



**STC**  
SACRAMENTO  
THEATRE COMPANY

**Study Guide**



***The Fantasticks***

Book and Lyrics by Tom Jones Music by Harvey Schmidt

Study Guide Organized March 6, 2016 by William Myers

# Sacramento Theatre Company

## Mission Statement

The Sacramento Theatre Company (STC) strives to be the leader in integrating professional theatre with theatre arts education. STC produces engaging professional theatre, provides exceptional theatre training, and uses theatre as a tool for educational engagement.

## Our History

The theatre was originally formed as the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre in 1942, an ad hoc troupe formed to entertain locally-stationed troops during World War II. On October 18, 1949, the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre acquired a space of its own with the opening of the Eaglet Theatre, named in honor of the Eagle, a Gold Rush-era theatre built largely of canvas that had stood on the city's riverfront in the 1850s. The Eaglet Theatre eventually became the Main Stage of the not-for-profit Sacramento Theatre Company, which evolved from a community theatre to professional theatre company in the 1980s. Now producing shows in three performance spaces, it is the oldest theatre company in Sacramento.

After five decades of use, the Main Stage was renovated as part of the H Street Theatre Complex Project. Features now include an expanded and modernized lobby and a Cabaret Stage for special performances. The facility also added expanded dressing rooms, laundry capabilities, and other equipment allowing the transformation of these performance spaces, used nine months of the year by STC, into backstage and administration places for three months each summer to be used by California Musical Theatre for Music Circus.

Sacramento Theatre Company can accommodate 292 patrons in the proscenium-style auditorium of its Main Stage, while the Pollock Stage offers a more intimate experience with only 87 seats in a black box-style theatre. Both provide good acoustics and sight-lines. This professional, Equity theatre presents seven professional productions per season with a reputation for excellent stage adaptations of classic literature. Three annual productions in the Cabaret Stage, which seats 100, round out the experience with high-quality Broadway musical revues.

The Young Professionals Conservatory, a training program for young theatre artists, was founded in 2003. The program, as well as the entire STC School of the Arts, is directed by Michele Hillen- Noufer.

For further information about the Sacramento Theatre Company please visit us online at [sactheatre.org](http://sactheatre.org)

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## Summary

*The Fantasticks* opens in Act One with El Gallo singing the most famous song in the play, “Try to Remember the Kind of September.” El Gallo quickly addresses the audience as narrator and tells us the simple story of a boy (Matt), a girl (Luisa), two fathers (Hucklebe and Bellomy), and a wall (often played by a Mute holding up a stick). From the beginning we realize that Luisa is young, innocent, pretty, and thinks she’s in love with her neighbor that’s just over the wall, Matt. Matt feels the same about Luisa. But when their fathers appear, the lovers do not show their affection since the two fathers are supposedly engaged in a private feud with each other. However, we quickly discover that the fathers have concocted the feud for no other reason than to get their two children together—a kind of reverse psychology in action. They are actually good friends and have built the wall simply to add to the deception. There is only one difficulty: they can’t decide how to end the feud. Finally one father suggests that they hire a man (El Gallo) to stage a fake abduction. The plan is that El Gallo will abduct Luisa, Matt will run in to save her and defeat El Gallo, and Matt will become the hero, thus ending the feud.

El Gallo is helped in the abduction by two actors who are down on their luck—one Mortimer (who specializes in dying) and one rather old Henry (who specializes in reciting mixed up pas ages from Shakespeare’s plays). The actors succeed in the abduction with just a little bungling and Matt emerges as the hero having vanquished all three actors with his wooden sword. Our girl, our boy, and our fathers embrace in a loving tableau. Act One closes with our families still frozen in a “happy ending.”

Act Two opens on our families still in the same frozen tableau, only they are getting tired of it. The fathers tell their children that the abduction and feud were all arranged. El Gallo makes his appearance with the bill for the abduction, and Matt tries to sword fight him again, but this time he loses. Our fathers part, angry with each other over gardening habits, and our lovers part, over equally trivial things.

At this point El Gallo and Matt sing a song from opposite sides. Matt is looking for a “bright shining somewhere” and El Gallo knows that “There’s a song he must sing; / It’s a well-known song / But the tune is bitter / And it doesn’t take long to learn.” As Matt heads off, Mortimer and Henry turn up to accompany Matt on his journey. El Gallo informs us of the passing of the month of October. Next we see our two fathers by the wall that is being fortified; however, they start discussing the fact that they haven’t heard from Matt for over a month. They end up by singing a song about how much they enjoy gardening because, unlike children, vegetables are dependable. They are friends once again and leave to play a game of poker.

We find Luisa daydreaming when suddenly she sees El Gallo sitting up in a tree. She is happy to see “her bandit” since she is obviously infatuated by his good looks and decides to climb the tree to sit beside him. She asks him if he won’t take her “To the parties! To the world!” El Gallo and Luisa dance, and the Mute hands her a paper, laughing mask to wear over her face. While they are dancing, Luisa sees Matt in various dangerous circumstances—first being burned by Mortimer and Henry, then being beaten by them, and then being forced to sit on nails. In each case Luisa feels no compassion as long as she keeps the mask to her face. El Gallo agrees to take Luisa and run away with her. As Luisa runs off to pack, we notice that Matt has returned and has been watching. Now Matt knows that the world is not gleaming—it contains hunger and sorrow. He tries to stop El Gallo from leaving Luisa, but it is useless. Luisa returns to find El Gallo gone and sinks to her knees. As narrator once again, El Gallo explains that hurting them was a necessary part of their growing. He and the fathers watch as our two lovers once again face each other and sing, “You are love”—only this time, everyone is wiser. One father suggests they tear down the wall and El Gallo responds, “No. Leave the wall. Remember— you must always leave the wall... Deep in December it’s nice to remember / The fire of September that made us mellow.”

## The Characters

**El Gallo:** The narrator, El Gallo sings to the audience.

**Luisa:** A button-maker's young and pretty daughter, Luisa is in love with Matt.

**Matt:** The son of Hucklebee, Matt is in love with Luisa.

**Hucklebee:** Father of Matt, Hucklebee is pretending to fight with Bellamy in order to get Matt and Luisa together. In the STC Production, Hucklebee will be played as Matt's mother.

**Bellomy:** A button-maker and the father of Luisa, Bellamy is faking a fight with Hucklebee in order to get Matt and Luisa together.

**Henry:** An ancient actor who specializes in reciting passages from Shakespeare's plays, Henry is hired by the two fathers to stage an abduction in order to end the fake feud.

**Mortimer:** An actor who specializes in dying, Mortimer is hired by the two fathers to stage an abduction in order to end the fake feud.

**The Mute:** Holds up a stick representing a wall, and deals with props

## A Play for All Seasons

by Lynnette L. Horner

“Still Fresh After 16,562 Performances, *The Fantasticks* Transcends Generations and Outlasts Nine Presidents”

This headline from one of many internet sites devoted to *The Fantasticks*

(<http://home.att.net/~fifthdecade/index.html>) celebrates the enduring quality of the show that broke all records as it marked its forty year run on May 3, 2000. “*The Fantasticks* has charmed audiences at the Sullivan Street Playhouse in Greenwich Village ever since Dwight Eisenhower was president. Each generation from bobby-soxers to flower children to baby-boomers, to cyberkids have embraced the universality of the show” (ibid). So, what were you doing in 1960? Do you remember 1960? Just think, “Before the mud of Woodstock there were the love songs of *The Fantasticks*. Before Neil Armstrong walked on the Moon, before Elizabeth Taylor received an Academy Award for *Butterfield 8*, and before Wilt Chamberlain completed the first of his seven consecutive years as basketball’s top scorer, ‘Try to Remember’ and ‘Soon It’s Gonna Rain,’ from *The Fantasticks*, were part of our national culture” (ibid).

Where does a theatrical treasure like this begin? And why does it resonate with all generations?

More than 400 years ago, a young playwright penned the story of a young boy and girl who were kept apart by their feuding families. Shakespeare’s tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* became the inspiration for Edmond Rostand’s 1894 satire *Le Romanesques*, a play about a family that invents a feud to encourage their children to fall in love. In 1950 two college students at the University of Texas began by writing comedy sketches and music for a revue entitled “Hipsy-Boo!” Encouraged by their college success, Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt continued their collaboration after graduation and during their service in the Korean Conflict. After their discharge, they moved to New York and began working on a musical based on Edmond Rostand’s *Les Romanesques*. Of this collaboration they write, “We always envisioned it as a big Broadway show involving two ranches in the southwest... trying to take the story and force it into a Rogers and Hammerstein mold, which is what everybody did in those days. ... I always imagined everybody on real horses on the stage of the Winter Garden. ... The whole project just collapsed, our treatment was too heavy, too inflated for the simple little Rostand piece. It seemed hopeless” (<http://home.att.net/~Fantasticks/index.html>).

Then in 1959, they were asked to contribute a one-act musical for summer theater at Barnard College. Jones and Schmidt revisited their “little Rostand piece” and molded the beginnings of *The Fantasticks*. It received enough acclaim to draw the attention of New York producers and after Jones and Schmidt expanded the story to a full length musical, *The Fantasticks* opened to mixed reviews at the Sullivan Theater in Greenwich Village in 1960. Through unwavering faith in the show by producer Lore Noto, *The Fantasticks* weathered the first critical storms and is now a theatre legend.

But this legend doesn’t “knock your socks off” with show stopping numbers, big sets, and breathtaking special effects. In the case of *The Fantasticks*, less is definitely more. It magically conjures stagecraft almost from thin air. There are no pyrotechnics, no pulse racing “how did they do that” effects; just eight actors and some simple props and costumes that lead the audience on a joyous journey of the heart.

This is the story of a young boy and girl who fall in love *Romeo and Juliet*-style when their fathers pretend to feud. The young, starry-eyed lovers long to pursue the excitement of the big wide world. But, under the harsh light of day, they perceive that their moonlit dreams have lost their patina. The hurt of their disillusionment leads them on a journey back to discover that their deepest happiness was found in their own backyard, with each other, all the time.



The enduring quality of *The Fantasticks* lies in the fact that it resonates deeply with every season of life. The first time I saw *The Fantasticks* as an away-from-home-for-the-first-time-full-of-big-dreams college freshman, I remember the young girl, Luisa's, refrain in her first number, "Oh, please God, please—don't let me be normal!" (Tom Jones, Harvey Schmidt, *The Fantasticks* Musical Score [U.S.A.: Chappell and Co., Inc.], p.17). I was captured. Here was a character I related to. And all parents that have tried reverse psychology on their children will relate the lament of "Why did the kids put jam on the cat? ... Why should the kids do something like that, when all that we said was 'No'?" (Jones and Schmidt, p. 39). Any couple whose love has survived the aftermath of heart racing infatuation may find themselves smiling wryly at the refrain of "This plum's too ripe. / Sor-ry!" (Jones and Schmidt, p. 87).

The play's appeal isn't limited to audiences on American shores, either. *The Fantasticks* has been staged in over sixty-seven countries, including Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Ireland, Italy, Hungary, Thailand, and China. You can count on the fact that every night of the week, somewhere in the world, someone is hanging a cardboard moon and inviting the audience to "Try to remember, and if you remember, then follow."



## The Playwrights: *The Fantasticks*

By Elaine Pilkington

Which investment made in 1960 has returned 19,465 percent? General Motors stock? RCA? No, it's *The Fantasticks*, a simple but timeless story of the tenacity of love. Although best known for this nearly immortal, off-Broadway hit, Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones have created an extensive body of work in a musical collaboration that has spanned over fifty years.

Their personal and professional association began at the University of Texas in 1950 with a musical revue for which Jones wrote comedy sketches and Schmidt served as musical director. At that time, neither planned to pursue a writing career. Jones majored in play production, and Schmidt was studying art. After graduating from college and before relocating in New York, Schmidt and Jones continued their collaboration, sending music and lyrics between bases while both served in the army ("The Authors," *The Fantasticks Company*, 2000. <http://www.TheFantasticks.com>).

Once in New York, Schmidt worked as a graphic artist for NBC Television and then as an illustrator for *Life*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Fortune*. Jones taught, conducted workshops, and endeavored to become an established director. Together they wrote revue material for Julius Monk's *Upstairs at the Downstairs* shows and Ben Bagley's *Shoestring Revues* as well as a musical version of Edmund Rostand's play *Les Romanesques* that evolved into *The Fantasticks*, receiving its first performance as a one-act musical created at the request of Word Baker, who had directed the University of Texas musical revue that first brought Schmidt and Jones together in 1950. Having attracted the attention of the professional theater, *The Fantasticks* made its way to the Sullivan Street Theater (It's still there!) on May 3, 1960 ("The Team," <http://members.aol.com/n2thewoods/index.html#/theteam>).

Following *The Fantasticks*, Schmidt and Jones wrote *110 in the Shade*, their first Broadway show. Opening in 1963, this musical version of N. Richard Nash's *The Rainmaker* "boasted a glorious score which was especially singled out by the critics" ("The Team"). Schmidt and Jones "wrote over a hundred songs for *110 in the Shade* before the final choices were made" (Martin Gottfried, *Broadway Musicals* [New York: Abradale Press/HarryN. Abrams, Inc., 1979], 39). Three years later, *I Do! I Do!*, adapted from Jan de Hartog's comedy, *The Fourposter*, opened with Mary Martin and Robert Preston appearing in the roles originally performed by Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn ("The Authors").

From 1969 to 1975, Schmidt and Jones operated the Portfolio Studio to experiment with primal theater (Robert Viagas, "The Fantastic World of Jones and Schmidt," *Playbill Online*, 30 September 1996. <http://members.aol.com/n2thewoods/part1html>). *Celebration* appeared in 1969 as an attempt to expand the scope of the Broadway musical by combining aspects of myth and ritual with popular entertainment. Concentrating on small-scale musicals in new and often untried forms, they created *The Bone Room*, *Portfolio Revue*, and *Philemon*, which won the Outer Critics Circle Award and was later produced by Hollywood Television Theater ("The Team").

Since then, three major projects have occupied their talents. The first is *Collette*. Having written songs for a play based on the autobiographical works of Sidonie Gabrielle Claudine Colette, the author of *Gigi*, the two resolved to write *Collette*, a full-scale musical covering her entire life of eighty-two years. The work initially blossomed into an elaborate production before becoming the far more simple, more successful *Collette Collage*. While endeavoring to perfect *Collette*, Schmidt and Jones also worked on *Grover's Corners*, a musical version of Thornton Wilders' *Our Town*. Working within the restraints of rights to *Our Town* that were initially limited to

two years, the two have seen the musical through many versions, including a production in Chicago that received great acclaim (“The Team”). Mirette, the third most notable production in recent years, is based on the Caldecott Award book *Mirette on the High Wire* written by Emily Arnold McCully. The 1994 Sundance Festival included a first draft workshop reading of Mirette. “A rare second Sundance workshop, this semi- staged for an audience, followed in 1995, which led to a July 1996 production at Sundance’s children’s theatre” (Viagas). “In the 1997-98 season, Jones and Schmidt appeared off-Broadway in *The Show Goes On* a new revue based on their theatre songs... [H]ailed by the New York Times as ‘lighthearted, loving and sad, laced with nostalgia but also with laughter,’ the show extended its run several times and was subsequently released as a CD” (“The Authors”). Schmidt and Jones are no strangers to performance. When *The Fantasticks* opened in 1960, the Old Actor was played by Thomas Bruce, better known as Tom Jones. When the actress playing Colette was detained during readings for a workshop production of *Colette Collage*, Jones decided to play the role himself. “With Schmidt at the piano, Jones threw himself into the part ... establishing that he remains one of the great, though rarely-heard interpreters of his own work—even as a gaunt sixty-plus-year-old playing a ripe seventeen-year-old courtesan” (Viagas). When the National Alliance of Music Theatre Producers obtained the rights to *Grover's Corners* and organized a premiere production in 1987 at the Marriot Lincolnshire Theatre near Chicago, Schmidt and Jones “served onstage as co-Stage Managers. Jones did most of the talking; Schmidt played piano and chimed in on songs” (Viagas). Jones first played the role of the Stage Manager when he was twelve years old, the only child in a cast of adults (Donald P. Farber and Robert Viagas, *The Fantasticks: America's Longest Running Play* [Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1991], 9). Schmidt was known to attend performances of *The Fantasticks* and sit “down at the piano to reprise themes from the show as the audience, generally unconscious of his identity ... [filed] out of the theatre” (Viagas).

Their dedication, involvement and enthusiasm for their collaboration have earned them an Obie Award, the 1992 Special Tony for *The Fantasticks*, and the ASCAP-Richard Rodgers Award. “In February of 1999 they were inducted into the Broadway Hall of Fame ... and on May 3, 1999, their ‘stars’ were added to the Off-Broadway Walk of Fame outside the Lucille Lortel theatre” (“The Authors”). They have given us much to remember.

## A Simple Journey for Knowledge and Love

by Jaylynn Lewis

When Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt created *The Fantasticks*, it was complete with elaborate scenery, stage sets, and explanations. But it didn't work well. Jones and Schmidt finally threw the elaborateness away. As Jones says, "Less is more. The theatre works best when it is at its barest" (Tom Jones, Harvey Schmidt, *The Fantasticks Celebration* [New York: Nelson Doubleday Inc., 1973], 168). *The Fantasticks* thrives on simplicity; but although it is simple, it still has much to teach us.

One of the foremost themes of *The Fantasticks* is the timeless lesson of growing up and the journey from innocence to knowledge. In Act One we discover that most of the main characters are deceived in the way they view the world. For example, Luisa believes that she is a "princess" despite her father's assertions that she is nothing more than a "button-maker's daughter" (Jones and Schmidt, 15). Matt claims that his lover (Luisa) is "Too vibrant for a name ... she is a star ... or the inside of a leaf" (Jones and Schmidt, 8 9). These are nice poetic words, but they are not real. Just like the imaginary castle in which Luisa and Matt find themselves dancing in Act One, their love will also disappear unless they can undergo a test—a journey from unreal innocence to the knowledge of hard reality. It is ironic that our characters welcome this journey. Luisa exclaims, "Please, God, don't let me be normal. I'd like to be ... a little worldly wise" (Jones and Schmidt, 6). Even the father, Bellomy, correctly labels them "Fantastic!" in their youth and innocence. At the end of Act One, life is simple and perfect—it is an evening in September. "Try to remember the kind of September when you were a tender and callow fellow. Try to remember when life was so tender, that dreams were kept beside your pillow" (Jones and Schmidt, 3).

Act Two opens in the month of October. We hear Gallo (as narrator) saying, "Their moon was cardboard, fragile. It was very apt to fray" (Jones and Schmidt, 35). Our characters have found that the lovely things they thought they had on an evening in September look different by day. Luisa says, "He looks different in the sunlight" (Jones and Schmidt, 36). Act Two is glaring in symbols of bright, hot sunlight that pulls our lovers apart. Matt exclaims, "I can see everything. All the flaws." And he correctly states that Luisa is childish and silly. Luisa is equally disenchanted with her lover, "I hate you," she says. Matt decides to leave. "Beyond that road lies a shining world...Bright lights invite me to come and learn!" (Jones and Schmidt, 43-45). He is off on his journey to obtain knowledge.

It seems to be at this point that we realize that Gallo is ironically the character closest to a devil, and yet, he is the only one who consistently speaks the truth. When Matt decides to leave, we hear Gallo saying, "The world will teach him very quickly the secret he needs to know" (Jones and Schmidt, 47). It is interesting that Gallo performs the same function of a wise narrator in Jones and Schmidt's play as jesters typically do in Shakespeare's plays. Gallo is very worldly wise and seems to bring on the tragedy, much as the serpent of old brought the apple to Adam and Eve. It is no lost allusion that Luisa climbs a tree (like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) to sit with Gallo from where he can see "everything." In the Bible allusion Eve partakes of the fruit to open her eyes, and Luisa hopes to do the same in Gallo's presence. Luisa says to him, "You must steal something." He replies, "I steal whatever is treasured most" (Jones and Schmidt, 55). This not only includes her mother's rhinestone necklace but her fanciful dreams as well.

At this point in the play Gallo tells us that "October is over. We're one month older" (Jones and Schmidt, 49). The month of November includes the scenes in which Matt's comrades are torturing him by burning and beating him, and making him sit on nails. This is compounded by the fact that Luisa is watching him and feels no compassion as long as she views him through a theatrical mask. Jones and Schmidt are showing us that life can

and does give each one of us a beating at one time or another. In contrast to the words Luisa sings, “Life is [not] a colorful carousel. Reckless and terribly gay” (Jones and Schmidt, 60).

In the final scene of the play, December has arrived. Matt returns home penniless and beaten just as the Biblical story of The Prodigal Son. Matt has learned that “Beyond that road lies despair” (Jones and Schmidt, 63). However, this time Matt has learned compassion as evidenced by his desire to spare Luisa pain. He tries to make Gallo wait for her as Gallo promised he would. “Don’t leave her like that,” Matt pleads with Gallo. But December is upon us and life is at its cruelest. Finally, in December when Luisa and Matt “face” each other, they sing a different song, a song in which we again see the symbol of sight/eyes that we have seen so frequently throughout the play. “Without you near me, I can’t see. You are love... Better far than a metaphor can ever be” (Jones and Schmidt, 66).

Finally, we realize that we too have been deceived. Gallo is not the devil we thought, but rather has functioned as an educator. He explains himself, “Who understands why? We must all die a bit Before we grow again. I hurt them for that reason” (Jones and Schmidt, 64). Both Luisa and Matt have made the journey from innocence to knowledge and have learned much about life—perhaps the most important lesson being how to love truly. In the words of Tom Jones, “The last thing I learned from *The Fantasticks* was that you have to be in love. Not all the skill in the world, not all the knowledge, not all the daring means anything at all in your writing if you are not passionately in love” (Jones and Schmidt, 168).

## Theatre Etiquette

- Arrive at the theater on time.
- Visit the restroom before the performance begins.
- Turn off your cell phone. Do not speak on the phone or text during the performance.
- Pay attention to announcements that are made prior to the show about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
- Don't speak during the performance. Whispering is still speaking, so only in an emergency.
- Remember that the Overture (introductory music) in musical theater is part of the performance, so be quiet when it begins.
- Do not take pictures during the performance. It can be very distracting to the actors and can cause a mishap.
- Remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment.
- Do not eat or drink in the theater.
- Do not put your feet up on the seats or balcony and do not kick the seat in front of you.
- Don't put or throw anything on the stage.
- Do laugh when the performance is funny.
- Do applaud when it is appropriate during the performance.
- Do applaud when the performance is over... this tells the performers and crew that you appreciate their work.
- Stand and applaud if you really thought the show was great.
- Do not whistle or scream out to the performers except for a Bravo or Brava.



## Using What You've Learned to Learn More

A significant part of this Study Guide comes from materials originally developed and collected into the Utah Shakespeare Festival's Study Guide and Educational material for their production of the show. The Utah Shakespeare Festival has graciously allowed us to use their material for this season's production of *The Fantasticks*, though clearly any adaptation and production concept oriented details will not sync with the local production. Note that not all of the material available at the USF site was included. To find more from that collection, please visit their site at:

Utah Shakespeare Festival [www.bard.org](http://www.bard.org)

*The Fantasticks* Official Web site  
<https://theFantasticks.com>

*The Fantasticks* has been around long enough (and been actively running long enough) that we might have forgiven it for not having entered the contemporary Information age. But it IS online and includes a fantastic gallery of photos from the show's history and both audio and video from productions recent and past. But hey, looking a little too 1990's web design for you?

That's because the original production closed back in 2002. Don't despair though, try

<http://www.Fantasticksonbroadway.com/>

Because the Broadway revival opened in 2006 and has been running since then. More photos await you.

*The Fantasticks* wikipedia

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Fantasticks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fantasticks)

Never forget the value of Wikipedia... not so much as a primary resource, but as a starting point for learning and research.

