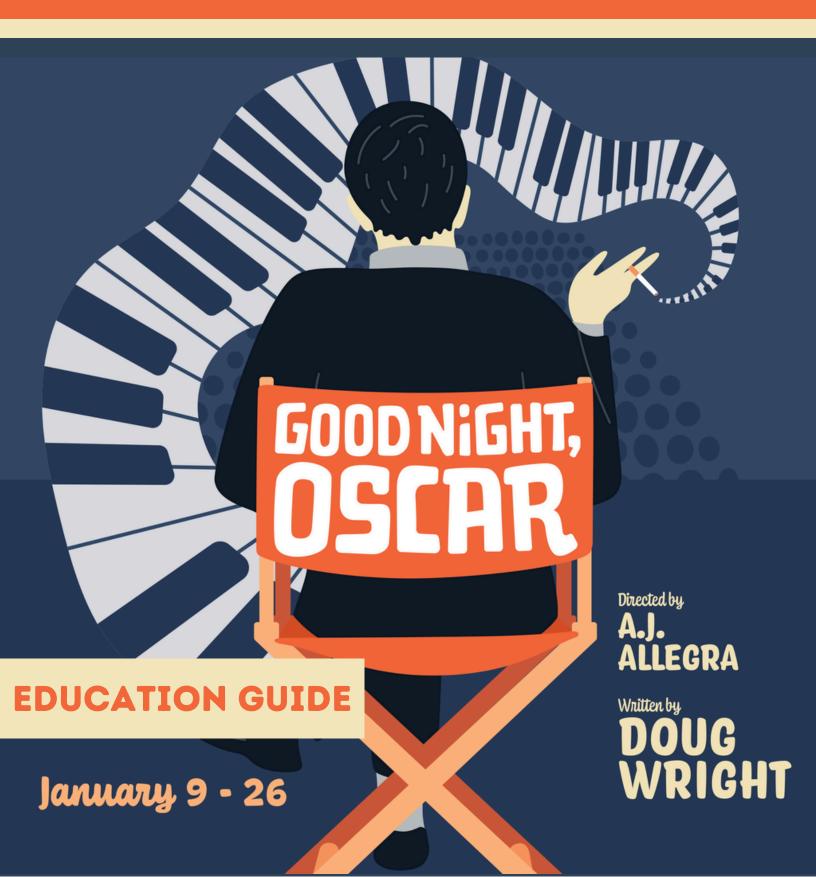
# LEPETIT THEATRE





# **HISTORY**

New Orleans' most historic playhouse, Le Petit Théâtre Du Vieux Carré, has played an important role in our nation's theatrical history since 1916. Located just off of Jackson Square in the French Quarter, we have called our current stage at 616 St. Peter Street home since 1922.

Since moving into its current home in 1922, Le Petit has entertained thousands of audience members in a wide array of dramas, comedies, and musicals. First conceived as a community theatre, and later grown into a professional venue, hundreds of actors, designers, directors, and technicians, both locally and nationally, have shared their talents to make Le Petit a true shining star in the theatrical world.

# THIS SHOW

It's 1958, and Jack Paar hosts the hottest late-night talk show on television. His favorite guest? Character actor, pianist, and wild card Oscar Levant. This play is a unique fiction/nonfiction dramedy play. What we mean by that is that many of the characters (Oscar Levant, June Levant, Jack Paar, Bob Sarnoff, George Gershwin) and a lot of the dialogue of this play are based on real-life people and true events. But this isn't exactly how it all happened. Playwright Doug Wright has used an immense amount of research about the real life of Oscar Levant to concoct a dramatic scenario whereby he appears on the Tonight Show while on a four-hour leave from Mt. Sinai, a mental hospital where he is currently committed as a patient. The result is a play fraught with tension and bursting with wit and hilarious one-liners that were actually delivered by the real Levant. While the overall arc may be a dramatic one, it is certainly a very funny journey along the way, given Oscar's biting, and oftentimes inappropriate, sense of humor. The play is split into two halves with a short intermission between them. In the second

half of the play, you will get to see Oscar doing what he best know for: masterfully playing the piano. The show's climax comes as Oscar play's Gershwin's famous "Rhapsody in Blue."

## **ARRIVING & DEPARTING**

Once you arrive at Le Petit, one of our staff members will greet your group leader in the lobby and lead you to your seats. Please be certain to make sure to fill in every seat, as our student performances are very often completely full. The show will run approximately two hours inclusive of a 15 minute intermission. The restrooms at Le Petit are shared with Tableau, our neighbor restaurant, and located in the shared courtyard between the two businesses.

After the performance has ended (and following your rousing ovation), your group leader can lead you back into the lobby where you can exit the theater. If you wish to greet some of the cast members or take your photo up on our stage, just be sure to let a staff member know. We are very happy to oblige any reasonable request to make your time at Le Petit a memorable one.



# **HOW TO SHOW UP**

We are so excited to host you at our student matinee, and we hope you are excited to see our show! Attending a live piece of theatre or music is a wonderfully unique experience because you get to share the same space with both the performers on stage and your fellow audience members for a couple of hours. Even though the audience section is darkened for lighting purposes, EVERYONE can see and hear one another; Actors can see and hear you, and you can see and hear them! The communication is much more direct than watching a video or listening to something with your headphones. And that is what makes it special.

So in order for you to have the most exciting and engaging experience possible, we highly recommend the following:

**UNPLUG!** - Turn those phones and devices off and escape the electronic world for a couple hours. Taking that kind of break is great for your mental health and will also help you tune into the story in front of you.

**REACT!** - If you enjoy what you see and hear, let the artists know it! We love to hear your natural reactions, such as laughter and applause. It lets us know you are there with us and it helps feed the actors' energy.

**RESPECT!** - Make sure to keep the show up on the stage. Resist the urge to draw attention to yourself by talking or looking at your phone. The actors can all see and hear those things, and it probably is annoying to those around you.

**EMBRACE!** - Theatre, by its nature is designed to challenge, to educate, to provoke, and to engage. That means you may see and hear things that are outside of your comfort zone or beyond your current understanding. You may see characters do things and express ideas that challenge your present perception of the world, or you may see a reflection of the world just as you see it. Either way is a welcome experience! We just ask that you keep an open mind and and open heart to what you see and hear. We hope whatever you experience provokes thoughts and feelings within you. That is why we tell stories on stage after all.

We can't wait to see you soon!





# **ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: DOUG WRIGHT**

Broadway credits include I Am My Own Wife (Tony Award, Pulitzer Prize, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle Award and others), War Paint, Hands on a Hardbody (Drama Desk nomination), The Little Mermaid, and Grey Gardens (Tony Award nomination). Off-Broadway credits include Posterity (Atlantic Theatre Company); Unwrap Your Candy (Vineyard Theatre); Quills (New York Theatre Workshop); Standing on Ceremony (Minetta Lane Theater); Buzzsaw Berkeley (WPA Theater). His plays and musicals have been seen in over thirty-three countries around the globe. Films include Quills (WGA's Paul Selvin Award, Golden Globe nomination) and the upcoming The Burial starring Jamie Foxx and Tommy Lee Jones. He is the former president of the Dramatists Guild of America and a member of SAG-AFTRA, SDC and the WGA.





He has been a frequent fellow at Yaddo, MacDowell and Ucross. Doug serves on the Board of the New York Theater Workshop and has taught at NYU, Princeton and Yale. He has mentored young screenwriters at Sundance for twenty years. He hails from Texas, and lives in Manhattan with his husband singer-songwriter David Clement, and their cats Glynis and Murray.



A humble wooden stage with a velvet curtain can still be a site for soul-shattering revelation.

# THE CREATIVES



### AJ ALLEGRA, DIRECTOR

Makaylee Secrest



A.J. ALLEGRA (Artistic Director/Director) is serving in his second season as artistic director at this historic institution. Prior, he served as artistic director of The NOLA Project from 2008 to 2023. Under his direction, the organization was twice awarded the National Theatre Company Grant from the American Theatre Wing, producer of the Tony Awards®. During his tenure at NOLA Project, the organization successfully partnered with the New Orleans Museum of Art to present work all around the museum's campus, including several outdoor productions in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden. For sixteen years, Allegra served as a New Orleans theatre arts teacher, first at NOCCA and then at The Willow School, and is tremendously proud of the hundreds of students he was fortunate to instruct and direct. He has been named to City Business' Power List: Young Professionals and Gambit Magazine's 40 Under 40 list. He proudly serves on the board of Bike Easy and advocates for bicycle safety and access in New Orleans. He holds a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and an MS from the University of Pennsylvania. He is husband to the talented New Orleans costume designer, Kaci Thomassie. He thanks you for supporting live theatre and the artists who make it.

Assistant Director

makayiee secrestAssistant Director
Steve SchepkerSet Designer
Daniel RigamerCostume Designer
Daniel ZimmerLighting Designer
Jamie DoyleSound Designer
Laurin HartWig/Hair Designer
Deborah Bommer-MorisseyProperties Designer
Sarah ChatelainProduction Stage Manager
Ryan WilesAssistant Stage Manager

# THE CAST



#### LESLIE CASTAY (JUNE LEVANT)



LESLIE CASTAY (June Levant) is thrilled to return to the Le Petit stage where she starred in *Noises Off, It's Only a Play* (with director A.J. Allegra), *Merrily..., Grey Gardens, Forbidden Broadway*, and created a virtual cabaret during the covid lockdown, *Crazy World*. A veteran of several Broadway shows, including *Guys and Dolls* (with dear friend and stage husband Michael Paternostro!), Leslie has multiple TV and film credits, including the upcoming season two of "Mayfair Witches" as Alicia Mayfair.

### MICHAEL PATERNOSTRO (OSCAR LEVANT)

MICHAEL PATERNOSTRO (Oscar Levant) most recently came from Moonlight Amphitheatre where he played Michael/Dorothy in *Tootsie*. Also there, he played Lumiere in *Beauty* and conducted/MD'd *Something Rotten*. On Broadway, he was in the '93 revival of *Guys and Dolls* starring Nathan Lane (also national tour), the original company of *Fosse* (Tony Award® Best Musical), *Sweet Smell of Success* and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* with John Lithgow, DJ Monty in *Saturday Night Fever*, Greg in 2006 *A Chorus Line*, Moisheleh/Milt in *Soul Doctor*. Also, Carmen Ghia in *The Producers* (national tour and Ovation Award), Frank Shultz in *Showboat* at the Hollywood Bowl, sang at Carnegie Hall in "Sondheim: A Celebration at C.H.," and Frederick in *Young Frankenstein* just to highlight a very few. Co-wrote *Scary Musical: The Musical*.



### KC SIMMS (ALVIN FINNEY)



KC SIMMS (Alvin Finney) is a Baton Rouge-born actor, director, and proud member of the Goat in the Road ensemble. A graduate of the University of New Orleans Film School, he has been featured in *The Advocate* and *Offbeat Magazine* for his co-directorial work on *We The Future* and *Do You Love Me?* His stage performances include roles in productions such as *Fool for Love, Romeo and Juliet, The Trees*, and *As You Like It*. Onscreen, KC has portrayed characters like Henry Tillman in "Mike" and Jerren in *Hit Man*, working with directors like Craig Gillespie and Richard Linklater.

### **NICK STRAUSS (BOB SARNOFF)**

NICK STRAUSS (Bob Sarnoff) This is Nick Strauss' fourth time at LPT (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, Let the Right One In). He is thrilled to be back in this beautiful, historic house. Chicago credits include Starkid's Me and My Dick and A Very Potter Senior Year, WCP's Southern Gothic, and Death & Pretzels' Anatomy of Gray, The Basement Company, and more where he served as an ensemble member and managing director.



### ZANE SYJANSKY (MAX WEINBAUM)



ZANE SYJANSKY (Max Weinbaum), a recent 2024 graduate from Loyola University, is jazzed to be in his first production with Le Petit Theatre. Zane's previous credits include Adam (*The Mad Ones*), Musidorus (*Head Over Heels*), and Senator Fipp (*Urinetown*). Zane wants to thank his family and friends that have always been his unwavering support, especially his girlfriend. Zane will continue with his creative pursuits within theatre and, more importantly, in life.

### **KEVIN WHEATLEY (JACK PAAR)**

KEVIN WHEATLEY (Jack Paar) is thrilled to return to the Le Petit stage after performing in previous seasons' *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and *Let the Right One In.* Film/TV credits: series regular roles in pilots for CBS, NBC, ABC, and Warner Bros. He played Kenny on the FX series "Dirt" with Courteney Cox. He wrote and directed feature film *The Beach Party* at the Threshold of Hell and short films *The Thwart* and *Beggars Grove*. He graduated the BFA acting program at UNC School of the Arts. Kevin thanks Stephanie and the girls and his loving and supportive family, friends and representatives.

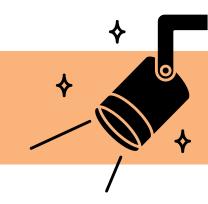


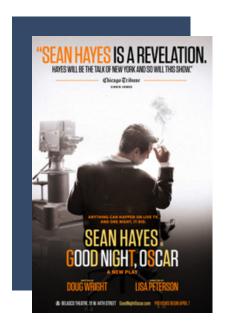
### **REID WILLIAMS (GEORGE GERSHWIN)**



REID WILLIAMS (George Gershwin) is a New Orleans-born and raised actor and circus performer. A NOCCA Graduate, Reid completed classical study at Monash University in Prato, Italy, and Drama Studio of London. Reid is a graduate of The Hartt School BFA program and San Diego Circus Center. An Alumni Member of The NOLA Project, Co-Founder of YellowBox Circus, and represented by Louisiana Talent Agency, Reid is excited to share his Le Petit Debut with his hometown.

# **OVERVIEW**





Good Night, Oscar is a 2023 Broadway play by Doug Wright that centers on Oscar Levant's appearance on Jack Paar's The Tonight Show in 1958. In the original production, Sean Hayes (star of Will and Grace and Smartless podcast) starred as Levant in the production, which earned significant acclaim and a Tony Award nomination for Hayes's performance.

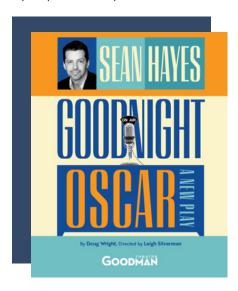
The play focuses on one memorable night when Levant, a renowned pianist and notorious wit known for his neuroses and addiction struggles, appears as a guest on Paar's show. At this point in his life, Levant is living under the care of his wife June and regularly staying at a psychiatric hospital. Despite (or perhaps because of) his well-known mental health challenges, he has become a favorite television guest for his sharp, self-deprecating humor and unfiltered honesty about his personal demons.

During the television appearance that forms the play's core, Levant engages in his characteristic wit and musical performance while navigating the complex territory between entertainment and personal revelation. The play explores themes of mental illness, celebrity, artistic genius, and the price of fame. Through Levant's interactions with Paar, the network staff, and his wife June, we see both the brilliant and troubled sides of his personality.

Wright's play uses this single television appearance as a lens to examine broader questions about entertainment, mental health, and authenticity in the public eye. The story is particularly resonant as it

depicts an early example of a public figure openly discussing mental illness on national television, well before such conversations became more common.

The play premiered at Chicago's Goodman Theatre before moving to Broadway's Belasco Theatre in April 2023, where it received strong reviews for both its writing and performances, particularly Hayes's portrayal of the complex character of Levant.



# FACT OR FICTION?

Doug Wright's Goodnight, Oscar brings to life the brilliance and chaos of Oscar Levant, a pianist, composer, and raconteur whose razor-sharp wit made him both a Hollywood favorite and a public enigma in mid-century entertainment. But how much of the story is true?

The play is deeply rooted in historical reality, but it is not a documentary. Instead, it blends fact and fiction to create a compelling theatrical experience that captures the essence of Oscar Levant's life rather than providing a strictly accurate chronology. The play's central premise—Levant appearing on The Tonight Show with Jack Paar while on a fourhour leave from a psychiatric institution—is grounded in truth but shaped for dramatic impact. Levant was a frequent guest on The Tonight Show where he became well known for candidly discussing his psychiatric struggles and multiple hospitalizations. However, there is no documented instance of Levant appearing on live television while on a medical leave, and the specific events of the play are dramatized to fit the emotional arc of Wright's storytelling.

Levant was one of the first public figures to openly discuss mental health issues, an act of radical transparency in the 1950s, when such topics were still largely taboo. Yet, as *Goodnight, Oscar* portrays, Levant's transparency wasn't a calculated crusade for awareness—it was simply who he was. His brilliance and neuroses were inseparable, spilling out in ways both hilarious and heartbreaking. Wright adds accuracy to Oscar's portrayal by featuring many real jokes drawn directly from Oscar's 1961 appearance on *The Tonight Show* and his multiple memoirs.

These quotes include one of Levant's most famous lines that perfectly captures his sardonic wit: "There's a fine line between genius and insanity. I have erased that line." Another classic moment that makes its way into the play is when Paar asks him, "Oscar, what do you do for exercise?" to which Levant dryly replies, "I stumble, then I fall into a coma."



Jack Paar and Oscar Levant pictured mid-interview on a 1961 taping of The Tonight Show with Jack Paar

As seen in the show, Jack Paar, the host of *The Tonight Show* from 1957 to 1962, was one of Levant's biggest champions, frequently inviting him onto *The Tonight Show* despite—or perhaps because of—his unpredictability. *Goodnight, Oscar* imagines Paar going to battle with NBC executives who worry that Levant's erratic nature could be bad for television. While this conflict is dramatized, it reflects real anxieties of the era, when networks tightly controlled what was acceptable for broadcast. In 1960, Paar himself famously had his own clash with censorship, when NBC edited out a joke he told that included the term "water closet" (a euphemism for a bathroom). Furious, Paar quit the show on air, returning only a month later with the now-famous

line, "As I was saying before I was interrupted..." The play channels Paar's real-life battle for creative freedom into his defense of Levant, highlighting the ongoing tension between artistic expression and the media's enforcement of the era's rigid social standards.

Another central relationship in Levant's life and in the play was his connection to George Gershwin. Levant was one of the most celebrated interpreters of Gershwin's music and deeply admired the composer, though their friendship was complicated by Levant's intense envy. In his 1940 autobiography, A Smattering of Ignorance, Levant famously wrote, "Tell me, George, if you had it to do all over, would you fall in love with yourself again?"—a pointed remark that highlights the accuracy of the play's portrayal of their brotherly rivalry. The script explores this rivalry through imagined conversations between Levant and Gershwin's ghost that highlight Levant's lifelong struggle to define himself outside Gershwin's shadow.

Goodnight, Oscar immerses audiences in a historically accurate portrait of pop culture of the 1950s, referencing real Hollywood figures and media. Though these details add authenticity, a deep knowledge of the era is not needed to follow the story. Wright works cleverly to introduce Oscar's life as more than a biological or historical depiction but as a lens to explore questions that remain relevant today: In a world that values spectacle, what happens when the truth is too uncomfortable for audiences to hear? Where is the line between entertainment and exploitation? Does genius come at a cost?

While some events in Goodnight, Oscar are dramatized for theatrical impact, the emotional truth of Oscar Levant's life remains intact. The play condenses timelines, heightens conflicts, and imagines conversations, but incorporates real quotes

people, and references. Even when certain details are fictionalized, the play faithfully reflects the dynamics of Oscar's relationships, both with those in his life and with the entertainment industry at large.



Oscar Levant in Rhapsody in Blue trailer - 1945

Whether drawn in by the wit, music, or drama, audiences will leave *Goodnight*, *Oscar* with a newfound knowledge of one of the most fascinating cultural figures of the century and a lingering sense of both awe and unease—an experience Levant himself might have appreciated.

# MORE REAL OSCAR QUOTES TO LOOK OUT FOR IN THE SHOW!

- "It's not a pretty face, I grant you. But underneath its flabby exterior is an enormous lack of character."
- "Strip away the phony tinsel of Hollywood and you will find the real tinsel underneath."
- "I once said cynically of a politician, 'He'll doublecross that bridge when he comes to it."
- "What the world needs is more geniuses with humility: there are so few of us left."
- "I was once thrown out of a mental hospital for depressing the other patients."

# ABOUT OSCAR LEVANT



Originally from Pittsburgh, Levant was born to Max and Annie Levant, Orthodox Jews who had emigrated from Russia. He moved to New York at age 15 to study piano under Zygmunt Stojowski, a Polish composer and teacher. In addition to attending classical concerts, Levant also frequented nightclubs, where he developed a taste for popular music. In 1925, he appeared in Ben Bernie and All the Lads, a short film made with then-new technology that recorded sound and film together. For an audience accustomed to silent films, the movie —which consists of a group of men playing a medley of songs, with 19-year-old Levant at the piano—represented an exciting technological advance. Perhaps entranced by this new medium, Levant moved to Hollywood a few years later, where he quickly impressed and befriended George Gershwin and found work in films playing the piano and, later, composing and appearing as an actor.

Throughout the 1930s, Levant maintained a delicate balance between Hollywood, Broadway and classical composition. Upon George Gershwin's death in 1937, critics and audiences considered him the leading interpreter of Gershwin's music, a role that Levant took on as both an honor and a chore for the next two decades. In his memoir A Smattering of Ignorance, Levant later noted that the first time he had heard Gershwin play the piano, he felt the first stirrings of "the two characteristics I have nurtured ever since as the dominating influences of my life—jealousy and revenge." Though Levant's words can be interpreted as a joke, he likely felt overshadowed by the enormity of Gershwin's fame and talent. Carrying the Gershwin torch must have been a burden.

Fortunately, Levant's career didn't stall. Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, Americans had bought radios en masse, and for the first time in human history, voices and music could be broadcast live into living rooms. Levant began appearing regularly on the radio in 1938, but surprisingly, he didn't usually play music. Rather, he regularly appeared as a panelist on Information Please, a radio quiz show on which listeners sent in questions to try to stump the panelists; if they succeeded, they won a cash prize. Levant impressed viewers with his knowledge of music, but he also regaled them with his witty repartee; he often buried cruel truths within jokes.

For the first time, he had a large audience for his wisecracks, which he later continued to showcase through television and memoirs. "I think a lot of Bernstein—but not as much as he does," Levant quipped about the famous composer. "I knew Doris Day before she was a virgin," he remarked about the famously innocent-

seeming songstress. Levant knew many people in Hollywood, and he used his fame to discuss and dissect stars, becoming a de facto cultural commentator. Ironically, his success also led to more appearances as a concert pianist, since promoters booked him on the assumption that audiences would want to hear the famous quiz show man play the piano.

From the late 1940s to the early 1950s, Levant enjoyed major supporting roles in a string of successful movies: The Barkleys of Broadway, starring Gingers Rogers and Fred Astaire; An American in Paris, starring Gene Kelly; and The Band Wagon, starring Astaire and Cyd Charisse. In these boisterous musical films, Levant more or less plays himself: a slightly acerbic pianist or composer. Frequently seated at the piano, he provides some of the accompaniment that the musicals' songs require, and sings smaller parts. In An American in



Paris, Levant plays Gershwin's Concerto in F Major in a dream sequence that diverges from the movie's plot for the sole purpose of showcasing his virtuosity. In one of The Band Wagon's most famous musical numbers, "That's Entertainment!", there is no piano to be seen, and Levant gamely (if a bit awkwardly) performs choreography alongside legendary dancer Fred Astaire.

Levant's upbeat performance in The Band Wagon belied his failing health. A year before the film's release, in 1952, he had suffered a heart attack. After receiving treatment with Demerol, Levant soon developed an addiction to the narcotic. From this point on, he faced professional difficulties, and his faithful wife, June, shuttled him between mental hospitals, professional engagements and rest at home. Despite his struggles, Levant had one more medium to conquer: the small screen. He appeared as a panelist on the NBC game show Who Said That?, and hosted his own television show from 1958 to 1960. On The Oscar Levant Show, which appeared on KCOP-TV in Los Angeles, he played the piano and interviewed guests including Fred Astaire and Linus Pauling. Levant was also a frequent guest on talk shows, including The Tonight Show.

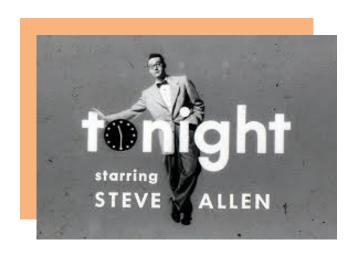
By the 1960s, Levant made few appearances. But during this period he wrote two of his three memoirs: The Memoirs of an Amnesiac and The Unimportance of Being Oscar. That title, a pun on Oscar Wilde's play The



Importance of Being Earnest, indicates how Levant thought of himself: he'd spent his life not being George Gershwin. But he'd done something Gershwin hadn't: he reinvented himself repeatedly as new technologies offered different ways of reaching audiences. Today, he might be playing the piano on TikTok—or avidly seeking the next app.

# THE TONIGHT SHOW





### 1957: Jack Paar Takes Over

When Jack Paar became host in 1957, he shifted the tone to one that was more emotional and unpredictable. Paar was known for his candid monologues and didn't shy away from serious or controversial topics. In 1960, he famously walked off the set mid-show after NBC censored a joke about a "water closet" (bathroom). He returned weeks later with the iconic line, "As I was saying before I was interrupted..."



### 1954: The Beginning

The Tonight Show premiered on NBC as Tonight Starring Steve Allen, establishing the late-night talk show format. Allen's version was a mix of comedy sketches, celebrity interviews, and live musical performances. He set the tone for the genre by interacting with the audience and embracing absurd humor. For example, in one memorable episode, he climbed into a giant bowl of Jell-O, showcasing his willingness to take risks for laughs.



# 1962: Johnny Carson's Era Begins

Johnny Carson took over in 1962, hosting for an unmatched 30 years and cementing *The Tonight Show* as a cultural institution. Carson's charm, impeccable timing, and wit made him a television icon. He was known for showcasing up-and-coming comedians, helping to launch the careers of stars like David Letterman, Robin Williams, and Jerry Seinfeld. Carson's final episode in 1992 attracted over 50 million viewers, making it one of the most-watched late-night episodes in history.

# 1992-2010: The Late Night Wars

The Late Night Wars began when Jay Leno replaced Johnny Carson in 1992, sparking a fierce rivalry with David Letterman, who left NBC to launch *The Late Show* on CBS. Leno's mainstream humor and segments like Headlines helped him dominate ratings, but in 2009, Conan O'Brien took over. Conan's quirky, offbeat style wasn't a hit with NBC, and after just seven months, the network brought Leno back, causing major backlash. Conan left NBC, launching his own show on TBS, and mocked the network with hilarious stunts, including a fake \$1.5 million Bugatti Veyron mouse sketch.



# 2014-Present: Jimmy Fallon Brings a New Energy

Jimmy Fallon became the host in 2014, bringing a youthful energy and a focus on viral content. Fallon introduced playful segments like Wheel of Musical Impressions and games featuring celebrities, which quickly became internet sensations. His emphasis on shareable, digital-friendly moments helped the show adapt to the age of social media and streaming. Fallon's lighthearted and collaborative style marked a new era for the program, appealing to a broader and younger audience.

#### **FUN FACTS**

- With over 70 years on air, *The Tonight Show* holds the title of the longest-running talk show in American TV history.
- The show has featured every sitting U.S. president since its debut, starting with John F. Kennedy.
- Robin Williams holds the record for the most appearances on the show, with over 50 visits.

- The Beatles made their first U.S. television appearance on *The Tonight Show* in 1964.
- Fallon's *The Tonight Show* segment "Lip Sync Battle" became so popular that it spun off into its own primetime TV show.
- Several The Tonight Show hosts, including Fallon, Leno, and O'Brien, got their starts on Saturday Night Live before making their mark on latenight TV.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



#### PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what ways might fame and public performance impact a person's personal life and well-being?
- Have you ever used humor to cope with a difficult situation? How did it help or hinder?
- How has society's understanding and treatment of mental health changed over the decades?
- Have you ever watched a performance where a comedian or artist seemed to be revealing something deeply personal? How did it impact your experience?

#### **POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What role did music play in shaping the mood or themes of the play?
- How might the issues presented in the play resonate in today's world?
- How might Oscar Levant's use of dark humor on live television have pushed boundaries or challenged the norms of his time?
- In what ways has television censorship evolved since the era depicted in the play? What topics remain controversial or censored today?



# IN REHEARSAL



### "HOW'D YA LEARN ALL THOSE LINES??"

Our rehearsal process at LPT is about 4 weeks long - That's it!

The first 3 weeks of rehearsals occur off-site at a separate rehearsal facility to allow carpenters, painters, lighting technicians, and sound technicians to work in the theater building the scenery for the play.

To start our rehearsal process, we have a "read-through" of the play. This is the first time the whole cast and crew hears the play spoken aloud. There is then a chunk of time devoted to "table work" where the director and the actors dive deep into the meaning and themes of the play, the characters' motivations and backgrounds, and move through the play's "beats" one at a time to discuss every moment of the show. It is called "table work" because none of the performers are yet up on their feet and moving around. This is all done while sitting in chairs at a big table, a lot like in a classroom.

This particular production's table work process involved "dramaturgical research." This research typically involves discussing a play's production history and playwright. Since this script is based on real people and events, our team conducted further research to ensure historical accuracy. Information on the lives of the charecters and general context on the social and political state of both the United States and late night television in the 1950s have informed our creative process.

After this, it's time to get the play on its feet! For 26 hours a week (about 4 hours per night) the actors work with the director and the stage managers to "block" the play. This is the term used to describe the process when actors and directors determine where the characters will move around in every scene. Once this is decided upon, the actors will perform the same movements night after night to ensure that the movement feels natural and familiar.

After about two weeks of this type of work, the actors are ready to put down their scripts and try to perform the play "off book." This is the industry term meaning fully memorized. This process is always a tricky one because plays have SO many words! Though each individual actor has their own special trick to memorizing dialogue, there is no one set way to do it other than practice, practice, practice. When actors are on stage and do not remember what comes next, they can call "Line!" to the stage manager, and the stage manager will prompt them with the next few words.

After three weeks of this kind of rehearsal, using "doofer" or stand-in props and costumes, the team is ready to move into the theater just in time for "tech week." Tech is the process when the actors go through the show extremely slowly so that the lighting and sound designers can add in every light or sound change that occurs. These are called "cues" and the slow tech rehearsal is commonly called a "cue-to-cue" rehearsal.

Once this slow and methodical cueing process is completed, it is time to add the costumes and props used for the actual show. These rehearsals are called "dress rehearsals" and usually occur a couple of nights before the play opens to the public.

After each of these rehearsals, the cast will change out of their costumes back into their "street clothes" and come sit in the audience (what theatre professionals call "the house") to get "notes" from the director and stage manager. At the next rehearsal, the actors will attempt to implement all of the notes to better perfect the overall performance.

Following dress rehearsals, it is time to show our work to the public. At Le Petit, we typcially perform one "**preview**" performance in front of a live, paying audience. The preview is a show where the director watches the show with a live audience reacting to it and then is also followed by more notes for the actors based on the reactions from the live audience.

Following the preview, it is on to "opening night" when the show is "frozen" and no further changes are made. After this night, the director departs and heads off for other directing jobs and it is up to the actors, the stage managers, and the crew to ensure that the performance happens the same way night after night until the "closing night" performance. All in, the entire process lasts about 7-8 total weeks.







### THEATRE VOCAB

- table work
- beats
- dramatugical research
- block/blocking
- off-book
- line
- doofer
- tech week
- dress rehearsal

- cues
- cue-to-cue rehearsal
- dress rehearsals
- street clothes
- the house
- notes
- preview
- · opening night
- frozen
- closing night





Compiled by Mak Secrest Production photos by Brittney Werner