Scenic rendering by scenic designer Adam Koch

P.L.A.Y.
Performance = Literature + Art + You
Student Matinee Series
2019-2020

La Cage aux Folles

Discovery Guide
DEAR EDUCATOR:

Thank you for choosing to bring your students to La Cage aux Folles. We know that each academic year you are presented with a multitude of thought provoking and exciting educational visits, performances, exhibitions, tours, and other off-site opportunities to enrich your students’ classroom curriculum and to inspire them as they continue to transform into young adults, sharing their bright minds and open hearts with the world around them. And, each year, there is less time and fewer funds available to participate in these experiences, which are deeply meaningful in so very many ways. We appreciate that you found La Cage aux Folles compelling and enriching, and chose to share this particular story - and all of its many messages - with your students as you start the 2019-2020 school year. Over the next several pages, we hope to highlight information that will prepare your students to invest in this production and give them a glimpse into the world of the play.

In a phone conversation with Melissa Rain Anderson, director of Geva’s production of La Cage aux Folles, Melissa immediately expressed her desire to share this piece with Rochester’s student population (with whom she is very familiar from her years of playing Mrs. Cratchit in Geva’s A Christmas Carol, as well countless other roles on our stage, and directing several recent Geva productions). Melissa specifically highlighted inclusion and acceptance (of ourselves and of others), drag culture, LGBTQ+ illumination, family relationships, generational divides, identity, community, and the highly theatrical style of this musical as opportunities for students to connect with the characters and the story they’ll experience in the theatre. “Ultimately,” said Melissa, “La Cage aux Folles is about heart, family (and the people we love like family), love and the sacrifices we make for love, and our tribe – the village of people that come together to make something happen for someone they love. ‘How do we make this work for our son?’ Georges and Albin wonder. And, like Anne’s parents, we’re never too old to learn, to adjust.”

Thank you, again, for choosing to share the power and wonder of live theatre with your students. We’re certain La Cage aux Folles’s resonance and ever-increasing relevance in our world today, which extends far beyond the stage, will be a highlight of the academic year for both you and your students, and we are so excited to explore this show alongside you. Please plan to stay for a 20-minute talkback with the cast immediately following the performance. As you’ll see, they are a phenomenal ensemble of genuine and generous artists who are eager to meet your students, answer their questions, and share in a rich discussion about the themes and impact of this piece.

We invite everyone to lean forward, engage, and enjoy the performance. We’ll see you at the theatre!

Lara Rhyner
Associate Director of Education
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Throughout this guide, LGBTQ+ is used to refer to the entire community, even at times or during periods of history when that language was not in use, in an effort to fully include all individuals and identities.
BACKGROUND AT THE FOREFRONT

Characters:

Georges: The owner of the legendary nightclub La Cage aux Folles, partner to Albin, and biological father to Jean-Michel.

Albin: The star drag performer at La Cage aux Folles, known as Zaza; Georges’ partner, and Jean-Michel’s mother figure.

Jacob: The vivacious butler employed by Georges and Albin.

Jean-Michel: Georges’ son from a fling with a woman many years ago; wishes to transform his parents before they meet his fiancée Anne and her traditional family.

Anne: Jean-Michel’s fiancée and the daughter of conservative politician Edouard Dindon.


Marie Dindon: The wife of Edouard Dindon and Anne’s mother.

Jacqueline: The owner of the Chez Jacqueline restaurant, and a good friend of Albin and Georges.

Monsieur and Madame Renaud: Owners of a popular café, and friends of Albin and Georges.

Chantal, Angélique, Hanna, Mercedes, Bitelle, and Phaedra: Performers at La Cage aux Folles, known as Les Cagelles.

Francis: The Stage Manager in Georges’ club.


Saint-Tropez is a coastal town on the French Riviera, in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region of southeastern France. Long popular with artists, the town attracted the international “jet set” in the 1960s, and remains known for its beaches and nightlife. The cobbled La Ponche quarter recalls its past as a fishing village, although yachts now outnumber fishing boats.
Synopsis: Georges, owner of the St. Tropez drag nightclub La Cage aux Folles and his partner, Albin, have lived happily together for many years in an apartment above La Cage with Jacob, their butler. Albin is a drag queen, and the star performer of La Cage aux Folles, under the name Zaza. When Georges’ son Jean-Michel arrives home with the news that he is engaged to Anne Dindon, Georges is reluctant to approve of Jean-Michel’s engagement, but Jean-Michel assures his father that he is in love with Anne, whose father is head of the “Tradition, Family, and Morality Party” – a political party with a mission to close all of the local drag clubs. Anne’s parents want to meet their daughter’s future in-laws, so Jean-Michel pleads with his father to present a heterosexual lifestyle by re-decorating the apartment in a more subdued fashion and telling Albin to stay away while Anne’s parents are visiting. Jean-Michel also asks Georges to invite Sybil, his estranged biological mother, to attend the dinner with Anne’s parents in Albin’s place. When Georges tells Albin of Jean-Michel’s plan, Albin reluctantly agrees to pretend to be macho Uncle Al while Anne’s parents are visiting. When Sybil telegrams that she won’t be coming after all, Albin endeavors to save the day by presenting as Jean-Michel’s mother. After a mishap at home, the dinner is moved to a local restaurant, where Albin’s true identity is revealed.

MEET THE WRITERS

Jerry Herman (Music & Lyrics) was born in New York City on July 10, 1931 and was raised in Jersey City. His father, Harry, was a gym teacher and his mother, Ruth, was an English teacher and performer who also ran a summer camp in the Catskills where Herman taught himself to play the piano. Herman once recalled, “My parents took me at a tender age to see Annie Get Your Gun; I was absolutely dazzled. I have one of those retentive ears, and when I came home I sat down at the piano and played about five of the songs. My mother was amazed.” Herman first studied interior decorating at the Parsons School of Design (a hobby he maintained for many years), then transferred to the University of Miami to study drama and began creating revues and playing music at cocktail lounges. After graduating, Herman moved back to New York and staged a revue of his compositions titled I Feel Wonderful. The production was presented at the Theatre de Lys in Greenwich Village for 48 performances. In 1958, Herman opened another revue, titled Nightcap, at a New York City jazz club called the Showplace. Herman wrote the book and directed the show, which ran for two years. In 1960, Jerry Herman began his career on Broadway. On April 20, 1960, From A to Z opened at the Plymouth Theatre and featured many songs written by him. Later, in 1961, he was approached by a producer who asked if he would be interested in writing a musical about the founding of Israel. Herman accepted the offer, writing the music and lyrics to Milk and Honey, which awarded him nominations for a Grammy and a Tony Award. In 1964, Herman wrote the music and lyrics for Hello, Dolly!. His work won him several Tony Awards, Variety’s Best Composer and Best Lyricist Award, a Gold Record, and a Grammy Award. In 1966, Herman wrote the music and lyrics to Mame, which brought him similar successes. In the years to follow, Herman would write the music and lyrics for Dear World, Mack & Mabel, and the musical revue Jerry’s Girls. In 1983 he was offered the chance to write the music for a musical adaption of Jean Poiret’s La Cage aux Folles. Herman, who was a huge fan of the movie, quickly accepted the offer and began working with the up-and-coming book writer, Harvey Fierstein. La Cage aux Folles was a hit on Broadway and won six Tony Awards, including Best Score. Herman was the first of only two composer/lyricists to have three musicals run more than 1,500 consecutive performances on
Broadway (the other being Stephen Schwartz). In 2009, Jerry Herman won the Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement, and in 2010, Herman was awarded a Special Drama Desk Award for “enchanting and dazzling audiences with his exuberant music and heartfelt lyrics for more than half a century.”

In an era when many musical theatre composers were exploring dark themes and new forms of expression, Herman chose to write optimistic, entertaining shows with catchy tunes and happy endings. He was quoted as saying that he wished he had been born 30 years earlier, so that he could have worked in the era of light musical comedy as purveyed by predecessors like Irving Berlin. While his lyrics could be witty, they were usually light-hearted, and his music simple. In “Jerry Herman: Poet of the Showtune” biographer Stephen Citron wrote that simplicity could be deceptive, noting: “Herman's melodic gift depends not on complex chord relationships, but rather on taking a harmonic cliché and infusing it with life and color.”

**From Showtune: A Memoir by Jerry Herman & Marilyn Stasio**

“La Cage is a gay love story. But it is much more than that. The hero of that show is a gay man who finds his pride by challenging his own son’s bigotry toward homosexuals. The moral of the piece is actually very wholesome, because it is about standing up for yourself and fighting bigotry. In the beginning, people were shocked when they heard about the gay romance and the homosexual themes. But once they became involved in these people’s lives, they realized that the human issues applied to everybody—not just homosexuals. I think everybody working on the project was aware, on some level, of the importance of what we were doing - the chorus kids, our two stars George Hearn and Gene Barry, our director Arthur Laurents, Harvey Fierstein, and me too. But we were not out to change the world and wipe out bigotry overnight. We were just doing a musical. There was a strong feeling of camaraderie on this show. We may have been three gay men, but you couldn’t have found three more diverse individuals to put together on a project. The three of us didn’t have a thing in common - except the passion we had for this show. Our collaboration worked because we all respected each other, learned from each other, and we shared our ideas with each other. We pulled this off because we agreed to put aside any individual political agendas and make La Cage appealing to the broadest mass audience. The material was so rich; we could have done it lots of different ways. We could have toned down the humor, given it a much more serious tone, or made it more romantic, or more politically militant. The material seemed to us to work best as a charming, colorful, great-looking musical comedy - an old-fashioned piece of entertainment. That suited me because I like to say things quietly, almost subliminally. I feel that’s the way to really get into a person’s heart.”
Harvey Fierstein (Book) was born on June 6, 1954 in Brooklyn, New York and was the youngest son of conservative Jewish immigrant parents, a librarian and handkerchief manufacturer, from Eastern Europe. The Fierstein family encouraged both of their young sons to attend cultural events in New York City, and Saturday matinees on Broadway quickly became a favorite outing. Inspired by the incredible performers he had seen onstage, young Harvey Fierstein decided to create an act of his own and began dressing in drag and performing show tunes. He became a stand-up comic and female impersonator in a nightclub in NYC’s East Village at the age of 16 and, as a result, was offered a role in Andy Warhol’s 1971 production of *Pork* at the La MaMa Experimental Theater Club. Fierstein graduated with a Fine Arts degree from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in 1973, however, he opted to pursue a career in writing rather than painting. Over the next few years, he developed a series of plays about a young gay man named Arnold Beckoff that eventually became *Torch Song Trilogy*, which won an Obie Award for Best Play, as well as the Oppenheimer Playwriting Award in 1982 before moving to Broadway and winning a Drama Desk Award and a Tony Award. Fierstein, who played Arnold in the Broadway production, won the Theatre World Award for Outstanding New Performer, a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actor, and a Tony Award for Best Leading Actor in a Play in 1983. The success of *Torch Song Trilogy* brought Fierstein to the attention of producer Alan Carr who offered him the opportunity to write the book for *La Cage aux Folles*. In addition to his many stage works, Fierstein began a successful film and TV career in the mid-1980s appearing in Sidney Lumet’s *Garbo Talks* and narrating *The Times of Harvey Milk* in 1984. He also starred in the film version of *Torch Song Trilogy*, which was produced in 1987 by the then-unknown production company New Line Cinema. Fierstein has also had parts in popular TV shows like *Cheers* and *The Simpsons*, and films including *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Bullets Over Broadway*, *Independence Day*, and *Elmo Saves Christmas*. Additionally, he lent his distinctive voice to animated characters in *Mulan* and *The Sissy Duckling*. Fierstein returned to the Broadway stage in 2002 as Edna in *Hairspray*. He won a Tony Award for his performance and became the first man to win the award for Best Actor while playing a woman. Fierstein also became the second person to win a Tony Award in four different categories. In 2005 he starred in the Broadway revival of *Fiddler on the Roof* and played Albin in the 2010 Broadway revival of *La Cage aux Folles*. He continued writing for the stage and recently wrote the librettos for the musicals *Newsies* and *Kinky Boots*.

One of America’s first openly gay celebrities, Fierstein combined elements of experimental theatre with campy nostalgia, heart-tugging showmanship, conventional tearjerker formats, drag revue, and sitcom. In the process, he proved to be a key figure in promoting the idea that contemporary gay and lesbian life, with no apologies, could be a viable subject for contemporary drama distributed through widespread venues. Fierstein has been a strong voice in the LGBTQ+ community, and it was his honest, funny, and smart perspective inside the lives of the homosexual community that brought him into the *La Cage Aux Folles* production.
**From Harvey Fierstein:**

“Obviously, what we want people to go home with is a reaffirmation of relationships. A family does not have to be blood relations; it’s people who come together and take care of each other. If I had to sum up what the show is about in one phrase it would be, ‘Honor thy father and thy mother.’ Whether that’s your real father and mother, or the people who have made you a person, or the people who care about you. What I hope they will take away from La Cage aux Folles is a simple point: Everyone has games they play. And one of the things you must understand about loving someone is that there are going to be times when this person is going to behave, what you consider to be, very badly - for a reason that is separate from you. But if you understand that they can do that and still love and respect you, then the love will go on. But you must finally demand this from the other person; you must call them to account, and say, ‘You have now gone too far - this you cannot do.’ The other person will see it, and say, ‘you’re right.’ That, at least, is how it happens on Broadway.”

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**LA CAGE AUX FOLLES FOUR WAYS**

**The Original Play:** *La Cage aux Folles*, the play, by Jean Poiret, opened in Paris in 1973 and ran for five years (almost 1,800 performances). The play was a basic French farce on a unit set consisting only of Georges and Albin’s apartment, with a small cast, and starring the playwright himself as Georges. The son’s name was Laurent, and the fiancée’s family name was Dieulafois, or “God-faith.” Laurence Senelick, speaking in an interview for the *La Cage aux Folles* movie years later, had this to say about the play:

“*The fact is, there has never been in the French theatre a play like this - a big popular comedy that pivoted on female impersonation. French farce pivoted on adultery. It was a very heterosexual form in every respect, and you rarely got gender disguise as a major theme. So what they do is take the standard formula of French farce - which is that something has got to be disguised from somebody else (whether it’s an adultery, or a secret business deal, or some kind of mysterious action that may or may not actually take place), and you have to put on a big act so everybody else won’t know what it is - and they figure out a gay theme. They think the time is right.”*

**The French/Italian Movie:** The play was turned into a movie, which was filmed in its original location of Saint-Tropez, and was released in 1978. It was directed by Edouard Molinaro, and the script was rewritten for the screen by Francis Veber, who was considered the Neil Simon of French theatre. He added the character of the mother, opened up the script to allow for more locations, added multiple scenes
following the fiancée’s family (renamed Charmier) on their journey by car to St. Tropez, and reconfigured some key plot points and motivations. The film grossed over forty million dollars and boasted the highest success of any French film until the release of *Amelie* in 2001. *La Cage aux Folles* was an important marker for the film industry as it began to normalize homosexual relationships within a family structure.

**The Musical:** Since the producers of *La Cage aux Folles* the musical did not have the rights to the movie script, the character of the mother could not appear onstage. In other changes to this 1983 Broadway adaptation (which received nine Tony Award nominations, and won six of them), Laurent became Jean-Michel, and the fiancée Andrea became Anne. The last name Charmier became Dindon, and Anne’s parents did not appear until the second act. The musical also opened up the story to include additional locations, and put much more emphasis on the club itself, with its musical acts. Broadway revivals were staged in 2004 and 2010.

**The American Movie:** *The Birdcage*, the American version of the movie, directed by Mike Nichols and released in 1996, starred Robin Williams as Armand Goldman and Nathan Lane as Albert, and was set in South Beach, Florida. The script paralleled the French film almost scene for scene and word for word, except that names and locations were updated, Jacob was Latinx, and an extra level of prejudice was added by making Armand Goldman Jewish (and so he had to change his name from Goldman to Coleman for the night of the parents’ visit).

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<th><strong>Fun Facts</strong></th>
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<td><em>La Cage aux Folles</em> was the only show to win the Tony for Best New Musical or Best Revival each time it was on Broadway.</td>
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<td>Advanced ticket sales for the original Broadway production of <em>La Cage aux Folles</em> totaled $3.5 million. It was the first musical to charge $47.50 for orchestra seats.</td>
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<td><em>La Cage aux Folles</em> was the first musical to contain a drag show within a musical.</td>
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**THE MESSAGE BEHIND THE MUSICAL**

“I think this show is actually very deceptive, because people do not expect something that is that entertaining to be saying anything they might be afraid of. This play has an audience crying and cheering for several things that, if you took a Gallup poll, they would be against. Drag queens? A boy accepting a man as his mother? The love of two men, onstage in an American musical comedy, singing a love song to each other and meaning it? I think one of the greatest things in life is to be surprised - pleasantly surprised. Theatre is a fantasy, and you can make it all come true. But you can’t get by with just tricks. You use them to heighten a theatrical moment. It’s the childhood part of theatre - all the glamour and glitter and beads and feathers and sequins, and disappearing this and appearing that. But, finally, it has to get down to people and emotions. I really feel that musical theatre has been getting lost in all the icing, with no cake. It’s lovely to see the icing, but if you’re going to spend $45, there has to be more. I think so many people have the mistaken notion that to be positive is to be inartistic, and that cynicism and a bleak view of life equal art. I don’t believe it. Grubliness has no monopoly on truth. All the icing and the glitter make people feel better, and if you feel better you’re more disposed to accepting what’s served to you. I think people do need somebody else to say, ‘Yes, life is glorious, or can be, if you let yourself go emotionally and have a sense of humor about it.’ I think *La Cage aux Folles* does that.”

- Arthur Laurents, director of the original 1983 Broadway musical of *La Cage aux Folles*
The traditional definition of family when *La Cage aux Folles* was written, was a married man and woman with biological children. The U.S. Census did not even include a category for same sex couples until 2010, when it included questions about gender and relationships. Despite the fact that *La Cage aux Folles* was the first Broadway musical that used two homosexual men as its main characters, the show did not focus on the AIDS epidemic or the government’s noticeable silence during this critical period, that homosexual couples could not legally marry or adopt children, or the myriad of other political issues that were - and still are - prevalent in society. Instead, the show focused on the comfortable relationship of a middle-aged couple and the sacrifices that this couple was willing to make for the happiness of their son.

In his haste to impress his future in-laws and preserve his romantic relationship, Jean-Michel allows his embarrassment to cloud his judgment. While he may not be immediately likable for audiences because of this, Jean-Michel is a relatable character. His struggle to accept his parents as they are is something many people go through, and is so common that it has become a continuous running joke in movies and sitcoms; being embarrassed by your parents is almost a rite of passage. And though Georges is willing to go to extremes to placate his son, he is unwilling to allow Jean-Michel to disregard Albin’s impact in his life. He counters his son’s embarrassment with the nights that they nursed him through sickness, the times that they put his well-being before their own, and remind Jean-Michel that Albin is his mother in every way, apart from his sex. In Act II, Georges sings, “How often is someone concerned with the tiniest thread of your life? Concerned with whatever you feel and whatever you touch? Look over there, somebody cares that much.” When placed in this light, the universally relatable message of “honor thy mother and father” is communicated to both Jean-Michel and the audience.

One thing that *La Cage aux Folles* makes abundantly clear is that even though Albin and Georges are willing to “straighten up” for Jean-Michel, they are not ashamed of themselves. Albin defiantly breaks out of the routine number “We Are What We Are” and gives a passionate solo proclamation of, “I am what I am. I am my own special creation so come take a look, give me the hook or the ovation. It’s my world that I want to have a little pride in, my world and it’s not a place I have to hide in.” And while they are deeply
hurt by Jean-Michel’s actions, they are willing to abide by his wishes because they love him and his happiness is worthy of their consideration, even at a price. It is important, however, to acknowledge the personal cost of this sacrifice Georges and Albin endure for their son. As you watch La Cage aux Folles, consider both the intent and the impact of what Jean-Michel is asking (recognizing that intent and impact can – and often do - have different outcomes) and the emotional toll the couple selflessly pay out of love for their child.

Jean-Michel is acting out of both love in his own way - love for his fiancée, and the fear of losing her. The show, even in its negative or difficult moments, is centered on love and the lengths that a person is willing to go for the ones they love. To quote George Hearn, the actor who originated the role of Albin on Broadway, “Dressing up is just the cosmetic part of this show. It's about love, respect for yourself, and growing older. It's a universal love story.” By creating a show that drew on both the best and most nostalgic, as well as most universal aspects of musical theatre to surround a relatively sensitive subject, the writers were able to gain the acceptance of Middle America.

At the beginning of the 1980s, reports began to surface of young men in California and New York being diagnosed with rare forms of cancer and pneumonia. The specific strains of illness found in these patients were supposed to be found in people with severely compromised immune systems or specific genetic profiles. However, these men were young and had previously been healthy. The only other factor that linked them was that they were all gay. By 1983, this mysterious disease that had already claimed hundreds of lives (and would soon claim thousands more) had been given a name - AIDS. Just as La Cage aux Folles cheerfully broke down barriers onstage, the show also quickly became a force for unifying the Broadway community offstage. In the spring of 1984, members of the La Cage aux Folles cast were the main event in one of the first fundraisers for this terrible disease, in sharp contrast to the indifference of President Ronald Reagan and the US government. Harvey Fierstein remarked, “This show is very special to me. We lost half the cast of the first production to AIDS, and the whole Broadway Fights Aids campaign was originated in that period of the show.”

Jerry Herman and his collaborators carefully and artfully constructed a groundbreaking musical in such a way that it managed to be both family-friendly and risqué, balancing old fashioned Broadway schmaltz with modern musical theatre. “If we had written a stronger, tougher political message into the material, The New York Times might have loved us more. But that would have given our show too narrow an appeal and it never would have found the huge universal audience that it did.”

**HISTORIC MOMENTS IN THE FIGHT FOR LGBTQ+ RIGHTS**

**By the decade:**

**1950s: The Lavender Scare** - In the 1950s homosexuality was hidden, ridiculed, and illegal. The Lavender Scare, a parallel of the anti-communist campaign known as the Red Scare, referred to the government’s hunt for and persecution of gays and lesbians. The FBI and police kept records of ‘known homosexuals’ and printed their photographs in local papers. Police performed sweeps of bars and nightclubs to rid neighborhoods of gay people who were often publicly humiliated, harassed, fired from jobs, jailed, or institutionalized in mental hospitals.

**1960s: The Stonewall Riots** – As gays and lesbians began to meet more publicly at bars and clubs, one particular nightclub - The Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York City - would change the course of the gay rights movement by sparking a flame of revolution. On June 28, 1969, a police raid on the bar quickly turned into a riot, which brought publicity to the homosexual community as LGBTQ+ individuals
stood up and fought for themselves and their rights as Americans. The events at Stonewall ignited worldwide LGBT+ activism.

**The 1970s: Pride** - The 1970s focus on sexuality in pop culture was influential to America in many ways, from Women’s Rights to Gay Pride. The seventies marked the rise of gay support and advocacy groups, with the occurrence of the first march on Washington advocating for gay rights, and the first Pride March (which took place in New York City and had no dress or age regulations).

**The 1980s: AIDS** - The 1980s were marked with the beginnings and growth of the AIDS epidemic. AIDS would draw an even darker line between those who accepted homosexuality, and those who did not. The theatre industry provided much support to the gay community during this time, and lost many of their own community of artists to the disease.

**The 1990s: Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation** – The 1990s brought about an increase in legislation aimed at restricting the rights of gay and lesbian individuals, including “Don’t ask, don’t tell” – a complex directive that technically allowed gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans to serve in the military, as long as they kept their identity hidden - and the Defense of Marriage Act, which banned same-sex unions and defined marriage as “a legal union between one man and one woman.”


### An Excerpt of Key LGBTQ+ Moments:

- **1924:** The first gay rights group was established in Chicago.
- **1958:** The Supreme Court ruled in favor of gay rights for the first time by ruling that the US Postal Service must distribute *One: The Homosexual Magazine*, which they had previously refused to distribute.
- **1973:** The American Psychiatric Board removed homosexuality from the official list of mental illnesses.
- **1987:** Barney Frank became the first member of Congress to voluntarily come out as gay.
- **2000:** Vermont legalized same-sex civil unions (a first step toward marriage equality).
- **2009:** President Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act into law – which expanded previous hate crime legislation to include crimes motivated by actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability.
- **2011:** “Don’t ask, don’t tell” was revoked.
- **2013:** The Supreme Court ruled the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional, allowing married same-sex couples federal benefits.
- **2015:** For the first time in US history, the words lesbian, bisexual, and transgender were used in the President’s State of the Union address when President Obama stated that, as Americans, we respect human dignity and condemn the persecution of minority groups. 2015 also marked the addition of sexual orientation to the military’s anti-discrimination policy, Love Wins (the unofficial name for the Supreme Court’s declaration of same-sex marriage as a nation-wide constitutional right), and the end of the ban on transgender military service.
- **2016:** A directive was issued to all public schools that transgender students should be allowed to use the restroom that reflects their gender identity.
- **2018:** Over 150 LBGTQ+ identifying individuals were elected into office in the mid-term elections.
- **2019:** President Trump rescinded the right for transgender people to serve in the military and enacted other anti-trans policies, including the removal of questions from the 2020 census asking about a person’s sexual orientation and gender identity, so that non-coupled LGBTQ+ individuals could not be counted.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Before You Go:**

1. Think about a time when you were embarrassed or ashamed of a parent(s). Why did you feel that way? How did they respond to your reaction? Was a resolution reached? Did you forgive them? Did they forgive you? How did (or do) you feel now that some time has passed? Would you change anything from that experience, if you could? Consider that memory through your parent(s) eyes. Did putting yourself in their position change your perspective on the memory, or allow you to experience a motivation or side to the story you hadn’t previously considered?
2. What does family mean to you? Who do you consider your family to be? Have you encountered families who look different than yours? What were your thoughts and feelings as you considered another version of family that was different than your own?
3. Have you ever felt as through a relative, friend, peer, or other individual has struggled to accept you for who you are? Why do you think they struggle with that acceptance? Do you feel love and acceptance for who you are? Is there a relative, friend, peer, or other individual who you struggle to accept as they are? Consider why you are struggling with this acceptance.
4. In what ways can you support, or be an advocate or ally for, inclusion and acceptance?
5. What sacrifices or compromises have you made for love (love of self, love of family or friends, romantic love, etc.)? Was it worth it? Was there a boundary to that sacrifice or a compromise?
6. Have you ever seen a drag performer or drag show before? Do you have any expectations of what the experience or performance might be like? Do you have any expectations of what that person, as an individual, may be like? Where did your expectations or ideas originate from?

After The Show:

1. Were the set, costumes, lighting, and sound in line with what you expected prior to seeing the show? How did each of these elements enhance your understanding of the story or deepen your experience with the characters and situations in this production?
2. Consider each character’s worldview, or outlook, on life. How were they similar and different? Did any particular character resonate with you?
3. What character(s) experienced transformative moments or a journey throughout the story? How were they different at the end of the play from the beginning?
4. If you were Georges or Albin, how would you have reacted to Jean-Michel’s request? Would you have done anything differently? What consequences, do you imagine, would there have been for your choice – both positive and negative?
5. What message or impact did you take away from the story? Did you feel the story was universally relatable? In what specific ways were you able to relate to the story, characters, or themes?
6. Can you draw connections between the world of La Cage aux Folles and our world today? How is this story still relevant in today’s social and political world? What has changed? What hasn’t? Can you pinpoint opportunities for further progress?

Activity:

“Love, Commitment, and Family belong to all people” – Harvey Fierstein

Watch this Barbara Walters interview with a young Harvey Fierstein from 1983, when La Cage aux Folles first opened on Broadway. What did you find interesting about this interview? How have views changed – or remained the same – over the past 35 years?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wffy5QC40io

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DRAG CULTURE

“Cross-dressing really goes back to the dawn of time because it’s connected to the origins of magic and religion. Shamans, who are the intercessors between a tribe and its divinities, don’t choose to be a shaman. Usually in adolescence, at a time when the body is changing, the spirit inhabits this person. Now, if it’s a male spirit that’s inhabiting a woman, or a female spirit that’s inhabiting a man, they accept that possession, and they then continue to live their lives as the gender of the spirit that inhabits them. And this is why is so many indigenous societies, the ‘third sex’ - as it might be called - who is behaving contrary to their physical gender is considered holy, or special, or in some way touched by the divine. The performative element actually comes out of the religion.”

– Laurence Senelick, author of The Changing Room: Sex, Drag, and Theatre (transcribed from an interview included in the DVD of the original French film of La Cage aux Folles)
The Gender Equity Resource Center of UC Berkeley defines drag as “the act of dressing in gendered clothing and adopting gendered behaviors as part of a performance, most often clothing and behaviors typically not associated with your gender identity. Drag Queens perform femininity theatrically.”

Although the origins of the term drag queen are disputed, its first recorded use to refer to actors dressed in women’s clothing is from 1870. Many believe that drag was theatre slang for the sensation of long skirts trailing on the floor. There is also a common belief that DRAG is an acronym for “dressed resembling a girl,” coined by Shakespeare in the footnotes of his plays. This legend is probably not accurate though, as the use of acronyms wasn’t common until the twentieth century and Shakespeare’s works predated common usage of the term. ‘Queen’ is most likely derived from the Old English ‘quean,’ which was a derogatory term commonly used in the 1700s to describe prostitutes and gay men. Since then, the word has been reclaimed in a positive sense. Also known as female impersonators, drag queens have existed throughout human civilization and across all cultures. They appear in ancient Roman and Greek literature and history, in Chinese classical theatre, and in Norse and Hindi mythologies. In England, women were banned from performing on stage in Shakespearean times, so men had to perform all the roles, including female roles. Only after the Restoration in 1660 were women allowed to take the stage as actresses and the first recorded female actor played Desdemona in a production of Othello on December 8, 1660.

A big time for drag was in the 1920’s during Prohibition. The clearly defined lines between femininity and masculinity were blurring, with women wearing their hair short and wearing less constrictive clothing. This freedom of sexuality, plus the great parties of the Prohibition, provided a way for drag performers to entertain. Also, with the theatrical medium of Vaudeville, men were impersonating women more frequently. Though, often, men performing in drag were also gay, sexuality and drag are not always connected.

The 1940s favored post-WWII theater sketches performed by all men and shows put on during the war by soldiers. These performances were advertised as ex-servicemen acting out revues that had been used as entertainment during service. Throughout the ‘40s, drag performers seemed to be protected by the fact that it was all part of theatre. However, family entertainment was central during the ‘50s. According to Laurence Senelick, “The moral panics that happened in the United States after World War II came from a need for society to go back to normal. You had a lot of gay men who, in the fifties, were feeling particularly under threat from legal persecution. And so places like The Jewel Box Revue, or Club 52, were safe venues. And, gradually, the club scene began to develop what became known as alternative drag - a drag that was a complete reversal of the glamor idea.”

The ‘60s brought about a slow revival of drag, and by the 1970s, drag was coming back as a strong form of entertainment and lifestyle. Harvey Fierstein’s Torch Song Trilogy brought beautiful understanding not only to the performance of drag, but also to the sexual identity of the man beneath the drag. Drag queens flourished in the ‘80s and ‘90s, when a strong gay culture began to take hold and, since then, drag has grown ever more popular and accessible with the rise of glamour drag. In the 1980s in New York City, a
style of drag performance called “ball culture” evolved. These were talent competitions for participants who identified as LGBTQ+, and continue to this day. Participants competed for prizes in elaborate costumes by dancing, strutting, and posing in various categories, meant to both epitomize and satirize gender and social class. Ball culture set the stage for such series as RuPaul’s Drag Race and Pose. “The female impersonator is not some sort of witch-like clown, but is actually somebody dressed in the latest fashion who was trying to convey an illusion of sexual allure,” said Senelick. “By the end of the century, you have people who are making their careers entirely by performing as gender impersonators. Youth begin to accept drag performance because they’re getting it out of rock and roll. Alice Cooper, David Bowie - so many of them were not necessarily drag performers, but they were blending genders.”

Starting in the late 20th Century, groups of drag queens have come together under a unifying identity to perform a charitable or activist function in their communities. Some perform to raise funds for charities, while others protest for LGBTQ+ civil rights. Some of these groups are reviving the ancient archetype of drag queens as shamans and spiritual leaders.

In 2009, the widely watched and wildly popular RuPaul’s Drag Race television series was first aired, and is still going strong today. “Drag Race has definitely given tremendous legitimacy to the art of drag,” said Frank DeCaro, author of Drag: Combing Through the Big Wigs of Show Business. “It’s presenting queens with full lives - which might be the most important thing it’s done. We see their hopes, their lives, and loves. We see them being rejected and finding love. All the great stories we can all relate to. Just, you know, in dresses and heels.”

Drag Television and Documentaries:
- Paris Is Burning (1990)
- Wigstock (1995)
- Dragtime (1997)
- Queens For a Night (1999)
- RuPaul’s Drag Race (2009)
- Glitterboys and Ganglands (2011)
- Danny LaRue: A Fabulous Life in Drag (2013)
- The Art of Drag (2013)
- Life’s A Drag (2014)
- Pose (2018)

Drag in Theatre and Film Performance:
- Charley's Aunt (1892)
- White Christmas (1954, musical in 2004)
- Some Like It Hot (1959)
- A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum (1962)
- The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1973, film in 1975)
- Tootsie (1982, musical in 2018)
- M. Butterfly (1988)
- Mrs. Doubtfire (1993)
- The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994)
- To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar (1995)
- The Birdcage (1996)
- Hedwig and the Angry Inch (1998)
- Kinky Boots (2013)
- Dumplin’ (2018)
CREATING A WORLD: WHAT YOU’LL SEE ONSTAGE

“The original creators wanted to maintain a charming, colorful, and beautiful play. A buoyant, frothy, ravishing, extravagant musical comedy romp bursting with naivety - a world where anything can happen. The magical and opulent French Riviera feel is entrancing so that deeper issues and the human message come as a bit of a surprise.”

– Melissa Rain Anderson, director of Geva’s production of La Cage aux Folles

“The look for this show is sparkly and colorful. The piece originated in the early 80s, so the design is a little bit of an homage to a time period when, in terms of clothing, it was fun - people were unafraid to experiment with clothes and with color. Everyone remembers crimped hair, and big high hairdos, and mini-skirts, and layers of lace tights. And it was also a time before people truly knew what was going on with the AIDS crisis, so it was a very high-spirited, happy, fun time. Happy, and bright, and goofy.

The drag that’s done in the show is very different from the drag world today. There’s an innocence about it, and a lot of camp. We’re not covering any of the dancers’ tattoos, or muscles, or hair. Hey, it’s boys in girls’ clothes, and they’re having a blast. Its early 80s camp drag.

This is a massive show, so we had to determine what we could make ourselves and what we could find and modify to fit our needs. Because drag is such a big thing again and has gained so much acceptance, there’s a lot out there: there are places you can go to for sequined drag gowns. We had some things built in Thailand. For one robe, I wanted to give a special look, so I designed the fabric and my assistant transcribed the design digitally, and then we had the fabric printed by a company in England. I found some great 80s vintage pieces, so the character of Anne is wearing some of those; the character of Jacqueline also. It’s hard to think of clothes from the 80s being vintage now, but there you go!

We are not trying to copy someone else’s production. We’re not recreating what was on Broadway. This is our show, designed and built at Geva Theatre Center, for the Rochester audience.”

– Kevin Copenhaver, costume designer for Geva’s production of La Cage aux Folles
Costume renderings by costume designer Kevin Copenhaver

By the numbers:

*La Cage aux Folles* features….

- 110 complete costumes
- 45 wigs
- 77 pairs of shoes
- 800 ft. of color changing LED tape
- 54 microphones (22 onstage, 4 offstage, 28 in the pit)
Appendix
EDUCATION PARTNERS
Geva gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the following individuals, businesses, and foundations:

Max A. Adler Charitable Foundation
Ames Amzalak Memorial Trust in Memory of Henry Ames, Semon Amzalak & Dan Amzalak
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ESL Charitable Foundation
Excellus BlueCross BlueShield
Feinbloom Supporting Foundation
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Thanks to the following donors for their generous contributions to the 2019 Summer Curtain Call:

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Hedonist Artisan Chocolates
Imagine Photography
Iron Smoke Distillery
Madeline’s Catering
Marshall Street Bar & Grill
The Melting Pot
Moonlight Creamery
Nolan’s Rentals
Papermoon Productions
ROC Brewing Co.
Rockcastle Florist

And thanks to the 500 individuals who attended the event and made donations through the auctions, raffle, wine pull, and paddle call.
**Resources Used in the Compilation of this Guide**

Geva Theatre Center Dramaturgical Packet, compiled by Jean Gordon Ryon

Goodspeed Musicals Audience Guide (used with permission):
https://www.goodspeed.org/My%20Files/Guides/Audience%20Insights/LA%20CAGE_Audience%20Insights2.pdf

Civic Theatre Study Guide (used with permission):
https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/128f40_7385a73441ef4cc79a1c3172082b5370.pdf

Skylight Music Theatre Audience Guide (used with permission):

Justine Leonard – Research and writing
Ray Jivoff - Editor

LGBTQ+ information:
https://www.teenvogue.com/story/lgbt-equality-key-moments-timeline

La Cage aux Folles information:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Cage_aux_Folles_(musical)

Images:
https://excellence-saint-tropez.com/
https://theargyros.org/calendar/the-argyros-presents-jerry-herman-musical-theatre-tribute/
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_Fierstein
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Herman
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Drag_Ball_in_Webster_Hall--1920s.jpg
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Minnesota_Anti_Gay_Marriage_Amendment_Protests.jpg
https://www.mixindia.com/what-is-lgbtq-meaning-and-full-form/
https://students.ubc.ca/ubclife/were-queer-were-here-queer-trans-visibility-ubc
Geva Theatre Center Student Matinee Policies

Payment: Your contract must be signed and returned to Geva or your seats are subject to release. A 25% non-refundable payment is due 6 weeks prior to your performance date to hold the reservation. The full balance is due 3 weeks prior to your performance date. No refunds will be issued after the balance due date if you are unable to attend a performance that has not been cancelled by Geva.

Attendance: Have the exact headcount for both students and chaperones for your entire group ready to give to the House Manager as soon as you enter the lobby – it is the first information we will ask for, and your group cannot be seated until we know your exact numbers.

Chaperones: Though student responses are usually terrific, educators must stay vigilant about watching students during performances. We depend on you to ensure that everyone can enjoy the performance. All attending schools or groups must have at least one chaperone for every 15 students.

Special Needs: If any individuals in your group have needs that require special seating arrangements (mobility, hearing, vision, easy access to an exit, etc.) please contact us as soon as possible.

Weather: Please allow for traffic delays due to weather and plan accordingly. If your group encounters an issue, please call Geva and let us know your estimated time of arrival. In the rare event that a student matinee performance is affected by weather, your group will be contacted directly.

Buses: The bus route for arrival to and departure from Geva is to circle around South Clinton Avenue, Court Street, and St. Mary’s Place. Drivers will be given detailed parking instructions and a map upon arrival. Parking is available on Capron Street (across the street from the rear of the building). Space will be reserved and designated specifically for buses. Bus drivers should feel free to join the performance. We will do our best to accommodate them with any available seats.

Cars: We do not provide arrangements for groups traveling by car. However, there are several city parking garages in the area surrounding Geva, including Washington Square Parking Garage across the street from our facilities. Pricing information for these garages may be found on the City of Rochester’s parking web pages. Please note that the smaller parking lots adjacent to and behind Geva are not owned by Geva and are not public parking lots.

Arrival: Please have your entire group arrive at the theatre at the same time. We seat schools in groups, and it is difficult to match late arrivals with the proper school after seats are filled in. Please have your group sit where our ushers seat them. If you would like your students to sit in a particular order, students must be arranged in that order prior to your group entering the theatre.

Lunches: Groups may bring lunches or snacks to eat during the 20 minute intermission. They should be stored in boxes, and your school’s name should be clearly marked on the outside. No outside food may be ordered or delivered during the performance. All food and beverages will be stored in the Geva café during the performance. Capri Sun juice pouches and Rice Krispies Treats are also available for purchase for $1. No food or drink is allowed in the theatre.

Personal Belongings: All electronic devices should be turned off and stored for the duration of the performance. Any electronic items seen in use during the performance will be confiscated and returned after the performance. Larger bags or backpacks should be left on the bus or in the café along with lunches. Geva is not responsible for any personal items.

Dismissal: We hope your group will plan to stay for 20 minutes following the performance for an insightful talkback with the cast. If your group does not plan to stay, please alert the House Manager. After the talkback, groups will be dismissed by the House Manager and told where to meet their buses.
Thank you so much for choosing to share the power and wonder of live theatre with your students. We know how much work and preparation you put into attending a student matinee performance at Geva, and we’re delighted that you’re here!

**Geva Theatre Center Student Matinee Etiquette**

We are so excited to welcome you to Geva! To ensure a positive experience for everyone, please review these guidelines before the performance:

- **If you were an actor on our stage, how would you like the audience to respond to your work?** Our actors welcome appropriate responses to their performance! We encourage you to engage with them - laugh when it’s funny, cry when it’s sad, and lend them your support and focus. We don’t want you to be completely silent or unresponsive! Instead, respond in the moment and then continue to listen carefully (and remember that others around you are listening as well). You don’t want to miss anything important or exciting - there is no way to rewind!

- **Unlike television or the movies, our actors share the same room with you and can hear you and see you.** Our theatre is designed to allow noise to travel, so even quiet whispers or digging through a backpack can be audible. If the actors see you slouched in your seat sleeping, whispering to your neighbor, looking at your phone, or not paying attention in other ways, it can impact their performance as well. A live theatre performance is a conversation between the artists and the audience, in which you are an active participant. Your verbal and non-verbal responses directly affect the actors’ energy; they take their cues from you, and you have influence over their work onstage. Offer your respect and contribute to a strong performance by keeping your eyes on the stage and saving conversations – even ones discussing the play - for intermission or after the show.

- **To help us keep our space in great shape, please do not bring food, drink, gum, or candy into the theatre, and remember to keep your feet on the floor and off of the seat backs and stage.** If you’re seated in the balcony, no items (coats, playbills, etc.) should be placed on the balcony half-wall for the safety of the people seated on the orchestra level below you.

- **Cell phones, headphones, games, laser pointers, and watches all emit light and make noise that’s distracting both to the actors onstage and those seated around you.** Please keep all devices off and tucked away in your bag. Texting, or quickly checking social media, may seem harmless and discreet, but actually draws a lot of attention and creates a distraction for those around you (and onstage in front of you!).

- **Due to copyright laws, no pictures, video, or other recording can be taken of the show.**

- **Plan to use the restroom before the show starts so you can remain in the theatre during the performance.** Many shows have an intermission for stretching and visiting restrooms.

- **Keep bags and other personal items stored underneath your seat so nobody trips over them.** For the safety of all audience members and actors (who may be making aisle entrances or exits), remember to keep the main aisles clear of personal belongings and outstretched legs!

- **Most importantly…enjoy your experience at the theatre, engage, and have a wonderful time!**