



THE

# ROBBER

## BRIDEGROOM

ROUNABOUT  
THEATRE  
COMPANY

50  
YRS

UPSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of

# UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

## *The Robber Bridegroom*

**Book and Lyrics by** Alfred Uhry

**Music by** Robert Waldman

**Directed by** Alex Timbers

*The Robber Bridegroom* is a Southern-fried Robin Hood tale featuring Jamie Lockhart, a dangerous, handsome, backwoods rogue who's a gentleman by day and bandit by night. When he falls for the beautiful daughter of a wealthy planter, his world and code of ethics is turned upside down.

### *a note from Artistic Director Todd Haines*

My feelings about *The Robber Bridegroom* boil down to one simple word: fun. This musical is an absolute delight, and I can promise you that the actors and musicians onstage are having as good of a time performing as you'll have watching them. Not only is the story itself a charming fable, but the music is truly fantastic, blending bluegrass and ballads into its own Broadway sound.

*when* 1795    *where* In and around Rodney, Mississippi.

### *who*

**Jamie Lockhart**  
A gentleman robber

**Clement Musgrove**  
A wealthy planter

**Salome**  
Musgrove's second wife

**Rosamund**  
Musgrove's daughter.

**Little Harp**  
A robber

**Big Harp**  
The head of a robber

**Goat**  
A simpleton

**Goat's Mother**

**Airie**  
Goat's sister

**A Raven**

**Residents of Rodney**

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# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ALEX TIMBERS

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke to director Alex Timbers about reviving and revamping *The Robber Bridegroom*.

**Ted Sod:** Where were you born and educated? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

**Alex Timbers:** I grew up in New York City and suburban Chicago and then went to Yale for college. Two teachers in particular had a big impact on me: my fifth grade teacher, Diane Hawes, who got me excited about history, a topic that has ultimately become a huge part of my focus in theatre. And Peter Ferry, my high school English teacher, who helped me find my own voice as a writer and helped me embrace the notion that humor and irreverence were a legitimate form of expression.

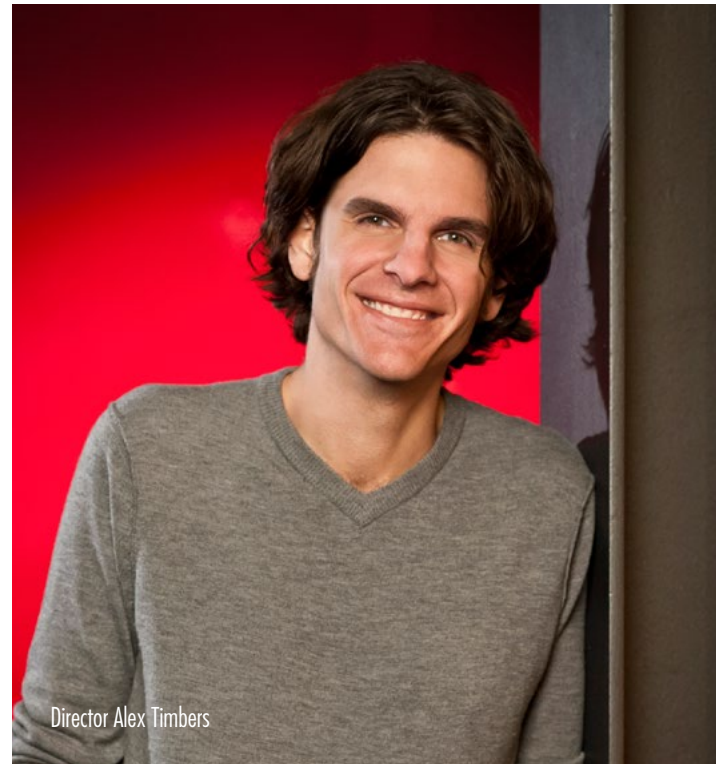
**TS:** Was there a specific moment when you decided to become a director?

**AT:** The extent of my theatre experience until college was really just the annual school play. In high school, I was always relegated to the one non-singing, non-dancing character in the musicals they chose: for example, the Hungarian diplomat Zoltan Karpathy in *My Fair Lady* and the gangster Big Jule in *Guys and Dolls*. It was humbling! But I'm not a great actor and knew it. So, in college, I wasn't initially interested in doing more theatre. I auditioned for and joined an improv troupe and a sketch comedy group, which was much more my speed. We toured and performed. Over time, I became curious about the mechanics of comedy—in other words, how comedy works. And, as a result, I started to grow curious about the construction of farces. I acted in a student production of one. And then, to learn more, I chose to direct Peter Shaffer's *Black Comedy*. It was a great experience, so then I directed Ken Ludwig's *Lend Me a Tenor*. I got bit by the directing bug at that point. And it soon led to me directing dramatic plays and musicals and then devised work, but it all began based on an interest in comedy.

**TS:** Why did you choose to direct a revival of *The Robber Bridegroom*?

**AT:** As a director, I've spent my post-college professional career devoted to new work. But I saw a production of *The Robber Bridegroom* many years ago, and it always stuck with me and inspired me. I remember when I saw it feeling a real kinship with the material. Even though it was written in the 1970s, it felt like it had a fresh, playful, and sexy irreverence. It was also raw, mischievous, and gritty—qualities at the time that I didn't naturally associate with musicals. I also loved the actor/audience relationship in the show, which was fluid and charged. What's more, the characters onstage appeared to be making up the show as they were doing it. I loved the improvisatory spirit—that nothing felt premeditated.

So, a few years ago, when Todd Haimes, the Artistic Director at Roundabout, and I were talking about shows I'd like to direct, I brought up *The Robber Bridegroom*. New York hasn't seen a professional production of the show in 40 years. Todd was intrigued. I reached out to the wonderful authors of the musical, Alfred Uhry and Robert Waldman, and they were enthusiastic, so we did a



workshop of the show in a rehearsal studio to experiment with how we might tackle the material in a potential revival.

**TS:** How have you researched the world of this play? Will you give us some insight into your process?

**AT:** I do a lot of work focused on historical figures and historical subject matter. But no matter what the show, I'll begin with a research phase. Here, that started with the musical's source material: Eudora Welty's novella. Then I looked at research imagery from the period where the show takes place, as well as the Natchez Trace, indigo fields, basically everything name-checked in the musical. Then I researched what resources were available to people living back then in Mississippi and the larger historical-political context surrounding the area. For a revival, you also look at the environment in which the show was originally created: *The Robber Bridegroom* was born of a certain breed of musical in the 1970s that includes shows like *Pippin* and *Godspell*. In these musicals, the audience is repeatedly reminded of the fact that they're watching performers play roles and telling you a story. The act of making theatre is part of the central event.

When my collaborators and I began thinking about staging the show at the Steinberg Center, we thought about how we could push that idea even further than the premiere production. How can we do the show with less: less scenery, fewer performers. How can we rely on the audience's imagination as much as possible in the act of staging this play, so we can make it a real "lean in" theatregoing experience?

“HOW CAN WE RELY ON THE AUDIENCE’S IMAGINATION AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE IN THE ACT OF STAGING THIS PLAY, SO WE CAN MAKE IT A REAL ‘LEAN IN’ THEATREGOING EXPERIENCE?”

**TS:** What do you think the musical is about? Do you feel it has contemporary resonance?

**AT:** *The Robber Bridegroom* is a tribute to the con men, riverboat hucksters, and charlatans that colonized and created our great nation at its founding. America doesn’t have the rich set of myths that Europe does, filled with princesses, magical swords, and trolls under bridges, so Eudora Welty made up her own fitting menagerie of gentleman bandits, talking heads, and Southern stepmothers. Welty, and now Uhry and Waldman, here suggest these were the people that created our nation and in a way so many of our leaders and politicians are born from their rib. Businessmen and bandits, all rolled into one. The show is trying to define a uniquely American spirit, locate a strange part of our psyche, and point at our attraction to these figures. So as we see the great salesmen of today stump across America and as they try to wrangle a vote from us, not every one of them seems so different from Jamie Lockhart.

**TS:** How do you understand the role of Jamie Lockhart?

**AT:** Jamie Lockhart is a rogue. He’s a charmer. He’s clever, funny, and he has the privilege of speaking directly with the audience. And we’re putty in his hands. The character is an update of Robin Hood. He’s a gentleman by day and a bandit by night, and he follows his own code of ethics in justice. It’s meeting the character of Rosamund that turns his worldview upside down. He’s hardhearted and cynical and pragmatic, yet meeting this girl transforms him, which is a beautiful and moving idea.

**TS:** Rosamund and Jamie fall in love with each other’s alter egos first. Did I understand that correctly?

**AT:** There’s a duality throughout the entire show. That’s one of the big themes in this piece – everyone has two sides to them. There’s big suspension of disbelief for the audience in that Jamie Lockhart doesn’t realize that Rosamund is Rosamund when she’s dressed up in her mop cap and acting like a crazy person. And Rosamund doesn’t know that the Bandit of the Woods is also Jamie Lockhart when he has berry juice stains on his face. We need to remember that the show is sub-titled “A Mississippi Fairytale” and these sort of dramatic devices, while far-fetched, exist confidently within the language of this story.

**TS:** Are there substantial differences between the version you are directing and the original version of the script and score?

**AT:** Alfred Uhry has taken a fresh look at the book and trimmed and re-written a half dozen scenes throughout. There have been efforts to add more musical material for Jamie Lockhart and Rosamund to share. There’s been a big re-think of the first 15 minutes of the show, and a great deal of tightening throughout. I think the piece is going to end up being 85 minutes straight through.

**TS:** Are you anticipating having the actors be the band, or are they separate entities?

**AT:** There’s going to be a lot of fluidity. The actors will be playing instruments, but the band will be on stage as well and participating in many of the numbers. My hope is that there is a seamless energy

between the band and the performers. All the people onstage need to be invested in the communal aspect of telling this story.

**TS:** Why did you choose to work with Connor Gallagher and Justin Levine?

**AT:** Justin Levine, who is musical director, is one of the most gifted young composers and music directors working today. We worked together on *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *Here Lies Love*, and one of his own writing projects as well. I consider him one of my closest collaborators. Beyond being a brilliant writer of pop music and musical theatre, he plays a dozen instruments and has a deep love and appreciation, specifically, for bluegrass. I thought he would be the perfect person to be in charge of the band and re-investigating this score, along with the genius musical mind of Martin Lowe. Robert Waldman, the show’s composer, wisely wants the score to feel as alive today as it did to audiences back in 1975. I think what comes with that is a responsibility to put the score in dialogue with what’s going on in music today with bands like Grizzly Bear and Mumford and Sons. Justin and Martin are the perfect people to do that.

I first worked with Connor Gallagher about six years ago. We were paired together on a project and, while it was a forced marriage, we felt it was serendipitous as we had an immediate connection. Connor is an enormously clever and talented young choreographer with a huge imagination and a great wit. He also has the unlikely benefit of having acted in *The Robber Bridegroom*! He played the character of Goat in high school. He knows the show incredibly well, has the same love of it that I do, and understands the spirit of what I want our production to be.

**TS:** Talk about casting the show – what traits did you need?

**AT:** The actors we cast needed to be true proteans, playing multiple roles and willing to step forward and take the lead in a scene or song, and then in the next one hold up a board or a rope and recede into the scenographic world. These hard-working actors never even leave the stage. We’ve got an exciting cast that I couldn’t be more delighted about, led by the remarkable Steven Pasquale. •



# A ROUGH GUIDE TO BUILDING A PLAY

DIY stands for do-it-yourself, and anyone familiar with the handful of home improvement television channels will understand the term as it applies to fixer-uppers. These channels operate on the premise that with enough time and know-how, normal people can cheaply fix that hole in their ceiling, remodel their kitchen, or build an enviable dining room table. But how does someone build a play?

A DIY theatre aesthetic is a style that emerges from collective practices of creating and controlling one's own environment. So, more simply, DIY theatre is made on the spot out of whatever elements—set pieces, props, humans, or stories—are available. Artists who use DIY styles appreciate the way they encourage the audience's imagination through these non-realistic props or scenery. In this sense, the performances sometimes take on an improvisational style, seeming to be made up on the spot. Artists working in this way are often on the fringe who embrace the "make do with what we've got" mentality. But this style is not limited to the small black box theatres of downtown Manhattan, as Roundabout's production of *The Robber Bridegroom* uses a DIY style to create a sense of magic through the roughness of its performance. In this production of *The Robber Bridegroom*, director Alex Timbers is interested in bringing the characters downstage center, highlighting the fact that the world does not exist unless they create it. Timbers perfected this style in his previous work with his downtown theatre company, Les Freres Corbusier. Timbers' company mission is to make "aggressively visceral theatre combining historical revisionism, multimedia excess, found texts, sophomoric humor, and rigorous academic research." He aims to create a similar work with Roundabout's *The Robber Bridegroom*.

When fixing up a house for much-needed repairs or building a piece of furniture from scratch, the materials are often what matter most. In the theatre, it is no different. The play is two-layered, with the outermost frame of the story being an annual celebratory story-telling that reinforces this



*Peter and the Starcatcher* co-directed by Alex Timbers

Mississippi town's history. They begin as a troupe of modern actors, taking off their modern dress and swapping it out for the garb of the 18th Century American South. The actors introduce themselves to the audience and become their characters as they speak directly through the fourth wall (if there is one). The characters are of today's world pretending to be characters from a time long past, telling each other their favorite story. And, by doing so, the performance becomes about their telling a story, rather than living it. It is a slight shift from other performance styles, in which the audience observes characters without any hint of the process required to create the show. A traditional performance appears to happen automatically, with the action of the play beginning as late as possible into the story and ending only after characters have completed their arcs. The actors playing the characters are only ever seen as the characters, never revealing the humans underneath. But here, the characters have a two-faced nature: they are both of the world of the play and of the world of the audience. It is almost as if the characters hopped up from seats among the audience because of the power of the story. In DIY theatre, as in DIY home repairs, the process of building the play, which is to say the skill and craft of the people making it, is as much on display as the final product.

Deviating slightly from the world of home improvement, a DIY theatre aesthetic can also highlight the world of the play. (What homemade table highlights the world of the apartment?) The world, or environment, of *The Robber*

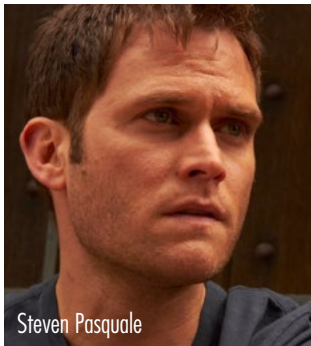
*Bridegroom* is one of grit and integrity, of authentic materials and of calloused hands. The cast and characters attempt to hide nothing from the audience, and we are able to see that the play lives between the modern and the historical. This extends one step further, in that the actors also move props and scenery in a way that is atypical for most productions of this scale: there are no visible stagehands or crew. The world is built entirely out of the characters' need to tell their annual story. In the same vein, a significant portion of *The Robber Bridegroom* takes place outdoors, and rather than staging every single scene change, Timbers uses his performers (again, "make do with what you've got") and the clean slate of the audience's imagination to create the setting. The characters use the barrels, boxes, and their own bodies to make stairs, walls of a bedroom, and even the trees and bushes in a forest. Naturally, this style requires a leap of the imagination. It requires a little sweat-equity from the audience to meet the performers halfway and mentally imagine the textures of the play: are the walls rough? does everyone have splinters in their feet? what does it smell like? By introducing enough material to inspire these questions, the world of the play becomes a unique experience for each member of the audience.

But perhaps most important is the question of why someone might choose to do-it-themselves, rather than hiring a contractor or performing in a more polished aesthetic. Primarily, the reason is individuality and authenticity. These DIY techniques specifically avoid those of mass-market musicals like *Les Misérables* with their machine-operated turntable sets. These sets are exemplary of an attempt to create a separate world, rather than one that is human-made and familiar to the audience. They intend to transport the audience somewhere else entirely, and in doing so, create a fake world. The DIY aesthetic applied to this production of *The Robber Bridegroom* allows the cast and creative team to build a unique musical that communicates directly with (and from) its audience. The play (and its world) are real, irreplicable, and only understood when seen live and in person. The stage and setting of Jamie's and Rosamund's story, created anew every night, becomes a unique expression from the performers to the audience about the duality of life, necessity of community, and ultimately, the American identity. If one considers the origins of this country ("...government of the people, by the people, for the people..."), it's obvious why this aesthetic is a perfect fit for *The Robber Bridegroom*. •



Timbers' *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*

# INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR STEVEN PASQUALE



**Ted Sod, Education Dramaturg, sat down with actor Steven Pasquale to discuss the role of Jamie Lockhart in *The Robber Bridegroom*.**

**Ted Sod: Will you tell us where you were born and educated and why you decided to become an actor? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?**

**Steven Pasquale:** I was born in Maplewood, New Jersey and

raised in Central Pennsylvania, just outside of Harrisburg. I was an athlete as a kid and got injured playing football, and a friend convinced me to act in a play during my junior year of high school. I had a great time and was convinced it was something I wanted to do. That summer I went to a theatre training program at Northwestern University. Then I went to SMU for that one semester. I got a job on tour and never made it back to school. I started at eighteen and have been going ever since. As far as profound influences are concerned: Paul Newman, Jim Carrey, Michael Keaton, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Bradley Whitford—all amazing actors that I’ve attempted to steal from.

**TS: When did you realize you could sing?**

**SP:** In the car. It’s always been about mimicking good singers. I think it was probably at seventeen or eighteen years old, singing along with Donny Hathaway or Billy Joel or Stevie Wonder, where I felt like I could sing like those guys depending on the genre. I started to think that maybe that was rare, and I began to seriously explore singing at that point.

**TS: Did you teach yourself how to read music?**

**SP:** I don’t read music. I’d say I have a good ear. I never studied music and I never studied singing, so it’s just about what I feel.

**TS: You’re intuitive.**

**SP:** Yeah, I’d like to think so.

**TS: Why did you choose to play the role of Jamie Lockhart in *The Robber Bridegroom*? What do you find challenging about it?**

**SP:** Alex Timbers is the reason why I am interested in this version of *The Robber Bridegroom*. I think Alex is one of our great living American directors. And I’m interested in anything he does. He pitched it to me in a really smart and interesting way. In a nutshell, I wanted to work at the Roundabout, and Alex Timbers was my way in. I also listened to the score and thought it sounded completely contemporary in a great bluegrass way. I respect what Alfred Uhry and Robert Waldman have accomplished. I think that the libretto and score has honored the tall-tale fable that it’s based on. I think it’s a weird, fun, dark, dangerous romp, in the best possible way.

**TS: When you take on a role, does it have to have personal resonance for you? Do you have to immediately connect with the character?**

**SP:** For me, that is 100 percent not true. I have a better time playing people that I don’t relate to. I enjoy going to work and

putting on another person’s skin, as opposed to going to work and accessing different parts of my own persona.

**TS: What is the first thing that you do when you take on a role?**

**SP:** I like to feel well-versed in terms of knowing what was happening historically when the piece was written or when the piece takes place. For me, the table work during the first few days is really valuable. It’s not until I have the ability to get rid of the script and have committed the lines and the music to my brain that I really feel confident moving forward. It’s always a crazy, fearful, excited, anxious time during the first week or two. Once I’ve gotten the material in my bones and muscles, it evolves quickly into excitement and confidence and all of the good things that make acting fun.

**TS: I know you haven’t started rehearsals yet, but, at this point in time, what do you think this musical is about?**

**SP:** It’s a love story at its heart, and it’s a cautionary tale.

**TS: I’m wondering if reading the original story has had any value for you?**

**SP:** Yes. I’m in the middle of it right now, and I’m finding it very helpful. The answer so far is yes. I’m about 100 pages into it.

**TS: Can you share your preliminary ideas about Jamie with us? Or Jamie’s relationship to Rosamund?**

**SP:** That’s going to be something that we’ll discover in the rehearsal room. I think clearly what happens when Jamie meets Rosamund is undeniable attraction and, ultimately, love. There’s a softening that happens to Jamie, and the line between the nighttime bandit and the daytime gentleman becomes blurred. I think there’s some fun to be had in that blurring of his two personalities.

**TS: It seems Rosamund and Jamie fall in love with each other’s alter egos.**

**SP:** It speaks to the idea of one’s sexuality in a way. You can be interested in a person in the daytime and feel very different in the nighttime because of—for lack of a better term—perspective. I think that’s maybe what the musical is commenting on. The faces that we show to the world and then the private ones we show that are sometimes darker and more sinister.

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

**SP:** I like to get to theatre and movies and to tune into quality, scripted television as often as I can. Whenever I see something good, it keeps me going artistically. I think it’s a really vibrant time in theatre in New York right now and I’m really happy to be doing something with an incredible group of artists in Roundabout’s off-Broadway space. With the success of *Hamilton* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, a lot of high-quality work is being deservedly celebrated; I think the Broadway and off-Broadway community is on fire right now.

**TS: New York City public school students will be reading this, along with our subscribers and anyone else who chooses to see the show. They often want to know what it takes to be a successful actor. Do you have any advice?**

**SP:** Yes, I do. Acting takes an incredibly thick skin, as well as the ability to be vulnerable and sensitive to a moment’s notice. You have to be insensitive to the rigors of the business and sensitive when it comes to acting and making art. That’s the main challenge of living this life. If you can successfully balance those two things by checking in and checking out, it is a great profession. •



# THE "GENTLEMAN ROBBER": AMERICA'S MYTHOLOGIZED OUTLAWS

*The Robber Bridegroom's* Jamie Lockhart is, literally, a man of two faces. When cleaned up, he's a high-class gentleman, respectable and refined. But when he stains his face with berry juice, he's a bandit, a selfish thief who's not to be trusted. These two faces – the good and the bad – are, together, the full identity of Jamie, who calls himself "a gent and a robber all in one."

But this duality of character—though uniquely *literally* expressed in *The Robber Bridegroom*—is not unique to Jamie Lockhart. For centuries, the outlaw has inhabited a paradoxical role in American history and literature: dangerous and alluring, lonely and beloved, depraved and deeply moral. Since the 19th century, the years in which the concept of the romantic outlaw most deeply took root, the outlaw (who might go by any number of names, among them bandit, huckster, confidence man, scoundrel, charlatan, flimflam man, pirate, rebel, and desperado) has become a staple of American mythology. Standing alone, riding a horse into the sunset, or walking out of a cleared bank vault, he is both our enemy and our hero, the man we run from and the man we want to be.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE OUTLAW

The outlaw in western culture dates back to the fifth and sixth centuries, in the British Isles. Early justice systems depended upon direct compensation for crimes (what Frank Richard Prassel's *The Great American Outlaw: A Legacy of Fact and Fiction* calls "approved vengeance"). If a man guilty of a major crime skipped town, he was running from his rightful punishment, and the townspeople were free to pursue and kill him. By leaving his community, he was also stripped of his legal rights and social and spiritual worth (altogether, his *laga*);



Illustration of Robin Hood in combat with Little John



Illustration of Guy Fawkes




Illustration of Blackbeard the Pirate

without this status and protection, he was *utlagatus*, from which the word *outlaw* is derived. The word *bandit* emerged from a similar etymology, though it referred to one who was banished *for* his crimes, not to one who ran from the law. By the end of the ninth century, the image of the outlaw, Prassel explains, had already begun to transform into the figure's contemporary likeness: "It became quite possible to view the outlaw as more than an ordinary criminal; he might also be seen as a free man hunted by unjust authority. The word *brigand* even came into use indicating a roving bandit. It carried connotations of strife, fighting, and plunder. But it also signified independence, strength, and honor." This paradoxical identity would prove to be one of the outlaw's most intriguing and lasting traits.

In the centuries that followed, variations of the bandit and the outlaw appeared both in the UK and the US (and in the oceans between). The most notable hero-criminals of the centuries leading to the year in which *The Robber Bridegroom* takes place (1795) are likely Robin Hood (who roamed Yorkshire in the 13th century and was mythologized many times over in the centuries following), Guy Fawkes (the best known conspirator in the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605, despised as a traitor in his day but later venerated as an icon of truth in the face of oppressive power), and Blackbeard, a dreaded 17th/18th century pirate whose legacy alternates between one of fearful infamy and revered fame.

But historical basis aside, there is also the question of the outlaw's cultural roots—what about the figure so enthralls us? Some scholars, including Martha Grace Duncan in her book *Romantic Outlaws, Beloved Prisons: The Unconscious Meanings of Crime and Punishment*, have looked to the subconscious for an explanation. Duncan



notes that the law holds many similarities to a parent: while we, the citizens, have grown to adulthood, the law remains a system above us, an authority that retains the power to keep us in line and punish us for wrongdoing. As a result of this hierarchical relationship, Duncan argues, we have the same complex, conflicting emotions towards the law as we do to our own parents: love and resentment as well as submission and defiance. The criminal, by this logic, is the rebellious child we still, to some extent, long to be: independent, free, and charmingly disobedient.

Other scholars have looked to America's economic system – and its idealistic expression in the form of “the American Dream” – for explanation. America, after all, is a place in which entrepreneurialism and ingenuity rule; who is more resourceful, more ingenious, than a con man? The confidence man, another variation of the outlaw, is, along with the huckster and the charlatan, the outlaw figure most closely tied to economics. The term was first coined in an 1849 article in the *New York Herald*, in which the reporter relayed the tale of William Thompson. Thompson was attracting attention for a brilliantly simple racket: sharply dressed, he would roam the New York City streets, strike up conversations with friendly passersby, convince the well-meaning strangers to lend him their watches until the following day, and then never return. This type of crime – in which the victims are willing but unknowing participants – has taken up a near-constant place in American entertainment. We see variations of the con man on film (*The Sting*, *Catch Me if You Can*, *American Hustle*), on stage (*The Producers*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*), in books (*The Great Gatsby*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*), and on television (*Mad Men*, *White Collar*, *Breaking Bad*). And of course, we see Jamie Lockhart's efforts at a long con throughout *The Robber Bridegroom*; by sparing Clemment Musgrove's fortune (and life) early in the musical, Lockhart earns the rich planter's trust, thus opening up an opportunity for an even bigger windfall down the line.

### THE SELF-MADE MAN

As audience members, we delight in Lockhart's schemes. But why do we identify with the fraud, rather than with the law-abiding planter? The answer, again, lies in economics – and in the American ideal of the “self-made man.” The concept of the self-made man dates back to the first half of the 19th century, though many men who fit the term's definition

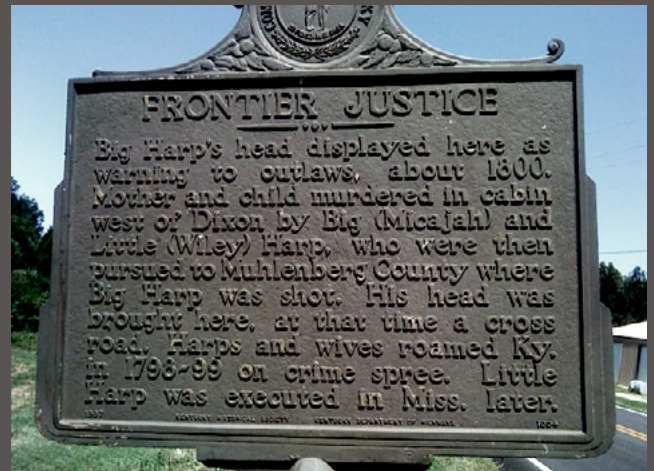
(Benjamin Franklin, most iconically) came before. Essentially, the term refers to a person who comes to success, status, and wealth by their own work and character alone. The formula for a self-made man has varied slightly throughout the centuries. In its earliest incarnation (the B. Franklin school), hard work, ambition, and discipline would lead logically to success. Later, a strong character (good moral fiber, unimpeachable ethics) would also be considered an invaluable ingredient for success. In other stories (Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches tales among them) luck, in the form of a charitable benefactor, was also a necessary element – though one's own industry and perseverance were necessary to win fate's favor. But with the advent of the industrial revolution, achieving upward mobility through one's own efforts became a more and more distant possibility. Industrial titans (the legendary Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and John D. Rockefeller among them) were becoming more and more powerful and gaining more and more wealth, but the workers who toiled under them (putting in double-digit work hours for little pay) weren't moving up the ladder, no matter how dedicated. “In this climate,” *Slate* deputy editor John Swansburg explains in his examination of the trope, “the self-made man started to look more villainous than heroic.” Indeed, Swansburg, notes, it's no coincidence that the phrase most associated with American class mobility, “pull yourself up by your bootstraps,” is actually a physical impossibility. (In today's terms, try to imagine bending over and lifting yourself off the ground by your shoelaces.)

Looking on their brethren climbing a seemingly endless industrial ladder presided over by a fat-cat boss, many Americans began to lose faith in the idea that hard work would lead, unequivocally, to success. Even more importantly, looking at the suspect business practices of some industry leaders (not to mention the suspect dealings of ruling politicians), Americans landed on the idea that success *by any means* – honorable or not – was the path to a comfortable life. If the means included dishonesty or a shortcut here and there, so be it; to compete in a bloodthirsty business world, sometimes you might have to take a shortcut – or stab someone in the back. Of course, this realization didn't lead every American to start lying and stealing from their neighbors. But it did mean that many Americans began looking for unconventional shots at success, attempting to *create* opportunity rather than to find it in a traditional job. While hard-work-to-wealth stories would continue throughout the 20th century (most predominantly in immigrant narratives), new stories of getting rich quick (or getting rich at the expense of the law) also became more and more commonplace. As

institutional distrust grew, con artists seemed less to be bucking the system and more to be taking full (and smart) advantage of it; as historian Amy Henderson put it in a 2014 Smithsonian.com article, con artists “exemplify the land of opportunity.” If the system is corrupt, why not flout it in order to get ahead? If the average person is looking for an easy fortune, why not capitalize on that hope (or, less charitably, that greed and gullibility) while making something for yourself in the process?

### THE OUTLAWS OF TODAY AND YESTERDAY

The 21st century version of the outlaw/con man is as often a businessman or a politician (see: Donald Trump) as a bona fide criminal. The continued blurring of the boundary between authority and rebel has occasionally been a challenge to the beloved American outlaw (the 2008 financial crisis, in particular, cast a pall on our fondness for dishonest fortune-gathering), and yet our appetite for fictionalized hucksters has not yet waned (see: *The Wolf of Wall Street*). And though many of today’s confidence men are in the boardroom or behind a podium, the mythology of the American outlaw still retains a whiff of the Old West, where many of the most beloved and notorious outlaws (Billy the Kid, Jesse James, Butch Cassidy) first entered the American consciousness. The American West, with its gold-driven, every-man-for-himself mentality and its wide-open, untamed frontierland, has become synonymous with the American outlaw, a fierce landscape that offers up both freedom and danger and in which free and dangerous men thrive. It is with this independent and wild spirit (and a bit of Southern charm) that Jamie Lockhart captivates us, his audience. In 2016, there is also something comforting about the tangibility of his outlaw narrative: we can recognize him by his painted face and judge his success by a bag of gold. In today’s world, the con artist is harder to pin down. As the *New Yorker*’s James Surowiecki explained in a 2014 article entitled “Do the Hustle,” there is an “unquantifiable mélange of risk, hope, and hype” that “provides both the capitalist’s formula for transforming the world and the con artist’s stratagem for turning your money into his money.” As audience members and as Americans, we want to believe we can distinguish the capitalist from the con artist; perhaps by aligning ourselves with the con artist, by seeing the world from his wily perspective, we hope we’ll be able to spot the difference with clear eyes. But even Jamie Lockhart slips into conformity by the end of *The Robber Bridegroom*, choosing to abandon his bandit life in favor of becoming a merchant. Do his customers know they’re buying goods from a man who used to brag that he could “steal with style?” •



### THE REAL BIG HARP AND LITTLE HARP

*The Robber Bridegroom* characters Big Harp and Little Harp are based on a pair of real men who terrorized the burgeoning United States of America in the late 18th Century, becoming the first serial killers in the country’s history. They were a pair of cousins who passed themselves off as brothers, with the real names of Micajah and Wiley Harpe (they would Americanize their Scottish last name by removing the “e”). Micajah was a large man, with some reports putting him at six-foot-four, towering over the smaller Wiley and leading to their nicknames of Big and Little Harp. The cousins first exhibited violent behavior when they took the side of the British Loyalists in the Revolutionary War, fighting against the American Patriots. But the Harps seemed less interested in politics and more excited by the excuse to burn, rape, and pillage. The ensuing years saw the Harps wreaking havoc throughout Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Illinois. Sometimes, they would join up with Native American tribes to raid settlements. Once, they hid out with a group of river pirates, but even the pirates found the Harps’ tactics too violent and threw them out. Along the way, the Harps would steal, murder, and kidnap, but financial gain was never their priority. It was bloodlust that seemed to drive the pair, who would often murder the very people who showed them hospitality, and they left with no more stolen than they would have received through generosity. They killed as many as 40 men, women, and children during their careers, including Big Harp murdering his own baby for crying too much. The law caught up to Big Harp first in 1799, when a man avenging the murder of his wife and child cut off Big Harp’s head. He would leave the head on a pole at a crossroads near Henderson, Kentucky; the intersection became known as “Harpe’s Head.” It was five years later that Little Harp lost his head, which was displayed on the Natchez Trace as a warning to any other outlaws who may try to follow in the footsteps of these infamous, murderous men.

# INTERVIEW WITH AUTHORS ALFRED UHRY AND ROBERT WALDMAN

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Alfred Uhry and Robert Waldman about their collaboration on *The Robber Bridegroom*.

**Ted Sod:** Where were you born and educated? When did you decide to write for the theatre?

**Alfred Uhry:** I was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. And my only connection to the theatre was because my mother loved it and she took me to movies. And, eventually, she thought maybe I'd be interested in shows. I don't remember not wanting to write. I would write little stories and things, and I had a teacher in grammar school, Mrs. Harrison, who worked part time for *The Atlanta Journal*, which was one of the big newspapers, and she loved writing and she encouraged me to write.

**Robert Waldman:** I was born in the absolute middle of Brooklyn, New York: Crown Heights, near Ebbets Field. It was a middle-class, second-generation Jewish neighborhood. It wasn't a religious area at that time. It was filled with a generation of Jews who wanted to be American. It was the kind of area where intellect wasn't a dirty word. But it was kind of rowdy. If our gang had seen all the movies in our neighborhood, we would think nothing of going to the Brooklyn Museum, walking through and looking at the art. In my home, there was always a love of art and music. My father, who came from Argentina, played the fiddle. My mother worked in a scenic design house on Broadway. We went to a lot of theatre, lots of musicals. Because I had a sinus condition as a child, I would have to go to this horrible doctor who I hated, and after the doctor visits, my mother would take me to see musicals on Broadway.

**TS:** Did you study composition or piano?

**RW:** I started formal piano lessons when I was ten. From age four to ten, I'd sit under the piano while my older brother and sister had their piano lessons. Later, when I got the family piano, I opened the bench and found this little spiral-bound book from when I was four or five and already composing things. There were notes with no stems and no bar lines. I studied piano until I went to Brown University when I was eighteen. Then after Brown I went to grad school at Juilliard.

**TS:** Can we talk about when you met each other?

**AU:** Robert and I met in college, at Brown, and he was a year ahead of me.

**RW:** Brown had a student-led organization called Brownbrokers, which was an open competition for original musicals written by students. Winners would get \$100, and a production of the show would be put on for the university. During my sophomore year I



Librettist and Lyricist Alfred Uhry



Composer Robert Waldman

won working with two seniors. The next year, those collaborators had graduated so Alfred and I started to work together.

**AU:** I came to New York after I graduated, and Bob and I were signed up by Frank Loesser, who was one of the greatest songwriters that ever was, I think. He wrote *Guys and Dolls* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* and really wonderful shows.

**TS:** *The Most Happy Fella* is one of my favorites.

**AU:** They were all extraordinary. He had a publishing company, and he signed Bob and me up to write songs, and part of the deal was, we would go to see him every month or so with a bunch of songs and he would critique them. It was like a master class in writing, and I've used his criteria ever since.

**TS:** Will you share some of that with us? What was his criterion?

**AU:** His main criterion was that every syllable you write is important. Be prepared to defend every syllable and make it clear, not stupid. Say what you mean to say. It's like telling someone who plays golf to keep their eye on the ball, but it's that simple. I've tried to do that throughout my writing career. I think the reason my plays are so short is because when I began writing, I was writing mostly librettos to musicals, and we were taught to leave room for songs, so, after that, I always left room for songs.

**RW:** Loesser took us under his wing and was a wonderful mentor. He was a good listener and never beat around the bush. He would say "You've got to write more football notes!" We'd leave and say to each other, "What the heck did he mean by football notes?" We had to learn his language. He would never say, "No, that's not going to work." Instead he would say, "It should be more *Melancholy Baby*." He was absolutely brilliant,

"IT STILL RETAINS THE DARKER MATERIAL—THE ROBBERS AND MURDERERS GETTING AWAY WITH THINGS—BUT IT'S DONE WITH A SMILE."

but you always had to interpret what he was saying. And he was tough on us and made us tough on ourselves.

**TS:** The first musical I'm aware of that you wrote together after Brown was based on Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. Is that right?

**RW:** Right. *Here's Where I Belong* was the first show we wrote out of school. We loved the movie adaptation of *East of Eden*. We thought Rodgers and Hammerstein had acquired the rights to *East of Eden* and that would be the end of our effort. We were about to abandon the project, but Frank Loesser said, "Don't, don't, don't! We'll set up a date and you'll play the songs for Steinbeck!" We went over to Frank's house and into the living room and there's Frank, his wife Jo, and Steinbeck and his wife all laughing and reminiscing about their lives out in California. Then they said "Go on, Guys, play some songs." We played half a dozen songs, and Steinbeck turned, with tears in his eyes, and said, "It's yours."

**TS:** Was there a show after *Here's Where I Belong* that you worked on before you wrote *The Robber Bridegroom*?

**RW:** We were writing a musical about liberalism in that time period, and Bert Shevelove was going to direct. We started trying to raise money. There was a big dip in the economy, and it never was done. We asked ourselves, "Now, what are we going to do?" Alfred kept pushing this novella by Eudora Welty, *The Robber Bridegroom*, at me, and I kept pushing it back. It's ironic how things fall into place.

**AU:** Being a southern boy, I love the work of Eudora Welty. I found *The Robber Bridegroom* in a bookstore. I'd never even heard of it; it's one of her early novellas. I read it and just flipped out over it and immediately thought it would be a great musical. I wrote her a letter and, even though I had yet to establish a name for myself, she wrote back and gave me the rights.

**RW:** Up until then, the influence of country music was minimal on the public. It was just starting to cross over. We tried doing it satirically, and then after about three months I said to Alfred, "I can't do it like this. Writing satirical music on top of country music? I can't live with this. Let's write real country music."

**TS:** *The Robber Bridegroom* is often called a "bluegrass musical." Did you have to do any research in order to compose it?

**RW:** It is much more Appalachian than bluegrass. The score came naturally to me. What country songs sound like was mixed with our understanding of what moves an audience theatrically. I've written music all my life taking in atmosphere. I absorb the color and sound and mix it with my feelings. I believe that you take a deep breath, take it all in, and let it come out as you – the way that you feel. Your fingerprints are always different from anybody else's in the world. The same is true of the way you create. If you have faith in it and dig for your own musical fingerprint, it'll come out in a way that is



The cast of *The Robber Bridegroom* in rehearsal

unique to your sensibility. I always go for my understanding of the truth. It just comes out like me.

**TS: Can you tell us why this story made such an impression on you?**

**AU:** It's a delightful story. It was just fun to read. You know, *The Robber Bridegroom* was originally a Brothers Grimm fairy tale.

**TS: It's a bit different though in the Brothers Grimm version, correct?**

**AU:** It's very violent, very dark.

**TS: As many of them are.**

**AU:** Eudora kept some of that darkness in, but she certainly brightened it up a lot. Her idea was to take that story and set it in America, so instead of having witches and princes and princesses and things like that, she had robbers and go-getters and beautiful girls and wicked stepmothers. She set it in the 1790s, and she has the action happening in Mississippi. It still retains the darker material — the robbers and murderers getting away with things — but it's done with a smile.

**TS: Can you give us some insight into how you worked together?**

**AU:** We would meet all the time and talk about the storyline and the characters and we would map it out and I would write things. This was the first libretto I really ever wrote. I was a lyric writer! But I was always much more interested in the script than the lyrics. I became a playwright and stopped writing lyrics after we finished working on *The Robber Bridegroom*. Gerry Freedman, the original director, is really responsible for so much of the success of *The Robber Bridegroom*. He kept encouraging me to write more. He'd say, "You can do it, you can do it," and nobody else had ever encouraged me before.

**TS: This was one of the first musicals that underwent a workshop at Musical Theatre Lab under Stuart Ostrow, correct?**

**RW:** Yes. We knew Stu Ostrow when he was the manager of a publishing firm before he became a producer. Stu knew the business was changing. There was a time when you would write a musical and you would go out of town to two or three major cities and sit for a while and fix the show, but it got too expensive. Producers were opting to stay in town, and the authors had a couple of weeks of previews to work on their shows. There was no place to workshop musicals. As far as I know, Stuart created Musical Theatre Lab to be a place where writers could develop their musicals. The first team picked to do a piece was Alfred and me.

**TS: What do you look for in a director?**

**RW:** Truth. That's it. Honest truth.

**AU:** I look for somebody that I can talk to, that really gets me. And, usually, I've had very good luck with directors, both

in movies and in the theatre. And I like to collaborate with directors, I like to be in the room and watch it happen and do what I can. I don't know what Alex will do with the show, but I know he gets the humor of it. It's his baby now. We are not making up a show together. It's a finished piece—he and I worked on it this fall and made some adjustments, but it is still *The Robber Bridegroom*. The main thing that delights me is that finally *The Robber Bridegroom* is really going to be done by the best people that could possibly be doing it. And that doesn't always happen. We've waited a long time and been very careful about it, and it's very exciting to have the Roundabout, Alex Timbers, Steven Pasquale and the rest of the company do it with all their talent and fervor and youth.

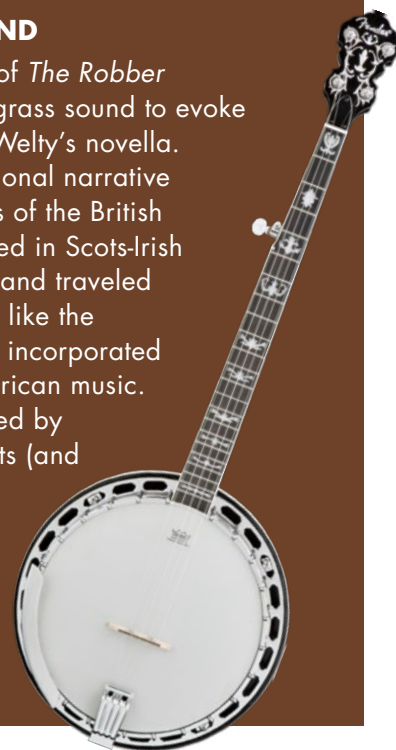
**TS: Do you have any advice for a young person who might want to write for the theatre?**

**RW:** Study the really great musicals and what their composers did. Be honest in every aspect of a number. You have to be precise and specific and then maybe the song will work. In musical theatre, I am of the opinion that it's the emotionality of the words and the melody. It's the subtext. Just like in a play, a really fine musical number has subtext, which is as understood by the performers as the accompaniment is.

**AU:** Write something that turns you on, not something that seems like it's going to be a hit. It's usually not a path to success. Write something that speaks to you one way or another; something that you're willing to get in bed with and stay with for a couple of years. •

## THE MUSICAL'S SOUND

The musical adaptation of *The Robber Bridegroom* uses a bluegrass sound to evoke the rural Mississippi of Welty's novella. Originating in the traditional narrative ballads and dance tunes of the British Isles, bluegrass developed in Scots-Irish enclaves in Appalachia and traveled south along trade routes like the Natchez Trace, where it incorporated elements of African-American music. Bluegrass is characterized by multiple string instruments (and sometimes the human voice) taking turns leading the melody, often offering complex, virtuosic solos, while the others fill in rhythm.



# FROM GRIMM TO SOUTHERN GOTHIC

## ORIGINS OF THE STORY

The plot of *The Robber Bridegroom* is so old and ubiquitous that folklorists classify it by number—it's a type 955, in which a mysterious man is matched with a maiden daughter, but there is something truly sinister about him.

The origin of this specific variant of the tale can be traced to a young, middle-class woman from Kassel (now in central Germany) named Marie Hassenpflug, who recounted the story to the now famous Brothers Grimm around 1810. The Grimms were collecting and publishing German folktales as a means of promoting unification of German-speaking principalities, hoping to create a sense of a shared culture. It was a nation-building exercise rooted in the idea of a shared German subconscious.

## EUDORA'S WELTY'S ADAPTATION

In 1942 American author Eudora Welty adapted *The Robber Bridegroom* (incorporating elements of several other tales collected by the Grimms) into a novella of the same name, moving the story from the forests of Central Europe to the Natchez Trace in Mississippi, in the year 1795.

Welty herself was born in 1909 in Jackson, Mississippi. After graduate school at the Columbia University School of Business, she worked at a radio station and wrote society columns for a Memphis newspaper before joining the publicity department of the Works Progress Administration. As a WPA agent, she traveled rural Mississippi at the height of the Great Depression, taking photos and writing press releases. Welty was an avid photographer, and her portraits inspired her first book, a collection of short stories called *A Curtain of Green*, published in 1941. This ethos of documentary photography would color her approach to fiction writing throughout her life. In her essay *Words into Fiction*, Welty suggests that "the artist must look squarely at the mysteries of human experiences without trying to resolve them," as her biographer Suzanne Marrs summarized. *The Robber Bridegroom* was Welty's second book and first novella.

Welty's work is part of the Southern Gothic tradition. Southern Gothic uses characteristics of gothic literature—

—a dark and mysterious setting, the supernatural, death, taboo issues like rape or racism, miraculous survivals, stock characters, and the experience of being trapped—to comment on (or perhaps expose the dark side of) contemporary southern culture. Playwright Tennessee Williams said Southern Gothic encapsulated "an intuition of an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience," a description that fits well with a tale sprung from the primitive unconscious.

In *The Robber Bridegroom*, Welty turns the frontier, the root of America's vision of itself as free, adventurous, and self-sufficient, into a nightmare:

*"Murder is soundless as a spout of blood, as regular and rhythmic as sleep. Many find a skull and a little branching of bones between two floors of leaves. In the sky is a perpetual wheel of buzzards. A circle of bandits counts out gold, with bending shoulders more slaves mount the block to go down, a planter makes a gesture of abundance with his riding whip, a flat boatman falls back from the tavern to the river below with scarcely time for a splash, a rope descends from a tree and curls into a noose. And all around again are Indians."*

Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* centers on the theme of duality. "All things are divided in half," Clement Musgrove says in the novel, "Night and day, the soul and body, and sorrow and joy and youth and age." This duality is underscored by use of grotesque characters, those who evoke both revulsion (often through physical deformities) and pity. "In those early stories I'm sure I needed the device of what you call the 'grotesque,'" Welty said. "That is, I hoped to differentiate characters by their physical qualities as a way of showing what they were like inside."

This duality manifests itself in the musical adaptation of *The Robber Bridegroom* both in tone (a light comedy about dark subjects) and structure: it's a show about a group of townspeople reenacting the story of the Robber Bridegroom. The actors are at once both the folktale's characters and the town citizens, play-acting a story they already know the ending to. •

# THE NACHEZ TRACE: TRAVELING THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE



Map of the Natchez Trace

Author Eudora Welty found inspiration in the land surrounding her childhood home in Jackson, Mississippi. Welty set *The Robber Bridegroom* and several other stories along the Natchez Trace: a 450-mile forest pathway connecting Natchez, Mississippi with Nashville. The path easily slopes from high ridges to deep valleys, making it easy for animals and people to traverse on foot. Its history goes back to prehistoric times and teems with colorful incidents and legends. Though the Trace itself may be gentle, many of its travellers were anything but.

During prehistoric times, bison and other grazing animals traipsed along the Trace to reach salt licks in the Tennessee area. Native American hunters then followed the "traces" of the herds. American mound builders, the ancient tribes of the Mississippi region, settled along the Trace and built large earthen mounds that still stand today. Centuries later, the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Natchez tribes all lived along the Trace.

In the 18th century, Europeans from Spain and France used the road as a trade route and widened the path for their horses and wagons. The US acquired the Mississippi territory in 1798. Under Thomas Jefferson's presidency, the US army began improving the path of the Trace so that it could serve as a major artery to the southwest frontier.

The route bustled with activity from the late-18th into the early-19th century. Farmers and boatmen from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Kentucky began floating supplies down to ports in Natchez (then a busy trade port) and New Orleans in the early 1800s. Regardless of where they came from, they were collectively known as "Kaintucks." After selling their goods, the Kaintucks walked or rode horses up the Trace to return to Nashville. This trip took three to four weeks, so there were many roughly-built inns (with names like Buzzard Roost and Sheboss Place!) for rest stops along the way. From 1800-1930, the Trace was the most-travelled road in the southern US, used by over 10,000 people each year.

Far from cities, civilization, or law enforcement, the Trace was a rugged, rustic frontier that attracted all sorts of people: fur traders, hunters, pioneer families, and shopkeepers. Because it was a secluded route, it



On the Natchez Trace



Mount Locus — an inn along the Natchez Trace where travelers could spend the night.



“WHY, JUST TO WRITE ABOUT WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN ALONG SOME LITTLE ROAD LIKE THE NATCHEZ TRACE— WHICH REACHES SO FAR INTO THE PAST AND HAS BEEN THE TRAIL FOR SO MANY KINDS OF PEOPLE—IS ENOUGH TO KEEP YOU BUSY FOR LIFE.”  
— EUDORA WELTY

also attracted bandits and highwaymen. Two of the first organized gangs in the US operated hideouts along the Trace. Travellers risked being held up or even murdered, and the area was so dangerous that it became known as “the Devil’s Backbone.”

By 1820, most travellers abandoned the Natchez Trace in favor of faster steamboats and a new, direct road

between Nashville and New Orleans. With faster, safer options, the Trace was no longer a choice route. By 1830 it was barely used and was reclaimed by wilderness. In the 20th century, it was paved. The Natchez Trace Parkway is now maintained by the National Park Service. The 444-mile drive allows drivers, bikers, horseback riders, and campers to enjoy the exceptional scenery and 10,000 years of history, without any threat of bandits!•

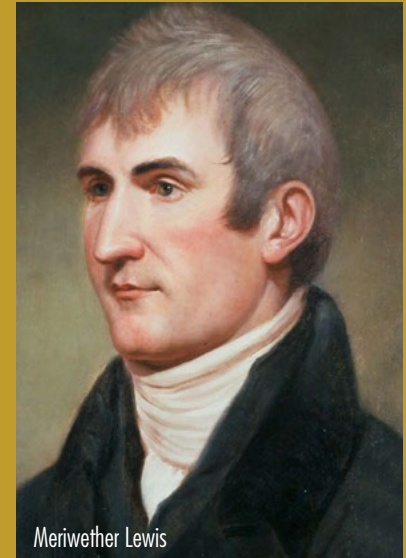


Old Baptist Church in Rodney

### THE GHOST TOWN OF RODNEY

Today, the town of Rodney, Mississippi is considered a ghost town, but like the Natchez Trace, this setting for *The Robber Bridegroom* has a rich history. Americans and Europeans began settling in the area, about 30 miles north of Natchez, during the 1770s, and the town of Rodney was incorporated in 1828. By the 1860s, it was one of the busiest ports along the Mississippi River: a bustling town with churches, hotels, banks, and over 4,000 residents. Rodney’s economy declined after the Civil War, and in 1869 much of the town was destroyed by a fire. Nature dealt the ultimate blow, with a sandbar in the Mississippi that shifted the course of the river away from the town. By 1870, Rodney no longer had a port, and the next 50 years saw a steady decline in business and population. A Governor’s proclamation officially closed Rodney in 1930. Today, the remains of Rodney can be reached only by a single dirt road. It has no operating businesses, and only a few people still live near the town ruins.

Click [here](#) for a video tour of Rodney today.



Meriwether Lewis

### THE MYSTERY OF MERIWETHER LEWIS

One of the most famous travelers (and victims) of the Trace was explorer Meriwether Lewis (of Lewis and Clark). In 1809, Lewis stopped for the night at Grinder’s Stand, an inn in Tennessee. Shots were heard by the innkeeper’s wife at night, and in the morning Lewis was found dead in his room. Although an investigation determined his death was a suicide, his family remained convinced that the innkeeper was involved with his murder. Certainly, he was not the first person to enter the Trace on foot and leave in a coffin.

# DESIGNER STATEMENTS



*The Robber Bridegroom* costume designs and set model

## DONYALE WERLE — SET DESIGN

Things are not always as they appear. *The Robber Bridegroom* is the musical story of Jamie Lockhart, the man with two faces—gentleman bridegroom by day and bandit by night. This duality within became the basis of the design for *The Robber Bridegroom*. When Alex Timbers and I first sat down, we talked a lot about barns, a place where farm animals live and an impromptu bluegrass hoe-down can happen, and asked the question, could a barn be simultaneously over-stuffed and deconstructed? We needed a framing device, a stage for the spinning of the tale. We needed actual locations or the perception of those locations: the Musgroves' mansion, the Indigo Woods, the Robber's hide-away cabin. But we also needed for all of those elements to disappear immediately, as if they were never there to begin with. The research for this show focused on barns and the Mississippi woods. These cavernous, heavy-beamed structures and beautiful, quiet, organic symphonies of nature became two-fold. We looked through images lit by strong sunlight and soft moonlight and became enamored with the spaces between the boards and branches—this place where the light coming through tells one story and the shadows created spin another. Authenticity became

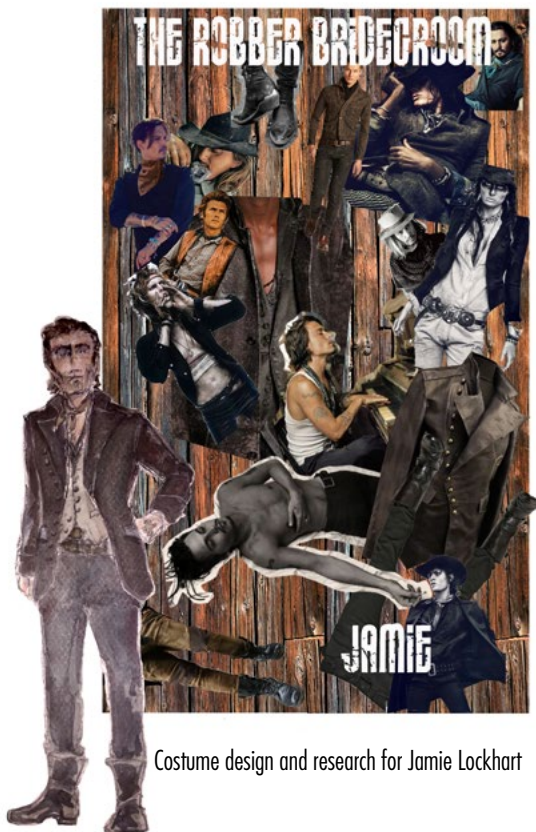
very important. A lesson all good con men know: if you are selling something, people better believe in what they are buying! We turned to the basics—real wood, dirt, steel, exposed lights and structure, a wood plank, a trunk, a burlap sack. We now invite the actors to manipulate the real, to play their games, to spin the yarn, create the world of mythical characters & charlatans and explore the adventure that is going to unfold—the Mississippi fairytale world of *The Robber Bridegroom*!

## JEFF CROITER AND JAKE DEGROOT — LIGHTING DESIGN

The world of *The Robber Bridegroom* is a world where opposite, seemingly contradictory forces are woven together right before our eyes. This is certainly true of Jamie Lockhart (one man with two faces), and it is just as true of the lighting design, which is both period and modern, warm and cool, and contained and expansive. How can it be both period and modern at the same time? The hijinks on the Natchez Trace take place well over a century before the invention of the electric light bulb, yet the presence of modern theatrical lighting fixtures alongside lanterns and candles helps the characters playfully leap out of the period. The whole story



Costume design and research for Rosamund



Costume design and research for Jamie Lockhart

unfolds within Donyale Werle’s beautiful barn-inspired structure, yet we find ourselves bouncing seamlessly from location to location relying on lighting shifts and a heap of imagination to re-shape the environment. The lighting see-saws from the warm, inviting, soft, candle-lit glow of Rodney to the cool, crisp, textured, shadowy woods. Throughout these locations, the stage is bursting at the seams with energy and action. From the footlights that barely dodge stomping feet to the nearly-reachable ceiling of lights, the cramped quarters can barely contain the story. Yet, when the lighting opens up to reveal hidden layers of texture and depth outside, piercing through and swelling from beyond the slatted walls, we discover a whole new sense of space. It turns out that the lighting design, as Jamie might say, can be many things at the same damn time.

### DARRON L WEST – SOUND DESIGN

I spent my childhood in Kentucky surrounded by the sounds of bluegrass and country music and shape note singing harmonies in churches and on porches. So the chance for the first time to dive back into “the music of my people” (in midtown Manhattan no less!?) was certainly an offer I couldn’t pass up. To be back in a room with Alex Timbers and many of the same design team from *Peter and the Starcatcher* is just icing on the cake. My associate Charles and I fell in love with the sound of the Laura Pels Theatre during our work on Fiasco’s *Into the Woods*, and it’s a pleasure to be back in the room breathing life into a new production of *Robber Bridegroom*. Much like *Into the Woods*, the sound design of *The Robber Bridegroom* is rooted in the beautiful sound of acoustic instruments being played well. There is a trend happening now in musicals of lots of processing from the house mixing position and using compression to squash the music’s dynamic range (much like the over-compressed MP3s we play on our iPhones daily). Music, all music, but especially roots and bluegrass-driven music, lives and breathes in its dynamic range. The interpretation of the singers and musicians on their instruments and the performers’ dynamics of loud and soft are the heart and soul of that music. Robert’s amazing music is filled with subtle details, and Justin and Martin’s glorious orchestrations just enhance that. The story of *The Robber Bridegroom* is about trickery in all forms, but the sound design shouldn’t be. Some of the greatest performances of roots music have been done with a group of musicians and singers gathered around one microphone, and we’ve taken this approach with the sound design. No over-processing or fancy digital tricks are put in the way. Carefully selected microphones put through a transparent sound system, carrying beautiful music performed by fabulous singers and musicians straight to the audience’s ear with nothing in the way. The purity of that in itself is magic no doubt, but I assure you there are no tricks up our sleeve. •

# PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR  
EDUCATORS

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## HOW DOES AN ENSEMBLE USE FOUND MATERIALS TO STAGE *THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM*?

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In this show, a 19th-century Southern community gathers in a barn to act out a beloved legend. Without with a real theatre, they use the rough materials found in the barn (planks, crates, barrels, etc.) to stage the story. This is a creative, imaginative way to stage many plays. Students will interpret scenes from the show, using materials found in the classroom. (Common Core Codes: CCSS 9-10, SL1b )

Materials: Download/copy script excerpts [here](#). Gather materials that could be found at home or in your classroom. Large chart paper and marking pens are helpful, but students may use furniture, books, backpacks, jackets, scarves, etc.

**DISCUSS** Use the article on page 6 of this UPSTAGE guide to introduce the "Do-it-Yourself" staging concept for *The Robber Bridegroom*. Explain that you will now stage a few scenes from the play using ONLY the materials they can find in your classroom. You may wish to list out which objects are available for use and which are off-limits and assign the groups different areas in the room to work.

**ACTIVATE** Break students into small groups and give each group one scene. (You may duplicate scenes across more than one group.) Allow groups 10 minutes to stage their scene, using materials found in the room. NOTE: With a large group, this process may be loud. Circulate among the groups to keep them on task. Then, allow a few groups to share their scenes with the class.

**REFLECT** How did you decide which objects to use in your scenes? How is this kind of theatre different from film or television? As actors and as audience, how does this require you to use your imagination?

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## HOW DOES A COMPOSER USE MUSICAL STYLE OR GENRE TO EVOKE SETTING?

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*The Robber Bridegroom* is based on a folk tale. Versions of this particular story exist in many cultures. But this musical has a very specific setting, one reinforced by the choices made by Robert Waldman, the show's composer. (Common Core Codes: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1)

Materials: blank paper, markers or crayons, *The Robber Bridegroom* musical clip [[here](#)], speakers for playback.

**DRAW** Pass out blank paper and markers or crayons. Play the opening track from *The Robber Bridegroom* several times, and ask students to draw what they imagine the setting of the musical to be based on what they are hearing.

**VIEW** Create a gallery of students' drawings, and hold a gallery walk so that students can compare and contrast their work.

**REFLECT** What similarities do you see in drawings? What setting did you choose? What element of the opening number suggested that you? What instruments were used? What was the singer's vocal quality? What was the tone of the music? How did those elements influence your choice of setting?

# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR  
EDUCATORS

## HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT USE THE AMERICAN FASCINATION WITH THE OUTLAW TO UPDATE A FOLKTALE?

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American author Eudora Welty adapted *The Robber Bridegroom* (the novella on which the musical is based) from a German folktale. Welty changed many elements of the original story, and set it in eighteenth century Mississippi, making the tale fully American. (Common Core Codes: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D)

Materials: copies of the first half of the *The Golden Goose* folktale, downloadable [here](#).

**DISCUSS** Use the article on page 9 of this UPSTAGE guide to explore America’s history of mythologizing the outlaw. What are the characteristics of an outlaw? Make a list. Besides Jamie Lockhart, what other characters in fiction, film, theatre, or television fit this profile? Which public figures take advantage of this duality? Besides outlaws, what else makes *The Robber Bridegroom* an American musical?

**ADAPT** Ask students to “Americanize” the truncated version of *The Golden Goose*. How can the idea of the outlaw be incorporated into the story?

**SHARE** Hold a reading and have students read their updated versions out loud. Afterwards, reflect: how did the author Americanize the story? Why are we, as Americans, drawn to the outlaw character?

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## HOW DO ACTORS AND DIRECTORS DEVISE SCENES ABOUT DUAL PERSONALITIES IN ORDER TO EXPLORE AN ARCHETYPE?

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(Common Core Codes: CCLS 9-10 RL3)

**DISCUSS** Ask students to identify examples of pairs throughout the show, e.g. Jamie’s two personae (robber and gentlemen), the two Harp heads, Rosamund’s twin babies. You may wish to explore the theme of doubling and duality in the show. Then, ask students to consider other examples of the archetype of the alter ego, such as Jekyll/Hyde, Superman/Clark Kent, Sméagol/Gollum, Selina Kyle/Catwoman. Why are characters like Jamie and these others so compelling?

**ACTIVATE** Group students into groups of 3 (2 actors +1 director) and ask them to create 2 short scenes with characters, A and B. Character A stays the same. Character B is one person with two faces, like Jamie. In one scene A interacts with one of B’s personae, and in the next, A interacts with the other B. The team should identify the given circumstances (or 5Ws) for the scenes. Encourage the directors to provide some guidance for the story. Allow the groups to devise an unscripted scene. Then, allow a few to share their scenes for the class.

**REFLECT** Ask students how they came up with their character and the story. Ask students how could the situation become more complicated if there was a third scene? What makes stories of alter egos or dual-personalities so compelling?

# GLOSSARY

|                   |   |                    |   |
|-------------------|---|--------------------|---|
| <b>BILOXI</b>     | a city in Mississippi<br><i>Salome boasts that she can grow her nails faster than any other woman between Rodney and Biloxi, Mississippi.</i> | <b>PRICKLEPEAR</b> | type of cactus that produces fruit, the outside is covered with sharp needles<br><i>Salome compares herself to a pricklepear.</i> |
| <b>BONNY</b>      | meaning attractive; term used for a loved one<br><i>The Raven often says "turn back my bonny, turn away home."</i>                            | <b>RAVINE</b>      | a small and steep slope<br><i>Salome asks Goat to push Rosamund over the edge of the ravine.</i>                                  |
| <b>BUZZARD</b>    | a common name for several species of birds of prey<br><i>Salome is introduced as a woman with buzzard eyes</i>                                | <b>SCUPPERNONG</b> | a type of grape found in the South<br><i>Goat is described as having a brain the size of a scuppernong seed.</i>                  |
| <b>CORINTHIAN</b> | a style of classical architecture<br><i>Clement Musgrove tells Jamie that his house has twenty-two Corinthian columns.</i>                    | <b>SNIVEL</b>      | to whine and cry messily<br><i>Big Harp tells Little Harp to stop his snivelling.</i>   |
| <b>FINAGLE</b>    | to use manipulation to get one's way<br><i>Jamie sings that his way of stealing is a finagling, angling game.</i>                             | <b>SWINDLER</b>    | a person who tricks others out of their money or belongings<br><i>Little Harp calls Jamie a swindler.</i>                         |
| <b>PISSANT</b>    | a despicable and worthless person<br><i>Big Harp calls Little Harp a pissant.</i>   |                    |   |

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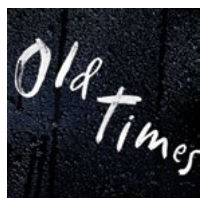
# ABOUT ROUNDABOUT

## ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

Founded in 1965, Roundabout Theatre Company has grown from a small 150-seat theatre in a converted supermarket basement to become the nation's most influential not-for-profit theatre company, as well as one of New York City's leading cultural institutions. With five stages on and off Broadway, Roundabout now reaches over 700,000 theatregoers, students, educators and artists across the country and around the world every year.

We are committed to producing the highest quality theatre with the finest artists, sharing stories that endure, and providing accessibility to all audiences. A not-for-profit company, Roundabout fulfills its mission each season through the production of classic plays and musicals; development and production of new works by established and emerging writers; educational initiatives that enrich the lives of children and adults; and a subscription model and audience outreach programs that cultivate and engage all audiences.

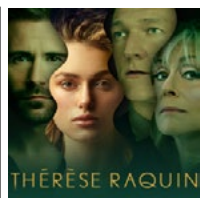
## 2015-2016 SEASON



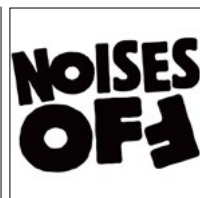
By Harold Pinter  
Starring  
Clive Owen, Eve Best  
and Kelly Reilly  
Directed by  
Douglas Hodge



By Stephen Karam  
Directed by  
Joe Mantello



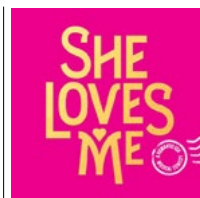
By Helen Edmundson  
Based upon the novel by  
Émile Zola  
Starring Keira Knightley,  
Gabriel Ebert, Matt Ryan  
and Judith Light  
Directed by Evan Cabnet



By Michael Frayn  
Directed by  
Jeremy Herrin



Book and Lyrics by  
Alfred Uhry  
Music by  
Robert Waldman  
Directed by  
Alex Timbers



Book by Joe Masteroff  
Music by Jerry Bock  
Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick  
Choreographed by  
Warren Carlyle  
Directed by Scott Ellis



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

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH THEATRE RENTALS MANAGER, NANCY MULLINER

**Ted Sod:** Tell us a bit about yourself. When did you become the Roundabout's Theatre Rentals Manager?

**Nancy Mulliner:** My personal story is I am an artist who paints large emotional portraits of people. I arrange them in spaces and then add music/projections/words to create an installation. I worked for Roundabout in various capacities over the years: receptionist the last year at Union Square ("off-Broadway Theatre Company seeks receptionist no experience necessary"); I opened our first lobby bar/concessions at the first Times Square theatre; I worked in the American Airlines box office; I was company manager at Studio 54—it was a very crooked career path, and I moved around and lived in different places in between the different Roundabout jobs! I started working as Theatre Rentals Manager in October 2013 after a couple of years working as an independent contractor renting out Roundabout's spaces. A Rentals Manager at a Broadway Theatre Company? Who knew? But this is NYC, and real estate is a commodity. With three Broadway theatres, two off-Broadway theatres, and three rehearsal studios, renting out the spaces when we aren't using them just plain makes sense.

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

**NM:** I am the initial contact for anyone wanting to rent out a theatre or lobby space for a benefit, a gala, a corporate event, a memorial. The event has to take place on a Monday (we have our own show performances running every other day of the week) and

has to fit on the stage set currently in place. I talk the client through plans and expectations, write up a cost estimate, hire required—in house union crew and front of house staff, write up a contract and invoices, collect insurance certificates, hold production meetings, create a very hopeful event timeline, and then oversee the actual event. After the event I write up a financial summary and take notes for the next time. Sometimes I just notate "never again."

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

**NM:** The best part of my job is when it all magically comes together (usually at the last minute) and the client is happy, maybe the event has raised money for a charity close to my heart. The hardest part is managing expectations. No, you may not twirl flaming hula hoops on our Broadway set (true story), and remember when I told you that a grand piano would not fit on our stage?

**TS:** Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

**NM:** I have worked for three theatre companies: the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in DC, the Ogunquit Playhouse in Maine, and the Roundabout Theatre Company here in NYC. To work for a company like Roundabout with its beautiful productions, constantly changing scenery, and the dramatic people who surround me (you KNOW who you are), I am challenged, inspired, always entertained, and sometimes terrified. Who wouldn't want a job like mine?•

Learn more at [roundabouttheatre.org](http://roundabouttheatre.org). Find us on:



# WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

## TICKET POLICY

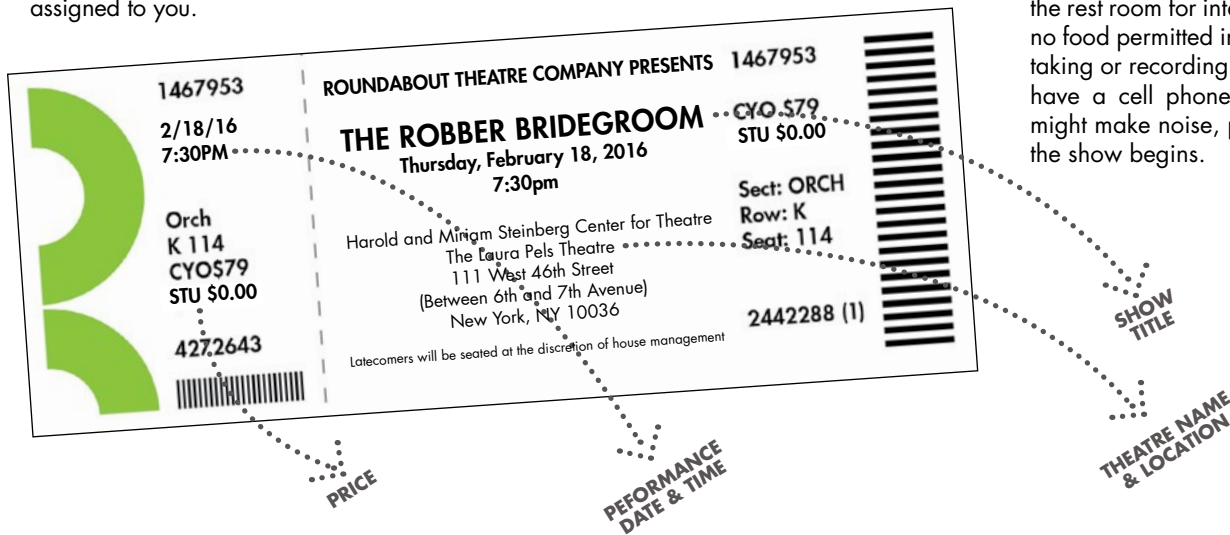
As a student, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat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

## PROGRAMS

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

## AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

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



*The Robber Bridegroom* benefits from Roundabout's Musical Theatre Fund with lead gifts from The Howard Gilman Foundation and Perry and Marty Granoff.

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