

# *Picnic*

**UPSTAGE**

A PUBLICATION OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AT **ROUNDABOUTTHEATRECOMPANY**

# UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

It's a balmy Labor Day in the American Heartland, and a group of women are preparing for a picnic... but they'll have to lay a lot on the line before they can lay out the checkered cloths. When a handsome young drifter named Hal arrives, his combination of uncouth manners and titillating charm sends the women reeling, especially the beautiful Madge. When Hal is forced out of town, Madge must decide whether their fleeting encounter is worth changing the course of her life.

## A NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES:

*This will not be a Picnic in which the 1950s are viewed through a veneer of nostalgia that distracts from Inge's original intentions. It will not be a soft, bucolic view of small town life in the Midwest. This production will reflect the reality of time and place, of people hemmed in by the need to perform their daily domestic tasks and make a living, of young people dreaming big and living small. We will see people, just as Inge wrote them, without the comfort of distance that a "period piece" often provides.*

<http://www.roundabouttheatre.org/Shows-Events/Picnic.aspx>

<b>WHEN</b>	Early 1950s	<b>Act One</b>	Early morning, Labor Day
		<b>Act Two</b>	Same day, just before sunset
		<b>Act Three</b> Scene I	Early next morning, before daylight
		Scene II	Later the same morning, after sunrise

**WHERE** The yard shared by Flo Owens and Helen Potts in a small Kansas town.

## WHO

- Flo Owens:** The widowed owner of a boarding house. She is protective of her two daughters, Madge & Millie.
- Madge Owens:** Flo's very beautiful, eldest daughter. The reigning Queen Neelah, Madge is dating Alan Seymour.
- Millie Owens:** Flo's youngest, intellectual daughter. She is ever-envious of her sister's beauty.
- Alan Seymour:** Madge's college educated boyfriend.
- Hal Carter:** A wanderer and former fraternity brother of Alan. Hal is hired to do some work for Helen Potts.
- Helen Potts:** Flo's neighbor. Helen lives with her aged and invalid mother. She hires Hal to do a few chores around her property.
- Rosemary Sydney:** The self-proclaimed old maid school teacher. Rosemary rents a room at Flo's house. She wishes Howard would marry her.
- Howard Bevans:** Rosemary's 'friend-boy.' He runs a small shop in the neighboring town of Cherryvale.
- Irma Kronkite & Christine Schoenwalder:** Rosemary's school teacher pals.
- Bomber Gutzel:** The neighborhood newsboy. Like many boys in town, he has a crush on Madge.

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## UPSTAGE Contributors

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Greg McCaslin  
*Education Director*

Jennifer DiBella  
*Associate Education Director*

Sarah Malone  
*Education Program Associate*

Aliza Greenberg  
*Education Program Manager*

Ted Sod  
*Education Dramaturg*

Lou-Lou Igbokwe  
*Education Assistant*

Paul Brewster  
*Education Apprentice*

Jason Jacobs  
*Teaching Artist*

Leah Reddy  
*Teaching Artist*

Jill Rafson  
*Literary Manager*

Amy Ashton  
*Artistic Associate*

Nikki DiLoreto  
*Artistic Apprentice*

Laura Abbott  
*Digital Marketing Apprentice*

Eric Emch  
*Graphic Designer*

# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR SAM GOLD

Just before rehearsals began, Education Dramaturg Ted Sod sat down with Director Sam Gold to talk about *Picnic*.

**Ted Sod:** Why did you choose to direct *Picnic*? It seems you have an affinity for 1950s dramatic literature.

**Sam Gold:** I started my career directing new plays by young writers. I was drawn to writers of the 1950s because I felt that was the last time theatre was a dominant entertainment form. It seemed like a vital time for writers. I especially liked the American and British playwrights from that period because I thought they were an inspiration to the younger writers I was working with and I wanted to go back to the source of that inspiration. Last year I directed John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. That play was of particular importance as it was the original "kitchen-sink drama." William Inge and Tennessee Williams both defined American theatrical storytelling in the 1950s. We've seen Williams's plays over and over again, but no one is producing Inge's work as regularly. I think he's underrepresented and perhaps misunderstood. I've made it a priority to revive Inge for a contemporary audience.

**TS:** It seems odd that people have forgotten him. Inge had four very successful plays in the same decade.

**SG:** I think these things go through cycles. There was a period where Arthur Miller went out of favor. No one did his plays in America. When they started doing his work in London with great success, every Arthur Miller play was suddenly being produced in New York. Inge is due for his revival. These are great plays. They just need to be seen. Maybe they went out of favor based on taste, stigma, or because certain productions that were done made people think about them in a negative way.

**TS:** Tell us what you think the play is about.

**SG:** It's a small town play. It takes place in post-war Kansas. Inge is writing about young people who have a fantasy of a better life. They dream of romance, falling in love, getting on a train and going far away. You also see the older generation of characters who had similar dreams that did not necessarily work out. You see what it's like to give up your dreams and face the reality in these Midwestern towns at that time. I think Inge is speaking to the fire that burns in the young and what happens to that fire when you grow up. At its core, it's a family play about a single woman, Flo Owens, raising two daughters by herself. Her husband's not on the scene. Flo is a hardworking mother raising her kids, fearing that she's going to lose them.

**TS:** Madge does, at times, feel like an independent woman.

**SG:** There's a lot in the play about being an independent woman. I think the play is really trying to take on the way American culture put women in a box in the late '40s and early '50s. You see that Flo married the wrong guy and now she's alone, trying to raise her kids by herself. You see Rosemary, the school teacher, who never got married and is now desperate to find a man. She's a boarder in someone else's house and teaching high school, which is not necessarily the life she wants to have. Then you see Millie, a sixteen-year-old intellectual reading Carson McCullers, and you imagine she is at a historical turning point. Millie is probably going to go to college, move to the West Village, and have the kind of life that many women in the 1950s had a hard time imagining. You see the seeds of possibility for Millie. On the one hand,



there's Millie and all that she has to look forward to and the barrier she's going to break, and on the other hand, you see Mrs. Potts and Rosemary, who did not break down barriers. Their lives were really diminished by being in the shadow of men and not truly getting the opportunity to be independent.

**TS:** I know you want to bring *Picnic* to a contemporary audience in your unique fashion, but why do you think there is contemporary resonance?

**SG:** This is a very apt time to look back on things like women's rights and pursuing the American dream in hard economic times. I think it's a very interesting time to be directing a play that examines that era in American history. I think one of the reasons that Inge's plays haven't been revived is people think they're dated. There can be nostalgia for a time more innocent than ours that is read into the plays, but I don't see that at all. I think the play is a very accurate portrait of Middle America.

**TS:** I'm curious if you read *Front Porch*, the early draft of *Picnic*, or *Summer Brave*, Inge's later revision of the play?

**SG:** I took a look at *Front Porch* and *Summer Brave*. I didn't find them particularly useful to me. What was really useful was Inge's biography.

**TS:** The one that was written by Ralph Voss?

**SG:** Yes, that book was very useful. The insight into Inge's life was incredibly useful because I think *Picnic* is a very autobiographical play. Inge was a troubled man who led a difficult life, a very repressed life. He died a tragic death. I think that his plays have all of his life's repression and tragedy written all over them. The plays are very interesting to look at in light of the life he led and the life he didn't get to lead. In this process,

**INGE IS WRITING ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE A FANTASY OF A BETTER LIFE. THEY DREAM OF ROMANCE, FALLING IN LOVE, GETTING ON A TRAIN AND GOING FAR AWAY.**

I'm trying to look at the relevance of the play to contemporary audiences by also looking at Inge's life and what he was really trying to write about.

**TS: Do you think Millie is a stand-in for Inge?**

**SG:** I wouldn't put it as simply as that. There's a lot of sexual desire in the play that gets punished. The things Inge struggled with in his life inform the fantasy of getting to have romance and sexual desire fulfilled, and then the punishment that goes along with those desires. I think Inge identified with the idea of someone like Millie, a young writer who is "different." But as someone who's married to a playwright who writes about her own life, I never like to say there's a stand-in for the author in any play.

**TS: Usually the author puts a bit of themselves into every character.**

**SG:** I think there are certainly fragments of Inge in the whole play. This is an ensemble play. He always wrote small slices of life where the play is dependent on the characters' interaction with each other. Millie is not just a symbol or a stand-in. When you study all these characters, you get a portrait of what was on Inge's mind and what he was dealing with. Inge is reflected from so many different perspectives. I'm very interested in ensemble plays like this one; I've done many of them. I like plays that are character driven. I'm trying hard to depict one day in the life of a few people in this small town. It's a very small, very true and detailed portrait.

**TS: Inge is often compared, as was Lanford Wilson, to Chekhov. You've just directed *Uncle Vanya*, so it all seems connected in many ways.**

**SG:** I'm very interested in the Chekhovian sense of what can be explored about people in small circumstances. I think it's a thread in a lot of my work. I think it's Inge's greatest quality. I'm really excited by Inge's plays because they're very ambitious on the level of psychology. His characters are drawn with deep psychology; the more you dig into who those people are, the more true to life and

complicated you realize they are. The texture of these plays is very deep.

**TS: What were you looking for in casting this play?**

**SG:** I'm always looking for people who are game for being a part of the fabric of telling a story; actors who are interested in the other actors and collaboration. I put together a group of people who would work well together and who I think will bring something personal and passionate to the ensemble. I am working with people that I've worked with for a long time; Reed Birney and I have done many shows together. I'm also working with actors I've admired for years like Ellen Burstyn and Elizabeth Marvel and Mare Winningham. And I'm working with brilliant young actors who are game and passionate about the ensemble work I want to do.

**TS: Talk about the visual sense of the play. Based on the model I saw, it is not a conventional, bucolic rendering of the set.**

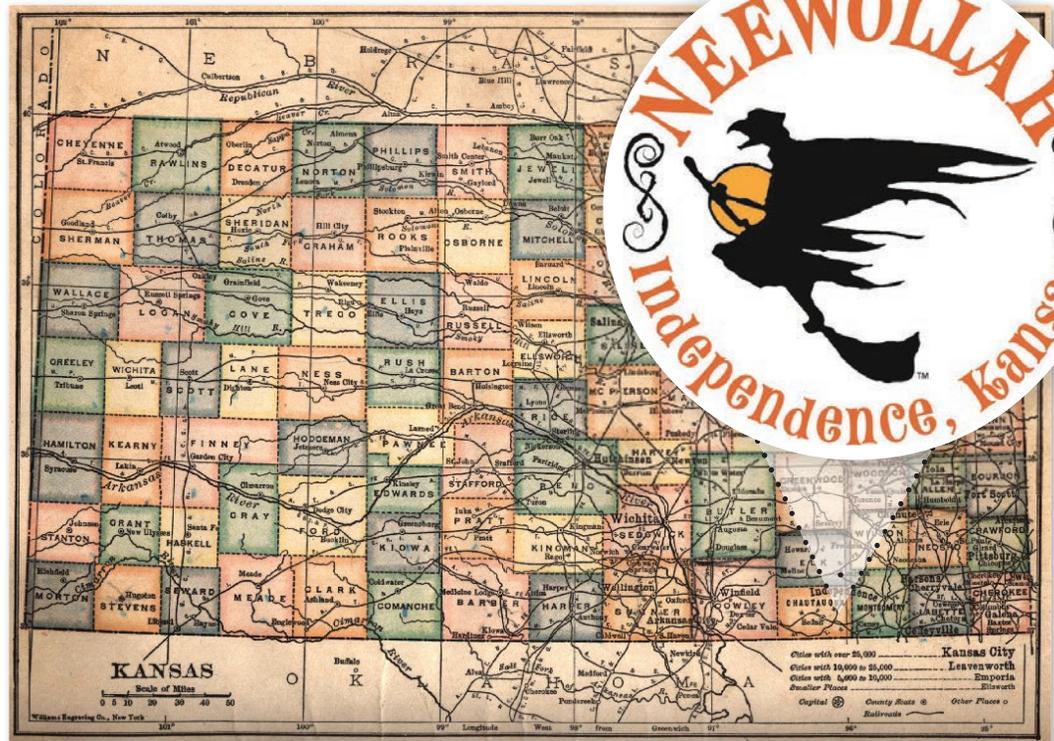
**SG:** I wanted it to be hyper-realistic. I researched what it was like in Independence, Kansas during the time period. I looked at how these people were living. The little yards between the houses were hard to keep up. If you're a single mother raising two daughters, how much time do you have to keep the grass green? It's also late summer and it's hot. The grass gets burnt up. I think the reason why it doesn't look like the typical lush landscape you might imagine is because I want to wipe away what's in your imagination and replace it with what it would be in reality. I wanted to take the rosy-colored lenses off our vision of the 1950s and treat it the same way I would treat a new play. If I was handed a play that read like *Picnic* but was written this year, what would the set be? I'd go to Independence, Kansas, do some research and approach it realistically. There is an element of the industrial agricultural complex of the Midwest that really interested me. I got interested in rust and metal. I was inspired by the idea of these old pickup trucks and farm equipment that wound up in the backs of people's yards. I was very struck with how there was a lot of oil in Kansas at this time. It wasn't about people living on farms with picturesque red barns. ■



*The cast of Picnic. Photo by Joan Marcus.*

# THE NEIGHBORS ARE ON THEIR PORCHES WATCHING: LIFE IN SMALL TOWN KANSAS

THE BACKYARD IN A SMALL TOWN. A ROADSIDE DINER. A VICTORIAN HOME IN OKLAHOMA. THE SETTINGS OF WILLIAM INGE'S PLAYS OFFER UNIQUE VIEWS INTO MIDWESTERN AMERICAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE 20TH CENTURY. GROWING UP IN KANSAS HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT ON INGE'S WORK, AND AMONG HIS WORKS, *PICNIC* MAY COME CLOSEST TO "HOME."



## KANSAS: A SHORT HISTORY

Located exactly in the center of the United States, surrounded by land and thousands of miles from any ocean coastline, the Kansas area was first inhabited by Native Americans of the Wichita and Pawnee tribes. In 1803, the land acquired by the U.S. from the Louisiana Purchase included the area that would become Kansas. Thomas Jefferson sent explorers Lewis and Clark to survey the territory and report on the geography and native population. Pioneers travelling westward on the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails passed through and sometimes settled in Kansas. American Indians from the East and the Great Lakes region were moved onto Kansas reservations by the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

In 1853, Kansas was declared an official U.S. territory, sparking debate and violence over whether it would become a slave state. It joined the Union in 1861 as a free state, infuriating the Confederate states and pushing the country towards Civil War. Following the war, Kansas's population grew with the arrival of veteran soldiers from both sides of the conflict and former slaves leaving the south. Immigrants from Germany and Russia came to farm, and despite difficult weather and frequent tornados, Kansas became known as "The Wheat State." With the expansion of railroads, Kansas was a crossroads for several important railroads, including the Santa Fe and the Union Pacific. Kansas also became a center of the beef industry, as cowboys from Texas brought cattle to Kansas, where they were loaded onto trains bound for the East and Chicago.

In the early 1930s, over 60% of Kansas's population worked on prosperous family farms, but in 1935 the Dust Bowl blew enormous clouds of dirt and dust across the land, with detrimental consequences. A long drought forced many families to leave the state and give up their land. By 1940, the population of Kansas had dropped by 80,000, and only 58 percent continued as farmers. In the 1950s (when *Picnic* was written), Kansas and the entire Midwest were undergoing significant social changes. Large numbers of rural households lacked electricity, indoor plumbing or telephone service. Many small farms never fully recovered from the Dust Bowl, and as farming continued to decline, people moved to towns and cities to take blue-collar jobs. On a brighter note, Midwestern states invested seriously in public education during these years. In 1950, Kansas was among the top four states nationally in percentage of adults having graduated high school. As the Midwest population grew better educated, the region was challenged to provide employment opportunities for these educated people. More young people left their homes for school and never came back. Someone like Millie\*—or William Inge—might choose not to return to Kansas after going to college.

## INDEPENDENCE

Inge's hometown of Independence—the setting for *Picnic*—is part of Montgomery County in the Southeast corner of Kansas, close to the Oklahoma border. The town, originally called “Haytown,” was first settled in 1869 by founders who did not want factories or blue-collar workers to settle there. Prior to the Great Depression, Independence was said to have had more millionaires per capita than any other city in the country. Oil magnate Harry Sinclair was raised in Independence. He brought jobs and money to the town in the early 1930s when he built his profitable Sinclair Oil pipeline. In addition to secretarial and white-collar jobs, the pipeline also employed blue-collar workers. Like many towns in Kansas, membership in churches and social societies, such as the Boy Scouts, Elks, or the American Legion, was encouraged for community participation. Independence supported cultural events, and touring shows on the way to Kansas City often stopped for a one-night show at the Civic Center.

Inge grew up in the 1920s, when Independence was a wealthy white-collar town, but by the time he left for college, he would have seen the early impact of the pipeline as well as the Depression. Ken Brown, a local historian and resident of Independence, argues that the blue/white-collar distinction could be a key to understanding class in the play. Flo's\* husband, a travelling salesman, would not be a respected member of the community, and when Flo sees Hal\* working in the backyard, she looks down on him, calling him a tramp. Hal is disappointed when Alan\* suggests he get a job on the pipeline, because this job will not earn him respect from the town. Alan's family would have lived in the wealthy part of Independence, in a large house near the exclusive Country Club, and Alan would be expected to meet his future wife in college. Having become the Queen of Neewollah would have raised Madge's\* status to a local celebrity, which may explain why the Independence society (and Alan's parents) would overlook the class difference between Madge and Alan. For Flo, the best chance for her family's security and advancement would be for Madge to marry Alan. The class tensions in the play may have been inspired by Inge's first-hand observations of people and relationships during his Kansas youth.

*Queen of Neewollah*

### 1950 CENSUS INFORMATION

#### INDEPENDENCE

**POPULATION** 11,335

**WIDOWS / DIVORCEES** 950

#### MONTGOMERY COUNTY

**WOMEN “KEEPING HOUSE”** 11,763

**WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE** 1,216

**WOMEN TEACHERS / EDUCATION** 334

**NEEWOLLAH** In the early 20th century, Halloween in Kansas was more about tricks than treats—often with destructive outcomes from dangerous pranks. The Independence community created the Neewollah celebration (Halloween spelled backwards) in 1919, in order to provide positive activities for its young people. The festivities included parades with decorated cars and carriages that carried the “Queens” and “Princesses” representing the community. Queen Neelah (or Queen of Neewollah) was elected by votes bought for a penny each. By the late 1950s, Neewollah became a three-day celebration, with pageants, contests, and of course, the parade. Neewollah has since grown into a 10-day celebration that is now the largest festival in Kansas, bringing over 50,000 visitors to Independence every year. In addition to the parade and pageants, there are cook-offs, a musical production, a race, and a pumpkin contest. Around 30 high school seniors usually compete in the annual Queen Neelah pageant.

*Learn more about the Neewollah festivities at <http://www.neewollah.com/>*

\* For a complete list of character descriptions, see the Callboard on p.2

# UNDERSTANDING INGE: AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER ELLENSTEIN

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod interviewed the Inge Center's Artistic Director, Peter Ellenstein, about the legacy of *Picnic* playwright William Inge.

**Ted Sod:** Please tell us about the mission of the Inge Center and your role there.

**Peter Ellenstein:** I am the Artistic Director of the Inge Center, which grew out of the William Inge Theatre Festival. The festival started in 1982 to honor the legacy of William Inge and to honor contemporary playwrights. Soon a few playwrights came out to this little town in Kansas every year and the town set up volunteer groups. It grew and grew. Now, almost every major American playwright has been to Kansas for the Inge Festival. I became Artistic Director in 2001. Partnering with Independence Community College, we expanded to become The William Inge Center for the Arts. The William Inge Festival Foundation purchased Inge's house. We began a playwrights' residency in 2002 and have hosted more than forty-five contemporary playwrights. They garner inspiration by living in Inge's house while working on their plays.

**TS:** What is your attraction to Inge? Sometimes it seems that he is forgotten.

**PE:** He was forgotten from the mid '60s on. He had four huge hits on Broadway right in a row. In the '50s, he was the most successful American playwright, more successful than Miller, Williams, or anybody at the time. He had *Come Back, Little Sheba*, *Picnic* (which won the Pulitzer), *Bus Stop*, and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. All were hits and all were turned into major motion pictures. His next three plays, *A Loss of Roses*, *Natural Affection*, and *Where's Daddy?*, were not well received. In 1961, Inge wrote the screenplay for *Splendor in the Grass*, which won the Academy Award, but he was viewed as passé by many. Almost every playwright goes through some sort of fallow period at some point in the middle of their career. Inge had a very understated way of observing human behavior; which worked up until the 60s. Albee, Pinter, and all of the experimental stuff was happening. Inge was such a phenomenal writer that I have no doubt he would have eventually adjusted to the new taste and created work that would have been popular. Several scholars have referred to him as the American Chekhov, which I don't think is an unwarranted comparison. He writes in everyday language, but roiling passions are beneath the surface. His plays, especially those first four, are meticulously constructed. I think *Picnic* may be the best written of them all. I think the thing that makes Inge unique among the great American playwrights is that he deals with empathy, compassion, and forgiveness and yet, he doesn't write villains. There are very few playwrights who write without a villain.

**TS:** I am curious about the genesis of *Picnic*. I read that Inge remembered as a young boy how his mother ran a boarding house and took in some school teachers. Am I correct?

**PE:** Yes, that's absolutely correct.

**TS:** Wasn't this play entitled *Front Porch* at one point?

**PE:** Josh Logan [who directed the original production] made him change it. Logan also made him change the ending. Inge never forgave Logan for that, even though it won a Pulitzer Prize.

## — SPOILER ALERT! —

**TS:** You mean Madge running off with Hal?

**PE:** In the original version, Madge stays. Basically, Inge is saying that this woman, whose reputation is now tarnished, will stay and suffer for the rest of her life because of this one indiscretion. Inge and Logan had knock-down, drag-out fights about whether or not Madge should leave. Inge would agree to writing a new ending,



bring in new pages with changes, but Madge would still stay. Inge really respected Logan's wife, who came in during one of their arguments at Logan's apartment. Inge stopped and said, "All right, I want your opinion, what do you think? Should Madge stay or go?" Logan's wife said, "If that girl doesn't go after him, I don't want to see the play." So, Inge finally gave in and to great success. It gives a little bit of hope; the relationship is probably going to be a mess, but at least there is someone pursuing their dream as opposed to just being fallen. It works perfectly, and the end of the play is just beautiful. Inge went back and rewrote *Picnic* as *Summer Brave*, which in my opinion is a much inferior play. He turns Hal into much more of a villain and jerk. He has Madge stay and be ruined.

**TS:** Was Inge happy with the '55 film version of *Picnic*? It seems like William Holden, who played Hal, was too old.

**PE:** Holden was way too old, there's no doubt about it. I think so many playwrights from that era wrote for the stage and lived off the movies. Only a handful of writers got movie versions that were really true to the plays. Movies gave them money; most playwrights couldn't live off their plays alone. Unless you had a major hit that ran forever, then you had to be doing something else to try and make a living. You were writing for radio, film, or TV. Inge was unhappy that the film version retained the same ending as the play. He had really wanted *Picnic* to be filmed in Independence, but they ended up filming in another small town in Kansas called Hutchinson. Inge was disappointed in that. He never forgave Josh Logan, even though Logan later went on to also direct the film version of *Bus Stop*, which was a mega hit and made him an enormous amount of money.

**TS:** How many biographies of Inge have been written? I am only familiar with the one written by Ralph Voss.

**PE:** There have been several. Ralph's is the most substantial. Dan Sullivan, the critic, not the director, began one when he was writing for the Los Angeles Times but couldn't complete

it to his satisfaction.

**TS:** How do you feel about the biography? Do you feel it is accurate?

**PE:** I'm not a historian and I have not read all the letters Inge wrote, so I'm very influenced by the biography. We commissioned a play about Inge, and there was some primary research done by a playwright, Marcia Cebulka, from Kansas, that

gave me additional insight into him. One of the things that struck me is that Inge was enormously understanding and forgiving of almost everybody else's flaws, foibles, and mistakes. The only person that he didn't forgive was himself. I think that in many cases his plays are an effort to exorcise the personal demons he lived with.

**TS: Are you speaking primarily of his homosexuality, which they say led to his alcoholism?**

**PE:** Several things: homosexuality, alcoholism, pills, depression. His older brother, ten years his senior and the star of the family, died when Inge was ten. Inge was left bearing the legacy and had enormous shoes to fill. He was a sensitive child. In fact, in *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, which is quite autobiographical, the character Sonny is very much like Inge. Sonny collects photos of movie stars; Inge had this enormous scrapbook of movie stars that he collected. He and his sister put on shows in their barn and church and charged either a penny or a pin to come and see it. He was really a good young actor until he got stage fright in his mid-twenties and turned to writing. It was really Tennessee Williams who turned him into a playwright. He met Tennessee when he was writing reviews in St. Louis, and they became friends. What really made him decide to be a playwright was seeing *The Glass Menagerie* in its out-of-town tryout in Chicago.

**TS: Williams was very comfortable with his sexuality.**

**PE:** They were completely different. Williams was comfortable and Inge was not. In fact, Inge kept going for cures. He went to the Menninger Institute in Kansas and also the Riggs Institute.

**TS: What do you think *Picnic* is about?**

**PE:** The play is very much about repression, dreams, and living vicariously through others. Not being actualized, in essence. This sexy guy, Hal Carter, shows up and everybody reacts in various ways: fear, jealousy, excitement. I can't even say Hal is the antagonist; he's the catalyst for all of this change. Because of Hal, everybody begins to examine their life, wants, and needs. For Madge, the obviously respectable and, in truth, practical choice is to go with Alan, who's a perfectly nice guy and clearly adores her. But she feels dumb compared to Alan. Alan, in some ways, is much better suited to her younger sister Millie, who's an intellectual. Madge thinks she wants the respectability, the money, and the prestige of being able to marry into the upper classes. Alan thinks he wants the beautiful girl who would not normally pay attention to him. They're all after different things.

**TS: Do you think Madge wins by running off with Hal?**

**PE:** I don't know if Madge wins. There's a chance. They've got this strong sexual connection that Madge has never felt with anyone. There's a chance they could potentially grow up. Whereas if she stays with Alan, she will know that she settled for something less than what she wanted and she wouldn't have escaped the small town. In small towns like this, the reputation that people develop in high school is, often, still with them for the rest of their lives.

**TS: So I take it it's a very homogenous population?**

**PE:** Fairly. The great thing about it is there's by far more volunteerism and sense of community here than I've experienced anywhere else I've ever been. If you're putting a project together, people throw in. If there's a house flood, they'll be there. They'll cook you meals and bring you food. There are some really wonderful qualities, but there's definitely parochialism as well. Strangely enough, there are a lot of people who leave and come back. I think that growing up in a town like this is a very pleasant experience until you get bored when you're older. There's a sweetness to it, a familiarity, in the best sense of the word. Here, routines are very comforting. Each year, Neewollah happens; they elect a Queen Neelah every year and the town goes crazy.

**TS: That's in the movie version.**

**PE:** Madge is crowned queen in the movie. In fact, Neewollah started in the early part of the 20th century to keep kids from doing pranks. It's Halloween spelled backwards. They stopped it during World War II. After the movie of *Picnic* came out, they started it up again in '58. It's been going on continually since then. There has to be over a thousand volunteers that do all of the different events: the chili cook off, three different parades, the queen's pageant. There's also a community theatre production produced in the 1600-seat theatre that practically sells out. It's a wild experience. And it's a homecoming. People who grew up, lived or spent part of their life here come back. Families may not come back at the holidays but they come back for Neewollah. ■

## WILLIAM INGE TIMELINE

<b>MAY 3, 1912</b>	William Motter Inge born in Independence, Kansas.
<b>1930</b>	Inge attends University of Kansas (at age 17) to get his B.A in Speech and Drama.
<b>1937</b>	Inge teaches high school English and Drama in Columbus, Kansas.
<b>1938</b>	Completes M.A. at Peabody Teacher's College in Nashville
<b>1943</b>	Inge moves to St. Louis and works as an entertainment critic for the "Star-Times."
<b>1944</b>	Inge sees Tennessee Williams's <i>The Glass Menagerie</i> , which inspires him to write plays.
<b>1947</b>	Inge's first play, <i>Farther Off From Heaven</i> , is produced.
<b>1950</b>	<i>Come Back, Little Sheba</i> premieres on Broadway at the Booth Theatre.
<b>1953</b>	<i>Picnic</i> premieres on Broadway at the Music Box Theatre—wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama (477 performances).
<b>1955</b>	<i>Bus Stop</i> premieres on Broadway at the Music Box Theatre and runs for 478 performances.
<b>1957</b>	<i>The Dark at the Top of the Stairs</i> premieres on Broadway at the Music Box Theatre and runs for 468 performances.
<b>1959</b>	<i>A Loss of Roses</i> plays 25 performances at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre.
<b>1961</b>	<i>Splendor in the Grass</i> wins an Academy Award.
<b>1963</b>	<i>Natural Affection</i> shuts at the Booth Theatre after only 36 performances.
<b>1963</b>	Inge, deeply troubled by receiving poor reviews on Broadway, moves to California.
<b>1966</b>	Inge's final Broadway show, <i>Where's Daddy?</i> , has 22 performances at the Billy Rose Theatre (now the Nederlander Theatre).
<b>1971</b>	<i>My Son Is a Splendid Driver</i> is published. This book is an autobiographical story about Inge's childhood and was one of his last works.
<b>JUNE 10, 1973</b>	After a lifelong battle with depression and substance abuse, Inge commits suicide at age 60 while living with his sister in Hollywood.
<b>1982</b>	The William Inge Center for the Arts is founded at Independence Community College in Inge's hometown. His legacy lives on.

# A PRETTY GIRL DOESN'T HAVE LONG: WOMEN IN THE 1950S

**IN THE WORLD OF INDEPENDENCE, KANSAS IN THE EARLY 1950s, THERE IS ONE ACCEPTABLE GOAL FOR WOMEN: TO BECOME A WIFE AND MOTHER. THE EDUCATIONAL, RELIGIOUS, AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES IN THE TOWN AND THE NATION ALL REINFORCED THIS NARROW IDEA OF SUCCESSFUL WOMANHOOD.**



Caucasian American women of the 1950s are often summed up—and dismissed—by referencing the decade’s most famous female television character: June Cleaver. June Cleaver was the idealized suburban housewife and mother on “Leave it to Beaver.” She wore elegant dresses and accessories, even while doing housework. Her hair and make-up were always perfect. She enjoyed “feminine” activities, including baking for her family, sewing, and entertaining. She never worked outside the home and relied entirely on her husband’s income.

“June Cleaver” represents the whitewashed idea of 1950s womanhood, and the women of *Picnic* are all her metaphorical sisters, shaped by the same cultural forces and social expectations. But unlike June, several of the women in *Picnic*—Madge, Millie, Flo, and Rosemary\*—find a way to push against the limitations placed on them.

## WOMEN’S “NATURAL ROLE”

The women of Independence, Kansas have long been homemakers, housewives, and caretakers of children. In the first half of the twentieth century, many Kansas women were farm wives, working alongside their husbands to maintain the family business. Even those who lived in towns like Independence spent their days busily preparing food, gardening, and sewing the family’s clothes. The work women did was vital to success and survival.

The importance of women’s work in the domestic sphere was celebrated and used to promote traditional gender roles. The forty churches in Independence, mostly Protestant, were led by male pastors and governed by all-male vestries, elders, and committees. Preachers referred to passages in the bible like Ephesians 5, which commands women to submit to and obey their husbands. Women’s “natural role” was in the home, raising children.

Audiences at Roundabout’s production of *Picnic* will see the characters engage in their daily tasks in real time. They have few modern conveniences. Here’s a glimpse into the time it takes to perform some everyday chores.

<b>HEMMING A SIMPLE DRESS BY HAND</b>	<b>45 minutes</b>
<b>SHAVING ICE FROM A BLOCK</b>	<b>15 minutes</b>
<b>MAKING DEVEILED EGGS FROM SCRATCH</b>	<b>45 minutes</b>
<b>PEELING POTATOES</b>	<b>30-40 seconds/ potato</b>

## THE AVERAGE WOMAN IN THE 1950s

 <p>Married at age 20</p>	 <p>Had four children</p>	 <p>34% worked outside the home (full or part -time)</p>	 <p>2.6 out of every 1,000 marriages ended in divorce</p>	 <p>5.2% had college degrees</p>
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## WOMEN & WORK

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**“I’VE FORMED MY WAYS TOO. BUT THEY CAN BE CHANGED. THEY GOTTA BE CHANGED. IT’S NO GOOD LIVIN’ LIKE THIS, IN RENTED ROOMS, MEETIN’ A BUNCH OF OLD MAIDS FOR SUPPER EVERY NIGHT, THEN COMIN’ BACK HOME ALONE.”**

*Rosemary*

Women’s working outside the home was actively discouraged by federal and state policies, particularly in the years immediately after WWII.

In addition to overt discrimination, women were pushed into lower-paying, lower-status jobs, like secretaries, stenographers, or “dime store” clerks. In the 1950s, only 6% of managers at any level were women.

### UNTIL 1964

- It was legal to pay a woman less than a man doing the same job, just because of her gender
- It was legal to specify gender (and race) desired in help wanted ads
- It was legal to fire a woman because she married, or to specify that only single women could hold a particular job

School teachers like Rosemary, most of whom were women, worked under extremely strict rules. She must remain single in order to keep her job. If she marries, she must “give immediate notice in writing to the Superintendent of Schools.” She can’t live alone, so she takes a room in Flo’s boarding house. Her image in the community must be maintained: she can’t be seen drinking or smoking, and some types of dancing and socializing are off-limits.

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## WOMEN & EDUCATION

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**“I’M OLD ENOUGH ALREADY. MADGE CAN STAY IN THIS JERKWATER TOWN AND MARRY SOME ORNERY GUY AND RAISE A LOT OF DIRTY KIDS. WHEN I GRADUATE FROM COLLEGE I’M GOING TO NEW YORK, AND WRITE NOVELS THAT’LL SHOCK PEOPLE RIGHT OUT OF THEIR SENSES.”**

*Millie*

There were virtually no “professional” women in Independence in the early 1950s: no doctors, dentists, college professors, lawyers, or hundreds of other professions. Only 5.2% of American women had a college degree in 1950. At the time, colleges placed quotas on the number of women they admitted, rationalizing that returned soldiers needed college educations to support their families. Women who did attend college were encouraged to study subjects considered appropriate, like psychology or nursing, and barred from certain courses.

Girls were steered away from hard academic subjects in school as well. Rosemary’s colleague teaches “feminine hygiene,” which presumably taught future wives and mothers about health and home economics.

Millie’s academic achievements and college plans are extraordinary for a woman in her time and place. In encouraging her daughter’s intellectual pursuits, Flo is also rebelling against convention.

If women’s “natural role” was in the home, men’s role, then, was to provide for and protect the family. Widows and divorcees like Flo and Helen\* suffered high rates of poverty. Some, like Flo, made ends meet by renting rooms in their homes.

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## THE IDEAL WOMAN

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**“A PRETTY GIRL DOESN’T HAVE LONG—JUST A FEW YEARS. THEN SHE’S THE EQUAL OF KINGS AND SHE CAN WALK OUT OF A SHANTY LIKE THIS AND LIVE IN A PALACE WITH A DOTING HUSBAND WHO’LL SPEND HIS LIFE MAKING HER HAPPY.”**

**“AND NEXT SUMMER YOU’LL BE NINETEEN, AND THEN TWENTY, AND THEN TWENTY-ONE, AND THEN THE YEARS’LL START GOING BY SO FAST YOU’LL LOSE COUNT OF THEM. FIRST THING YOU KNOW, YOU’LL BE FORTY, STILL SELLING CANDY AT THE DIME STORE.”**

*Flo to Madge*

During the 1940s and 1950s mass media was used to spread ideas, first as part of WWII victory campaigns and later as part of the Cold War and as advertising for the hundreds of new products being developed. For the first time, women across the country were exposed to advertisers’ vision of an “ideal woman.”

Of all the women in *Picnic*, Madge—a small-town beauty queen—is the closest to the “June Cleaver” ideal. She’s unquestionably feminine and is dating a man with money and social status. Her ambitions seem to line up with the expectations placed on her: a good marriage, children, a beautiful home.

\* For a complete list of character descriptions, see the Callboard on p.2

# INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR SEBASTIAN STAN

Before starting rehearsals for *Picnic*, Sebastian Stan spoke with Education Dramaturg Ted Sod about preparing to play Hal Carter.

**Ted Sod:** I'm curious why you chose this role in this particular play.

**Sebastian Stan:** I have been looking for an opportunity to come back to the theatre. It's been about five years or so. I really wanted to work with Sam Gold. And then, of course, this is a great play. It's a classic. I wanted the opportunity to work with a great director on a great piece of writing. I'm also a complete fanatic about the time period and what was going on in the 1950s.

**TS:** Can you talk about what kind of preparation you have to do to play a character like Hal Carter?

**SS:** Every process is different for me, a new discovery. I don't necessarily have one way of approaching the work. But I do always consider the specifics of the script. With the Internet, there's fortunately a lot of material that you can find on William Inge and his intentions. I've been looking at information about the shifting thoughts and feelings of the time period: everything from Elvis Presley to Jack Kerouac. There's a lot of research one can do for Hal Carter. That research mixes with your instincts. It's very important to acknowledge the specific things that jump out at you when first reading a script. I have also been listening to the 1940s satellite radio station. Music was shaping the way that people were feeling at that time. Music is very helpful to me, so I find myself walking down New York streets, listening to jazz and rock 'n roll. I can already feel a perspective change which may apply to the character. That's the fun of it: being a bit of an explorer and detective.

**TS:** Do you sense what the challenges of this role are by having read the text?

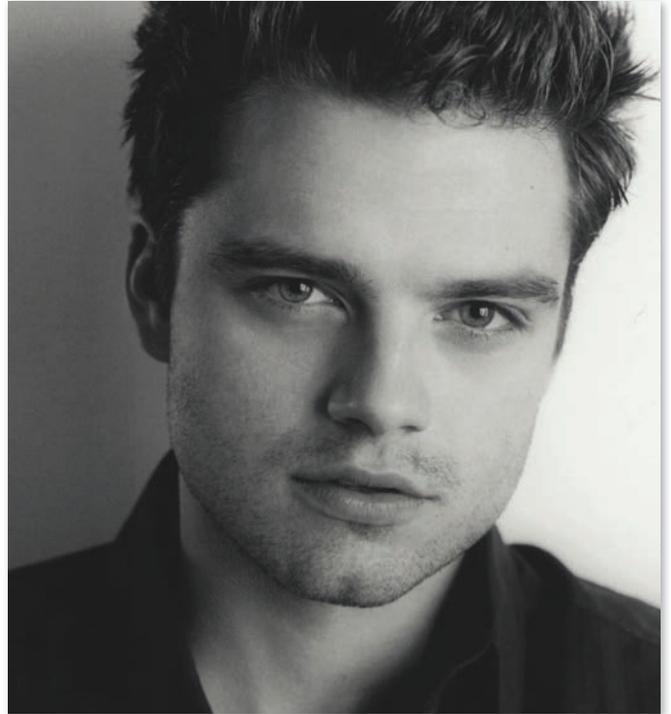
**SS:** Yes and no. It's still very early. There's always a challenge in making dated material relatable, but the themes of restraint and the role of women are very appropriate for today's audiences. There are universal themes in this play about being classified, having to live your life a certain way and how one follows through with their real feelings. Another challenge is to honor what William Inge wrote, his language, and to make sure it is translated to a modern audience.

**TS:** Do you feel that the character of Hal is relevant to you and the way you think? Or are you quite different from him?

**SS:** There are similarities with every character that one plays. I think there are affinities, which is one of the reasons you gravitate to certain kinds of roles. There are also differences and that's where you really have to honor what's in the script. A character essentially is not you. There's an opportunity to be someone else for a while. That's part of the fun. I grew up with such an admiration for the acting heroes of the 1950s: Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Paul Newman, to name a few. Paul Newman was actually in the original production of this play.

**TS:** Do you plan to read any biographical material on Inge?

**SS:** I always love reading biographies and learning the way things came to be. It's especially interesting to learn the path of some of these goliaths of the movie industry. Essentially, Hal is a hero of the times. I think William Inge knew that. Growing up in a small town himself, Inge was very much aware of the women's roles. I don't think there was a real Hal Carter, but I think the character of Hal is the spirit of the future. It's tragic at the same time because he reminds me so much of Neil Cassady, who was an extraordinary muse for the beat generation and for Kerouac. He brought out the honest truth in the people he affected with his magnetism and charisma, but failed to understand the gift he had. He was trying to be a poet and writer, but what he really thrived on was inspiring people around him to confront how they felt about the times they were living through.



**TS:** I know it will change for you over time, but what do you think the play is about?

**SS:** To me, the play is about a shift that was happening at the time in America. It seemed like there was a boiling point. The bread-and-butter, "All-American" mentality was coming to an end. Everything was too quiet, everyone in their houses with their little lawns and fences. People were essentially bored. They were tired of the housewife mentality. The root of the play is how some of the characters gain freedom by learning how to feel and pursue dreams. I also think that generation was sexually restless, which had tremendous influence in the 1960s.

**TS:** It does feel like many of these characters are battling convention.

**SS:** It's a matter of "to thine own self be true"—some of the characters are trying not live in a way that has been predetermined for them.

**TS:** What do you make of this relationship with Hal and Madge? Is it just sexual attraction or are they soul mates?

**SS:** Their sexual attraction is a catalyst for a lot more that's at stake. I think their relationship is the heart of the play. I might be biased because I'm an old-fashioned romantic, so I tend to think in terms of "all or nothing." Both of the characters ignite such a primal reaction in one another that ultimately nothing else is important. Madge's innocence and inexperience mixes with her tremendous urge to be heard. Hal is this restless soul

who's been chasing dreams in Texas, pursuing acting in Hollywood, aimlessly boozing and gambling. Then he meets this girl who ultimately makes him recognize that who he is, the way he is, is enough. He should just embrace that instead of running away from it. Something very beautiful happens at the end of the play: an acceptance of one's self. That's a real discovery of self-identity.

**I DON'T THINK  
THERE WAS A  
REAL HAL CARTER,  
BUT I THINK THE  
CHARACTER OF HAL  
IS THE SPIRIT OF  
THE FUTURE.**

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

**SS:** Every director is very different so there's always an adjustment period at the start of a process. Above everything else, honesty is most important. I appreciate a no-fear approach, the idea that we could both explore something and it may not be the right choice or what we end up with. It takes patience and courage to not leave any idea unexplored in the process.

**TS: Can you talk about your training?**

**SS:** I was extremely lucky to have great teachers while growing up. I went to the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University. It is basically an extension of the Neighborhood Playhouse, where the Meisner technique was taught. I had two great teachers there by the names of Barbara Marchart and Kevin Kittle. They taught me the Meisner technique, which helped to shape my approach to theatre. There's one more teacher that I had after I left school that has been a real mentor: Larry Moss. Everyone who wants to act should take classes with this man; he's changing lives. He's phenomenal. Read his book, *The Intent to Live!* I should also mention that I was fortunate enough to work with several actors who have been equally influential.

**TS: You've worked with Ellen Burstyn before.**

**SS:** Yes, I'm so lucky. We worked together this past summer. I am amazed by her. I couldn't possibly be any more grateful that we're going to continue to work together. We were still shooting "Political Animals" together when I auditioned for *Picnic*, so I asked her advice. About a week later, she said "I'm supposed to meet with Sam Gold about that play." She was my first call when I found out I had the role.

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

**SS:** I feel it's really important to follow your instincts. Learn from the great actors you admire. Learn how they got there, read about them, and understand how they struggled. Don't think you need to play a part a certain way just because somebody else did it with success. When you get up there, trust your instincts and do what you feel is right despite what anyone else says. You're not always going to hit the bulls-eye on the target, but eventually you will. I feel there's a tremendous pressure with young actors to find instant results. It's important to remember to have a good time and stay in the moment. Don't get ahead of yourself. It really is all about the present. ■

## THE OUTSIDER: CHANGING THE TUNE

Known for his jazz-tinged, lyrical dialogue and deeply personal subject matter, Tennessee Williams explored new theatrical territory with *The Glass Menagerie*. The play finds each member of the Wingfield family trapped in a self-destructive, carefully-crafted personal illusion. It takes the Gentleman Caller, the "outsider," to shatter their fantasies and change their tune. Tennessee Williams had enormous influence over William Inge's career. That influence manifests itself in *Picnic* by the appearance of the outsider character of Hal Carter. Earlier this season, Roundabout's production of *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet* introduced audiences to such a character within a modern context. In that play, overweight high school student Anna's mental and emotional health rapidly deteriorates, but her parents are oblivious. It takes her uncle Terry's outsider's perspective to instigate change in their lives. Over half a century before Terry tore through the atmosphere of Nick Payne's drama, Hal Carter tore off his shirt in a small Kansas town to similar effect.

In *Picnic*, Hal enters and immediately wakes up the sleepy town of Independence, Kansas. The residents of this early 1950s Midwestern locale find themselves nestled into certain social roles, seemingly comfortable in their particular routines, and (in the case of some) facing stalemates in their relationships. What tension and discomfort exist in this immobile state surfaces when Hal, the outsider, arrives to work as a day laborer for Mrs. Potts, a pleasant older woman who (according to other characters) is prone to hiring "riff-raff." Hal certainly seems to fit the bill, ruffling the feathers of Mrs. Potts' female neighbors. Having failed to make a career for himself in Hollywood and consequently roaming the country, Hal lives a life reminiscent of the Beat Generation iconoclasts of his era. This makes him an especially serious threat to the comparatively tame small-town status quo.

The Beat writers scratched the polished veneer of stereotypical 1940s and 1950s American life. In 1946 Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady, Alan Ginsberg, and others went on to lay a foundation for the movement by challenging the social mores of their time and writing about their adventures—most notably in Kerouac's *On The Road*. In an age when the general population accepted Reefer Madness as a cautionary tale, the Beats openly smoked marijuana. While sexuality was a topic most refused to discuss, the Beat writers were having numerous casual affairs (and children). They adopted a new, jazz-inspired writing style. Like the Beat Generation's influence on America's cultural landscape, Hal similarly acts as a jazz riff amid a classical composition; the notes are forever rearranged to create a song that is entirely new.



Sebastian Stan and Madeleine Martin. Photo by Joan Marcus.

# INTERVIEW WITH LIGHTING DESIGNER JANE COX

Lighting Designer Jane Cox shared some of her insight and experience with Education Dramaturg Ted Sod.

**Ted Sod:** Tell me a little about yourself.

**Jane Cox:** I was brought up in Dublin, Ireland. I didn't see much theatre growing up, but I was interested in music, dancing, reading, painting—anything creative really—and most of all, in organizing imaginary games for my friends with complicated stories and characters. My parents took me to see the film of Ingmar Bergman's *Magic Flute* when I was six years old, and it changed my perception of the world. It made me think I wanted to be a musician because of the magical flute and the glorious music. I loved music because it expressed things I was experiencing emotionally and energetically that I didn't see expressed in any other way in the world I was living in, but I was always uncomfortable and nervous on stage. I watched the film of *Magic Flute* again a couple of years ago, and I realized that it is actually a movie for designers—most of the important information that isn't told musically is told through the visuals. The film starts with a little girl watching the stage from the audience—I realized that it is also a film about audiences. A lighting designer is the first audience member in the rehearsal room, and then we try and get the audience to experience the performance in the same way that we do!

I fell into lighting when I was about nineteen, when I was asked to run the light board for a production of *Oh What A Lovely War* in college, where I was studying music. I fell in love with it. I realized immediately that lighting is the same medium as music, only visual. I hope it doesn't sound too pretentious to say that, to me, lighting has always had melody, harmony, color, rhythm. It is a totally visceral medium. You can't express intellectual ideas with light or music. You need words or images for that. Light is more like energy, and we connect to light in a physical way. I have always been interested in how we communicate with each other without words and images, and lighting is one of those ways.

**TS:** *Picnic* takes place mostly outdoors. What challenges does that present to you?

**JC:** The useful thing about the outdoor setting for me is that the scenes in *Picnic* take place at very particular times of day, in a world that has a very strong routine. Inge is very specific about time of day. The times of day have very particular meanings for the characters. Hal's relationship to night time is very different from Madge's, for example. Telling the story outside allows us to really use the energy of those times of day through lighting without having to use an abstract vocabulary. So the energy of morning, sunset, night and dawn as it reaches the porches and garden can help us to express the play. How light reaches an outdoor space explains a lot about the world the characters are in—are they living in a confined outdoor space or an open space? Are they closed in by other buildings, are there trees? All these details help us to understand how the characters feel, and the outdoor location gives us lots of tools to do that.

**TS:** What kind of research did you do in order to design *Picnic*?

**JC:** Lighting is a totally abstract medium, really. The sun and the moon don't do anything much different now than they did two thousand years ago. So I don't do much lighting specific research, except for technical things like the sodium vapor streetlight we have on the wall, which is specific to the period. A big part of how I prepare to light the show is by really studying and understanding the scenery. The kind of lighting that will work



in any production is going to be dictated by the space. I need to understand the surfaces, colors, geometries of the space and how they relate to a human being. I need to take what I have learned about light and people and emotion, and relate that to this particular space and what these particular people are wearing. It's hard to talk about, because it doesn't translate into English very well, like music. Light can enter a space aggressively or gently, it can catch a person's face brutally or softly, but it always relates to the particular space and clothes the people are in. The other critical part of my prep work is to be in rehearsal and experience the energy of the actors. One big job of lighting is to help the actors harness the imagination of the audience. When I do my job well, I often feel that the lighting breathes with the performers, and it should—unless the light is intended to create an atmosphere that feels like it is stopping the characters from breathing.

**TS:** What do you think Inge's play is about?

**JC:** I have come to think that *Picnic* is about choices, and it is about sexuality. About how life choices relate to sexuality, and about how people's lives are confused or stifled by not understanding themselves or not expressing themselves. In *Picnic*, this is expressed through a group of female characters who are almost all trapped by their inability to picture themselves in a different life, and whose destinies are dictated by their sexual choices. I imagine that Inge had a particular empathy for how women's sexual desires and choices defined them since, as a closeted gay man, his own sexual choices dictated his life in the time period he lived in.

**TS:** What do you look for from the director before you start designing?

**JC:** Every relationship with a director is different. My job is to help the director create their event. In order to do that, I need to understand how they see or experience the play, and I need to figure out how to communicate with that particular director in a useful way for them. Some directors are able to be very articulate about their intellectual or emotional experience of the play (Sam is one of those people). Other directors express themselves primarily

through their collaboration with the set and costume designers. Other directors don't really express much about the play until they are in a room with actors. I don't usually like to talk about light specifically with a director until quite late in the process. It is more important that I understand how they see the play, and

**YOU CAN'T EXPRESS INTELLECTUAL IDEAS WITH LIGHT OR MUSIC. YOU NEED WORDS OR IMAGES FOR THAT. LIGHT IS MORE LIKE ENERGY, AND WE CONNECT TO LIGHT IN A PHYSICAL WAY.**

that they trust me. I need time to work—sketch with light, erase it, sketch again once we are in the theatre together with the light and the actors. And if the director doesn't trust me, it is hard to get good work done. The bulk of my work happens in the theatre, where I am making extremely fast decisions that affect everyone else in a very short space of time, well after everyone else has had a long process that they have invested a lot of time and energy in. I need to know everyone else's work well enough to be able to do my job fast and well.

**TS: How do you collaborate with the rest of the design team?**

**JC:** I collaborate with the other designers mostly through their physical work. I spend a lot of time with the set, ideally the model, but if not, photos of the model and the scenic drawings. I try to really understand what the set is trying to do—what is the essence of the space the play is set in. I stare at it for hours and I wander around with it in my head and wonder why I am not getting anything done. But this time is critical—the energetic essence of a space is how light hits it. I need to wonder exactly what shade of orange would make that wall glow in the exactly right gritty way. I need to wonder what angle of light entering the space produces the most interesting tension with the angles of the walls. And then, I work with the set designer to make sure that their space actually physically allows me to do what it seems to be asking me to do!

I relate to clothing mostly through color. I ask myself who needs to look the most magical in a scene, who needs to look the most depressing? By changing the color of the light you can change which person looks incredible or present on

stage. In a larger way, there is a color palette being created between the set, clothes and the lights that has an energetic quality to it. It is my job to bring the three things together in an energetically appropriate way.

Light relates to sound in the most direct way. The rhythm of the show lies in the hands of the sound and lighting as well as the cast. Does the show move fast and aggressively? Does it slide smoothly from one time into the next? The sound designer and I make those decisions with the guidance of the director.

**TS: Any advice for a young person who wants to become a lighting designer?**

**JC:** I read an article recently that argued that most people find their passion through actually doing work, rather than coming into this world with a passion and chasing after a dream. That has been true for me. Not many of us know exactly what we want to do at twenty. I have always been interested in the imagination and how we communicate in non-literal ways, and I have always been interested in being creative, especially in a group setting; but it has taken me many, many years to just begin to understand what is really amazing about light. The longer I do this, the more interesting it seems to me, and the more passionate I am about light. I love that I have found work that I grow to love more and more the longer I do it. I would hope that for any young person—that your work can deepen and grow as you do. ■



*The set of Picnic. Photo by Joan Marcus.*

# PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR  
EDUCATORS

## ACTIVITY #1: HOW DO WE ENVISION BREAKING THROUGH THE SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS PLACED ON US?

The characters in *Picnic* all face—and defy—certain social expectations. Women like Madge and Millie, for example, are expected to marry and become stay-at-home mothers.

**Materials:** open space, pencils, paper

- WRITE** Ask students to brainstorm about the expectations placed upon them. Here are some questions to get started. What do your peers expect from you? Do you feel you have an image or reputation you work to uphold socially? What does your family expect you to pursue for a career? Do you feel anyone underestimates what you can accomplish?
- ACTIVATE** Working in small groups, students create two tableaux. The first shows how they are now, living with the expectations placed upon them. The second shows their aspirations, the person they will become after they have broken through expectations. Once students have created and shared both tableaux, ask them to create a tableau showing how they got from the first tableau to the second. Share with the class.
- REFLECT** What do we see in the middle tableau? What choices did the character make in order to defy expectations? What was difficult about figuring out the moment in between? How do we get to where we want to go in life?

## ACTIVITY #2: HOW DO ACTORS EXPLORE THE CHARACTER ARCHETYPES OF *PICNIC*?

Although *Picnic* is set in Kansas in the 1950s, the play features character archetypes you may recognize from popular culture—maybe your own life.

- ACTIVATE** Improvise a “Dating Game” Show to explore the character archetypes of the play.
- Choose a Bachelorette and 3 Bachelors to compete for the date. Each Bachelor is assigned one archetype: 1) A Rebellious Bad Boy, 2) A Rich Boy, and 3) A Dull Businessman.
  - Bachelorette can ask any of the questions below, or think of her own. Each Bachelor improvises his answer “in character”—based on the archetype.
  - After a few questions, Bachelorette chooses one Bachelor for a date.
  - Now, choose one Bachelor to ask questions and 3 Bachelorettes to compete. Their character archetypes are 1) A Pretty & Popular Girl, 2) A Brainy Girl, 3) A Bossy School Teacher

Question ideas:

- 1) Where would you take me on our first date and what would we do?
- 2) If we were going on a picnic, what’s the most important thing you would bring?
- 3) Tell me how you see our future together?

- WRITE** Ask students to choose one of the 6 character archetypes from the game and write a monologue in which this character tells how she or he has been misunderstood because of their type and how s/he perceives her/himself.
- REFLECT** Do you recognize any of these character stereotypes from TV, movies, or your own life? How does stereotyping affect us? How do we judge or make assumptions about people based on their type?

# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR  
EDUCATORS

— SPOILER ALERT! —

## ACTIVITY #1: HOW DO WE IMAGINE AND CREATE OUR OWN ENDINGS FOR *PICNIC*?

You've seen how, in the course of one day, many of the characters in the play make important choices: Madge chooses to follow Hal to Tulsa. Millie declares she will move to New York City when she gets older. And Alan leaves Madge and returns to college.

- WRITE** Pick one of these four characters (you could also choose any other character who interests you) and imagine what will happen 5 years after the play ends. Who are they living with? Where are they living? What are they doing? How do they like their life? Why did their life turn out this way?
- ACTIVATE** Create an artistic work that imagines this character in 5 years. This work could be a poem, a song, a visual artwork, a comic strip, a monologue, or dialogue.
- REFLECT** How does your work show us this character's future? Do you think this character made a good choice at the end of the play? How would you like to imagine your own life to be 5 years from now?

## ACTIVITY #2: HOW DOES EXPLORING ALTERNATE ENDINGS TO A PLAY PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO A CHARACTER'S PERSPECTIVE?

William Inge originally wanted Madge to stay in Independence, Kansas with her mother and sister. He altered the ending of the play at the behest of Joshua Logan, the play's first Broadway director. How would the original ending have influenced how you understood the play?

- WRITE** Brainstorm a list of major life events that require decision-making. "Getting Married" is a good example.
- ACTIVATE** Set up an improvisation. One character is making a choice around a major life event. The other character strongly disagrees with the first character's choice and attempts to talk him or her out of it. Play the scene twice, letting each character win the argument.
- REFLECT** How did changing the ending change your understanding of the characters? How did you feel after you heard both points of view? What do you think Madge should have done at the end of the play? What will happen to Madge if it doesn't work out with Hal? How do you think her leaving affected Flo and Millie?

# GLOSSARY

## LANGUAGE OF THE TIME AND PLACE

<b>BRIDGE</b>	A card game for four players in two partnerships. <i>The teachers have a standing date to play bridge.</i>
<b>CORKER</b>	An idiom to mean “remarkable.” <i>Hal refers to his father as a corker.</i>
<b>DIME STORE</b>	Also called a five-and-ten; a retail store that carries inexpensive merchandise and household goods. <i>Madge works at the dime store.</i>
<b>FILLING STATION</b>	Gas station. <i>Hal’s father ran a filling station.</i>
<b>HOT ROD</b>	A car that has been modified for high speed and fast acceleration. <i>Madge says she is not the type of girl that rides in hot rods with the boys in town.</i>
<b>ICEBOX</b>	Refrigerator. <i>Hal eats a piece of cherry pie from Mrs. Potts’s icebox.</i>
<b>IN A PIG’S EYE</b>	An idiom meaning that there is no chance something is true. <i>Alan accuses Hal of making up a wild story to explain why he can’t pay back what he owes.</i>
<b>LADY BALTIMORE CAKE</b>	A southern specialty: white cake topped with a frosting filled with nuts and dried fruits. <i>Mrs. Potts bakes a Lady Baltimore cake for Hal.</i>
<b>PAUPER’S ROW</b>	Graves in a cemetery for very poor people unable to pay for a “proper” grave. <i>Hal’s father was buried in Pauper’s Row because his mother would not pay for his grave.</i>
<b>PIPELINE</b>	A system for delivering oil. Large construction project. <i>Mrs. Potts suggests Hal look into a job with the pipeline.</i>
<b>QUICK AS YOU CAN SAY JACK ROBINSON</b>	An expression originating in the 1700s about someone whose visits are so short there isn’t time to announce their arrival before they depart. <i>Rosemary claims that if she is seen taking a drink she’ll lose her job quick as you can say Jack Robinson.</i>
<b>SHALIMAR</b>	Perfume <i>Madge asks to borrow some of Rosemary’s Shalimar for the picnic.</i>
<b>SHORTHAND</b>	A style of rapid note-taking used by secretaries and stenographers at the time and used by court reporters today. Words are transcribed as symbols and abbreviations, not unlike modern texting. <i>Rosemary teaches shorthand at school. Madge had a hard time in the course.</i>
<b>STORK CLUB</b>	A high profile NYC nightclub that operated from 1929 to 1965. <i>Irma boasts about attending the Stork Club when she studied in NYC.</i>
<b>TRAMP</b>	A wanderer without established residence or visible means of support. <i>Hal is constantly called a tramp by Flo.</i>

## VOCABULARY

<b>ARISTOCRATIC</b>	Socially exclusive or snobbish; often wealthy. <i>Hal explains that his father certainly wasn’t an aristocratic millionaire.</i>
<b>ESPIONAGE</b>	Spying. <i>Madge dreams of being whisked away from Kansas to work in Washington’s Espionage Department.</i>
<b>ORNERY</b>	Having an irritable disposition. <i>Millie calls Bomber an ornery bastard when chasing him off the lawn.</i>
<b>OUTBOARD MOTOR</b>	A self-contained motor for propelling boats. <i>Alan jokingly asks Hal, “How’s the old outboard motor?” when taunting him.</i>
<b>PAVILION</b>	A large, outdoor tent. <i>Flo says there will be dancing at the pavilion.</i>
<b>PENITENTIARY</b>	A state or federal prison. <i>Flo says Hal should be in a penitentiary.</i>
<b>SHOOTING CRAPS</b>	A gambling game played with two dice. <i>Hal refers to shooting craps as a kid.</i>

## PEOPLE / CELEBRITIES

<b>BETTY GRABLE</b>	The highest paid Hollywood actress of the 1940s, famous for her pin-up pose and starring in musicals. <i>Mrs. Potts summarizes the plot of a film starring either Betty Grable or Lana Turner—she can’t remember which one.</i>
<b>CARSON MCCULLERS</b>	A female American writer of novels and stories that depict the inner lives of lonely people. <i>Millie is reading the McCullers novel The Ballad of the Sad Café.</i>
<b>DELILAH</b>	An attractive and treacherous biblical character. <i>Alan teasingly refers to Madge as Delilah.</i>
<b>HUMPHREY BOGART</b>	A Hollywood actor known for “tough guy” gangster roles. <i>Hal likens a tough girl he met to Humphrey Bogart.</i>
<b>LANA TURNER</b>	A Hollywood actress with a troubled personal life. <i>Mrs. Potts summarizes the plot of a film starring either Betty Grable or Lana Turner—she can’t remember which one.</i>
<b>RITA HAYWORTH</b>	A Hollywood actress known for her dancing and good looks. <i>Millie exclaims that she feels like Rita Hayworth while dancing on the lawn.</i>

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Maggie Grace. Photo by Joan Marcus.

# When you get to the theatre...

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

## TICKET POLICY

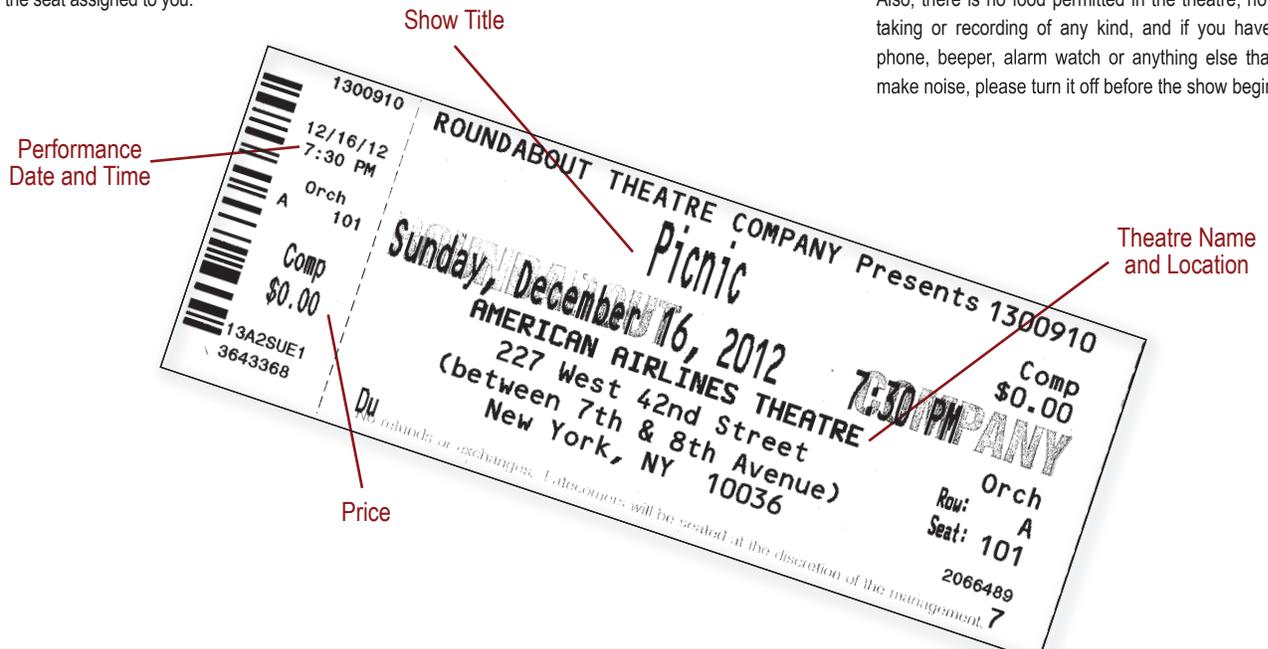
As a student participant in Producing Partners, Page To Stage or Theatre Access, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to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

## PROGRAMS

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

## AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

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



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