Fall Dinner Theatre 2014

Thorton Wilder’s

Directed by Mrs. Riddell

24 Cast Members
Flexible Casting 5-9M / 7-13F

October 8-11, 2014 at 7pm
Black Box Theatre

Focus:
All props will be pantomimed and this show has a very limited bare bones set. At the time when it was written it was very experimental in nature and paved the way for minimalism in the theatre. The only set pieces include: two ladders, chairs, benches, and stools. The Black Box’s intimate setting is a perfect blank slate for this show.

We will work hard on pantomime and character study. I will be bringing in a pantomime expert to help us hone this craft in early in the rehearsal process. We will have many discussions about the overall message of the play and the part each character has in portraying it. Thorton Wilder’s Our Town has a great reputation as a masterpiece of the American theater and we cannot wait to bring it to life!
Crew:
The crews needed for this show include: stage manager, assistant
director, front of house, dramaturgy, costumes/makeup, lights, and
sound. No set crew or running crew will be needed.
Since our cast/crew will not be working a set we will be joining the
mainstage cast/crew to build their set.

Synopsis/Theme: This play is set in the early 1900s in Grover’s
Corners, New Hampshire around the early 1900s (costumes will reflect
this). The play is broken down into three acts: daily life, love &
marrige, and death & dying. It is a time capsule of human life and
existence at that time, and yet its message surpasses time and lives
on in each of us. It ventures to ask the questions: why are we here
and why don’t we enjoy life while we live it?

"Do any human beings ever realize life while they live
it--every, every minute?"- Emily Webb, Our Town

Act by Act Synopsis:
Act I: Daily Life

The Stage Manager who guides the audience through the play introduces
the audience to the town of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, and the
people living there as a morning begins in the year 1901. Joe
Crowell, one of the characters in the book delivers the paper to Doc
Gibbs, Howie Newsome delivers the milk, and the Webb and Gibbs
households send their children off to school, a simple morning. We
see the mundane to realize later how precious it will seem when it is
all gone. We see a glimmer of the budding relationship between Emily
Webb and George Gibbs, the couple this story revolves around.

Act II: Love and Marriage

Three years pass and George and Emily prepare to wed. The day is
filled with stress. Howie Newsome is delivering milk in the pouring
rain while Si Crowell, younger brother of Joe, laments how George's
baseball talents will be squandered. George pays an awkward visit
with his soon-to-be in-laws. Here, the Stage Manager interrupts the
scene and takes the audience back a year, to the end of Emily and George's junior year of high school. Emily confronts George about his pride, and over ice cream soda, they discuss the future and their love for each other. George resolves not to go to college, as he had planned, but to work and eventually take over his uncle's farm. The wedding follows where George, in a fit of nervousness, tells his mother that he is not ready to marry, and Emily tells her father she is not ready to marry either, but they both calm down and accept their proposals happily. They marry and all is well with the world.

Act III: Death

The Stage Manager opens the act with a lengthy monologue emphasizing eternity, and introduces us to the cemetery outside of town and the characters who died in the nine years since Act Two: Mrs Gibbs (pneumonia, while traveling), Wally Webb (burst appendix, while camping), Mrs Soames, and Simon Stimson (suicide by hanging), among others. We meet the undertaker, Joe Stoddard, and a young man Sam Craig who has returned home for his cousin's funeral. We learn that his cousin is Emily, who died giving birth to her second child. The funeral ends and Emily emerges to join the dead. Then Mrs. Gibbs tells her that they must wait and forget the life that came before, but Emily refuses. Despite the warnings of Simon, Mrs. Soames, and Mrs. Gibbs, Emily decides to return to Earth to re-live just one day: her 12th birthday. She finally finds it too painful, and realizes just how much life should be valued. Poignantly, she asks the Stage Manager whether anyone realizes life while they live it, and is told, "No. The saints and poets, maybe - they do some." She then returns to her grave, beside Mrs. Gibbs, watching impassively as George kneels weeping at her graveside. The Stage Manager concludes the play, reflecting on the probable lack of life beyond Earth, and wishes the audience a good night.
(Source: Wikipedia)

Why Our Town?:

This is a drama in its purest form. It is hailed as a theatrical masterpiece and a well known classic. Our goal is to portray the Thorton Wilder’s purpose. We need to make people question the way they live their life and appreciate the little things. Through this show we need to make them cry and long for a simpler way of life. Every person who sees this show should reevaluate what their priorities and hopefully live life to the fullest when they walk out of the black box. This is what Our Town is all about.

From an actor’s perspective, this is a great chance to dive into a character and really analyze every aspect of the play. We will have many conversations about the play’s purpose and why each role is in the play. Each character has a purpose no matter how small. I can’t wait to help you analyze your character and practice the art of pantomime.

Director’s Note: This play is one of my favorite plays and a favorite of my family. I played Emily Webb and consider it one of my favorite roles I ever performed while I was an actress. You are all helping me fulfill my goal of bringing this story to life as a director. Thank you in advance. I can’t wait to share this experience with you.

-Riddell

Praise for Our Town:

Winner of the 1938 Pulitzer Prize for Drama

"While all of Wilder's work is intelligent, non-synthetic and often moving, as well as funny, it is Our Town that makes the difference.
It is probably the finest play ever written by an American." — Edward Albee

"Thornton Wilder's masterpiece...An immortal tale of small town morality [and]...a classic of soft spoken theater." — The New York Times

"Beautiful and remarkable one of the sagest, warmest and most deeply human scripts to have come out of our theatre...A spiritual experience." — The New York Post

"No American play describes more powerfully how we imagine ourselves."— The New York Daily News

"No play ever moved me so deeply." — Alexander Woolcott, The New Yorker

Our Town was first presented in New York City at Henry Miller's Theatre on February 4, 1938. It was produced and directed by Jed Harris. (Samuel French)

Videos:

Trailer for a Production at Ford Theatre

CBS Special on Our Town’s lasting impression on theatre today

Theatre Talk with Our Town

Audition Suggestions:

● Read the play here: (Act I, Act II, Act III). Be familiar with the text.
● Attend the Audition Workshop on August 19th from 3:30-6pm at O’Plaine.
● Choose a dramatic monologue to audition. It does not have to be from the play.
• Work on your pantomime over the summer. I will ask you to do some pantomime during callbacks.

*I realize the Saturday show does conflict with the ISU band competition. If you are a member of band, you need to be in constant communication with the directors of both events. Students always have the choice to participate in the competition or the play as well. If needed, double casting is possible for certain roles.*

**Character Descriptions:**

1. **Stage Manager (Role Split 1 M & 1 F/ 2M or 2F)**
The host of the play and the dramatic equivalent of an omniscient narrator. The Stage Manager exercises control over the action of the play, cueing the other characters, interrupting their scenes with his/her own interjections, and informing the audience of events and objects that we cannot see. Although referred to only as Stage Manager and not by a name, he/she occasionally assumes other roles, such as an old woman, a druggist, and a minister. Interacting with both the world of the audience and the world of the play’s characters, he/she occupies a godlike position of authority. This role will be divided into two people. It requires a great deal of memorization and they will never leave the stage.

2. **Emily Webb (F)**
Mr. and Mrs. Webb’s daughter and Wally’s older sister. Emily is George’s schoolmate and next-door neighbor, then his fiancée, and later his wife. She is an excellent student and a conscientious daughter. After dying, Emily joins the group of dead souls in the local cemetery and attempts to return to the world of the living. Her realization that human life is precious because it is fleeting is the central message of the play. She is considered the female lead of the play and has a powerful monologue at the end of the show.

3. **George Gibbs (M)**
Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs’s son. A decent, upstanding young man, George is a high school baseball star who plans to attend the State Agricultural School after high school. His courtship of Emily Webb and eventual marriage to her is central to the play’s narrative action. Wilder
uses George and Emily’s relationship to ponder the questions of love and marriage. At the end of the play, George must be able to emotionally break down at Emily’s grave. He is considered the leading man of this play.

4. **Mrs. Myrtle Webb (F)**
Emily’s mother and Mr. Webb’s wife. At first a no-nonsense woman who does not cry on the morning of her daughter’s marriage, Mrs. Webb later shows her innocent and caring nature, worrying during the wedding that she has not taught her daughter enough about marriage. She is a central figure and must play older.

5. **Mrs. Julia Gibbs (F)**
George’s mother and Dr. Gibbs’s wife. Mrs. Gibbs’s desire to visit Paris is a wish that is never fulfilled. This suggests the importance of seizing the opportunities life presents, rather than waiting for things to happen. At the same time, Mrs. Gibbs’s wish for the luxurious trip ultimately proves unnecessary in her quest to appreciate life. She is one of the spirits that Emily sees at the graveyard at the end of the show. She gives Emily counsel in the afterlife.

6. **Mr. Charles Webb (M)**
Emily’s father and the publisher and editor of the Grover’s Corners Sentinel. Mr. Webb’s report to the audience in Act I is both informative and interactive, as his question-and-answer session draws the audience physically into the action of the play.

7. **Dr. Frank F. Gibbs (M)**
George’s father and the town doctor. Dr. Gibbs is also a Civil War expert. His delivery of twins just before the play opens establishes the themes of birth, life, and daily activity. He and his family are neighbors to the Webbs.

8. **Simon (or Simone) Stimson (M/F)**
The choirmaster, whose alcoholism and undisclosed “troubles” have been the subject of gossip in Grover’s Corners for quite some time. Wilder uses Mr. Stimson’s misfortunes to explore the limitations of small town life. Mr. Stimson appears in the group of dead souls in Act III, having committed suicide by hanging himself in his attic. He is perhaps most notable for his short and cynical speech in Act III,
when he says that human existence is nothing but “ignorance and blindness.”

9. Howie (Holly) Newsome (M or F)
The local milkman. Howie’s reappearance during every morning scene—once each in Acts I, II, and III—highlights the continuity of life in Grover’s Corners and in the general human experience.

10. Rebecca Gibbs (F)
She is George’s younger and energetic sister. She is always in her brother’s business and won’t leave him alone. She has a very significant scene with her brother. Her remarks in Act I about the location of Grover’s Corners in the universe articulates an important theme in the play: if the town is a microcosm, representative of the broader human community and the shared human experience, then this human experience of Grover’s Corners lies at the center of a grand structure and is therefore eternal.

11. Mrs. Soames (F)
A gossipy woman who sings in the choir along with Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibbs. Mrs. Soames appears in the group of dead souls in Act III. One of the few townspeople we meet outside of the Webb and Gibbs families, Mrs. Soames offers a sense of the interrelated nature of the lives of the citizens of Grover’s Corners.

12. Professor Willard (M or F)
A professor at the State University who gives the audience a report on Grover’s Corners. His role in the play is to interact with the audience and to inform theatergoers of the specifics of life in Grover’s Corners.

13. Constable Warren (M or F)
A local policeman. Constable Warren keeps a watchful eye over the community. His personal knowledge of and favor with the town’s citizens shows the close-knit nature of the town.

14. Joe Crowell Jr. (M)
The paperboy. Joe’s routine of delivering papers to the same people each morning emphasizes the sameness of daily life in Grover’s Corners. We see this sameness continue when Joe’s younger brother, Si, takes over the route for him. Despite this sameness, however, each of the conversations Joe has while on his route is unique,
suggesting that while his activities are monotonous, daily life is not.

15. Sam (Samantha) Craig (M or F)
Emily Webb’s cousin, who has left Grover’s Corners to travel west, but returns for her funeral in Act III. Though originally from the town, Sam has the air of an outsider. Her unawareness of the events that have occurred in Grover’s Corners during her absence parallels the audience’s own unawareness.

16. Joe (Josephine) Stoddard (M or F)
The town undertaker. Joe prepares Emily’s grave and remarks on how sad it is to bury young people. This statement emphasizes a theme that grows ever more apparent throughout the play and receives its most explicit discussion in Act III: the transience of human life.

17. Wally Webb (M)
Emily’s younger brother. Wally is a minor figure, but he turns up in Act III among the group of dead souls. Wally dies young, the result of a burst appendix on a Boy Scout trip. His untimely death underscores the brief and fleeting nature of life.

18. Si (Sally) Crowell (M or F)
Joe’s younger brother (or sister), also a paperboy. Si’s assumption of his brother’s former job contributes to the sense of constancy that characterizes Grover’s Corners throughout the play.

People of the town—3-5 people (male & female) interspersed throughout the show.

- School Teens
- Choir Members
- Three Baseball Players (M)
- Woman in the Balcony (F/Audience)
- Man in the Auditorium (M/Audience)
- Lady in the Box (F/Audience)
- Dead Souls