



**JOHN
LITHGOW:
STORIES BY HEART**



**ROUNABOUT
THEATRE
COMPANY**

UPSTAGE GUIDE
A publication of **EDUCATION AT
ROUNABOUT**

UPSTAGE SPOTLIGHT



JOHN LITHGOW: STORIES BY HEART

Adapted and Performed by John Lithgow
Directed by Daniel Sullivan

Virtuosity and imagination combine in one utterly unique event, as Tony® and Emmy® Award winner John Lithgow creates a singularly intimate evening. With equal measures of humor and heart, he evokes memories of family, explores and expands the limits of the actor's craft, and masterfully conjures a cast of indelible characters from classic short stories by Ring Lardner and PG Wodehouse. Lithgow elevates the magic of storytelling to masterful new heights, with a performance the *New York Times* calls "a tour de force."

A NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES

With a trademark mastery of his craft, John Lithgow reminds us of the magic that is possible with as little as a story, a teller, an audience, and a little bit of suspended disbelief. Eschewing big-budget spectacle in favor of his audience's imagination, John explores how stories are able not only to entertain but also to rejuvenate, educate, and, most importantly, heal. Storytelling is as old as the human race itself, and though our theatre, film, and television have the capacity to be bigger and more ambitious than ever before, John's exhilarating, multidimensional performance in *Stories By Heart* proves that we never outgrow the sense of wonder and awe that we felt at our childhood storybooks.

WHEN Present

WHERE A Theatre

WHO

John Lithgow: (Adaptor/Performer) has been a major presence on the big screen, small screen and stage for over forty years, performing plays and musicals, tragedy and farce. But the word versatile barely describes his career. He has played principal roles in the UK at the National Theatre and the RSC; danced with the New York City Ballet; performed at Carnegie Hall and with a dozen American orchestras; created nine picture books and three albums for kids; written a memoir; and recently co-created a crossword puzzle for the *New York Times*. He has appeared on Broadway over twenty times, receiving six Tony Award nominations and winning twice for *The Changing Room* and *Sweet Smell of Success*. He has shot over forty major films, receiving Academy Award® nominations for both *The World According to Garp* and *Terms of Endearment*. For his work on television, he has received 11 Emmy® nominations and won six, most notably for the Netflix series *The Crown*, Showtime's *Dexter*, and NBC's *3rd Rock from the Sun*. Most recently he has appeared in the films *Daddy's Home 2* and *Pitch Perfect 3* and in NBC's current sitcom *Trial and Error*. Such variety has won him a place in the Theater Hall of Fame, a star on The Hollywood Walk of Fame, and membership in the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. He created *Stories by Heart* in 2008 and has performed it in thirty-five American cities prior to bringing it to Broadway in his debut, at long last, with the Roundabout Theatre.

Stories by Heart



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Actor John Lithgow..... Page 4-7

The Act of Storytelling..... Page 8-9

Interview with Director Daniel Sullivan Page 10-11

Tellers of Tales..... Page 12

What Makes a Good Short Story.....Page 13

Legendary Storytellers: Lardner and Wodehouse.....Page 14

Wodehouse Wordplay.....Page 15

The Healing Power of StorytellingPage 16

Variations on the Truth: The Art of Solo Performance.....Page 17

Designer Statements Page 18-19

Pre- and Post-Show Activities..... Page 20-21

Glossary and Resources.....Page 22

About Roundabout and Staff InterviewPage 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 Associate
 Miranda Haymon, Directing Fellow
 Anna Woodruff, Education Apprentice
 Lucy Powis, Artistic Apprentice

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INTERVIEWS:

Ted Sod, Education Dramaturg

GRAPHIC DESIGN:

Darren Melchiorre, Associate Director, Art and Design
 Bo Krucik, Graphic Design Apprentice

EDUCATION STAFF:

Jennifer DiBella, Director of Education
 Mitch Mattson, Associate Director of Education
 Katie Christie, Assistant Director of Education
 Abby Case, Education Program Manager
 Karen Loftus, Education Program Manager
 Sarah Kutnowsky, Education Coordinator
 Jackie Maris, Education Assistant
 Olivia Atlas, Education Apprentice
 Aasim Rozier, Education Apprentice

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR JOHN LITHGOW

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Actor John Lithgow about his life and his show *John Lithgow: Stories By Heart*.

Ted Sod: I read that you were studying literature and history at Harvard and it wasn't until you performed in *Gilbert and Sullivan's Utopia Limited* that you decided to become an actor. Is that true?

John Lithgow: Well, there's a lot of truth in that. The fact is, I grew up in a theatre family and I had done a lot of acting by the time I got to Harvard. But I didn't intend to be an actor. I didn't want to go into the family business. I knew it was tough because I had plenty of evidence of that, having lived and worked among professional actors virtually my whole life. The main reason why I didn't want to be an actor was that I wanted to be a painter. I was very, very serious about it. But as soon as I got to college, I fell in with a theatre gang almost immediately. I became a campus star almost immediately and, as I've always said, if you hear enough applause, enough laughter early on in your life, then you're going to be an actor whether you want to or not. *Utopia Limited* was actually the third or fourth show I'd done at Harvard. It was the first time I'd ever been in anything in which I'd sung on stage, and I did this show-stopping number. I remember the audience applauding for so long that we couldn't go on with the show. Everybody left me alone on stage, and the audience just wouldn't stop applauding. That's when I decided, oh, yes, I'm going to do this as my profession.

TS: I love the fact that you wanted to be a painter because it reminds me of your role in *The Crown* as Churchill. Did Churchill start painting after he retired?

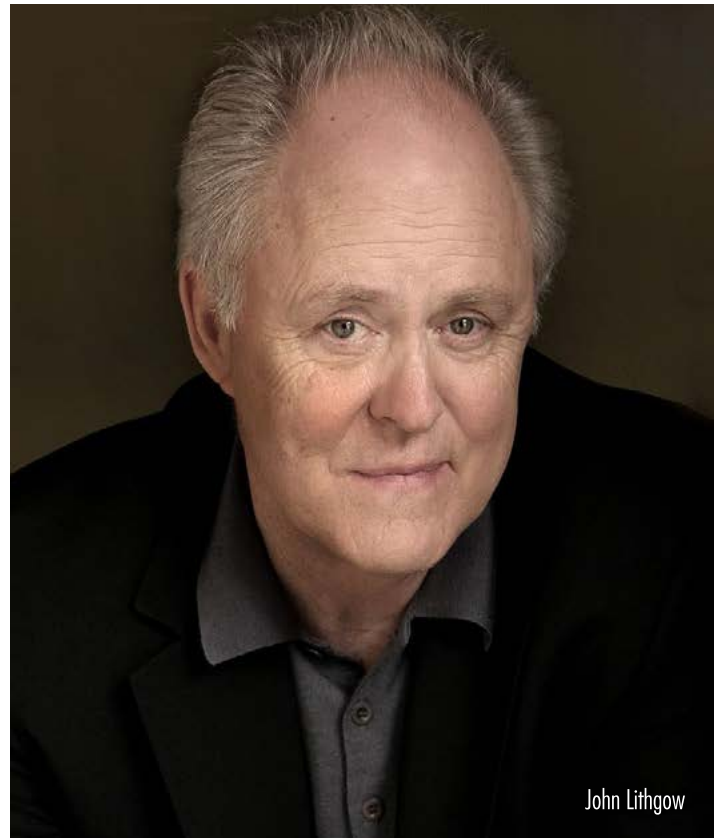
JL: Oh, no, he painted long before he retired. It was a big part of his life. He always had paints with him; he did mainly landscapes. If you visit Chartwell or Blenheim in England, they are absolutely full of his paintings. He originally painted oil landscapes literally by the hundreds. I had a wonderful time acting in those scenes. I'd always wanted to play a painter because it's so rare to see a painter portrayed convincingly on film, and it was part and parcel of his character, you know. He was a restless and depressive character who really did rely on painting. He took it very seriously, and he forgot about the stress of his life when he painted.

TS: Do you remember any teachers at Harvard who had a profound influence on you?

JL: Oh, gosh, yes. At Harvard, I got a wonderful education. Back in those days, there tended to be these superstar, venerable old men and I had a whole list of them: John Finley, William Alfred, Harry Levin. It was a very male world in those times.

TS: Will you talk about going to the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA)?

JL: I completed my four years at Harvard and got a degree in British history and literature. What was available back in those days was Fulbright grants to go to LAMDA, one for a young man and one for a young woman, to study in their one-year program. I auditioned for that program and got the grant. I'd never been to England before, even though I'd grown up doing more Shakespeare than anything else. It was also an extremely exciting time for British theatre. The National Theatre had been established only a year or two before I arrived.



Trevor Nunn had become the director of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Peter Brook and Peter Hall and all sorts of remarkable directors and theatre managers were doing amazing work. I went over for the one year and renewed my grant for yet another year just to continue working in London theatre, mostly as an assistant director. I was just loving the life over there, even though I knew eventually I would get back to America. British training was extraordinary in those days, still is. And it was having access to that training that allowed me to work in England so often during the years, culminating in *The Crown*.

TS: I'm curious about the history of *Stories By Heart*. Will you tell our readers about the development of this piece?

JL: The inciting incident is described in great detail during the course of the play. And that is reading to my father from this very same book that he read to me when I was a child, a book of stories called *Tellers of Tales*. That moment was so emotional for me. It connected me so deeply to my father, but also to what it is that I do as an actor and why I do it. To me, the great mystery is something I state very early on in the show: why do we all want to hear stories? And why do some of us want to tell them? What is it we need and require from stories, because obviously we do? No society, no human being can do without stories being told.

TS: I love that you pose that question in the show because I think you want the audience to answer that for themselves.

JL: Yes, but I never saw this as an idea piece. I didn't want anyone to feel that they were being lectured to or that it was academic or intellectual. It is genuine entertainment; the trick is to entertain people



but in the midst of that make them contemplate the whole notion of entertainment. It is designed to move them but also to stir their own curiosity about what it is they've just been through when the evening is over. My father was very sad and depressed. I read a bedtime story to my mother and him as if they were little children. The story that I read made my father laugh, just as simple as that. That was an essential lifeline to him. To me, reading that story extended his life and was quite a profound thing. The other thing that happened when I read this amazing PG Wodehouse story to my parents is that I realized, this is the funniest thing I've ever read. All I have to do is memorize this and I can entertain people with it. It was four years later that I finally created the show. It took me that long to build up my confidence because it was the first thing I'd ever written for myself to perform on stage. But I felt completely comfortable with it because I wasn't just performing. I was actually conversing with an audience about things that mean an awful lot to me.

TS: Did you write out a script and take it to Lincoln Center and Jack O'Brien, who was the director at the beginning of your process? I know it has morphed into something different over the years.

JL: It all happened quite organically. I approached Jack O'Brien and said, "I have this bright idea. Help me build up my confidence here." I learned the piece, and Jack and I spoke to Andre Bishop at Lincoln Center and said give us a room. We invited about 25 of our friends, and I simply performed the show for them. They loved the storytelling, but they really loved that little scrap of information I gave them about reading to my dad. So, I decided to expand on that. The story itself takes about 45 minutes. I extended the running time with stories of my father as a younger man and what he had done as a Shakespeare producer. I told stories about my grandmother who used to entertain us with long poems that she remembered as a child. I made it into a 90-minute evening.

Then the following year, I created yet another show using another story from that same book, "Haircut" by Ring Lardner. And I ran the two shows in repertory, one on Sunday night and one on Monday night, for about seven weeks. The very last night I did a marathon of both shows, and on that evening, I discovered if I put the two shows together, I would have a two-act evening. That's the version I continued performing for the next eight years. And, as you say, it's morphed over the years.



John Lithgow performing *John Lithgow: Stories By Heart*

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR JOHN LITHGOW cont.



I've changed it in all sorts of ways, tinkered with it, made it evolve. I called up Todd Haimes at Roundabout and said, "I think it is ready for Broadway now."

TS: I read an interview you gave and you said, "Every actor needs to have a trunk show." When *Stories By Heart* opens on Broadway, will it still be a trunk show?

JL: Oh, sure. I'll still go out of town to perform it. It's been a wonderful way of visiting our country. I've performed this show in 35 cities now, and that's not going to stop. I'm still going to take it out to people. I've done it in Galveston and Lexington and Oklahoma City, and Memphis and Rochester and Buffalo and St. Louis—just all over the country. And everywhere I go, I make sure that I can spend 36 hours there, so that I can explore that city. I've learned about my own country. It's been amazing.

TS: Would you say this show is an homage to your parents?

JL: Very much so.

TS: And an homage to the relationship between an actor and the audience?

JL: As an actor you really feel you've succeeded when you get the sense that people have left the theatre very glad that they were there. That they really have taken something from this experience. It just elates you, that sensation. And it's what I do. It's what I do for a living. I try to give this show to people as a gift and they've certainly given me back

the gift of gratitude. It's funny. I'm inviting them to contemplate what this experience is and what they're getting out of it. And I think that's unusual. I can rattle off ten amazing experiences I've had in the theatre, but at no point has everything stopped and the performer simply said, "Let's examine this moment. Let's examine what you and I are going through together."

TS: It seems like the perfect thing to do in a solo show because the audience is your acting partner in many ways.

JL: Yes. I always describe it as a conversation that turns into a performance. And I like the fact that the line is blurred between the two.

TS: You've written books and songs for children. I think nine or ten books, correct?

JL: That's correct.

TS: Was writing *Stories By Heart* very different than writing for kids?

JL: What I write for kids is mainly songs and interactive games. It's a completely different audience, a very different experience. Developmentally, children experience entertainment in a different way than adults do. As an actor, what you aspire to is creating suspension of disbelief, finding those moments when people virtually forget that they're watching a fiction and they respond to it as if it's a real event. But with adults you never achieve it. You measure your success by how close you get to achieving the suspension of disbelief, but you never really truly achieve it. Adults sit in an audience and they know

John Lithgow's quick sketches of characters in "Uncle Fred Flits By" by PG Wodehouse



Julia's Father



The pink chap, "Wilberforce"



Julia's Mother



The beautiful young woman, "Julia"



John Lithgow performing *John Lithgow: Stories By Heart*



they're in a theatre. They know they're watching people pretend. Children aren't there yet. They haven't learned the difference between reality and fiction. They are completely immersed—that is, if you do it right. That's a thrilling thing for an actor. It's the one time when you really truly can achieve that suspension of disbelief I keep mentioning. They forget that they're watching anyone pretend. It's also a great responsibility because I really do believe in fine entertainment for children. I love writing and performing for children for that very reason.

TS: I believe this version of *Stories By Heart* will be the fifth time you are working with director Daniel Sullivan. What do you enjoy about collaborating with him?

JL: The thing about Dan is he does not say a single word that you can't use. He knows exactly what an actor needs, and that's a very unusual quality in a director. He's done a little acting, but he doesn't really come from acting as much as from stage managing. He just knows the process. He's very relaxed. You never sense that you're impressing him or dazzling him. He works as if he's your other brain. He is methodical and practical and he's a problem solver. I enlisted Dan to direct this version even though I have a long history with this show. I've already done it many, many times. I enlisted him because we have a wonderful history and a great shorthand together, but I also liked the fact that he had never seen it. He really didn't know what it was, which made me want to perform it for him and get his first impressions. I was doing a

movie up in Rochester, and I came down for a single day to perform it for him and some of the Roundabout staff, maybe 15 or 20 people. It was just folding chairs in a rehearsal room, and I did both acts full out. I hadn't done it in about four months, so it was pretty rough, but it didn't matter. I was giving them the show. Dan and I talked for about five minutes afterward and I went right home and rewrote the first 20 minutes of the show. He zeroed right in and said, "I just feel like we should get to the first story sooner." I needed to hear that. We're going to rehearse for a week before I go into previews. The idea of me rehearsing this after having done it 80 times may sound ridiculous, but I just know that Dan is going to refine this thing. We're going to examine every moment. It may not change much or it may change enormously for the better. I do know that everything Dan says will be something I can use. •



The parrot

THE ACT OF STORYTELLING

John Lithgow | Notebook

Why do all of us want to hear stories? Why do some of us want to tell them? Why, for that matter, are all of you even here tonight, huddling in the darkness, with a bunch of total strangers, staring at me for well over two hours, listening to me talk talk talk?

— John Lithgow

Stories By Heart invites us to consider our primal relationship with storytelling. As we huddle in the darkness of the American Airlines Theatre, we are connecting to an ancient tradition, like our cave-dwelling ancestors gathered around the fire. Storytelling predates the invention of writing and print, and it can take forms of poetry, song, dance, and masks. Across cultures, storytellers serve diverse roles, from leader to spiritual guide, historian to shaman, healer to jester. The common thread, according to Dr. David Leeming in *Storytelling Encyclopedia: Historical, Cultural, and Multiethnic Approaches to Oral Traditions Around the World*, is a human obsession with narrative that transcends culture and time. The question of “why” has invited explanations from anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, and scientists.

OUR BRAINS ON STORIES

Our brains are wired to think in narrative, linking events through cause and effect, and we learn better when information is transmitted through stories. When we are curious, emotionally engaged, concerned about what happens next, making predictions, we produce neurotransmitters that allow the brain to change. This explains why the Bible uses stories rather than lists or bullet points to engage and teach. Humans need to connect with each other, and stories develop our capacity for empathy. Neuroscience now understands the role of “mirror neurons,” which are activated in the brain when we hear stories. We may not feel a physical sensation of pain when the hero of a story hero is hurt, but mirror neurons allow us to process emotional experiences in fiction as if we they were happening to us. Through this mirroring, we “put ourselves in another person’s shoes.” Our capacity for empathy may give us a long-term evolutionary advantage.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST STORYTELLERS?

From a biological and evolutionary perspective, our capacity to tell and listen to stories helped the human species to advance. Stories allow us to prepare for life-threatening situations from a position of safety. They simulate potential crises, which we can virtually experience while listening from a secure place. In *Origin of Stories*, Brian Boyd explains how fiction and the arts are important forms of “high play.” Just as animals chase and tussle, safely practicing how to react in actual life-threatening situations, stories prepare us to process important patterns, images, and social information. Jonathan Gottschall, in *The Storytelling*

Animal, notes the centrality of “trouble” in stories. Fiction is driven by conflict and struggle, which allows our minds to simulate threatening events, removed from the actual risk. This virtual experience may prepare us to react better when real trouble arises.

Gottschall also asserts the value of storytelling in teaching us to cooperate within social groups, and this social bonding contributes to our long-term survival as a species. He posits that, across cultures, humankind is attracted to stories with a positive moral viewpoint. Stories with protagonists who are rewarded for honesty and playing by group rules show us the collective benefits of prosocial behavior. By promoting our capacity for cooperation and creativity, storytelling has helped humans to advance.

STORIES ARE GOOD FOR YOU

Native American people have long recognized that storytelling has a beneficial impact on both individual and communal wellness. Through characters that model both positive and negative behaviors, tribal stories help promote introspection and convey essential values, including self-respect and health. While Native Americans have honored the power of stories to preserve cultural traditions for centuries, a 2002 study showed a correlation between storytelling and individual health. To test the impact of storytelling on heart disease and cancer in tribal communities, stories were selected to motivate tribal members to make healthier lifestyle choices. The researchers concluded that “storytelling becomes a powerful adjunct to health education.”

By helping us understand the world, prepare for threats and danger, connect to culture, learn about cooperation and collaboration, and work through our darkest fears or strongest desires, storytelling helps us survive and thrive. For thousands of years, whether in fire-lit caves or Broadway theatres, we still come back for more stories. •



A monkey using mirror neurons to imitate an action



STORYTELLERS EVERYWHERE

Australian Aborigines

Aboriginal cultural heritage goes back between 50,000 to 65,000 years and is today still passed on mostly through oral storytelling, song, and dance. Stories of “The Dreaming,” which describe the travels of the spiritual ancestors, are central to the Aboriginal belief system. Dreaming stories pass on important knowledge, cultural values, and beliefs from one generation to the next and are told progressively as people age in life. Through these stories, contemporary Aboriginal people maintain a link to ancient times.

Griots

Griots (griottes for women) originated in highly stratified West African societies. Their traditional role was preserving the memory of their societies, and this included taking on the job of genealogist, historian, spokesperson, diplomat, musician, teacher, master of ceremonies, and advisor. Griots held a unique social caste; their work was seen as a service, particular to the nobility and richer members of the community. The male griots used spoken word and musical instruments, while the female griottes specialized in singing. Contemporary griots still use storytelling, performance, music, and art to embody and pass on history.

The Grimm Brothers

Many of the fairy tales beloved today (think *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Little Red Riding Hood*), were originally collected by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the early 19th century. The brothers collected oral German tales from people throughout the countryside in an effort to preserve a communal volk (folk) culture that was disappearing with modernization. They intended to capture the natural language of the people and understand the customs, rituals, and beliefs that bonded communities. After publishing the tales, which were crude and often violent, the Grimms began to revise and polish the stories, inserting Christian morality and making them more appropriate for children.

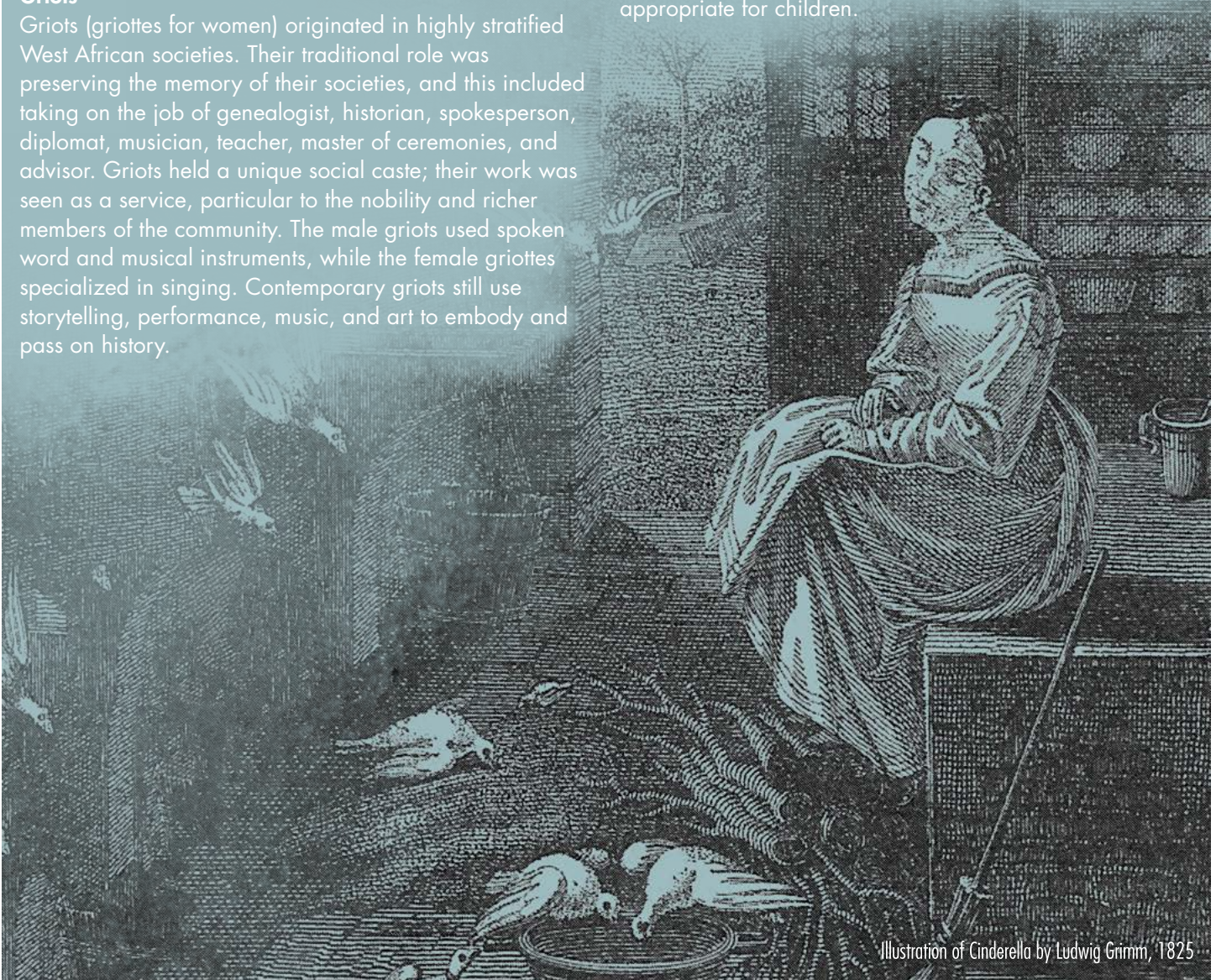


Illustration of Cinderella by Ludwig Grimm, 1825

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR DANIEL SULLIVAN



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Director Daniel Sullivan about his life and his work on *John Lithgow: Stories By Heart*.

Ted Sod: I want to start by talking about your getting involved with *John Lithgow: Stories By Heart* because, based on my research, it seems like the show has had a long journey.

Daniel Sullivan: Yes, Jack O'Brien first directed the show at Lincoln Center. I think that even before Lincoln Center, John had tried it out at a couple places and then asked Jack to take a look at it when he was doing it at Lincoln Center. Since that time, John has gone out on the road with it and has changed some material he's doing. The order in which he's doing it, etc. Since Jack was otherwise engaged with *Carousel* on Broadway, John asked me to get involved.

TS: I did notice that from reading reviews since about 2008 that the show has kept evolving.

DS: Right. The Ring Lardner story, "Haircut," he added in later. He used to open with the Wodehouse, and he closes with that now. But through all of these changes, its reason for being has remained the same: it's a tribute and a thank you to his parents.

TS: Do you see this as an autobiographical solo show?

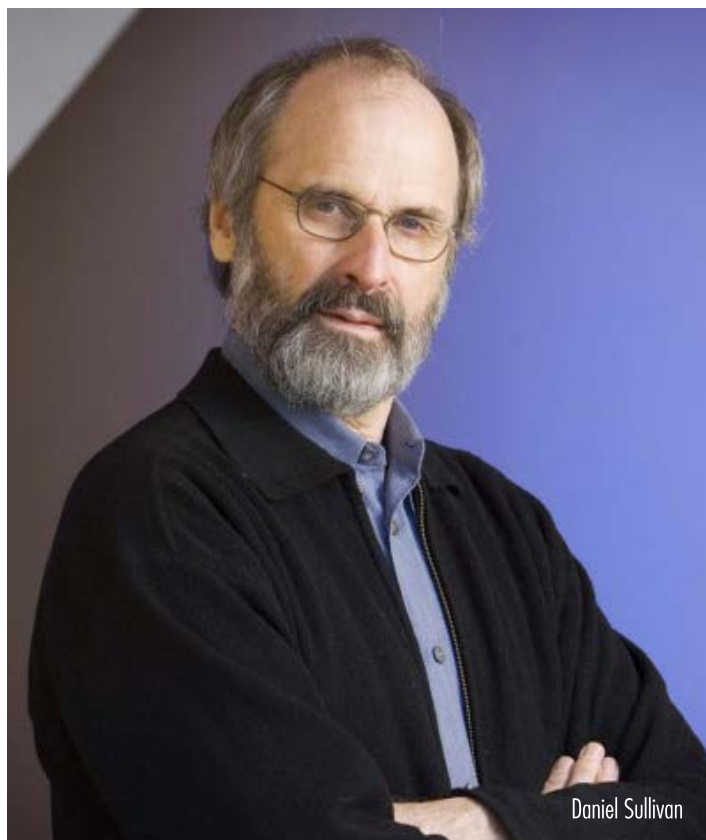
DS: Well, it's interesting because the actual stories that he was read to as a kid and that he reads to his parents during the end of their lives are 80% of the evening, and those stories really have nothing to do with his parents except for the fact that they were instrumental in his life as an actor.

TS: I didn't know anything about Arthur Lithgow, his father. I didn't know John was part of an acting dynasty.

DS: I actually remember meeting his father at a Theatre Communications Group (TCG) conference back in the late 1970s. He was a very elegant man, though I never saw him act and I never saw a production that he directed. He was a beloved figure in TCG and that whole beginning of the regional theatre world. He was part of all of that.

TS: Let's talk a bit about directing solo shows because I know you've also directed Charlayne Woodard's one-woman pieces. What are the challenges in directing solo shows? What do you appreciate about that form of theatre?

DS: If it works, it is thrilling. One of the things I loved about working with Charlayne and also John is simply the risk factor of walking out on stage and saying I'm going to entertain you for the next two hours. It takes extraordinary courage as well as the talent to be able to embody so many different characters as Charlayne does in her work and as John does in *Stories By Heart*. It's dizzying. When John does the Wodehouse story, he has to keep all these balls in the air with all of these characters on stage at the same time. You begin to really believe you're seeing all these people. That's a kind of wonderful magic trick. When you do a one-person show, you need to have somebody who has the kind of huge range that John does. You feel his goodness and his good nature; that's not fake.



TS: Solo shows seem to showcase the protean aspects of a performer. What I understand about solo shows is that it's difficult because your acting partner is the audience and they don't show up until the first preview. Is that true?

DS: Yes, that's very true. As a director, you become the partner. There's a kind of energy in John that's very similar to Charlayne's; it's a kind of shaping energy. The performers have to have all these impulses, and your role as director is more one of channeling that energy than it is producing it. That person has to come with that energy and desire; it takes a lot of chutzpah.

TS: In his show, John talks about why human beings have a fundamental need for stories. I think you could talk about this idea because you've spent your life telling stories.

DS: Part of it is this great desire to make sense of the world. Narrative is the only way you can do that. The beginning, middle, and end of a story is a way of summing up our existence. I sense this is very true for John and this play. It's a way for him to come to terms with his parents. One of the things John talks about at the beginning of his show is his father, who would direct and perform in different Shakespeare plays every night of the week in his company. The amount of energy that it takes to do that is extraordinary. You can see that same energy in John on stage in everything he does, certainly in this piece. He's inexhaustible. The question is not so much do we need stories, but do the stories themselves keep us alive? Give us heart or the courage to live? He never states this boldly in the piece, but it's there.



TS: I'm also curious if you think that this is something that we learn from childhood when our parents read to us?

DS: I think that's true certainly. My father had a book of Russian folk tales that had been translated by Arthur Ransome. It was a little slender black book, and it used to terrify us. So, my father would bring this thing out and all five of us would gather around. It was an odd moment because there was such a tenderness in the gathering of all the children around my father as he would read. For me, it was one of the most weirdly sensual experiences as I got to be in my father's lap and at the same time the stories always ended with people being put in sacks and thrown in the river. Awful things like that. We just obviously hung on every word and they were terrifying, but those were some of the closest and most tender moments that I remember with my father as a child.

TS: Was he a good reader?

DS: Yes, he was a good reader, and you could hear his appreciation of the writing as he read. You could hear him being drawn in, and I think that was important. It wasn't as though he was an actor in any way. You could just hear his love for the words.

TS: I wanted to ask about you and John collaborating together -- is this the fourth time you have worked together?

DS: I think so. We did *The Retreat from Moscow*, *The Columnist*, then *King Lear*, and a fundraiser for The Public Theater in the park where John sang "I Am The Very Model Of A Modern Major General" made up to look like General Flynn. With appropriate changes to the lyrics. It was hilarious.

TS: Can you talk about working with an actor like John on multiple projects? What makes you want to work with certain actors again?

DS: First of all, if there's no trust, you won't work with same theatre actors over time. There's usually a lack of vanity not just on the actor's part, but on the director's part also. Actors have to be honest with themselves, and the director depends on that. Both actor and director have to be aware of the fact that you're going to be honest with one another and kind at the same time. I think it's easy to develop relationships that are ongoing between a director and the actor, and I have a lot of relationships with actors that way. John is one of them. You always hear people talk about the shorthand that actors and directors develop, and I think that's also true. You don't have to say much because you share similar views of the world and how people behave in it.

TS: What do you personally make of the Ring Lardner and PG Wodehouse stories? Are you a fan of both writers?

DS: I would say that I like Lardner and certainly "Haircut" is a brilliant piece of writing. One of his very best pieces. And Wodehouse and all of those Uncle Fred stories are really hilarious. It's almost Monty Python-esque. You can really see the lineage there. It's so completely mad.

TS: "Haircut" is told from a singular voice, and you get a sense of the homogeneity of that town and the people living there. It seems like it speaks to the times we are living in.

DS: You're right that it does speak to our time. There's a real sense of enveloping darkness in that piece that is also very surprising. The

wonderful thing is that the barber doesn't understand the consequences. He doesn't quite understand the story he's telling. It's not that he's an unreliable narrator, just a naive one. Which is a wonderful technique I feel.

TS: I also love that in the Wodehouse piece, he's showcasing a charming criminal. Both stories deal with this criminal element.

DS: That's very true.

TS: I've always thought that Americans appreciate a conman—they love stories about people who get away with murder.

DS: Of course, in the Wodehouse piece it's basically about adventurousness. Uncle Fred just loves to make trouble and get himself into situations that he has to try to find outrageous ways to get out of.

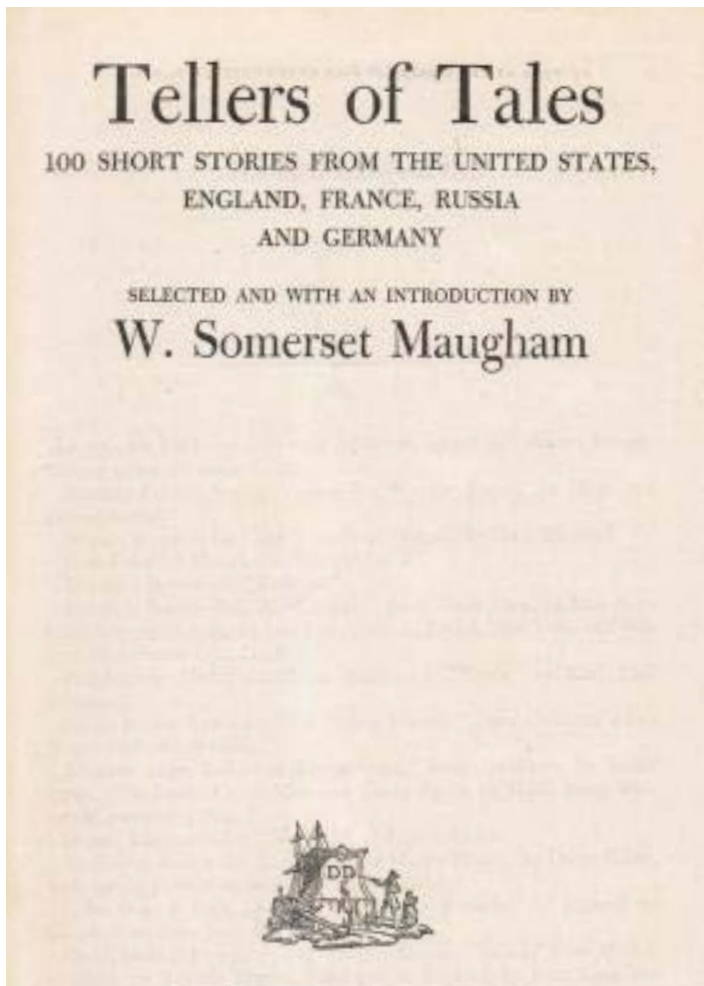
TS: What else is coming up for you as director?

DS: I'm directing Shaw's *Saint Joan* at Manhattan Theatre Club. That's the big thing I'm working on right now – trying to put all that together. Condola Rashad is playing Saint Joan. I saw her in *A Doll's House, Part 2*, and I thought, there she is—there's Saint Joan. •



John Lithgow performing *John Lithgow: Stories By Heart*

TELLERS OF TALES



Tellers of Tales: 100 Short Stories from the United States, England, France, Russia and Germany was compiled by W. Somerset Maugham, a successful English playwright (his play *The Constant Wife* was produced at Roundabout in 2005) and author, and published in 1939. The first edition of the book, likely the one from which Arthur Lithgow read, was 1,574 pages long and weighed 4.5 pounds. As the *New York Times* book reviewer put it, the book is “so heavy that if while reading it in bed you fall asleep and drop it, you’ll likely break a rib.”

When Maugham began work on *Tellers of Tales*, his aim was to show how the short story had developed since the beginning of the 19th century. Writers, Maugham noted, write in whatever medium will pay them, and short stories were in demand in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Before 1850, annuals—ornate literary yearbooks aimed at young women and sold as gifts each holiday season—were

popular. Annuals were replaced by magazines, which paid top dollar for short stories. In America, the rise of the short story was further driven by lax copyright law: it was cheaper for publishers to pirate the work of foreign novelists rather than pay American writers for original work. American writers thus turned their attention to short stories.

Ultimately, Maugham concluded that while writing styles and subjects had changed, “what was a good story at the beginning of the 19th century is still a good story,” and he abandoned his plan of charting the short story’s development. He instead gathered the 100 short stories he found most “moving, exciting, and amusing” because fiction must, first and foremost, entertain the reader.

Organized in approximate chronological order, *Tellers of Tales* opens with “The Two Drovers” by Sir Walter Scott. First published in 1827, it tells of two cattle drovers in Scotland in 1795 who get into an argument that ends in murder and an execution.

Tellers of Tales includes the work of 96 different authors from five countries, with most stories coming from England and the United States. Maugham contrasts the well-made short stories of authors like Edgar Allan Poe, whose tale “The Gold-Bug” is included, with those of Anton Chekhov, whose realistic, seemingly plotless stories influenced a generation of writers.

Chekhov’s short story “Mouzhiks,” (which translates to “The Peasants”), a grim, realistic tale set in an impoverished rural community, is included. Maugham breaks with chronology for the Russian stories, placing them all together because to absorb them “one has to shift one’s outlook on life, one’s feelings on all manner of things, on to another plane.”

Tellers of Tales also includes “The Nowaks,” a short story from *Goodbye to Berlin* by Christopher Isherwood. “The Nowaks,” like the other stories in that book (including “Sally Bowles,” the inspiration for the musical *Cabaret*), is a semi-autobiographical account of Isherwood’s life in Berlin as the Nazis rose to power in the early 1930s.

Maugham ends *Tellers of Tales* with “Oklahoma Race Riots” by Frances W. Prentice, a true account of the 1921 Tulsa race riots. “It is the death of the short story,” Maugham noted in his introduction, “if it can be beaten at its own game by the naked truth.”•

WHAT MAKES A GOOD SHORT STORY?

What makes a good short story? Edgar Allan Poe, a 19th Century American author, literary critic, and pioneer of short stories, was the first to define the medium. Poe was writing in the 1840s and 1850s, and his criteria for a good short story are still used today, though not all writers and critics completely agree with them.

Poe's most famous short story criteria is that a short story should produce a "unity of effect"—a strong, single impression—on the reader.

While Poe had detailed criteria for assessing a story, W. Somerset Maugham, who compiled *Tellers of Tales*, took a simpler approach, saying, "I should be inclined to say that the only test of its excellence is that it interests."

How does "The Haircut" by Ring Lardner, one of the short stories in *Stories By Heart*, compare to Poe's ideal? Let's take a look.

The short story should be short enough to be read in one sitting. Poe wanted the "soul of the reader... in the author's control." Readers shouldn't need to get up to eat or be interrupted by their everyday tasks. "The Haircut" is 5046 words. The average American adult reads 300 words per minute, so the story can likely be read in about 17 minutes.

↓↓↓

THE HAIRCUT
by Ring Lardner

I got another barber that comes over from Carterville and helps me out Saturdays, but the rest of the time I can get along all right alone.

Poe thought a good short story contained one voice. The unnamed barber who narrates "The Haircut" has a very distinctive voice.

Well, Jim would set there a w'ile without openin' his mouth only to spit, and then finally he'd say to me, "Whitey,"—my right name, that is, my right first name, is Dick, but everybody round here calls me Whitey—Jim would say, "Whitey, your nose looks like a rosebud tonight. You must of been drinkin' some of your aw de cologne."

In a short story every word and punctuation mark should contribute to the mood of the story. Dialect words like "w'ile" and "aw de cologne" put the reader in the time and place of the story. Describing a nose "like a rosebud" gives the reader an image of the alcoholic's nose while reinforcing the rural setting.

Poor Julie! She didn't show up here on Main Street for a long, long time afterward.

Poe thought short stories should deal with one incident. "The Haircut" tells of several events leading up to the death of Jim Kendall.

Next mornin', I hadn't been open more than ten minutes when Doc Stair come in. He looked kind of nervous. He asked me had I seen Paul Dickson. I said no, but I knew where he was, out duck-shootin' with Jim Kendall.

Poe also thought a short story should have one protagonist. Though there are many characters in "The Haircut", Jim Kendall is the main character.

It probably served Jim right, what he got. But still we miss him round here. He certainly was a card! Comb it wet or dry?

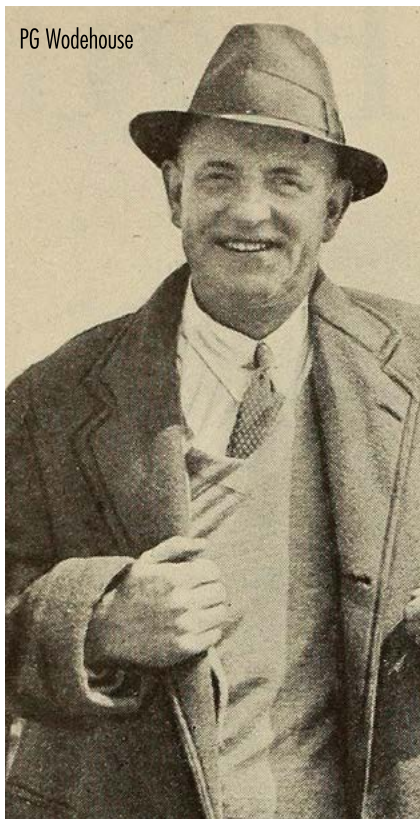
Short stories should have a climax that the reader doesn't realize is coming. While Jim's death is mentioned early on, the reader doesn't suspect that Paul will kill him or that Doc Stair will help cover it up.

LEGENDARY STORYTELLERS: LARDNER & WODEHOUSE



Ring Lardner

RING LARDNER (1885-1933) was born Ringgold Wilmer Lardner in Niles, Michigan into a wealthy family. He was tutored privately in his home and showed an early interest in music, athletics, theatre, and writing. After high school, he enrolled briefly in engineering school but, after failing every class except for writing, decided to pursue journalism. Lardner started his writing career in 1905 working as a sports reporter for the *South Bend Times*. In 1907 he moved to Chicago to report for the *Chicago Examiner*, traveling with the White Sox on their spring tour. In 1910 the *St. Louis Sporting News* offered him a position as their managing editor and featured writer, which he eagerly accepted. However, Lardner couldn't stay away from Chicago for too long, especially once the *Chicago Tribune* offered him the opportunity to write for the daily column "In the Wake of the News." In 1916 Lardner published his first book, *You Know Me Al*, originally published as six separate but related short stories from the *The Saturday Evening Post*. *You Know Me Al* developed into a nationally syndicated comic strip written by Lardner and drawn by Will B. Johnstone and Dick Dorgan. Lardner went on to publish many other short stories such as "Haircut," "Some Like Them Cold," "The Golden Honeymoon," "Alibi Ike," and "A Day with Conrad Green." He also pursued his long time passion for theatre and music, writing the play *June Moon*, which premiered at the Broadhurst Theatre in 1929 and wrote songs and lyrics for Bert Williams, Jerome Kern and Aubrey Stauffer, among others. Lardner and F. Scott Fitzgerald were good friends and remained so until Lardner's death in 1933 at the age of 48, of complications from tuberculosis.



PG Wodehouse

PG WODEHOUSE (1881-1975) was born in Guildford, Surrey, United Kingdom to Eleanor and Henry Ernest. Wodehouse's father was a magistrate resident in the British colony of Hong Kong, so as a young child he and his two older siblings traveled a fair amount without seeing their parents for long periods of time. Many biographers believe that this isolation caused him to avoid emotional engagement in both his life and his works, but it allowed for him to create fantastical imaginary worlds from a very early age. At the age of 12, Wodehouse followed his brother to Dulwich College, a boarding school for boys in southeast London. There he was able to sing, become an editor for the school magazine and become involved in athletics. Wodehouse was expected to follow the path of his older siblings and go on to college, but his family's finances took a turn for the worse, and he was forced to take a job in the London office of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank. Wodehouse found the work to be extremely boring and would long for the end of the day so he could go home and write. In 1902 he had his first real publication: his short story called "The Prize Poem" was published in *Public School Magazine*. He resigned from the bank that same month in order to devote himself to writing full time. Many of his early works were related to his experience in English boarding school, but he also wrote comic fiction, a series of novels, Broadway musical comedies that served as a precursor for the American musical, and even wrote for MGM in Hollywood during the 1930s. Wodehouse was famous for the extensive research he would do before starting a book (writing up to four hundreds pages of notes in preparation) and his use of highly original phrases and manipulation of language that made for humorous, clever dialogue and characters. •



WODEHOUSE WORDPLAY

PG Wodehouse was an English writer in the 20th century. His short story "Uncle Fred Flits By" is the second story in *Stories By Heart*. Wodehouse was popular for his language and use of literary devices and wordplay in his writing, specifically: understatement, exaggeration, allusion, repetition, and juxtaposition. Robert McCrum, Wodehouse's biographer, says of his use of language: "His instinctive command of the prose sentence, combined with a perfect ear for the music of English, gave him the confidence to trade in school slang." It is his melding of colloquial language and complicated prose that makes his writing accessible to the masses.

At the time Wodehouse was writing, England was at its peak for literacy. Since most people were literate at this time in England, British writers would have to learn to speak to everybody. This means Wodehouse was not writing for one particular class or group in society; he had a wide audience spanning all classes. Coincidentally, while most people in England were reading, the amount of drinking in the country was also at its highest. This explains the author's popular chosen state for his characters: drunk. In fact, Wodehouse created a plethora of different terms to describe drinking culture: awash, fried, lathered, scooped, tanked, among many others. Outside of his drunken lexicon, Wodehouse is responsible for over 1,750 quotations in the Oxford English Dictionary. Below is a list of literary devices used in "Uncle Fred Flits By" that demonstrate his passion for words:

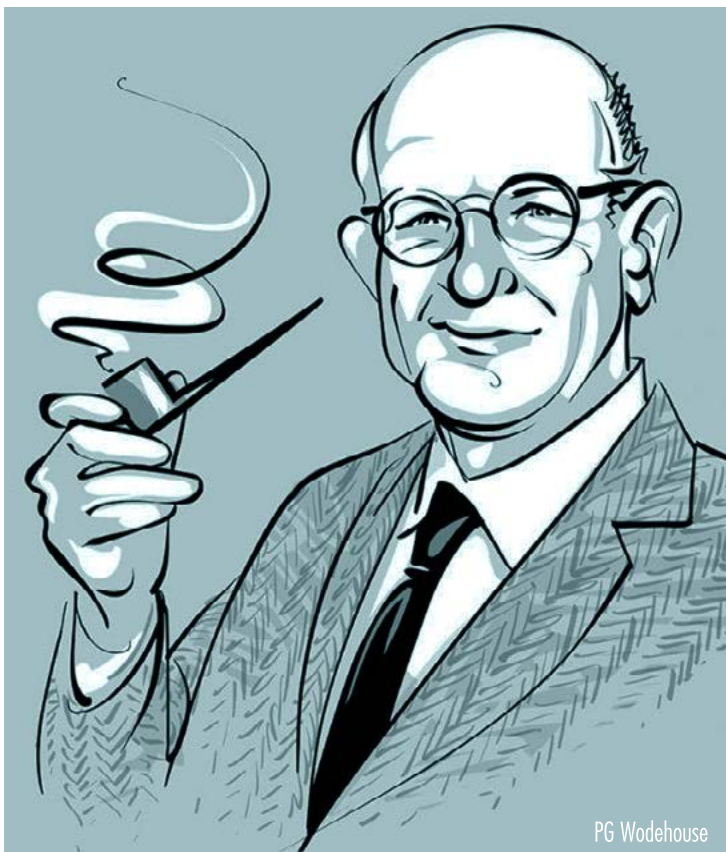
REPETITION: a word or phrase that is repeated in a text for emphasis or comic purposes

"The red-faced bird crept, and came back not exactly foaming at the mouth but with the air of a man who for two pins would so foam."

"How can I leave this foul hole a better and happier foul hole than I found it?"

COINCIDENCE: unexpected actions that occur at the same time by chance

"'He is ambitious. It won't be long before Wilberforce suddenly rises in the world.' She never spoke a truer word. At this very moment, he came from behind the settee like a leaping salmon."



HYPERBOLE: exaggerations that are not meant to be taken literally, usually for comic relief

"I ask you, my dear boy, to envisage what will happen if I return with a cold in the head. I shall sink to the level of a fifth-class power."

"And as Lord Ickenharn had specifically stated that his wife, Pongo's Aunt Jane, had expressed her intention of scalping him with a blunt knife if he wasn't back at the Hall by lunch time on the morrow."

SIMILE: a comparison of one thing to another in order to make the meaning more visceral

"Lord Ickenham had been stopping at intervals like a pointing dog."

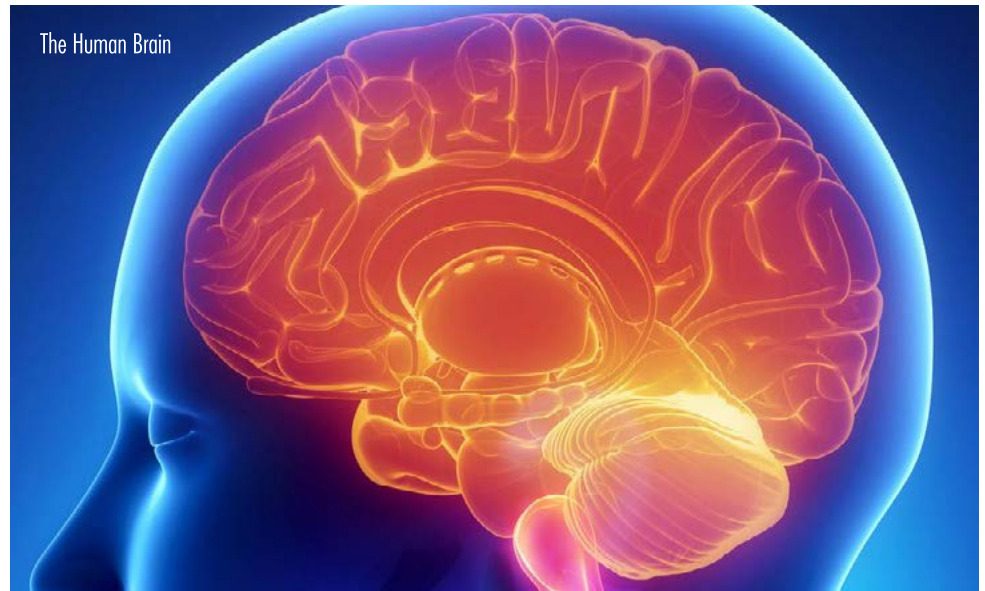
"You will readily understand why the unfortunate young clam gazed at him as he would have gazed at two-penn'orth of dynamite, had he discovered it lighting up in his presence."

THE HEALING POWER OF STORYTELLING

In *Stories By Heart*, John Lithgow describes a moment in which his aging and chronically ill father experienced a transformation of body and mind while listening to a story out of a childhood storybook. Wheezing with laughter and flooded with good spirits, “my father came back to life” as he heard the story, Lithgow explains. This newfound “life” seemed to sustain his father for over a year, Lithgow says, providing him strength in his ongoing fight against his illness and depression. The phenomenon Lithgow witnessed, as miraculous as it may seem, is not without precedent or scientific backing. “Bibliotherapy,” the use of literature and storytelling as instruments of healing, is an increasingly common practice, and its therapeutic potential, though not uncontroversial, finds much support in any array of scientific studies and documented anecdotes.

Bibliotherapy has been connected with the alleviation of symptoms in people with a wide variety of illnesses, syndromes, and disabilities throughout recorded history. There are stories of neurological patients speaking for the first time in months after reading poetry; seniors with dementia experiencing an abatement of agitated behavior after hearing poems and stories; and sufferers of rheumatoid arthritis and acute physical pain finding noticeable relief during and after diving into a book. In one study published by the *Annals of Internal Medicine* in 2011, storytelling was found to help a group of patients control their high blood pressure. In another conducted by the University of Bucharest in 2015, adults with severe intellectual disabilities experienced a strengthening of their communication skills and a decrease in instances of negative behavior after sessions of storytelling and active drama therapy. Some recipients of bibliotherapy have even been known to experience improvements so drastic that they have stopped visiting their doctors and reduced their dosage of medication.

Recent studies are illuminating the psychological and neurological reasons behind the effectiveness of bibliotherapy. Reading itself has been shown to have a trancelike effect on the brain similar to that of meditation,

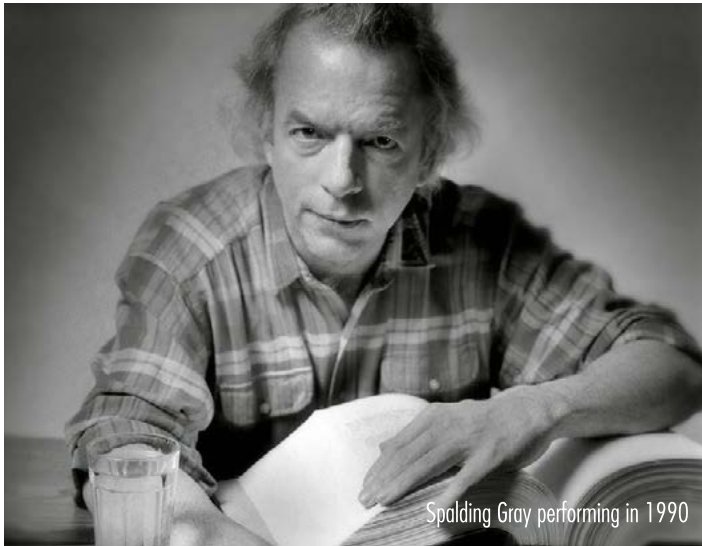


and studies have found that those who read regularly have markedly better sleep, greater self-esteem, lower stress levels, and lower rates of depression than do those who rarely or never read. Reading, then, can induce the same therapeutic effects in the mind as deep relaxation. Stories also have been proven to stimulate the brain’s mirror neurons, which serve as our “centers of empathy.” (See more on mirror neurons in “The Act of Storytelling” on page 8.) Reading fiction or nonfiction stories activates the mirror neurons in a similar way to observing or interacting with others in day-to-day life. This strengthens the brain’s empathic connections, resulting in heightened social competence and improved mental health overall. The success of bibliotherapy, then, can very much be attributed to a combination of proven neurological factors.

Bibliotherapy has been on the rise in recent years, from book clubs aimed specifically at providing a place of healing and community to those who need it, to “reading pharmacies” that match literature to an array of physical and mental conditions, to reference books that recommend novels based on personal behaviors or habits that a reader would like to remedy. Books are by no means a guaranteed “cure” for any ailment or a wholesale substitute for doctors, medicine, or professional therapy, and there are medical professionals who caution against treating bibliotherapy as a magic bullet. But, as John Lithgow attests in *Stories By Heart*, stories really can serve as agents of healing, and their positive impact on our physical and mental health is not to be discounted. •

VARIATIONS OF THE TRUTH: THE ART OF SOLO PERFORMANCE

In describing *Stories By Heart*, one word that has been used by Lithgow's collaborators is "Homeric." Indeed, while Homer's works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are now most commonly encountered in written form, this was not their original form. Called a "divine singer," Homer is said to have been a traveller who communed with the Muses and the Gods, collecting stories from those around him and spreading them further, establishing the importance of stories to those divine and mortal. To say that someone's work is in the "Homeric tradition" typically means that they regard the telling of stories as an art, a craft to be learned and refined.



Spalding Gray performing in 1990

This craft is one that has been practiced by the Lithgows, with John not only retelling stories that shaped his childhood in *Stories By Heart*, but adding some of his own as well. The idea of autobiographical solo performances was popularized in New York in the late 1960s by Spalding Gray. A member of The Performance Group, a company of experimental theatre-makers based in SoHo, Gray became famous for his monologues. When he performed, Gray would sit at a desk with a microphone and glass of water, speaking to the audience on a subject that he had predetermined thoughts on but largely improvising the text. In describing his work, Gray referred to himself as taking on the character of "Spalding Gray." He would record himself telling stories, play them back, and ask questions about them like "what would this character do next?" in order to determine how to redraft his work. This process led him to a lengthy career as a writer and actor, most notably with his 1985 monologue *Swimming to Cambodia*, which was later adapted into a film.

Someone who has managed to tell his story through solo performance without ever appearing on stage is Nassim Soleimanpour. Unable to leave his native country of Iran due to his refusal to serve in their military, Soleimanpour wrote *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit*, a piece performed by a different actor each time it is produced. The bigger twist? These actors are given the play for the first time in a sealed envelope when they walk on stage, and they are required to perform it with no preparation. Soleimanpour uses this unique approach to speak to his isolation and to explain why he cannot tell his story himself.

Anna Deavere Smith is someone else who sheds light on stories that would not otherwise be heard. In pieces like her most recent one, *Notes From the Field*, which looked at racial discrimination in the criminal justice system, Smith creates and performs solo performances by conducting interviews and performing the responses verbatim, inhabiting the bodies and voices of her interviewees.

Lithgow, Gray, Soleimanpour, and Smith don't all appear in their work. Some of their stories are their own, and some of them are not. They are only four examples of the many who have honed the craft of solo performance. What they all share is a tradition in which stories are told, refined, and hopefully shared even when their tellers are gone. •



DESIGNER STATEMENTS

JOHN LEE BEATTY—SET DESIGN

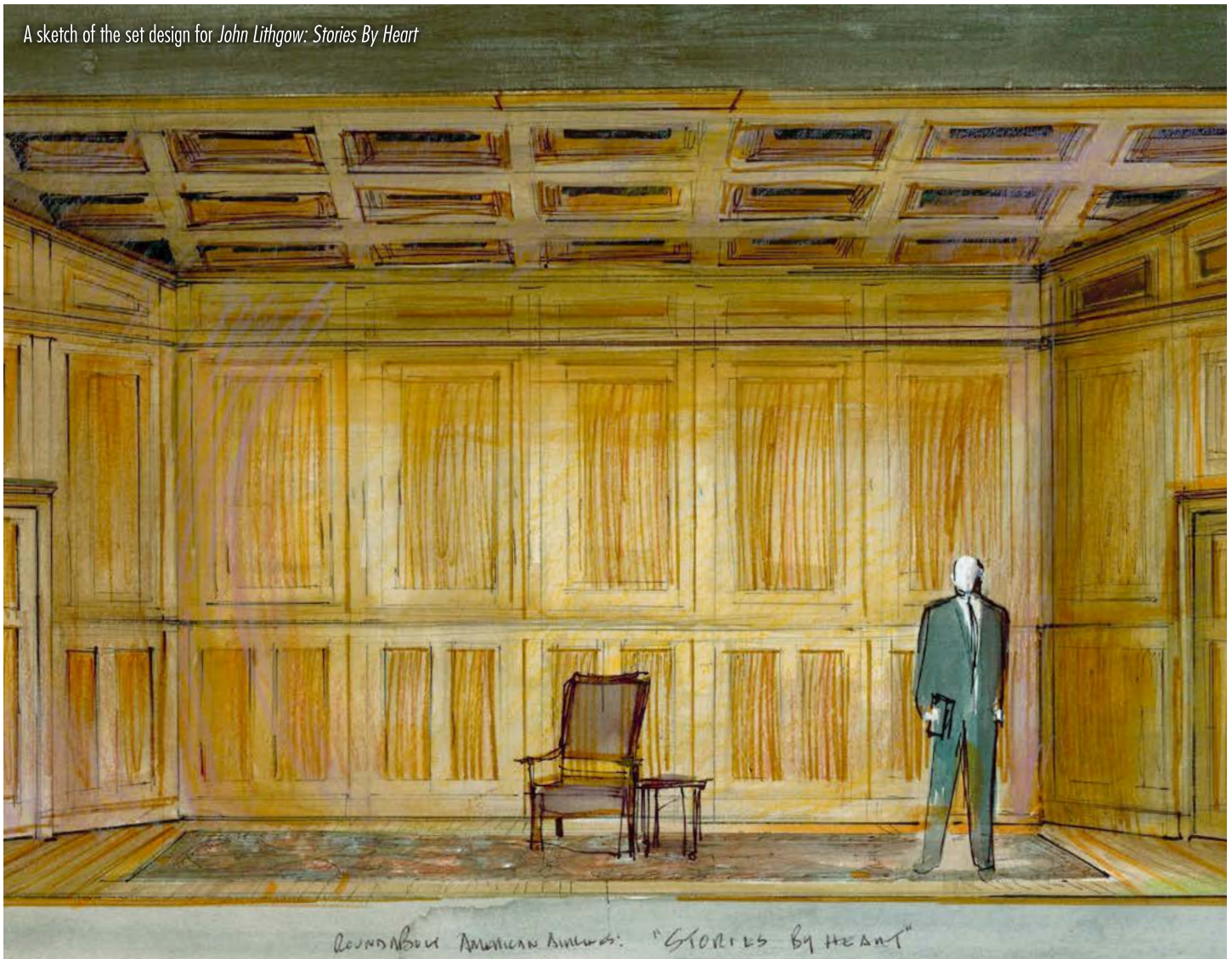
This is an evening of storytelling. The first thing the scenery has to do is not get in the way of that. John Lithgow has performed this piece all over the country in many, many venues. Oddly, to me, that suggested going against the “black drape masking void” or “deserted backstage with old props and a rope or two” look one might expect. Rather, I imagined this as a venue best suitable to the actor’s work. Daniel Sullivan, the director, and I sat in the American Airlines Theatre together and figured out what we thought was the optimal size of area for the performance, and we made sure that the space was totally and unmysteriously exposed to the audience (nothing out of view) and that it supported the actor’s performance in another way...by physically amplifying the sound. The set is an “orchestra shell” for an actor. I drew from memories of Carnegie Hall

and also “Little” Bridges auditorium in my home town of Claremont, California. Both venues are known for excellent acoustics, and both are period suitable in a general way to the stories we hear. It was important NOT to illustrate the stories in any way. That is the business of John Lithgow’s performance and the imaginative participation of the audience. The “finite space” of the set is opposite to a huge black void and is intended to keep all of us in the same room to experience the stories together.

JESS GOLDSTEIN—COSTUME DESIGN

I believe John Lithgow has been performing *Stories By Heart* for at least a couple of years now...different versions in different theatres. I have been asked to come in and refine a look that he has already established for himself. He has always worn his own black suit with a white shirt. We've

A sketch of the set design for *John Lithgow: Stories By Heart*



ROUNDABOUT AMERICAN THEATRES: "STORIES BY HEART"



decided that for this Roundabout production we will have a tailor create a custom-made suit for John. Our director, Daniel Sullivan, and John have agreed that the suit could have a bit of color—so, after looking at several fabric options, we have chosen a medium-dark blue wool fabric with a very slight checkered pattern. The pattern probably won't be evident to the audience, but it will give the suit a lovely texture. And it will give the suit a sort of vintage look that supports the historical periods of the stories he tells. The process of making the suit began with John visiting the tailor's shop and having extensive measurements of his body taken. We also discussed with the tailor all of the various choices available: style and width of the lapels, pleated trousers versus flat-front (we chose the second option), a single vent at the back hem of the jacket, number of buttons, etc. We want the suit to have a classic look that feels modern but could also be believably decades older. In a few weeks, probably just before we begin dress rehearsals, we will have a fitting on the suit. It won't be completely finished, thereby giving us the opportunity to make slight changes if we feel they're necessary. We are also having a shirt custom-made for John. Once again, it is based on the classic white shirt he has worn in previous versions of the show. Instead of solid white, we've chosen a white cotton fabric with a pale grey stripe, which will give it some interest. The shirt will be made with a square bottom hem, as opposed to the usual curved hem of a dress shirt, so that it will look like a barber's smock when he wears it untucked from his trousers as he tells the story "The Haircut." Once we see John onstage in dress rehearsals, we'll continue to refine the look and make small changes, if necessary. Ultimately, this costume is really all about giving John a handsome, comfortable, and engaging look.

KENNETH POSNER—LIGHTING DESIGN

After reading the script to John's solo show, I imagined how the lighting for the different parts of the play would look onstage and began to sketch these ideas in my mind's eye. I read his autobiography, *Drama*, and I found it fun and fascinating. Both *Drama* and *Stories By Heart* are love letters to the theatre. John is one of my favorite actors. He basically says in both works, "I'm a storyteller." All of us who work in the theatre—writers, actors, directors, designers, crew members—we're all storytellers. That's what really appeals to me about this piece. His show is about how storytelling engages humanity—how sharing stories with other people makes us all want to learn, change, and evolve. Lighting a solo show has special challenges. The design needs to be very subtle in order to support the performance and keep

the audience's focus on the text. The mood and lighting composition for each scene need to transition imperceptibly. I have to pay very close attention to the beats and work closely with the director to help create a complete arc for the evening. Often in the play, the action goes back and forth between different times and locales and, as the lighting designer, I pay close attention to these shifts. In *Stories By Heart*, there are many different layers of events, including John's recounting of how he rediscovered the power of storytelling with his aging parent, as well as the Ring Lardner piece, which is deceptively simple. I love the period setting of that story. The PG Wodehouse piece is a distinct contrast to the Lardner story, and I am excited about lighting John as he pops in and out of nearly a dozen different characters.

PETER FITZGERALD—SOUND DESIGN

When I was asked to design the sound for *John Lithgow: Stories By Heart* and read this character-filled script, my first step was to go to the American Airlines Theatre and reacquaint myself with the space. I always like to spend some time in a room to get a sense of the room's acoustic quality. I designed the first show for the Roundabout at the American Airlines Theatre and at that time installed a permanent sound system. It was a pleasant surprise to find a good portion of that sound system still in use. The American Airlines Theatre is a good sounding space; like most theatres, some sound amplification may be required, especially in the rear orchestra seating area and upstairs in the back of the balcony. I like to be proactive as a designer and be able to make adjustments throughout rehearsals and when the audience arrives. At the time of this writing, I had not yet had an opportunity to meet with our director Daniel Sullivan; however, from working with Dan on previous productions, I will make some assumptions relating to the sound design. The design will be divided into two parts. The first part will be the speaker system and related electronics. Some speakers will be added and adjustments made to existing speaker locations. The second will be decisions that will come later in the process, including microphone choices and placement and any playback such as pre-show music or effects. The staging will dictate microphone placements, and the set could have some impact on the sound coming from the stage, so microphone choices and placement may happen when the set is in place and I have better idea of the staging from rehearsals. The sound design is geared to be as focused and natural as possible for John as he takes us through these wonderful stories. •

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY

HOW DOES A WRITER CREATE A COMPELLING SHORT STORY?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA .SL.11-12.5)

In *Stories By Heart*, students will watch one highly skilled actor tell two stories with few theatrical elements other than his voice, body, and facial expressions. This activity explores the craft of storytelling from an actor's perspective.

PREPARE Identify three components of acting: vocal choices (including pitch, volume, tempo), physical choices (posture, level, gesture), and facial expressions. You may want to lead the class as a group to practice each of these.

ACTIVATE Give each student this section from "Goldilocks" (found [HERE](#)), or choose a short selection from your curriculum with at least 3 characters. Allow students to practice telling the story and making vocal/physical/facial choices to define each character.

SHARE AND REFLECT Allow a few students to share their storytelling. Identify students' unique choices and reflect on how different actors interpret the same story/characters in different ways.

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HOW DO ACTORS MAKE PHYSICAL AND VOCAL CHOICES TO TELL A STORY?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4)

In *Stories By Heart*, actor John Lithgow describes the influence that *Tellers of Tales*, a compilation of stories, had on his family and artistic life. This activity explores how a writer crafts a strong short story.

ACTIVATE Gather students in a seated circle and ask them to tell a story as a group by going clockwise around the circle with each student adding one sentence. Allow the activity to continue until an event has transpired within the story, or students end the tale.

REFLECT Ask students to reflect on the experience. What was challenging about it? Was their story interesting? Good? What makes a strong short story?

READ Read "What Makes a Good Short Story?" found on page 13 of this guide. Scribe on a board or chart paper Poe's criteria for a strong short story.

REVISE Return to the seated circle and repeat the storytelling activity. Ask students to actively pursue the elements of a strong short story as they contribute to the tale.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY**HOW DO WRITERS REFLECT ON IMPORTANT STORIES IN THEIR OWN LIVES?**

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA W.9-10.3)

After listening to John Lithgow describe the impact that two short stories had on his own life, students will write and present their own “story about a story.”

DISCUSS Ask students to recall why Lithgow selected these two stories and how they had an impact on his own life. For a deeper dive, you may read and discuss “The Act of Storytelling” article on pages 8-9 of this Upstage Guide.

WRITE Think of a story that you either read or heard, that has influenced you or had an impact on your life (or perhaps just a story you always loved). What is the story? Who is the protagonist of the story, and what is your opinion of this character? Describe the first time you heard the story. Where were you? Did someone read it to you or tell it to you? Why did you respond to this story? How did this story influence who you are today? (About one paragraph)

SHARE Allow a few students to read their own story about a story.

REFLECT Do we need stories? Why are stories essential to people?

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HOW DOES A COSTUME DESIGNER ENVISION A CHARACTER BASED ON AN ACTOR’S INTERPRETATION OF THE ROLE?

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

After seeing *Stories By Heart*, students create costume designs for one of the short story characters embodied by John Lithgow.

BRAINSTORM Alone or as a class, generate a list of words or phrases that come to mind when students think of the character Uncle Fred from “Uncle Fred Flits By.”

DESIGN Using the figure drawing or John Lithgow drawing (available [HERE](#)), ask students to create a costume for Uncle Fred. What items of clothing would he wear? Would they be tight or loose? What colors would he choose? Allow ample time for students to draw and color their designs.

SHARE Stage a gallery walk. Ask students to point out similarities between the drawings: What does that suggest about the actor’s performance? Ask a volunteer student to explain their choices and how they connect each choice to something they saw or heard at the show.

GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES

ANGLOPHILE:

a person who greatly admires England
John describes his family as Anglophiles who stood out amongst the all-American community in Ohio because of their love of Shakespeare.

PURLOIN:

to steal something; this is a common device used in storytelling to create mix-ups and other hijinks
John speaks of the tricks and devices of storytelling they learned as children growing up, including purloined letters.

WOOD ALCOHOL:

a term for methanol, which is the simplest alcohol but is poisonous to the body
In "The Haircut," Jim says he is so desperate for a drink that he would be willing to drink wood alcohol.

TWO-PENN'ORTH:

British colloquialism meaning two cents worth
Pongo is described as staring at his uncle as though he was looking at "two-penn'orth of dynamite."

OMNIBUS:

a dated term for a bus
Pongo and his uncle go to Mitching Hill via an omnibus.

MACKINTOSH:

a full-length raincoat, named after its Scottish inventor Charles Macintosh
The woman Pongo and Uncle Fred encounter at the door is wearing a mackintosh because of the bad weather.

MUFFLER:

a heavy scarf, usually made of wool, worn in the winter to keep one warm
Uncle Fred's wife demanded he take his woolly muffler before leaving the house because of the cold weather.

LIVER PAD:

a medicated pad or plaster worn on the skin over the liver used to prevent malaria, sea-sickness, fever. Popular at the end of the 19th century
Uncle Fred explains if he does not warm up inside the house he will surely end up sick and have to wear a liver pad.

ANAESTHETIST:

a medical specialist who administers anaesthetics, a drug which prevents pain during surgery
When Robinson comes in the house, Uncle Fred introduces Pongo as the parrot's anaesthetist.

IODOFORM:

an odorous, pale yellow substance that is used as a disinfectant
Uncle Fred orders Pongo to look more like the parrot's anesthetist and to smell like iodoform.

TITHE:

one-tenth part of something
When Uncle Fred goes to give Wilberforce and Julia 100 pounds, Pongo is surprised to discover that his uncle has even a tithe of that much money.

RATTING SEASON:

hunting season for rats, common in England
Uncle Fred explains to Pongo that his aunt will be angry with him for a while and will not let Pongo visit, but they will want him to come visit once rattling season begins.

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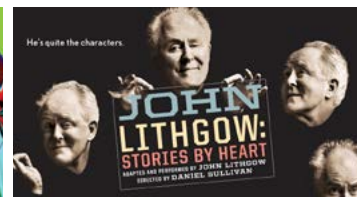


ABOUT ROUNABOUT

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO) 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.

2017-2018 SEASON



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH JANICE PENINO, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become Human Resources Director?

Janice Penino: I am a native New Yorker. I grew up in Maspeth, Queens and graduated from St. John's University with a BS degree in Communications. My path to getting into HR is a long story. I started my career in radio promotion—I was the Advertising and Promotion Manager at WNBC Radio. From there, I took a job in NBC Corporate Communications as Guest Relations Manager. I was responsible for the NBC Page Program and oversaw the NBC Tour and Audience Services. I met the folks at Late Night with David Letterman through that job, and when they left NBC to go to CBS, I started the Audience Services department for them at Late Show. About three years into the run of the show, I was asked to start an HR Department—from scratch. It seemed a really interesting challenge, and something I might enjoy, and I was right. By the time the show ended 19 years later, I was the VP of HR for Worldwide Pants Incorporated—Dave's production company. My story is one that shows that what someone starts out to do and then ends up doing can be very different things – but each step along the way leads to the next, and each experience is valuable and relevant.

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

JP: I am responsible for all of the typical HR functions—strategy,

recruitment, compliance, benefits, compensation, employee relations, performance management—to name some—but the biggest responsibility to me is working toward making the culture at Roundabout one that is inclusive, open, welcoming, and more fun.

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

JP: The best part is working with our staff. The people here are smart, creative, dedicated, and just lovely. It has been a pleasure getting to know everyone and hopefully making a difference in how they see HR and what I can bring to them as individuals and to Roundabout as an organization. The hardest part of my job is realizing that I can never make everything perfect for everyone, but I do attempt to make our staff feel that even if a problem or situation can't be solved or changed, we listen and try our best to do whatever we can.

TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

JP: I had always been impressed with Roundabout and its mission, so when I found out they were looking for a new HR Director, it intrigued me. When I met the folks here, I was thrilled to learn that they were looking for someone who wanted to bring to this company what I had to offer and that creating a positive culture was and is a real priority. I thought that this would be a wonderful opportunity to do some good work at a terrific place—and I was right! •

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org. Find us on:



WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR EDUCATORS

TICKET POLICY

As a student, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row, and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the 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.



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