



**THE
BIG
KNIFE**

**UPSTAGE
GUIDE**

A publication of **EDUCATION AT
ROUNDBOUT**

UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

The Big Knife

In the golden age of Hollywood cinema, actors may have all the glory, but studio execs have all the power. The Hoff-Federated studio has had its most successful star, Charlie Castle, over a barrel ever since it helped cover up a mistake that could have ended his career. When a woman with insider knowledge threatens to come forward, the studio heads will stop at nothing to protect Charlie's secret... but how far is he willing to go before he quits the movie business for good?

a note from Artistic Director Todd Haimes

Odets' early plays were bold and angry, perfectly in tune with the times and with his own youthful ambition. The Odets of 1948 was far from the same man, but critics weren't looking for emotional growth. Instead, they interpreted the change in tone as an Odets who had lost his bite. While I will, like so many, always appreciate the early masterworks of Odets, I can't help but have soft spot in my heart for this ambitious, prophetic, deeply felt piece.

<http://www.roundabouttheatre.org/thebigknife>

when

July, 1948

Act One: A summer afternoon

*Act Two: Late one night,
the following week*

Act Three:

*Scene I: Late afternoon,
a few days later*

Scene II: An hour later

where

The "playroom" of Charlie Castle's Beverly Hills house

who

Russell Charlie Castle's butler. Simple, sincere man who finds pleasure in everything.

Buddy Bliss Charlie's friend and publicist. He is an eager, grateful, and nervous failure.

Charlie Castle Famous movie star. He is virile and insistent, sensitive and aware.

Patty Benedict Famous movie columnist. She is authoritative, cynical, and assured.

Marion Castle Charlie's wife. She

is smart and good-looking. While normally alert and intelligent, she is currently anxious and nervous.

Nat Danziger Charlie's agent. He is tolerant, sympathetic, reliable, and wise.

Marcus Hoff Studio Executive. He knows how to play a part and how to get his way.

Smiley Coy Hoff's tool and factotum. Completely competent, cynical, calm, and courteous.

Connie Bliss Buddy's wife. She is determined and sly.

Hank Teagle Tender and affectionate by nature and experience. He is unpretentious, quiet, and mature, with a gift for devotion.

Dixie Evans Physically small but attractive. She has learned to appear bright and competent. She has shrewd if intuitive flashes of genuine insight.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Actor Bobby Cannavale Page 4-5

Everything Comes to Hollywood: The Golden Era of the 1940s Page 6-7

Interview with Director Doug Hughes Page 8-9

Playwright Biography: Clifford Odets Page 10-11

Odets' Style.....Page 12

Post-War AmericaPage 13

Interview with Costume Designer Catherine Zuber.....Page 14-15

Pre-show ActivitiesPage 16

Post-show Activities.....Page 17

GlossaryPage 18

Resources.....Page 19

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INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR BOBBY CANNAVALE

Early in the rehearsal process, Bobby Cannavale spoke with Education Dramaturg Ted Sod about the role of Charlie Castle in *The Big Knife*.

Ted Sod: Would you tell us a little about yourself?

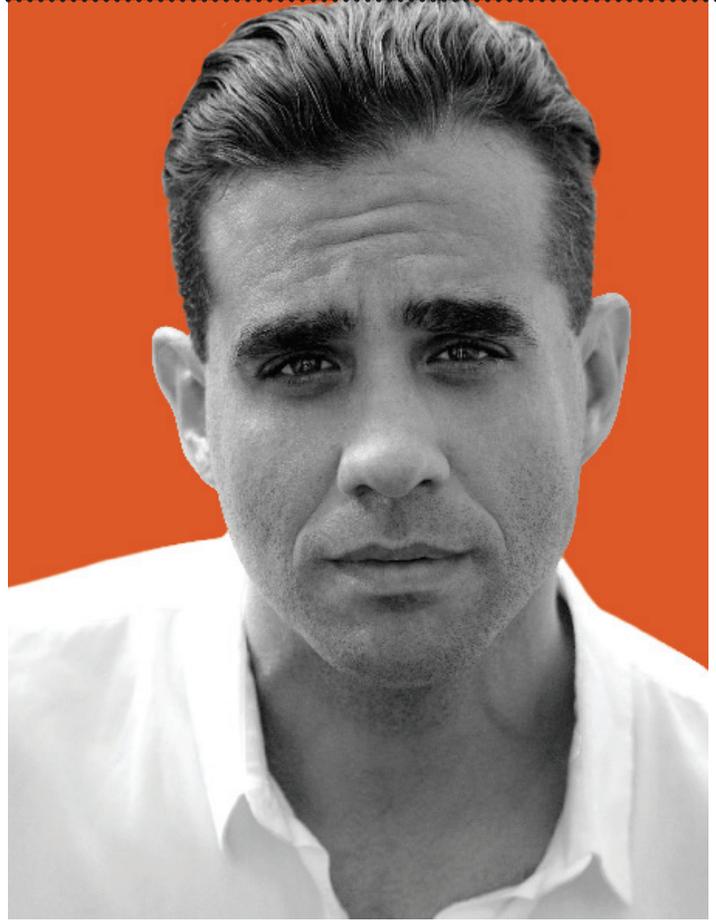
Bobby Cannavale: I was born in Union City, New Jersey. I moved to Florida in the middle of the 8th grade. I got thrown out of school in Florida, so I moved back to Jersey to live with my dad and grandmother in my senior year. I graduated, started auditioning, and didn't go to college. I was acting from the time I was a kid. I knew very early this is what I wanted to do. I didn't grow up wanting to be a doctor or a lawyer. I wanted to be an artist. I went to the library a lot. Plays were some of the first things I read as a kid. I was obsessed with them. I could hear the characters in my head. As a kid, I read Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Sam Shepard, the classics. I started going to open calls. There were a lot of years of no pay and off-off Broadway plays. I was in a production of Joe Orton's *The Ruffian on the Stair* at the American Theatre of Actors on 54th Street. It opened on Christmas Eve. There were four people in the audience. One of them was an agent who was a friend of the director. That's how I got my first agent. Eventually I was asked to be a member of Circle Rep and that's where I received a more formal education. The playwright Lanford Wilson took me under his wing and became a mentor. He really taught me how to act. He taught me that what the characters are going through in the play has to be the biggest event of their lives. He taught me how to find the beats in a play, how to tell the difference between a well-written play and a not-so-well-written play, which I had trouble with as a younger actor. I learned quite a bit from Lanford. I hear his voice in my head all the time.

TS: How did you become involved with this production of *The Big Knife*? Were you familiar with the play beforehand?

BC: I was in Williamstown rehearsing for Paul Rudnick's *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told*. One night after rehearsal, I went to see a production of *The Big Knife* and I was knocked out. It had me glued to my seat. I couldn't move. I thought, "How come I don't know this play?" I was already a fan of Odets and I knew the popular plays, but not this one. I went on a mission to do this play one day. Any time I did anything with a director I admired, I would bring it up to them. Then Doug Hughes called me about a year ago and said, "Roundabout wants to do something with you. How about we do a reading of *The Big Knife*?" Odets is one of those writers who I feel has not received his due. He's considered a post-depression-era playwright, but he was a working playwright his whole career, even after he went to Hollywood. People who have been in the theatre their whole lives don't know this play. So I am excited.

TS: Talk about the character you are playing, Charlie Castle. He seems extremely complex. Do you see him that way?

BC: Absolutely! It's very easy to say the play is about a movie star in Hollywood, but that's what happens on the surface. What makes the play complex is the fact that it was written post-World War II. This is a play about Americans. The collective consciousness of this



country changed after we "won the war." It became very important for us to be "the best." Corporate America and the desire to "have it all" began to dominate the collective conscience. The play asks tough questions: At the end of the day, how much is enough? When do you realize that you can't have it all and not compromise yourself or your beliefs? What happens to your loved ones when you leave them behind? At what point do you say, "Enough is enough. I'm going to stick to my ideals and not desire everything the world has to offer"? That's what interests me about playing Charlie Castle. Hollywood is a good metaphor for this atmosphere of needing to be the best, being given everything, feeling like you're number one and on top of the world.

TS: Talk about the relationship between Charlie and his wife, Marion. They seem to be soul mates.

BC: I think you're right, they are soul mates. They come from the same place. She's known him since before he became Charlie Castle. He was Charlie Cass in New York. She knew him before he went to the war. She knew him when he was acting on the stage. He has a coterie of intellectual mates that all have that idealistic Group Theatre quality about them. She recognizes the truest part of him. Yet she is also complicit. She's come out to Hollywood with him. She's gone along with the various contracts he's signed as well as the lifestyle. I think Marion has had it. She's woken up to what they have become. Now is the moment for her to confront Charlie and force him to make a decision.

TS: What do you sense is the biggest challenge of doing this role?

BC: I never really noticed the fever dream quality of this play until we got on our feet. It's striking to me. Charlie doesn't ever leave the stage, and that is always a challenge. I sit there and various people keep coming in. They come in the front door. They come in the back door. The chickens are coming home to roost. I am being confronted by all of these obstacles. The challenge is getting the audience to go on a journey with Charlie, who is trying to find his true self before it's too late.

TS: What do you look for in a director?

BC: I have to say that I have been fortunate to work with many great directors. The thing I love about Doug is that he does a lot of homework. Doug is the most prepared director I've ever worked with. He's a very erudite person. He's someone you want to listen to. There's a great combination of intellectual know-how and plain talk. I need those things. When I'm in the rehearsal room, my heart is open and ready to take anything in. I feel like I can provide the heart but I need someone really smart to get inside my head and meld the two. Doug facilitates that beautifully.

TS: What inspires you as an artist?

BC: I go to the theatre every week, and I love it! What inspires me is that communion in the theatre that happens. It happens when I'm leaning forward and I feel like I am in the world. It's like magic. It's ethereal and you can't put your finger on it. It's great work, yes, but you can't really put on paper what that is. I live for that. I think great art, when the communion is made, has the ability to make people change their viewpoints. It has the ability to change the way we are. I have a great respect for the ongoing effort to make the world a better place that art provides. Cultures change because of art.

TS: Do you have any advice for young people who want to be actors?

BC: There's no secret. There's no key. For me, I had to be around the world all the time. I never said no to anything. I was a reader for the longest time for auditions at Roundabout. That was valuable for me. I was a reader for Bill Irwin when he directed *A Flea in Her Ear* at the Criterion Center in 1998. He asked me if I'd understudy. That was a break! We all have to make money, but if you're young, you don't have to sleep that much. I would work from 11:30 to 5am in night clubs and I would crash until noon. Then I'd hustle back into the city and hit it hard. Audition for anything, especially when you're young. The theatre is a very incestuous

group here in New York. We all know each other. That's from years and years of cultivating relationships and being there for people. It means saying, "Yeah! I will do your reading. I know I only have three scenes, but sure I'll come and read it." If you're 23 or 24 years old, be around those people that years from now you'll have a relationship with. One of you might have success. You might both have success. More likely than not, those relationships will form other relationships. Ultimately, it's just about being in the world.

THE PLAY ASKS TOUGH QUESTIONS: AT THE END OF THE DAY, HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH? WHEN DO YOU REALIZE THAT YOU CAN'T HAVE IT ALL AND NOT COMPROMISE YOURSELF OR YOUR BELIEFS? WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR LOVED ONES WHEN YOU LEAVE THEM BEHIND? AT WHAT POINT DO YOU SAY, "ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. I'M GOING TO STICK TO MY IDEALS AND NOT DESIRE EVERYTHING THE WORLD HAS TO OFFER"?

TS: Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't covered?

BC: I wouldn't be doing this play if I didn't think it was relevant. I think a great play lasts because it speaks to us no matter what the times are, particularly today when we are so easily distracted. It's astounding that this play is 60 years old and very little has changed. Life doesn't just happen to you. You can't let it happen to you. You have to meet it halfway. It's about committing yourself to what's important and what you want to do. If it means changing the way you think or your behavior to get what you want, then you actually have to do that. No one is going to do that for you. We get complacent. We get comfortable. I think Charlie Castle is the epitome of the comfortable guy whose life is falling apart. •

Bobby Cannavale and Marin Ireland.



EVERYTHING COMES TO HOLLYWOOD: THE GOLDEN ERA OF THE 1940s

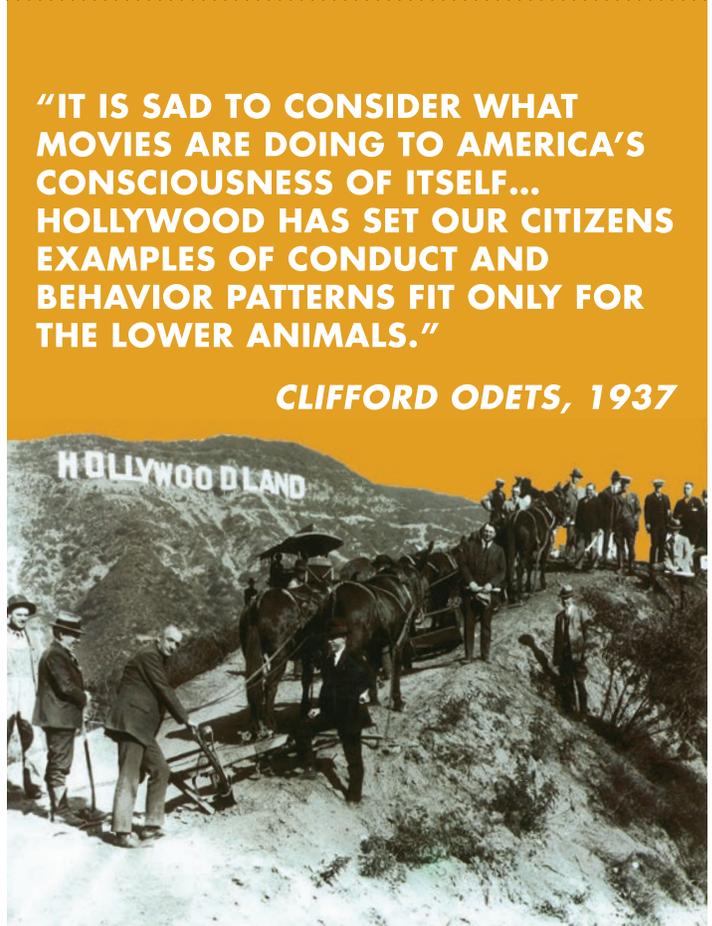
THE BIG FIVE: THE POWER OF THE MOVIE STUDIOS

Charlie Castle's conflict with Hoff Studios reflects the reality of actors, directors, and writers—like Clifford Odets himself—working for the movie studios during the "Golden Age of Hollywood." Until 1948, five major studios (MGM, Warner Brothers, Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox, and RKO studios) along with three smaller studios (Universal, Columbia, and United Artists) controlled every aspect of the film industry, from production to distribution—a structure of "vertical integration."

With the advent of sound and "talkies" in 1927, movie stars became valuable commodities but had little control over their careers. Actors were contracted to the studios, usually for seven years at a time, and contracts were subject to renewal at the studio's option. Studio executives determined whether actors would become stars or merely supporting players, which roles actors would play, and what publicity they would receive. Under contract, actors were forbidden to work for any other producer; if they did not cooperate, they could be suspended without pay. Furthermore, studios oversaw their stars' personal lives. Pregnant actresses were sent out of the country and gay actors were set up with fiancées and public marriages.

Similarly, film directors were hired, and fired, by the studio producers, who oversaw how films were shot and edited. Screenwriters in Hollywood had even less status and no authorial control over their own scripts.

The studios controlled where, when, and how movies could be shown. Each of the Big Five had their own movie theatres that took in more than half of the studios' revenues. Through a policy of "block booking," the studios required independent theatres to rent a block of 10 movies; theatres were required to show all the films rented in a "block." Although the studio system created many excellent films, block booking also allowed studios to produce cheap, low quality "B-movies" and force them into the theatres.



"IT IS SAD TO CONSIDER WHAT MOVIES ARE DOING TO AMERICA'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF ITSELF... HOLLYWOOD HAS SET OUR CITIZENS EXAMPLES OF CONDUCT AND BEHAVIOR PATTERNS FIT ONLY FOR THE LOWER ANIMALS."

CLIFFORD ODETS, 1937

The studios' power was challenged in 1948 with an important legal decision in the Paramount Case. The Supreme Court declared vertical integration and block booking to be a violation of antitrust law; studios would have to sell each film individually and divest their ownership of movie theatres. This gave independent producers an ability to compete with the majors. As a result, the studios found it less profitable to keep actors on long-term contracts, and in the early '50s, movie stars gained more control over their careers. The financial structures of Hollywood have continued to change, and the studios are still important—but today the stars and accomplished directors wield far more influence in Hollywood than anyone half a century ago could have imagined. •

To meet 20th Century Fox executive Darryl Zanuck and take a tour of how the studio operated in 1935, watch this video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SEd4s0JeSM>

To read a Life Magazine article about the end of the studio system, click here:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=Nz8EAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA146&pg=PA146#v=onepage&q&f=true>



ODETS VS. HOLLYWOOD

In *The Big Knife*, Odets perpetuates the legend of “Hollywood as destroyer,” in which an artist lured to Tinseltown by hopes of riches and opportunity finds himself ruined by the system. Odets had a complicated relationship with the film industry. His first wife, Luise Rainer, was a European-born actress contracted with MGM. Odets supported his wife in her fights with executive Louis B. Mayer. Despite winning an Academy Award, her career suffered because she stood up to the studio.

Odets was hired to write his first screenplay in 1936 and would travel between New York and Hollywood for the rest of his life. Many of his scripts were either rewritten by other writers or never actually filmed—a typical fate for screenplays—but he did co-write the 1957 hit *The Sweet Smell of Success*. Odets struggled to balance the financial rewards of Hollywood with his devotion to theatre and his comrades in New York’s Group Theatre. His acclaimed play *Golden Boy*, written in 1937, borrowed cinematic techniques such as multiple locations and fade-outs between scenes. Both *Golden Boy* and *The Big Knife*, though written more than a decade apart, portray heroes who are shattered when they give up their ideals to achieve success. Odets continued working in film and television until his death in 1963. Hollywood may have bruised him, but unlike his characters, Odets was not entirely destroyed.

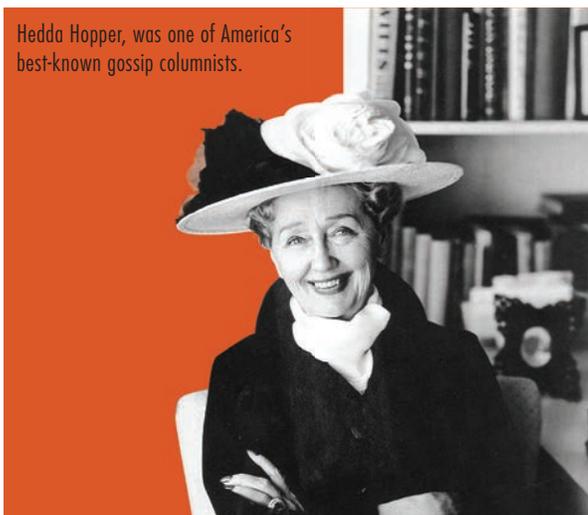
FILM NOIR

The 1955 Robert Aldrich movie adaptation of *The Big Knife* is considered to be *film noir*, a popular style of the 1940s and ‘50s. Noir stories were often those of crime, blackmail, and betrayal, reflecting the darker aspects of modern life, especially the anxiety and cynicism felt by Americans in the post-war years. Borrowing from German Expressionism, the noir look featured high-contrast lighting, skewed camera angles, and ominous shadows. Noir was often set in shadowy, smoky rooms or nighttime urban streets, a choice motivated in part by the need to shoot inside the studios rather than on-location during World War II. The film noir protagonist was an isolated man (often a hard-boiled detective), seduced by a femme fatale (a dangerous woman) and manipulated as he investigated corrupt systems. Whether he was battling immoral politicians, wealthy individuals, or crime syndicates, the noir hero was almost always doomed to lose.



1947's film noir
T-Men.

Hedda Hopper, was one of America's best-known gossip columnists.



GOSSIP COLUMNISTS

The Big Knife opens with Charlie Castle and Buddy Bliss fending off questions from Patty Benedict, the “authoritative, cynical, and assured” Hollywood gossip columnist. Patty—like Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons, real gossip columnists she is likely based on—writes juicy, rumor-filled articles about the personal lives of celebrities that are read by eighteen million people each day. She can make or break a career, and she knows it.

In an era before paparazzi, the internet, or even “The Tonight Show,” the gossip columnist played an important role in generating public interest in movie stars and their films. Gossip columnists were sought after by movie studios and stars’ publicists, hoping to make their stars seem likable and fascinating. They were Hollywood insiders, always around, always looking for their next story, and never trusted.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR DOUG HUGHES

Just before rehearsals began, Education Dramaturg Ted Sod sat down with Roundabout Resident Director Doug Hughes to talk about *The Big Knife*.

Ted Sod: Why did you choose to direct *The Big Knife*?

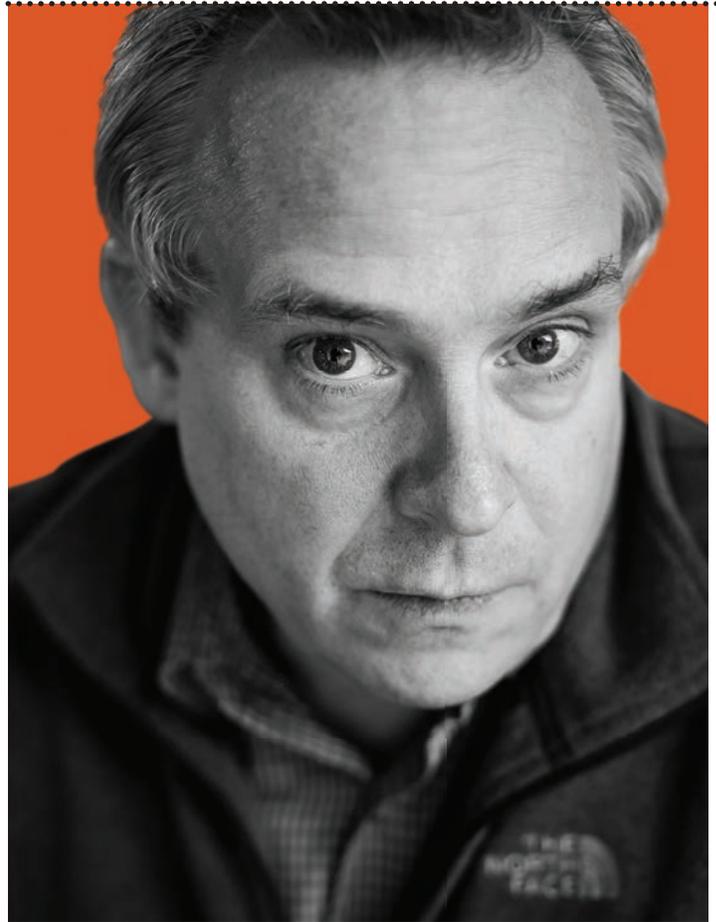
Doug Hughes: I've always felt that it was one of Odets' most striking and powerful plays. It's also one of his most neglected. Odets was a great American playwright who was staggeringly influential. Critical opinion has identified entirely with his pre-WWII work and the Depression era. But I think he had something remarkable to say about the America that emerged victorious from the war. That short period between Hiroshima and the Korean War fascinates me. What was this country going to do now that its military, economic, and cultural power was unassailable? Nearly seventy years after that moment, I'm interested in looking closely at *The Big Knife*, which took the temperature of post-war America. We were either at the start of "The American Century," as Henry Luce called it in Time magazine, or "The Century of the Common Man," as Henry Wallace, Roosevelt's wartime Vice President, who had very different ideas, dubbed it. In a very powerful, very personal way, I think Odets was writing about the tension between those two aspirations for our country. Charlie Castle, Odets' protagonist in the play, wants to be an uncompromising artist; he yearns after an idealistic, altruistic pathway through life. But he also has an equal if not overriding appetite for power, for security, and for, as he puts it, "the life of a rajah." This was a life-long dilemma for Odets. Somewhere in *The Time is Ripe*, which is the title of the published version of a journal he kept in 1940, there is this entry: "I want to be a poor poet and a powerful businessman, a sensational young man and a modest artist with a secret life."

TS: The studio system in Hollywood was still in place during the time this play takes place, correct?

DH: It might be past its heyday, but it's still very much in place. There are still big stars under long-term contracts. There are still studio heads who kept their own police forces, ruthlessly defended their territory, and dealt darkly with unpleasant secrets. These guys were totalitarian dictators. They were dedicated to driving up the company stock price and increasing their own power and prestige. They were making a lot of money. They were also, it has to be said, making some great movies. So, yes, the studio system was very much in place at the time of this play, which was first done on Broadway in 1949.

TS: Do you think Odets' life in Hollywood or the life of his first wife, Luise Rainer, who I know was ostracized by MGM chief Louis B. Mayer, is reflected in this play?

DH: The story of Odets' time in Hollywood can certainly offer up a parable of the poet lured to Babylon. The notion that Hollywood corrupts the artist, that the system is rigged against the artist, is a tale that's been oft told. That's old news, and I don't think it's what Odets was writing about. He isn't writing a polemic. He's offering us an experience. The studio system is what it is (or is what it was); it operates on its own rules, just as Wall Street does or Washington



does. And the play's central character, Charlie Castle, is a man who has thrived in that system and has played beautifully by its rules. But as the events of the play unfold, he finds himself entering an impossible situation. He is in a place where there really seems to be no way of avoiding soul-killing compromise. It's Charlie's story—not a tale about how dreadful Hollywood is. That's not the way I'm going to approach it. I'm thinking of *The Big Knife* as "The Passion of Charlie Castle." Don't get me wrong, everyone involved in the show is fascinated by the milieu of that time and place—studios and starlets and fancy homes in the Hollywood Hills and such. But we are after other things as well.

TS: One of the things that I love about the play is the relationship between Marion and Charlie. It seems like Marion is offering Charlie an opportunity to get his soul back. Do you think their marriage is an important aspect of the story?

DH: Oh, it's the most important thing. It's a very intense, very complex love story. They are soul mates who bonded in a world that more closely resembled the early days of The Group Theatre than the world they live in now, the high life of late '40s Hollywood. Are they going to make it? Can their relationship survive the violence and lies that have beset it? Odets is writing about the familiar fact that the person who can most deeply wound you is the person who loves and knows you most deeply. Both Charlie and Marion keep secrets. Both are capable of betrayal. There's lots of betrayal in this play. Charlie is the sort of man who

can both inspire and resist profound love. That paradox is one of the major tensions that animates the play.

TS: What were you looking for in casting the play?

DH: It all dates back to a conversation over five years ago with Bobby Cannavale. We were doing a play of Theresa Rebeck's called *Mauritius* on Broadway at the Biltmore; and one day we were chatting in between scenes and we discovered our shared admiration for this play, which I had read years and years ago. I had picked up a copy at a second-hand bookstore and Bobby had seen a production directed by the phenomenal Joanne Woodward at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. That was that until about a year ago when Bobby and I got together socially and *The Big Knife* came up again. With my patented firm grasp of the obvious, I mentioned that he was superb casting for Charlie Castle. He seemed to agree and we both got enthusiastic about working on it together. So I took it to Todd Haimes, who knows every play ever written, and we built it from there. We did a reading last March, and it was one of those great occasions where, in nearly every case, the people I asked were available and interested and similarly captivated by the play. And nearly everybody from that reading will be reassembling a year later to do the production. Odets' plays are orchestrated for a lot of different voices. And I think we've been lucky enough to interest actors who are brilliantly capable of playing the fantastic score of this play.

TS: Have you watched the film version, or is that not of value to you?

DH: I used to be a lot more precious about staying away from previous incarnations, but in this case my curiosity overtook me and I looked at the 1955 version. And I'll simply say this: I'm not profoundly intimidated by it. I think it has a lot of admirable scenes in it, and the director Robert Aldrich made some great pictures. (I think he made the incredible *Kiss Me Deadly* the very same year.) But I think certain things were softened and sentimentalized in the adaptation of the play to the screen. For reasons unknown to me, Odets was not involved. There are some terrific performances in it: Rod Steiger in particular, Ida Lupino, Jean Hagen. But we're starting fresh with the play, which I believe hasn't been given any real attention in New York in quite a while.

OSETS IS WRITING ABOUT THE FAMILIAR FACT THAT THE PERSON WHO CAN MOST DEEPLY WOUND YOU IS THE PERSON WHO LOVES AND KNOWS YOU MOST DEEPLY. BOTH CHARLIE AND MARION KEEP SECRETS. BOTH ARE CAPABLE OF BETRAYAL. THERE'S LOTS OF BETRAYAL IN THIS PLAY. CHARLIE IS THE SORT OF MAN WHO CAN BOTH INSPIRE AND RESIST PROFOUND LOVE. THAT PARADOX IS ONE OF THE MAJOR TENSIONS THAT ANIMATES THE PLAY.

TS: Will there be a film noir quality in the design?

DH: I'm very interested in the movies that fall under that heading, and I'm always one for shadows and high-contrast lighting—that seems to be a proclivity of mine. I did a production of *Born Yesterday* a couple of seasons ago on Broadway, and it falls exactly in the same era and, if it isn't too paradoxical a statement, I think of that as a noir comedy and I think of this as a noir tragedy. A lot of the anxieties that animate *Born Yesterday* are alive in *The Big Knife*: Just how aware are we going to choose to be? Just how honest are we going to choose to be? Just how brave are we going to choose to be? Will we get found out? Will we get out alive? Those are the concerns of what is called film noir, in which there is often a system, a status quo, that hums along nicely until somebody runs afoul of the rules, and thereby hangs a tale.

TS: I think the language of the play is challenging. It's a very specific kind of music.

DH: That's Odets. Everybody's using words as weapons, and they each have a custom-made wardrobe of rhetoric and usages that is distinctly tailored for their characters. I think Odets was a dramatic poet. You can hear the music in all the plays and in his dialogue for a truly great movie like *The Sweet Smell of Success*.

TS: It seems to me as if David Mamet may have been influenced by Odets. They both write in a very idiosyncratic style.

DH: Who didn't Odets influence? Arthur Miller acknowledged the great influence Odets had on him. He took the vernacular of the workplace, the street, the gym, the tenement, the studio, and wove it, like great American poets have done, into a language that really lives and sings onstage.

TS: You've assembled an amazing ensemble, and I'm excited to learn how our audience will respond to it.

DH: This is why theatres like the Roundabout exist. Who else would have the guts to do *The Big Knife*? And who else has cultivated an audience as interested in venturing away from familiar titles? There is such a thing as the neglected play, the lost play of genuine stature, of true merit. The concerns of *The Big Knife* seem to me to be perennial ones. I am so grateful to Todd and Roundabout. I'm thrilled to be a resident director here because the whole operation is designed for just such an exploration of a fantastic but forgotten play by an essential American genius. •

A BIOGRAPHY OF CLIFFORD ODETS

LIFE

Clifford Odets was born in Philadelphia on July 18, 1906. His family moved to New York City when he was six, and Odets grew up in the Bronx. He dropped out of high school to work as an actor in small companies around the city. In 1931 he became a founding member of the Group Theatre, which became the most influential company in the history of American theatre.

The plays Odets wrote for the Group ensemble reflect his interest in Marxist principles. In 1934 he joined the Communist party, but left within a year in favor of a broader humanistic philosophy, a morality that emphasized the value of individual happiness.

Like many East Coast writers, Odets received offers from Hollywood. He went west in early 1936 to write his first screenplay. While there he met German actress Luise Rainer, whom he married in 1937. Both volatile in temperament, they separated twice within two turbulent years and divorced in 1940. Odets married actress Bette Grayson in 1943. The couple had two children, but the marriage ended in 1951. Grayson died suddenly in 1954 at age 32, leaving Odets as the children's sole caretaker.

Because of his early and brief Communist affiliation and the perceived radicalism of his plays, Odets was under surveillance from the mid 1930s for what the government called "premature anti-fascism." He never abandoned his support of progressive causes and was subpoenaed in 1952 by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). He testified twice and reiterated names of former Group Theatre colleagues who had Communist ties. Elia Kazan, Odets' fellow Group member, had named these same people in his testimony a month before. Odets adamantly upheld the Communist Party's right to exist and gave evidence of positive as well as negative Communist activity. He felt he had defied the Committee, as he gave them no new information. Negative reactions to his testimony confused him; he was surprised and hurt by criticism that came his way from both the political right and left. He was deeply traumatized, and his ability to work suffered as a result.

Odets died on August 14, 1963 of advanced colon cancer.



CHRONOLOGY OF PLAYS

1935: *Waiting for Lefty*

1935: *Awake and Sing!*

1935: *Till the Day I Die*

1935: *Paradise Lost*

1937: *Golden Boy*

1938: *Rocket to the Moon*

1940: *Night Music*

1941: *Clash By Night*

1949: *The Big Knife*

1950: *The Country Girl*

1954: *The Flowering Peach*

WORK

The Group Theatre employed an acting technique new to the United States, based on the teachings of the Russian actor and director Constantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski's "system" encouraged realism and naturalism by using actors' personal experiences and truthful emotions. The system was further developed by Group director Lee Strasberg and became known as "The Method."

Odets' colleagues did not consider him to be a particularly good actor, and he grew frustrated with the insignificant roles in which he was cast. He began to write plays, adapting Strasberg's technique to his writing process. *Waiting for Lefty*, his one-act play based on an actual taxi strike, was produced as the winning entry of a playwriting contest conducted by the left-wing New Theatre magazine. Those present on the opening night of January 5, 1935 responded with such passionate enthusiasm that Odets found himself instantly famous. The Group soon produced *Waiting for Lefty* itself, along with another Odets one-act, the anti-fascist *Till the Day I Die*. *Awake and Sing!*, the first full-length play on Broadway to focus exclusively on the tribulations of a Jewish family, solidified Odets's reputation. His next play, *Paradise Lost*, which continued his trend of expressing Depression era themes, was not well received.

Early in 1936, Odets accepted his first lucrative film assignment in order to keep *Paradise Lost* running and the Group afloat. This initiated a period of frequent travel between the coasts, during which Odets continued to write both plays and films. *Golden Boy*, written in 1937 expressly for commercial success, proved to be the Group's greatest hit. *Rocket to the Moon* (1938) and *Night Music* (1940) followed, but neither was well received and the Group was forced to disband.

Odets returned to Hollywood, where he stayed from 1943 to mid-1948 writing screenplays. In 1944 he adapted and directed *None but the Lonely Heart*, which starred Cary Grant and garnered Ethel Barrymore an Oscar. Still, Odets's increasing disgust with the emptiness of Hollywood led him to send his friend, director and critic Harold Clurman, an outline for the play that would become



The Big Knife. They corresponded throughout 1947 and into the spring of 1948 about a possible collaboration.

Meanwhile, Odets did not stop his political activity in support of left-wing causes. In late 1947, HUAC intensified its investigation of the film industry, and Odets decided to move his young family back to New York. They arrived in June 1948. Odets spent an intense summer and early fall writing *The Big Knife*, which provides a harsh view of the world of Hollywood.

Odets had two more plays produced in New York, *The Country Girl* (1950) and *The Flowering Peach* (1954). *The Country Girl* was a commercial success, but *The Flowering Peach* was not. Odets felt forced to return to Hollywood in order to support himself and his children. He acted as a consultant and doctored scripts, and in 1957 he wrote the screenplay for *Sweet Smell of Success*, an exposé of the newspaper world. It has since become a cult classic film and the basis of a 2002 Broadway musical. He began work on a musical adaptation of *Golden Boy* and acted as script supervisor for NBC's new dramatic anthology, "The Richard Boone Show." He also contracted to write four of a proposed total of thirteen teleplays for the series, and two of his scripts were aired posthumously.

IMPACT

Odets marks a turning point in American theatre history. *Waiting for Lefty* and *Awake and Sing!* have become classics of the American stage. Odets's singular contribution is his lyrical treatment of urban speech. An "Odetsian line" transforms street talk into poetry. Odets is primarily remembered as a spokesman for the working man, despite the fact that he dropped his Marxist stance by the time he wrote *Golden Boy*, a mere two years after he first came to international attention. His influence can be traced through the works of Arthur Miller, Paddy Chayefsky, David Mamet, Tony Kushner, and countless others.

ODETS' STYLE —SPOILER ALERT—

CHARLIE'S DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

"All my plays...deal with one subject: the struggle not to have life nullified by circumstances, false values, anything," Clifford Odets said in 1955. Odets' characters grapple with the question of how to live with integrity and dignity. Charlie Castle, central character of *The Big Knife*, is no exception. Charlie is a big-time movie star who has risen from humble beginnings. Despite his success, Charlie is not a free man; he has a dark secret that his studio helped to cover. Now he's being blackmailed into signing a fourteen-year contract with the studio. Charlie Castle has made a "deal with the devil." He's maintained his good reputation, but he's lost his freedom. "I'm Hoff's prisoner now, and signing that contract is the ransom fee!" he says.

"Deals with the devil" are a common literary motif. They are often called "Faustian bargains" after the famous German story about a professor named Faust who traded his soul for unlimited knowledge and magical powers. For Charlie, and for Odets himself, the struggle is always how "not to have life nullified by circumstances, false values, anything." Charlie wants to hold on to his idealism and his passion in the slick, anything-for-a-buck world of Hollywood. But he's in too deep: the studio has changed his name from Cass to Castle, made him a millionaire, and found someone else to take the blame for his crime. In many ways, *The Big Knife* personifies Odets' own struggle with fame and success within Hollywood.

ODETS' LANGUAGE

Odets' dialogue is written in the form of heightened language. Odets was born and raised in a world of working and lower middle class immigrants. When he began to write, he drew on the language of this world he knew. "It is the speech of New York; half-educated Jews, Italians, Irish, transformed into something new-minted, individual, and unique," Harold Clurman, a long-time colleague of Odets, wrote. Odets took the language of everyday life, "words heard on the street, in drugstores, bars, sports arenas," and used elements of poetry to make those words express larger-than-life emotions. He also drew inspiration for the rhythms of his dialogue from music, one of his great passions.

In *The Big Knife*, Odets uses images of animals to create character and to highlight the human need to move beyond brute instinct.

"You used to grab your theatre parts and eat 'em like a tiger," his wife tells him.

"Listen monkey, I know I'm a mechanical, capering mouse," he says.

And when Charlie gets angry, he says, "Yeah, all the red neon lights are on and the sky is full of drunken blackbirds."

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Odets also uses stage directions, instructions about the action written into the script, to shape the scene. In many plays, it is left to the actors and the director to discover what is happening between the characters, where they move and how they use each line. Odets began his theatrical career as an actor and occasionally directed his own plays. He was keenly aware of how each moment drove the action of his scripts forward. Take this example from *The Big Knife*. Without stage directions, the line reads:

MARION

You can talk... How you can talk, when you're Charlie Cass!

I want to beat you...

I'll sleep in my own room. I don't know what I'm doing any more.

Something has changed in Marion in the course of those three short lines. Adding back in Odets' stage directions, it becomes clear:

MARION

You can talk... How you can talk, when you're Charlie Cass!

(Trembling.) I want to beat you...

(MARION starts to pound CHARLIE with her fists--CHARLIE grabs her wrists and holds them tightly. MARION broken, next turns away, crying and sobbing bitterly. After a long moment CHARLIE takes her by the arms and raises her to him, they stand for a moment in an embrace. Then MARION starts for the stairs saying)

I'll sleep in my own room. I don't know what I'm doing any more.

With the combination of the actors' intuition and the stage directions, the audience is able to see a fully realized range of emotions and events.

POST-WAR AMERICA

In *The Big Knife* we find Charlie Castle, a studio favorite, living in Beverly Hills. However, he began his career as a stage actor in New York. The differences between New York and Los Angeles were vast in the 1940s, especially for an actor.

After the war, there was a huge change in the style of American theatre in New York City. Young theatre makers wanted their work to reflect the hardship of the times, unlike the light-hearted entertainment of the past. Odets was a pioneer of this new approach to theatre. His *Waiting for Lefty* was a groundbreaking example of the new style. For actors like Charlie, the theatre scene in New York was a place to be a real artist and not lose his self-respect. Alternatively, film stars in LA had very little freedom in the 1940s. Actors either had a contract with a studio, or they didn't work. Money was everything in Los Angeles. Your social status was determined by the car you drove and what you wore to a party. Movie stars like Charlie would be invited to extravagant house parties, constantly surrounded by lavish furnishings, intricate interior design, and all the alcohol a celebrity could handle—and then some. Hollywood was a big town, but the social circles were claustrophobic. Private lives were difficult to maintain.

Beverly Hills had drawn a celebrity population since 1919, when film stars Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford built their estate, named the Pickfair. This prompted the trend among Hollywood celebrities and executives to build lavish homes in Beverly Hills, a practice that still continues today.

World War II brought many European actors and directors in exile to Hollywood, including Marlene Dietrich, Max Reinhardt, Luis Buñuel, Jean Renoir, and Cary Grant. These artists brought the late German Expressionist film style to Hollywood and refreshed the look for crime films through what the French called “film noir.” New ideas in intellectual and popular culture provided growth for the city.

Despite this cultural growth, America found itself in dire need of a larger workforce during wartime. Using advertising like “Rosie the Riveter,” the government reached out to women, hoping they would (temporarily) fill positions traditionally held by men. Before the war, roughly 25% of the workforce was made up of women; during the war, this increased to around 33%. Though some women did continue their careers, the late 1940s largely saw a return to

working life as it was before WWII. With this regression came a return to old attitudes towards women. Worsened by the media, including the Hollywood films of the era, women were reminded that their worth was measured by their marital status and ability to raise children.

Both marriage and divorce rates saw a significant increase in 1946. Divorce rates had slowly increased until this point, peaked just after WWII, and then sharply decreased and became more comparable to pre-war numbers. The 1930s saw, on average, 7 divorces per 1,000 marriages. The 1940s, on the other hand, saw around 18 divorces per the same sample size. The 1950s brought the rate back down to roughly 9. It seems likely that the spike in the late 1940s can be attributed to couples quickly marrying when men enlisted to fight in WWII, only to dissolve these hastily planned unions upon the husbands' return. Though an increase in the divorce rate was a reality of the period, the general public's attitude towards couples separating was still one of great concern.



Even more scandalous than getting a divorce was having a child out of wedlock. Unmarried mothers-to-be were ostracized, causing many to seek out abortions. Because abortion was illegal in 1940s America, women seeking to terminate their pregnancies often paid greatly—with their money and sometimes with their lives—to do so. Before penicillin was used to control infection, these procedures were incredibly risky to a woman's health. In

the early 1940s, roughly 1,300 women died each year from complications of these illegal abortions. This number didn't significantly decrease until 1967, when the first state-legalized abortion occurred.

Charlie and Marion live not only under the weight of these social attitudes, but also with the pressure of being in the public eye. Rather than living out their lives privately, their family is put under a microscope, every action monitored and magnified—and subsequently controlled by studio executives. Though Charlie had a fulfilling career on the stage, making the transition to Hollywood was a better financial opportunity for his family, especially after living under an economy devastated by war. Charlie's decision to uproot his family and go from New York to Los Angeles may have been a financially sound move but, in the end, there is a much larger price to pay.

INTERVIEW WITH COSTUME DESIGNER CATHERINE ZUBER

Costume Designer Catherine Zuber shared some of her insights and experiences with Education Dramaturg Ted Sod.

Ted Sod: Would you tell us about yourself? Where were you born? When did you realize you wanted to design costumes?

Catherine Zuber: I was born in London. My family immigrated to New York when I was nine. The excitement of being in New York was thrilling. All the details reverberated with the exotic. The architecture was different, the cars were different, the way of life and what people ate and wore were all new to me. I think those differences informed how I examine what makes a particular world what it is. In costuming a play or an opera, I love to do the research and get inside a specific time and place. I try to inhabit the lives of the characters that are telling the story.

After I went to art school and majored in photography, I moved to New Haven with a boyfriend who was going to Yale. While I was there, I discovered costume design. I applied to the Yale School of Drama and was accepted. It was an amazing environment to learn the craft of costume design. What I really love about theatre is the collaboration among the designers, the actors, the director, the writers, the musicians, the technical people and the stage managers; the way we all come together to create something, it's very fulfilling and exciting. Other disciplines can be very solitary in their execution.

TS: Can we talk about your first response to the play *The Big Knife*?

CZ: The journey of Charlie Castle is a Faustian story. Charlie Castle's naturalism is appealing to Hollywood and it has made him very successful. In the process of embracing this world, he loses his soul.

TS: When you are designing clothes for a period show like *The Big Knife*, what's the first thing you have to do?

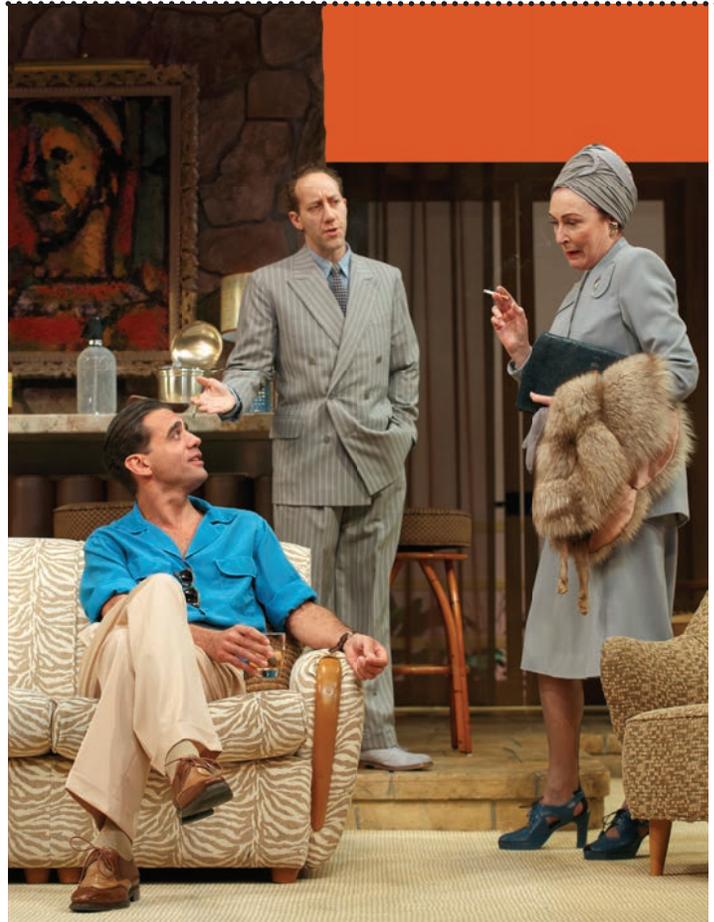
CZ: After I read the play, I talk with the director to get an idea of how they envision the world of the story. I find this process even more important when designing for a Shakespearean play or a classic because the directorial point of view is so open to interpretation. I like to discuss with the director the nuances of each character. I ask for a description of their inner life, of their hopes and goals, and we try to create a palette of visual silhouettes, creating a world in which the storytelling can take place.

TS: How do you collaborate with the set designer?

CZ: The vision of the set designer is so important and it is my cue on how to begin to populate our story. The color palette they've chosen, the props, furniture, the transitions, create a visual world.

TS: Tell us about your research process on this show. Did you study period newspapers or magazines?

CZ: Yes. I have a personal collection of magazines from the time period: *Harper's*, *Vogue*, and some sewing pamphlets from various



pattern companies. Also, I often go to FIT (Fashion Institute of Technology), which is a great resource. They have a library with a great collection of publications from all different time periods. They have plates from various department stores with images of what was for sale in a given time period. You need to think about where the characters you are designing would have shopped for their clothes. Sometimes the character is somebody who would have ordered from a Sears catalogue, or they could be a person who attends the Paris couture collections for their wardrobe. You have to consider what a character is thinking when it comes to their clothing. What is particularly interesting about *The Big Knife* is that it is set in Hollywood. Image is, then as now, extremely important. Flamboyance contributes to the choices that are made. Photographic research of post-war California indicates how high-style casual clothing was becoming popular. There were amazing prints and colors. Color in film was becoming more prevalent. There were leisure clothes for men where the shirts are beautifully cut, but it is a casual look.

TS: Which designers influenced style at the time the play takes place?

CZ: Movie designers like Adrian had a huge influence on fashion. Hollywood costume design had a certain aesthetic that translated into what was then available in department stores. I think that, for the most part, fashions were dictated by what was happening in Paris. When you look at the late 1940s, Dior was starting to

introduce the new look, which was such a departure visually from what was happening up until that point. Of course, during the war years with fabric shortages, a lot of design choices were influenced by the materials that were available. That's why women's dresses were quite short. After the war, there was a real interest in embracing color. Garments used more fabric and it was a very different look.

TS: How will you find these clothes? Will you build them or go to vintage shops?

CZ: I use a costume house called Angels in London, which is a great resource for clothing. I mix things I find there with vintage pieces. All of the ladies' costumes will be built by Werner Kulovits at the NY costume shop Euroco and by John Cowles. Brian Hemestat will build some of the men's garments. The Roundabout is a limited run, so it's more cost-effective to take advantage of garments I can rent.

TS: Will the women be wearing wigs? Will the men be wearing hairpieces?

CZ: Yes, the women will be wigged. I don't think we need to do any hairpieces for the men. Sometimes, when people are playing more than one character, it's a good idea to have hairpieces; but in this particular production, we don't have to worry about that.

TS: Do you sense that there's one particular challenge in designing this show?

CZ: My challenge is to create a costume story that delineates the characters who have power and the characters who think they have power; there's real nuance in how the clothes will define the inner lives of the people onstage.

TS: Could you talk about collaborating with Doug Hughes, the director? I know you've worked together quite often since your first collaboration in 1991.

CZ: I love working with Doug because he has a wonderful understanding of who the characters are. And I really count on a director to be clear about that. When a director is clear, you feel safe about following their directives and interpreting what they've told you about how they see that character. Doug is one of those great directors who really knows how to look at a sketch and understand what it means.

TS: How do you collaborate with the actors?

CZ: I always feel that unless an actor likes what they're wearing, it's never going to work. So if I sense in a fitting that they have a sad face, then I'll say, "Is there anything I can do?" And maybe

they'll say, "Oh you know, I really hate things that are close to my neck." Or they'll say, "I'm really self-conscious about my waist and I prefer something that doesn't have a defined waistline." And if it's something that doesn't compromise the character, I'm more than happy to work with the actor to come up with a solution.

TS: Who or what inspires you as an artist?

CZ: I love going to the Metropolitan Museum. I'm also inspired by novels that are quite descriptive. I'm a big fan of 19th-century French literature, so I love to read Balzac, Flaubert, Hugo, and

Zola. I find the writing so descriptive of time and place. I'm very influenced by old films; I'm a big fan of film noir and I'm very influenced by the history of fashion. I get a lot of inspiration from looking at photographs, listening to music. The list is really endless.

TS: It's often said that the '55 film version of *The Big Knife* is a film noir. Did you see the film and if so, will that in any way affect how you design?

CZ: I saw the film version on TCM a couple of weeks ago, and I think what we're doing is very different. Usually, I don't like to see the film if

I'm working on a project of something well known. I like to design having an honest reaction. But in this particular case, it was on TCM, and I started watching it.

TS: Do you have any advice for a young person who may want to be a costume designer for the theatre?

CZ: I would say they should be observant and find their own personal voice. Don't try to copy someone else's style; find the voice that's particular to them. Of course, if you apprentice yourself to a working designer, you can learn quite a bit. •

MY CHALLENGE IS TO CREATE A COSTUME STORY THAT DELINEATES THE CHARACTERS WHO HAVE POWER AND THE CHARACTERS WHO THINK THEY HAVE POWER; THERE'S REAL NUANCE IN HOW THE CLOTHES WILL DEFINE THE INNER LIVES OF THE PEOPLE ONSTAGE.



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR
EDUCATORS

HOW ARE OUR VALUES TESTED BY OUR OWN AMBITIONS AND DESIRES?

In *The Big Knife*, you will see movie star Charlie Castle struggle with an inner conflict between his own values and ambitions.

Materials: index cards or paper scraps, List of Values (on board or large poster).

List of Values: ARTISTRY. COMMUNITY. FAITH. FAMILY. FREEDOM. FRIENDSHIP. INTEGRITY. INDEPENDENCE. LOVE. PRIVACY. REPUTATION. SAFETY. SPIRITUALITY. TRUST.

- ACTIVATE** Each student receives 4 index cards. From the list of values above, students select 4 and write one value on each index card.
- Students stand on one side of the room and Teacher stands on the other. Teacher announces that students could receive FAME, but they would have to be willing to give up one of their values written on the index cards. If they choose to do so, they must cross the room, give up a value card to the teacher, and write: "In order to obtain _____, I would give up my _____." on the chalkboard or a large piece of paper.
- Repeat this process, asking the class if they would be willing to sacrifice a value card for WEALTH, POWER, and BEAUTY.
- WRITE** Ask students to look at the board and select one of the statements and write a journal entry about all of the ways this kind of bargain would affect their lives.
- REFLECT** How would giving up their values change their lives? If this were a contract that never could be broken, would they sign it?

HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT USE EVERYDAY LANGUAGE TO EXPRESS HEIGHTENED EMOTION?

Clifford Odets took the language of his everyday life, "words heard on the street, in drugstores, bars, sports arenas," and used it in his plays. His style has been described as "the poetry of the streets."

Materials: pens, paper

- REFLECT** Think back to a time when you (or someone you know) were asked to do something that went against your conscience. What happened? How did you feel?
- WRITE** Write a scene about that moment. Use colorful phrases and expressions you hear in your neighborhood to make the characters and their world come to life for the audience.
- ACTIVATE** Have volunteer actors read each scene out loud. What specific words or phrases were used? What emotions did they help the characters to express? How could you change the phrases to make them express stronger or bigger emotions?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

—SPOILER ALERT—

FOR
EDUCATORS

HOW DOES THE MEDIA CREATE A MOVIE STAR'S IMAGE?

In *The Big Knife*, Smiley Coy and Hank Teagle each tell the world the story of Charlie Castle's death.

Smiley tells the press, "Charles Castle, the renowned star of fifty Hoff-Federated pictures, died today of a heart attack at his Beverly Hills home at 6:55 Pacific Coast Daylight Saving Time. Present at his bedside were his physician—Curley—his wife, Marion, his five-year-old son, Billy, and... and his close friend and associate, Marcus S. Hoff."

Hank plans to report that, "He killed himself because that was the only way he could live. You don't recognize a final act of faith when you see one."

Materials: pens, paper, space to stage a press conference

- ACTIVATE** Impvise two press conferences about Charlie Castle's death. Students will take on the roles of Smiley Coy, Hank Teagle, and gossip columnists.
- In the first press conference, Smiley Coy delivers his version of Charlie's death to the crowd of gossip columnists. In the second press conference, Hank Teagle offers his version of Charlie's death to those same columnists.
- WRITE** Write a gossip column for tomorrow's paper. What will you tell your readers about Charlie's death? Why?
- REFLECT** Switch columns with a classmate. How was their account of Charlie's death different from yours? How was it similar? How would each influence the readers' image of Charlie? Can you think of a recent event involving a celebrity where the media played an important role?

HOW DO A DESIGNER'S CHOICES FOR THE SET AND COSTUMES CONVEY INFORMATION ABOUT A CHARACTER?

In her interview on pages 14–15, costume designer Catherine Zuber explains: "I like to discuss with the director the nuances of each character. I ask for a description of their inner life, of their hopes and goals, and we try to create a palette of visual silhouettes, creating a world in which the storytelling can take place."

Materials: pencils, paper, coloring utensils

- REFLECT** How did the costumes and set help tell the story? How did the set and costumes express Charlie's hopes and goals? In his inner life, do you think Charlie was happy?
- WRITE** Imagine a character who, like Charlie, has achieved great success at some personal cost. (Alternatively: students may work with historical figures or literary characters you are studying.) Who is this character? What have they gained and what have they given up? Where do they live? How do they dress?
- ACTIVATE** Create a set or costume sketch, showing either an important room in your character's home or an outfit. How do your design choices (i.e., furniture, objects, space, color, silhouette, fabric) help an audience see the character's hopes, goals, and inner life? How do your choices help tell the story?

GLOSSARY

LANGUAGE OF THE TIME AND PLACE:

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| CALL A SPADE A SPADE | To “call a spade a spade” is to speak honestly and directly about a topic <i>Nat asks Charlie to be truthful and upfront regarding Marion.</i> |
| CASTIGATE MY CATACHRISIS | Castigate means to reprimand severely. Catachresis is a misuse of words <i>Charlie asks Marion if she will reprimand him for wrong word choice even though he was a college graduate.</i> |
| CULVER CITY | A city in western Los Angeles County, California <i>Nat declines plans to attend the races with Hoff because he will be in Culver City.</i> |
| IDEALISM | The act or practice of envisioning things in perfect form <i>Hank says to Charlie, “I know that Marion stands in your life for your idealism...and that you’ve wounded her and it.”</i> |
| LET SLEEPING DOGS LIE | Phrase that means “don’t stir up trouble”; or, if the situation is quiet at the moment, let it be <i>Charlie wonders why Patty must always attempt to stir gossip and wake the sleeping dog.</i> |
| LOUSE | An unpleasant or mean person <i>Charlie admits to being a louse because he did not know what Marion expected him to know.</i> |
| MINCE WORDS | To soften the effect of one’s words <i>Connie does not mince words when discussing Buddy. She is direct and truthful.</i> |
| RAJAH | A prince, chief, or ruler in India or the East Indies <i>Charlie compares his fame and LA life to that of a rajah in Asia.</i> |
| STAND ON CEREMONY | To hold rigidly to protocol or formal manners <i>Connie sarcastically says Buddy is standing on ceremony by not being where he said he would be.</i> |

PEOPLE OF THE TIME AND PLACE:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| FDR | Franklin Delano Roosevelt, also known by his initials, FDR, the 32nd President of the United States and a central figure in world events during the mid-20th century <i>During their interview, Patty mentions Charlie’s devotion to FDR.</i> |
| GENERAL MACARTHUR | An American general who was Chief of Staff of the United States Army during the 1930s and played a prominent role in World War II <i>Hoff has Charlie sign the contracts with gold pens once used by MacArthur.</i> |
| UNCLE SAM | A common personification of the American (initials U.S.) government that, according to legend, came into use during the War of 1812 <i>Hoff and Charlie discuss Uncle Sam during a conversation about horse racing and the value of money.</i> |

ART OF THE AGE

In his stage directions for *The Big Knife*, Clifford Odets describes the art hanging on the walls of Charlie Castle’s playroom.

| A number of good paintings hang on the walls and add to the quality of the room, these include a good, typical Utrillo, a large impressive head of a clown by Rouault, and a typical Modigliani.

Odets collected paintings and in the last decades of his life painted and exhibited his own watercolors. He chose the paintings for the Castle residence to reflect the cultural aspirations and illuminate the emotional lives of Charlie and Marion. The Castles have chosen current, serious works of art from noted European painters.

Maurice Utrillo was a French artist who painted Post-Impressionistic cityscapes in the first half of the twentieth century. He was alive at the time *The Big Knife* was written. His work is likely the most literal and upbeat of the three paintings Odets selected.

Amedeo Modigliani was an Italian painter and sculptor of figurative art, mostly stylized portraits with elongated faces or bodies. After his death in 1920, his common-law wife, then nine months pregnant, committed suicide by jumping out a window.

Georges Rouault was French, a printmaker and etcher as well as a painter. He, too, was a living artist at the time *The Big Knife* was written. He was an Expressionist painter, using his work to express his emotions and evoke emotion in others. Though Charlie and Marion own a head of clown painting, one of many low-status characters he painted, Rouault is best known for a series of prints reflecting the miseries of the World Wars in Europe and finding hope in Jesus Christ.

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WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR
EDUCATORS

TICKET POLICY

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

PROGRAMS

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

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

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



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