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Student Matinee Series



Broadway Bound



Geva
Theatre
Center

By **Neil Simon**
Directed by **Tim Ocel**

Student Matinee
2004-2005

SEASON

Dear Educators,

When I sit down to read a Neil Simon play I know that I'll be chuckling within the first couple of pages. That's especially true with the *Brighton Beach* trilogy. Growing up in a family of five, I'm all too familiar with the smell of pot roast, the constant sound of people running up and down the stairs and the wrestling matches that take place when five people try to share one bathroom. It's amazing that our house could hold all that energy – let alone all that noise. It's even more surprising when I go home to visit and find that what was once Grand Central station is now more like a library. The house where my brother, sister and I spent our childhood is now home only to my mom and dad. It's hard to believe, but it seems that somewhere along the way all three of us have grown up. I've come to find that growing up is Neil Simon's specialty.

The *Brighton Beach* trilogy takes us through transitions in the life of Eugene Morris Jerome and his family. From his adolescence in *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, to leaving home for the first time in *Biloxi Blues*, to leaving home for the last time in *Broadway Bound*, we watch Eugene grow into a young man as his family changes around him. The story begins in a household bursting at the seams and ends quietly as those who had always lived there make plans to leave. This play, filled with Neil Simon's signature humor, is bittersweet. While we see some members of the Jerome family grow closer together, others begin to drift apart. *Broadway Bound* shows us a family going through changes, realizing they must let go of the past before they can move into the future.

It is unique for a theatre to produce a trilogy and we are thrilled to be sharing this final installment with our Student Matinee audiences. Needless to say this is a great piece for adults and young adults to experience together. To further enrich that experience you will find in this guide a variety of resources including an interview with actor Dennis Staroselsky, set and costume renderings, suggested classroom activities and historical information.

Please call 232-1366 x3058 with any questions you may have. Thank you for joining us for our 2004-2005 Student Matinee Season. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre.



Andrea Stoner
Associate Director of Education

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Cast of Characters

(in order of appearance)

Kate Jerome

Ben Epstein

Eugene Jerome

Stanley Jerome

Blanche Morton

Jack Jerome

"If you don't have faith in us, I have enough for both..." Stanley

Synopsis

Broadway Bound is the third play in Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach trilogy*. We first meet Eugene Morris Jerome and his family in *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. Their overcrowded home in Brooklyn, New York is the setting as the family strives to make the most of life during the depression. In *Biloxi Blues*, Eugene is shipped off to Mississippi for basic training during World War II and for the first time experiences life outside his doorstep. *Broadway Bound* takes us back to Brooklyn where the once overcrowded home is now quiet and of the few still living there, many are making plans to leave.

The play begins on a cold night in February, 1949 with news that Eugene and his brother, Stan, have been asked to write for CBS television. Their mother, Kate, and Grandfather, Ben, are home to hear Stan announce that he and Eugene must write a comedy sketch that night and bring it to CBS first thing the next morning. The boys are already hard at work when Kate's sister, Blanche, stops by. She makes a generous offer to send both Ben and their mother to live in Florida where they can escape the harsh Brooklyn winters. Ben declines her offer and later confides in Blanche that he thinks Kate and Jack's marriage is in trouble.

Jack comes home to find Kate waiting for him. She suspects he is having an affair and confronts him. Meanwhile the boys continue writing throughout the night. Jack and Kate are far from resolving the argument when she decides she can no longer continue the conversation and decides to retire for the evening.

The next time we see the Jerome family they are anxiously waiting to hear the sketch, however instead of getting picked up by CBS television it is being featured on *The Chubby Waters Radio Program*. The brothers worry that their futures ride on the show's success, but they are most concerned about the family's approval of their work. The program airs and Eugene and Stan immediately see the impact of what they have written. Bringing underlying tensions to the surface, they set a chain of events into motion that take the family into the next chapter of their lives.

About the Playwright

Neil Simon's bio reads like the quintessential American success story. Born in the Bronx on the fourth of July in 1927, he grew up with his second-generation Jewish immigrant working-class family in Washington Heights. After brief stints in college and the army, he began work in the Warner Brother's mailroom. At this time he also began working on comedy sketches with his brother. Soon he was creating revues for the stage, and both brothers began writing for television. Simon's first play *Come Blow Your Horn* was written as a relief from the grind of television writing and was a huge success in 1961, beginning a tradition. Rarely has there been a Broadway season where Simon's name has not appeared on a playbill. After a series of less successful plays in the late 70s, Simon revitalized his career and reputation with his autobiographical trilogy of *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1983), *Biloxi Blues* (1985) and *Broadway Bound* (1986). His 1991 play *Lost in Yonkers* won him a Pulitzer Prize in drama, as well as his third Tony for Best Play. Simon currently lives in California.

If you aren't already familiar with *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, read the play and compare the two. How have the characters changed from play to play? How is the tone of each play different?



Neil Simon

Interview with Actor Dennis Staroselsky

This interview was conducted by Andrea Stoner, Geva Theatre Center's Associate Director of Education



Dennis Staroselsky

Dennis, you have played Eugene Morris Jerome in Geva's productions of Brighton Beach Memoirs, Biloxi Blues and now Broadway Bound. What has it been like to play the same character in three different shows?

Working on this project has been an amazing opportunity. In regional theatre it's rare to be able to work with the same artists or play the same character. Here I get to do both. Tim Ocel has directed each play, so the two of us have shared the journey from the beginning. Over the past two years we've grown and the community has grown with us. It's been an incredible experience.

How is Eugene different in Broadway Bound?

By developing the character over a two year period, some of what I needed to do came naturally. He has matured and so have I. It's the events in each play, the cause and effect, that shape Eugene as he transitions from adolescence to adulthood.

Eugene is our narrator throughout the Brighton Beach trilogy. Does that make your role more of a challenge?

I can't wait to have people in the theatre. I feel like I'm not completely Eugene until they arrive – the audience becomes my scene partner. When we go into previews, it's my opportunity to build that relationship. Once we open, the audience helps to keep the show fresh because I make a new connection in every performance.

Why should young people see this play?

Because it's a great story. There are universal themes in *Broadway Bound* that students will relate to. Neil Simon explores relationships between parents and their children and how those relationships change over time. We all grow up, and that's what this play is about.

"I'm very happy that actor Dennis Staroselsky has worn Eugene's shoes the entire trip and that our cast from *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (with the addition of David Silberman) has returned to the house at 1427 Pulaski Avenue. It has made our design and rehearsal process a delightful extension of previous ground covered, and has facilitated a reunion with a wonderful, trusting cast." Tim Ocel, Director and Associate Artist

How is the structure of this play different from others you've seen? Does it enhance or detract from the story?

"I want you to show me how you danced." Eugene

The Post-War Years: America in Transition

The years following World War II brought seismic changes to American and global politics, culture, industry and everyday life.

What was happening in New York in 1949? Go to the library, surf the web or talk to people in the community about how things have changed over the past 55 years.

Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball when he was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. At the end of the season he won baseball's first Rookie of the Year award.



Photo by Irving Haberman

Protesters at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia in 1948 call for an end to segregation in the armed forces.



Drive-in movie theater

Drive-in movies united some of the most popular aspects of post-war American lifestyle: viewers could enjoy a movie from the comfort and privacy of their own car, while still gathering socially with hundreds of other drivers who were doing the same thing. Two thousand drive-ins were built around the country between 1947 and 1950.

RCA introduced the 45 RPM record in 1949 – just in time for the birth of rock and roll – opening up the market for music to even younger consumers at an affordable cost.

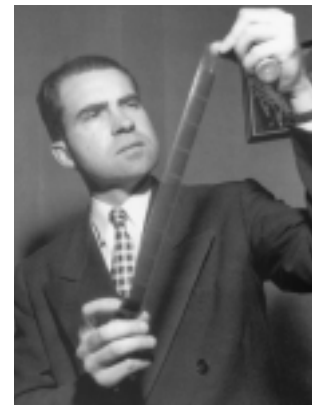


Photo by Irving Haberman

Richard Nixon gained national prominence during the 1949 trial of accused spy Alger Hiss. The trial fueled national anti-communist sentiment and paved the way for Senator Joseph McCarthy and the Red Scare of the 1950s.

Chuck Yeager breaks the sound barrier in 1947, marking the beginning of the space race that two decades later would see the first man on the moon.



Chuck Yeager is pictured on the left

This page features selections from the *Broadway Bound* lobby display. For each production Geva's Literary Department researches the historical background of the play to provide the director, cast and our audiences with valuable information about the time period.

"What you want to do and making a living are two different things." Jack

The Advent of Television

It was 1939 and radio was king. Up until this point, it had been the main source of news and entertainment for families inside the home. There were serial programs like *The Shadow*, soap operas, variety shows, comedy sketch shows and news programs. The longest running soap opera, *The Guiding Light*, began on the radio in 1937. Families would gather around the radio each night, planning their schedules around their favorite shows. Jack Benny, Milton Berle and Arthur Godfrey first became celebrities there, hosting sketch comedy and variety shows that paved the way for similar programs on TV.

At the New York World's Fair in 1939, RCA introduced the first television set to the world and television broadcasting in the United States began the same year. Unfortunately, the Second World War erupted and interrupted the advancement of television broadcasting and manufacturing. When the war ended, bringing post-war prosperity, people were hungry for products to spend money on and television fit the bill. In 1945, there were only 5000 sets with 5-inch screens in the country. By August of 1949, there were 2 million sets in the country and sales were 600% above 1948 sales. People flocked to TV to see the stars they were used to hearing on the radio. Big stars moved their programming over to TV and scored with it. Audiences who had listened to Jack Benny could now see him and his guests live in black and white. New writers cut their teeth on these shows; Neil Simon was a writer on Sid Caesar's show, along with Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner.

The 1950s are frequently referred to as the "Golden Age of Television." Milton Berle was a staple at 8:00 on Tuesday nights, taking his *Texaco Star Theatre* from ABC radio to NBC television. He became known as "Mr. Television" and "Mr. Tuesday Night." Restaurants and nightclubs rearranged schedules so patrons could watch him. It has been said that his show stimulated television sales and audience size, much the way *Amos 'n Andy* affected radio's popularity. But he was not the only one who benefitted from television. Ed Sullivan owned Sunday nights and Arthur Godfrey was must-see-TV on Mondays.

By 1955, most of the major talent had gone from radio. Those who didn't move to television retired. Radio, in turn, made an adjustment from talky programs to playing more music. Some consider the birth of rock-and-roll the salvation of radio. Families no longer gathered around the radio but the radio itself still remained relevant. Those who once collected around the radio now found themselves in front of the television. As of 2001, there were 248 million TV sets in the United States alone.

Amos 'n Andy: a popular radio show for 30 years, based around African-American characters

What would our world be like without television? Do you think its invention has had a positive or negative impact on society?

Do some research into early TV shows. What types of shows were popular? How do they differ from what is popular today?



Television set from 1948

"You did leave, Jack. You never moved out, but you left." Kate

The Trilogy

Often referred to as an autobiographical trilogy, *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, *Biloxi Blues* and *Broadway Bound* all contain experiences from Neil Simon's life. Like many of his plays, Simon weaves his own relationships, struggles and achievements into the telling of the Jerome family story. While we may never know exactly where the truth ends and fiction begins, his autobiographies *Rewrites* and *The Play Goes On* give us some insight as to how much of his plays come from his own life story.

Neil Simon wrote a trilogy of plays based on his own life. Write a short story using your life and one of your life experiences as a starting point.

Simon has said that he never intended to write a trilogy because he had no idea the first play would be a success. The family is modeled after his own and the major events in the plays follow those of Simon's life: growing up in New York, going into the army and then finally becoming a writer. The plays, however, are set in Brighton Beach instead of Manhattan, where he grew up, and while Simon does draw on his own experiences he creates many different characters to convey them. In *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, for example it is Nora, Eugene's cousin, who explains how she would reach into her father's coat pocket to find the candy he brought home for her, a memory of Simon's relationship with his own father.

Nora: So I'd run to the closet and put my hand in and it felt as big as a tent. I wanted to crawl in there and go to sleep. And there were all these terrific things in there, like Juicy Fruit gum or Spearmint Lifesavers and bits of cellophane and crumbled pieces of tobacco and movie stubs and nickels and pennies and rubber bands and paper clips and his grey suede gloves that he wore in the winter time.

In *The Play Goes On*, Simon explains that there are three common themes that show up in various forms throughout his career: the abandoned child, a father with a failing heart and a mother dying of cancer. In *Broadway Bound* it is the mother who is abandoned, the grandfather with a failing heart and the father's mistress who is diagnosed with a terminal illness. In setting out to write the third play, Simon knew it would be about the final breakup of his family and the ultimate parting of his parents. In *The Play Goes On* he writes, "It all started with one image in my mind: my mother waxing the dining room table." After the play opened Simon worried that he had invaded his parents' privacy during such a difficult time in their lives. "But by doing so," he writes, "I think I made the play accessible to all. The audiences could identify with their own parents and in some cases, their very own experiences."

Each play in the trilogy holds secrets from Simon's past that he reveals by sharing the joys and sorrows of growing up during the depression era. While many of the details have been rewritten, it is the truth in his plays that gives us a great understanding of the challenges he and his family once faced. Through their struggle it is the humor and spirit in Neil Simon's writing that brings each one of his scripts to life time and time again.

"The table you eat on means everything. It's the one time during the day the whole family is together... This is where you share things." Kate

From the Costume Designer – B. Modern

In *Broadway Bound* as with the other two parts of the Jerome family trilogy, the most important function of the costume design is to reflect the everyday reality of a real working-class family in Brighton Beach. The story takes place 10 years after *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, in the late 1940s, after the end of WWII. Eugene has gone off to the Army and returned; he and his brother have promising jobs; the Jerome family is better off now, and their life reflects the modest prosperity that many American families enjoyed after the austerity of the war years. The costumes are as true as we can make them to the time and place, and as realistic as possible based on a great deal of careful research.

Austerity: severely simple living conditions

I looked extensively at many magazines, photography books, catalogs and even films of the period to find out the details of how the members of a Brooklyn family might have dressed in the winter of 1949.

The design process began as always with an in-depth conversation with director Tim Ocel to discuss the play and explore the familiar characters 10 years later; how they are different, as well as how they remain the same. We considered the profound changes in their lives,

and how these changes would be reflected in their costumes...the teenage boys are now young men with Broadway dreams. Their aunt who had suffered poverty and widowhood is now remarried to a successful businessman...she wears the latest fashions and a full-length mink coat to keep out the winter chill. Their mother Kate as always wears the uniform of the hardworking wife and mother: a clean cotton housedress with an apron and sweater.

Kate has held her family and their home together, but the years have taken their toll on many of the relationships so it was important to us to illuminate this by using deeper, cooler colors and heavier fabrics to establish the harsher realities of a biting winter outside and a family drifting apart inside the little house in Brighton Beach.

What would change about *Broadway Bound* if it were set in 2004? What elements would remain the same?



Costume rendering for Eugene

"I have three daughters, and I love them the same. But the one who's in trouble is the one that I help." Ben

From the Set Designer – Erhard Rom

The director Tim Ocel and I decided very early on in the process, that we wanted the audience to experience the situation of this play realistically. The design therefore needed to follow, as closely as possible, realistic spatial arrangements. In order to achieve this, I took a trip to Brighton Beach where I studied the houses in the area. I got a sense of how the neighborhood was situated in relationship to both the city of New York and to the ocean. I was able to analyze the shapes of houses as well as the details that went into them. Many photographs were taken, and one of these will serve as a backdrop to the house in our production. It might have been possible to design the set without actually going to Brighton Beach, but when one is trying to recreate as closely as possible an actual location, nothing beats going to that location and really looking at it. The next step was to take all of the requirements of the script, and the requirements of the Geva space, and to try and make them all work together without distorting the reality of the space too much. It is really like solving a puzzle. What you have in the end is not truly realistic. Sightlines and other limitations pose too many problems. So what you end up with is a kind of theatrical realism.

*Brighton Beach
Memoirs* takes place
in 1937 and
Broadway Bound is
set in 1949. The
play is performed on
the same set for
both shows. If you
saw *Brighton Beach
Memoirs*, does the
set differ for
Broadway Bound?
How? Does the set
capture the passage
of time?

Theatrical realism:
*a style that attempts
to recreate real life*



*Model of Brighton
Beach Memoirs, whose
set is also being used
for Broadway Bound;
courtesy of Erhard
Rom*

*“How is it possible I could hate you so much
after loving you all my life?”* Kate

Glossary of Terms

Abe Burrows - 1910-1985. He was a writer on the Milton Berle Show, one of the early hits on TV. He is also known for writing the musical Guys and Dolls.

Leprosy - An infectious disease caused by bacteria that results in sores on the body. If untreated, it can destroy affected tissue.

The Phil Silvers Show - The show ran from 1955-1959. It was one of the most popular shows of the 1950s and won five Emmys during its run.

Pinochle - A card game for two to four people, using a 48 card deck.

George Raft - 1895-1980. He became a Hollywood actor after starting as a dancer in New York City. He was best known for playing gangsters.



George Raft

Leon Trotsky - 1879-1940. Born Lev Davidovich Bronstein, he was a leader of the Bolshevik Revolution. He was later expelled from the Communist Party and exiled for his opposition to Stalin.

Tell Us What You Think

We love to get letters from students about the plays they see at Geva. Tell us what you thought of the play, the production, the direction, the acting. Send your letters to Andrea Stoner, Associate Director of Education, c/o Geva

Theatre, 75 Woodbury Boulevard, Rochester, NY 14607 or email them to astoner@gevatheatre.org.

- How did the production elements – lights, costumes, set, sound – support or detract from the play? What would you have done differently? Why?
- What was useful in this study guide? Did any of this guide help you understand or enjoy the play?
- Did you have a favorite scene or moment in the play? Which was it and why?
- In your opinion, what is *Broadway Bound* about? Would you recommend it to someone who hasn't seen it?

Eugene and Stanley are living their dream at a young age as they begin their careers as writers. Where do you see yourself in five years? What would be your dream job?

Broadway Bound is told from Eugene's perspective. How would the story be different if it were told by his father or his mother?

"We knew our future was on the line that night, but it wasn't CBS we were worried about. It was Mom and Pop's approval that meant the most to us." Eugene

Resources

<http://www.museum.tv/archives/>- A great resource for researching people and shows from television history.

<http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/decades.html>- An excellent site for history of each decade of the 20th century.

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"When I was in the army, they told us, in battle, don't bother attending the wounded who were crying for help...Go to those that didn't make a sound. They were the ones in real trouble." Eugene

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