



marvin's room



**ROUNABOUT
THEATRE
COMPANY**

UPSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of

**EDUCATION AT
ROUNABOUT**

UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

Marvin's Room

By Scott McPherson

Directed by Anne Kauffman

Lee is a single mother who's been busy raising her troubled teenage son, Hank. Her estranged sister Bessie has her hands full with their elderly father, his soap opera-obsessed sister and a brand-new life-or-death diagnosis. Now the women are about to reunite for the first time in 18 years. Are Lee's good intentions and makeover skills enough to make up for her long absence? Can Bessie help Hank finally feel at home somewhere...or at least keep him from burning her house down? Can these almost-strangers become a family in time to make plans, make amends, and maybe make a trip to Disney World?

a note from Artistic Director Todd Haines

For me, this play beautifully demonstrates that life is rarely one thing at a time. While the theatrical world is filled with neatly defined dramas and comedies, *Marvin's Room* reminds us that the lines are more often blurred than not, and that it's in those blurry places that things really get interesting and where people can truly surprise us.

when Early '90s

where Florida

who

- Bessie:** Lee's older sister
- Lee:** Bessie's younger sister
- Ruth:** Bessie and Lee's aunt
- Marvin:** Bessie and Lee's father
- Hank:** Lee's son, 17 years old
- Charlie:** Lee's son and Hank's younger brother
- Doctor Wally:** Bessie's doctor
- Bob:** Dr. Wally's brother and receptionist
- Doctor Charlotte:** Hank's doctor
- Retirement Home Director**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Director Anne Kauffman	Page 4-5
Scott McPherson	Page 6-7
Interview with Actor Janeane Garofalo	Page 8-9
Scott McPherson and the Second Generation of AIDS Theatre	Page 10-11
Interview with Actor Lili Taylor.....	Page 12-13
Finding the Tone in <i>Marvin's Room</i>	Page 14
Sibling Psychology	Page 15
The Science behind <i>Marvin's Room</i>	Page 16
Caregiving.....	Page 17
Designer Statements	Page 18-19
Pre-Show Activities	Page 20
Post-Show Activities	Page 21
Glossary and Resources.....	Page 22
About Roundabout and Staff Interview.....	Page 23

UPSTAGE CONTRIBUTORS

MANAGING EDITORS:

Kim Oria, *Senior Manager of Education Programs*
Jill Rafson, *Director of New Play Development*

WRITERS:

Jason Jacobs, *Teaching Artist*
Leah Reddy, *Teaching Artist*
Nick Mecikalski, *Artistic Assistant*
Ashley Thomas, *Education Apprentice*
Rory McGregor, *Artistic Apprentice*

Copyright © 2017 Roundabout Theatre Company, Inc.
All rights reserved.

INTERVIEWS:

Ted Sod, *Education Dramaturg*

GRAPHIC DESIGNER: Darren Melchiorre

EDUCATION STAFF:

Jennifer DiBella, *Director of Education*
Mitch Mattson, *Associate Director of Education*
Paul Brewster, *Assistant Director of Education,
Teaching and Learning*
Abby Case, *Education Program Manager*
Karen Loftus, *Education Program Manager*
Sarah Kutnowsky, *Education Coordinator*
Jackie Maris, *Education Assistant*
Shannon Gingell, *Education Apprentice*
Gabrielle Esposito, *Education Intern*
Maury Mayen, *Education Intern*

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ANNE KAUFFMAN



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Director Anne Kauffman about her work on *Marvin's Room*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? Why did you want to become a theatre director? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

Anne Kauffman: I was born in Phoenix, Arizona. I was one of six children, and I often say that my theatrical chops came from trying to get attention from my family. I went to school in California for both undergrad and graduate school; two different universities, but I was an actor in undergrad—a bad actor as it turned out. I was cast a lot as guys, and it became very clear to me that I wasn't destined for the stage because of my acting talent. I took a class in directing, and my teacher, Michael Hackett, said to me, "You're a director." I learned quite a bit from Michael, and he sat me down one day and said, "What are you going to do now that you know you are a director?" It was really moving that he validated me in that way. Ultimately, I decided to move to New York in the early '90s when *Marvin's Room* debuted off-Broadway. I did not see it, but I was very aware of it. I like to say that *Marvin's Room* and I came to the city at the same time and we are now making our Broadway debut together. I was an intern at Circle Rep before it closed its doors. I interned in their literary office in 1988, and then I worked for David Esbjornson at Classic Stage Company, where I was his resident assistant director.

TS: How did you get involved with *The Civilians*?

AK: I went to graduate school at UCSD, and our mentor there, Les Waters, was part of Joint Stock at the Royal Court in London, and in that company were Max Stafford-Clark, Caryl Churchill, and Timberlake Wertenbaker, among others. Joint Stock created interview-based work. Les taught a class in it, and one of my classmates, Steve Cosson, really took to the method as a way of creating work. We started *The Civilians* upon coming back to New York in 1999/2000.

TS: Why did you choose to direct Scott McPherson's play *Marvin's Room*? What do you think this play is about?

AK: It is interesting that I'm making my Broadway debut with a revival and not a new play. I'm a new-play director who does weird new plays. But David Binder and Sharon Karmazin optioned the play, and David brought it to me. And actually, it has the elements that I traffic in as a new-play director; it has the absurdity and the kind of humanity that is in my wheelhouse, and it is a stranger play than people give it credit for. I think it's quite revolutionary in its own way. It's unfortunate that I never got to meet Scott McPherson, who died not long after the play debuted in New York. Not only do I miss having the playwright in the room, but by all accounts, he was a startling human. I've been speaking with Jim Bagley, who is the Literary Executor for the play, and I feel as though I'm beginning to know Scott through him and learning what he cared about and how his sense of humor, which is dark and very confrontational, functions. The play is about facing illness, caregiving, the labyrinthian medical establishment, and what it means to be in a family. What those relationships and responsibilities are. Scott's not being coy about any of these things, he's facing them head on, and he does it with a great sense of humor. His humor is what complicates the world in a really beautiful way.



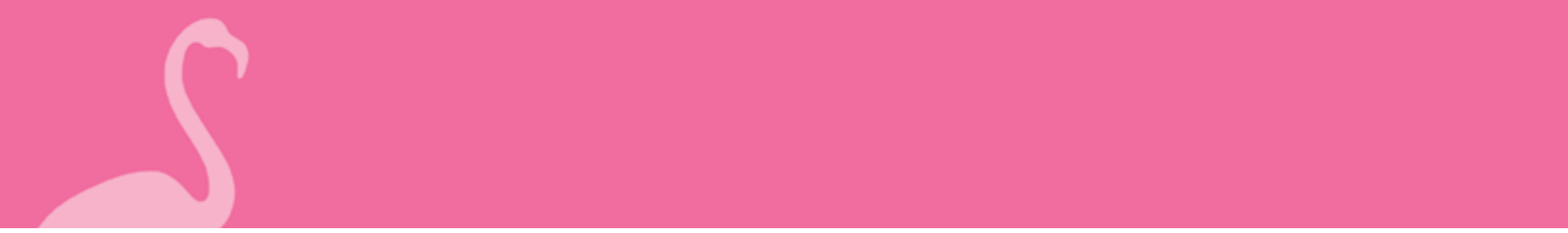
Anne Kauffman

TS: Do you see the play as contemporary or a period piece, or does it really matter?

AK: I think that what it's grappling with is contemporary. It's some of the details like what's available medically and...well...smoking indoors (that I refused to part with!) that put the action in a particular decade. But what Scott was talking about will forever be contemporary because we live in a culture that does not value caregiving and does not pay attention to or want to confront illness, aging, or death. In this country, those things are very neatly swept under the rug. This play exposes those issues and treats them with respect. The play values and celebrates the act of caregiving and celebrates our responsibility to one another—rather than trying to shut it away in a dark room.

TS: Will you give us some insight into your process as a director? What kind of research did you have to do?

AK: My way into any play is through the design—through the set design really—and, so, the set designer is my most important collaborator. I don't understand the play until I understand what the space is, and I don't mean "is it a kitchen?" I mean, what is the psychic space? What is the metaphor that most accurately expresses or captures the engine of the play? We have to address not only what the play is about but what the metaphor is that encapsulates it. We examine who these characters are within the space, what are their comings and goings? I know that sounds pedestrian, but it is actually very illuminating when you're trying to figure out where someone is physically coming from and where someone is physically going. For instance, in this play, there are a lot of locations. My collaborator on this set is Laura Jellinek, and



Janeane Garofalo and Lili Taylor

Marvin's Room are striving for is redefinition and a chance to reconfigure their relationship. One of the things that's important about the play is that the audience not jump to the conclusion that Bessie has sacrificed herself, that she has taken herself out of the world to take care of her father, Marvin, and her Aunt Ruth. It would be reductive to decide that Bessie's reality was Plan Z and not Plan A. I certainly think Lee judges Bessie in that way. And I think Bessie sees Lee as a fuck-up and someone who is shirking responsibility—but Lee has her own family who she's trying to be responsible for. I'm trying not to view Bessie as someone who is just taking care of her family or Lee as someone who has abandoned her family. I want to relook at their individual actions, not as negative choices, but as things that are fulfilling and right for who these women are.

what was important to us was finding the envelope of the play. When the audience walks into the theatre, what is the tone? What is the mood? What do we want to communicate? And then within that, if we do the envelope well, the interior machinations of going from space to space and how characters move from one location to another should follow with fluidity and ease. And the mechanism that we use to get from place to place has dramaturgical value. Laura and I approached this play as an absurdist journey through the medical establishment. For Bessie, it's a journey from caregiving to being taken care of. I think that Scott wrote the very first scene as a vaudeville to illuminate the idea that the byzantine medical establishment is a confusing and ridiculous entity. We start the play as a vaudeville downstage in one and then the curtain lifts and we see Bessie's home and on stage left there's a turntable and with each revolve of that turntable, we switch locations. That turntable ends up being a carousel at Disney World. So what you realize is that Bessie's life, within the span of the play, has been this circular and somewhat disorienting ride-like journey.

TS: I'm curious how you understand the relationship between Bessie and her sister, Lee?

AK: I have very deep relationships with my sisters. It is very difficult for me to understand how sisters could not be close because I'm so dependent on mine. I think that within families, children take on certain responsibilities, and they are labeled from a very young age. What kind of person are we in our family's dynamic? Are we the black sheep? Are we someone who's a really good student? Someone who's maternal or someone who is a rebel? I feel like I'm the rebel in my family. Although we aren't fractious like the two sisters in *Marvin's Room*, I understand that family is the most wonderful and the most heinous source of who we are as individuals. It gives us everything. It writes our history into the future. I think the thing that the sisters in

TS: Let's talk about casting. What traits did you need in the actors?

AK: I think that this play is trafficking in and articulates the need for generosity and that we all need to model that behavior. So, I was looking for actors who have reputations for being generous. There's so much to explore in this play. We all need to give this play the kind of exploration it deserves, and I often find if I'm getting resistance from an actor, it denies the company from going as deeply as it can. And this is just too important of a play to settle for a surface reading. What the play is saying about this culture and what we need from one another requires actors who are giving.

TS: Do you have any advice for young people who say they want to direct? And how do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?

AK: I would say you've just got to do it. You have to do it whenever you can. Get your friends together and work on your craft. You have to put stuff up wherever and whenever. It can be just two chairs in your living room, but figure it out so that you start to understand what you're interested in and what your voice is. Then you can worry about your career.

I feel very clear nowadays that when I'm attracted to a play, it's because it usually includes real questions I have about my life. What inspires me are the questions I have about how to move forward in this country right now. And I seek out work that is an exploration in answering those questions. •

SCOTT McPHERSON



With the opening of *Marvin's Room* at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago in 1990, playwright Scott McPherson emerged as one of the most talked-about new voices in the American theatre. The play went on to be produced in New York at Playwrights Horizons and then at the Minetta Lane Theater, garnering rave reviews each step of the way. *The Chicago Tribune* called it a "beautifully written, deeply moving new play"; *The New York Times* hailed McPherson as an "original" and "unexpected" voice who "you really must hear...for yourself." Tragically, however, McPherson began battling AIDS-related health issues shortly after the writing of *Marvin's Room* in the early '90s, and he passed away on November 7, 1992 at the age of 33. Now, 25 years after his untimely death, McPherson is remembered not only for his remarkable contributions to the American theatre, but also for the wisdom and warmth that he brought to a generation living under the spectre of AIDS.

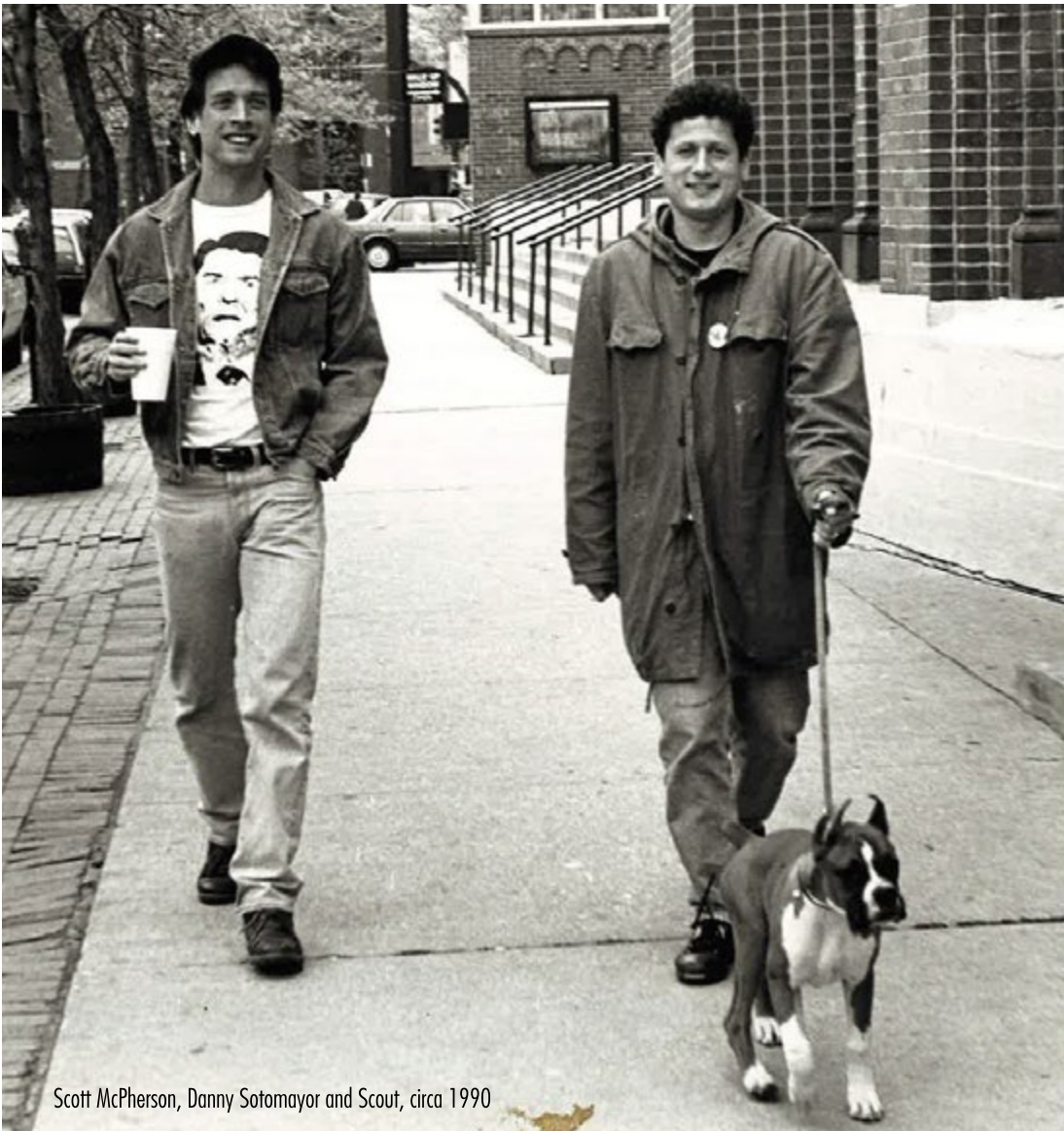
For all the connections to the AIDS crisis that can be drawn in *Marvin's Room*, the play was not actually written with the disease directly in mind, but rather was inspired by McPherson's childhood experiences with his ailing family members. McPherson was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1959. When he was only two years old, his father died in a car accident. To ease the family's ensuing financial burden, McPherson's mother moved them in with their maternal grandmother, who was struggling with cancer and, as McPherson notes in the program for Hartford Stage Company's 1990 production of *Marvin's Room*, had morphine injections that came at "regular intervals" with commercial breaks for "The Ed Sullivan Show." McPherson's mother, now a single parent, not only had to raise her three children and care for her mother, but also had to work as a department store sales clerk part-time to keep food on the table. "[My mother] threw herself at her responsibilities with a terrifying determination," McPherson wrote in the Hartford Stage Company program, "afraid if she gave any less she would awake to find she was running off in the other direction, leaving all of us behind to fend for ourselves." Much of the source material for *Marvin's Room*, then, derives from McPherson's childhood experiences watching his mother immerse herself in her familial responsibilities. The play, McPherson contends, is not as much about the dreariness of living with disease as it is about "love and the power of giving yourself to someone else."

Marvin's Room wasn't the first play of McPherson's that explored the unexpected humor in tragedy. While



McPherson was away studying theatre and dance at Ohio University in the early '80s, his oldest brother died in a motorcycle accident. McPherson's subsequent play, *Til the Fat Lady Sings*, follows a family who, in the wake of the death of their own son, tries desperately to grieve in private while facing down a barrage of well-meaning but comically overbearing sympathizers. Both darkly funny and painfully poignant, *Til the Fat Lady Sings* premiered at Lifeline Theatre in Chicago in 1987. It was McPherson's first full-length playwriting credit in the midst of a career of writing for local television stations and acting in various shows throughout the city.

Encouraged by the success of *Til the Fat Lady Sings*, McPherson began work on *Marvin's Room* in the late '80s and submitted it as an unsolicited manuscript to the Goodman Theatre, which accepted and produced it. It wasn't long after its opening at the Goodman that McPherson met editorial cartoonist and AIDS activist Daniel Sotomayor, who would later become his lover. The pair moved in together, soon learning that Daniel was HIV-positive. A few months later, McPherson himself was hospitalized for complications resulting from AIDS-related pneumonia—quite literally alongside Sotomayor, who



Scott McPherson, Danny Sotomayor and Scout, circa 1990

shared a hospital room with McPherson while receiving his own treatment for AIDS-related health issues. It was in the aforementioned program for the Hartford Stage Company's production of *Marvin's Room* that McPherson publicly announced the illness from which he and Sotomayor suffered, along with all too many of their friends. In the note, McPherson describes their community as a group of people who "take care of each other, the less sick caring for the more sick." The play, then, which had emerged out of McPherson's memories of his ailing relatives and the care that his mother had administered to them, became, almost unintentionally, a mirror to McPherson's own life and the community of AIDS sufferers who would alternately assume the role of caregiver in a time of crisis. "At times,"

McPherson wrote, "an unbelievably harsh fate is transcended by a simple act of love, by caring for one another. By most we are thought of as dying. But as dying becomes a way of life, the meaning of the word blurs."

As *Marvin's Room* prepared for its New York premiere, McPherson and Sotomayor fought to take a "vacation" from their illnesses, but they found it harder and harder to plan around their health. At the opening night of *Marvin's Room* at Playwright Horizons in December 1991, McPherson was in noticeably bad condition, as was Sotomayor, who shivered under a blanket for the duration of the performance. McPherson nevertheless continued writing, even though he would every so often refer to himself, jokingly, as a "playwrit." Paramount had purchased the film rights to *Marvin's Room*, and McPherson himself

was tasked with adapting it into a screenplay. He finished the screenplay in 1992, but, sadly, it would be his last completed work. Sotomayor passed away on February 5, 1992 from complications from AIDS, nine months before McPherson himself would succumb to the same illness.

Marvin's Room went on to win the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play and the Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Off-Broadway Play, and the film, which stars Diane Keaton, Meryl Streep, and Leonardo DiCaprio, premiered in 1996. Though McPherson's career was short-lived, his unique humor and sagacious insight made for a legacy from which audiences are still learning today. •

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR JANEANE GAROFALO



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with actor Janeane Garofalo about her role as Lee in *Marvin's Room*.

Ted Sod: Will you talk a bit about where you were born, where you were educated and how your career evolved?

Janeane Garofalo: I'll start with Newton, New Jersey, where I was born in 1964. My family, at the time, lived in Sparta, New Jersey. My mom went into labor near Newton. I lived in Sparta very briefly and then we moved to Orwigsburg, Pennsylvania. The majority of my life was spent in Madison, New Jersey with a few years in Houston, Texas because my dad worked for Exxon, which was headquartered in both Elizabeth, New Jersey and Houston. We went back and forth. Then, I went to Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island.

TS: Did you ever have any acting training?

JG: No, I didn't train, but I knew I wanted to be involved in comedy. I didn't start acting until I was 27. That was mostly because of my friendship with both Ben Stiller and Garry Shandling who both, in the same year, had TV shows. One was on Fox called "The Ben Stiller Show." Garry was on HBO in "The Larry Sanders Show." I got into acting very fortuitously, but unprepared. As it happens sometimes, I was given access to opportunities that I may or may not have deserved, and I worked quite a bit in the '90s. Then, those opportunities slowed down. Now, I have to audition for everything the way one would at the beginning of their career. It's almost like I've had to start again. This isn't me saying, "Oh, poor me!"; I'm just telling you how the heat eventually wears off as it did for me in the early 2000s. So, I took two years off to work at Air America. After two years, it's really hard as a middle aged lady to jump back into acting. A few years ago, I did do a play with The New Group entitled *Russian Transport* directed by Scott Elliott, which was really my first theatre work. I had done some work with the Fire Department Theater Company, but they were short vignettes. I was shocked when I got the audition for *Marvin's Room*. I never thought I would get it because I still don't perceive of myself as a "real actor."

TS: What do you think the play *Marvin's Room* is about? How do you relate to Lee, the character you are playing?

JG: Many good stories are essentially about the same thing: human beings. It doesn't matter what the era is or what the country is or where they are socio-economically or what have you. If the story is good, it's about the human condition. How people relate to each other, the personal baggage that they bring to their relationships. In this case, there is the childhood issue with my character, Lee, and who did what to whom. She feels she was treated badly and we see how memory plays into that. There's a constant tension between Lee and her sister, Bessie, regarding Lee's leaving and not helping Bessie take care of their dad. It's like any family.

How I relate to Lee, personally, is that I can't spend an enormous amount of time with my family. Unfortunately, when my siblings and I get together, we regress. We're 15 again. After the first hour of pleasantries, here comes the same argument we've been having since we were kids—who did what to whom and who felt slighted.




They all seem not to mind hanging out with each other. We are very different politically, culturally. I was raised in a conservative, religious household. By the time I was out of college, I was not only an atheist, but quite liberal in my politics. That is not the norm for my family in general. I find it difficult to navigate peaceably through certain conversations that come up. I don't want to have the same arguments over and over. I don't want to have the same conversations. I'm not proud of this, but I keep my distance. There's a resentment that builds up on both sides. This is, again, not me asking for sympathy. I had a very lovely childhood. I'm just saying I relate to the play in that I have kept a wider distance from my nuclear family than my other siblings have.

TS: What kind of preparation do you do for a role like this?

JG: I just think about it. I don't want to over-prepare before we go into rehearsals because one never knows. You don't want to get locked into something because it can be difficult to unlock yourself. One must remain completely open. I also don't want to memorize it before we start rehearsing. I don't want to get locked into a tone of voice or an inflection.

TS: What do you make of Lee's relationship to her children, Hank and Charlie?

JG: It seems like Lee is exacerbating the problems with her son, Hank. This is a single parent who has struggled and struggled and made bad choices. She knows this and she's her own harshest critic. It's



hard for any single parent. It's hard to be a parent, period. To do it well is extremely difficult, and to be on your own and economically challenged, that's really difficult. Lee chose a partner who is working against her, to the detriment of her sons. She has enough guilt and anger about her choices without others suggesting she's a terrible parent or a terrible person.

TS: What do you look for from a director?

JG: Any good director knows it's a collaboration. The actors need to feel not only validated and confident, but that they are also in the hands of a man or woman who is absolutely at the top of their game. Even if they're not, they have to pretend that they are. If you're working on network television, it has nothing to do with quality 90 percent of the time, nothing to do with, "Let's deal with character. Let's deal with narrative. Let's deal with content." In fact, that is very low on the list of things that are thought about during the day, unfortunately. When you work in television, you realize very quickly that obedience is prized above all. Whereas, when you work in theatre, you have time. Also, everybody comes prepared. Everybody is in service to the whole. You must have the long game in mind, have everybody's best interest in mind. You have to be as generous as possible and listen, listen, listen. Systems work at their best when everybody is pulling for it and working with empathy and intelligence—both emotional and academic.

TS: Do you have any advice for young people who think they want to be part of show business?

JG: I would say, first of all, really think about why you want to do this. Really, why are you doing this? If it's to become successful, then don't do it, because there's too much pain involved in rejection. Part of the human condition is that we all want to be seen. We all want to be heard. It's a natural impulse. I am a perfect example of that. If I didn't have stand up comedy—which I find very fulfilling—I don't know what I'd do because I can control my stand up gigs. I can book them. Part of the beauty of living in New York and being here for many years is you can do stand up every night, if you want. You can find fulfillment. With acting, it's not up to me. I have no control over it. I have to wait to see if anybody is interested in me. It's constant waiting until you have sustained career success. If you have sustained career success, then you have control. If you don't have that—and 90 percent of SAG actors don't—it's a waiting, hoping, and rejection game. Also, if you're really serious about acting, stay away from mainstream television and, for the most part, mainstream film because you're not going to be satisfied there. Start doing theatre. Theatre is where you'll become good. That's where you'll get fulfillment, and that's where you're going to work on excellent scripts.

TS: Are there things that inspire you as an artist?

JG: I actually don't call myself an artist. I feel like I haven't achieved that yet. I don't feel like I've earned it. I aspire to be better than I am. I don't mean that in a weird way.

TS: Who is an artist in your mind, then?

JG: Mark Rylance. Not only is his work very subtle, there's no one else that would have done it that way. Obviously, Meryl Streep. I just

watched *Heartburn* this morning at 4:00 a.m. I love that movie. Albert Brooks. Carol Burnett. Norman Lear. Do you remember SCTV with Catherine O'Hara, Andrea Martin, Joe Flaherty and Martin Short? It was a Canadian sketch show that started in 1975. I would say those people are artists because of their attention to detail, their specificity and the quality of content they create.

TS: Since you've done a variety of work—stand-up comedy, television, radio, plays—what haven't you done that you still want to do?

JG: I hope that in the future I have the opportunity to work with certain people. I am not saying I deserve this, but I would love to be in a Coen Brothers film or a Woody Allen movie. I would like to work with Lena Dunham. I've gotten a chance to audition for the Coen Brothers before. That was a thrill of a lifetime. I've gotten the chance to audition for "Girls," which was also thrilling. I would like to have those opportunities again because I think that they write great stuff. I would also love to be on a British detective series or any Masterpiece Theatre classic or contemporary thing. That is a dream. I'm a bit of an anglophile, especially TV-wise. I would love to work with Armando Iannucci. I would love to work with Steve Coogan. Also, to live in England and work for the BCC would be a joy. They're all high-brow ideas, aren't they? Classy, I'm real classy. •



SCOTT MCPHERSON AND THE SECOND GENERATION OF AIDS THEATRE



While it makes no direct references to AIDS and features no gay characters, *Marvin's Room* was recognized as a response to the plague. In its review of the 1992 movie version, *Entertainment Weekly* declared, "The AIDS subtext is everywhere, if you look for it." In fact, McPherson's initial inspiration came from events in his own family, years before the virus. However, he and his partner, Daniel Sotomayor, were both struggling with AIDS and its symptoms as the play was being produced.

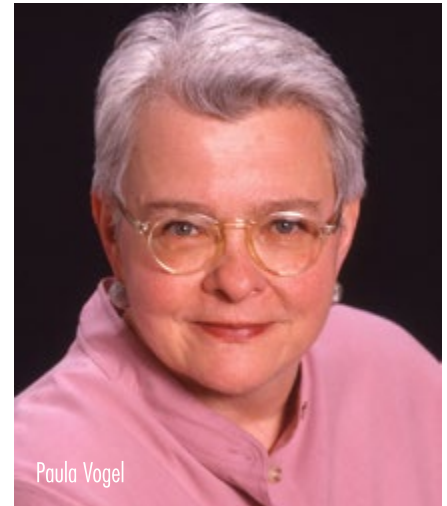
Given that AIDS first struck gay men in New York and San Francisco, it's not surprising that some of the earliest artistic responses to AIDS appeared in theatres. The "first generation" of AIDS plays include William M. Hoffman's *As Is* (1984) and Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985). Written in response to unprecedented crisis and governmental indifference, these critical dramas conveyed educational messages and promoted action and behavior to ensure the survival of the gay community. Theatrically, they were traditionally structured, realistic tragedies; AIDS and its manifestations were portrayed in a direct, head-on manner.

First produced in Chicago in 1990, *Marvin's Room* sits among "the second generation of AIDS plays." In her introduction to *Sharing the Delirium: Second Generation AIDS Plays and Performances*, professor Therese Jones describes a shift in the tone, messages, and theatrical forms in the early '90s. Although still fatal, AIDS was "no longer an event to be comprehended but a reality be accommodated." Humor became a coping strategy, and these plays often employed absurdity, farce, romance, and satire. Stylistically, they drew on magical realism and fantasy. Playwrights were now exploring indirect, metaphorical ways to address AIDS. Many of these plays started out in smaller downtown performance spaces and in cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle.

In New York, the two best-known plays from this period were Craig Lucas's *Prelude to a Kiss* (originally produced in 1990 and revived by Roundabout in 2007) and Paula Vogel's *The Baltimore Waltz* (1992). Recalling the early years of the epidemic, Lucas said, "it was so unimaginably strange and new and psychotic-seeming: friends and colleagues dropping from view, suddenly gone." He captured this disorientation through a fairy-tale metaphor. *Prelude to a Kiss* features a heterosexual couple, Peter and Rita. At their wedding, a mysterious old man kisses Rita, causing their souls to exchange bodies. Peter's quest to recover Rita's spirit

raises questions of whether he can still love her in the body of an aging old man. For audiences, the transformation of a healthy young person into a frail older body clearly read as an allegory about the impact of AIDS.

Vogel dedicated *The Baltimore Waltz* to her deceased brother, "because I can't sew," a reference to the AIDS memorial quilt. The play follows Anna, an unmarried schoolteacher who has been diagnosed with a fatal syndrome, "Acquired Toilet Disease," and her brother Carl, on a whimsical European tour.



Paula Vogel

While Anna indulges in food and sex, Carl searches for a cure for his sister. Fantastical and silly, the play builds to a heartbreaking revelation that the entire journey has taken place in Anna's mind. Through her imagination, Anna mourns her brother's death. *The New York Times* called it a new kind of AIDS play, "that rides completely off the rails of documentary reality, trying to rise above and even remake the world in which the disease exists."

By most accounts, McPherson did not initially approach *Marvin's Room* as an AIDS play; rather it was about "love and the power of giving yourself to someone else." Yet during the Chicago premiere, he was surprised when reviewers did not make a connection to the virus. When it moved to Hartford Stage, McPherson added a program note disclosing his AIDS status and discussing his experiences as a caretaker for his lover and friends. Not seeing himself as an activist, McPherson had mixed feelings about this statement. Still, he came around to seeing the play's subtle message. "You could say *Marvin's Room* is about acceptance. And I'm not sure that the proper response to AIDS isn't anger—demanding more from the government and not just accepting what's been given to us. On the other hand, when people are dying of AIDS, to say that they're worthy of care has almost become a political statement in and of itself." •



AIDS Advocate Organization, ACT UP NYC, rallying against NYC Mayor Ed Koch's AIDS Housing Plan, 1989



AIDS Candlelight March in NYC, 1983

LOST GENERATION OF PLAYWRIGHTS

CHARLES LUDLAM (1943-1987)

"... a master of travesty, creating in a tiny grotto theater on Sheridan Square critically and popularly acclaimed parodies of such familiar genres as the dime novel ('The Mystery of Irma Vep'), film noir ('The Artificial Jungle') and opera ('Camille,' 'Der Ring Gott Farblonjet')." — *The New York Times*

Playwright, director, and actor Ludlam came of age in New York's downtown scene in the late 1960s, performing both in and out of drag. Ludlam used camp to challenge societal assumptions about gender. In 1968 he founded The Ridiculous Theatre, where he wrote and performed with his partner Everett Quinton. Ludlam had written 29 plays and was on the verge of achieving more mainstream recognition when he succumbed to AIDS.

HOWARD ASHMAN (1951-1991)

"[He] wrote the award-winning songs for *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*—the movies that saved Disney's animation studio. He was also one of the AIDS epidemic's many victims." — *Vice*

Born in Baltimore, Ashman moved to New York in 1974 and worked as a book editor while writing plays. He became the artistic director for WPA Theatre, which first produced his 1982 hit, *Little Shop Of Horrors* (music by Alan Menken). The show ran for five years and became the highest-grossing off-Broadway musical at the time. His show *Smile* (music by Marvin Hamlisch) had a short run

on Broadway in 1986. Ashman and Menken were best known for their Disney musicals and won an Oscar® for "Under The Sea" from *The Little Mermaid*.

REZA ABDOH (1963-1995)

"... a perfectionist, a closet martinet and prodigiously gifted creator of effects, co-ordinating bombardments of noise, physical energy and outrage." — *The Independent*

Abdoh was an Iranian-born, American director/playwright whose large-scale, experimental theatrical productions were seen widely in Europe and Los Angeles. Abdoh's nightmarish spectacles addressed sexual politics and urban decay. He created site-specific work in New York with En Garde Arts before forming his own ensemble, Dar A Luz, in Los Angeles, where he was acclaimed for his original pieces: *The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice*, *Bogeyman*, and *The Law of Remains*.

HARRY KONDOLEON (1955-1994)

"...for a decade beginning in 1983 he was practically ubiquitous in the New York theater." — *The New York Times*

Born and raised in Forest Hills, a product of NYC public schools with an MFA from Yale, the two-time Obie winner was a prominent voice in New York theatre through much of the 1980s. Without conforming to rules of genre and form, Kondoleon's comedic plays like *Christmas on Mars*, *Self-Torture*, and *Zero Positive* satirized the self-indulgence and greed of 1980s society. Shortly before his death, Kondoleon published a novel about a young man with AIDS and his obsession with death.

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR LILI TAYLOR



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with actor Lili Taylor about her role as Bessie in *Marvin's Room*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born? Where did you get your training? Did you have any teachers who profoundly influenced you

Lili Taylor: I was born in the Northern Suburbs of Chicago, very close to Evanston. Because I was so close to Evanston, I had the good fortune of studying with Joyce Piven at the Piven Theater Workshop. I studied with Joyce from when I was about 12 years old until the age of 22. Joy was the undercurrent of her teaching. Truth and Joy. What a beautiful combo.

TS: Why did you choose to do the role of Bessie in the revival of Scott McPherson's *Marvin's Room*? What do you think the play is about?

LT: I read the play and was struck by its honesty and purity. It was Scott McPherson's only play, and it contains an urgency and energy and profundity that comes from a this-is-your-last-chance kind of moment. The play is about relationships as opposed to plot or results—so it's difficult to sum up. But if I was going to try, I would first turn to Tolstoy's perfect articulation of every family: Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. The "in its own way" part is what the story is about, and it's fascinating.

TS: What kind of preparation or research do you have to do before rehearsals begin in order to play this role?

LT: I like to be off book before I begin rehearsal but, unfortunately, I won't be for this because I've been too damn busy. So, I'm kind of looking forward to shaking things up a little bit—that's never a bad idea. The main thing I try to do before rehearsal is empty myself out, so that I'm as open as I can be to Bessie, the other actors, the truth of the play, and Anne Kauffman, the director.

TS: How is this character relevant to you? I realize the rehearsal process hasn't begun yet, but can you share some of your initial thoughts about who your character is with us?

LT: I relate to Bessie because my father was quite sick, and I put a lot of energy into helping him out. I made sacrifices, but to a much lesser degree than Bessie. I can imagine staying home with my family in a different life. That different life is in the form of Bessie, and I can imagine it.

TS: At the early stage in your work, how do you understand Bessie's relationship to her sister, father, and aunt?

LT: If anything, the relationship with Bessie's aunt and father is much more complex than the relationship with her sister. I'm very curious to discover all the different feelings that Bessie has regarding Marvin (her father) and Ruth (her aunt) and how she manages them. Has she suppressed feelings in order to cope? How much of it is a choice and how much of it is from a place of obligation? How aware is she of the above questions? I'm glad I don't have answers to these questions now, but I better by previews.



TS: What do you look for from a director when working on a play?

LT: I look to the director for everything. Absolutely everything. I want to collaborate with them completely. Find out what they need, let them know what I need, and help each other. I feel like I can put all my trust in Anne. She will take me to where I need to go. I have full confidence in that.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?

LT: One way is by continuing to work with creative people. That is the food. That is what it's about.

TS: Students reading this interview will want to know what it takes to be a successful actress—what advice can you give young people who say they want to act?

LT: I always say: "To thine own self be true." Because it is you who is going to be playing those characters, and you want the work you do to come from you and not from who you think you should be. It is you who is going to be choosing those characters, and if there is one that you don't connect with or doesn't feel right, you can be true to yourself and say, "No." There are a lot of cooks in the acting kitchen, and at the end of the day you need to check in with yourself and listen. •



Janeane Garofalo and Lili Taylor

FINDING THE TONE IN MARVIN'S ROOM



Marvin's Room follows a family trying to take care of an elderly father, Marvin, who has had multiple strokes. The caregivers themselves struggle with their own issues: Bessie is dying of leukemia, Aunt Ruth has three collapsed vertebrae, and Lee has a troublesome teenager on her hands. Understandably, this does not sound like a conventional set-up for a laugh-out-loud comedy, but *Marvin's Room* is just that. In 1992, in their review of the play, *The New York Times* commented, "Is there any chance you will believe me when I tell you that 'Marvin's Room' is one of the funniest plays of this year as well as one of the wisest and most moving? Maybe not. And that's how it should be. When the American theater gains a new voice this original, this unexpected, you really must hear it for yourself."

There was much clamor over the originality of McPherson's voice because it signaled a new, innately American comedic tone for a play. In the same *Times* review, critic Frank Rich conceded that McPherson had inspiration in absurdist comedy (for example, Eugene Ionesco) but opined that "'Marvin's Room' is most decidedly not a soap [opera] itself. Nor is it a pitch-black gallows farce in the British mode of Joe Orton or Peter Nichols...the play is just too American to subscribe to European cynicism. It sees life as it is and how it could be, and it somewhat optimistically imagines how one might bridge that distance without ever sentimentalizing the truth."

By the time McPherson wrote *Marvin's Room*, the seeds of this distinctly American blending of tragedy and comedy in a family drama had already taken root in American plays. These earlier American plays tended to be much more directly influenced by the European absurdist tradition, but

with an American flavor. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* by Christopher Durang, for example, explored the author's own parents' marriage in a much more overtly satirical and absurdist way. However, the seamless blending of seriousness and comedy is present there, with the *New Yorker* review reasoning that Durang "has perfected the art of turning bitterness into comedy without losing its edge." What separated McPherson, however, was the lightheartedness of his comedy—edge was not his endgame.

After McPherson, other authors explored this approach to grief within a family structure through tragicomedy. Nicky Silver, a year later, wrote *Pterodactyls*, which similarly used comedy to play with serious family drama. Even more so, in 2011 Silver wrote *The Lyons*, in which a family gathers at a hospital where the patriarch lies dying from cancer. Despite the setting, the play is replete with laughs.

So in the face of horrible catastrophe, why write something light-hearted? To McPherson, life was rarely all wonderful or all terrible—it was everything at once. As we witness in Bessie's journey through the medical system, even cancer treatment can lead to laughs. By allowing these contrasting highs and lows to come together on stage, *Marvin's Room* gives us an unflinching glimpse of a heightened version of our own reality. As Laura Esterman, who played Bessie in the play's original production, has said, the piece is "so impossible to describe to people...I tell people, 'I'm playing this character who's dying of leukemia, and it's such a wonderful, funny play.' Then they just look at me strangely." And it's that reaction, that sense of walking an emotional tightrope, that makes the play so delightfully (and sadly) unique. •



SIBLING PSYCHOLOGY

Since the Nineteenth century, there has been much debate and speculation on the family structure and how the family unit shapes personality. In the case of siblings, there have been thousands of scientific studies on how much of a role birth order plays in child development. Some studies have definitively said that birth order affects your personality, while others have completely refuted this. (As for those without siblings, only children have a reputation for being perfectionists and high-achievers, constantly seeking attention and approval from their parents and from others.) However, we exist in a world where there are stereotypes of personalities of oldest, middle, and youngest children that are consistent across literature.

There is a suggestion that siblings' personalities differ insofar as they adopt different psychological strategies to win their parents' attention and favor. By this theory, the oldest child may be more likely to identify with authority and to support

the status quo, while younger children are more likely to seek attention by rebelling.

According to Dr. Kevin Leman, author of *The Birth Order Book* and *The First-Born Advantage*: "Kids learn their role in their family... firstborns are held to a higher standard. As kids come into the birth order, parents loosen up."

Attributing personality traits to people based on birth order has permeated history both with and without statistical support. It has inspired thousands of different reports and scientific studies, but the results are still largely inconclusive. However, the below stereotypes continue to thrive in our culture, as we see in the two sibling pairs (Bessie and Lee, Hank and Charlie) of *Marvin's Room*, and will likely continue to be a shorthand for understanding families for generations to come. •

OLDEST CHILD

- Firstborn children tend to be achievement-oriented, often performing well in school and thriving in leadership positions. For example, the majority of U.S. Presidents are firstborn or only children, and a 2007 study demonstrated that 43% of 1,582 CEOs were firstborns.
- According to the Huffington Post, there is a lot of research to support the above personality profile, including a 2012 paper reviewing more than 500 studies from the past 20 years. In the paper, psychologists from the University of Georgia showed that the firstborn child (or the one who has taken on the psychological role of the "eldest") is the most likely to hold leadership roles and to strive for achievement. A 2009 study published in the journal *Child Development* also found that firstborn children are more likely to conform, which can manifest as seeking to please their parents and others by doing well in school or in work.
- Firstborns tend to be responsible, competitive, and conventional, whereas laterborns have to "distinguish themselves and create a specific niche by being playful, cooperative, and especially, rebellious," Belgian psychologists Vassilis Saroglou and Laure Fiasse wrote in a 2003 paper published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*.

MIDDLE CHILD

- The middle child tends to be fiercely loyal, the family peace-keeper, and often possesses very agreeable personality traits.
- According to the Huffington Post, a 2010 review of birth order literature also found that it's common for middle children to be sociable, faithful in their relationships, and good at relating to both older and younger people.
- Due to their position in the family, as being stuck in the middle, middle children tend to be good at mitigation and negotiation because they know how to keep the peace.

YOUNGEST CHILD

- Often considered "the baby of the family," the youngest child tends to have a rebellious streak and to be more attention-seeking and more creative. This is a direct result of how parenting often changes from the first to the last child—it becomes more relaxed, lenient, and assured after raising one child.
- The stereotype of the youngest child is that they know how to play the system, because they have known how to game their parents. They are social creatures, manipulative and outgoing, and they make good salespeople.
- There is often a suggestion that there is a link between the youngest child and "problem behavior" but, so far, no concrete links have been found.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND MARVIN'S ROOM



Marvin's Room revolves around illness, around the care we need when our bodies betray us and the ways our frailties bind us to each other. The play begins when Bessie, a woman who has devoted her life to caring for her ailing father Marvin and Aunt Ruth, is diagnosed with leukemia.

Marvin suffered a **stroke** twenty years earlier. A stroke occurs when blood flow to part of the brain is cut off. Strokes can be hemorrhagic, caused by a burst aneurysm or a weakened blood vessel leaking into the brain, or ischemic, caused by a blood clot blocking an artery carrying blood to the brain. The effects of a stroke depend on what activities are controlled by the damaged area of the brain. Marvin's paralysis, incontinence, and aphasia (difficulty speaking or processing speech) are common post-stroke conditions. Many stroke survivors improve and regain certain abilities over time.

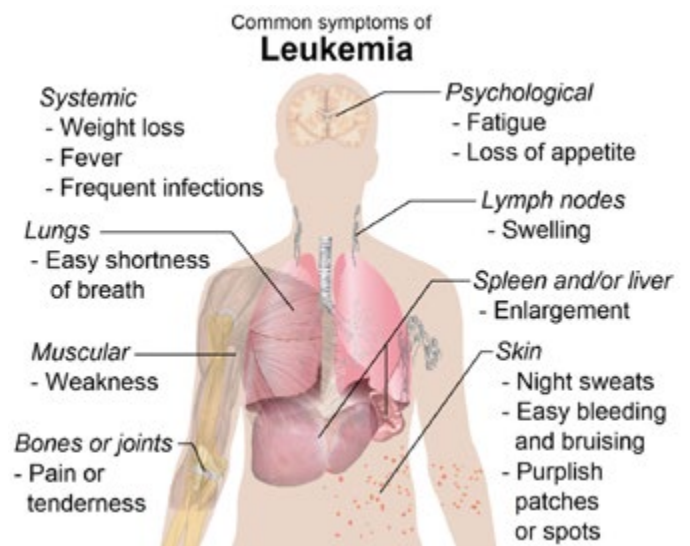
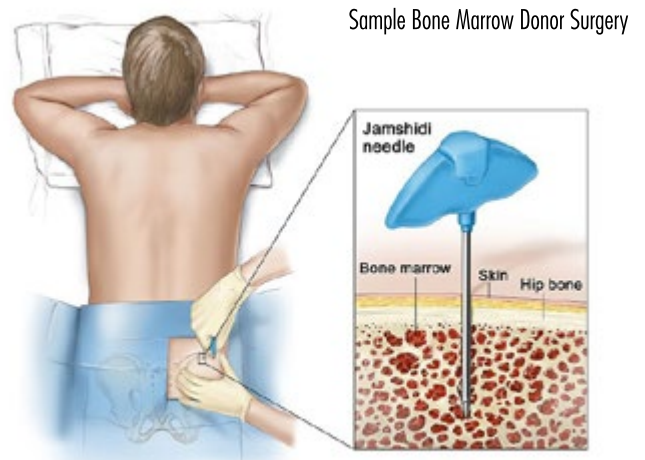
Aunt Ruth has suffered from lifelong back pain and **collapsed vertebrae**. Collapsed vertebrae develop when osteoporosis, a common condition in which bones weaken and thin, causes vertebrae to fracture in front and compress. Patients develop a rounded hump in the upper back (often called a dowager's hump, as it appears mainly in older women) as well as pain. Ruth's pain is being treated by an electric anesthetizer. This is a type of **subcutaneous electrical nerve stimulator**, a small electrical device implanted under her skin, which works by sending electrical pulses to the spinal cord or affected nerves, disrupting the body's pain signals. Research on the efficacy of these devices is mixed.

Bessie is diagnosed with **leukemia**, a cancer of the blood cells, after reporting common symptoms: fatigue, easy bruising, and an enlarged liver and spleen. The word leukemia comes from the Greek words *leukos*, white, and *haima*, blood: in a patient with leukemia, the bone marrow produces too many white blood cells. These white blood cells (which fight infection in healthy people) don't work right, and eventually crowd out red blood cells (which supply oxygen to the body) and platelets (which help blood clot).

In *Marvin's Room*, Bessie's best hope for recovery is a **bone marrow transplant**. In a bone marrow transplant, the patient's diseased bone marrow is first destroyed by high doses of chemotherapy. Then, healthy bone marrow from a donor with matching proteins called human leukocyte

antigens (HLAs) is given to the patient through an IV. Donating bone marrow is a simple process: needles are used to extract liquid marrow from the donor's pelvic bone. Localized pain is the most common side effect. If the transplant is successful, the new bone marrow begins producing healthy blood.

Bessie's sister Lee and Lee's sons Hank and Charlie are tested as potential matches for a bone marrow transplant. HLAs are inherited, and there's a 25% chance that any two siblings will have the same combination, and a much lower chance that other relatives will match. Today, if family members don't match, a non-family donor is sought through bone marrow donor registries around the world. There are 24.5 million potential donors registered. But in 1991, when *Marvin's Room* was written, donor registries were relatively new, and a sibling match is Bessie's best option. •



In *Marvin's Room*, Bessie, a 40-year-old woman, serves as primary caregiver for both her disabled father Marvin and her elderly Aunt Ruth. She's built her life around their care, maintaining the household, preparing food, administering medication, taking them to the doctor, and acting as their advocate.

Author Scott McPherson took inspiration for *Marvin's Room* from his own experiences with elderly relatives who lived in Florida. But by making the primary caregiver in this fictional family a woman, he reinforces a familiar narrative in American culture: the adult daughter serving as nurse for an ill or disabled parent. A study published in 1992, one year after *Marvin's Room* premiered, found that 29% of caregivers were

daughters, while 23% were wives and 20% were other females. Only 28% of primary caregivers for functionally impaired adults were male.

Bessie, like more than 40 million other Americans, is an informal, unpaid caregiver. Assuming that each hour of care provided by those 40 million Americans is worth \$12.51 and that each caregiver provides 18 hours of care per week, these unpaid caregivers contribute \$470 billion dollars of value to the American economy. Additionally, providing care increases the likelihood that an individual will reduce their hours at work, leave a job, or be unable to take a new job. The loss of lifetime income (estimated at an average \$303,880 in income and benefits for caregivers over 50 who leave the workforce to care for a parent) increases financial instability for caregivers, more than doubling their risk of falling into poverty. Businesses are also affected: it is estimated that U.S. businesses lose \$25 billion annually due to lost productivity as a result of full time employees missing work due to caregiving responsibilities.

Caregivers also struggle to maintain their own physical and mental health because of their responsibilities: over half report themselves to be in fair or poor health, and caregivers are more likely to have a chronic condition such as arthritis, cancer, diabetes, or heart disease. Over a quarter of caregivers suffer from depression. Caregivers are statistically more likely than other adults to put off their own doctor visits and medical care.

Though 90% of long-term care in the U.S. is provided by family caregivers, few public policies are in place to support their needs. Advocates, including the bipartisan Assisting Caregivers Today Caucus in Congress, are pressing for policies like caregiver tax benefits, flexible employment policies and expansion of the Family Medical Leave Act, and expanding support services for those requiring care and their families. •

COMPARING BESSIE WITH THE AVERAGE 2015 CAREGIVER

Bessie: 40 years old
Average Caregiver: 49.2 years old

Bessie: 20 years of caregiving
Average Caregiver: 4 years of caregiving

Bessie, as an average live-in family caregiver, provides 40.5 hours per week of care.

The average caregiver provides 24.4 hours of care each week.

Percentage of caregivers who are:
White, like Bessie: 16.9%
African-American: 20.3%
Hispanic: 21%
Asian-American: 19.7%

Like Bessie, 40% of caregivers do not work outside the home.

60% of caregivers hold jobs in addition to caregiving.

11% of caregivers provide care for a father.

9% of caregivers self-identify as LGBTQ.

DESIGNER STATEMENTS



Set model for *Marvin's Room*

LAURA JELLINEK—SET DESIGN

At first read, *Marvin's Room* poses some tricky challenges for a set designer since there are so many locations and the play moves so fluidly through them. As Anne Kauffman, the director, and I talked through the play, we realized the structure is actually an endless loop between Bessie's house and an institutional, often medical, location—which is different each time we cycle through. And this, in some ways, is a perfect parallel of what it is like to deal with aging and sickness, with constant trips from home to different doctor's offices. We wanted to evoke this loop onstage—which is where the idea for the turntable came—as we travel to places with characters who are always different but, in some ways, all the same and then return home. We also wanted to conjure Florida as a strange place full of transplants like the characters in this play. The architecture of the set is meant to connect to the strip mall feeling that one finds in a lot of Florida architecture. The surrounding wall has the dual identity of being a huge expanse of sky and is made of concrete—like the parking lots and roads that cover a big portion of Florida's landscape. In the second act, when we travel to one very different location—which in some ways is a continuation of the ride we've been on all along—the turntable turns as the set transforms for one last time before we arrive home for good.

JESSICA PABST—COSTUME DESIGN

Marvin's Room is about estranged sisters reuniting due to a sudden illness. These women shared an upbringing but have taken different paths in adulthood. One is living in Florida taking care of aging relatives, and one is trying to scrape by as a single mother of two in Ohio. I was most excited about discovering who these women are and how their different life choices could be reflected in their clothing. The play was written and set in the early 1990s. When thinking about the fashion of that decade, it doesn't feel too removed from what we wear today. The fit of the clothes was looser, the colors were brighter, the silhouettes were fuller, and the hairstyles were longer and less controlled from what is in fashion today. But fashion is always a collage of the old and the new. Bessie, Lee, and Ruth each have distinct personal styles, and their clothes reflect decades of life lived: items they wore in high school, in the 1970s, '80s, clothes that have survived moves and life changes, and items they bought last week. Clothing can serve as a road map of where we have been and how we live our lives. Highlighting the visual differences between Bessie and Lee, you see the dramatic tension of a family of individuals struggling to come together and relate to one another in a time of need.



Costume research for *Marvin's Room*

JAPHY WEIDEMAN—LIGHTING DESIGN

When approaching the lighting design for *Marvin's Room*, I begin by 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 *Marvin's Room*. 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. 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. Currently as I write this, the process of the lighting is only in its beginning stages. The results of the lighting design will develop and evolve through the rehearsal process on stage as the actors bring their performances to life.

DANIEL KLUGER—ORIGINAL MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN

When I first read *Marvin's Room*, it evoked for me the road trips that we take to be with family. Especially when we live far from relatives and have to make journeys to stay connected to them, these drives become infused with the potency of the relationships, memories, rehearsals of conversations. So, in composing the music, I've imagined the drives people take in between the scenes. The wonderful huge wall upstage evokes for me both an indoor and an outdoor space, so I feel the imagery implied between scenes and the sense of location can reverberate throughout the composed music and sound design of the production. The instrumentation (so far) is electric guitar and the Prophet-6 synthesizer. The period of the play and the Florida setting requires a specific sensibility that the Prophet-6 captures so perfectly. It evokes soundtracks of the '80s and '90s, but it's also having its own renaissance in popular music right now, so I hope it will strike a tension between the piece and our own time. •

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES



HOW DO ACTORS EXPLORE SERIOUSNESS AND COMEDY IN A SCENE FROM *MARVIN'S ROOM*?

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

PREPARE Read and discuss the article on “Finding the Tone in *Marvin’s Room*” on page 14 of this UPSTAGE Guide. Explain that they will work as actors to explore the play’s mixture of comedy and seriousness in a scene. Break students into pairs and pass out the scene.

REHEARSE Have pairs choose roles (“A” or “B”) and allow them to read aloud the excerpt (found **HERE**) from *Marvin’s Room* with their partner. Then, ask half of the groups to rehearse the scene in a tone that is as dramatic and serious as possible, and the other half should rehearse in a tone that is as comedic as possible. If you have advanced students, you may challenge some groups to find BOTH serious and comedic moments.

PERFORM Allow a few pairs to show their versions of the scenes, with an attempt to see 2-3 scenes in contrasting tones.

REFLECT What acting choices contributed to a more serious tone? A comedic tone? Do you believe this is a serious scene, a comedic scene, or both? Why do you think McPherson shifts tone in the scene and throughout the play?

.....

HOW DOES A COSTUME DESIGNER MAKE CLOTHING AND ACCESSORY CHOICES THAT CONVEY CHARACTER?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1)

OBSERVE Study the costume collages for the characters Bessie and Lee in *Marvin’s Room*. What color palette has the costume designer chosen for each character? What silhouettes are suggested? What can you infer about the characters’ ages, socio-economic status, and the time and place of the play?

WRITE Draft a four to six sentence description of one or both of the characters. Include basic information like their age and occupation, as well as descriptors of their personalities, and ideas about how they move and sound.

SHARE Read character descriptions out loud as a class or in small groups. What aspects of the collage inspired your description of the character? How do you think these characters are connected? What do you predict will happen in this play?



POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES



HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT EXPLORE A SOCIAL ISSUE THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVES OF HIS CHARACTERS?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A)

In *Marvin’s Room*, Bessie and Lee made different decisions following their father’s stroke twenty years earlier. Bessie moved to Florida to become Marvin’s primary caregiver, while Lee remained in Ohio and raised a family.

POLL Hand out copies of the statement “Children are obligated to become their parent’s primary caregiver if it becomes necessary,” and ask students to agree or disagree with it and to quickly write a paragraph justifying their answer. Divide the class into debate teams based on their answer.

READ Working as a team, have students read “Caregiving” on page 17 of this guide and add a second paragraph to their justification for why they agree or disagree with the statement.

DEBATE Host a debate. Should children become their parent’s primary caregiver? Why or why not? The teacher or a neutral third party or parties can serve as the debate judge, moving a step closer to a team each time a compelling argument is put forth.

REFLECT How did playwright Scott McPherson bring different perspectives on caregiving into *Marvin’s Room*? Did our debate or the article we read change anyone’s mind? Why? In our debate, did you find emotional appeals or factual appeals more effective?

EXTENSION Over the next several classes, research current policy proposals around caregiving (<https://www.caregiver.org/> is a great place to start) and write letters to government officials about caregiving policy.

HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT CREATE A MONOLOGUE THAT EXPLORES A CHARACTER FROM MARVIN’S ROOM?

(Common Core Code: CCSS .RL.11-12.3)

DISCUSS Discuss the end of the play. What is resolved and unresolved? What questions are they left with about the characters? Then, discuss students’ impressions of Hank (Lee’s older son) at the end of the play. Why did he run away? Why did he come back? Where do they think he went?

BRAINSTORM Brainstorm as a class to explore ideas about Hank as a character, and scribe answers. Accept contrasting responses and encourage multiple perspectives to these questions:

- What are Hank’s feelings towards his family?
- Why do they think Hank runs away?
- Why do they think Hank returns?

WRITE Have students write a monologue for Hank, after the play’s conclusion. Imagine he comes home to Ohio and tells his therapist about his experience with his family in Florida. In Hank’s words, explain why he ran away, what happened, and why he came back.

SHARE & REFLECT Allow a few students to read their monologues. Reflect on students’ perspectives on Hank. Do they sympathize with him and why? What challenge does he face? What does he want?

GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES



- CARNY:** a person who works at a carnival
Bessie's one true love was a carry worker.
- CHEMOTHERAPY:** the use of any drug for cancer treatment
Chemotherapy sessions cause Bessie to lose her hair.
- DEplete:** use up the supply or resources of
Lee would have to deplete her savings if she placed Marvin and Ruth in a retirement home.
- FORbearance:** patient self-control; restraint and tolerance
Ruth has learned to practice forbearance since she is unable to walk on her own.
- LITHIUM:** a drug used to treat the manic episodes of bipolar disorder
Hank takes Lithium to subdue his violent reactions.
- NOXIOUS:** harmful, poisonous, or very unpleasant
The fumes from the fire were noxious.
- ORDERlies:** attendants in a hospital responsible for the non-medical care of patients and the maintenance of order and cleanliness
Without orderlies, the rooms at the mental institution might all be destroyed.
- REMISSION:** a temporary or permanent decrease or subsidence of manifestations of a disease
Since Bessie is in remission, this is the best time for her family to get tested for a successful transplant surgery.

RESOURCES

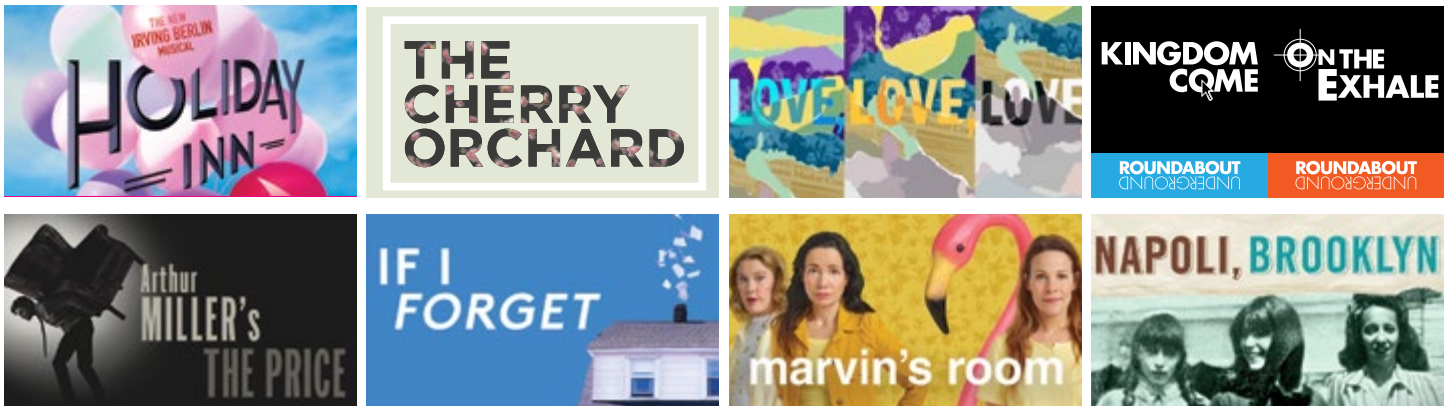
- BeTheMatch.org. "How a Bone Marrow Transplant Works." What Is a Bone Marrow Transplant? How a Transplant Works. National Marrow Donor Program, 2017. Web. 15 May 2017.
- Black, Sandra. "A New Economic Study Shows How Your Birth Order Can Influence Your Career." *Quartz*. Quartz, 19 Apr. 2017. Web. 31 May 2017.
- Black, Sandra E., Paul J. Devereux, and Kjell G. Salvanes. "The More the Merrier? The Effect of Family Size and Birth Order on Children's Education." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Oxford University Press, 01 May 2005. Web. 31 May 2017.
- Blau, Eleanor. "Howard Ashman Is Dead at 40; Writer of 'Little Shop of Horrors.'" *New York Times*. March 15, 1991. Web. 19 May 2017.
- Briggs, Rick. *Caregiving Daughters: Accepting the Role of Caregiver for Elderly Parents*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- "Caregiver Statistics: Demographics." *Caregiver Statistics: Demographics | Family Caregiver Alliance*. Family Caregiver Alliance, n.d. Web. 14 May 2017.
- Christiansen, Richard. "'Marvin's Room' Offers up a Breathtaking View (February 20, 1990)." *'Marvin's Room' Offers up a Breathtaking View*. Chicago Tribune Archives, 20 Feb. 1990. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Collins, Glen. "Harry Kondoleon Is Dead at 39; Wrote of the Desolation of AIDS." *New York Times*. March 17, 1994. Web. 19 May 2017.
- Collins, Glenn. "Walking the Tightrope That Is 'Marvin's Room'." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 11 Dec. 1991. Web. 05 June 2017.
- "Daniel Sotomayor, Cartoonist, 33." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 15 Feb. 1992. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Dannatt, Adrian. OBITUARY: Reza Abdoh. *Independent*. 14 June 1995. Web. 19 May 2017
- Devaney, Erik. "Oldest Siblings Are More Likely to Become CEOs – ThinkGrowth.org." *ThinkGrowth.org*. ThinkGrowth.org, 07 Nov. 2015. Web. 31 May 2017.
- Healthwise. "Electrical Nerve Stimulation for Chronic Pain." WebMD. WebMD, 15 Feb. 2015. Web. 14 May 2017.
- Isherwood, Charles. "Death Defying Fantasy Fueled by Love." *New York Times*. December 6, 2004. Web. 19 May 2017.
- Isherwood, Charles. "I Do. But Who Invited the Old Guy?" *New York Times*. March 9, 2007. Web. 19 May 2017.
- James, Everette, JD, MBA, Meredith Hughes, and Philip Rocco, PhD. "Caregiver Risk Policy Strategy." Rep. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 2016. Web. 14 May 2017.
- Jones, Chris. "'Marvin's Room' Still a Beautiful Thing to Behold." *Chicago Tribune*, 05 Oct. 2015. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Jones, Therese, Ed. "Introduction." *Sharing the Delirium: Second Generation AIDS Plays and Performances*. Heinemann Drama, 1994.
- Keehen, Owen. *Owen Keehen: Interviews*. Queer Cultural Center, n.d. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Lambert, Bruce. "Scott W. McPherson, 33, Actor And Author Of a Hit Stage Play." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 08 Nov. 1992. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Gener, Randy. "'Fear. Hope. The Life Force': Why I Write Plays – Interview with Craig Lucas." *Critical Stages/Scènes Critique*. The IATC webjournal/Revue web de i'AIC. December 2011: Issue No 5. Web. 19 May 2017.
- Gerard, Jeremy. "Charles Ludlam, 44, Avant-garde Artist of Theatre Is Dead." *New York Times*. May 29, 1987. Web. 19 May 2017
- Gregoire, Carolyn. "How Being An Oldest, Middle Or Youngest Child Shapes Your Personality." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 13 May 2015. Web. 31 May 2017.
- Medew, Julia. "Patients Turn to Electrical Implants to Relieve Chronic Pain." *The Age*. The Age, 10 July 2015. Web. 14 May 2017.
- Nelson, Emmanuel S. Ed. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature of the United States*. Volume 1: A-L. Santa Barbara Greenwood Press, 2009.
- "Post-Stroke Conditions." *Stroke.org*. National Stroke Association, 01 Mar. 2015. Web. 14 May 2017.
- Reinhard, Susan C., Lynn Friss Feinberg, Rita Choula, and Ari Houser. "Valuing the Invaluable: 2015 Update." *Valuing the Invaluable: 2015 Update. Undeniable Progress, but Big Gaps Remain – AARP Insight* (n.d.): n. pag. AARP.org. AARP Public Policy Institute, July 2015. Web. 14 May 2017.
- "Review/Theater: 'Marvin's Room': Life, As It Is and Could Be." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 05 Mar. 1992. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Rich, Frank. "Play About AIDS Uses Fantasy World To Try to Remake the World." *New York Times*. February 12, 1992. Web. 19 May 2017.
- Richards, David. "A Door Left Ajar in 'Marvin's Room'." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, 5 Jan. 1997. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Richards, David. "From Life to Art and Back Again." *The New York Times*. November 10, 1991. Web. 19 May 2017.
- Schwarzbaum, Lisa. *Marvin's Room*. Entertainment Weekly. December 20, 1996. Web. 19 May 2017.
- "Scott McPherson." *Whiting Awards*. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Shewey, Don. "AIDS on Stage: Comfort, Sorrow, Anger". *New York Times*. June 21, 1987. Web. 19 May 2017.
- Shewey, Don. "Homage to a Theatrical Comet of the 80's." *New York Times*. Nov 19, 2000. Web. 19 May 2017.
- Spinrad, Diana. "Til the Fat Lady Sings." *Chicago Reader*. Chicago Reader, 05 June 2017. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Therese Jones, Ed. "Introduction." *Sharing the Delirium: Second Generation AIDS Plays and Performances*. Heinemann Drama, 1994.
- Thompson, Derek. "Why First-Born Children Are Better Leaders." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 11 May 2017. Web. 31 May 2017.
- Voo, Jocelyn. "How Birth Order Affects Your Child's Personality and Behavior." *Parents*. Parents, 16 Oct. 2015. Web. 31 May 2017.
- Westbrooks, Emily. "8 Reasons You Should Care About Birth Order." *Romper*. Romper, 12 May 2017. Web. 31 May 2017.
- "What Is Leukemia?" WebMD. WebMD, n.d. Web. 15 May 2017.
- Whitbourne, Susan Krauss. "For Better or Worse, Siblings Shape Our Close Relationships." *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publishers, 12 Nov. 2013. Web. 31 May 2017.

ABOUT ROUNABOUT

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

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, 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. Roundabout has been recognized with 36 Tonys®, 51 Drama Desks, 62 Outer Critics Circle, 12 Obie and 18 Lucille Lortel Awards. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting roundabouttheatre.org.

2016-2017 SEASON



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH SARAH HOM, DIRECTOR OF AUDIENCE SERVICES

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

Sarah Hom: I was born and raised in Denver, Colorado. I started off studying technical theatre at the University of Colorado in Denver, but I was getting so much freelance costume design work that I put school on hold for a while. When I decided to go back to school, I got my degree in psychology and history from Metropolitan State University.

TS: How and when did you become the Director of Audience Services?

SH: In July 2014, I had several friends who sent me the Playbill job posting, encouraging me to apply. I had always wanted to live in New York, but I really had no plans to move out of Colorado at the time. My background and experience seemed like a perfect fit, and I had always admired the work that Roundabout did, so I applied. After a couple rounds of interviews with Roundabout, it seemed like everything was falling into place for me to move here (by some miracle I even had a friend who was subletting his apartment at the exact moment that I needed one). By the beginning of October, I had arrived in the city after a frantic month of packing.

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

SH: My job is to help craft a first-class experience for our ticketholders, as well as for my staff, who play a huge role in creating those experiences. I manage a talented team of people who handle a wide range of activities from programming how a ticket is sold in our ticketing system, to following up with someone after they've seen a

performance, and everything in-between. I'm always looking at what we can tweak or add to the experience to make it even better. The great thing is that we get to work with House Management, Marketing, Development, Education, and other departments to help make all of this happen.

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

SH: There is not much that I love more in life than a great theatre experience. To be able to help create great experiences for others is such a joy. Standing in the back of a crowded theatre and watching people travel to a world that so many talented people on- and off-stage have worked together to create is so rewarding. You don't often get those kinds of moments in every profession. The people Roundabout serves have needs and expectations as varied as this great city. It's a challenge to try to make everyone happy, but I love a good challenge!

TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

SH: First and foremost, the staff here is such a talented group, and it's nice to work with people who love theatre as much as I do! I also like that our not-for-profit mission allows us to support a number of programs that have been important to me throughout my career; a commitment to accessibility, education programs that foster arts education around the city; and a wide range of programming (because I love plays and musicals as well as new works and revivals—I did mention that I love theatre, right?). •

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 restroom 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 Theatre Company is thankful to the following donors for their generous support of \$5,000 or more to Roundabout's education programs during the 2016-2017 fiscal years.

- Anonymous
- The Aeroflex Foundation
- AJA Charitable Fund
- Altman Foundation
- American Express Foundation
- The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- Rose M. Badgley Residuary Charitable Trust
- The Theodore H. Barth Foundation
- The Bay and Paul Foundations
- Brooke and Roger Berlind
- The Bok Family Foundation, Roxanne and Scott L. Bok Trustees
- Gina Leonetti Boonshoft
- Phillip and James Burke
- Karen McKeel Calby
- R. Martin Chavez and Adam Norbury
- Con Edison
- Dalio Foundation
- Glen de Vries
- Jeanne Feldhusen and Gerry Jager
- Mark R. Fetting
- Kathleen Fisher and Rocco Maggioletto
- Myrna and Freddie Gershon
- Jodi and Daniel Glucksman
- The Golden Family
- Gray Foundation
- Mr. Barry Gurin and Mr. Buzz Kelly
- Barbara McIntyre Hack
- Meryl Hartzband

- Maureen A. Hayes
- The Hearst Foundation, Inc.
- The Heckscher Foundation for Children
- Muna and Basem Hishmeh
- Doug Hitchner and Larissa Martell
- Tracey and Craig Huff
- Karen and Paul Isaac
- JobsFirstNYC
- The JPB Foundation
- The Kaplen Foundation
- James and Josie Kelly
- Elroy and Terry Krumholz Foundation, Inc.
- Ms. Alexandra Lange
- Ms. Barbara Lee and Mr. Alston Gardner
- Randi Charno Levine
- Peter J. Lyon
- Tristin and Marty Mannion
- David and Anita Massengill
- May and Samuel Rudin Foundation
- Sara Miller McCune/SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Mr. Terrence Meck and Mr. Breton Alberti
- Mellam Family Foundation
- The Michael and Pamela Miles Gift Fund
- Scott and Iva Mills
- Carol Mitchell
- New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
- New York Community Trust
- New York State Council on the Arts

- Cynthia Nixon
- Charles R. O'Malley Charitable Lead Trust
- Stephen Pierce
- The Pinkerton Foundation
- Lisa and Gregg Recler
- Daryl and Steven Roth
- The Rudin Foundation
- Ms. Samantha Rudin and Mr. David Earls
- S&P Global
- Steven Sanders and Madelyn Simon
- The Adolph and Ruth Schnurmacher Foundation
- Mr. Michael Slocum
- Denise R. Sobel
- Mary Solomon
- Jeffrey and Janis Ing Strauss
- Fern and Lenard Tessler
- Theater Subdistrict Council, LDC
- Tikkun Olam Foundation, Inc.
- Time Warner Cable
- Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund
- Troutman Sanders LLP
- Michael Tuch Foundation
- Diane and Tom Tuft
- Lori D. Uddenberg
- The Walt Disney Company
- Emily J. Zuckerman, Esq. and Dr. Edward H. Bonfield

Education programs at Roundabout are supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

