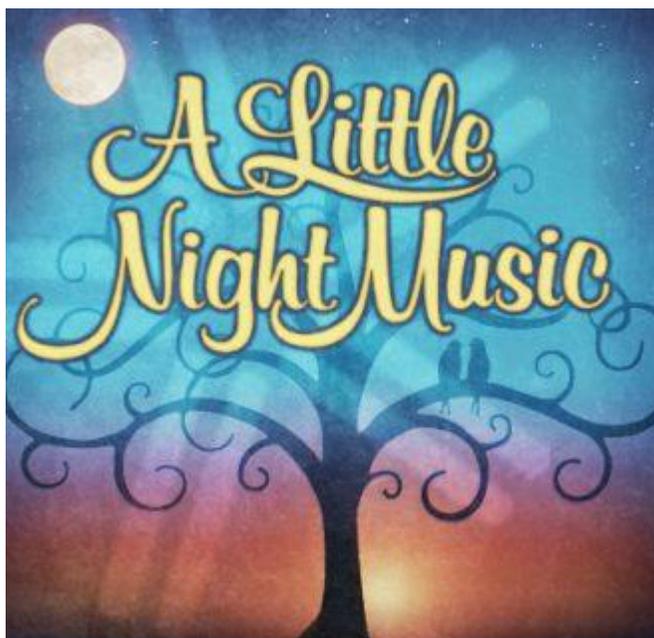


# Sacramento Theatre Company

## Study Guide



## **A Little Night Music**

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim  
Book by Hugh Wheeler

**Study Guide Materials Compiled by Anna Miles**

# **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:**

**<http://www.sactheatre.org>**

# A Little Night Music

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, Book by Hugh Wheeler

## Sacramento Theatre Company Production Study Guide

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\*published with permission from the Utah Shakespeare Festival ([bard.org](http://bard.org))

Study Guide Materials Compiled by Anna Miles

## **About Stephen Sondheim\*** (music and lyrics, *A Little Night Music*)

Stephen Sondheim began his Broadway career as a lyricist. He provided words for Leonard Bernstein's music in *West Side Story* and for Jule Styne's *Gypsy*. His first Broadway music was written for a straight play, Arthur Laurent's *Invitation to a March* in 1960. His first complete Broadway score was for *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* in 1962. Of course, he wrote the lyrics too, as he was to do throughout his career, joining the somewhat rarefied company of the theatre's twentieth century composer/lyricists: Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, George M. Cohan, Noel Coward, and Frank Loesser.

His plays' subject matter has ranged from fairy tales to discreet Victorian cannibalism; his settings have roamed from Japan and Sweden to Paris and London to New York and Hollywood. Along the way, he has collected most of the awards that the theatre has to offer, including five Tony Awards and a Pulitzer Prize shared with James Lapine.

Some of his most popular shows have been *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1986), and *Assassins* (1990).

He also composed the film scores for *Stavisky* (1974) and *Reds* (1981), wrote songs for the motion pictures *The Seven Percent Solution* (1976) and *Dick Tracy* (1990), and co-authored the film *The Last of Sheila* (1973).

## An excerpt from "The Playwrights: Into the Woods"

by Don Leavitt for the Utah Shakespeare Festival\*

Sondheim's career was a pursuit that began at the young age of eleven. Born in New York in 1930, Sondheim was the only child of a successful dress maker and his designer wife. His father left the family when Sondheim was ten, and his mother moved them to Pennsylvania, where he became good friends with the son of Oscar Hammerstein. Looking back, Sondheim has said that Hammerstein became a mentor and surrogate father; if Hammerstein had been a geologist, "I probably would have been a geologist," Sondheim said (Mick Brown, "Still Cutting It at 80: Stephen Sondheim Interview [<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/8022755/Still-cutting-it-at-80-Stephen-Sondheim-interview.html>]).

Sondheim wrote his first play at fifteen, a musical about life at a Quaker boarding school. He studied theatre at Williams College in Massachusetts and went on to study composition with composer Milton Babbitt. While working briefly as a television scriptwriter, he composed the musical *Saturday Night*, which was not produced but did attract the attention of Leonard Bernstein, who hired Sondheim to write the lyrics for *West Side Story* in 1957; he wrote the lyrics for *Gypsy* (1959) and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962) before suffering his first major failure with *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964). In 1970, Sondheim wrote *Company*, and has said it was the first musical in which he "began to hear my own voice loud and clear" (Brown). Though he has not always been a critical favorite, Sondheim has nevertheless won more awards for theatre than most people know even exist. His catalog of awards includes Grammys, Tonys and Obies; Drama Desk awards and several Laurence Olivier awards. *Telegraph* reporter Mick Brown writes, "He is, by universal acknowledgement, the man who revolutionised American musical theatre, and the last survivor of a form that is all but extinct, swept away in the deluge of 'jukebox musicals', overblown crowd pleasers and 'theme-park' spectacles that now dominate the Broadway stage" (Brown).

Sondheim appreciates the sentiment but recognizes that his time may have passed. He has produced only one new play in the last nineteen years, and at age eighty-three, wonders if there is a place for him in modern theater. In the *Telegraph* interview, Sondheim says, "I don't know that there is an audience now for the kind of shows I would want to write. . . . The fact is if I had something I really wanted to write, I would write it. But I don't. . . . I don't have to prove anything to myself. I don't have to prove anything to the world. I'm venerable now."

\*published with permission from the Utah Shakespeare Festival ([bard.org](http://bard.org))

## **About Hugh Wheeler** (book, *A Little Night Music*)

Hugh Wheeler, born in 1912, was a British writer of novels, screenplays, librettos, and poetry. In 1934, Wheeler moved to the United States and became a naturalized citizen in 1942. Wheeler remained in the US until his death on July 26, 1987.

Wheeler wrote many mystery novels and short stories under the pen names Patrick Quentin, Q. Patrick, and Jonathan Stagge, and in 1963 he was given an Edgar Award by the Mystery Writers of America for his collection titled *The Ordeal of Mrs. Snow*, published two years prior. *A Little Night Music* was his first collaboration with Stephen Sondheim in 1973, but they worked together again to write *Sweeney Todd* in 1979. Wheeler won Tony Awards and Drama Desk Awards for both books, as well as for the book of the 1974 musical *Candide*. Wheeler is also considered a co-writer of the screenplay for *Cabaret*, though he is only credited on the film as a "research consultant."

## Synopsis: *A Little Night Music*

In Sweden, sometime during the turn of the century: the Quintet slowly emerges, where they will take their place as a musical chorus, their voices weaving in and out of the story throughout both acts. Their vocal overture gives way to Madame Armfeldt, pushed in her wheelchair by her servant Frid and sitting with her granddaughter, Fredrika, as she teaches the young girl how to watch for the night to "smile." The night smiles three times, Madame Armfeldt tells Fredrika: "The first...at the young, who know nothing. The second, at the fools who know too little...and the third at the old who know too much."

We are transported to the grand room of the Egerman estate, where we meet Fredrik, a middle-aged lawyer, Anne, his 18-year-old wife, Henrik, Fredrik's 20-year-old son from a previous marriage, and Petra, the Egerman's feisty young maid. Though Anne has been married to Fredrik for 11 months, the marriage still has not been consummated, as Anne is terrified to do so.

Meanwhile, on a small-town tour, Desiree Armfeldt (famous actress and Fredrika's mother) arrives to perform near Fredrik and Anne's home. Fredrik, who had been Desiree's lover in their youth, presents Anne with theater tickets under the pretense of surprising his wife with a night out. In reality, he has been thinking of Desiree, and wishes to see her. Anne notices Desiree and Fredrik's familiar and suggestive glances they give one another during the performance, and demands to be taken home, where Petra is attempting to seduce a very conflicted Henrik.

After leaving with Anne, Fredrik secretly returns to see Desiree. After a bittersweet reunion full of reminiscing, Fredrik propositions Desiree, who agrees to sleep with him again for old time's sake and because he is not satisfied by Anne.

The next morning, Desiree and Fredrik are discovered by Desiree's lover, the Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm. They attempt to convince the Count that nothing romantic has occurred, but he remains suspicious. Carl-Magnus returns home to his wife, Charlotte, to whom he tells everything about his affair with Desiree, including about his jealousy.

Charlotte, who's younger sister went to school with Anne, calls upon Anne and tells her about Fredrik's infidelity with Desiree, which devastates Anne. When the Egerman's receive an invitation from Desiree and Madame Armfeldt to join them for a weekend at their country home, Anne at first refuses, but then, after Charlotte's urging, agrees to go so that she may have a chance to eclipse Desiree in beauty before Fredrik's eyes. Though the Malcolms are not invited, the Count determines to crash the party, and Charlotte agrees to go along, with her own plot to seduce Fredrik in order to make her own husband jealous.

Desires run rampant once at the country- even for the servants, Petra and Frid, who engage in a tryst with one another. While the intense competition for Desiree's attention continues between Fredrik and Carl-Magnus, Desiree tricks Carl-Magnus into leaving so she can have time in private with Fredrik, when she tells Fredrik about her daughter- who, of course, has a strikingly similar name to his own. In the garden, Fredrika walks with Henrik, who confesses to her that he is secretly in love with his stepmother, Anne.

Once all together again at dinner, Charlotte puts her plan in motion by aggressively flirting with Fredrik, which annoys Desiree and ends with the two women insulting one another. The events prove too much for Henrik, who deems the entire company amoral before running away. When Anne is finally able to get away from the table, Fredrika tells Anne about Henrik's secret love, and the two rush away to find him, worried he might harm himself.

While the young people rush through the gardens, Fredrik and Desiree meet once more. Desiree confesses that she would like something more permanent with Fredrik, but Fredrik wishes to remain married to Anne. They bemoan their very disparate feelings together while Anne finally finds Henrick, who is attempting to commit suicide outside. Anne confesses to him that she loves him as well. Nearby, Frid dozes in Petra's lap, while Petra muses upon her inevitable future as someone's wife, vowing to have as much fun as she can before being pinned down to a husband.

Charlotte meets Fredrik and confesses her plan to him while they watch Anne and Henrik run off together. They take comfort in each other, which enrages the passing Carl-Magnus, who challenges Fredrik to a game of Russian Roulette. This challenge relieves Charlotte, since it proves her husband does care about her after all. During the game, Fredrik misfires his gun, grazing his own ear but stopping any further bodily harm from befalling either of the two men. Carl-Magnus re-devotes himself to his wife, while Fredrik admits to Desiree that he has loved her all along, and that he too is ready to settle down into a life with her and Fredrika.

Fredrika, however, despite her careful watching, has yet to see the night smile. Madame Armfeldt tells her that "It has already smiled. Twice." "For the young and the fools?" Fredrika asks. "So there's only the last to come." "Only the last," Madame Armfeldt, the old one, who knows to much, replies as she dies peacefully beneath the smiling night sky.

## **Characters: *A Little Night Music***

**Fredrik Egerman:** A successful middle-aged lawyer, widowed from his previous wife with whom he had one son, Henrik. Anne's husband and Desiree's former lover.

**Anne Egerman:** Fredrik's very young, 18-year-old, naive wife of eleven months, who remains a virgin even after almost a year of marriage.

**Henrik Egerman:** Fredrik's 20 years old son from Fredrik's previous wife, who is studying to be a Lutheran priest. He has a confused and tortured inner life, affected not a little by his secret love for his stepmother Anne as well as his attraction to Petra.

**Petra:** Anne's feisty, lusty maid, who engages in an attempted affair with Henrik, and later, a successful one with Frid.

**Desiree Armfeldt:** A once glamorous and successful actress who is now forced to tour the country with a less-successful play; she was Fredrik's lover fourteen years before the start of the play, and desires to rekindle their romance, this time for good.

**Fredrika Armfeldt:** Desiree's thirteen-year-old daughter, who may or may not be Fredrik's daughter- unbeknownst to him.

**Madame Armfeldt:** Desiree's elderly mother who was once a glamorous courtesan.

**Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm:** Desiree's latest lover- a very possessive and jealous man when it comes to his relationships with both his wife and Desiree, despite his own dalliances.

**Countess Charlotte Malcolm:** Carl-Magnus' wife, who is forced to listen to his accounts of his affairs and infidelities- despite which, she still desperately loves him.

**Frid:** Madame Armfeldt's manservant, who has a romp with Petra.

**The Quintet:** Mr. Lindquist, Mrs. Nordstrom, Mrs. Anderssen, Mr. Erlanson and Mrs. Segstrom: a group of five singers, which acts as a kind of Greek chorus for the story. Harold Prince, the original director of the show, once said that these characters represent "people in the show who aren't wasting time ... the play is about wasting time."

**Malla:** Desiree's devoted maid

**Osa:** A maid in Madame Armfeldt's home

**Bertrand:** A page in Madame Armfeldt's home

## Editor's Notes: *A Little Night Music* Excerpted

### Published as a foreword to the libretto of the musical

Shortly after *West Side Story* had opened in 1957, Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim first came up with the notion of collaborating on a musical with a score made up entirely of waltzes. But unable to find a suitable property, they put the notion aside to work on other projects. After their prize-winning *Follies* had opened in 1971, they resumed their search for a basis for their "waltz" musical. They asked Hugh Wheeler to aid them in their search, but it was Sondheim who recalled Ingmar Bergman's 1956 film, *Smiles of a Summer's Night*, one of the film maker's few comedies. The three men screened the film and immediately knew they had found the right property. Mr. Bergman was approached and sold the rights when he was assured that the producer did not intend "a rigid adaptation" of his film, but rather a musical freely suggested by it. Thus, *A Little Night Music* was born, "a stylish celebration of romantic love, set in the enchanted birch groves of Sweden at the turn of the century."

*A Little Night Music* burst upon the Broadway scene with a magic that was enthusiastically acclaimed by audiences and critics. Clive Barnes of *The New York Times* rapturously exclaimed: "Good God! - an adult musical! Heady, civilized, sophisticated and enchanting....Hugh Wheeler's book is uncommonly urbane and witty. The jokes are funny, and the very real sophistication has considerable surface depth....Then, of course, there are Stephen Sondheim's breathtaking lyrics" and his "music is a celebration of 3/4 time...of plaintively memorable waltzes, all talking of past loves and lost worlds."

Otis Guernsey, Jr., in his coverage of the Broadway season in *The Best Plays of 1972-1973* stated: "Leading the season's parade of thirteen Broadway musicals was - as usual - a Harold Prince show, *A Little Night Music*, with Stephen Sondheim at the top of his virtuosity, and with a beguiling book by Hugh Wheeler based on Ingmar Bergman's film *Smiles of a Summer Night* (it was about the ways of love on a Swedish country estate on Midsummer's Eve, when the sun never sets and the characters from both drawing room and scullery wander in pairs among the birch trees throughout the long, warm twilight). This show took an operetta form, not as a pastiche but in a very high style" and "ranks among the best that the Broadway theatre has to offer."

Opening on February 25, 1973, the show ran for 601 performances, won a parcel of awards, notably, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award as the season's best musical, six Antoinette Perry (Tony) Awards (including one for best musical), and three Drama Desk Awards for best lyricist, composer and author of a musical book.

Accolades for *A Little Night Music* were not confined to New York. The national road company (headed by Jean Simmons and Margaret Hamilton) toured for a year and received three major awards from the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle. The musical opened in London on April 15, 1975, to generally ecstatic notices.

## An Intro to "Meta-Theatricality"

Like the play *Deathtrap*, produced by the Sacramento Theatre Company earlier this season, *A Little Night Music* uses a device called "meta-theatricality." Meta theater is theater that is self-aware: in other words, theater that knows it's theater, and which comments on and engages with that awareness in order to further enhance the storytelling.

Meta-theatricality can take many forms. It can appear in the form of direct address to the audience, any acknowledgement by the character in the play of knowing the audience is there, any acknowledgement by the characters that they're aware they're being played by actors, plays-within-plays (when a play is performed or rehearsed within the larger play), or just generally, any theater that's about theater- that references the making of theater, that takes place in a theater, etc. Many moments in *A Little Night Music* make use of these various devices: when Anne and Fredrik watch Desiree perform, we see a "play within a play." The quintet hovers outside the action, implicitly commenting on the complicated goings-on, while also existing as an inextricable and vital part of the action. The musical's most famous song, "Send in the Clowns," compares Desiree and Fredrik's relationship to a theatrical circus event, further intertwining the narrative and themes with a commentary on the nature of performance both public and private.

And that's the element that connects all these different ways of using meta-theater: meta-theater is almost always used as a way to critique or challenge the form of theater in a specific way- or, it could be challenging the ways in which human beings often put on performances in their real life, blurring the lines between reality and theater.

Now that you know a little more about meta-theater, what are some other points Levin makes about theater and/or humanity using this device? Can you think of other movies, TV shows, books, or plays that use "meta" as part of their storytelling?

# The Role of Farce in *A Little Night Music*

By Anna Miles

As part of *A Little Night Music's* use of meta-theatricality, Anne and Fredrik attend a performance of a French comedy starring Desiree Armfeldt- Fredrik's former lover, though this fact is unbeknownst to Anne. The play is described as being set in "a tatty Louis XIV salon"- which would imply that this French comedy is, more specifically, a French Farce.

The term "farce" comes from the French word "farci," meaning "to stuff," a reference to the fact that these comedic plays were originally put in the middle of more serious dramas as the sort of "comic relief." Farces are characterized by physical comedy, deliberate absurdity, and highly stylized acting; above all, farces aim to entertain, and spark laughter in their audiences by presenting hugely exaggerated and over-the-top storylines, characters, and situations.

French Farce developed alongside and was greatly influenced by another form of theater: namely, the Italian tradition of Commedia dell'arte, which was popular in Italy from the 16th century all the way through the 18th century. Commedia used a few well-known plots populated with "stock characters" as the baseline for their performances, and then improvised around this framework. These stock characters are the basis for many archetypal characters we see throughout history and even today- each character is defined by one or a few simple, basic traits. The typical stock characters include the *Innamorati* (the young lovers), the *Pantalone* (the older, rich womanizer), the *Il Dottore* (the pretentious scholar), the *Colombina* (the young, flouncy female maid), the *Arlecchino* (the servant), and the *Pierrot* (the sad clown).

These stock characters continued to appear in the French Farces, which were influenced by Italian Commedia troupes who traveled to France, and which picked up where Commedia left off. While farce dates back as early as the 1300s, the French farce became hugely popular in 18th century France, after the reign of Louis XIV and before the French Revolution. The farces follow many of the same patterns as Commedia (in particular, the use of the stock characters), but French farces were scripted plays with more complex and original storylines. The playwright Moliere is best known for his mastery of the farce genre- his famous plays such as *Tartuffe*, *The Miser*, and *School for Wives* make use of stock characters and exaggerated humor while also satirizing the absurdities of the upper, privileged classes. Because farce is always about the wealthy (hence, the "court clothes" worn by the actresses in the play performed in *A Little Night Music*), the form lends itself to commentaries on this wealth. *The Miser*, for example, makes fun of rich men who hoard their wealth to the point of obsession.

*A Little Night Music* gives a meta-theatrical nod to the French farce by displaying the genre literally, but the musical also references farce more figuratively, through its very own plot and characters: for example, the main characters are of a wealthier class, while their servants operate as comedic background characters. Many of the stock characters are represented: the *Innamorati* in Anne and Henrik (the latter of whom also boasts a little of the "il dottore" archetype), the *Pantalone* in Carl-Magnus, the *Colombina* in Petra, and the *Arlecchino* in Frid. The promise of the Commedia archetypes float about in more symbolic ways, too: the *Innamorati* of the past shimmer in the memory of Fredrik and Desiree's younger days, while the *Pierrot* (the "sad clown") makes an appearance in the haunting refrains of "Send in the Clowns." The characters certainly find themselves in absurd situations- one wouldn't likely call the Countess' plan to seduce Fredrik prudent and "every day." And the setting and the action that unfolds within it (namely, the romp of lovers through a fantastical

pastoral wonderland in the middle of midsummer), both echo a certain English comedy with farcical elements (namely, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

As complete an homage to farce as *A Little Night Music* is, Sondheim and Wheeler ultimately wrote it for a 1970s American audience, not a 1700s French one; and that more modern audience demanded a little more nuance. The musical complicates and subverts the expectations of how these typical characters will behave, and the story is rife with poignant and very human bittersweetness even within its absurdities. Petra, as silly, frivolous, and loose as she appears for most of the play, reveals a much deeper reason for behaving the way she does in "The Miller's Son:" she knows she must eventually settle down and prioritize stability, so she prioritizes fun and love while she can. We learn the complicated, very un-funny human motivations behind the "Colombina"- motivations which wouldn't have been explored in either Commedia or French farce. Fredrik and Desiree, though they would like to squeeze themselves into comfortable stock characters living comfortable stock lives, learn that they must rather build their own characters from the pieces of their past personal performances: "a coherent existence after so many years of muddle."

In the reprise of "Send in the Clowns," Desiree asks, "Was that a farce?" When putting that question to *A Little Night Music* itself, one might answer that the musical is both a farce, and something much, much more, all at the same time.

## **An Excerpt from *Moliere's Obsession*\***

By Lawrence Henley for the Utah Shakespeare Festival

Molière (a.k.a. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin) was the preeminent writer of seventeenth century French stage comedy, acknowledged today as the prime force that advanced the genre beyond the unidimensional farce and commedia influences preceding him. Molière (1622–1673) brought his characters out of greyscale into full, living color. In his hands, the French stage became a vehicle for social commentary, examination of character (mostly flawed), and an intellectual look inside the shortcomings of human nature. Molière's success vaulted French comedy to its apex. Now France possessed a comedic master to equal any of his European contemporaries.

To avoid falling into disfavor with his royal patrons (most notably King Louis XIV), Molière primarily targeted the French upper classes as the object of his magnificent humor. The lead role in *The School for Wives* exemplifies his best characters: myopic males, mostly gentrified, that focus too heavily on belief in the very thing that will, ultimately, lead to their undoing. These characters are usually foiled in their obsessive attempts to manipulate the world, often through schemes that backfire. Because they adhere so firmly to their own narrow view of the world, a negative result is inevitable, and by play's end they are made to look foolish.

Mostly, the focal points of Molière plays attempt to victimize or control other characters through manipulative behavior, usually for personal gain. Due to an intense focus on the character's "Achilles heel," the audience's field of vision expands, making the character's capacity for ridiculous behavior seem as wide as a football field. In *The Misanthrope*, Molière portrays Alceste, a man who despises hypocrisy, and can do nothing but see all of society as corrupt. In *Tartuffe*, Molière's best-known work (1664), Orgon can't see that he has come under the spell of the parasitic title character that usurps everything of value to him, including his own family. Toward the end of his career, an increasingly ill Molière created Argan (*The Imaginary Invalid*, 1673). Argan's stupefying hypochondria manifests itself in an obsession whereby his health neuroses inspire him to force his daughter to marry a physician.

...Critics have noted similarities between many of Molière's characters and those of the commedia d'ell arte genre. A great number of his creations closely resemble the stock characters found in that genus. As a prime example, *The School for Wives* employs the standard Innamorati (young lovers) and the cranky elder (Vecchio) who tries to obstruct their path to marriage. On the other hand, there is a more biographical slant to the fabric of this play, and commedia influences were not Molière's exclusive basis for character.

While it certainly is insightful that the characters in *The School for Wives* may have an interesting basis in history, the most important characteristic of this show is it's vintage, uproarious comedy. Molière truly had amazing instincts for where the rarest comedy could be found: within the human condition, and within himself.

**\*published with permission from the Utah Shakespeare Festival (bard.org)**

# Study Guide Questions: Engage With the Play

By Anna Miles

Take charge of your theatre-going experience and make it your own by asking yourself questions before, during, and after watching a play.

## Questions to ask before the play:

If you **HAVE** read the play:

How did you envision the set, or the visual world of the play, while reading?

How did you imagine the characters looked while reading the play?

What themes did you notice repeating throughout the play?

What images jumped out at you while reading the play?

How would you describe the central theme of the play in one sentence?

If you **HAVEN'T** read the play:

Do you know anything about the play? If so, what do you know?

In General:

When you think about "theatre," what impressions come to mind? What does "theatre" mean to you?

What do you expect your experience to be when you watch a play? Do you expect to be bored? Excited? Engaged? Curious? Angry? Tired?

## Questions to ask after the play:

If you **READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT**:

How did the production set differ from what you had imagined while reading the play? How was it similar? How did these changes affect your understanding of the story?

Did the characters look different from how you envisioned them looking while reading the play? Did they sound different? Act differently? How did these changes affect your understanding and opinion of each character? How did these changes affect your understanding of the overall story?

How did the themes and images you noticed while reading translate to performance? Did the same themes and images jump out at you? Did you notice new ones?

Did this particular production seem to have the same central theme, or a different central theme from the one you discovered while reading? What elements of the staging, acting, or design helped convey the theme?

Did they play gain or lose anything in performance? Did you enjoy reading it more, or watching it?

**If you DIDN'T READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT:**

How did the play live up to your expectations? Did it turn out the way you thought it would? Was your knowledge of the play correct?

Were you able to follow the story?

Which part of the story did you most respond to? What themes and images jumped out at you?

Which character did you most relate to? Why?

**In General:**

How did this production change or confirm your original impressions of "theatre"?

How did your experience watching the play differ from how you expected it would go?

In your own words, how would you summarize the plot of the play? How is the plot different from the story, or the thematic implications, in the play?

Did you feel the story was relevant to your life? How and why?

Did you feel the story said something about our society, or about the world at large? If so, what?

Do you feel this story is an important one to tell and keep telling? How and why?

What kind of stories do you most respond to?

# California State Standards

Giving students the chance to experience live theater at the Sacramento Theatre Company not only gives them the chance to enrich their understanding of literature, humanity, and the world, but also includes the added benefit of fulfilling several of California's State Standards for Education, including:

## California Arts Standards in Theater:

**RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

**Enduring Understanding:** Theatre artists reflect to understand the impact of drama processes

6 TH·Re7 PK.TH:Re7	7 TH·Re7 K.TH:Re7	8 TH·Re7 1.TH:Re7	Prof TH·Re7 2.TH:Re7	Acc TH·Re7 3.TH:Re7	Adv TH·Re7 4.TH:Re7	Adv TH·Re7 5.TH:Re7
With personal and peer prompts, recall an emotional response in a <b>dramatic play</b> or a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	With personal and peer prompts, express an emotional response to characters in <b>drama experience</b> .	Recall choices made in a <b>guided drama experience</b> in a drama/theatre work.	Recognize when artistic choices are made in a <b>guided drama experience</b> in a drama/theatre work.	Understand and discuss why artistic choices are made in a drama/theatre work.	Identify artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation.	Explain <b>cultural context</b> to structure and justify personal artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work.

**RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

**Enduring Understanding:** Theatre artists' interpretations of drama/theatre work are influenced by personal experiences, culture, and aesthetics.

**Essential Question:** How can the same work of art communicate different messages to different people?

**Process Component:** Interpret

PK.TH:Re8	K.TH:Re8	1.TH:Re8	2.TH:Re8	3.TH:Re8	4.TH:Re8	5.TH:Re8
a. With prompting and supports, explore preferences in <b>dramatic play, guided drama experience</b> or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. With prompting and supports, identify preferences in <b>dramatic play, a guided drama experience</b> or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. Explain preferences and emotions in a <b>guided drama experience</b> or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. Explain how personal preferences and emotions affect an observer’s response in a <b>guided drama experience</b> or age-appropriate theatre performance.	a. Consider multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.	a. Compare and contrast multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.	a. Justify responses based on personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.
b. With prompting and supports, name and describe characters in <b>dramatic play</b> or a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	b. With prompting and supports, name and describe settings in <b>dramatic play</b> or a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	b. Identify causes of character actions in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	b. Identify causes and consequences of character actions in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	b. Consider multiple ways to develop a character using physical characteristics and prop or costume design choices that reflect <b>cultural perspectives</b> in drama/theatre work.	b. Compare and contrast the qualities of characters in a drama/theatre work through physical characteristics and prop or costume design choices that reflect <b>cultural contexts</b> .	b. Explain responses to characters based on <b>cultural contexts</b> when participating in or observing drama/theatre work.
c. With prompting and supports describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in <b>dramatic play</b> or	c. With prompting and supports describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in <b>dramatic play</b> or a	c. Explain or use text and pictures to describe how personal emotions and choices compare to the emotions and choices of characters in a	c. Explain or use text and pictures to describe how others’ emotions and choices may compare to the emotions and choices of characters in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	c. Examine how connections are made between oneself and a character’s emotions in drama/theatre work.	c. Identify and discuss physiological changes connected to emotions in drama/ theatre work.	c. Investigate the effects of emotions on posture, gesture, breathing, and vocal intonation in a

a **guided drama**  
**experience.**

**guided drama**  
**experience.**

**guided**  
**drama**  
**experience.**

drama/theatre  
work.

**RESPONDING—Anchor Standard 9:** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

**Enduring Understanding:** Theatre artists apply criteria to understand, explore, and assess drama and theatre work.

**Essential Question:** How do analysis and synthesis impact the theatre artist’s process and audience’s perspectives?

**Process Component:** Evaluate

PK.TH:Re9	K.TH:Re9	1.TH:Re9	2.TH:Re9	3.TH:Re9	4.TH:Re9	5.TH:Re9
a. With prompting and supports, discuss and make decisions about <b>dramatic play</b>	a. With prompting and supports, discuss and make decisions with others in <b>dramatic play</b> or a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	a. Build on others’ ideas in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	a. Collaborate on a scene in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	a. Understand how and why groups evaluate drama/theatre work.	a. Develop and implement a plan to evaluate drama/theatre work.	a. Develop multiple criteria to evaluate drama/theatre work.
n/a	n/a	b. Compare and contrast the experiences of characters in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	b. Describe how characters respond to challenges in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	b. Evaluate and analyze problems and situations in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.	b. Analyze and evaluate characters’ choices in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.	b. Analyze and evaluate a character’s circumstances in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective.
n/a	n/a	c. Identify props and costumes that might be used in a <b>guided drama experience</b> .	c. Use a prop or costume in a <b>guided drama experience</b> to describe characters, settings, or events.	c. Consider and analyze <b>technical theatre elements</b> from multiple drama/theatre works.	c. Explore how <b>technical theatre elements</b> may support a <b>theme</b> or idea in a drama/theatre work.	c. Assess how <b>technical theatre elements</b> represent the <b>theme</b> of a drama/theatre work.

**California Reading Standards in Literature:**

**Standards in Integration of Knowledge and Ideas for grades 6-12:** Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

**Grade 6 students:** Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

**Grade 7 students:** Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).

**Grade 8 students:** Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

**Grade 9-10 students:** Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.

**Grade 11-12 students:** Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

## 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 unless you are encouraged by the performers to participate.
- 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. It can also be a violation of an actor's contract.
- 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 (a standing ovation).
- Do not whistle, stomp your feet, or scream out to the performers except for a Bravo or Brava.

## **Additional Resources**

**A Little Night Music Study Guide- American Conservatory Theater**

[https://www.act-sf.org/content/dam/act/2014-15\\_Season/A%20Little%20Night%20Music/A\\_Little\\_Night\\_Music\\_Program.pdf](https://www.act-sf.org/content/dam/act/2014-15_Season/A%20Little%20Night%20Music/A_Little_Night_Music_Program.pdf)

**Look Back at the Original Broadway Production of A Little Night Music**

<http://www.playbill.com/article/look-back-at-the-original-broadway-production-of-a-little-night-music>

**French Farce and Commedia Dell'Arte**

<https://medium.com/lantern-theater-company-searchlight/french-farce-and-commedia-dellarte-c41cb381b8c>

**Metatheater: The Art and Pop Culture Encyclopedia**

<http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Metatheatre>