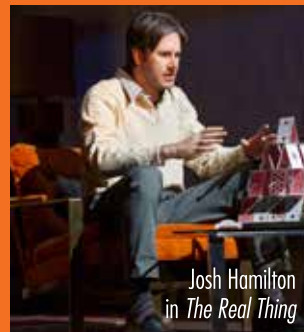
Today, the phrase is often used as a metaphorical synonym for the Droste effect, the infinite reflections that occur when two mirrors are placed face-to-face (think of a hall of mirrors, or, in more Google-able terms, the endless box-within-a-box logo of Land O'Lakes butter). This replica effect is most apt, as a term, when applied to plays-within-plays that have thematic connections between the frame story and the internal story (sometimes referred to as the "composition en abyme"). Since *The Murder of Gonzago* is truly the plot of *Hamlet* in miniature, the play is an ideal example of *mise en abyme*.

Of course, not every example of a play-within-a-play need adhere to such neat parallels, and the definition of the format isn't restricted to works that feature, at their center, a miniature dramatization of the overarching plot. But even in less thematically tight works, the dizzying implications of *mise en abyme* are illuminating. Consider the multiple levels of reality that occur within a play-within-a-play: real people acting, playing actors, playing characters within a second fictional story, sometimes for a fictional or unseen audience.

Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner's 2007 study on the trope, *The Play Within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*, observes that "the play within the play would seem to be a particularly apt device for the expression of the playful self-referentiality of the post-modern condition," and indeed, the past two decades have seen multiple iterations of the form across film, television, and theatre. Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman* is a stellar example of a show-within-a-show (in this case, a play-within-a-movie), and Christopher Guest's mockumentary *Waiting for Guffman* adds a third layer of reality to the meta-theatrical mix. On television, similar faux documentaries abound, and *The Comeback* and *30 Rock*, among others, feature shows-within-shows. Onstage, today's Broadway lineup alone is a boon of examples: *The Book of Mormon*, *The King and I*, *Dames at Sea*, *An American in Paris*, and *Something Rotten* all feature versions of the show-within-a-show. •

SHOWS-WITHIN-A-SHOW (WITHIN ROUNDABOUT'S PAST FIVE YEARS):

The Real Thing



Josh Hamilton
in *The Real Thing*

On the Twentieth Century



Kristin Chenoweth
in *On the Twentieth Century*

Cabaret



Alan Cumming
in *Cabaret*

The Mystery of Edwin Drood



Chita Rivera
in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

DESIGNER STATEMENTS



DEREK McLANE—SET DESIGN

The very first thing I thought when I finished *Noises Off* is that this is one of the funniest plays I've ever read. But the other thing I felt, almost at the same time, was a sense of anxiety about figuring out what the hell to do with all those doors. There are so many doors; and they're so specific in the play that the designer side in me started to wonder how I was ever going to figure it all out. Another thing I had to consider, from the design point of view, is the perception of reality for the set of the play-within-the-play, which is entitled *Nothing On*. It would be very easy to do it as something that's really, truly terrible. But it's important that the stakes be high enough that we believe this group of actors performing in *Nothing On* have a lot invested in it. They can't be such hacks that you're not concerned for them. There are a couple of layers to the set. It's described as a Tudor type home in the country that the owners don't really live in and, of course, it's also a set for a sex farce performed by a company that's not comprised of the highest caliber professionals. When you sit down with pencil and paper and lay out the doors, the stairs and the balcony, the way that they need to be in order for the plot of the comedy to work, it doesn't make any sense architecturally as a house. The front door is straddled by a bathroom and the study. Normally, if I'm designing a play set in a realistic house, I usually imagine the rest of the ground plan, the part that's not seen. But it's really tough to come up with a logical version for this show. If you were to draw the ground plan of this house, you would look completely nuts.



Noises Off Set Model

MICHAEL KRASS—COSTUME DESIGN

Noises Off is a great modern classic of farce. Mercifully, I had never seen nor read it when I was asked to design costumes for it—so my first exposure to the play was reading the script. And that was torture because there are so many stage directions, descriptions of bits and physical humor suggested, that it was hard to sort through it all to find the people. Finding out who the people are in the play I am designing is my job. It took some disciplined rereading to discover the humans in this production, which features a play-within-a-play. When Jeremy, the director, and I spoke, he thought it important to set the play in the time it was first presented, the late 1970s, so I began reminding myself what that time was like. I looked at magazine images of British actors, British



Noises Off Costume Research

theatre and television productions, the icons of fashion and leadership, the queen, real people and haircuts. I also had to understand that the play-within-the-play was designed by a 1978 costume designer with perhaps limited resources. So I got to thinking about what “she” thought about, how she saw her world, how desperate she was in putting together the production, how she got along with her actors and how she spent her budget. Then logistics entered my thinking. This is about a play that’s touring over the course of several months. What happens to costumes on the road? Bad dry cleaning? What happens with actors who dislike their costume? Who doesn’t want to wear their wig? Who has worn holes in their pants? How do we tell that story? It’s all a delicious assignment for me —when you add in rehearsals, collaboration with smart and funny actors, and a great director—I’m in heaven.

JANE COX—LIGHTING DESIGN

Anyone who has ever been involved in theatre will find something familiar in *Noises Off*—whether it’s the big personalities, the backstage politics, or the tense nerves of a final dress rehearsal. As a lighting designer, you are always coming into the room at the most stressful moment for the actors and the director—the moment when the play finally takes the physical stage, which is often the moment when everyone’s psychological cracks appear. For lighting designers, it’s also a workplace parody and a very cathartic opportunity to bring this energy in front of a curtain. The play-within-a-play idea is both the challenge and the great pleasure of working on *Noises Off*. As a lighting designer, I really have to think about it as if I am lighting two separate shows, all on one light plot. We are not only lighting a comedy here at the Roundabout, but we are also convincingly lighting an English farce, all in the same amount of physical space (which is a huge challenge for the technical and production staff as well). The farce has to be well executed enough that we can be optimistic about it, so that the stakes are high. We have to believe that this play-within-a-play can succeed, so that when it really falls apart it is tragic (in order to be extremely funny). So for the designers, we have to exercise our craft well and badly at the same time. We have to pretend we’re trying really hard and failing. The whole thing feels like a lovely opportunity to poke fun at ourselves, but it’s also a love letter to the theatre, of course. Despite mounting desperation and distraction, the show must go on. I can’t wait to get into the theatre with it!

TODD ALMOND—COMPOSER

Noises Off is just one of those plays. You know? It sits around in your subconscious and keeps you entertained for (I’m hoping) a lifetime. I quote it constantly and feel like it is my personal friend with whom I have a living history. To be clear, I’ve never worked on this play before, until now—I will be writing original music for Roundabout’s production. One doesn’t think of music, however, when one thinks of *Noises Off*—it’s all slamming doors and dialogue. And that is where my exciting challenge lies; there are indeed music cues, and I’m approaching my assignment in the way a comedian approaches physical humor—it needs to feel effortless and precise while being at the same time big and, well, funny! My love of these characters will guide me; I really do think of them as friends.

CHRISTOPHER CRONIN—SOUND DESIGN

I happen to love this play. I was involved in another high profile production, some number of years ago, and it remains a very fond memory. When Jeremy asked me to be involved, I thought long and hard if that would work as an asset, or an obstacle. I started the conversation by asking him if he were taking this production in any sort of “direction?” His answer was “classic.” As a generic rule, Sound Design for farce is more about support than statement. The playwright has crafted a load of mechanical parts: doors, split second timing, and outlandish situations (sardines anyone?) that make the play go. All the sound design needs to do is grease up the gears. But that said—it’s hard to forget that the title of the play refers to sound in the play—two plays really. *Nothing On* needs to show off the feel of a creaky, generic pastoral countryside soundtrack, that was probably provided by Tim himself. Then, the backstage, workplace, neurosis-driven world of *Noises Off* needs to bounce along on the back of the play within. There are some tricky technical requirements—voice-overs, text acted upstage, away from the audience, phones ringing, doors slamming. But there are also some fun opportunities to tie sound elements to the relative stress level of these characters. The phone ring tempo may alter slightly to fit Dotty’s increasingly frantic journey from Act 1 to Act 3. Freddie’s many pratfalls down the stairs require an increasing amount of audible injury. Add a dash of some bouncy, fun ‘70s sitcom theme music. Classic, I thought—let’s leave it to the estate agents—Squire, Squire, Hackham, and Dudley. I can’t wait. •

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

HOW DOES AN ENSEMBLE COLLABORATE TO PRODUCE A PLAY?

(Common core code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.4)

MATERIALS: Sticky name tags, pens or pencils. Character job descriptions and meet-and-greet trivia game can be downloaded at <http://www.roundabouttheatre.org/Roundabout/media/Roundabout/PDF/UPSTAGE/2015-2016/NOISES-OFF-pre-show-activity.pdf>

PREPARE Prepare sticky name tags with the name of one of the *Noises Off* characters for each student. (Repeating names is fine.) Place the nametags in an envelope with the character's job description and the meet-and-greet trivia game. At the beginning of the activity, have each student attach a name tag to their shirt and familiarize themselves with their job descriptions.

ACTIVATE Host a meet-and-greet for the *Nothing On* company. Students should be prepared to shake hands, mingle, and make conversation in role. Their goal is to complete the meet-and-greet trivia game as quickly as possible. The rules: they can reference their own job descriptions, but they can't show them to anyone else. They must stay in role at all times.

REFLECT Which character has the most power in this production? Why? Which character has the least power? What, besides their jobs, gives someone power?

HOW DOES A SET DESIGNER CREATE A SET THAT ALLOWS FOR MULTIPLE ENTRANCE AND EXIT POINTS?

(Common core code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7)

ANALYZE The setting of *Nothing On*, the play within *Noises Off*, is described as:

A delightful 16th-century posset mill, 25 miles from London. Lovingly converted, old-world atmosphere, many period features. Fully equipped with every aid to modern living and beautifully furnished throughout.

The house comprises: an open-plan living area, with a staircase leading to a gallery. A notable feature is the extensive range of entrances and exits provided. On the ground floor the front door gives access to the mature garden and delightful village beyond. Another door leads to the elegant panelled study, and a third to the light and airy modern service quarters. A fourth door opens into a luxurious bathroom, and a full-length south-facing window affords extensive views. On the gallery level is the door to the master bedroom and another to a small but well-proportioned linen cupboard. A corridor gives access to all the other rooms in the upper parts of the house. Another beautifully equipped bathroom opens off the landing halfway up the stairs.

SKETCH Create a thumbnail sketch (quick pencil drawing), rendering (scale, color drawing), or groundplan of the set of *Nothing On*. Incorporate the style and mood of the set as described, as well as the technical requirements of stairs, entrances, exits, and windows.

REFLECT Host a gallery walk to compare and contrast renderings. How did each designer solve the problem of the set? What similarities are present? What do you predict happens in this play? Why?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

HOW DO PLAYWRIGHTS USE STAGE DIRECTIONS TO CREATE A SILENT, BACKSTAGE STORY?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B)

After seeing how playwright Michael Frayn creates an elaborate backstage story through silent physical action in Act 2 of *Noises Off*, students write stage directions to create an original backstage story.

DISCUSS Ask students to recall as many of the events that happened silently in Act 2 of *Noises Off* as they can. Capture these events on the board, and discuss how the actions told the behind-the-scenes story of the characters. Explain that playwrights use stage directions to describe nonverbal action in a play.

WRITE Ask students to consider other situations where the public can't see what happens "behind-the-scenes" (e.g., backstage of a fashion show, a music concert or a live-TV taping; or the kitchen in a restaurant). Students choose one of these settings, imagine a few characters, and write a silent "backstage" scene. Instruct students to write at least 10 different stage directions that build to tell a story.

ACTIVATE Ask a few students to volunteer as actors. Allow students to slowly read their stage directions, giving time for the actors to perform them, one at a time. Reflect on how a story can be told silently through movement.

HOW DO ACTORS IMPROVISE COMEDIC SCENES ABOUT MISTAKEN IDENTITY?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B)

After seeing *Noises Off*, students discuss the elements of farce and improvise a classic farcical situation: the mistaken identity.

DISCUSS Have students read the article on farce on page 10 of this guide and lead a discussion on which elements of farce students noticed in *Noises Off*. (Try to distinguish which were part of the play-within-a-play, *Nothing On*, and which were part of the backstage play.) Explain that a common aspect of farce is the mistaken identity: a character is mistaken for someone else, often a person of much higher or much lower status.

PREPARE Break students into groups of 3 or 4, and provide each group with a situation of mistaken identity. (Suggested scenarios below) Students plan to improvise a 3-minute farce scene, centering around a case of mistaken identity and using other farce elements such as slapstick, romance, or moving in and out of doors.

- A student is mistaken for the Principal by a new teacher
- A Principal is mistaken for a student by a security guard
- A twin is mistaken for her/his sibling by the sibling's boyfriend/girlfriend
- Ordinary person is mistaken for a celebrity by a waiter

ACTIVATE Allow groups to improvise their scenes. Reflect on how the mistaken identity created comedy and on where else students have seen this plot device used in plays, films, and literature.

GLOSSARY

BALLCOCK a mechanism used for filling water tanks, found in toilets
In Nothing On, the Burglar steals the Brents' ballcock.

BULLION precious metals (e.g. gold or silver) in bulk form
In Nothing On, the Burglar reminisces about robbing bullion vaults.

DEMATERIALIZIZE to disappear, to lose physical substance
In Nothing On, Roger asks Mrs. Clackett if anything in the house has ever dematerialized.

DISTRAINT a legal term meaning the seizure of a person's property in order to repay a debt
In Nothing On, Philip finds a troubling letter from the government that mentions distraint.

FLOOZIE a person with a reputation of being promiscuous
In Nothing On, Flavia calls Vicki a floozie.

INCITEMENT the encouragement of unlawful behavior
In Nothing On, the Burglar says the Brents should be charged with incitement, since their house is so easy for him to break into.

INLAND REVENUE a department of the British Government that is responsible for collecting taxes
In Nothing On, Philip is hiding from Inland Revenue.

IRREVOCABLE cannot be changed or reversed
Lloyd snidely remarks that time is sliding irrevocably into the past.

LAVATORY a bathroom
Dotty suggests that Selsdon could be hiding in the lavatories.

MARBELLA a city in southern Spain
In Nothing On, Philip tells Roger he's from Marbella.

OXFAM an international organization that works towards ending poverty
Tim claims that he'll donate Selsdon's whisky to Oxfam.

POTENTATE a powerful ruler
Lloyd asks Frederick if potentates wear their pants around their ankles.

SHEIK an Arab leader
Frederick plays the role of the Sheik in Nothing On.

TAX EXILE a wealthy person who chooses to live in a country with low tax rates
In Nothing On, Philip and Flavia are tax exiles.

UNDERGROWTH small bushes or shrubs, usually growing under a taller tree
In Nothing On, Vicki sees a man lurking in the undergrowth.

VALIUM a prescription drug used to treat anxiety, muscle spasms, and seizures.
Lloyd jokes that God takes valium.

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ABOUT ROUNDABOUT

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY - 50TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director) is 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 founded in 1965 and now celebrating its 50th anniversary, 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. Roundabout presents this work on its five stages and across the country through national tours. Since moving to Broadway 20 years ago, Roundabout productions have received 208 Tony Award nominations, 202 Drama Desk nominations and 239 Outer Critics Circle nominations. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting roundabouttheatre.org.

2015-2016 SEASON



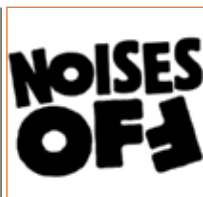
By Harold Pinter
Starring
Clive Owen, Eve Best
and Kelly Reilly
Directed by
Douglas Hodge



By Stephen Karam
Directed by
Joe Mantello



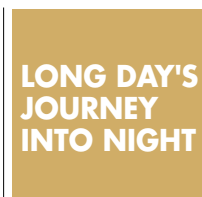
By Helen Edmundson
Based upon the novel by
Émile Zola
Starring
Keira Knightley,
Gabriel Ebert, Matt Ryan
and Judith Light
Directed by
Evan Cabnet



Starring
Andrea Martin, Campbell
Scott, Tracee Chimo,
Daniel Davis, David Furr,
Kate Jennings Grant,
Megan Hilty,
Rob McClure, and
Jeremy Shamos
By Michael Frayn
Directed by
Jeremy Herrin



Book by Joe Masteroff
Music by Jerry Bock
Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick
Starring
Laura Benanti, Zachary
Levi, Gavin Creel, Byron
Jennings, Michael McGrath
and Jane Krakowski
Choreographed by
Warren Carlyle
Directed by Scott Ellis



By Eugene O'Neill
Starring
Jessica Lange, Gabriel
Byrne, Michael Shannon
and John Gallagher, Jr.
Directed by
Jonathan Kent



By Lindsey Ferrentino
Directed by
Patricia McGregor

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH MARKETING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, ELIZABETH KANDEL

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the Marketing department's Associate Director?

Elizabeth Kandel: I am a native New Yorker, born and raised on the Upper West Side. I attended Syracuse University, where I graduated with a dual degree double major in Drama and Modern Foreign Languages. I was the first student to create a major in Theatre Management, and I hope one day to return and help to establish a fully accredited major for future arts administrators. I came to Roundabout directly after having worked for two years leading the team on the Roundabout account at Situation Interactive, our digital marketing agency. And, since everyone is connected in the theatre industry, I came to Situation Interactive having been a client of theirs while I worked at Blue Man Productions, the global headquarters for Blue Man Group.

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

EK: I oversee the advertising and promotional efforts for all of our shows. I am the point person for our two ad agencies, reviewing all ad materials (TV, print, radio, email blasts, banner ads, posters, etc.) before they are released into the world. I review media plans and

budgets to make sure that we are reaching the people who we feel would be interested in our shows. I also oversee marketing of our subscription options, which allow people to save money by committing to attending multiple productions in a season.

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

EK: The best part of my job is the product—I always say I'm grateful that I don't market toilet paper. I love seeing each of our productions and being proud that it's my job to let the world know that this terrific piece of theatre is running. The hardest part is time management—advertising is very deadline-oriented, so part of my job is often banging down doors to make sure we meet deadlines. Also, marketing planning happens several months in advance, so we are already starting to think about next season, even though this season has just begun. But our work is not yet done on this season's shows, so we're more or less working on two seasons simultaneously.

TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

EK: Roundabout has a 50-year history of producing incredible work. If your job is to sell a product, why wouldn't you want to sell the very best one? •

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org. Find us on:



WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

TICKET POLICY

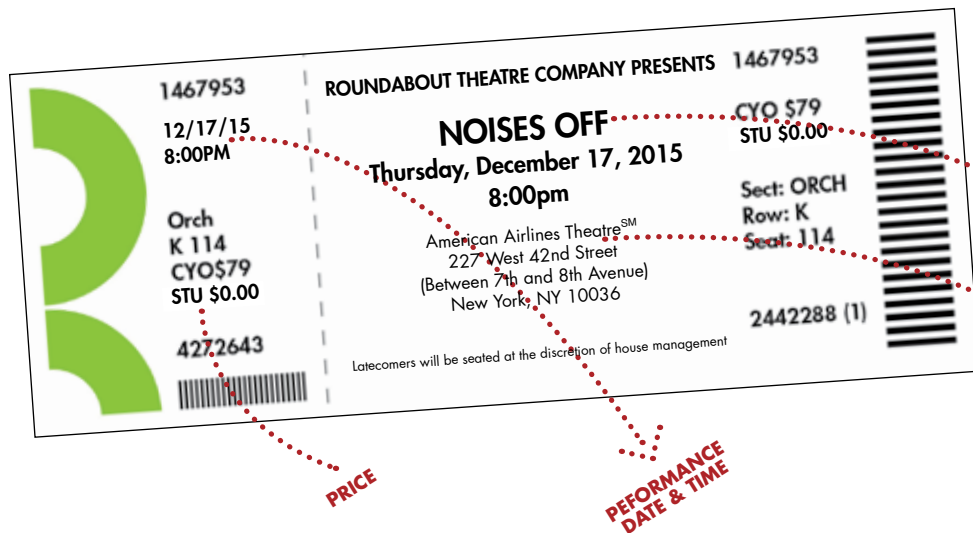
As a student, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat 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.



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