

By **Michael Frayn** | Directed by **KJ Sanchez**
Buddy and Catherine Robinson, Associate Producers

Noises Off

PLAY GUIDE

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November 19 – December 22

Quadracci Powerhouse

By Michael Frayn

Directed by KJ Sanchez

Buddy and Catherine Robinson, Associate Producers



MARK'S TAKE

"Patrons have requested a comedy in the Quadracci Powerhouse—not just a play with some laughs, but an outright hilarious evening in the theater. *Noises Off* is one of the best comedies ever written, a contemporary classic that has had people rolling in the aisles for three decades now, and I can't wait to share it with our audiences!"

-Mark Clements, Artistic Director

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SYNOPSIS

ACT I

In the hours before the opening of a ridiculous British bedroom farce, *Nothing On*, the touring company runs through a final rehearsal before the curtain goes up. As the action of *Nothing On* unfolds, it becomes evident that this cast is nowhere near ready for the first performance.

Dotty, playing Mrs. Clackett, cannot remember her entrances, exits, or where she has put one of several ever-present plates of sardines. Garry, playing the male love interest, cannot seem to get his lines quite right. Brooke, who plays his counterpart, focuses more on looking lovely than understanding what is happening. Selsdon, the aging veteran actor playing the burglar, is too busy sleeping it off in the seats to remember when he needs to enter or even that they are in the middle of a rehearsal.

Director Lloyd Dallas tries desperately to pull the show together, shouting from the audience and finally heading up on stage to wrangle his motley crew of thespians. Into this mix, add a few lovers' spats between Dotty and Garry; and Lloyd and Brooke and Poppy, the Assistant Stage Manager; and the ingredients for disaster are set.

The act ends with the hope that maybe, just maybe, they will pull it together in time for the show.

ACT II

Unfortunately, Act II dashes that hope.

The set has revolved and the audience is backstage at the Theatre Royal in Goole, a month into the run of the tour. The lovers' spats have turned into full out wars and the act opens with the possibility of the show not going on, with Dotty hiding out in her dressing room.

Lloyd has returned from his rehearsals of *Richard III* in order to smooth over a former argument with Brooke, but he ends up witnessing the disaster that has become his play while also making a disaster of his relationship with Poppy. As the curtain goes up, a pantomime of the rising chaos ensues, and the audience bears witness to the miscommunication, physical violence, and rotating bouquets of flowers and bottle of whiskey being passed from player to player. As the insanity escalates backstage, *Nothing On* spirals even further into problems and hilarity.

ACT III

Another six weeks have passed and the tour is in its final legs. Performing the show has taken a backseat to the interpersonal relationships between the cast and crew.

Again, the audience watches the show from the front of the house. While they are not privy to the shenanigans going on backstage, the show has deteriorated even further over the past months. Props are not in their places, lines are getting lost, multiple actors are playing the same character, and Brooke has no ability to adapt to what is actually occurring onstage.

In the end, the show must go on even if it has gone completely off the rails and *Noises Off* closes with the final line of *Nothing On* . . . with one minor alteration.



Gerard Neugent, Laura Gordon, Deborah Staples, Aaron Christensen, Joe Dempsey, and Kelley Faulkner. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

THE CHARACTERS

Cast Member

Noises Off

Nothing On (the play-within-a-play)



Joe Dempsey

Lloyd Dallas



Director

"That's what it's all about.
Doors and sardines. Getting
on - getting off... That's farce.
That's theatre. That's life."



Laura Gordon

Dotty Otley

"And I take the sardines.
No, I leave the sardines.
No, I take the sardines."

Mrs. Clackett

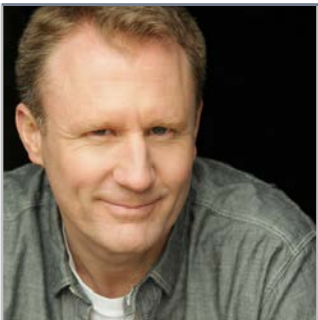
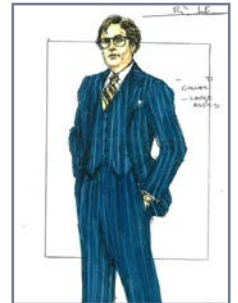


Gerard Neugent

Garry Lejeune

"No, but here we are, we're all
thinking, my God, we open
tomorrow, we've only had a
fortnight to rehearse, we don't
know where we are, but my
God, here we are!"

Roger

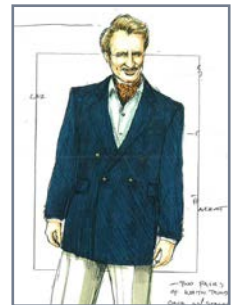


Aaron Christensen

Frederick Fellowes

"The only thing I like about
technicals is you get a chance
to sit on the furniture."

**Philip Brent,
Sheikh**



Deborah Staples

Belinda Blair

"My sweet, we're having
great dramas downstairs!"

Flavia Brent



Cast Member

Noises Off

Nothing On (the play-within-a-play)



Kelley Faulkner

Brooke Ashton

"I was lying on the floor of the green room . . ."



Jonathan Gillard Daly

Selsdon Mowbray

"Once you've got it in your nostrils you never forget it. Sixty years now and the smell of the theatre still haunts me."



Sara Zientek

Poppy Norton-Taylor



Vicki



Burglar



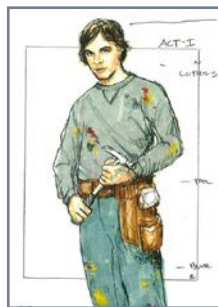
Assistant Stage Manager, u/s Vicki

"They say he's very dirty and rather smelly, and I thought, oh my God, because –"



Joe Boersma

Timothy Allgood



Stage Manager, u/s Burglar, Philip, Sheikh

"This is getting farcical."





Cast of the Broadway revival of *Noises Off*, 2001



Carol Burnett, Mark Linn-Baker, John Ritter, and Michael Caine in a scene from the film *Noises Off*, 1992

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Michael Frayn was watching his play *The Two of Us* in 1970 from backstage, when he says he realized that his show was much more entertaining from that vantage point than from the audience. He was determined to write a farce set backstage and in 1977 his one-act play, *Exits*, was presented as part of a fundraiser.

Producer Michael Codron commissioned Frayn to write a full-length version of that play, and in 1982 *Noises Off* premiered in London at the Lyric Theatre. Shortly thereafter, the play moved to the Savoy in the West End and ran for five years. The play premiered on Broadway in December of 1983 at the Brooks Atkinson Theater and was nominated for four Tony awards, and won two Drama Desk Awards.

In 1992, Disney produced a film version of the play which Americanized some of the language and references, but kept true to the story. Critics panned the film despite its all-star cast including Carol Burnett, Michael Caine, and several other stars.

Noises Off received much better reviews when revived on Broadway in 2001. Starring Patti Lupone and Peter Gallagher, the show again was nominated for several awards and Katie Finneran's portrayal of Brooke won her a Drama Desk Award and a Tony Award.

Noises Off continues to be a popular choice for community and regional theaters in the United States and abroad due to its enduring hilarity and character roles that appeal to actors, directors, and audiences alike.

A Few Famous Farces

On Stage

Lysistrata, Aristophanes, 411 BCE

Tartuffe, Moliere, 1664

A Flea in Her Ear, Faydeau, 1907

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Sondheim, 1962

Lend Me a Tenor, Ludwig, 1985

On Film and Television

Clue, 1985

It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World, 1963

Three's Company, 1977-1984

Frasier, 1993-2004



PLAYWRIGHT, MICHAEL FRAYN

Michael Frayn is a man of many literary talents. While *Noises Off* may be his funniest play, he has also written critically acclaimed theatrical dramas such as the Tony-Award-winning *Copenhagen*. Frayn also writes novels, translates Chekhov, and has had a long career as a journalist.

Frayn has said of *Noises Off* and farce: "I mean, it seems to me that everyday life has a very strong tendency towards farce, that is to say, things go wrong. And they go wrong often in a very complex and logically constructed way – one disaster leads to another, and the combination of the two disasters leads to a third disaster, which is the essence of classical farce: disaster building upon itself. It seems to me that the same thing happens in life, in my life anyway."

A FARCICAL HISTORY

Derived from the French word for “stuffing” or “padding”, farce was a term given to short comical sketches performed as interludes during long, somber plays. Eventually, the name came to denote any piece that closed a playbill, but we now attribute the term to a more specific style of comedy characterized by unlikely predicaments, verbal humor, mistaken identity, and physical humor.

In Renaissance Italy, farce took the form of a physical type of acting called *Commedia dell' Arte* derived from performance traditions that dated from the Ancient Roman comedies of Plautus. With improvised dialogue, stock characters denoted by masks worn by the actors, and travelling troupes, *Commedia* became the most popular form of theater for the common people.

In the 17th and 18th century, the genre became the domain of the French, and writers such as Moliere and Marivaux developed the form we now call farce. The form was not only a lighthearted evening out, but also was a vehicle to mock the elite and conditions for the lower classes.

Farce continued to evolve as a form through the end of the 19th century, with the playwrights Eugene Labiche and George Faydeau creating some of the most striking examples of the genre. In the 20th century, the British bedroom farce developed with the plays of Ben Travers, Alan Ayckbourn, and Noel Coward. The play-within-a-play, *Nothing On*, is an example of this style with its constant opening and closing of doors, scarcely clothed characters, and mistaken identities.

While farce is often looked at as fluff or only played for laughs, its long history and ability to poke fun at the absurdity of everyday life makes it an enduring genre that has some substance to accompany those belly laughs.

MICHAEL FRAYN ON FARCE

“Farce has always been regarded in this country, in fact everywhere, as rather down-market, popular entertainment . . . but farce chose me as its victim.”

“I think what most farces have in common is an element of panic. People lose their heads. They find themselves in an embarrassing situation, and they tell a lie to cover up. The lie doesn't make things better, it makes them worse, and then they have to explain not only the initial embarrassing situation but the lie as well, and the panic escalates.”

“In every farce, in every comedy, there has to be an element of pain and difficulty, and we laugh as a relief that it is happening to somebody else and not to us.”

Michael Frayn quotations excerpted from an interview that appeared in “The Art of Theater No. 15” in *The Paris Review*.



Commedia dell' Arte Characters

PLAYBILL FOR **NOTHING ON**

EXCERPTED FROM **NOISES OFF** SCRIPT

NOTHING ON

by
ROBIN HOUSEMONGER

Cast in order of appearance:

Mrs. Clackett **DOTTY OTLEY**
Roger Tramplemain..... **GARRY LEJEUNE**
Vicki **BROOKE ASHTON**
Philip Brent **FREDERICK FELLOWES**
Flavia Brent **BELINDA BLAIR**
Burglar **SELSDON MOWBRAY**
Sheikh **FREDERICK FELLOWES**

For **OTSAR PRODUCTIONS LTD**
Company & Stage Manager **TIM ALLGOOD**
Assistant Stage Manager **POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR**
Production Photographer **MARTHA NORCHEESIE**

Production Credits

Sardines by Old Salt Sardines. Antique silverware and cardboard boxes by Mrs J. G. H. Norton-Taylor. Stethoscope and hospital trolley by Severn Surgical Supplies. Straightjacket by Kumfy Restraints Ltd. Coffins by G. Ashforth and Sons.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of
EUROPEAN BREWERIES in sponsoring this production.

Grand Theatre Weston-Super-Mare

Otstar Productions Ltd

present

**Dotty Otley
Belinda Blair
Garry Lejeune**

In

NOTHING ON

by

ROBIN HOUSEMONGER

with

**Selsdon Mowbray
Brooke Ashton
Frederick Fellowes**

Directed by Lloyd Dallas

WORLD PREMIERE PRIOR TO NATIONAL TOUR!

Smoking is not permitted in the auditorium.

The use of cameras and tape recorders is forbidden.

The management reserves the right to refuse admission, also to make any alteration in the cast when may be rendered necessary by illness or other unavoidable causes.

From the Theatre rules "All exits shall be available for use during all performances."

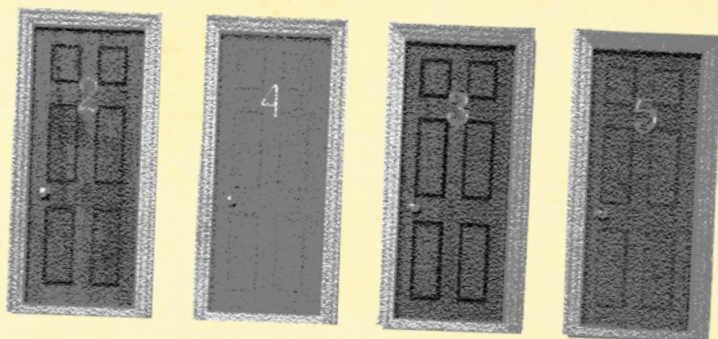
"The fire curtain shall be lowered during each performance."

Behind the Dressing Room Doors

DOTTY OTLEY (Mrs Clackett) makes a welcome return to the stage to create the role of Mrs. Clackett after playing Mrs. Hackett, Britain's most famous lollipop lady ("Ooh, I can't 'ardly 'old me lolly up!") in over 320 episodes of TV's *ON THE ZEBRAS*. She was born in Malta, the only daughter of Lt. Cdr. Clive Otley, R.N., D.S.M., and trained at the Estelle Birkwood School of Drama and Allied Arts, winning the Bronze Medal, and going on to the Embassy Theatre, Swiss Cottage, where she gained invaluable experience as ASM in successful production like *AS YOU DESIRE* and *STARCHED APRONS*. Understudying Bee Duffell in *HADDOCK'S EYES* at the New Lindsey Theatre, Notting Hill Gate, and Margaret Lockwood in *PETER PAN* at the Scala, was followed by The King's Theatre, Peebles for a season, and then the Duke's Players at Lyme Regis for the better part of two seasons, and this in turn led to a prolonged stay in Australia, where she enjoyed some of the biggest successes of her career. When she gets the time she intends writing her memoirs, she says.

BELINDA BLAIR (Flavia Brent) has been on the stage since the age of four, when she made her debut in *SINBAD THE SAILOR* at the old Croydon Hippodrome as one of Miss Toni Tanner's Ten Tapping Tots. She subsequently danced her way round this country, Southern Africa, and the Far East in shows like *ZIPPEY-DOODA!* and *HERE COME LES GIRLS!* More recently she has been seen in such comedy hits as *DON'T MR DUDDLE!*, *WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING IN MY BED?*, and *TWICE TWO IS SEX*. She is married to scriptwriter Terry Wough, who has contributed lead-in material to most of TV's chat shows. They have two sons and three retrievers.

GARRY LEJEUNE (Roger Tramplemain) was twice winner of the Rose Brudford Medal for Effort. His many successful tours have brought him to Weston-super-Mare only once before, when he was starring in *THE ADVENTURES OF A WINDOW DRESSER*. He has made innumerable television appearances, but he is probably best known as 'Cornetto', the ice-cream salesman who stirs the hearts of all the lollipop ladies in *ON THE ZEBRAS*. Recently made his 'big screen' debut in *UP THE VIRGIN SOLDIERS*, for which he was nominated as Best Male Newcomer under Forty in any British Low-Budget Comedy Film by readers of the *SUN* newspaper.



SELSDON MOWBRAY (Burglar) first 'trod the boards' in *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* with the Ben Greet Players, with whom he toured for three years, playing, among other roles, Moth, Mustardseed, and Nerissa (!) After ward service in the Artists' Rifles, outstanding season with various repertory companies across the length and breadth of Great Britain led to his first West End play, *KELLY'S EYE*. The 'alfresco' in Regent's Park for several seasons, playing leads. To Stratford thence for *Mercutio*, King John, and the Porter in *MACBETH*. To Hollywood for several good supporting roles, including stand-in to Robert Newton. Back home he played King Lear in Portsmouth, and joined the BBC Rep for two months in 1938. Great War No. To saw him back in khaki. Invalided out in 1940, he continued to serve by joining Ensa, and performing all over the world in many different 'Theatres of War'. To Dublin in 1946, where he set up his own touring company playing the Classics, and rivaling the great Agnew Macmaster. Returned to England in 1952 and set up his own tour - a revival of *MR. CINDERS*. Since then, apart from an occasional excursion to 'tread the green', he has been busy writing his autobiography, which he is thinking of titling *HANGING ON THE WALL*.

BROOKE ASHTON (Vicki) is probably best known as the girl wearing nothing but 'good, honest, natural froth' in the Hauptbahnhofbrau lager commercial. But she has enjoyed a flourishing stage career, extending from a widely acclaimed Dandini in Hull to six months in Lebanon with *PIXIE PEARLS*. Her television appearances range from Girl at Infants' School in *ON THE ZEBRAS* to Girl In Strip Joint in *ON PROBATION*. Cinemagoers saw her in *THE GIRL IN ROOM 14*, where she played the Girl in Room 312.

FREDERICK FELLOWES (Philip Brent) comes from a theatrical family - his parents were a popular specialty dance act of the thirties and forties, 'The Funny Fellowes'. He taught at a prep school near Hayward's Heath before bowing to family tradition and joining the Osmosis Players. There followed successful seasons in Nairobi, Ventnor, and Southwold, and he was most recently seen in the controversial all male version of the *TROJAN WOMEN*. He is happily married, and lives near Crawley, where his wife breeds pedigree dogs. "If she ever leaves me," he says "it will be for an Irish wolfhound!"

ROBIN HOUSEMONGER (Author) was born in Worcester Park, Surrey, into a family 'unremarkable in every way except for an aunt with red hair who used to sing all the high twiddly bits from *THE MERRY WIDOW* over the tea-table'. He claims to have been the world's most unsuccessful gents' hosiery wholesaler, and began writing 'to fill the long hours between one hosiery order and the next'. He turned this experience into his very first play, *SOCKS BEFORE MARRIAGE*, which ran in the West End for nine years. Two of his subsequent plays, *BRIEFS ENCOUNTER* and *HANKY PANKY*, broke box office records in Perth, Western Australia. *NOTHING ON* is his seventeenth play.

A Glimpse of the Noumenal

(condensed from JG Stillwater, *Eros Untrousered: Studies in the Semantics of Bedroom Farce*)

The cultural importance of the so-called 'bedroom farce', or 'English sex farce', has long been recognized, but the attention has tended to centre on the metaphysical significance of mistaken identity and upon the social criticism implicit in the form's ground-breaking exploration of cross-dressing and trans-gender role-playing. The focus of scholarly interest, however, is now beginning to shift to the recurrence of certain mythic themes in the genre, and to their religious and spiritual implications.

In a typical bedroom farce, a man and a woman come to some secret or mysterious place (cf. *Beauty and the Beast*, *Bluebeard's Castle*, etc.) to perform certain acts which are supposed to remain concealed from the eyes of the world. This is plainly a variant of traditional 'search' or 'quest', the goal of which, though presented as being 'sexual' in nature, is to be understood as metaphor of enlightenment and transcendence. Some partial disrobing may occur, to suggest perhaps a preliminary stripping away of worldly illusions, but total nudity (perfect truth) and complete 'carnal knowledge' (i.e. spiritual understanding) are perpetually forestalled by the intervention of coincidental encounters (often with other seekers engaged in parallel 'quests'), which bear a striking resemblance to the trials undergone by postulants in various esoteric cults (cf. *The Magic Flute*, *Star Wars*, etc.).

According to evidence given to the Royal Commission on Procedures and Practice in the Sale of Real Estate, approximately 17% of estate agents admit to having on at least one occasion passed off a property they were selling as their own. In 63% of these cases the intention was to impress a member of the opposite sex, and/or provide accommodation for illicit sexual activity—though some witnesses had at one time or another used properties to secure a loan or other business advantage from gullible victims. One agent boasted that he had managed to have intercourse in the master bedroom, then sell his partner the property—and help himself to a case of champagne from the cellar and a pound and a half of strawberries from the garden.

A recurring and highly significant feature of the genre is a multiplicity of doors. If we regard the world on this side of the doors as the physical one in which mortal men are condemned to live, the world or worlds concealed behind them may be thought of as representing both the higher and more spiritual plane into which the postulants hope to escape, and the underworld from which at any moment demons may leap out to tempt or punish. When the doors do open, it is often with great suddenness and unexpectedness, highly suggestive of those epiphanic moments of insight and enlightenment which give access to the 'other', and offer us a fleeting glimpse of the noumenal.

Another recurring feature is the fall or loss of trousers. This can be readily recognized as an allusion to the Fall of Man and the loss of primal innocence. The removal of the trousers traditionally reveals a pair of striped underpants, in which we recognize both the stripes of the tiger, the feral beast that lurks in all of us beneath the civilized exterior suggested by the lost trousers, and perhaps also a premonitory representation of the stripes caused by the whipping which was formerly the traditional punishment for fornication.

Farce, interestingly, is popularly categorized as 'funny'. It is true that the form often involves 'funny' elements in the sense of the strange or uncanny, such as supposedly supernatural phenomena, and behavior suggestive of demonic possession. But the meaning of 'funny' here is probably also intended to include its secondary sense, 'provocative of laughter.'

This is an interesting perception. It scarcely needs to be said that laughter, involving as it does the loss of self-control and the spasmodic release of breath, a vital bodily fluid, is a metaphorical representation of the sexual act. But it can also occasion the shedding of tears, which suggests that it may in addition be a sublimated form of mourning. Indeed we recognize here a symbolic foretaste of death. If sneezing has been widely feared because it is thought that during a sneeze the soul flies out of the body, and may not be recaptured (whence 'Bless you!' or 'Gesundheit!'), then how much more dangerous is laughter. Not once but over and over again the repeated muscular contractions and expulsions of breath drive the 'soul' forth from the body. The danger of laughter is recognized in such expressions as 'killingly funny,' and 'I almost died'. There is a lurking fear that even more spectacular violence may ensue, and that a farce may end with a bloodletting as gruesome as in *Oedipus* or *Medea*, if people are induced to 'split their sides' or 'laugh their heads off'.

Fear of the darker undertones of the bedroom farce has sometimes in the past led to its dismissal as 'mere entertainment'. As the foregoing hopefully makes clear, though, financial support by the Arts Council or a private sponsor for the tour of a bedroom farce would be by no means out of place.

THIS SPACE TO LET

Please apply to The Manager, Grand Theatre.

"When all around is
strife and uncertainty,
there's nothing like . . .
a good old-fashioned
plate of sardines!

-Burglar, *Nothing On*

SARDINE SNIPPETS

- Sardines are high in Omega -3s, selenium, and are in plentiful supply in natural fisheries, so they are an incredibly sustainable choice of fish.
- Oscar Wilde's son started London's first sardine tasting club in 1935.
- Aged sardines are considered a delicacy by many gourmands, with one man citing a delicious 30-year-old can from Norway as a personal favorite.
- In 1904, Charles Poole Cleaves wrote a novel entitled *A Case of Sardines: A Story of the Maine Coast*. Maine was as associated with sardines as Wisconsin is with cheese; unfortunately, Maine's last sardine factory closed in 2010.
- In the 1930s and 1940s, Monterey, California was the center of the sardine universe. John Steinbeck immortalized the world of sardine factories in his 1945 novel *Cannery Row*.
- If you are in Maine, make sure to stop by the Maine Coast Sardine History Museum in Jonesport.

SARDINES AROUND THE WORLD

Different parts of the world pack different species of small fish in cans and call them sardines. Each has a unique flavor and a fishy identity all its own. Can you match the sardines to their names and locations where they reign supreme?

A.



B.



C.



D.



Brislings, Silds, Sprats

Sardinops sagax

Pilchards

North Atlantic Herring

Spain, Portugal, France

Norway

American East Coast

Pacific Coast

A. Sardinops Sagax - Pacific Coast B. North Atlantic Herring - American East Coast C. Brislings - Norway D. Pilchards - Spain, Portugal, France

GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR THE THEATER NOVICES AND NON-ANGLOPHILES IN THE AUDIENCE

Technicals – the rehearsals when lights, sound, set changes, and other technical elements are incorporated into a show.

Company – a term used for the people working on a play, sometimes more specifically referring to the cast of the show. At The Rep, all employees are considered company members.

Weekly rep – a system of creating theater in which the resident acting company learns a new play, rehearses for a week, and then performs the piece, with the process starting over weekly.

Stalls – a British term for the seats of the theater.

VAT – “value added tax”, a tax levied on the difference between the cost of materials and the selling price of a commodity or service.

Quick change – when an actor must change costumes rapidly, often without the time to go back to the dressing room.

Beginners – British term for the American phrase “Places”, which tells actors that they are close to the show’s start and need to be in their spots, ready to go on stage.

House – house can refer to the area of the theater where the audience sits, the audience itself, or the entirety of the show, as in “The first house finishes just after five, yes?”

Front of house calls – the announcements the Stage Manager or House Manager makes to notify the audience to take their seats.

On the corner – this phrase refers to the corner where a Stage Manager may sit and feed lines to actors if they miss a cue. We at The Rep, of course, do not need such a thing.

Green room – the room in a theater where actors wait to make their entrances. Contrary to popular belief, all green rooms are not painted green.

Love – British term of endearment that is used both genuinely and sarcastically in the play.

Fruit machine – Cha-ching! Cha-ching! A fruit machine is Brit-speak for a slot machine.

Posset mill – posset is an old British drink made from mixing milk, ale, and spices that later became the inspiration for egg nog. The word also refers to a baby’s spit-up after drinking milk.

Bloody – an expletive adjective used in Great Britain and former commonwealth countries.

Airing cupboard – the linen closet, also a place to hide lovers/phony house buyers.

Postprandial – after dinner.

Inland Revenue – the British equivalent of the IRS.

Pigeonhouse – a small compartment in a desk or cabinet.

Bullion vault – a bank vault.

Berk – a disparaging term to imply that someone is a fool or stupid.

Boiled sweets – hard candy.

Telly – short for a television or television program.

Pensioners – the British term for retirees or those who are collecting pensions.

Cost a bomb – to cost a large sum of money.

Brassy – an adjective to describe something or someone trashy.

Laura Gordon and Gerard Neugent. Photo by Michael Brosilow.



Interview with *Noises Off* Assistant Director, Frank Honts

Each year, The Rep hires a group of full-time seasonal interns in our professional Artistic Internship Program. These interns are instrumental to our productions. Acting Interns understudy roles in all of our spaces as well as play smaller roles and serve as ensemble members throughout the season. Directing Interns are assigned as Assistant Directors for each of our productions. The Education Intern serves as the lead Teaching Artist for our in-school programs.



Milwaukee Rep Education Intern Hope Parow sat down with *Noises Off* Assistant Director and Directing Intern Frank Honts to talk about sardines, farce, and the nature of truth in theater.

Hope Parow: Tell us a little bit about what being an assistant director is like.

Frank Honts: At Milwaukee Rep, assistant directors wear a variety of hats, including performing background research prior to the start of rehearsals, acting as another set of eyes and ears for the director during rehearsals, and staying up to date with the show throughout its run. In addition, assistant directors facilitate understudy rehearsals, which are held for two hours each day before or after principal rehearsals. Although the specific tasks vary from show to show and director to director, the assistant director's most important job is to support the director's vision for the show and help bring it to fruition.

HP: So, how do you feel about sardines? Are they a staple in your diet?

FH: (Laughing) My goal in this production process is to never have to eat a sardine. I don't like them, and I hope that I can stay away from them.

HP: Do you think you will be forced to eat them?

FH: I sure hope not.

HP: In reading the script, have you been able to identify any parallels between the two worlds of *Noises Off* and *Nothing On* (the play-within-a-play)?

FH: Stylistically they are very similar pieces that live in a world that is a little bit unfamiliar to us: traveling stock theater in England made up of these crazy pieces that have some crazy things happen in them and some larger-

than-life characters. And people dealing with circumstances that are always a little bit out of their control and bumbling around trying to figure them out.

HP: Do you find yourself rooting for the cast as they bumble their way through this chaos?

FH: We were discussing this in rehearsal last week, and that is the wonderful thing about farce. On the one hand, you want these people to succeed, but in other ways, watching the train wreck is almost more enjoyable, so it is hard to look away. I think they are inherently likeable people who are dealing with the stress of their existence, which is working in professional or semi-professional theater, and really struggling to just get through the day. I think whether we are in theater or whether we are artists or not, we can all relate to that on some level.

HP: *Noises Off* is pure farce, which has been a prominent genre of literature for centuries. What do you think is the appeal of farce for a modern audience?

FH: I think the contemporary appeal of farce is to escape the perils of our everyday lives, to find a release in people who are not totally unlike us, but are just different enough that we can step away from our own realities for a bit and just enjoy the mishaps of others. We do not know if these people turn out okay or whether it all falls apart; it is a form of therapy, a way of releasing the tension. I think the other thing is that it is really hard to write and it is really hard to do well, so when a good farce comes along, people really glom onto it.

HP: Lloyd Dallas, the director of *Nothing On*, says, "I'm starting to know what God felt like when he sat out there in the dark and created the world." Is this a typical feeling for directors? Is there truth in his statement?

FH: One gets the sense that part of Lloyd's signature style is orchestrating "moments" in his productions, which might be a polite way of saying he over-manages the process. KJ Sanchez, the director of this production, brings a collaborative spirit to rehearsals. She has a strong sense of what the play should feel like, but she is more interested in allowing actors to figure out what works well in the moment than dictating where people should stand and move around. So for KJ, it is not about having a godlike director sit out there in the dark moving chess pieces around. It is funny, because on several occasions in rehearsal, she has explicitly directed moments in *Nothing On* by saying, "I think in this moment Lloyd would have

you do this.” The best productions tend to be led by directors who can embrace and support the creative talent of the artists involved and not get caught up in the God complex that Lloyd seems to suffer from at times.

HP: Despite the creative license that is inherent to farce, is *Noises Off* an accurate portrayal of your average theatrical production?

FH: I think the exaggerated reality we see in the play is very much grounded in the true experiences that we have as artists. We want to be professional: we come to our jobs every day and we want the work we do to be excellent, so we create as many circumstances as possible to make sure that happens. But there is some truth to it too; on the first day of rehearsal, KJ asked people to share their “bad show” horror stories. And, oh boy. There were some crazy mishaps (even worse than the ones we see in *Noises Off*). I think KJ’s point in having us share these stories was to acknowledge that these things do happen and that at some level,

they are the moments that keep us grounded and human..

HP: What do you hope the audience members take away from this experience? Are there any specific moments or elements you think the audience should look for?

FH: In addition to having that light and gleeful experience, we hope the audience walks away with an appreciation of the importance of how ensemble work brings a play like this to life. When you have a really great group of artists working with each other, things should feel seamless. It should feel like the play has a pulse and is an organism unto itself. It should breathe, move, glide, and creak with all sorts of precision. You have an ensemble of actors onstage, and an ensemble of artists offstage, and a director working to put the pieces together. The artistry of all of these things coming together can happen in a place like the Milwaukee Rep.



FEATURED ARTIST: JIM GUY, PROPERTIES DIRECTOR

Jim Guy is in the midst of his 16th season at Milwaukee Rep as our Properties Director, or as Jim calls himself, “The Prop Guy.” Jim began his career in theater in 1978, after studying Library Science and Theater Stage Management. After working in several other positions at the theater including Stage Manager, he was hired as a Prop Carpenter and then Properties Director at the Cleveland Playhouse, where he worked for eight seasons. In addition to that work, he and wife Margaret Hasek-Guy (The Rep’s Soft Props Artisan), founded The Prop Guy, a freelance prop company. He moved on to head the MFA Properties Design & Management program at the University of Illinois, one of only three

such programs in the country. Wanting a return to professional theater, Jim joined the company of the Milwaukee Rep in 1998. Jim is currently the president of the Society of Properties Artisan Managers (SPAM) and is a well-known expert on onstage use of firearms and weaponry.

This is Jim’s third production of *Noises Off*, and he characterizes the show as one of the funniest plays on which he has ever worked. Jim says it is a great show for props because it is “an exercise in calculated poor taste” which is much more fun and challenging than doing something with good taste. Jim says, “We have all worked in the theater that is producing *Nothing On*. Everyone who has done theater has had a *Noises Off* sort of experience. This play is a love letter to those adorable companies.”

In *Noises Off*, the Rep’s prop shop has several challenges to work through. There are many props within the show, and while some of them may seem like mundane, everyday objects, many of them have to be able to function in ways that are not so everyday. The armchair and couch featured throughout the play must deteriorate during the course of the run of *Nothing On*, and many plates of sardines will be in hand at all times, even some that do tricks! There are also the elements of period style, as the show takes place over thirty years ago, and the theater technology the audience sees in the second act needs to be accurate. Jim says that the best part of this show, besides the fun of working on a play with a sense of “calculated cheesiness,” is that he is working with actors, a director (KJ Sanchez), and a scenic designer (Dan Conway) with whom he has a strong collaborative relationship.

VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.



Milwaukee Repertory Theater. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. In the central rotunda is a large staircase which leads to The Rep's Quadracci Powerhouse theater and lobby.

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- Maintain our commitment to audiences with special needs through our Access Services that include American Sign Language interpreted productions, captioned theater, infrared listening systems and script synopses to ensure that theater at The Rep is accessible to all;
- Educate the next generation of theater professionals with our Artistic Intern Program which gives newly degreed artists a chance to hone their skills at The Rep as they begin to pursue their theatrical careers.

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