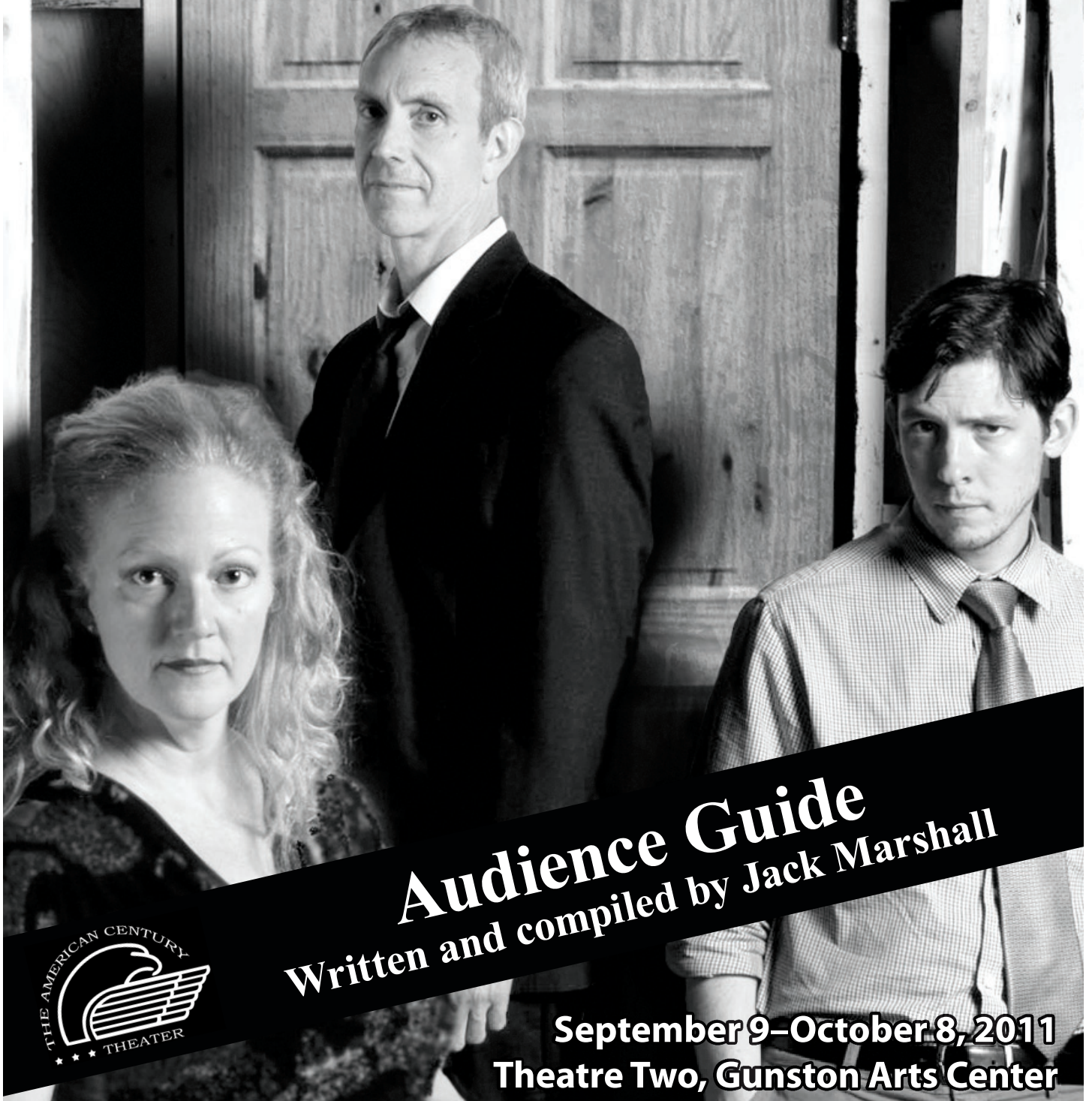


The American Century Theater presents

The COUNTRY GIRL

by Clifford Odets



Audience Guide
Written and compiled by Jack Marshall



September 9–October 8, 2011
Theatre Two, Gunston Arts Center



*Theater you can afford to see—
plays you can't afford to miss!*

About The American Century Theater

The American Century Theater was founded in 1994. We are a professional company dedicated to presenting great, important, but overlooked American plays of the twentieth century . . . what Henry Luce called “the American Century.”

The company’s mission is one of rediscovery, enlightenment, and perspective, not nostalgia or preservation. Americans must not lose the extraordinary vision and wisdom of past playwrights, nor can we afford to surrender our moorings to our shared cultural heritage.

Our mission is also driven by a conviction that communities need theater, and theater needs audiences. To those ends, this company is committed to producing plays that challenge and move all Americans, of all ages, origins and points of view. In particular, we strive to create theatrical experiences that entire families can watch, enjoy, and discuss long afterward.

These audience guides are part of our effort to enhance the appreciation of these works, so rich in history, content, and grist for debate.

The American Century Theater is a 501(c)(3) professional nonprofit theater company dedicated to producing significant 20th Century American plays and musicals at risk of being forgotten.

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The Playwright: Clifford Odets (1906–1963)

—Jack Marshall

1935 was the year of Clifford Odets. Few playwrights, maybe none, have ever been so active, so influential, and so in harmony with the tensions of the times as the 29-year-old writer was that year. Was it all downhill after that? Some think so.

Unquestionably, no writer ever approached such prominence having given so little warning based on the beginning of his career. Before 1935, Odets had been a socialist-revolutionary actor of no distinction whose best move was choosing his companions well. He had joined with the politically like-minded Cheryl Crawford, Lee Strasberg, and Harold Clurman in 1931 to split off from the junior acting company of the moderate Theatre Guild and form the Group Theatre, which was to transform the American stage. Thus Odets became a cofounder of one of the bravest and most significant theater organizations in American theater history.

But his contribution to the Group didn't end there, for he was literally its clearest voice. He had begun writing plays that would advance the company's objective of brewing an American brand of the Stanislavski acting principles, applied to ensemble, rather than individual, performing. His first was a draft of what would eventually become *Awake and Sing!*, called *I've Got the Blues*. (An unwritten essay or unplayed parlor game lies waiting on the fascinating topic of "Discarded Titles of Great American Plays" and the associated question of whether these classics would have succeeded under their original headings. *Oklahoma!*, for instance, was nearly called *Yessireee!* But the really interesting question is this: How many failed or forgotten plays lie in the theater archives that lacked only the right title to achieve critical recognition, box office success, and, perhaps, immortality? Ah, *Machinal*) *I've Got the Blues* was earnest but depressing, and Odets's Group colleagues patted him on the head as they suggested he go memorize his lines.

1935, however, changed everything, because everything was changing. The Great Depression was deeper than ever, but structural changes in the American economy and perhaps the world were on the horizon. Revolution was in the air: there had already been one in Austria, and France was in the

throes of its General Strike. Labor was organizing for a big push in America. People were poor and angry, and there were a lot of them. The theater world in New York functioned like a big filter that captured the most flamboyant, ambitious, brilliant, and leftist American artists, and the New Theater League was born—a cooperative enterprise by many socialist-leaning organizations, including the Group Theatre.

The League offered a one-act play competition with revolutionary politics as its theme. Odets locked himself in his room for three days and walked out of it with *Waiting for Lefty*, a furious and theatrical account of a taxicab strike. This play wasn't depressing—it was exhilarating. It not only won the prize, it won the confidence of Odets's Group colleagues. He was a playwright after all!

The group brought *Waiting for Lefty* to Broadway, where it was popular even with audiences who didn't share its politics. Using flashbacks and the explosive dialogue that remained Odets's trademark for thirty years, it was just plain entertaining theater. Entertaining *and* politically provocative: that was the Odets recipe, and when he got the balance just right, success followed. The Group and Odets hedged their bets a bit by filling out the Broadway evening with an anti-German fascism play, *Till the Day I Die*, just to make sure that the non-Pinkos in the seats had something to agree with.

Now Odets dusted off *I've Got the Blues* again and fleshed it out. The Group brought that to Broadway, too, under its new title. Odets also took a lot of the Jewishness out of his play—something the Group felt was essential for commercial viability. *Blues* contained many Yiddish words and Hebrew cultural references; not its new incarnation, *Awake and Sing!* Now it worked, for critics went gaga: Not only was this Odets kid a political firebrand with showbiz in his veins, he could also be funny, sentimental, and insightful. *Awake and Sing!* was called Chekhovian, and Odets was the new Eugene O'Neill. Well, O'Neill he wasn't, but he was the new Clifford Odets, and that was pretty good, too. (Ironically, as soon as the play was a success, it was translated into Yiddish, and became a staple of the Yiddish theater circuit.)

Odets craved success. He was no William Saroyan: It wasn't enough for him to move one audience member or to have “one human being sing his song.” Odets wanted big reviews, big ticket sales, big praise. Philadelphia-born to a more or less middle class family in 1906, Odets clearly embraced the

nobility of the struggling lower class and identified with the poor, but he also had both a hatred and a fear of the trappings of poverty. Perhaps this is because, unlike fellow Group-traveler Saroyan, he had never been *that* poor. Saroyan threw away money like it was the daily trash and often seemed to resent success. Odets would do anything, even compromise his artistic principles, to achieve it.

In 1935, he thought he had the formula down pat—and a guaranteed cheering section. This is why the failure of his next play, *Paradise Lost*, bewildered and upset him. It, too, had its roots in *I've Got the Blues*, but Odets was certain that it was richer, tougher, more profound, and better structured than either of his previous hits. Critics disagreed. To his dying day, Odets maintained that it was his best work, a common phenomenon among great playwrights. They always are loyal to the unloved child.

The failure of *Paradise Lost* sent Odets to Hollywood and the movies, though his first trip there didn't last long. He was back on Broadway with *Golden Boy* in 1937, and it was his biggest hit—the Group Theater's biggest hit—and the play that guaranteed that even if his star fell completely (and it did), Clifford Odets would never be completely forgotten. *Golden Boy* was a boxing saga with the plot of a hundred subsequent B movies. Joe Bonaparte wants to be a boxer; his father wants him to be, yes, a violinist. Joe chooses to be a gladiator, not a musician. He kills a man in the ring, and his girl seemingly deserts him, but they are reunited. Then they drive off into the sunset, only to die in a car crash.

Perfect.

Harold Clurman, Odets's director, champion, and friend, directed the play as an allegory, which it was. Odets was exploring the dual paths of the destructive (boxing) and the creative (music). Odets's manner of presenting his social parable rather than his message is what makes the play work. *New York Times* theater critic Brooks Atkinson wrote that what made Odets different from the usual variety of theatrical polemicists is that he didn't talk about ideas as much as he *showed* them.

During the run of *Golden Boy*, the playwright fell in love with the beautiful and emotional actress who portrayed the play's doomed heroine, Laura. She was Frances Farmer, and, when Odets ended their affair out of shame and regret (he was married at the time), she began her long, epic, downward

spiral into depression, alcoholism, self-destruction, and madness. What effect this had on Odets can only be speculated upon, but he was, unlike many artists, a kind and sensitive man. Farmer's fate, which included nightmarish confinement in an asylum and probably a frontal lobotomy, has haunted those who have only read about it or seen the Jessica Lange biopic, *Frances*. Odets was a participant in her tragedy, and his own history of depression and alcohol abuse may not be entirely independent of hers.

Then again, Odets had a series of romantic liaisons. One of his conquests, according to her autobiography, was none other than King Kong's girlfriend, Fay Wray.

Golden Boy was the peak from which Odets began his own fall from grace. 1938's *Rocket to the Moon* was a moderate success and still holds up when properly presented, but Odets felt it was a disappointment. A bigger one lay ahead with *Night Music*, a love story enmeshed in the dilemma of urban homelessness. The critics hated it, and it closed in three weeks in 1940. The next play, *Clash by Night*, did little better. Odets was disgusted with Broadway and headed to Hollywood for eight years. His flops also helped finish off the Group Theatre, although there were many other factors involved in its demise.

Clifford Odets was revolted enough by Hollywood to return to Broadway with an anti-Hollywood attack, *The Big Knife*, in 1949. An indictment of the lack of artistic integrity in a commercial world, it was something of a self-indictment as well. The play was not a success, and it marked the death of the angry side of Odets's talent. Not that Odets wasn't angry any more . . . far from it. The playwright just decided that anger wasn't working in his plays.

The kinder, gentler Clifford debuted in 1950 with *The Country Girl*, a sensitive examination of love, backstage show business, and the ravages of alcoholism—all topics he knew well. It was one of his biggest successes, and the last that did him justice. Odets returned briefly to Hollywood only to get himself blacklisted for his radical youth and flirtation with Communism. He returned to New York to write *The Flowering Peach* (1954), a treacly retelling of Noah's Ark. It was a hit, heaven knows why: the play was lightweight and hackneyed, the work of a beaten man. Odets was only 48, but, as a major playwright, he was finished.

The last chapter of his life was spent writing screenplays of varying quality and doing television scripts for shows like *Have Gun, Will Travel*. The star of that show, Richard Boone, hit it off with Odets and signed him up to supply material for his new anthology series, *Richard Boone Presents*. Both the show and Odets expired in 1963.

Looking over Odets's work now, his politics are less remarkable than his characters. As John Gassner and Bernard Dukore wrote in their assessment of the playwright:

His characters assert themselves regardless of argument, and we wonder how it is they possess so much individuality while their author insists that they are the product of social pressures. Poor or rich, successes or failures, Odets characters are irrepressible because they were born alive in their author's memory and imagination.



Odets in Hollywood

The Coen Brothers have made no bones about the fact that their much-admired oddball film about writer's block, *Barton Fink*, was inspired by Clifford Odets's experience as a Hollywood screenwriter. Of course, he was much more successful at it than Fink, but Odets probably found the work just as traumatic. He turned most of his own hits into movies (notably *Golden Boy*, which made a star out of William Holden). But he also wrote *The Sweet Smell of Success*, which is now regarded as a classic, and the little known masterpiece *Deadline at Dawn*, a poetic crime thriller. Odets also proved that he was a talented film director the two times he had a shot at it. One little-known piece of movie trivia: Odets did quite a bit of uncredited script work on Frank Capra's classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*, along with fellow blacklisted writers Dalton Trumbo and Dorothy Parker.

His 1940 journal, *The Time Is Ripe*, gives a vivid account of Odets's Hollywood adventures when he fled there after the failure of *Night Music* on Broadway. Below is an excerpt of David Denby's review in *The New York Review of Books*.

Excerpt from the review, "Odd Man In" by David Denby, The New York Review of Books, 9/29/88

The Time Is Ripe: The 1940 Journal of Clifford Odets, with an introduction by William Gibson. *Grove Press, 369 pp., \$22.50*

. . . In love with the theater but eager to make money, Clifford Odets dragged himself unhappily through long years in Hollywood, often working on screenplays never filmed or on anonymous rewrites of other men's work (at the end of his life, he was writing a television series for the actor Richard Boone). The journal he kept in 1940, now published by Grove Press as *The Time Is Ripe*, suggests how much the movies attracted and shamed him. In the course of the year (he is thirty-three at the beginning of it), the Group, beginning to lose its way, failed with its New York production of his play *Night Music*. Odets then traveled to Los Angeles to write a screen adaptation of the play (never made). He was earning \$2500 a week. He was restless, with little to do but work, drink, and sleep with the actress Fay Wray, and he quickly came back.

The year was a turning point for him. No longer the famous young playwright whose picture had been on the cover of *Time* two years before, he had begun his excruciating career as a famous American has-been.

The Time Is Ripe is an emotional record of Broadway, 1940, as a vale of soul-making. Fascinated by Casanova and Stendhal and Byron, Odets made breathless notation of his erotic triumphs, mixing rhapsodic ardor with homely notes of the bachelor life:

Home I came to write on the trio play. And yet this goddam acute loneliness makes me leave the telephone on, hoping that by accident someone may call. And then the phone rang! . . . She came here in record time, whereupon we fell upon each other and slept and awoke and chatted and massacred each other again and again and then she fell asleep and I prowled around the house, unable to sleep until past ten in the morning, she stained and scented beside me with all the exercises of the night.

There are many girls, some famous, some not; much restless driving around the city late at night; and, on every page, amid the lyricism, descriptions of

his friends and himself almost painful in their harshness. Idealistic, impassioned, and fatally lacking in canniness, even routine common sense, Odets demonstrates in this journal the intoxicating sweetness and seriousness of his famous conversation (by reputation, he was one of the best talkers of his time). He was a prodigious autodidact, and he had caught art fever that year, reading Stendhal, Gide, Heine, and Strindberg, gearing himself up with long stretches of Beethoven on the record player—more than one beautiful young woman was forced to listen to the late piano sonatas before climbing into bed.

The journal details plans for projected plays about Van Gogh, Nijinsky, Woodrow Wilson, and reveals why he had so much trouble completing anything. Piety and frivolity were so ruinously mixed in Odets' nature that he could not begin to write without episodes of exaltation (Beethoven and more Beethoven) yet could not work seriously without stopping to run out and meet, say, Leonard Lyons or Walter Winchell at a nightclub. Returning home from the Stork Club at dawn, exhausted and guilty, he would write for an hour or so before falling asleep. Inspiration, raised in Odets' journal to a fetish, required the constant celebration of scribes and photographers.

He knew he was turning himself into a fool:

This living from the jowls and testicles is murderous for me. It engulfs me, a man with an essentially religious purpose and use in life, a sort of sunken cathedral of a person.

The actor Lionel Stander said to him in a club one night: “You are a first-class man. What are you doing with these nitwits?” On the other hand, Odets got something useful out of the nitwits—the dialogue he added, years later, to Ernest Lehman's screenplay for *The Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), an acrid portrait of columnists and press agents prowling the corrupt New York night world. But his own play about his Hollywood experience, *The Big Knife*, was overblown and self-pitying. Like many other serious writers, he thought the movies were childish but had great difficulty mastering the peculiar skill of screenwriting. At one of Dorothy Parker's cocktail parties, he sees the moldering figure of F. Scott Fitzgerald—“pale, unhealthy, as if the tension of life had been wrenched out of him.”

It is a meeting sad to imagine—one writer drawing near the end of his Hollywood martyrdom, the other beginning his long descent.

From Play to Film: The Transformation of *The Country Girl*

—*Jack Marshall*

Clifford Odets was a master of character, and character in drama is inevitably a hybrid between what the playwright creates and what the actor brings to the role. Casting changes everything, and this was especially true when *The Country Girl* travelled from Broadway to Hollywood.

The script was adapted to the screen by someone other than the playwright, despite Odets's extensive experience as a screenwriter: George Seaton, who also took over Odets's Broadway role as director. Seaton liked to direct his own screenplays, and he was well regarded in 1955, having been an Academy Award–winner some years earlier for *Miracle on 34th Street*.

Seaton could not have cast the key roles of the alcoholic actor, his wife, and the director more distinctively, and in more marked contrast to the play, which had been cast according to Odets's own vision of the characters. Broadway's creators of Frank Elgin, Georgie Elgin, and Bernie Dodd were pure stage actors in 1950, hardly known to the public outside of New York, though Paul Kelly, who played Frank, would have been a familiar face from his character work in films in the '30s. Their replacements—despite the critical success of the play, none of the Broadway cast was given consideration for the movie—were movie stars in every way. None of them had much stage experience, and one of them wasn't even considered a dramatic actor at all.

Yet unlike so many Hollywood adaptations that foundered on misbegotten casting—Barbra Streisand replacing Carol Channing in *Hello, Dolly!*, Jerry Lewis replacing Cyril Ritchard in *Visit to a Small Planet*—it worked. *The Country Girl*'s trio of superstars turned in performances worthy of their reputations, making the movie a success, and, unfortunately, forever overshadowing the Broadway version.

Comparing the actors cast in the play and the film tells us much about the differences between the stage and the screen in the 1950s.

Frank Elgin on Broadway: Paul Kelly (1899-1956)

His father's saloon was located very close to the Vitagraph Studios in New York, and the studio used to borrowed furniture from the saloon for their sets. As partial repayment (at the request of his mother), the studio would use Paul for some of their one-reel silents. He eventually became the resident kid actor at the studio from 1911 on.

Kelly moved into teen and young adult roles while alternating between theater and movie assignments. His Broadway shows included the highly popular *Penrod* starring Helen Hayes in 1918; in movies, he had a key role as Anne's boyfriend in the silent classic *Anne of Green Gables* (1919). He continued his dual track career on stage and screen through the 1920s.

But Kelly found himself involved in a love triangle with a married (and abused) woman, actress Dorothy Mackaye, and when her husband, Ziegfeld Follies song-and-dance man Ray Raymond, found out, the two men had a violent fight that ended with Raymond's death of a brain hemorrhage, allegedly from the beating applied by Paul Kelly's fists. Kelly was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to one to ten years in prison; he was paroled in August of 1929 for "good behavior" after serving 25 months.

Broadway didn't seem to care, and began using him the minute the cell door shut behind him. He was in five shows in two years, and, although none were hits, he was firmly establishing himself once again. Hollywood sought him, too, though mostly in "B" movie supporting roles. Kelly appeared in nearly thirty movies over the next fifteen years. He made movies for the money, but he considered himself a stage actor first, and so did the theater community. During the 1947-1948 season, Kelly won a Tony Award (tying with Henry Fonda and Basil Rathbone) for his performance in *Command Decision*. Odets knew his work well and cast him in the part of Frank Elgin.

Kelly wasn't surprised to lose the role to Bing Crosby when it was filmed in 1955; he had lost his leading role in *Command Decision* to Clark Gable a few years before. He was a star on Broadway, but in Hollywood he was just one of those guys you always see but whose name you can never recall. Kelly went on to play the same kind of anonymous supporting roles in various TV shows until November 6, 1956, when he died of a heart attack.

Can you picture his face? I can't.

Frank Elgin in the movie: Bing Crosby (1903-1977)

The greatest similarity between Paul Kelly and Bing Crosby is that both spent time in jail: in Bing's case, he was imprisoned a few months for an accident while he was driving drunk. Harry Lillis Crosby, otherwise, was one of the top ten superstars in American entertainment history, with epic success in films, television, radio, and recordings over a career that was still going strong when he dropped dead on a Spanish golf course, having completed a triumphant run at the London Palladium.

None of that success, including an Academy Award for *Going My Way* and more #1 records than either the Beatles or Elvis, came on the dramatic stage, however, and when he was cast in the very serious role of Frank Elgin, Crosby's range in screen drama had never ventured far beyond the mild traumas of facing off against Barry Fitzgerald over the best way to run an inner-city parish. So it was something of a surprise to everyone when film critic Bosley Crowther's review of *The Country Girl* for the *New York Times* began:

Clifford Odets' poignant drama of a broken-down actor, his loyal wife, and a misunderstanding stage director in The Country Girl has been put on the screen with solid impact—and with Bing Crosby in the actor role. This latter piece of offbeat casting is the most striking thing about the film For, with all the uncompromising candor of George Seaton's adaptation of the play and with all the intense, perceptive acting of Grace Kelly and William Holden in the other roles, it is truly Mr. Crosby's appearance and performance as the has-been thespian who fights and is helped back to stardom that hits the audience right between the eyes Although the heroic character is inevitably the wife, who fights for her weak and sodden husband with the last store of energy in her weary frame, it is he—the degraded husband—who is the focus of attention here. And the force and credibility of the drama depends upon how he is played. That is why it is Mr. Crosby who merits particular praise, for he not only has essayed the character but also performs it with unsuspected power he plays the broken actor frankly and honestly, goes down to the depths of degradation without a bat of his bleary eyes and then brings the poor guy back to triumph in a chest-thumping musical show with a maximum of painful resolution and sheer credibility. There is no doubt that Mr. Crosby deserves all the kudos he will get.

Crosby brought some personal issues to the part to be sure. His late wife, Dixie, was an alcoholic, and Crosby was wary of drink himself after his jailing for drunk driving. Nonetheless, the part was a huge gamble for the singer, who was a perfectionist and not accustomed to failing in anything he attempted. Director George Seaton had to coax Crosby into playing the role and cope with periodic bouts of cold feet. He wrote:

Come the first day of shooting and at nine-thirty, there was no Crosby; ten o'clock, no Crosby; ten-thirty, and still no Crosby. At eleven I had a call from Wally Westmore—who was head of the makeup department—and he said, 'You'd better come up here, I think you've got big trouble on your hands!'

When Seaton arrived he found Crosby wearing an old toupee that he had worn nearly twenty years before.

When I walked in, there sat Bing with his College Humor [1933] wig on! The wavy one he'd worn in all those early films, and he was very defiant. He said, 'I've just decided that this is what I'm going to wear in this picture.' He said, 'Well, I've got my audience to think of. I don't want to look like an old man on the screen.' I said, 'You won't—you'll look your age—but there's nothing wrong with that, you're playing a character part.' I said, 'Bing, let's be honest, you're frightened,' and he almost started to cry and said, 'I can't do it.' I said, 'Please have faith in me, I'm frightened too, so let's be frightened together.' We threw our arms around each other and walked onto the set and from then on there was no problem at all.

In his own December 1954 *New York Times* article, “Bing Scans His Elgin,” Crosby admitted that he was hesitant to play someone so different from his established screen persona:

I suppose it's pretty apparent to anyone who goes to the movies much that through a career of sixty-odd pictures I have played one character—Bing Crosby. The background changed some, but not very much. The songs were other songs, and the people I worked with generally were different people, but I played the same fellow. Really, there seemed to be no great reason to do otherwise. But when [Producer] Bill Perlberg and George Seaton came to me with The Country Girl proposal, I knew the old routine wasn't going to do. Frank Elgin, my part, was a wholly

different guy, and I must say I had some serious qualms about my ability to play the role accurately. It was surely something that I had never tried to do before. In fact, I told Seaton two or three times I didn't think I could cut it. I even suggested on several occasions some fellows I thought would be infinitely better choices, but George was firm. I think really he just wanted to see if I had guts enough to try. He told me if I carried it off I'd have done something of which I could really be proud.

Bing had reason to be proud. The performance got him another Academy Award nomination (he lost to tough competition: Marlon Brando's epic Stanley ("Stella!!!") Kowalski) and opened up the possibility of other dramatic roles. If his amazing voice had ever waned, he had something else to fall back on.

But Bing Crosby could always croon "White Christmas," to the very end.

Georgie Elgin on Broadway: Uta Hagen (1919 –2004)

Few actors personify the professional who is a legend on Broadway and virtually unknown away from it better than Uta Hagen. Hagen was on the Hollywood blacklist for over a decade, in part because of her romantic affair with performer Paul Robeson, a civil rights activist and Communist. This closed Hollywood to her, focusing Hagen to perform in New York theaters, where few could match her.

Born in Göttingen, Germany, Uta Hagen and her family emigrated to the United States in 1924, when her father received a position at Cornell University. She was raised in Madison, Wisconsin; because one of her few memorable film roles was as a German nurse in *The Boys from Brazil*, many filmgoers think she had a German accent.

Only when she wanted to!

As a young actress Hagen studied acting briefly at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1936. She left for New York City in 1937 and soon was cast to play the leading ingénue role of Nina in the Broadway production of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* starring "the First Couple of the American Stage," Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. She was just 18, and wrote that "they were an enormous influence on my life . . . their passion for the theatre, and their discipline. It was a 24-hour-a-day affair, and I never forgot it—never!"

She played George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* (1951) on Broadway and Desdemona in a production of *Othello* which toured and played Broadway, featuring Paul Robeson as the tragic Moor and her then-husband, Jose Ferrer, as Iago. It was during this production that Desdemona cheated on Iago and had an extramarital affair with Othello resulting in Desdemona—Hagen— being blacklisted.

Hagen took over the role of Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the national tour and played Blanche (on the road and on Broadway) opposite at least four different Stanley Kowalskis, including Anthony Quinn and Marlon Brando. It is said that Hagen's Blanche refocused the audience's sympathies on Blanche rather than with Stanley, as in the Brando production.

She originated Georgie in *The Country Girl* and the role of Martha in the 1963 Broadway premiere of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee, winning Tony Awards for both. Later, Hagen became one of the most influential acting teachers of all time, training, among others, Matthew Broderick, Christine Lahti, Jason Robards, Jr., Sigourney Weaver, Liza Minnelli, Whoopi Goldberg, Jack Lemmon, and Al Pacino. She was a voice coach to Judy Garland, teaching her a German accent for the picture *Judgment at Nuremberg*. Garland's performance earned her an Academy Award nomination, her last.

Hagen also wrote *Respect for Acting* (1973) and *A Challenge for the Actor* (1991), which advocated realistic, "method" acting, as opposed to predetermined "formalistic" acting. In 1981, Uta Hagen was elected to the American Theatre Hall of Fame and in 1999 received a Special Lifetime Achievement Tony Award.

Most Americans, however, couldn't have picked her out of a lineup. For the Hollywood version of *The Country Girl*, the studio wanted a movie star.

Georgie Elgin in the movie: Grace Kelly (1929 –1982)

In 1954, there was no bigger movie star on earth than Grace Kelly.

Grace Patricia Kelly was born in Philadelphia to wealthy couple John and Margaret Kelly. Grace decided she wanted to become an actress, following in the footsteps of another Philadelphia rich kid named Katharine Hepburn, and studied stage acting at New York City's American Academy of

Dramatic Arts. She was initially more recognized for her beauty than her art, and found herself working as a model advertising cigarettes and on the covers of glamour magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Redbook*. Looks, however, could get a young woman into movies.

She debuted in the film *14 Hours* in a minor supporting role and then got her big break: she was cast as the courageous Quaker wife in *High Noon*, a risky and unconventional Western that was an instant classic. She then co-starred as Ava Gardner's blonde rival for the affections of Clark Gable in *Mogambo* and received an Oscar nomination and a Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress.

Director Alfred Hitchcock, suffering from a lifetime blonde fetish, soon swept in to make Kelly his personal Muse. She gave Hitchcock memorable performances in *Dial M for Murder*, *Rear Window*, and *To Catch a Thief*. It was during the filming of this film, in Monaco, that she met Prince Rainier, whom she soon married, effectively ending her career.

The Country Girl was almost as much of a change of character for Grace Kelly as it was for Bing Crosby. It won her the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role of 1954. (During the filming, she apparently entertained the attentions of both of her co-stars, Crosby and William Holden. Bing reportedly proposed to her.) In 1956, she was voted the Golden Globe's World Film Favorite Actor, Female.

When she married Prince Rainier Grimaldi III of Monaco to become Her Serene Highness Princess Grace of Monaco, Grace Kelly had made only eleven films. Few movie actresses have made so great an impact with such a limited body of work, nor made so many films without ever having a bad one.

Bernie Dodd on Broadway: Steven Hill (1922-)

You know Steven Hill: he played the grumpy old district attorney, Adam Schiff, for most of the run of *Law and Order*, the longest running drama in TV history.

Once, however, he was one of Broadway's most exciting young stars on the rise. "When I first became an actor, there were two young actors in New York: Marlon Brando and Steven Hill," Martin Landau has said. "A lot of

people said that Steven would have been the one, not Marlon. He was legendary. Nuts, volatile, mad, and his work was exciting.”

He was born Solomon Krakovsky in Seattle, Washington, and made his first New York stage appearance in Ben Hecht’s *A Flag Is Born* in 1946, which also featured Brando. His big break came when he landed a small part in *Mister Roberts*. “The director, Joshua Logan, thought I had some ability, and he let me create one of the scenes,” said Hill. “So, I improvised dialogue and it went in the show. That was my first endorsement. It gave me tremendous encouragement to stay in the business.”

In 1947, Hill became a founding member of Lee Strasberg’s Actors Studio along with Brando, Montgomery Clift, and Julie Harris.

The same year he played the director in *The Country Girl* on Broadway, 1950, Hill made his film debut in *Lady without a Passport*. He then reenlisted in the Navy in 1952 for two years and, when he completed his service, resumed acting, this time primarily in television. He was prominent during the “Golden Age” of live TV drama, appearing in such prestigious video productions as Reginald Rose’s *The Trial of Sacco and Vanzetti* in 1960, earning him an Emmy nomination for his portrayal of Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

In 1961, Hill had an epiphanic experience when he appeared on Broadway in Henry Denker’s *A Far Country*, portraying Sigmund Freud. In one scene, a patient screamed at Freud, “You are a Jew!” The scene caused Hill to think about his religion seriously, for the first time. “In the pause that followed I would think, ‘What about this?’ I slowly became aware that there was something more profound going on in the world than just plays and movies and TV shows. I was provoked to explore my religion.” Hill began adhering to strict Orthodox Judaism, observing a kosher diet, praying three times a day, wearing a four-cornered fringed garment beneath his clothes, and strictly observing Shabbat. This made Hill unavailable for Friday night or Saturday matinee performances, effectively ending his stage career and closing many film roles to him as well for the remainder of his career.

Hill was the original leader of the Impossible Missions Force, Dan Briggs, in the series *Mission: Impossible*. Though he had made it clear in advance of production that he was not able to work on the Sabbath, the show’s producers were unprepared for his rigid adherence to Jewish traditions. He

was briefly suspended from the show near the end of the first season and not asked to return for season two. That is how Peter Graves, “Mr. Phelps,” got the role of his life.

After being dumped from *Mission: Impossible*, Hill did no acting work for the next ten years. He quit acting and moved to a Jewish community in Rockland County, New York, where he worked real estate.

Then he returned, and after playing several character roles in movies and TV, Steven Hill landed on *Law and Order*. The rest is TV history. He never became a household name, but he was certainly a household face.

Bernie Dodd in the movie: William Holden (1918-1981)

While attending Pasadena Junior College, drop-dead, good-looking William Holden acted in local radio plays and became active with the famous Pasadena Playhouse. He was “discovered” by a Paramount Pictures talent scout, and soon the studio had assigned the neophyte as the lead in the film of Clifford Odets’s *Golden Boy* (1939). He had the build and the looks, but the acting was a challenge. He was tutored by co-star Barbara Stanwyck, and they became friends for life.

For the next decade, Holden was type-cast as a male bimbo, and deeply resented it. Director Billy Wilder rescued Holden’s career from what he called “Smiling Jim” pretty-boy roles by hiring him for the lead in *Sunset Boulevard*. As Joe Gillis, the jaded screenwriter so desperate for a job that he becomes the gigolo of a faded silent-film star, Holden uncovered his screen persona, the cynical leading man who learns something about life to temper his cynicism.

He was on an amazing roll when he was cast in *The Country Girl*, having become box office gold in such films as *Born Yesterday* (1950), *Stalag 17* (earning him the best actor Oscar for 1953), and *Sabrina* (1954). After *The Country Girl*, another triumph, came *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1955), *Picnic* (1955), and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). That was the end of Holden’s reign at the tippity-top, but it was a long one.

He managed to turn in one more key role in a classic, that of Pike Bishop in the bloody Western, *The Wild Bunch*. (1969). By then, Holden was something of a real life Frank Elgin: alcoholism had destroyed his looks and

reliability, and the good roles were few and far between. He died when he fell and hit his head on the corner of a table and bled to death. He had been drinking. It was an ignominious end for Hollywood's one-time "Golden Boy."



Clifford Odets Quotations

"Life shouldn't be printed on dollar bills."

"We cancel our experience. This is an American habit."

"There are two kinds of marriages—where the husband quotes the wife and where the wife quotes the husband."

"One night some short weeks ago, for the first time in her not always happy life, Marilyn Monroe's soul sat down alone to a quiet supper from which it did not rise . . . If they tell you that she died of sleeping pills, you must know that she died of a wasting grief, of a slow bleeding at the soul."

"I will reveal America to itself by revealing myself to myself."

"What this country needs is a good five-cent earthquake!"

"Sex . . . the poor man's polo!"

"No one talks about the depression of the modern man's spirit."—Lucas Pike, *Paradise Lost*

"This is why I tell you, DO! Do what is in your heart and you carry in yourself a revolution!"—*Awake and Sing!*

A Clifford Odets Timeline

July 18, 1906: Clifford Odets is born in Philadelphia.

1912: Odets's family moves to New York City.

June 28, 1914: Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austro–Hungarian Empire, and his wife are assassinated. In the months that follow, Austro–Hungary, Serbia, Russia, Belgium, France, and Germany all are drawn into what would become World War I.

April 6, 1917: The U.S. Congress declares war on Germany.

November 11, 1918: World War I ends with the signing of the Armistice.

1920: Adolf Hitler, as head of the National Socialist German Workers' Party announces his 25-point program.

1923: Odets drops out of high school.

1923–1929: Odets acts with various small theaters and has occasional parts with the Theatre Guild.

1929: Odets understudies Spencer Tracy in Warren F. Lawrence's *Conflict* on Broadway.

October 24, 1929: The stock market crashes; it comes to be known as Black Thursday.

1930: Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford begin holding meetings to discuss theater. Odets is among a number of actors attending these gatherings, which would become the basis for the Group Theatre.

September 29, 1931: The Group Theatre produces Paul Green's *The House of Connelly* as its first production.

March 9, 1932: The Group Theatre opens *Night over Taos*, by Maxwell Anderson.

November 8, 1932: Franklin Delano Roosevelt defeats Herbert Hoover and is elected the 32nd President of the United States.

January 1, 1933: Hitler is appointed Chancellor of Germany.

September 26, 1933: The Group Theatre opens *Men in White*, by Sidney Kingsley.

1933: American unemployment rises to nearly 25 percent.

1933: President Roosevelt commences his plan to alleviate the Great Depression with a series of measures creating social and public-works programs that would collectively be known as the New Deal.

1934: Odets joins the American Communist Party. He leaves the party a few months later.

December 9, 1935: The Group Theatre opens *Paradise Lost*, by Odets.

1935: Odets's play *Waiting for Lefty* is performed as a benefit for the Group Theatre; it is later remounted and performed with his anti-Nazi play *Till the Day I Die*, with great critical success. *Waiting for Lefty* wins the George Pierce Baker Drama Cup and the Yale University and New Theatre drama awards.

1935: The Group Theatre performs Odets's plays *Awake and Sing!* and *Paradise Lost*, both directed by Clurman.

1935: Odets, as a representative of the League of American Writers, is among a group of artists who make a protest trip to Cuba to investigate the treatment of students under Fulgencio Batista. He is arrested and deported.

1935: Legislation to create the Works Progress Administration, which ultimately would include the Federal Art, Music, Theatre, and Writers' Projects, is passed by Congress. The Group Theatre's work was a forerunner to this only American attempt to develop a nationalized theater program in the form of the Federal Theatre Project. Many Group actors work for the Federal Theatre Project, and the style of acting pioneered by the Group Theatre would strongly influence Federal productions.

July 1936: In response to general discontent, the Group Theatre reorganizes, creating an Actors' Committee to represent the views of the ensemble.

1936: Odets writes *I Can't Sleep*.

January 8, 1937: Odets marries actress Louise Rainer.

1937: Odets writes the screenplay for *The General Died at Dawn*.

August 23, 1937: Clurman returns from Los Angeles to direct Odets's *Golden Boy* for the Group Theatre. It becomes the Group's most profitable play.

1937: Odets begins a doomed affair with actress Frances Farmer.

1938: The Group Theatre produces Odets's *Rocket to the Moon*.

1938: Martin Dies is named head of the newly formed House Un-American Activities Committee.

December 5, 1938: Odets appears on the cover of *Time* magazine with the André Malraux quote as a caption, "Down with the general Fraud!"

1939: *Six Plays of Clifford Odets* is published. The plays are: *Waiting For Lefty*, *Awake and Sing!*, *Till the Day I Die*, *Paradise Lost*, *Golden Boy*, and *Rocket to the Moon*.

September 1939: Germany invades Poland and annexes the Danzig region; France and England declare war on Germany. World War II begins.

December 17, 1940: Irwin Shaw's *Retreat to Pleasure* opens, directed by Clurman, the Group Theatre's final play.

1941: Odets writes *Clash by Night*.

1941: He and Rainer divorce.

May 18, 1941: Clurman publishes an obituary for the Group Theatre in the *New York Times* writing, “our means and our ends were in fundamental contradiction.”

1942: Odets moves to Hollywood.

May 14, 1943: Odets marries actress Bette Grayson.

1943: Odets writes the screenplay and directs *None but the Lonely Heart*.

1944: Odets writes the screenplay for *Deadline at Dawn*.

May 8, 1945: Winston Churchill announces the end of World War II on the European front.

September 2, 1945: Japan signs its unconditional surrender, ending World War II on the Pacific Front.

1947: Odets returns to New York.

1948: Odets writes *The Big Knife*.

1950: Odets writes *The Country Girl*.

1951: Odets divorces Grayson.

1953: Odets is called before the House Un-American Activities Committee as a “friendly witness.” He disavows Communism and names Communists from his past.

1954: Odets writes *The Flowering Peach*, and it is produced on Broadway.

1954: Grayson dies. Odets takes over the parenting of their two children.

1959: Odets begins writing for television.

1961: Odets receives the Award of Merit Medal for Drama from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for his body of dramatic work.

August 18, 1963: Clifford Odets dies in Los Angeles of stomach cancer.



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