

Spotlight on Learning

a Pioneer Theatre Company
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 and R. Harold Burton Foundation.

Spotlight on Learning is provided to students through a grant provided by the **George Q. Morris Foundation**

Approx. running time:
3 hours, which includes TWO ten-minute intermissions.

Student Talk-Back:

There will be a Student Talk-Back directly after the performance.



Directed by Karen Azenberg

September 14 - 29, 2018

By J.T. Rogers

Playwright's Notes

By J.T. Rogers



These notes have been adapted from those included in the original Playbill for the Lincoln Center Theater production in March 2017:

In December 2012, after a performance of my play *Blood and Gifts* at Lincoln Center Theater, I went out for drinks with a Norwegian diplomat who had seen the play at the invitation of my director Bartlett Sher.

In a booth at a restaurant across the street from the theatre, in response to my questions about his work, he spoke about his involvement in the Oslo Peace Accords. I knew about this first ever peace deal between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization—signed in the White House Rose Garden on

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September 13, 1993—which gave us the iconic image of President Bill Clinton presiding over a handshake between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Chairman Yasser Arafat. But what I discovered that night over drinks is that there was a backstory to this momentous event. Digging further on my own, I learned the full story of how the Oslo Accords came to be—a story that is documented, almost completely unknown.

Oslo is the story of a hidden history that lies behind a public history. But to be clear, it is my version of this history. The events in the play all happened, but locations have been condensed and the chronology of events has been compressed. Some of the players in this history have been excised; some of those who remain have been assigned different roles than their actual counterparts. Though every character in this play is named for a real person the words they say are mine.

Twenty-four years later, the memory of that handshake in the Rose Garden between mortal enemies is still fixed in the world's mind. But the meaning and legitimacy of the process that led to that handshake remain in flux. Debates still rage about whether the Oslo negotiations were a brilliant masterstroke or a dangerous mistake. Participants and historians still battle over who deserve credit—or blame—for the historic compromises that were made. But both a dramatist and a citizen, I remain gripped by the unimaginable political will it took for those on both sides to create the opportunity for that handshake, and by the courage it took to stand face to face with the enemy as they struggled to find a way forward—together.

J. T. Rogers



US President Bill Clinton (C) stands between PLO leader Yasser Arafat (R) and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (L)

The Playwright



NEW YORK, NY - JUNE 11: J.T. Rogers accepts the award for Best Play for Oslo onstage during the 2017 Tony Awards at Radio City Music Hall on June 11, 2017 in New York City. (Photo by Theo Wargo/Getty Images for Tony Awards Productions)

How Tony Nominee J.T. Roger's Turned a History Lesson into the Thriller That is Broadway's OSLO

In 1993 Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, shook hands at the White House at the signing ceremony of the Oslo Peace Accords. The impossible had happened.

“[Sometimes it’s] easier to do the impossible than the possible,” says Terje Rød-Larsen, the Norwegian diplomat who conceived the negotiation process that led to the handshake on the lawn and who now serves as the president of the International Peace Institute. In the 1990s, his wife Mona Juul (a foreign affairs official) had been posted to Cairo and befriended Arafat’s brother. Rød-Larsen worked for FAFO, a research institute that had him studying the living conditions in Gaza. Seeing the fear and anxiety in both Israeli soldiers and Palestinian youth, Rød-Larsen and Juul saw a problem worth solving.

“It’s a musical comedy without songs,” Rogers urges. “It’s funny, it’s entertaining, it’s surprising! Trust me!”

The Playwright, continued from page 2

But, Rød-Larsen noticed a disinterest to do something challenging in the diplomatic world at the time.

Perhaps Rød-Larsen's willingness to seize a challenge is what made playwright J.T. Rogers, now a Tony nominee for *Oslo*, the right match to condense the history and intensity of the five-months-long covert peace process. ...*Oslo* is a titanic force of a play. Clocking in at nearly three hours, it roars by like a jet engine on a fairway...

"I'm trying to look for situations [as a playwright] where the ideas people are fighting about, they are willing to die for," says Rogers. The life-and-death stakes for these peoples elevate his work to edge-of your-seat action. "That transports it out of academia and in to Shakespeare-the lessons of Shakespeare."

Shakespeare is an apt comparison; *Oslo* is drama, not documentary, and that was always Rogers' intention. Just as Rød-Larsen's peace process focused on personal relationships, Rogers honed in on his characters. "The political act for me as a writer is just to continually, abominably work to expand the scope, in terms of humanity we get to see on the American stage," says the playwright.

"We're liberated from having to be right."

Still, Rød-Larsen says the play portrays the true spirit of the back-channel negotiations that put every one's lives-politically and literally-at risk.

Still, peace in the Middle East is a touchy subject and New York audiences lug their opinions to their seats. A play exposing the merits and misdeeds of both Israelis and Palestinians was risky. But Rogers felt no need to balance every merit on one side with one on the other. His version of equanimity derived "not from a PC or political point of view," he says, "but because interesting theatre, funny, moving, gripping theatre is when everybody onstage is right."

In this comes the enlightenment of *Oslo*. "A tragedy is not a wrong and a right, a tragedy is two rights," he continues. "This play is not a tragedy, it's a thriller with a lot of humor and heart, but that structure to me is always the best for a playwright.

"It's a musical comedy without songs," Rogers urges. "It's funny, it's entertaining, it's surprising! Trust me!"

Ruthie Fierberg, "How Tony Nominee J.T. Rogers turned a history lesson into the thriller that is Broadway's Oslo," Playbill, May 21, 2017.
<http://www.playbill.com/article/how-tony-nominee-jt-rogers-turned-a-history-lesson-into-the-thriller-that-is-broadways-oslo>



Cast of PTC's Oslo. Photo by BW Productions.

OCTOBER 30-NOVEMBER 1, 1991 ⇨
MADRID, SPAIN | Spain hosts the Madrid Conference, which is co-sponsored by the United States and Russia. The aim of the conference is to further peace talks between Israel and its neighbors. Since Israel refused to meet with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (P.L.O.), the Palestinian delegation is comprised of individuals from the West Bank and Gaza.

JULY 23, 1992 ⇨
ISRAEL | The Labor Party wins the Israeli elections. Yitzhak Rabin is elected Prime Minister. Shimon Peres named Foreign Minister.

NOVEMBER 3, 1992 ⇨
UNITED STATES | Bill Clinton is elected President of the United States.

JANUARY 21, 1993 ⇨
OSLO, NORWAY | *The official opening of the unofficial channel.* The first round of talks. The P.L.O. sends a team led by Finance Minister Ahmed Qurie; Israel sends two academics from the University of Haifa, Yair Hirschfeld and his former student and colleague, Ron Pundak.

APRIL 1993 ⇨
OSLO, NORWAY | The fourth round of talks.

JUNE 1993 ⇨
Rabin authorizes Singer to draft a new D.O.P.

AUGUST 1993 ⇨
STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN | *A secret negotiation on a midnight call.* In an eight-hour telephone call, Israeli Foreign Minister Peres negotiates the final details of the D.O.P. with P.L.O. Chairman Arafat and Abu Ala. Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jørgen Holst and team serve as intermediaries.

OSLO, NORWAY | *A secret ceremony. August 19, 1993*
Israelis, Palestinians, and Norwegians initial the D.O.P. in a secret ceremony in the middle of the night.

A snapshot of the Oslo Accords chronology

⇨ **APRIL 1992**
TEL AVIV, ISRAEL | *A new model.* The first meeting of Terje Rød-Larsen and Yossi Beilin, rising star of the Israeli Labor Party and protégé of Shimon Peres. Larsen and Beilin discuss the possibility of secret back-channel Israeli-Palestinian talks in Oslo.

⇨ **SEPTEMBER 1992**
ISRAEL | *A proposal.* Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Jan Egeland visits Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin and proposes back-channel Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to feed the official channel.

⇨ **DECEMBER 1992**
LONDON, ENGLAND | *A first encounter.* Israeli economics professor Dr. Yair Hirschfeld and P.L.O. Finance Minister Ahmed Qurie (Abu Ala) meet.

⇨ **FEBRUARY 1993**
OSLO, NORWAY | *The second round of talks.* They continue to discuss and draft a Declaration of Principles (D.O.P.), establishing an unprecedented roadmap for negotiations.

⇨ **MAY 1993**
An official upgrade. In a private meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Peres, Rabin authorizes the upgrading of the Israeli delegation in the secret back-channel talks.

OSLO, NORWAY | Israeli Foreign Ministry Director General Uri Savir and Joel Singer, a former Colonel and attorney in the Israeli army, join the Oslo talks.

⇨ **SEPTEMBER 1993**
September 9, 1993 | *Letters of mutual recognition exchanged.* Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and P.L.O. Chairman Yasser Arafat sign letters of mutual recognition.

WASHINGTON, D.C. | September 13, 1993
The official signing. P.L.O. Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin officially sign the D.O.P. (Oslo I) in a White House ceremony.

1991

1993

Characters in *OSLO*

HEIRARCHY OF POWER IN THE PLAY



Chairman of the PLO
YASSER ARAFAT

Finance Minister of the PLO
AHMED QURIE (Abu Ala)

PLO Liaison
HASSAN ASFOUR



Prime Minister of Israel
YITZHAK RABIN

Foreign Minister
SHIMON PERES

Deputy Foreign Minister
YOSSI BEILIN

Director General of the
Foreign Ministry
URI SAVIR

Legal Advisor to the
Foreign Ministry
JOEL SINGER

Professors
YAIR HIRSCHFELD
RON PUNDAK



Foreign Minister of Norway
JOHAN JORGEN HOLST

Deputy Foreign Minister
JAN EGELAND

Official in the Foreign Ministry
MONA JUUL

Fafo Institute Director
TERJE RØD-LARSEN

Fafo Executive
MARIANNE HEIBERG

Need More?

The history of the events and people leading to the Oslo Peace Accords is extremely detailed, spanning centuries and covering hundreds of individuals both historical and contemporary.

Considering downloading our Dramaturgical Packet for a complete understanding of the characters
<http://www.pioneertheatre.org/season/2018-2019-season/oslo/spotlight/#content>

Our Equity Cast & Director



IAN BEDFORD (John Jorgen Holst/Finn)

KAREN AZENBERG (Director) This marks Karen Azenberg's seventh season as Artistic Director at PTC. Last season she directed *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *Newsies* and is thrilled with the cast assembled for this regional premiere.

IAN BEDFORD (John Jorgen Holst/Finn Grandal) began his professional career at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. Stage credits include Eddie in *A View From the Bridge* (Goodman Theatre); *Murder on the Orient Express* (Hartford Stage); and *The School of Night* (The Mark Taper Forum). Film: Associate producer, *The Promise*, with Christian Bale and Oscar Isaac. Television: "Chicago PD" (recurring), "Shameless," "The Path," "How to Get Away with Murder," "Nurse Jackie," "Shades of Blue," "Unforgettable," "Law & Order: SVU" (recurring).



JOEL REUBEN GANZ (Yossi Beilin)

NEAL BENARI (Yair Hirschfeld/Shimon Peres) returned to acting last year after living in Taiwan for seven years. Broadway: *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Aida*, *Victor/Victoria*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Chess*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Roza* and *The First*. Regional: *Lend Me a Tenor* (Tito Merelli), *Man of La Mancha* (Don Quixote), *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (Sweeney), *Ragtime* (Tateh) and *My Fair Lady* (Professor Higgins). Film/television: "The Sopranos," "Law & Order," *And the Band Played On* and *Sea of Love*.



KATE MIDDLETON (Mona Juul)



NEAL BENARI (Yair Hirschfeld/Shimon)

RICHIE CALL (Joel Singer) returns for his 6th production at Pioneer Theatre Company. Previous PTC credits include: *Newsies* (Roosevelt), *The Last Ship* (Newlands), *Something's Afoot* (Greyburn), *The Philadelphia Story* (Mac) and *Hamlet* (Osric). Call is the artistic director of the Lyric Repertory Company in Logan, Utah, where he is also an assistant professor of acting at Utah State University.

BEN CHERRY (Uri Savir) Broadway: *Indecent*, *Fiddler on the Roof*. Off-Broadway: *Goldstein*. National Tour: *Mary Poppins*. Television: "The Following," "Smash," "I Love You...But I Lied." Awards: MAC Award, Best Debut.



JEFF TALBOTT (Terje Rød-Larsen)



RICHIE CALL (Joel Singer)

DEMOSTHENES CHRYSAN (Ahmed Qurie) Broadway: *Junk*, *Golden Boy* (Lincoln Center Theater), *The Velveteen Rabbit* (New Victory Theater). London: *Blood and Gifts* (The National Theatre). Film: *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, *Trouble*, *A Case of You*. TV: "Blindspot," "Gotham," "Blacklist," "Feed the Beast," "Sneaky Pete," "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt," "Orange is the New Black," "Flesh and Bone," "Killing Kennedy," "Blue Bloods," "Boardwalk Empire," "Damages," "Louie," "30 Rock," "Reckless" and "The Fear" (Channel 4, United Kingdom).

SUSANNA FLORENCE (Marianna Heiberg/Toril Grandal) returns to Pioneer Theatre Company after last season's *Twelfth Night*. She has appeared previously in *King Charles III*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and *One Man, Two Guvnors*, as well as several Play-by-Play readings, including *Speculator Spirits*, *The Envelope*, *A March Tale*, *Honor Killing* and *i*.

JOEL REUBEN GANZ (Yossi Beilin) debuts at PTC. Broadway: *War Horse* at Lincoln Center Theater. Other New York credits: *Macbeth* with Lincoln Center Educational and *The Living Room* at 59e59. Television credits include "Unforgettable" (CBS) and "What Would You Do?" (ABC).



THAMER JENDOUBI (Hassan Asfour)



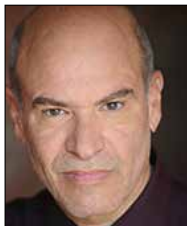
BEN CHERRY (Uri Savir)

KATE MIDDLETON (Mona Juul) is thrilled to return to PTC after appearing in *Alabama Story* and *A Few Good Men*. TV/Film: "Elementary," "Blacklist," "Blue Bloods," "Mercy," "Law & Order," "Law & Order: SVU," Comedy Central, *Obits* (winner NYC 48Hr Film Fest 2017), *40th*, *Set It Up*, *Tic*, *April Flowers* and *Thump*.

JEFF TALBOTT (Terje Rød-Larsen) returns to PTC, where he has appeared in *Doubt*, *The Odd Couple* and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. Broadway: *Sly Fox*, *Fortune's Fool*; Film: *Julie & Julia*. TV: "Orange is the New Black," "Unforgettable," "The Blacklist," "Boardwalk Empire," "The Sopranos" and all the "Law & Orders" (multiple times). As a playwright, his play *i* had its World Premiere this past spring at PTC.



MAX WOERTENDYKE (Jan Egeland/Ron)



DEMOSTHENES CHRYSAN (Ahmed Qurie)

THAMER JENDOUBI (Hassan Asfour) debuts at PTC. *Oslo* will be his first performance at a regional theatre. New York credits include: *Haram! Iran!*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Racquetball*.

MAX WOERTENDYKE (Jan Egeland/Ron Pundak) Broadway: Ivo van Hove's *A View From the Bridge*. Film and Television: "Longmire," *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2* and upcoming *Down the Barrel*.



SUSANNA FLORENCE (Marianna Heiberg/Toril Grandal)

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