

HHLT Play Time January 2021



HHLittletheater.org

Dates to remember

Thursday, Jan. 21 7:00 pm—Zoom meeting and **DRAMA AFTER DARK**. See article inside to learn about this activity.

Thursday, Feb. 18 700 pm—Zoom meeting and **18th HHLT Birthday Celebration**



Contents

Message From Our President

December Wrap Up

2021 Board

January's Drama After Dark—
The ABC Murders

All About Agatha Christie

Theater Classes On Line

Review of Netflix Film Adaptation--
Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

Turning Great Plays into Bad Movies—
by Terry Teachout

Minutes of December Meeting



Greetings from Our President

Dear Friends,

A familiar mantra in the theater is ***“The Show must go on!”***. So HHLT will do just that.

We’ve all experienced the curve balls thrown at us during life’s journey. Without a doubt, the Global Pandemic was the biggest curve ball in the history of HHLT. In fact, HHLT, Broadway, and the Nation were placed in suspended animation for most of 2020. Surely we could all post a horrific review for that show!

This new world situation encourages us to think **outside the box** on how to **SAFELY** continue our theater group and still achieve the club goals. The 2021 Board is committed to reinventing our club activities. You will be seeing us often in the coming months.

“Drama After Dark” will now be done via ZOOM so that **ALL** members can participate *either as actors or audience*. It is our *Grand xperimental Theater* program. Kathryn is committed to helping us produce plays online – in a format that will invoke our imagination. Fun times are ahead!

We will also produce group activities via ZOOM. Monthly meetings will be held via Zoom on the **3rd Thursday of every month**. Check your email inbox monthly for meeting reminders. And remember to read

the FANTASTIC HHLT **Playtime**. Our editor, Kathryn Schmiel, always provides interesting, fun stories as well as updates on club activities.

In addition, the 2021 Board of Directors voted unanimously to ***waive the 2021 Annual Membership Dues***. Money is not as important as keeping in touch with friends during the ongoing Pandemic when people often feel isolated. ***We simply ask that you “pay” by participating in our activities throughout the year.*** Everyone has something to offer our club – talent abounds! Our December Holiday Party was simply phenomenal. Let’s also applaud our members who represented HHLT in the HH Variety Show. Many thanks to all who participated.

Our HHLT club has been given a wonderful opportunity to reimagine how we do the things we love so much – entertain, educate and inspire both ourselves and the community. I’m counting on you to help make the HHLT 2021 Season the most successful and productive year yet!

Sincerely, Val Bowman



December Activities

Picking up after a long period of relative isolation, Little Theater spent the month of December enjoying friends and holiday activity in a socially safe manner.

Early in the month we held a very successful food drive accompanied by treats from our “elves.” Thanks to  **HOUSE OF MERCY** everyone who left bags of groceries and supplies by your front doors. These items amounted to four car loads and were distributed to House of Mercy and The Haymarket Food Pantry. Thanks are also owed to Sally Peterson and Andy Mays who made treat bags and delivered the food to  **Haymarket Regional Food Pantry** and to Joan and Ralph Turner who distributed treats and collected food donations.

The very next week HHLT held its first general zoom meeting. The short meeting was chaired by President Val Bowman. Following the meeting which included the introduction of the 2021 Board officers was a very entertaining variety show put on by our very own talented members. From poetry and story reading to music and an inspiring Hanukkah explanation members showed what talent they have as we enjoyed the Holiday season.

Finally the HHTV broadcast of the video of the HH variety Show premiered on Wednesday, December 16. Thanks to everyone who participated in the Little Theater’s contribution to the show! And a round of applause to the members of LSTV who worked so hard to create the video. It may be viewed by searching YouTube for 2020HHVHS.



Little Theater Board for 2021

With activities severely curtailed in 2020 and with uncertain conditions for 2021, Little Theater Board made some adjustments for 2021. With the exception of Tina Mullins and Paula James, the members of the Board from 2020 agreed to stay on. We thank Joan Turner and Val Bowman for stepping up to fill the two vacant Board positions. The officers for 2021 are the following:

President Val Bowman

Vice President Andy Mays

Secretary Joan Turner

Treasurer Kathy Carrico

Membership Mary Jane Fink

Activities Sally Peterson

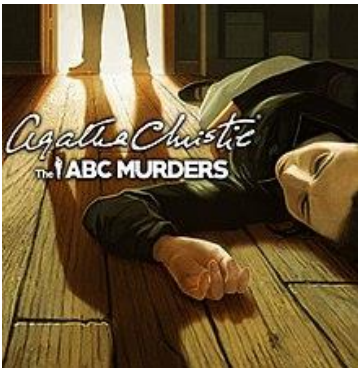
Member-at-Large Gene Schmiel

The new board met via Zoom in December.



ZOOMING DRAMA AFTER DARK

Since HHLT's successful Zoom meeting and Holiday Show in December, it has been decided to try Zoom again by putting our Drama After Dark in the Zoom format. This will allow everyone to participate from their own homes without requiring masks or social distancing. We hope we will have a great turnout for this virtual theater.



The date will be our usual third **Thursday of the month, January 21.** The Zoom link will be provided to all members by Bob Bowman in the afternoon of the 21st.

A short general meeting will take place at **7:pm** to be followed by the Zoom presentation of ***The ABC Murders*** by Agatha Christie.

There are 13 characters (6 women and 7 men) in this radio version of one of Christie's well-known mysteries. We are looking for volunteers to read (no memorizing necessary) the parts over Zoom! Please call Kathryn (1305) or email her at geneofva@gmail.com to volunteer. This is bound to be fun so don't be shy! You will be provided with a highlighted script several days ahead of time as well as a nametag to identify your character. This is

definitely experimental theater so let's give it a try. We are also looking for a couple of people to supply simple sound effects like train whistles, footsteps, doors closing. Please contact Kathryn to volunteer for this also.



ALL ABOUT AGATHA CHRISTIE

Agatha Christie (15 September 1890 – 12 January 1976) was an English writer of crime and romantic novels. She is best remembered for her detective stories including the two diverse characters of Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot. She is considered to be the best selling writer of all time. Her works have been translated into more languages than any other individual writer.

Agatha Christie was born in Torquay, Devon 1890 to Clarissa Margaret Boehmer and a wealthy American stockbroker. She said her father was a most agreeable man "but (he) was a gentleman of substance and never did a handstand in his life." She received little formal education and was brought up by both her mother and her sister. She did have access to many books and became an avid reader.

In 1905, she went to Paris where she was educated at finishing schools and hoped to become a singer, however, she realized that her voice was not strong enough to make it a career. She experimented with writing short novels, but not much came of it.

In 1914, Agatha Christie met Archibald Christie an aviator in the Royal Flying Corps – they married a few months after the outbreak of war in December 1914. They had a child, Rosalind in August 1919.

During the First World war, with her husband away in France, she trained and worked as a nurse helping to treat wounded soldiers. She also became educated in the field of pharmacy.

Agatha Christie was first published in 1920. Her first book was *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, (1920) which featured the detective – Hercule Poirot, who at the time was portrayed as a Belgian refugee from the Great War. Poirot is one of the most recognised fictional characters in English with his mixture of personal pride, broken English and immaculate appearance and moustache. The book sold reasonably well and helped meet the public's great appetite for detective novels. In 1926, she made her big breakthrough with the publication of "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd." This became a best-seller and made Christie famous as a writer.

In the same year (1926) as her major breakthrough, Agatha Christie disappeared for 11 days. It became national headline news as the whole country became absorbed in the mystery of where she had disappeared to. After much-publicised efforts, she was discovered eleven days later in a Harrogate hotel living under a false name. She appeared to be suffering from amnesia. Agatha Christie herself never gave a full explanation for those 11 days, preferring to ignore the subject. In a way, the drama of her disappearance increased her profile as a writer of fiction.



After the affair, she travelled to the Canary Islands for recuperation. In 1930, she married her second husband, Max Mallowan who was an archaeologist. She often

accompanied him on trips to the Middle East. She learnt to help in archaeological digs, taking photographs and working on the sites. Christie paid her own way and tried to keep out of the limelight, working anonymously.

Agatha Christie wrote over 40 novels featuring the proud and immaculate Hercule Poirot. However, Christie had no great love for her own creation – Poirot seemed to be admired by the public more than the writer herself. Christie felt he was a rather underdeveloped character, but the public loved him.

Agatha Christie preferred her other great detective – the quiet but effective old lady – Miss Marple, who

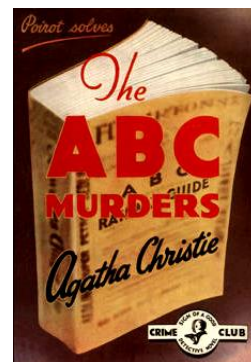
used to solve crimes through her intricate knowledge of how people in English villages behave. The character of Miss Marple was based on the traditional English country lady – and her own relatives. In later life, she increasingly preferred Miss Marple to Poirot.

Agatha Christie enjoyed writing. For her there was great satisfaction in creating plots and stories. She also wrote six novels in the genre of romance and suspense under a pseudonym – Mary Westmacott.

During the Second World War, Christie worked in the pharmacy of the University College London, which gave her ideas for some of her murder methods. After the war, her books continued to grow in international popularity. In 1952, her play *The Mousetrap* was debuted at the Ambassador's Theatre in London and has been performed without a break ever since. Her success led to her being honoured in the New Year's honour list. In 1971 she was appointed Dame Commander of the British Empire.

Citation: [Pettinger, Tejvan](#). "Biography of Agatha Christie", Oxford, www.biographyonline.net Last updated 18 March 2020. Originally published 5 February 2013.

The ABC Murders was published in 1936. It has been made into several TV shows with the BBC production of 1992 starring David Suchet. This can be still seen on PBS. A more recent TV version starred John Malkovich and was produced in 2018. A movie entitled *The Alphabet Murders* featured Tony Randall in 1965. The version we will read was aired on CBS Radio in 1943 in the Suspense series.





INTERESTING **EDUCATIONAL** **OPPORTUNITIES** **IN THEATER**

Longtime HHLT member Tina Mullins has brought to our attention some very interesting opportunities for members interesting in furthering their skills of acting, auditioning, script writing, and stage management, to name a few. The Little Theater of Alexandria is offering many online classes. The following list is a few of their offerings.

[Improv Play Your Way](#)

[View more details](#)

01/12/2021 - 02/16/2021 TU, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM
EST

Online Session

Ages 18-100

Payment plans available

Price

\$130.00

[Scriptwriting for Stage & Screen 1](#)

[View more details](#)

01/12/2021 - 04/20/2021 TU, 7:30 PM - 10:00 PM
EST

Online Session

Ages 18-100

Payment plans available

Price

\$210.00

[Storytelling](#)

[View more details](#)

01/12/2021 - 02/16/2021 TU, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM
EST

Online Session

Ages 18-100

Payment plans available

Price

\$130.00

[How To Find An Audition Monologue - Workshop](#)

[View more details](#)

01/13/2021 - 01/13/2021 W, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM
EST

Online Session

Ages 18-100

Payment plans available

Price

\$20.00

[Auditioning in a Time of COVID](#)

[View more details](#)

01/17/2021 - 03/07/2021 SU, 7:00 PM - 9:30 PM
EST

Online Session

Ages 18-100

Payment plans available

Price

\$210.00

[History of Musical Theatre](#)

[View more details](#)

01/17/2021 - 02/21/2021 SU, 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM
EST

Online Session

Ages 18-100

Payment plans available

Price

\$82.00

[The Speaking Voice Unleashed](#)

[View more details](#)

01/17/2021 - 02/21/2021 SU, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
EST

Online Session

Ages 18-100

Payment plans available

Price

[Waitlist only](#)

\$130.00

For information google Little Theater of Alexandria Classes.

August Wilson is the esteemed playwright whose series of ten plays depict the Black experience, decade by decade, in the 20th century America. Two years ago his play “Fences” was made into a movie starring Denzel Washington and Viola Davis. Now Washington and Davis have teamed up again to produce “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” which premiered on Netflix. The following article appeared in the Wall Street Journal on December 23. Terry Teachout is the WSJ drama critic. His article praises the latest of Wilson’s play to be made into film and dissects other films based on well-known plays.



TURNING GREAT PLAYS INTO BAD FILMS

by Terry Teachout

The universal critical acclaim that greeted George C. Wolfe’s superlative Netflix screen version of August Wilson’s “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” is rare. First rate plays almost never get turned into equally good films, and on occasion the result is a duck-and-cover disaster. What’s more almost all such disasters are caused by the same fatal error in judgment: somebody in Hollywood thought he knew better than the playwright, and so decided to rewrite the very play whose excellence is the main reason people thought it should be made into a movie.

In such fiascoes, the question, then is not so much what went wrong as who deserves the blame. Since filmmaking is a collective art, it can be tricky to tag the guilty party, but in most of the truly ignominious cases, you can pin the tail on the donkey with embarrassing ease.

Here are four of the most notorious offenders, categorized by the culprit:

The screen writer did it

“Design for Living.” Noel Coward’s suavely funny stage comedy about the making of a ménage à trois, was ideally suited—on paper—to the talents of Ernst Lubitsch, the most sophisticated of screen directors. But then Lubitsch brought in Ben Hecht, one of Hollywood’s top screen writers, to work on the film, and gave him license to completely rewrite Coward’s original script. When the film came out, Hecht

bragged that he’d left in tact only one of Coward’s lines and dared him to find it. “I shall not even be bothered to find the film,” the playwright retorted.

Lubitsch affected to be delighted with the results. “The critics will not like our picture,” he blithely assured the cast and crew. “They will say that we have ruined Noel Coward’s play, and it is true that our picture will be quite different. But the people who do not read reviews or care about them will love it, and Noel Coward means nothing to most of them.” No such luck: Not only was the film version of “Design for Living” a box office flop, but Coward’s play became a classic of 20th century stage comedy that continues to get done frequently. As a result anyone who bothers to see the film is likely to be familiar with the original play, and dismayed that Hecht rewrote every single word of the dialogue whose sparkle and fizz are what keeps modern audiences coming back to delight anew in Coward’s sharp wit.

The director did it

When Frank Capra got his hands on “Arsenic and Old Lace,” Joseph Kesselring’s long-running 1941 stage comedy, he cast Cary Grant as Mortimer Brewster, the drama critic whose little old aunts are mass murderers. So far, so good—Grant was Hollywood’s premier farceur—but Capra instructed Grant to give an exaggerated performance full of whinnying, rubber-faced mugging that killed the charm of the original play. “I was embarrassed doing it,” Grant admitted years later. “I overplayed the part.”

The producer did it

Sam Wood’s 1940 film version of Thornton Wilder’s “Our Town,” one of the two greatest American stage plays, is for most of its length exceptionally successful in finding workable cinematic equivalents for Wilder’s non-naturalistic masterpiece, which is staged without set. It also preserves the celebrated performance of Frank Craven, who created the role of Stage Manager, the central character, and was scored by Aaron Copland, whose gentle music is ideally suited to its smalltown setting. But Sol Lesser, the producer, decided that Wilder’s masterpiece needed a cheerful finale, one in which Emily Webb, who in the play dies giving birth to a child, turns out to have dreamed the whole last part of the play. A happy ending for “Our Town”? Preposterous—which is why

the film, for all its considerable virtues, is largely forgotten.

Everybody did it

Like Agatha Christie's "Murder on the Orient Express," in which the 11 suspects took turns stabbing the victim, Irving Rapper's 1950 film version of Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie," the original 1944 stage version of which is as great a play as "Our Town," was serially murdered by everyone who worked on it. The casting is all wrong, especially Arthur Kennedy as Tom and Kirk Douglas as the Gentleman Caller. As for the script, on which Williams worked briefly but which he subsequently disowned, it's a perversion of the play, one in which Laura (played on screen by Jane Wyman) is not a painfully-introverted wallflower with a pronounced limp but a regular-enough kind of girl who gets asked out on dates frequently and—yes—lives happily ever after. Small wonder that Williams himself called the film "dishonest," though Bosley Crowther put it even better in his New York Times review: "It is regrettable that director Irving Rapper was compelled, it appears, to kick around the substance of a frail, illusory drama as though it were plastic and not Venetian glass."

To be sure, certain kinds of changes can make a filmed play work better. "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," for example, was substantially cut by Ruben Santiago-Hudson, the screen writer, and it actually profits from the tightening (Wilson was notoriously long-winded). But nothings Messrs. Santiago-Hudson and Wolfe did to the letter of "Ma Rainey" was in any way false to its spirit, or to August Wilson's theatrical genius. That's Rule No. 1 of adapting a play for the screen: Trust the material.

Heritage Hunt Little Theater

Zoom General Meeting

December 15, 2020

President's Comments: Val thanked the past Board for all their hard work during the pandemic. She thanked Kathryn Schmiel for keeping the club going by hosting Drama After Dark on her driveway and later with masked participants in her home. She also thanked Kathryn for the monthly newsletter that kept us all connected.

Val thanked the members who participated in the food drive to benefit Haymarket pantry. Those that made goodie bags and those who drove to collect food included: Sally Peterson, Andrea Mays, Kathryn Schmiel, Kathryn's brother and Joan Turner.

Val next introduced the 2021 HHLT Board: Pres. Val Bowman, V. Pres. Andrea Mays, Sec. Joan Turner, Treas. Kathy Carrico, Membership: Mary Jane Fink, Activities: Sally Peterson, At Large: Gene Schmiel, Communications: Kathryn Schmiel, IT: Bob Bowman

Val said that we hope to keep Zoom meetings happening through 2021.

Val then turned the meeting over to Sally for our Holiday Party. Sally introduced the performers who read original poems, played guitar and banjo and read their favorite poems. Participants included: Deborah Kurylo, Dot Schuetze, Mary Glascock, Linda and Walt Meyer, Paul White, Joan Turner, Kathryn Schmiel, Sally Peterson and Tom Taggart.

Respectfully submitted: Joan Turner, Secretary