



Spotlight on Learning

a PTC Classroom Companion

Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts and Parks Program, Salt Lake City Arts Council/Arts Learning Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund, The George Q. Morris Foundation, and The R. Harold Burton Foundation.



Approximate Running Time:

Two hours, including one 15-minute intermission.

Student Talk-Back:

A Q & A session with the actors will directly follow the performance, lasting 20–30 minutes.

THE PLAY THAT GOES

WRONG



By Henry Lewis, Jonathan Sayer & Henry Shields
Directed by Karen Azenberg

December 6 – 21, 2019

The Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society are putting on a 1920s-era murder mystery, but everything that can go wrong...does! The accident-prone actors fight to make it through to their final curtain call, with hilarious and often painful consequences!

The Play That Went Right: An Interview with Jonathan Sayer

From *What's On Warwickshire*
whatsonlive.co.uk/warwickshire

How would you describe the show to someone who hasn't seen it?

It's certainly a play that does what it says on the tin! It's a comedy about a university drama society who try to mount a performance of an old school murder mystery that goes wrong in more or less every possible way it could. There are 6 actors, a stage manager and a techie who desperately try to get through to the end despite a lot of bad luck. I suppose it's about people over reaching to achieve something that they are not really capable of reaching – that's where a lot of the comedy comes from anyway.

Who are Mischief Theatre?

I act as the Company Director and I run Mischief Theatre with our Artistic Director Henry Lewis. We are an ensemble group of actors and are democratic in the way we operate. Most of us met during a drama foundation course at LAMDA and the company was launched when we took our first improv show to the Edinburgh Fringe.

Where did you get the idea for The Play That Goes Wrong?

There are three writers so we all have slightly different answers. I would say the biggest influences for the show would be Michael Green who wrote the Coarse Acting Plays and who taught one of the writers, Henry Lewis, and a lot of the physical stuff comes from Keaton and Chaplin. A lot of the status play comes from Laurel and Hardy too.



L: Henry Lewis, R: Jonathan Sayer in the Lyceum Theatre Broadway production in 2017. Photo by Richard Termine for *The New York Times*.

Interview with Jonathan Sayer (Cont'd)

How did you create the script?

We started working on the piece after the Edinburgh Fringe festival in 2012 and the first draft took little over a month to complete. We all have slightly different approaches as writers, but we have a mutual passion for it and our background in improv makes a huge difference. We worked as an improv company for years and years and we try to take the ethos of improv into the writing room. It means we can try new things in rehearsal and the script can continually develop. Improv also helps you keep in the moment and that allows us to maintain a sense of danger which is very important with this play.

We all made a pact together a long time ago that if something isn't funny we'd just say it isn't funny. I think writing comedy is like plumbing – if a guy comes round to fix your taps and they're still leaking, you say it's still leaking. He won't be upset, it's just a practical thing and I think you've got to try and approach this work in the same way. It's subjective and you've got to have personal distance. As long as you're always scrutinizing in a positive way, that's only going to make the work better.



Cast of *The Play That Goes Wrong* from the Lyceum Theatre Broadway production in 2017. Photo by Jeremy Daniel.

What's a farce?

From *Philip's Encyclopedia*

“Comic drama typified by **stereotypical characterizations**, **improbable plot lines** and emphasis on **physical humor**. One of the earliest examples is Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* (c. 1593). French dramatist Georges Feydeau developed the ‘bedroom farce’ [which are about relationships and usually involve infidelity, schemes of getting even, lots of slamming doors, and happy endings]. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) [about a man who pretends to have a wicked brother named “Earnest”] opened up new dramatic possibilities.”

Quick little note...

In the context of PTC's play, “stereotypical characterizations” will mean things like:

- *The Uptight Play Director
- *The Vain Actor
- *The Cranky Techie (and so on).

What is a murder mystery...?

From *Local Playwright Matthew Ivan Bennett*

Otherwise known as crime fiction, detective stories, or police procedural dramas, the **murder mystery** is a favorite genre (type) of entertainment for the intellectual reader and viewer. Mystery appeals to our sense of curiosity and love of puzzles.



The murder mystery always begins with a strange and unsolved case of murder. Alongside the detective—usually the main character—the audience follows the clues and guesses at **who** is the killer is, **what** the deadly weapon might have been, and **where** the crime actually took place.

The Play That Goes Wrong is a murder mystery wrapped in a farce. It's a play about a play going wrong. A British community theatre called the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society tries their level best to perform a mystery called *The Murder at Haversham Manor* by Susie H.K. Bride-swell. Unfortunately, and comedically, they're beset by numerous technical problems.

Read Along!

A Class or Group Exercise

To become acquainted with the murder mystery comedy, either choose three people from the class or separate into groups of three and read aloud from this portion of the made-up mystery play that's performed within *The Play That Goes Wrong*.

The play within the play is called *The Murder at Havershams Manor* and you'll need someone to read **Stage Directions**, someone to read **Thomas**, the longtime friend of the murdered Charles, and someone to read **Perkins**, Thomas's butler.

Anything **bolded** inside the brackets [...] is stage directions that should be read aloud. Anything in brackets that is not bolded is simply performed.

"[Off]" means that the line is performed as if standing offstage.

[CHARLES HAVERSHAM lies unmoving on the chaise longue. After a few moments, we hear a knock at the downstairs door. We hear THOMAS COLLEYMORE and PERKINS offstage.]

THOMAS
[Off.] Charley! Are you ready? We're all waiting downstairs to raise a glass to your engagement. Charley?

[THOMAS knocks on the door.]

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Come along now Charley, you've been in there for hours now. If I didn't know better, I'd say you were having second thoughts about the wedding. [Chuckles.] Charley? Hang it all Charley, if you won't come out, we'll come in.

[Tries handle.]

Darn it, he's locked the door. Hand me those keys Perkins.

PERKINS
[Off.] Here they are Mr. Colley-moore.

THOMAS
[Off.] Thank you, Perkins. Let's get this door open. We're coming in Charley! We're coming in!

[THOMAS and PERKINS enter.]

There we are. We're in. But what's this? Charles, unconscious?

PERKINS
Asleep surely Mr. Colley-moore?

THOMAS
Darn it Perkins, I hope so.

PERKINS
I'll take his pulse.

THOMAS
Blast! I knew something must have been wrong, it's so unlike Charles to disappear like this.

PERKINS
Sir, he's dead!

THOMAS
Darn it Perkins, he can't be! He's my oldest friend.

PERKINS
He's not breathing sir and there's no hint of a heartbeat.

THOMAS
Well I'm dumbfounded. He was right as rain an hour ago.

PERKINS
I don't understand. He can't be dead. He was as fit as a fiddle. It doesn't make sense.

THOMAS
Of course it makes sense. He's been murdered! Good Lord. Where's Florence?

PERKINS
She's in the dining room sir. Shall I fetch her?

THOMAS
At once Perkins and quickly.

PERKINS
But she's bound to have one of her hysterical episodes.

THOMAS
Darn it, gather everyone in here. Charles! Dead! What a horror.

[PERKINS rushes to the voice pipe on the wall and calls to the rest of the house. THOMAS removes his jacket.]

PERKINS
[Into the voice pipe.] Lounge to dining room. Cecil! Miss Colley-moore! Come to Charles' private rooms at once. Charles Haversham has been murdered. **[End of scene.]**

OUR EQUITY CAST



Greg Balla

KAREN AZENBERG (Director/ Choreographer) Favorite projects include the world premiere of *Alabama Story* and the regional premieres of Sting's *The Last Ship*. Originally from New York, her work there includes *Blocks* (with Jonathan Larson) and *The Dazzle* (Roundabout Theatre)

GREG BALLA (Robert) returns to PTC after last year's production of *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*. Other credits include Off-Broadway: *Blue Man Group*, *Straight, You Can't Kiss a Movie*. Regional: *The Cottage* (Florida Studio Theatre) and *Into the Woods*.



Ruth Pferdehirt

WILLIAM CONNELL (Chris) NYC/Regional credits include: *INK* and *A View From the Bridge* (2010 Broadway revival), *One Man, Two Guvnors* (PTC, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, South Coast Repertory), *The Hour of Feeling* (Humana Festival), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Gulfshore).

BRANDON CONTRERAS (Jonathan) was last seen here as part of *La Cage Aux Folles*. He most recently finished the Pre-Broadway tryout of the new musical, *Almost Famous* at The Old Globe Theatre. TV: "Mr. Robot" (USA), 2018 NBCUniversal Uprfront.



Kirsten Wyatt



William Connell

ARCHELAUS CRISANTO (Trevor) was recently seen as a performer at Evermore Park creating the role of lovable charlatan turned Knight, Sir Rooster. Other credits include *Speed* in *The Odd Couple*, *Claudius* in *Hamlet*, and the titular role in *Macbeth*.

RUTH PFERDEHIRT (Sandra) Favorite credits include: The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis – *The Play That Goes Wrong* (Regional Premiere), *Billie Dawn* in *Born Yesterday*, *Brooke* in *Noises Off*, and *Dolly* in *One Man, Two Guvnors*, the First National Tour of *A Gentleman's Guide To Love And Murder*, *Deb* in *Elf* at Madison Square Garden.



Brandon Contreras

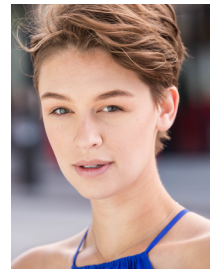
ERIC SANTAGATA (Dennis) was in PTC's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* and *Rent*. Broadway credits include *Falsettos* (Associate Director) and *The Scottsboro Boys* (Assistant Director/Choreographer). Other NYC credits include *The Beast in the Jungle* (Associate Director/Choreographer), *A New Brain* (Assistant Director), *Dot* (Associate Director).

JORDAN SOBEL (Max) Off-Broadway: Soho Playhouse. Regional: Asolo Repertory Theatre, Huntington Theatre Company, American Repertory Theater, Playhouse on Park (CT Critic's Circle Nomination for *My Name is Asher Lev*), Penguin Rep Theatre, Amphibian Stage, Company One.



Archelaus Crisanto

KIRSTEN WYATT (Annie) Previously at PTC in *Peter Pan*, *Les Misérables* and *Comedy of Tenors*. Broadway: *Annie* (Lily St. Regis), *A Christmas Story: The Musical* (Crusty Elf/Mrs. Schwartz), *Elf* (Santa's Elf), *Shrek* (Shoemaker's Elf), *Grease* (Frenchy, 2007 revival), *High Fidelity* (Anna).



Morgan Werder



Jessica Weyman



Eric Santagata

OUR ACTING INTERNS

HARRISON J. LIND (Cornley Polytechnic Stage Crew) is a senior in the Actor Training Program at the University of Utah, and an intern with PTC this semester. He most recently appeared as Captain Absolute in the Department of Theatre's production of *The Rivals*.



Harrison Lind

MORGAN WERDER (Cornley Polytechnic Crew Member) is currently a senior at the University of Utah pursuing their BFA, and an intern at PTC. Recent roles include *Macbeth* (*Macbeth*), *Men On Boats* (Dunn), and *Big Love* (Thyona).



Jordan Sobel

JESSICA WEYMAN (Cornley Polytechnic Stage Crew) is a senior in the Actor Training Program at the University of Utah. Recent credits include *Macbeth* (Witch 2/Fleance), *The Rivals* (Julia Melville), *Big Love* (Ensemble), and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Apostle) at the University of Utah.