

THE STUDY OF SAINT LOUIS REPERTORY THEATRE GUIDE



BY GEORGE S. KAUFMAN AND EDNA FERBER

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# Who's Who

**Della** is the perpetually busy maid in the Cavendish apartment.

**Jo** is the houseman who attends the Cavendish clan.

**McDermott** is the muscled trainer who preserves Julie's lithe figure with daily boxing lessons.

**Herbert Dean** is Fanny's younger brother, a once promising actor who, with the onset of middle age is fighting desperately to avoid becoming a has-been.

**Kitty Dean** is Herbert's wife, who resents living in the shadow of the Cavendish name and despite her declining talent is determined to attain stardom on her own.

**Gwen**, Julie's daughter and the third generation in this acting troupe, is expected to bear the theatrical mantle, but wavers between the glamour of the family tradition and the tranquility of domestic life.

**Perry Stewart** is very comfortable with the risks of Wall Street but flinches when his marriage to Gwen forces him into the tumultuous world of theatre.

**Fanny Cavendish**, mother to Julie and Tony, is the grand dame of the Cavendish troupe and an acting legend in her own time.

**Oscar Wolfe** is, on paper, a business associate of the Cavendish family, as their manager and producer, but in reality, he is also a close friend, steering them through personal crises as well as professional.

**Julie Cavendish** is currently the most grounded and successful member of this tribe, but is plagued by her own demons as she weighs her love of the theatre against the love of an old flame.

**Anthony Cavendish** is the charming loose cannon of the family

# Words to the Wise

**The Garden**—Jo is hopeful that McDermott can get him in to Madison Square Garden for a boxing match.

**The Graphic**—Formally known as *The Evening Graphic*, this was one of the most prominent tabloids to flood the market during the 1920s.

**Lambs' Club**—Herbert, as a point of pride, alludes to his membership in this exclusive club several times.

**Pullmans**—Herbert badmouths the touring life, complaining about traveling in these railroad cars designed especially for overnight trips.

**Otto Kahn**—A German-born émigré, Kahn was one of the U.S.'s greatest patrons of the arts and consequently is on the visiting list of Wolfe's new playwright.

**Hamlet, Petruchio, Othello, Iago**—Herbert uses this cast list of coveted Shakespearean roles to affirm his status as a gifted actor.

**The Old Vic**—During the 19-teens and 20s, this London theatre began its climb to popularity by presenting all of the plays in Shakespeare's First Folio. Herbert claims to have played there to great critical acclaim.

**Henry Irving**—A noted English actor, Irving was the first in his profession to be dubbed a knight.

**Beerbohm Tree**—A British actor and theatre manager, Tree was recognized for his productions at the Haymarket and Her Majesty's Theatres.

whose name is as likely to be seen on the cover of a tabloid as in a playbill.

**Gilbert Marshall** is a wealthy international businessman and Julie's one great love from her youth who returns to New York to offer her a quieter life.

**Richard Mansfield**—One of the most influential American actors and producers at the turn of the century, Mansfield's productions were known for their attention to realistic detail.

**Galahad**—Julie jokingly uses this reference to the only pure, chivalrous knight of Arthur's Round Table as a pet name for Oscar.

**Elsie Dinsmore**—Fanny likens Gwen to this greatly tested fictional heroine of a series of Victorian children's books written by Martha Finley.

**Vaudeville**—Past their prime, Herbert and Kitty are delighted to find work in this populist venue, even if it is a step down from the "legitimate" theatre.

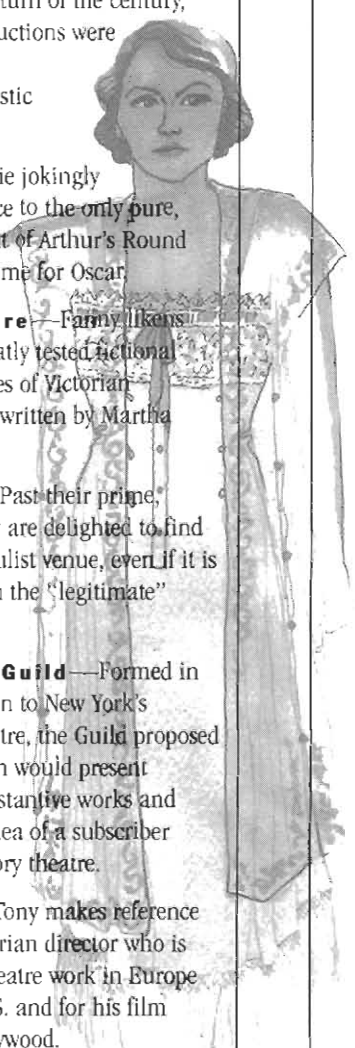
**The Theatre Guild**—Formed in 1918 as a reaction to New York's commercial theatre, the Guild proposed a company which would present challenging, substantive works and introduced the idea of a subscriber supported repertory theatre.

**Reinhardt**—Tony makes reference to this great Austrian director who is known for his theatre work in Europe as well as the U.S. and for his film direction in Hollywood.

**Pitoeff**—This Russian-born director relocated to Switzerland and then Paris where he made a name for himself with his inventive productions of Chekhov and Pirandello.

**Gunga** is Tony's loyal assistant.

**Miss Peake** is the overprotective nurse to Aubrey Cavendish, the newest member of the family and Gwen and Perry's first child.



# What's the Story?

*The Royal Family* provides a peek into the chaotic house of Cavendish, a family three generations deep in the theatre world. From the moment the play begins, we are swept into the hectic pace of this household and presented with the same question that each Cavendish must answer: which is better—the calm, security offered by domestic life and an “ordinary” job or the fulfillment that can only be found on stage?

At the helm of this family is Fanny Cavendish, an acting legend at seventy-two and determined to return to the stage in spite of failing health. She is flanked in the profession by her two children: Julie, a Broadway sensation and Tony, a talented but flamboyant player who has traded the legitimate theatre for film. The family tradition is carried on by Julie's eighteen-year-old daughter who is just beginning a promising Broadway career. Fanny's brother, Herbert Dean, and his wife, Kitty, are an antagonistic has-been pair, in constant competition with one another over whose past stage exploits have been the greatest. Overseeing both the professional and private lives of this brood is manager/producer Oscar Wolfe, while long-time domestic servants, Jo and Della keep the household running.

It is early afternoon when the action of the play begins, with most of the Cavendishes just beginning to stir. Gwen, however, has been up for some time and is returning from horseback riding with her socialite boyfriend, Perry Stewart. She finds Herbert and Kitty waiting for Julie and Fanny to descend and offer their opinions on a new manuscript. Wolfe gets in line with an announcement for Gwen and Julie as well. When Julie does arrive though, she brings much more interesting news: a cryptic telegram from Tony implying that he is en route to New York from Hollywood, having entangled himself in some unpleasant business there. Wolfe, as usual promises to take care of the situation and orders everyone not to speak to reporters. With this under control, he moves on to business, telling Julie that this afternoon she and Gwen must attend a reading of the new play they are about to begin, because the playwright has just arrived in town. This triggers the primary conflict of the play—the struggle between domesticity and artistic endeavor. Both Gwen

and Julie have plans for the afternoon with men—Gwen with Perry and Julie with Gil Marshall, a man she almost married twenty years ago. Although neither Julie's nor Gwen's plans are crucial, this is not the first time that they have had to sacrifice their personal lives for work. This gives both of them pause and forces them to reconsider their priorities. Gwen, terrified that she will never have a “normal” life, temporarily decides to leave the stage and Julie begins to reconsider marrying her wealthy ex-suitor and moving to South America with him.

While they grapple with these decisions, Tony arrives from Hollywood with a barrage of reporters trailing behind him. Always on the edge, he is fleeing the wrath of an angry director, a jilted lover and a movie studio. He apparently became involved with the director's girlfriend, got in a fight with the director,

dumped the girl and then broke his contract with the studio so that he could escape L.A. He hides in the family apartment just long enough for Oscar and Gil to make arrangements for him to sail to Europe and then makes a dramatic exit with plans to live a Bohemian life there indefinitely.

A year later, Gwen has married Perry and borne a son, Aubrey, and Julie is preparing to take on a new role, that of a wife, as soon as she completes her current production. However, Julie begins to question her decision when Gwen announces that she will be returning to the stage because her baby “doesn't do anything” right now and doesn't need her. Tempted by an exciting new play that Oscar is producing, Julie

realizes that life with Gil in South America simply won't do for her, and she decides to remain a single New Yorker. Adding to the excitement is a surprise return from Europe by Tony. He, too, has been called back to the theatre, having become involved with a constructivist version of the Passion Play. Finding themselves on the outside of an impenetrable way of life, Gil and Perry excuse themselves, leaving this royal family to revel in their craft. Fanny is very pleased that at last her whole tribe has returned to its calling and leads a toast to the future career of young Aubrey, saying of the Cavendishes “when one drops out there's always another one to take his place.” Moments later, she is slumped in her chair—dead and the curtain falls.

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# The Family Tree

*While Ferber and Kaufman's The Royal Family hinges on the dramatic comings and goings of the Cavendish clan, it also invites us to explore what is arguably the most exciting period in American drama, the 1920s. Embodied in the Cavendishes, we see representatives of the many forms that theatre was taking at that time. Herbert and Fanny scramble to catch the vaudeville train, Tony embraces and then rejects Hollywood, while Julie maintains the comfortable world of the commercial, legitimate stage. Gwen and Fanny stand poised on opposite ends of the spectrum—Fanny staunchly defending her old-style touring days and Gwen, reaching towards the new vision offered by the Theatre Guild. With Fanny's passing, the old theatre dies and Gwen and, presumably her son Aubrey, move forward with a new era which nurtures not only actors and playwrights, but also the idea of the theatre as a creative partnership among audience, producers and performers. The founders of the Theatre Guild wrote the following in 1936, as a retrospective on not only the development of their own organization, but also the roots of the repertory theatre movement that would resurface almost thirty years later.*

The Theatre Guild was founded on December 19, 1918, without a theatre, without a play, without an actor and without a scrap of scenery. Its sole artistic asset was an idea. If, in the years that have intervened, the Guild has achieved success, it is because the idea, revolutionary, has withstood the revolution it created and is still a driving force as potent as it was at the start.

The idea is simple. It is merely that the theatre itself is bigger than any of the workers in it and that it should be employed for the creation of the finest drama of the time, drama definitely and honestly reflecting the author's vision of life or sense of style and beauty.

The Guild is, then, primarily an "art theatre." It has from its inception produced only plays which it believed had something to say and which said it well. As to their content, it had no bias. It has not been in any sense of the word a propaganda theatre. It has been willing to produce a communistic play as quickly as an imperialistic play, so long as it was a good play with a definite idea to project.

It happened that the Guild dropped its idea into fertile soil in that year of 1918. It took root in an unusual state of unrest which had begun to take form in the American theatre shortly after the turn of the century and which with the end of the World War had grown to dangerous proportions. The organized drama was in the hands of commercially minded producers whose eyes were intent upon the box-office. They dominated the drama to the extent of imposing their own idea of what the public wanted upon helpless theatre-goers.

Playwriting had been reduced to a formula. Producers refused to permit the violation of the formula in fear of failure. It was almost impossible to penetrate the stone wall with a new idea. If playwrights were unwilling to write the usual "happy-ending" drama, their chances of a hearing in the theatre were slight. There were exceptions, of course, but they were few.

However, signs of revolt against this "system" were beginning to appear. In communities throughout the country and in colleges a younger generation, realizing that the plays it saw reflected neither life nor beauty, sought to make a theatre of its own outside the pale of the commercial theatre. "Little Theatre" groups began to appear. For the most part they were voices crying in the wilderness. Their protest was sincere but ineffective. The economic cards were stacked against them. Their standing was strictly amateur. The professional theatre was strongly entrenched.

The founders of the Guild felt sure that there was a potential audience for the plays it hoped to produce. We felt that if we could get the co-operation of that audience it would be of tremendous help. Getting them interested was our problem until we hit upon the idea of taking them into partnership with us in the experiment we were about to launch.



George Bernard Shaw's St. Joan

The result of this decision was our subscription plan. By this plan we ask theatre-goers to pledge their confidence in us by buying, in advance, tickets to the six productions we promise to produce each year. In the beginning, in that first season of 1918, there were only one hundred and thirty-five theatre-goers who were brave enough to gamble with us. Today there are more than 25,000 in New York alone and an equal number in the five cities outside of New York to which we have extended our plan. We do not ask our subscribers to do all the gambling. In return for their confidence we offer them prices lower than box-office rates and preferred seat locations. . . In this way we feel that we have brought an entirely new audience into the theatre and have organized that audience so that now it is available to all producers.

We have produced more than a hundred plays, more than half of which have been catalogued, under the Broadway definition, as hits. Many were failures from the box-office point of view, but also

successes, we feel, because they were experimental — they opened new trails in which we, and often even other producers, later, were able to achieve better things in the theatre.

As a matter of fact, the Guild began with a failure. Seeking a meaningful manuscript which had been ignored by the commercial theatre, we selected *Bonds of Interest*, by Jacinto Benevente. It lingered for only a few weeks, undiscovered by its audience. But those who did see it were appreciative, and the dramatic critics were more than encouraging. The torch flickered, but the Guild held on.

From that moment, the Guild's story is the story of the growth of the idea on which it was founded. The Guild continued to experiment, and theatre-goers, meeting an effort to approach them intelligently more than half way, continued to come into the fold.

Perhaps the most successful experiment of all was the one that brought George Bernard Shaw into the Guild's family. Mr. Shaw had written a play which could not find a producer on either side of the water, great as was his name as a dramatist. The play was *Heartbreak House*. The Guild finally prevailed upon the playwright, and the production not only gave us an artistic and financial success, but the prestige of a great name of the theatre.

Since then we have produced a number of Shaw plays, many of them in revival, but four of them in their world première, including *Back to Methuselah*, a play which he himself considered almost impossible of production, and *St. Joan*. Indeed, for a time the Irish playwright was known as the patron saint of the Guild.

The Guild was the first to produce a truly expressionistic play—*From Morn to Midnight*. It was the first to present a radical play—Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*. Among other experimental ventures were *Processional*, by John Howard Lawson, *Goat Song*, by Franz Werfel, *Man and the Masses*, by Ernst Toller, *The Failures* by H. R. Lenormand, and *Roar China*, by S. M. Tretyakov, to name only a few.

Even *The Guardsman* might be included in this list, for it had been a complete failure when first presented in New York.

The Guild was accused, in its early days, of producing only foreign plays. There was, of course, some truth in the accusation. But once the American playwright, cowed by the refusal of commercial producers to permit him any range of ideas beyond the formula-play, realized that he had a platform from which to speak, he began turning out plays which fit perfectly into our program.

One by one these voices began to be heard—Elmer Rice, Sidney Howard, John Howard Lawson, S. N. Behrman, DnBose Heyward, Philip Barry, Robert E. Sherwood, Maxwell

Anderson—until eventually the American drama surpassed that of Europe. Now the foreign play is a rarity in our programs.

It was natural that in this process of evolution Eugene O'Neill should become allied with the Guild. He came into our fold first with *Marco Millions* and followed this with what was perhaps the most unusual and successful experiment of the Guild's career, *Strange Interlude*. Here was a play in nine acts, a play which began at 5:30 in the afternoon, dismissed its audience for dinner, resumed at 8:30 and continued until 11 o'clock.



A scene from  
The Adding Machine

The Guild produced the play with a certain fear and trembling. It had no doubts of the play's artistic merits. But the question of its finding an audience was less certain of solution. The play found its audience in every state in the Union and in almost every foreign country as well. The Guild's most interesting experiment turned out to be its most successful.

The historical resume of the Guild could go on at great length. It would not be complete without at least a brief word about the changing conditions in the theatre, which, in the years of its existence, the Guild has had to meet.

First came the rise of the actor as an important factor in the theatre. The Guild met this condition by the formation of an acting company. Then came the growth of the motion-picture industry, with its vast profits which permitted it to raid the theatre at will. The Guild through its acting company brought many an actor and actress to full flower, only to see the movies steal most of them away.



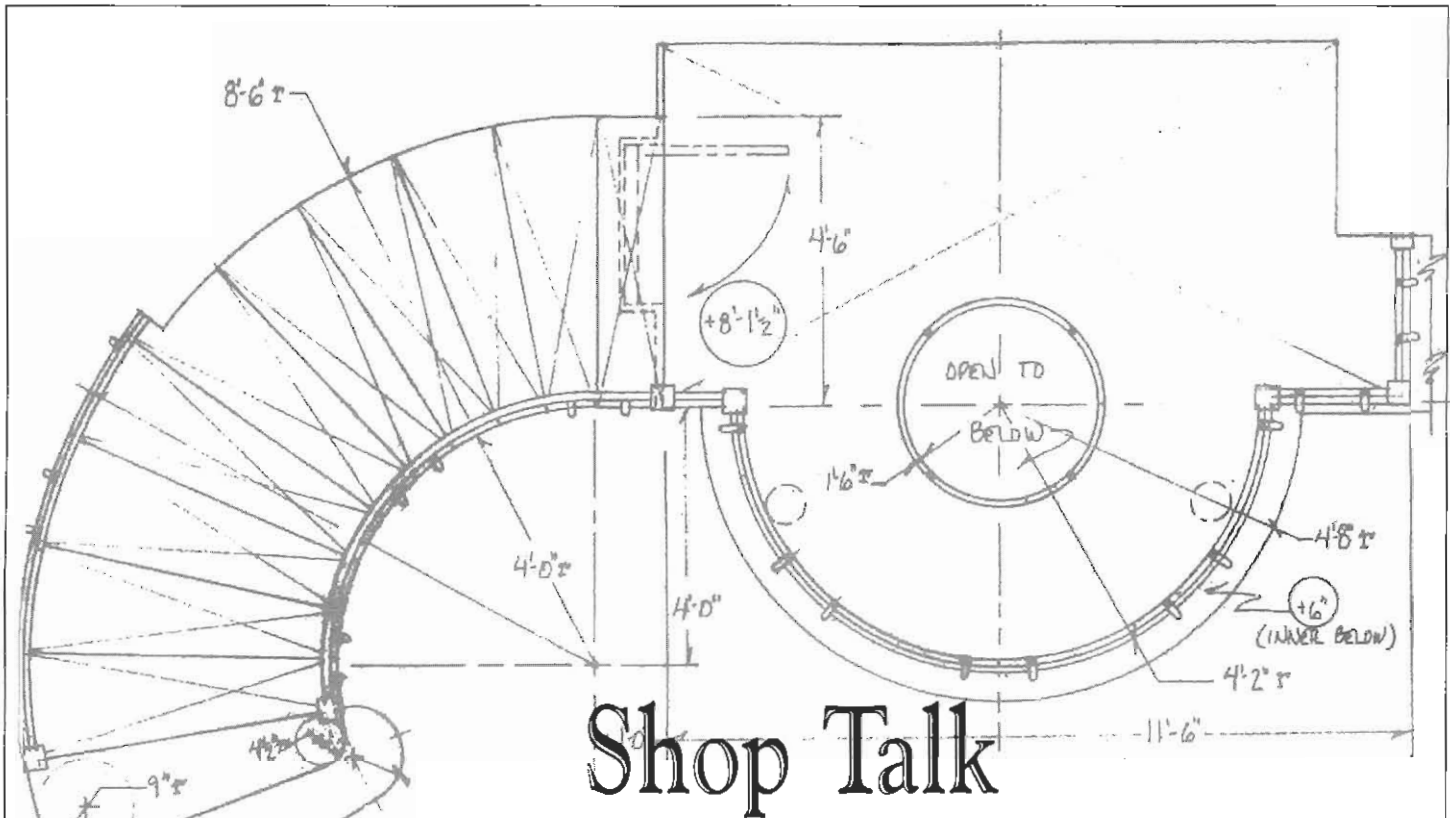
A scene from Strange Interlude

When the Guild was organized, the "road" was a vast field for production. The Guild, having achieved success with its experiment in New York, sought to do missionary work on the road as well. The advent of the motion picture meant the collapse of that factor too. When the Guild began, costs in the theatre were at a minimum. In the intervening years they have risen to a maximum.

However, the Guild's idea has come unscathed through the years. Its approach to the various problems of production may have changed in the years, but it still thrives on the belief that fine plays, honestly presented, represent the theatre at the height of its artistic achievement. That is still the aim of the Theatre Guild, and when it ceases to exist so will the Guild itself.

Philip Moeller      Lawrence Langner  
Theresa Helbrnn    Armina Marshall  
Lee Simonson      Helen Westley  
Alfred Lunt

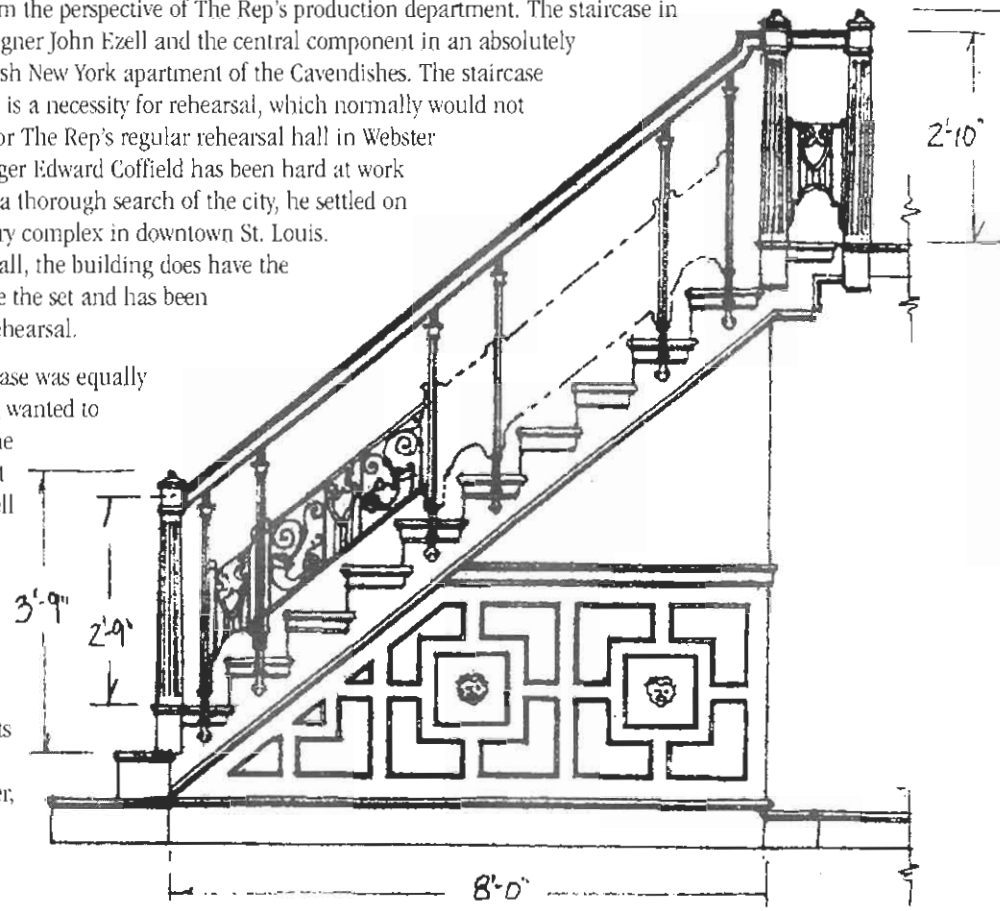
Excerpted from *The Introduction to The Theatre Guild Anthology* ©1936 by Random House, Inc.



# Shop Talk

In the world of theatre, each production has one element that seems to drive it. In the case of *The Royal Family*, that element is a staircase. Well, that may be a slight overstatement. After all, the play does provide a wonderful look at the complicated lives of actors and their craft, but that aside, the show is all about one very large staircase—at least from the perspective of The Rep's production department. The staircase in question is the creation of scenic designer John Ezell and the central component in an absolutely stunning set that brings to life the posh New York apartment of the Cavendishes. The staircase must be functional and consequently is a necessity for rehearsal, which normally would not be a problem. However, it is too tall for The Rep's regular rehearsal hall in Webster Groves. As a result, production manager Edward Coffield has been hard at work arranging an alternative space. After a thorough search of the city, he settled on an old warehouse in the Lemp Brewery complex in downtown St. Louis. While it is not the typical rehearsal hall, the building does have the high ceilings needed to accommodate the set and has been outfitted with all the necessities for rehearsal.

The design aspect of the staircase was equally challenging, as Director Susan Gregg wanted to maintain much of the same feel of the original 1927 production. This meant research and lots of it. Gregg and Ezell poured over old production photos looking for the smallest details such as how many steps were in the staircase. The result is a beautifully ornate structure that serves as the centerpiece in the Cavendish apartment. Other luxurious highlights of the set include a grand piano, Tiffany lamps and a crystal chandelier; all of which work together to create the opulent world that is home to the Cavendish clan.



ADMIT ONE

# Bio & Beyond

ADMIT ONE



George S. Kaufman, playwright, screenwriter, director and producer of stage plays, was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and moved with his family first to Paterson, N.J. and then to New York where the playwright-to-be began earning a living as a wholesale ribbon salesman, after a few months of fruitless law study.

His contributions of quips and humorous verse to Franklin P. Adams' (F.P.A.) newspaper column resulted in a column of his own

and eventually the position of drama editor at the *New York Times* during Alexander Woollcott's reign as drama critic. While at the *Times*, Kaufman was at the busiest crossroads of the theatrical world and began to tinker with writing plays of his own. The first two were failures, but he achieved a smash hit with his third try, *Dulcy* (1921). Again, F.P.A. was a stepping stone, since the play was based on a recurring fictitious character in Adams' column. *Dulcy* was written in collaboration with Marc Connelly and led to a partnership which would produce seven more plays by 1924, five of which were hits. This launched a lifetime of collaboration for Kaufman, who, by the end of his career would partner with sixteen different writers to create forty plays. His colleagues included Moss Hart, Alexander Woollcott, Morris Ryskind, Howard Dietz, Howard Teichmann and of course, Edna Ferber.

From 1922 to 1957, Kaufman was the topmost author of comedies in the American theatre and was generally known as "the gloomy dean of humor." Regardless of how enthusiastic reviews for a play of his might be, he would return to the theatre for weeks after opening, complaining about the way the actors were ruining his lines. Once in a fury over an actor's inadequacies, he sent the offending player a telegram: "I am watching your performance from the last row. Wish you were here." On another occasion he heard an actor taking liberties with the script and he wired him: "Your performance magnificent and improving every day. Sorry I can't say the same about lines."

Cutting comments like these terrified waiters, barbers, taxi drivers and stage managers alike, but he did not reserve his cold disdain for service workers. He was just as sharp to his equals or even superiors. Alexander Woollcott once remarked of Kaufman: "He was always careful to treat me like dirt." Even to his closest friends and collaborators, Kaufman could be laconic and shrank from saying anything that would betray emotion.



Edna Ferber, on the other hand, was described by Louis Bromfield, a fellow writer, as "an extraordinarily modest woman... you know exactly where to find her both as a writer and as a woman. She attempts neither to deceive others nor, what is far worse, to deceive herself." Her remarkable career began at the age of seventeen, when after graduating high school, she took a reporting job at her hometown newspaper in Appleton, Wisconsin for \$3.00 per week. She later wrote for the *Milwaukee Journal* and the *Chicago Tribune* but discarded her first novel because she didn't like it. Her mother, one of her greatest supporters, retrieved it and in 1911 it was published as *Dawn O'Hara*. From that time on, she worked to establish herself as one of America's most popular and esteemed authors, driven in large part by her curiosity.

Ideas for many of her novels and stories came from bits of conversation that happened to catch her interest. It was, for example, a casual conversation with a stage-struck Massachusetts aristocrat, Winthrop Ames, about show boats that sent her scurrying off to the Pamlico River in North Carolina where she found the Jamens Adams Floating Palace Theater, which featured Beulah Hunter, billed as the "Mary Pickford of the Rivers." The resulting novel, published in 1926, served as the basis for the now-classic *Show Boat*, written for the stage by Oscar Hammerstein II, with music by Jerome Kern.

Among her outstanding published works are *Fanny Herself*, *Gigolo*, *Mother Knows Best*, *Cimarron*, *Saratoga Trunk* and *Giant*. She received the 1925 Pulitzer Prize for *So Big* and published two autobiographies: *A Peculiar Treasure* and *A Kind of Magic*. She had also written several stage works prior to her collaboration with George S. Kaufman, including *Our Mrs. McChesney*, *The Eldest* and *\$1200 a Year*.

Her partnership with Kaufman was born out of an idle stroll in Chicago's Washington Park in the spring of 1921. As she walked, she saw three old men sitting on a bench, settling

the world's affairs. Ferber characterized them by saying: "They were truants from the Old Men's Home" whose brick façade was just west of the park. With this tidbit of inspiration, she went home and wrote a short story titled "Old Man Minick." Kaufman read the story and was convinced that it contained the germ for a play. Together, the pair wrote what would become *Minick*, and the play was produced in 1924 under the guidance of none other than Winthrop Ames.

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Many Kaufman-Ferber collaborations were hits both on stage and at the movies

The Kaufman-Ferber association resulted in a list of popular successes including *The Royal Family* (1927), *Dinner at Eight* (1932), *Stage Door* (1939), *The Land is Bright* (1941) and *Bravo!* (1948). According to Kaufman, it took two years to write a play with Ferber "because Edna works from nine a.m. to three-ten p.m., and I work from three p.m., to nine p.m., which gives us ten minutes a day in which to collaborate." In reality, *The Royal Family* was completed in only eight months, but not without a struggle. At that point, the pair had only one other collaboration between them, the 1924 success *Minick*, but they had already established a work pattern. They would begin their process in Edna's apartment on Central Park West, but eventually they would retreat into self-imposed isolation in order to complete the task. For *The Royal Family*, Kaufman selected the St. George Hotel in Brooklyn. With two adjoining rooms, they could work together throughout the day and then retire to their separate quarters in the evening. Ferber, who was very disciplined in her own work, was insistent that Kaufman spend his nights sleeping so that he would be well-prepared for their sessions together. However, Kaufman did not share her view and would stay in his room only until he knew that Edna was asleep. Then he would sneak out to spend his evening in revelry and return in the early hours of the morning to get a few hours of sleep before his 11:00 a.m. work call with Edna. It is impossible to say whether or not Edna was aware of her partner's trickery, but she is known to have said that she would not work in Brooklyn again, complaining that George never seemed well-rested there.



## Read More About It

We encourage you to examine these topics in-depth by exploring the following books and Web sites.

*The Barrymores* by Holia Alpert. The Dial Press: New York, 1964.

*Broadway* by Brooks Atkinson. The Macmillan Company, 1970.

*Ferber: Edna Ferber and Her Circle, A Biography* by Julie Gilbert. Applause Books: New York, London, 1978.

*The House of Barrymore* by Margot Peters. Touchstone, Simon & Schuster: New York, 1990.

*The Making of the American Theatre* by Howard Taubman. Coward-McCann, Inc.: New York revised edition, 1965, 1967.

*Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* by Frederick Lewis Allen. Harper & Row: New York, 1931.

*Run-Through* by John Houseman. Touchstone, Simon & Schuster: New York, 1972.

*Theater in America* by Mary C. Henderson. Harry N. Abrams, Inc.: New York, 1986.

*The Theatre, on Introduction* by Oscar Brockett. Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1964.

<http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/p/pd-modeng/pd-modeng-idx?type=header&id=FerbeButte>

<http://www.lm.liverpool.k12ny.us/Whacked/RoaringTwenties/1920s-6subjects-page.html>

[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/alganquin\\_round\\_table.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/alganquin_round_table.html)

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