



A SCORCHING NEW PRODUCTION
OF THE GROUNDBREAKING CLASSIC

UPSTAGE

A PUBLICATION OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AT **ROUNABOUTTHEATRECOMPANY**, WINTER 2012

UPSTAGE Callboard

For Jimmy Porter, there is nothing more criminal than the lack of emotion and enthusiasm he sees evident in his generation, especially in his well-born wife Alison and their roommate Cliff, who have grown addicted to Jimmy's passion and rage. When Alison's childhood friend Helena visits, she exposes the unsustainable madness of their relationships and living situation, forcing Alison to decide whether to leave the most exciting and dangerous man she's ever known.

Still as shocking and relevant as when it first premiered in postwar London, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* is a sharply funny, fiercely honest exploration of political disillusionment and basic human yearning.

<http://www.roundabouttheatre.org/Shows-Events/Look-Back-in-Anger.aspx>

WHEN

1954

WHERE

MIDLANDS, ENGLAND
(IN THE CENTER OF THE COUNTRY, NORTH OF LONDON)

WHO



JIMMY PORTER

A young man who feels confined by his society and turns his rage on those closest to him.



ALISON PORTER

Jimmy's well-born wife who loves her husband but can no longer tolerate how he treats her.



CLIFF LEWIS

Jimmy and Alison's best friend and roommate; he is the opposite of Jimmy but dependent on Jimmy's power and passion.

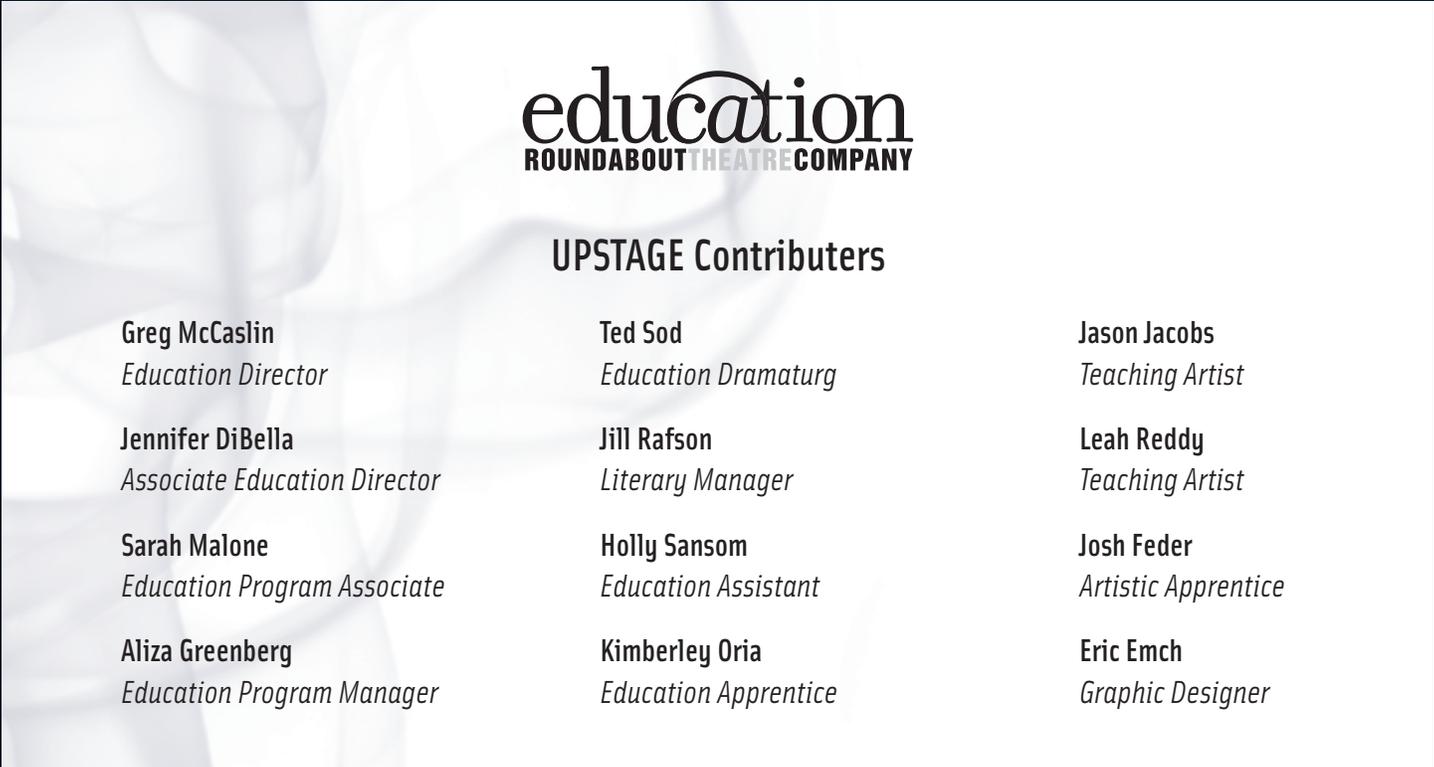


HELENA CHARLES

Alison's childhood friend, from a privileged background, who exposes the madness of Alison and Jimmy's relationship.

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education

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A Look at Acting

Interview with actor Matthew Rhys

Ted Sod, Roundabout's Education Dramaturg, sat down with actor Matthew Rhys to discuss *Look Back in Anger* and his role as the iconic Jimmy Porter.

TS: Why did you choose to play the role of Jimmy Porter?

Matthew Rhys: *Look Back in Anger* was instrumental in me choosing to be an actor. I've been slightly obsessed with this play since I was a very young boy when I saw Richard Burton in the film version. Consequently, it's always been an enormous ambition of mine to play the part.

TS: Jimmy seems to be a character who wasn't seen on British stages prior to 1956.

MR: Obviously, I wasn't around when it premiered, but we are all privy to the play's impact. There are people I've worked with who remember seeing Jimmy on stage for the first time and certainly felt the impact it had at that time. Sometimes, when the play is revived, the pressing question becomes "how relevant is it?" There are still great elements of the play that are incredibly relevant, I think. And that's why the play means so much to me; I can relate to Jimmy so easily.

TS: Is it premature at this point in your process for you to tell us who Jimmy Porter is?

MR: I can give you a sense of what I think of him now. He is an incredibly passionate and intellectual young man who's confined by many aspects of society. To me, he seems a man that's imprisoned by varying incarcerations. He's incarcerated in every sense; he's like a caged tiger on so many different levels. The small attic room he lives in physicalizes the fact that there's a class system in place that restricts him. He's incredibly frustrated by the job he has, because he's so over-qualified. He's obviously a working class man who had the intellect to go to university, but he feels confined for many reasons. On another level, there's this great insecurity that goes hand-in-hand with his relationship with Alison. He is desperately in need of her and wants her, and when their relationship has fallen apart, the presence of his friend Cliff doesn't allow him to say how he feels. Cliff is a reminder that he has to share everything. Cliff's presence in the flat reminds him that he's not succeeding as he should. Although he loves Cliff and he's incredibly loyal to him, there are elements of Cliff that frustrate him enormously and because of his presence, he can't really be who he wants to be with Alison. All of these things are conspiring against Jimmy. It snowballs towards these outbursts and monologues that come from this pressure cooker he is in.



TS: How much of Jimmy's emotional life is influenced by the death of his father?

MR: An enormous amount. On a schoolboy, psychoanalytical level, I think so much is defined by the early years, and when he goes into the monologue about his father's death, it's an instrumental moment for the audience. You understand where his anger comes from and his sense of the injustice of it. You understand very quickly where his seething violence comes from.

TS: You're Welsh, correct?

MR: I am, yes.

TS: What kind of preparation will it take to become Jimmy?

MR: I think I know a number of Jimmys, or indeed, I know a number of people who have very strong elements of Jimmy. I think the approach to his actions will be interesting because of the references to the family he has, to his education, and the other references that are

worked in. There's an Irish reference to him, which I think is quite fitting. His accent intrigued me quite a bit because of who he is and where he's from and now he's in a flat in England.

TS: I have to say, it seems to me Jimmy Porter might be part of the Occupy Wall Street movement if he was living among us. Would you agree?

MR: Yes, definitely. I think, in a certain way, the financial world in the United States (my impression of it) takes on what was the old class system of the United Kingdom, in that there are those who are extremely privileged. I think Wall Street is certainly where Jimmy would be if he were in New York City today.

TS: What do you think the play is about?

MR: The beauty of this play and why I love it is because I've seen it many times with different actors and it means a number of things for different people. There are those who think it's a play about the abuse within the relationship and then there are those who think it's about being trapped. The play will always bring up different things for me. I find it hard to confine it to being about one thing. It's about a lot of things, which is why it appeals to a wide audience and why it's so universal.

TS: Do you think the fact that the Colonel (Alison's father) does not appear in this version is going to make the play more of a pressure cooker?

MR: Absolutely. I love that. I love the claustrophobia that builds; the play comes on far more intensely. There's no opportunity to breathe; it just builds and builds until this moment that stops your breathing.

TS: What's your take on Jimmy and Alison's relationship? Do you think they are truly in love?

MR: Yes I do. I am a die hard romantic at heart; I think he has to be in love with her, otherwise nothing would matter. Then it would be a

play about abuse, a relationship that is finished. I think, in those final sentences, he has to be in love with her, so we can believe that there is hope for them.

TS: How do you like to collaborate with a director?

MR: You nailed it on the head for me. The word "collaborator"; that's what I look for primarily. Pardon the cliché, but I love to go on the journey with someone. We lead each other at times and help each other along.

TS: Can you tell us about your training? Did you have any teachers who influenced you in any way?

MR: I had a great number. I trained at the Royal Academy about 15 years ago in London where there were a slew of great teachers. There was an acting teacher, Martin Ledwith, who really influenced me.

TS: Can you tell us if you have any advice for young people who might want to be actors?

MR: The list is as long as my arm, but I think the biggest thing is your tenacity. You need that in your work ethic. You have to need to act because it's an incredibly difficult profession.

TS: Is there anything else that you want to tell us about the role or the play?

MR: There are people who think the play is a bit dated, but when I read it, I know it is relevant and will relate to a modern audience.

TS: What's interesting to me is that, on some level, there are still households like this.

MR: There are families where people can be so cruel, only because they love each other.

TS: It reminds me of that saying: "Familiarity breeds contempt."

MR: Yes, absolutely.

[JIMMY] IS AN INCREDIBLY PASSIONATE AND INTELLECTUAL YOUNG MAN WHO'S CONFINED BY MANY ASPECTS OF SOCIETY. TO ME, HE SEEMS A MAN THAT'S IMPRISONED BY VARYING INCARCERATIONS.

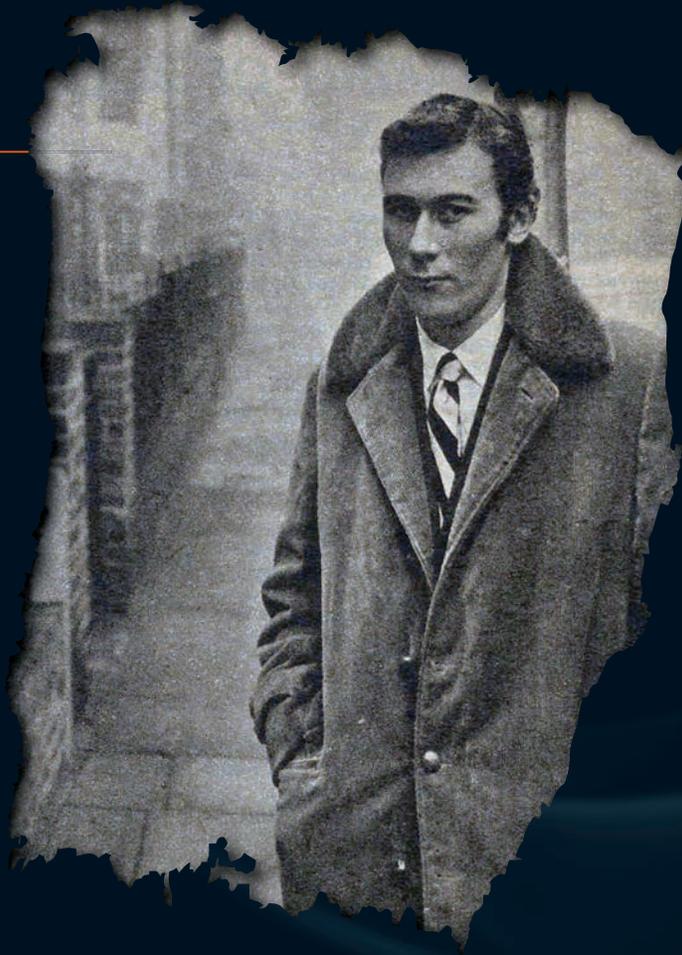
MATTHEW RHYS

A Look at Playwriting

John Osborne: The Angry Young Man

HIS LIFE

JOHN JAMES OSBORNE was born in London on December 12, 1929 to Thomas Godfrey, a Welsh commercial artist, and Nellie Beatrice, a Cockney barmaid. He loved his father deeply, but felt great disdain for his mother. He blamed her lower-class roots as part of his inability to succeed. When his father died in 1941, John was determined to get away from his mother, so he used his inheritance to attend boarding school at Belmont College in Devon. He soon became unhappy there as well. After striking the headmaster, he left and moved back in with his mother. He soon began tutoring children in a touring theatre company, where he discovered his passion for the theatre. He began acting, worked as an actor-manager, and then tried his hand at playwriting.



HIS WORK

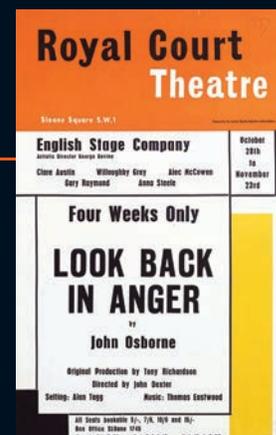
Osborne wrote what he knew—the plight of being young, educated, and filled with contempt for the disappointing results of welfare reform, unfair class structure, and living in the harsh aftermath of World War II while being too young to have participated in it. He expressed his anger toward his mother, wives, and even children in his writing. In *Look Back in Anger*, he voices his complaints through the character of Jimmy Porter but does not propose any solution for these frustrations. This play was particularly based on his turbulent marriage to Pamela Lane, to whom he was married at the time he wrote it (and whom he left to marry Mary Ure, ironically, the actress playing Alison). In total, John Osborne experienced four troubled marriages before entering into his fifth, final and only happy marriage to Helen Dawson.

Look Back in Anger received a wide range of reviews when it was first produced: some berated it for its vulgarity and lack of polish; others praised it for its exciting, new, and unique voice. He wrote many plays concerning these unfortunate and volatile characters and even revisited the iconic Jimmy in his last play, *Déjà Vu*, in 1992. He died of diabetes on December 24, 1994 at the age of 65.

HIS IMPACT

Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* blew the roof off of the norm. The prevailing theatre in England in the 1950s was the "well-made play," exemplified by Terence Rattigan (whose *Man and Boy* opened our season at Roundabout). These plays were comfortable, conventional, and careful plays about the upper middle class. Osborne led a generation of young playwrights writing gritty, shocking, and honest plays about their disaffected generation; these were known as "kitchen sink dramas" for their brutally honest portrayal of the harshness of reality. A press agent of the Royal Court Theatre referred to Osborne as an "angry young man," and that became the moniker for the type of anti-heroes he and his contemporaries wrote about. These angry young men were a new niche in society: intellectuals educated at universities, but unemployed and unable to gain upward mobility because of their lower-class roots. With the emergence of this new class of people came this new breed of plays.

Osborne's plays were always controversial; the government censored many of his shows by forcing scenes to be eliminated and shutting some productions down entirely. Finally, with *A Patriot for Me*, a play based on a true scandal involving an Australian spy, Osborne helped to end censorship that had been imposed by Lord Chamberlain. Osborne truly changed the theatrical landscape



A Look at Directing

Interview with director Sam Gold

Ted Sod, Education Dramaturg, interviewed director Sam Gold about his thoughts on *Look Back in Anger*.

Ted Sod: Why did you choose to direct *Look Back in Anger*?

Sam Gold: The play has always been very high on my list of plays to work on; it was influential to me as I was becoming involved in the theatre. I used the play as I started to think about myself as an artist. I really responded to Jimmy Porter as a character. I connected with Osborne and what he had to say about young people, class and culture. When Todd Haimes offered me the position of Associate Artist at the Roundabout and asked me what I wanted to do, it just felt like an important first revival to do with him.

TS: We're also producing *Man and Boy*, a play written by Terence Rattigan, this year. And, as you know very well, Osborne's play usurped Rattigan's popularity in 1956. Do you think this play is specific to that time period?

SG: Yes. Osborne was having a conversation about his culture in a very specific way and there's something about any great play that speaks about its time. This is a play that's so engaged in the politics, class and social issues of an exact community and time, and I find it an exciting challenge to think about how a play that spoke so loudly and bravely about an exact time and place is going to resonate and engage us now.

TS: I just spoke with Matthew Rhys, and we were talking about the resonance of *Occupy Wall Street* because we both felt that if Jimmy Porter were in NYC today, he would be part of the protest.

SG: We're not a very class-conscious culture in the U.S. It's a much more class-conscious culture in Britain. It is sort of crazy that we're having a national dialogue about class disparity in this country right now and that it timed out to be when we're doing this play. It wasn't by design, but I think it is a prescient time to do this play. I did *The Threepenny Opera* during the financial collapse and that play ends with Mack the Knife screaming that it should be the bankers not the bank robbers that are put in jail. I've been very interested in these rebellious plays about class and economy. Working on *Threepenny* got me really interested in *Look Back in Anger* again, but I never thought we'd be taking this kind of turn socially in this country by the time I did it.

TS: I'm very curious about your decision to excise the character of the Colonel, Alison's father. How did you go about making that decision and how difficult was that to do?

SG: The Colonel was a character that felt very symbolic of something very particular to the politics of postwar Britain. The big question for me was how much of this is going to be a period piece, and how much of this is going to be about how it resonates with a contemporary American audience? What I wanted to engage in was the core of the play: the instincts that Osborne had, the life he was leading, the young people he was dramatizing, their fiery young energy and their lust for life, and their relationships with each other. I felt if I could pare down some of the period specific aspects of the play—the stuff where he was really having a conversation with 1950s Britain—a



contemporary audience wouldn't feel so alienated and would connect with what the play has to say to us now.

TS: Did you have to negotiate with the Osborne estate? Was that a complicated process or fairly easy?

SG: The Osborne estate was really interested in how I was approaching the play and they seemed game.

TS: Do you see the play as a love story?

SG: Yes. I think of the play as a love rectangle. The way that young people mess up in love is really what the play is about. It's about young people from different walks of life thrown in a disgusting room together and the way in which they ruin or save each other's lives.

TS: Can you talk a bit about Alison and Jimmy's connection?

SG: I think there's self-hatred explored in this play. I think there's first love and young love and young people not knowing who they are and in turn just lashing out. They lash out at people and they grab on to people, and they're not self-actualized. By the end of the play, Alison and Jimmy start to self-

actualize; they start to stop hating themselves and begin to let themselves love each other.

TS: This contemporary movie term—"bromance"—is that what's going on between Cliff and Jimmy?

SG: When we think of young people with no money and what they have to hold on to, these are two guys who have held on to each other and made life possible by leaning on each other. It's a lot about allegiances and honor and trust. They have a very pure relationship in the play.

TS: What kind of research did you have to do to direct this play? How do you enter a world like this?

SG: To a certain degree, I'm not particularly worried about the research, because I'm not interested in giving the audience a museum piece. I'm not interested in taking them to 1950s London, because that won't ring any bells with them. What will ring bells with the audience is if I bring the play to them. So I'm interested in the research in as much as it illuminates the story. What I need to know about is the context that this play and these characters were written in. I need to research context in order to make the characters and the action in the play come to life. What I'm also trying to do is see the play from the audience's point of view and not distance the audience from the play by presenting something that feels dated.

TS: Did you watch the film version? Did you have any interest in that?

SG: I've seen the film version and it has absolutely nothing to do with what I do on stage. It's a period piece; I don't have any interest in going to the theatre to see something that was made 50 years ago. I want to go see something that's made one minute ago.

TS: Can you talk about what you were looking for in casting the show?

SG: Casting this play was incredibly challenging. It has very challenging language. It's written poetically, and people need to be able to deal with lower class characters who speak very well. I needed actors who were really great with language, who can connect with the poetry and ground the reality of the characters. I was really interested in doing the play with Brits, because I wasn't bringing that to the show and it was really important to me to have their voices in the rehearsal room. When it comes down to it, I was casting the love story. I was thinking about people who would have chemistry.

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

SG: I'm hoping to make something that's aggressively simple. I think when this play was first produced, it was aggressive to sit down in the theatre and have the lights come up on a woman and an ironing board. That idea visually, that design choice, was rebellious. I think a lot about when the lights come up, the world of the play should feel different than what the Roundabout audience expects. One way that I plan on doing that is by there being less.

TS: What do you make of John Osborne? What is his stature in dramatic literature from your point of view?

SG: I think that the shadow of this play is so large in British theatre. To have obliterated the middle class drama of the 20th century is a huge thing. He inspired a generation of writers who have changed the face of theatre.

TS: What's curious to me is that a renaissance has happened for Rattigan but I'm not sure it's happened yet for Osborne. Do you think it has?

SG: No, I don't think America has seen a compelling case for Osborne, so I hope I can do a great production that will turn people on to his work in this country.

TS: I wanted to ask you about your year, Sam—it's extraordinarily busy. Could you talk about how you manage all these projects in one year? How do you keep yourself sane?

SG: I have to say, on one hand it makes me more sane to have multiple things on my plate because I don't get neurotic and obsessive-compulsive about what I'm doing, because I have something else to think about. So I don't sit and stew anymore; I'm very in the present when I'm working. That's been the really nice thing about having work. I spent so many years sitting in my little apartment dreaming about doing a John Osborne play and feeling very angst-ridden, it's a lot more relaxing doing the plays and not just sitting around and thinking about them. I feel very healthy getting to work a lot. I like working and I like working a lot. I just have to be careful to make sure I don't work so much that I don't have time to be as detail-oriented as I want to be. I'm a very detail-oriented director. That's something I pride myself on in my work and I want to make sure I don't burn out.

I DON'T HAVE ANY INTEREST IN GOING TO THE THEATRE TO SEE SOMETHING THAT WAS MADE 50 YEARS AGO. I WANT TO GO SEE SOMETHING THAT'S MADE ONE MINUTE AGO.

SAM GOLD

A Look at Society



Social Structure of Britain in the 50's

AN ANGRY YOUNG MAN like John Osborne's Jimmy Porter was the product of the times. Following the end of World War II, all of British society was agitated by international events and national policies.

Citizens had to adjust to Britain's new place in the changing world order. Before the war, the British Empire still enjoyed enormous influence around the world; now its power began to decline. In 1945, the United Nations was established to bring countries together to work in peace and cooperation; though Britain was a leader in the U.N., it no longer dominated world affairs. Britain gave up control of India and Pakistan in 1947. The Suez Crisis of 1956 resulted in a U.N. ruling that forced withdrawal from Egypt—an embarrassing blow to Britain's international status. Meanwhile, the United States and the U.S.S.R. were emerging as the world's superpowers, and their escalating Cold War meant that people everywhere lived with the daily threat of nuclear annihilation.

On the home front, the rigid class structure was challenged. The demand for social reform put the Labour Party into power, and its leaders enacted social programs that would establish a new "Welfare State" in Britain. Welfare did not just mean help for the poor; it was a promise of security for all people "from cradle to grave." The central government or local authorities were to provide basic living needs—well-paid jobs, education, comprehensive health care, and insurance coverage. Private industries like the coalmines and the railway system came under national control. The Education Act of 1944 guaranteed free secondary schooling for all citizens. Several new "red-brick" universities were created for working-class students—a radical difference from the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge that were accessible only to the upper class.

All of these changes promised more equality, opportunity and visibility for Britain's working classes than ever before.

Within a few years, however, enthusiasm over the new Welfare State faded. Social programs proved costly, and the benefits most people received were disappointing. Britain's economy struggled after the war; the promise of prosperity and comfort was deferred. Rationing of food supplies, enacted during the war, remained in force until 1954, due to a shortage—in some cases, postwar rations were more severe than during the war.

Although the economy improved in the 1950s, strong class divisions remained and a more equitable society failed to emerge. A new class of educated proletariat graduated from the universities and found no opportunities for meaningful work. These young people had a better understanding of the class system that oppressed them for centuries – but no idea of how to improve it.

*Adam Driver and Matthew Rhys.
Photo by Joan Marcus.*



A Look at Gender

Gender Roles of 1950's England



*Sarah Goldberg and Matthew Rhys.
Photo by Joan Marcus.*

In *Look Back in Anger*, housewife Alison Porter must choose between remaining in a difficult marriage or leaving her husband and returning to her parents' home. Faced with the same situation today, many British women would consider a third option: becoming an independent, working woman. In the 1950s, however, it would have been both economically challenging and socially unconventional for Alison to build a life on her own.

As in much of the Western world at the time, a woman's primary role was seen as wife, mother, and homemaker. Prior to the industrialization of Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries, the country was agricultural; women worked in tandem with their husbands and families to grow crops, raise animals, and run small businesses. The advent of textile factories, steam engines, and the mining industry began the economic shift towards wage-earning men and homemaking wives. This would remain the ideal (unattainable by poor families) throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century.

Although British women won the right to vote in 1928 and many worked outside the home during the First and Second World Wars, a typical working class woman would have had much the same life as her mother. She left school at 15, took some career-training classes, worked in a low-paying profession dominated by young women, and quit the working world when she married in her late teens or early twenties. In the 1950s, women married so young that educators worried about having time to adequately educate them for the workforce.

A woman from a wealthier home would stay in school longer, study more academic subjects, and forego working altogether. She would likely move straight from her parents' house into her husband's home. Married women—even well-off, educated women—were barred from employment in the civil service and teaching professions.

Many of the postwar social reforms were designed to encourage the traditional model of male breadwinner and female homemaker. Family allowances—weekly cash benefits to families with children—encouraged childbearing. Education continued to segregate students by gender: an official 1959 report by the Central Advisory Council on Education advised that girls be taught differently during their last two years in secondary school, with an emphasis on her direct interest in dress, personal appearance and in problems of human relations. Popular magazines such as *Girl* and *Woman's Own* reinforced the image of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers, surrounded by domestic comforts.

Alison Porter, educated daughter of the middle class, finds herself living in a dingy flat, in a troubled marriage—far from the ideal woman's life.

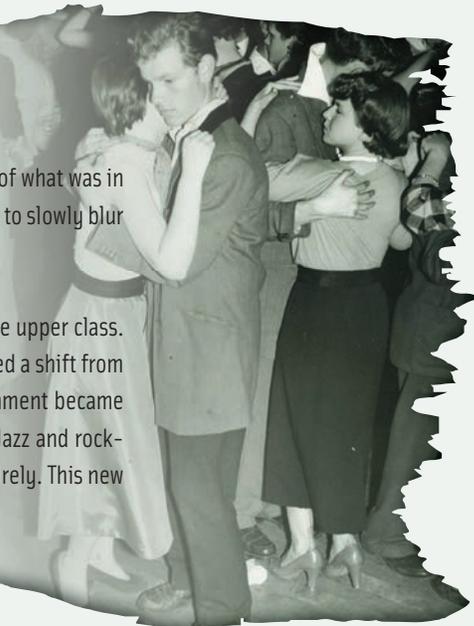
A Look at Mass Culture

The 1950s marked a shift in British culture; the early '50s laid the groundwork for this watershed period, but these changes in society were not evident until the end of the decade.

The End of High Culture

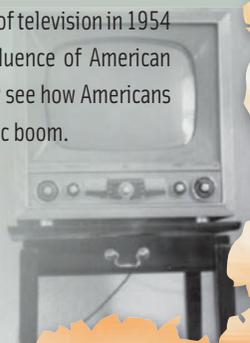
In the wake of World War II, England was caught between two cultures: the old order and a vision of what was in store for the future of British society. Class distinctions remained, but government reforms began to slowly blur the lines between the upper and middle classes.

High culture, such as classical music, opera, theatre, and fine art, had been accessible only to the upper class. But when the Conservative Party won the 1951 election, their slogan "Set the People Free" signaled a shift from state control to individual freedom and spurred drastic changes in culture. Traditional entertainment became enjoyable, affordable, and accessible to a new audience through radio, movies, and television. Jazz and rock-a-billy music became popular in music halls, which were turned into dance halls or torn down entirely. This new music pushed out the older audiences and made way for a new, younger audience.



Beginning of Mass Culture

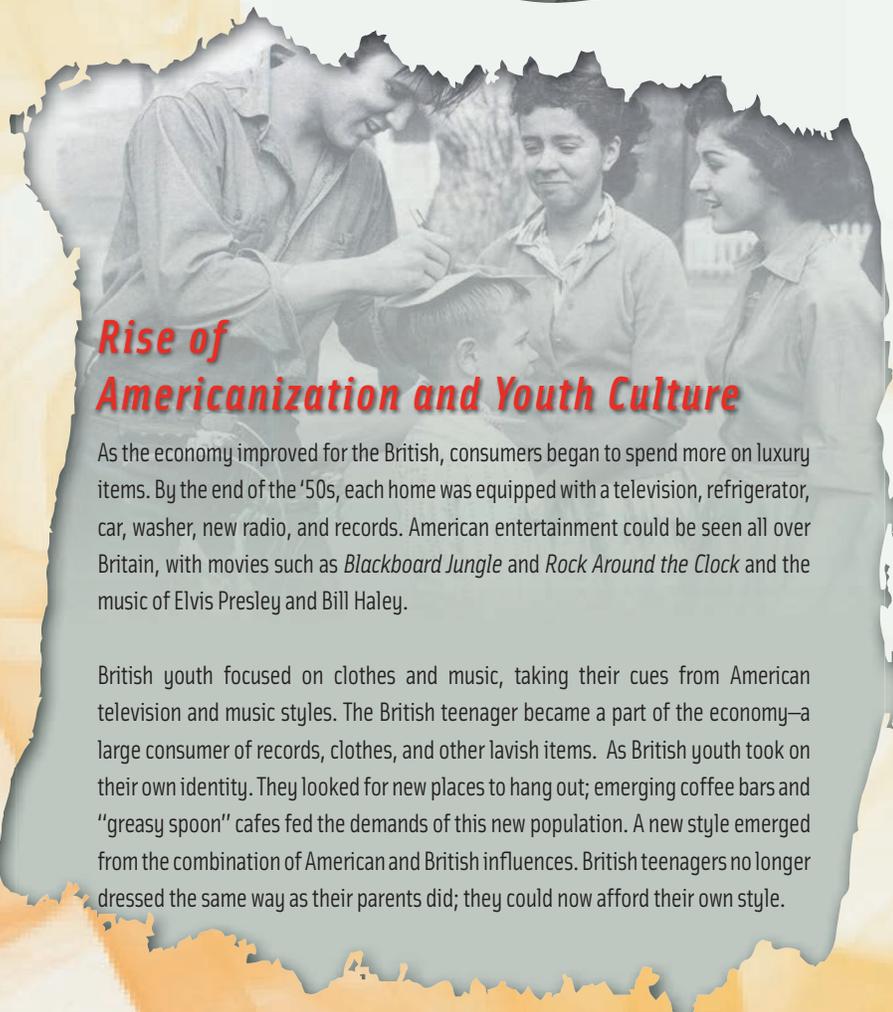
Entering into the 1950s, the British felt freer, more affluent, and eager to escape the rigidity of the past. They questioned and ridiculed the cultural conventions of before and during the war. Jazz, rock-n-roll, new movies, and television became known as the "mass culture" and were slowly accepted by the upper class. New technologies propelled Britain even further. In 1953, the television broadcast of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation increased TV sales, and the deregulation of television in 1954 opened England to the influence of American pop culture. Brits could now see how Americans were living in their economic boom.



Rise of Americanization and Youth Culture

As the economy improved for the British, consumers began to spend more on luxury items. By the end of the '50s, each home was equipped with a television, refrigerator, car, washer, new radio, and records. American entertainment could be seen all over Britain, with movies such as *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rock Around the Clock* and the music of Elvis Presley and Bill Haley.

British youth focused on clothes and music, taking their cues from American television and music styles. The British teenager became a part of the economy—a large consumer of records, clothes, and other lavish items. As British youth took on their own identity. They looked for new places to hang out; emerging coffee bars and "greasy spoon" cafes fed the demands of this new population. A new style emerged from the combination of American and British influences. British teenagers no longer dressed the same way as their parents did; they could now afford their own style.



Birth of the Kitchen Sink Drama

The postwar British theatre did not reflect the majority of the population. "Drawing room plays" and "well-made plays" dominated the stage and focused on the wealthy upper class. As British culture responded to societal changes, government reform, Americanization, and mass culture, the theatre also began to adapt.

The Royal Court Theatre opened in 1956 with *Look Back in Anger* as its first production. Artistic Director George Devine believed that the play "captured the anger and frustration of the younger generation in the 1950s." As the Royal Court established itself, its plays "challenged the social and political conventions of the time, pushing the boundaries of what was acceptable." Through these artistic ventures, the Royal Court established itself as Britain's first national theatre company and helped abolish censorship of British theatre.



Charlotte Parry.
Photo by Joan Marcus.

Language of Time and Place

AGE OF CHIVALRY	a time of courtesy and generosity
ART OF FUGUE	an unfinished work by Johann Sebastian Bach
BLIMEY	used to express excitement or alarm
BLOODY	a intensifier to a word, used as a swear word
BOYO	boy or lad
CHAP	an endearing term for man
DIGS	place of residence
DULLIN'	darling
FLAT	apartment
GATECRASH	to get into a party or event without payment or invitation
GO TO THE PICTURES	go to the movies
HIPPODROME	popular theatre of the time
MARQUESS OF QUEENSBERRY	formal rules of boxing
MARCHBANKS	a younger man in love with an older woman
MAGISTRATE	officer of the state
MARGE	margarine
MATELOT	a sailor
MELLERDY	melody of a song
MORRIS DANCE	a form of English folk dance, based on planned rhythmic stepping
NINEPENCE	a coin worth nine pennies
NOM DE PLUME	pen name
POSH	elegant
POPLAR	a borough of London
QUEUE	line
TIDDLY	slightly drunk
RANDY	lustful
RUBBISH	garbage or an item with no value
SIN-JOBBER	someone who uses guilt to influence another
SLOSH	splash
SWEET-STALL	a cart that sells sweets
TUPPENCE	two pence, equivalent to two pennies
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS	English composer of symphonies, opera, chamber & choral music
YOBS	teenage hooligans

A Look at Costume Design

Interview with David Zinn

Ted Sod, Education Dramaturg, sat down with costume designer David Zinn to discuss his design for *Look Back in Anger*.

Ted Sod: When did you realize you wanted to design for the theatre? Tell us about yourself and your education.

David Zinn: I was just reading Sam's interview in *American Theatre* and he said somewhat facetiously, "like everyone in the theatre, I started as an actor." And I too, like everybody, started as an actor. I was under the misapprehension for a while that that's what I wanted to do. I had a family that was very supportive of my interest in the theatre. I grew up on Bainbridge Island outside Seattle and had a lot of theatre available to me: community theatre and a rich Seattle theatre scene in the early '80s. Importantly for me, they had just reopened the 5th Avenue Theatre in 1980 and it was reopened with a tour of *Annie*, which my parents took me to see. I loved it and how all the scenery moved. I remember that made me think theatre was great. I went home and made my own little model of the set. I quickly became fascinated with backstage, how things happened behind the set. Through high school I designed and performed and I was lucky to do things outside of high school that fostered this passion. There was a woman named Susie Burdick who ran this theatre company on the island, and when I was in 8th grade I asked if I could show her my ideas for a show we were doing and she said sure. Susie tapped into my enthusiasm and honed it, fostered it. So by the time I left high school, I knew I wanted to be a designer and I applied to NYU as a set and costume designer as an undergrad, although all of the design courses were in the grad program. I did this weird thing where I was in the graduate design program; but I got my BFA and I did it in four years.

TS: Let's talk about *Look Back in Anger*. Both Sam Gold, the director, and Matthew Rhys, who plays Jimmy, have spoken to me and they've had similar takes on the play. What do you think this play is about?

DZ: My least favorite question—I don't know what the play is about. In general, I really don't think about what plays are about. I don't understand how to think like that. I don't say that churlishly; I'm just never interested in defining that. I'm interested in watching the people in the play. Period. I think the intensity of the love story, which crosses the line into hatred, is a fascinating situation. I think it's so beautifully articulated: the hunger that these people have for each other. With *Look Back in Anger*, I knew it was an "angry young man" play from the '50s, but I'd never seen it and never read it before I was asked to design it. There was so much passion in it that I found moving. It's a beautiful, intense love story to me, and extreme in the way that beautiful love stories are. And, you know, I have huge respect for Sam, so I was excited that he was excited about it.

TS: What's your process? I'm sure it's different for a contemporary piece, but this is a period piece.

DZ: I think about costumes for every show, period or not, as though I was going to go shopping for them.

TS: You become the characters?

DZ: Yeah, or I "channel" the characters. It's such a nutso thing, to go into a store and imagine you're one, or two, or three different characters and figure out what they'd like, what they'd shop for, what would catch their eye. So, yeah, I become the characters and I also try and figure out how to create a wardrobe for them. A closet that they/we can pick from. The possibilities available to you, when you're doing a modern show, can be really inspiring, and so even when I am doing a period piece, I try to think of the clothes in this way: I try and build a "rack" to pull from, to try to make things look like a person's choices from their closet and not a drawing on a page. I'm also really interested in how people wear clothes – not in the catalog, but in real life – what happens to them once someone gets their hands on them and makes their own "outfit". For *Look Back in Anger*, I started thinking about Nan Goldin, the photographer.

Charlotte Parry and Sarah Goldberg.
Photo by Joan Marcus.



TS: She seems like the modern Diane Arbus to me.

DZ: I think she and Diane Arbus have very different agendas, and I think Goldin captures people when their passions have become extreme. Also, what I like about her photographs from the '80s is that, with the kind of East Village person she was documenting, it was cool to wear 1950's clothes. So it's interesting to watch relatively modern people wearing period clothes, and for me, that's my way into how to think about this show. It's not a costume. It's not like, "It's a '50s thing, so it has piping on the collar." It's more like: "I've been living with this guy, my things are dirty, I don't want my things to match and I've thrown away the privileged life I've come from." I want the clothes to feel like those people felt, like the Nan Goldin photos. There's also a British photographer named Roger Mayne who also did a collection of photos called Southam Street, and they felt similar. I just want it to feel like the characters grabbed these things themselves.

TS: Will your designs be built?

DZ: Who knows how it'll end up, but we will probably build some things. We do have some ideas about needing some color. Especially with Helena, we'll want the sense of some strong color coming into this environment. In addition, she hasn't done to herself what Alison has done living with Jimmy, so I want her to feel alien in a couple of ways, and color is part of that. I would like to be open to using things we find for her, but I just expect if we find it, it's going to be black, blue, or maybe gray. And I need her to have some more "oomph" to her.

TS: What type of research did you have to do on this show? You already mentioned the photographers, but is there any value in watching films like *An Education*?

DZ: Sure. Not necessarily *An Education*, but we watched *This Sporting Life*, the Richard Harris film, which is great. It was a big touchstone for Sam and Andrew, the set designer, and it's beautiful. Also *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. They're all from a bit later like '61, '62, '63. They are films that were made in the wake of this play. I looked at several newsreels and tried to find as many photographs as I could of people in the time. And I've looked at a lot of actual vintage clothes.

TS: Do you use period catalogues?

DZ: I do, but I haven't for this as much, because I'm trying to take that level of remove away from the research for this. I'm trying to just look at pictures of the clothes on regular people. I have used some fashion photos, both from the period and from today for Helena's basic look.

TS: Will you talk about collaborating with actors? It always seems to me that you have the hardest job because it's so intimate and actors are so self-aware of their bodies.

DZ: It depends on the actor. I think I'm always interested in meeting them at least half way, just as a basic rule. I want to make something with them. As I said before, I really like going to a store and trying to figure out what a character would wear and choose. The kind of made-up psychology of putting myself in their shoes and trying to make their closet is really fun for me. It's very satisfying, whether it's a period play or a modern play. So it's great when you see an actor recognize their character in what you've brought them, and it's fun for me when you're done with a fitting and it really looks coherent – like someone's closet. I feel like the actor could almost wear anything at any time from the closet we've created. If I've done the job right, on a show like *Look Back in Anger*, they could just go to their dressing room and say "oh I want to wear this shirt and these pants for this scene" and that would be fine because that's who they are.

With period things, I'm bringing what I know about history, and I always bring what I know about color and being an audience member to everything I do. I think I also bring a certain amount of taste and sense of proportion. I like to be able to build the closet or let them feel like they're participating in selecting the garments. It's harder to do in a Victorian piece, but this will be different. Jimmy doesn't have a million costumes changes; he has a couple. We've been pondering whether we wanted to shop that or not and we might ultimately want to build it. But I think we'll start with a bunch of period things so he can start to get a sense of what he looks like in those clothes and how he feels. If we don't find it there, we'll make what we need. I want us both to have that feeling of "these pants are great" and to let him see what things look like on first and go from there.

TS: Can you tell me about collaboration with directors and particularly Sam? What do you look for in a director?

DZ: I look for anything they can give me: mood, emotion. I like to talk about the characters; I like to glean as much information as I can about the character. I've already designed a lot of things with Sam, so I do have a sense about who he is as a director coming into this. I don't have to learn anymore about the little things, like how literal he is when he says something. I know what scares him and I know what he's not interested in seeing. I think it's hard for anybody to talk too much until there's a product in the room. I don't generally like the director to come to first fittings. I feel like that's for me and the actor. Sometimes you come out of that with great things and sometimes not. I like to have that be the actor's time to figure out what it is that we want to show. Sam, I think, trusts me to give him choices he's going to be interested in. I want to give directors something to respond to, I think directors tend to work better when they're looking at something. Then they can say yes or no.

TS: Usually they want to know what your color palette is.

DZ: We don't really have conversations like that. The conversations were about the vocabulary we are using when the stage is five feet deep. What are transitions like? A good example is the dinner table scene. It brings up the question: What do you do when you have a small apartment and you have people over for dinner? You improvise. It's those conversations like: what do they do? Just sit on the floor? Should somebody not sit on the floor? Do you care about the time of day and light from windows? How does it start? What does the air feel like? Conversations like that are all I need to know to get started.

TS: If a young person were to say to you that they would like to design for the theatre, what type of advice would you give to them?

DZ: I think I would ask them what they mean. Like, what does that mean for them? I would be curious about what sort of event they're interested in participating in. I think the way most people think about being a costume designer is not what I'm interested in. I would ask them what they like. What type of theatre excites them? It's hard to know where to start. If I was going to turn that into a piece of advice I would say: saying you want to be a costume designer is too general, now that you've identified your desire to design clothing for the theatre, try to figure out what you're deeply passionate about. I am excited by people who have an overriding passion for something. I could give you all sorts of advice, but your passion needs to be like a disease. Otherwise, I think you're not going to be great, and there's too much bad theatre in the world, and the stakes are too low, and I don't understand why people go to the theatre or make theatre unless they're fearless. If you identify your passion, then you're halfway there.

I REALLY LIKE GOING TO A STORE AND TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT A CHARACTER WOULD WEAR AND CHOOSE. THE KIND OF MADE-UP PSYCHOLOGY OF PUTTING MYSELF IN THEIR SHOES AND TRYING TO MAKE THEIR CLOSET IS REALLY FUN FOR ME.

DAVID ZINN

Pre-Show Activities

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY #1: *How does space influence the characters' relationships?*

The setting of *Look Back in Anger* is a small, claustrophobic flat (apartment) shared by three people. This constrained space has a large influence on their relationships.

- Activate:** **Improvise a silent, physical activity in which two people are trying to accomplish separate tasks in a very small space.**
- Use chairs to define a small playing space (approx. 3' by 5').
 - Two people, each has their own household task. Suggested tasks: ironing, folding laundry, sweeping the floor, doing homework, cooking a meal, playing a video game, exercising/working-out. Use objects in the room to stand in for props (i.e., a book can become an iron).
 - For about 1-2 minutes, the people must try to do their tasks. Work silently. Express your feelings through the actions instead of words.

- Reflect:**
- How did sharing the space challenge you? How did you cope with the challenges?
 - How did sharing the space make you feel about the other person?

Write: **Now, choose what the relationship is between these two characters and write the dialogue they would have during the scene you started.**

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY #2: *How does an actor express feelings and conflict through subtext?*

In Osborne's play, the characters do not always articulate their true feelings in the dialogue. The true emotions are hidden UNDER the words (the subtext). Use the following open scene to explore how an actor expresses the conflict in the subtext.

Open Scene

A: Hi.
B: Hello.
A: Sorry I'm late.
B: That's all right.
A: I really am sorry.
B: That's fine.
A: Well, good-night.
B: Good-night.

Activate: **Choose a relationship and conflict. (Parent does not approve of Child's choices. Friend A has betrayed Friend B. Partner A is being unkind to Partner B). Using only the lines provided, act out the scene with the given relationship in mind.**

- Reflect:**
- What was different between what you were saying and how you were feeling?
 - How did you express a feeling in ways other than the words?
 - Why don't characters always say exactly how they're feeling?

Write: **Using the dialogue from the same open scene, choose a specific relationship/conflict. In parentheses, write the character's unspoken subtext for each line.**

Post-Show Activities

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY #1: *How do we respond to the conflicts of the play?*

Imagine you are a good friend of one of the characters in *Look Back in Anger* and they write you a letter asking for advice:

- Alison wants advice on what to do after she's returned to the apartment and found Helena and Jimmy together
- Helena wants advice on what to do when she arrives at the apartment and finds Alison in an unhappy marriage
- Jimmy wants advice on how to deal with the anger and frustration he feels towards society

Write: Write a letter back to your friend. What should your friend do and why? What did you observe in the play that leads you to give that advice?

Activate: Using the advice you've given in your letter, work with a partner to improvise a scene in which you give your friend advice.

If you are playing a character from *Look Back in Anger*, listen to your friend's arguments and try to offer counter-arguments. Can you change your partner's mind?

Reflect: Re-read the letter you wrote to your friend. Do you still agree with the advice you gave? Why or why not?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY #2: *How does a playwright write about current events?*

In *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy Porter rages at the middle class way of life and at his own limited economic opportunities. Jimmy lived in a time of great cultural shift, when the rigid class system was ending and England was no longer a world superpower.

Read: Read a few news articles from a local or national newspaper. What economic and social problems are people struggling with now? What has shifted in American culture in the past few years?

Write: Choose one person quoted in the newspaper and write a monologue from his or her point of view, as if the person is speaking to a close friend or family member. What economic or social issues are they angry or frustrated about? What has changed—or not changed—in their life as a result? How do these events affect this person directly?

Activate: Exchange monologues with a partner and prepare a staged reading of the monologue. What do you know about the character from the monologue? How does this character feel about what's happening in the world? How do their feelings influence how they speak and move?

Share monologue readings.

Reflect: What issues were repeated in monologues? Do you share those concerns? How did the characters express their feelings through their voices and bodies?

Glossary

CONSTITUENT	someone who authorizes another person to act as his or her agent <i>Alison tells Helena that her brother Nigel was too busy running for Parliament and winning constituents to get involved in her family's dispute with Jimmy.</i>
CISTERN	a tank for storing water <i>Jimmy makes fun of Alison's mother and says that she is probably in their cistern, listening in on the conversation.</i>
COURTESAN	a prostitute who serves a wealthy, upper-class clientele <i>Alison says that's the kind of woman Jimmy wants.</i>
DRONING	tedious speaking, a monotonous tone <i>Cliff complains that Jimmy's talk is droning.</i>
EMILY BRONTE	English novelist <i>Jimmy compares one of Alison's friends to Emily Bronte in an endearing way.</i>
EMPHATIC	expressing something forcibly <i>Helena admits she was emphatic in her descriptions of Jimmy.</i>
GENUFLECTING	bowing in respect <i>Jimmy makes fun of Helena, calling her a genuflecting sin-jobber.</i>
H-BOMB	hydrogen bomb, a nuclear weapon <i>Cliff refers to the H-bomb when talking about politics.</i>
INFALLIBLE	incapable of making mistakes <i>Cliff tries to comfort Alison and reassure her that everyone makes mistakes in life.</i>
LETHARGY	state of being indifferent <i>Jimmy believes that instead of defending him, Alison would become lethargic.</i>
MACABRE	gruesome or deadly <i>Alison uses this word to make Helena understand her actions when it comes to Jimmy.</i>
PHLEGMATIC	a cool temperament <i>Jimmy uses this word to describe Alison and her brother Nigel.</i>
PUSILLANIMOUS	lacking in courage <i>Jimmy says this word perfectly describes Alison; he uses it to hurt her.</i>
PURGATIVE	something that cleanses or purges <i>Jimmy tries to get a rise out of Alison and uses this word to describe her mother.</i>
RETICENT	Not forthcoming with one's thoughts <i>Helena asks Cliff if Jimmy is reticent about himself.</i>
SANDHURST	British military training academy <i>Jimmy mocks Alison's brother Nigel for attending Sandhurst.</i>
SYCOPHANTIC	using flattery to win someone over <i>Jimmy refers to Alison and her brother Nigel as sycophantic.</i>
VICAR	cleric in charge of a chapel <i>Jimmy recalls his wedding day, when he and Alison were married by a vicar.</i>
VESTRY	a room or building attached to a church. <i>Jimmy got sick in the vestry of the chapel that he was married in.</i>
VIRILITY	masculinity <i>Jimmy believes that his state of mind is masculine and forceful.</i>

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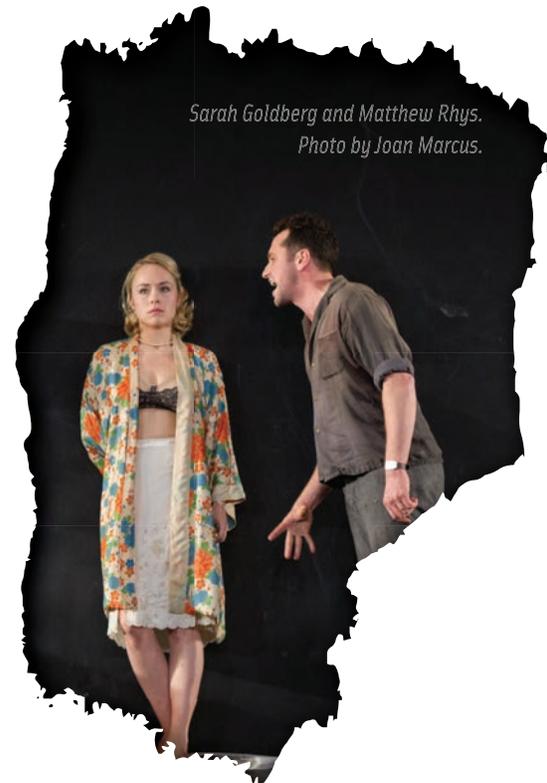
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BELOW ARE SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR THEATRE-GOING EXPERIENCE MORE ENJOYABLE.

TICKET POLICY

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

PROGRAMS

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

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone, beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



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