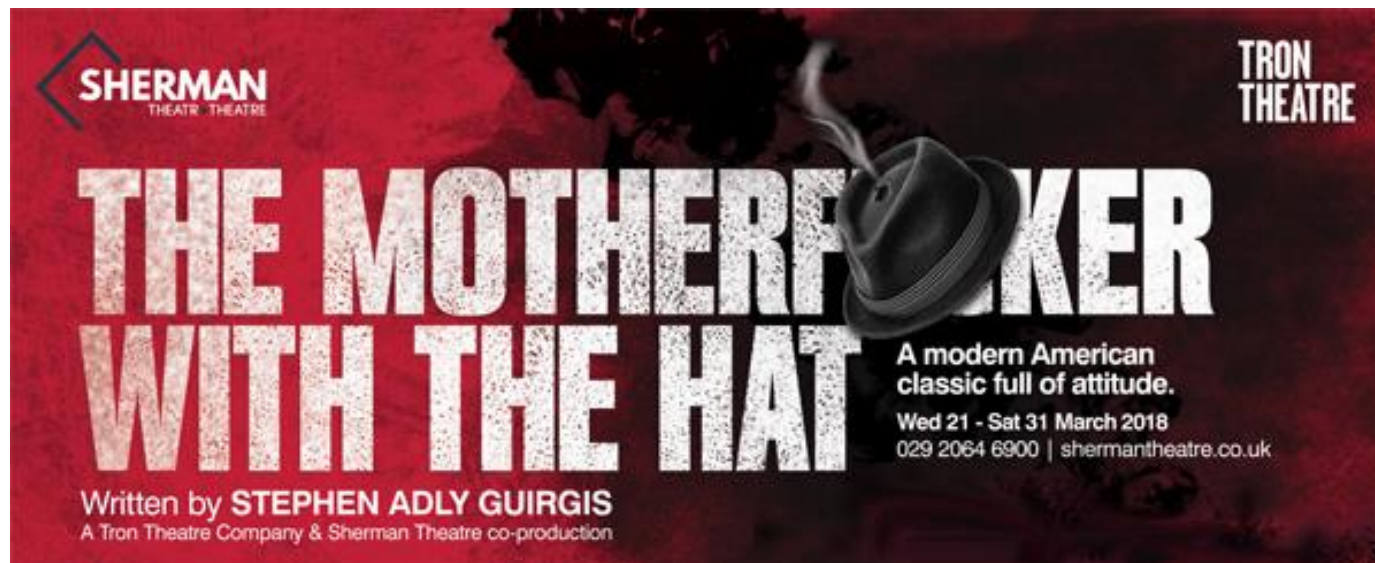


EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH PACK

THE MOTHERFKER WITH THE HAT**

BY STEPHEN ADLY GUIRGIS



DIRECTED BY ANDY ARNOLD

THE MOTHERF**KER WITH THE HAT WAS STAGED IN SHERMAN'S MAIN HOUSE DURING THE SPRING SEASON OF 2018.

The following pack provides some production background and context as well as providing you with the tools to answer an exam question on the Actor In Performance and Technical elements of this production.

There are both practical and academic questions within this – please be safe when completing the practical exercises.

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PRODUCTION CREATIVES

STEPHEN ADLY GUIRGIS - WRITER

- He is a member of LAByrinth Theater Company and The Actor's Studio.
- A former violence prevention and HIV educator, he lives in New York.
- He won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Drama with *Between Riverside and Crazy*.
- His Broadway debut, *The Motherf**ker with the Hat*, received 6 Tony Award nominations including Best Play.
- With Baz Luhrmann he co-created, wrote and executive produced the Netflix series *The Get Down*.
- As an actor, he has appeared in theatre, film and television, including the Oscar winning *Birdman*.
- Other awards include: Fringe First Award, NY Drama Critics Circle, L.A. Drama Critics Prize, and a Lucy Lortel Award.



ANDY ARNOLD – DIRECTOR

- He became Artistic Director of Tron Theatre in 2008 following many years as Artistic Director of The Arches.
- Andy's productions at Tron include, the Scottish premiere of *That Face* by Polly Stenham, *Valhalla* by Paul Rudnick (UK premiere), and world premieres of *Sea and Land and Sky* by Abigail Docherty, *Plume* by J.C Marshall, and *Edwin Morgan's Dreams and Other Nightmares* by Liz Lochhead.
- Most recently he has directed Anthony Neilson's *The Lying Kind* and Martin McDonagh's *The Lonesome West*.
- After premiering at the Tron his production of James Joyce's *Ulysses* adapted by Dermot Bolger, toured to Ireland.
- In 2015 *Ulysses* was performed in four cities in China where Andy also staged a devised piece with Chinese actors entitled *A Journey Round James Joyce*, translated into Mandarin.

KENNY MILLER – DESIGNER

- He is a freelance designer and director who formally Head of Design/Associate Director at the Citizens Theatre and is currently an Associate Artist for Sherman Theatre.
- He has worked in theatre and opera both nationally and internationally, designing and directing for numerous companies.
- He has won three Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland as well as the Manchester Evening News Award.
- Most recent design work for Sherman includes *The Cherry Orchard*, *A Doll's House*, *Romeo and Juliet* as well as co-productions *The Weir* (With Tobacco Factory Theatres) and *Bird* (With Royal Exchange Theatre).
- He has also worked for Dundee Rep, National Theatre of Scotland, Perth Theatre, Beacon Arts Centre Arches Theatre and national touring company Birds of Paradise Theatre.



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Stephen Adly Guirgis was born and raised in New York City by an Irish-American mother and Egyptian father. His mother came from a tough drinking background, whilst his father was nicknamed 'the bachelor'. They met in Cairo in 1962 (his mother worked for an airline), and married three days later. Like his mother (and his protagonist) Guirgis has a history of his own struggles with drugs and alcohol.

He studied at the State University of New York in Albany before John Ortiz and Philip Seymour Hoffman recruited him to join the *Labyrinth Theatre Company* - later becoming a co-artistic director. Guirgis still retains a portrait of his long-time collaborator and friend Philip Seymour Hoffman in his apartment (Hoffman directed five of Guirgis's plays to both critical and artistic acclaim).

Guirgis lives in his parents flat where he grew up. The apartment building retains fond memories for the playwright as growing up during the 1970s he recalls that he was surrounded by artists, dancers and musicians. Since his father died, he has lived alone and he enjoys the sense of freedom this gives. This lifestyle choice is reflected in him finding his most productive working hours between midnight and midday. This work ethic clearly pays off as he is a Pulitzer Prize Award winner. Despite this he is incredibly modest saying "If I die in a plane crash I guess it will say 'Pulitzer Prize-winner' in the obituary. Other than that it doesn't really mean anything".

Writing is something Guirgis fell into it; his theatre company were working on a workshop week one year, and the actors needed something to work with so he wrote a scene. "The audience laughed when it was funny, got quiet when it was serious and applauded at the end, so I guess I did something right." He says that this natural aptitude for writing is something he regards as a calling for which he has the upmost respect.

He has a cross made of wood and tin that was given to his family by an Egyptian Coptic priest. For him it has become a talisman for loyalty. Loyalty is something that he places at the centre of his worldly outlook, starting with his friends and family, but also extending as far as covering the commitment he has to his work.

"I love a happy ending, but sometimes things don't work out," he says with hope. "There's also something in this about surviving something and learning something. And if this scenario comes my way again, if I meet someone, I think I am going to do better."

With thanks to David Colman's New York Time's Article (10 June, 2011) and Guy Kelly's article in The Telegraph (17 Jul 2015)

What aspects of Stephen Adly Guirgis's life do you feel are relevant to *The Motherfker with the Hat*?**

What difference does that make to your ideas about the play?

PLOT

Characters

Jackie = *A recently released drug dealer* **Veronica** = *His drug addict girlfriend*
Cousin Julio = *His Cousin* **Ralph D.** = *Jackie's counsellor* **Victoria** = *Ralph's wife*

The play begins with an intense phone conversation between drug users Veronica and her mother. Veronica's boyfriend, Jackie, a former drug dealer returns home from a spell in prison. He mood is positive about his future and going drug and alcohol free.

But just as Jackie and Veronica are reigniting their relationship, he sees a hat in her apartment. The hat is not his or hers. Outraged he accuses her of cheating and seeks out his drug and parole counsellor, Ralph D., for help.

In his rage Jackie obtains a gun which, on Ralph's insistence, he gives to his cousin Julio for safekeeping. During this conversation Jackie reveals that Veronica's mistrust of him is because he had a relationship with his last counsellor. Later, Veronica is revealed to be in a relationship with Ralph, something that had begun whilst Jackie was in prison and he is not yet aware of it.

Jackie retrieves his gun and attempts to return the hat to its assumed owner – throwing it on the floor and shooting it. Victoria is fed up of her husband cheating and whilst Jackie confides in her about his situation she tries to seduce him. Failing at this she reveals the love affair between Veronica and Ralph – it is he who must be the owner of the hat.

Drunk and emotional Jackie shows up at Veronica's apartment as tempers rise she ends up hitting him with a baseball bat. Julio takes his injured cousin in and offers to help him get even with Ralph in repayment for an act of unexpected kindness to him years ago.

Jackie and Ralph fight but end up futilely wrestling on the floor. Despite Ralph talking tough with Jackie he tries to salvage their friendship. Jackie refuses this and, having broken his parole by shooting a gun, returns to his apartment to tell Veronica he loves her. She runs out of the room, unable to deal with the situation, leaving Jackie to depart with the situation unresolved. Shortly after, Veronica returns calling for him.

PRODUCTIONS

*The Motherf**ker with the Hat* premiered at Broadway's Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre in April 2011. It was directed by Anna D. Shapiro, featuring a set design by Todd Rosenthal and music by Terence Blanchard.

The first regional production met with some controversy as Stephen Adly Guirguis aired his thoughts about the casting, saying that director Thompson had cast white actors in two parts intended to be portrayed as Puerto Rican. Nonetheless the production opened at Theaterworks in Hartford, Connecticut in October 2011.

In June 2015 the play received its UK premiere in at The National Theatre's Lyttelton.

CRITICAL RECEPTION - Original Broadway Production

On its opening night performance, *The Motherf**ker with the Hat* received mixed reviews from New York critics.

“The Motherf**ker With the Hat is something you don't see on Broadway much: a tough and fresh portrait of working-class life in modern, multicultural New York.”

Jesse Oxfeld – *New York Observer*

“As its title suggests, Motherf**ker comes on with a lot of tough-talking bravado and wild profanity. Underneath that, however, it's a wistful story of a couple who have loved each other almost all their lives, but can't keep it together. Cannavale's Jackie bounces from goofy exhibitions of romantic ardour to volatile explosions to wounded-puppy vulnerability to genuine pain, always putting his own unique spin on Guirgis' virtuoso dialogue.”

David Rooney – *The Hollywood Reporter*

"This is by far the most accomplished and affecting work from the gifted Mr. Guirgis, a prolific and erratic chronicler of marginal lives."

Ben Brantley – *The New York Times*

CRITICAL RECEPTION – Tron and Sherman Co-Production

“First up, the writing is impeccable. Guirgis’ script takes-no-prisoners. It’s an endless stream of colourful, articulate street banter that hits those notes of heart-clenching horror and spit-your-drink hilarity that made *Trainspotting* such a hit.”

Christine Irvine – *Exeunt Magazine*

“It’s also a masterclass in naturalistic dialogue. The script is superb, exhibiting real flashes of wit and blessing each character with appropriate idiosyncrasies, as well as real-life proportionate sweariness and sexual vulgarity.”

Robert Peacock – *the wee Review*

Name three things that would excite you about *The Motherfker with the Hat* at Sherman**

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

EXTRACT FROM *THE MOTHERFKER WITH THE HAT* (Published by Oberon Books, ISBN: 9781783198085)****SCENE 8: RALPH'S APARTMENT -- AFTERNOON**

Ralph and Victoria eat pancakes in their bathrobes.

RALPH D. ...Blueberry Pancakes for dinner -- now this is a treat, eh?

VICTORIA ...Umm-hmm

RALPH D. Come on, admit it: your man Ralph can flap some jacks like nobody's business!

VICTORIA ...They're very good.

RALPH D.And these sausages -- mmm, mmm, mmm -- someone call the vegan police!

VICTORIA Once in a while is okay.

Pause

RALPH D. ... So I was thinking, and, "I know, I know", and I do truly know, I mean totally, but, I was thinking: maybe we could go down to Antigua for, like --

VICTORIA Ralph, don't over-do it.

RALPH D. Over-do what?

VICTORIA Ralph.

RALPH D. ...Okay. You're right. Sorry.

Pause

VICTORIA ... The pancakes really are very good.

RALPH D. ...They are. They definitely are.

Pause

VICTORIA It was thoughtful of you to make them

RALPH D. Well, and it's thoughtful of you to eat them.

Beat

RALPH D. (cont'd) I love eating breakfast for dinner with you.

VICTORIA Ralph.

RALPH D. Sorry.

Beat

VICTORIA But these are really good pancakes.

RALPH D. Thanks.

There's a knock at the door

EXPLORING THE TEXT EXERCISES (ACTING)

*The Motherf**ker with the Hat* relies on several scenes between just two characters mixing naturalistic settings with high stakes drama.

Initially we suggest that you read through the above scene with a partner (perhaps via Zoom, Skype or FaceTime) and attempt to freely stage it – do not worry about it being a finished piece of theatre. Just explore.

Once you are happy with your rough version of the scene try out some of the exercises below to explore the relationship within the scene.

PHYSICALISING INTENTIONS

Working on intentions in text can become an intellectual exercise with approaches such as ‘Actioning’. This exercise hopes to address this by taking inspiration from this methodology whilst giving the actor a physical action to assign to the line.

- For this you will need a selection of balls (We suggest tennis ball size).
- Initially consider just three ways of throwing the balls
 - i) Overarm ii) Underarm ii) Placing in someone’s hand.

These are the intentions with which lines can be delivered. **What kind of emotion might these symbolise?**

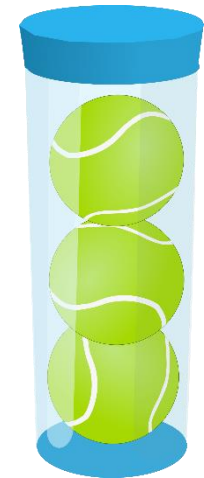
Overarm _____ Underarm _____

Placing in someone’s hand _____

- Now begin to work through the scene aloud assigning each line a ball throw. Go through it concentrating on one character to start with then the other.
 - Consider how you want the line to be received by the person your character is speaking too. Is it forceful or gentle? If in doubt refer back to the emotions you have chosen above.
 - Eventually the scene could be reduced to just the ball throws and the relationships being seen by the observers.
- N.B You can add additional deliveries of the ball. Such as rolling along the floor or perhaps just dropping it so that it does not meet its intended recipient. For each new delivery you add ensure that you know the intention behind it – keep a log.*
- Now work through the scene substituting the spoken lines for just the tennis ball throws.

What has changed about the scene? What have you learnt about the character dynamic?

Does your character predominately use one type of throw?



PROXIMITY EXERCISE *This intends to explore how the closeness of characters can affect how an audience sees a scene.*



- Firstly put two chairs next to each other.
- You should sit in one of the chairs (this is the beginning or neutral position).
- Now perform the scene, playing one character at a time.
- Imagining that the other person in the scene is sat in the remaining chair.
- Each time you speak you must move your chair closer or further from the other.
- You should think about this as an emotional decision. Do you emotionally wish to be further away or closer to the other character in the scene?

What kind of emotion might these moves symbolise?

Closer _____ Further _____

- Now work through the scene substituting the spoken lines for just the chair moves but thinking about the distance you want to place between yourself and the other character. Consider staging the scene in different rooms in your house and what action would take place to create this distancing?

What has changed about the scene? What have you learnt about the character dynamic?

Does your character predominately use one type of throw?

Once both these exercises have been experimented with return to the first staging and see how the intentions of the lines and the proximity of the characters are effected. You should make a note of any changes under the following headings

Staging	Vocal Skills	Physical Skills

EXPLORING THE TEXT EXERCISES (TECHNICAL THEATRE)

TOP TIP

Always think of the following when answering a question on design or technical elements of theatre.

- **What** is the intended **effect** on the viewer? (**What** or **how** does it make them feel?)
- **How** has this been achieved? (**What** technical elements have come together?)

The following exercises are intended help you to consider how the technical elements can affect the scene you have been working on.

SOUND EXERCISE – *Door Knock*



This exercise looks at how sound can affect the listener.

1. Let's experiment with the knock.
2. Firstly consider what the knock should sound like?
3. Consider what is the knock's acting intention? Is it loud / quiet / hard / soft? Where is the door in relation to the action?
4. Firstly read the scene with the door knocking as specified by Stephen Adly Guirgis.
5. Imagine you are playing Jackie. Write down how this might affect the following:
 - Frequency of your heartrate
 - Your proximity to the door and/or other characters
 - How might this affect the audience?
6. Now look at the scene again and this time choose two alternative times when the knock might happen.
7. This time consider all the characters in the scene and write down how this might affects the following for them:
 - Frequency of their heartrate
 - The character's proximity to the door and/or to each other.
 - How might this affect the audience?
8. Compare your two sets of responses – which offers the most dramatically pleasing effect?

LIGHTING EXERCISE

This exercise examines how angles of light can affect the reaction to a character.

1. Take a light source (a torch / phone torch / desk lamp).
2. Now pick two lines from the scene.
Write them here: i) _____ ii) _____
3. Experiment with placing the light source in some different locations relating to your actors face whilst they say the line.
4. Try changing the height, the proximity to the person, and if it is in front or behind them.
N.B You could perform these in front of a mirror or try to film these if possible so you can look back at them later.

Consider the following:

How do these different angles change how we feel about the person in the light? What affect does it have on the line?

Additionally you could consider the effect of colour on the actor by holding a coloured gel between the light source and the subject – if you do not have access to gels try using a Quality Street wrapper or a thin piece of coloured material.

COSTUME EXERCISE – Thinking about the titular hat

This exercise looks at how a piece of costume can change how someone is perceived.



1. You should place a hat on the floor in front of you.
2. Approach the hat react as if you are Jackie and this hat is owned by the Motherf**ker.
3. Now use the hat like they are the Motherf**ker.
N.B At first these should be silent moments but sound can be added later.
4. It is important that you adopt the attitude of the character as physically big as possible in the first instance. These should by no means be naturalistic.
5. Consider the following:
 - What are the differences between reacting to an item rather than a person?
 - How does it affect our eye contact / proxemics / stance?

It might help you further to ask someone to watch you do this and describe the differences to you or ask them to record you working with the hat.

ANALYSIS OF A SCENE IN PERFORMANCE (ACTING):

“JACKIE: You know what? You wanna flip the script on me...”

Your answers to the following should be influenced by the image below:



How might this line be delivered?

What would these vocal choices convey to the audience?

Describe these elements of the performance:

Eye Contact

Facial Expressions

Proxemics

What would these physical choices convey to the audience?

ANALYSIS OF A SCENE IN PERFORMANCE (ACTING):

“RALPH D.: I’m in Nutritional Beverages, take a card.” “COUSIN JULIO: Great. Give me a few to pass out -- I’m all about networking.”



Answer the following question using the image on the left:

Explain how the actors in this scene might use their acting skills to sustain the audience’s interest.

You should refer to physical skills, vocal skills as well as your understanding of the play.

(Continue on more pages as required)

ANALYSIS OF AN SCENE IN PERFORMANCE (TECHNICAL):

Where does it appear that this moment has taken place within the world of the play?

Describe these elements of the technical performance:

Lighting Colour (Warm (Amber) / Cold (Steel))

Lighting Source (Lanterns / Practical // Above / Below / Side)

Lighting Effect (Gobo / Stencil)

Sound Source (Where is it coming from?)

Type of Sound (Live / Recorded)

Sound Effect (Echo / Reverb)

Furniture (Age / Colour / Texture)

Costume (Age / Style / Colour / Texture)

Proxemics – Audience / Set / Characters



Consider these questions:

What technical element is the most important?

Do the actors interact with or acknowledge the technical elements?

What would happen if you changed one of them?

ANALYSIS OF AN SCENE IN PERFORMANCE (TECHNICAL):

Using the photo to the right explain how the technical elements of this scene could be used to sustain the audience's interest.

You should refer to Lighting, Sound, Costume and Set as well as your understanding of the play.

[illegible]

(Continue on more pages as required)

