



Fort Wayne Civic Theatre
IN THE WINGS
Arts-In-Education Program
Study Guide



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The Characters

Albin:	Drag performer at <i>La Cage Aux Folles</i> as the crowd favorite Zaza
Georges:	Owner of the club and Albin's partner in life and love
Jean-Michel:	Georges' son from a fling with a woman years ago
Jacob:	Georges and Albin's butler who wants to be a maid and in the show
Anne:	Jean-Michel's fiancée
Dindon:	Anne's father, right-wing radical politician
Marie Dindon:	Anne's mother, shy
Jacqueline:	Owner of the <i>Chez Jacqueline</i> Restaurant and friend of Georges & Albin
Renaud:	Owns a small local cafe, male friend of Georges and Albin
Francis:	Stage manager in Georges' club



The Songs

ACT 1

Prologue

<i>We Are What We Are</i>	(Les Cagelles)
<i>A Little More Mascara</i>	(Albin & Friends)
<i>With Anne on My Arm</i>	(Jean-Michel)
<i>With You on My Arm</i>	(Georges & Albin)
<i>The Promenade</i>	(Townspeople)
<i>Song on the Sand</i>	(Georges)
<i>La Cage aux Folles</i>	(Albin, Les Cagelles)
<i>I am What I am</i>	(Albin)

ACT II

<i>Entr'acte</i>	(Orchestra)
<i>Song on the Sand Reprise</i>	(Georges & Albin)
<i>Masculinity</i>	(Georges, Albin, & Townspeople)
<i>Look Over There</i>	(Georges)
<i>Cocktail Counterpoint</i>	(Georges, Dindon, MME. Dindon, Jacob)
<i>The Best of Times</i>	(Albin, Jacqueline, Patrons)
<i>Tell Her I'm Happy</i>	(Nelson)
<i>Look Over There Reprise</i>	(Jean-Michel)
<i>Finale</i>	(Company)



Douglas Hodge and Kelsey Grammer in the 2010 Broadway revival

Plot Synopsis

SETTING: St. Tropez, France - A nightclub with an apartment connected, Cafe, Restaurant

TIME: Summer

ACT I

Scene 1 (A nightclub):

The guests at *La Cage Aux Folles* are welcomed by Georges, owner of the nightclub, before a chorus of drag performers enter and perform (“We Are What We Are”). Georges announces the various solo performers all leading up to Zaza, who is the main attraction. Zaza doesn’t show for her number. Georges rushes backstage to Zaza’s dressing room. Jacob, the new hired butler who wants to be a maid is persuaded to let Georges pass for a part in the chorus.

Scene 2 (Albin’s dressing room):

There Albin, Georges partner in love and life, is taking his sweet time getting into costume as Zaza. Albin is worried about Georges falling out of love with him, mentioning their age difference and how things have changed over the years. Georges claims that could never happen. He convinces Albin to put on his (“Mascara”) and as Albin sings the Cagelles sing along with him.

Scene 3 (George & Albin’s apartment, connected to the club):

While Albin is on stage, Georges’ son Jean-Michel shows up. George is thrilled to see his beloved son till he learns that Jean-Michel is engaged to be married to Anne, the love of his life. He explains her folks are coming to dinner to meet his own family. The problem is that Anne’s father is the conservative Deputy of Tradition, Family, and Morality Party (TFM). Jean-Michel wants his birth mother to be there to complete the “traditional family” picture.

When Georges brings up Albin, Jean-Michel admits he doesn’t want him to be present. He has also taken the liberty of telling the Dindons that Georges was with Foreign Military Service. Georges is astonished and heartbroken at his son’s request. Jean-Michel tries to explain why it’s worth it and how it feels (“With Anne On My Arm”). Georges begins to understand and hopes that what Jean-Michel feels for Anne is close to what he feels for Albin. In comes Albin all excited for news on Jean-Michel’s engagement. Jean-Michel leaves and Georges can’t bring himself to tell Albin all of Jean-Michel’s demands. He is overcome with love for Albin and sings (“With You on My Arm”).

Scene 4 (A cafe):

Jean-Michel waits for fiance. When Anne arrives he spies George with Albin walking into the cafe, so he rushes her out before she can see them. In the cafe Georges tries to tell Albin about Jean-Michel’s wishes for Sybil, his birth mother, to come to the dinner to meet Anne’s folks. Albin reminds Georges of how flaky and distant Sybil has always been to Jean-Michel. He makes it clear he doesn’t want her there.

Seeing how much Albin loves his son, Georges gets wrapped up in his love and can't bring himself to mention the second part of Jean-Michel's wishes.

Instead Georges recalls a romantic time he and Albin once spent on a beach once. He sings their ("Song on the Sand"). Albin is inspired and declares that this wedding *should* be all about love. He expresses that Sybil should be there, for Jean-Michel. George tries again to break the hard news that Jean-Michel doesn't want *Albin* there, when Albin rushes back to the club to perform his number.

Scene 5 (The club wings):

Georges attempts to get all the performers under control when Jean-Michel enters claiming he has a van to collect all the questionable decorations from their home. He starts with Albin's closet making room for when Sybil comes. Albin enters as he finishes getting ready and suggests they all go over wedding plans after the show. He notices Jean-Michel is cleaning and tries to ask about it. As Albin enters to the stage, Georges demands Jean-Michel think about what he's making him do to Albin. Jean-Michel is adamant that this is necessary to winning Anne.

Scene 5a (The club):

Georges welcomes the audience to a special midnight show at *La Cage Aux Folles*. He introduces the main attraction, Zaza. With the help of Jacqueline and the Cagelles chorus, Zaza sings about the wonders that await all who come to ("La Cage Aux Folles").

Scene 6 (Backstage):

As Albin changes into his next gown he spies Georges and Jean-Michel moving all his gowns out of the apartment. He demands to hear an explanation. With Jean-Michel's pushing, Georges finally lets it all out. A silent Albin comes out from behind the dressing screen, ready to go on stage. Jean-Michel apologizes meagerly and Georges moves to comfort Albin. Albin dismisses them both and explains he has a show to finish.

Scene 6a (The club stage):

Albin as Zaza and the Cagelles begin their number of "We Are What We Are", but Albin cannot make it through. He is caught up in the emotion of it all. He tells the company to get off the stage and in a capella boldly sings his own rendition: ("I Am What I Am"). Albin finishes. He removes his wig and flings it at George who has stepped out from the wings. Albin then walks off the stage, into the house, and out of the theatre.

ACT II

Scene 1 (Town and Cafe):

Albin enters in funeral attire with Jacob. Georges enters from the cafe and tries to talk to a dramatic and dejected Albin. Georges gives Jacob 50 francs to leave so he can talk to Albin. Albin expresses his hurt and amazement at Jean-Michel's rejection. Georges brings up that Albin too refused to tell *his* parents

about Georges at first. Jean-Michel is just young and in love. George then explains that he too is hopelessly in love (“Song on the Sand Reprise”). They dance together as they reminisce about their young love and how far it has brought them.

George again tries to explain that Albin isn’t unwanted, but that all that comes with Albin is unwanted. This brings about Georges idea to get Albin to the dinner. Albin must dress up and act the part of Jean-Michel’s “Uncle Al”. Albin finally agrees and Georges tries to teach him how to have a little more (“Masculinity”), with the help of Renaud.

Scene 2 (The apartment):

Jacob lets Jean-Michel in who has brought *hors d’oeuvres*. Jean-Michel has stripped the apartment clean save for a huge wooden crucifix and some dark wooden furniture. Jacob admits Jean-Michel has gone too far. Georges enters and surprises Jean-Michel with Zaza being turned into Uncle Albert. Albin appears looking quite uncomfortable. A club performer enters, bringing a telegram. Albin reads the telegram but dismisses it saying it’s only a request for an interview and goes over to study it further.

Jean-Michel worries this dinner won’t work out with the club right here and people coming in and out. Georges tells his son if Anne loves you, you won’t lose her. Jean-Michel expresses his pent up embarrassment and anger over his loss of control over having a mother figure like Albin. He demands he hasn’t been given respect or understanding. Georges can’t take his son’s foolishness and exclaims (“Look Over There”) as he points out all that Albin has done for him. Jean-Michel considers making amends with Albin but instead leaves.

Albin admits to Georges that the telegram was really about Jean-Michel’s mother sending her regret, but that she cannot make the dinner. Jean-Michel runs back in; Anne and her parents have arrived. Jean-Michel gives Georges, Albin, and Jacob the final run down. Before he can open the door, Albin screams and runs into the dressing room.

The Dindon’s enter one by one. Things at first are smooth and polite. Dindon points the contrast of the decoration in a side of town that is known for shady nightclubs. He even points out the club that their apartment is connected to. Georges denies any affiliation and admits he’s just an old Foreign Legionnaire. The (“Cocktail Counterpoint”) ensues as Mr.Dindon judges Georges and Jean-Michel, Jacob worries about the prudish Mrs. Dindon and the prig of a man Mr. Dindon.

It all climaxes with Albin entering not as Uncle Albert but as Jean-Michel’s mother. He’s dressed as a proper mother. Albin is excellent at playing the mother. When the chicken for dinner is burned, he suggests they all go to *Chez Jacqueline*, a fancy restaurant. He calls Jaqueline, their friend, and gets a table for six.

Scene 3 (*Chez Jacqueline*):

The restaurant is quite elegant and hard to book so the Dindons are impressed. Though Dindon only sees it for it’s potential in being audited. He also brings up his daughter’s hefty inheritance that she will

acquire on her wedding day. But before anyone can comment, Jacqueline announces that an important celebrity is there tonight. Mrs. Dindon believes they're going to announce Mr. Dindon but instead Zaza, the great actress, is announced! Albin tries to play it off as it were a hobby but Jacqueline pressures him to sing them all a song. Albin dedicates the song to Anne, a welcomed future member of the family and sings ("Best of Times"). As the song picks up and everyone joins in the singing, Mrs. Dindon dances with Georges and even Mr. Dindon gets pulled into a dance with Albin.

The song ends and every applauds for Zaza. Caught up in the moment, Albin throws off his wig and freezes in horror. Mr. Dindon tries to run out but is stopped by a bird from *La Cage Aux Folles*. There are birds at every turn and he recognizes them from the famous *La Cage Aux Folles*. He is furious and disgusted by the "perverts".

Scene 4 (The Apartment):

Back at the apartment, a furious Dindon refuses to let Anne marry a man whose parents are homosexual. However Anne won't be pushed around. She sees nothing wrong with the surprising reveal of Jean-Michel's parents. She claims she likes them. Dindon continues to rage and verbally abuse Georges and Albin. Jean-Michel steps forward and apologizes for everything that's happened here tonight. He admits he's made a terrible mistake. Dindon refuses his apology, but Jean-Michel explains it wasn't meant for him but for Albin. He declares that Albin is his mother and always has been with ("Look Over There Reprise").

Jacqueline shows up at the apartment with a set up a publicity stunt for her restaurant. She has newspaper and television crews waiting outside the club. She wants a photo of the most anti-homosexual alongside the most infamous homosexual. She also claims the conservative Mr. Dindon forgot to pay the bill. Georges and Albin step in and declare they will save Mr. Dindon from scandal and shame on one condition: they demand his blessing on Anne and Jean-Michel's wedding, her dowry, and to not show up for family gatherings! Dindon agrees. Georges sends Jacqueline out to while they get ready.

Scene 5 (The club):

Georges steps forward on *La Cage Aux Folles* stage and presents the grand finale. He announces some promising new and odd talent ever to grace the stage. Georges and the Cagelles sing ("La Cage Aux Folles Reprise"). He then introduces Anne as Anne-Genuie and Jacob as Jacobina, who falls flat on his face. Then he introduces Marie Dindon Ave Maria in a very revealing outfit. Finally the lights shine on Winhilda, who is Dindon dressed as the ugliest woman ever seen. The Dindons and Jacob are swept up by the company and all sing.

Georges points Jacqueline in the wrong direction, Mr. and Mrs. Dindon get away, and Jean-Michel joins the stage to run off with Anne. Alone on stage, Georges feels the sadness of his grown up boy off to start his own life. Albin appears and sings softly ("Song on the Sand") once more. They sing together, kiss, and the show closes with a curtain call exclaiming the ("Best of Times") is now!

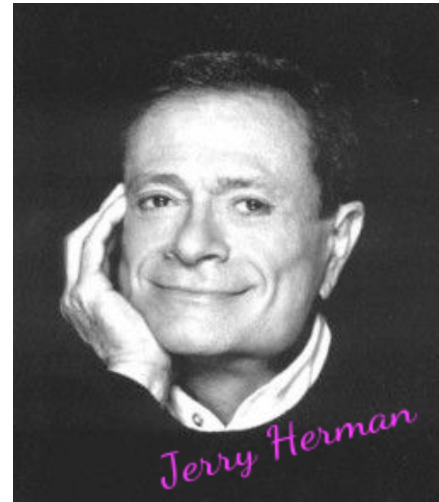
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We Are What We Are: *The People Behind the Show*

Jerry Herman (Music and Lyrics)

Born in New York City on July 10, 1932, Jerry Herman would become one of Broadway's most treasured lyricist and composer. Herman received his Bachelor of Arts at the University of Miami in 1953. His first professional production score was an Off Broadway show called *I Feel Wonderful*. He was 29 years old when his first break in Broadway began with writing the music and lyrics to a show called *Milk and Honey* in 1961. His most well known productions are 1964's *Hello Dolly!* and 1966's *Mame*, both of which have been revived on Broadway. *Hello Dolly!* has had four revivals, including the one that is on Broadway currently and *Mame* has had one. Herman has won Tony's, Grammy's, and was inducted into the The Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1982.

La Cage Aux Folles came after the success of *Hello Dolly!* and *Mame*. Herman was looking for something to work on following the success of *Mame*. Herman wanted to be a part of *La Cage Aux Folles* from the start. After he saw the 1978 french film, of the same title, he wanted to make it into a musical. However, a team had already claimed rights to it and were in the process of turning it into a stage production. It was during Herman's work on a new musical called *Jersey's Girls* that he was contacted by the producing team of *La Cage* to discuss Herman working on the score for the show. Herman was thrilled. Later the original writers were dropped and Herman was asked to do the music and lyrics.



Musical Productions

<i>Jersey Girls</i>	Music, Conception, Lyrics (1985)
<i>La Cage aux Folles</i>	Music, Lyrics (1983)
<i>A Day in Hollywood / A Night in the Ukraine</i>	Featured songs, Featured lyrics (1980)
<i>The Grand Tour</i>	Music, Lyrics (1979)
<i>Mack & Mabel</i>	Music, Lyrics (1969)
<i>Dear World</i>	Music, Lyrics (1969)
<i>Mame</i>	Music, Lyrics (1966)
<i>Hello Dolly!</i>	Music, Lyrics (1964)
<i>Milk and Honey</i>	Music, Lyrics (1961)

Harvey Fierstein (Book)

Harvey Fierstein is a Broadway force like no other. He's written the book for several successful musical productions, written plays, and starred in over 60 different films and stage performances. Fierstein has also always been a strong voice in the LGBTQ community. He was born in Brooklyn of New York City on June 6, 1954. When he was just fifteen years old he did his first performance in drag at a club in East Village. He received a Fine Arts degree from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. He wrote a play in 1972 that became his first written production. It was for the Playwright's Workshop Club in New York. The play was called *In Search of the Cobra Jewels*. His biggest break was his play *Torch Song Trilogy* written about a Jewish homosexual and drag queen who performs torch songs. Torch songs are singers who perform songs that have do with either unrequited love or lost love. The play is made up of "The International Stud", "Fugue in a Nursery", and "Widows and Children". Though the trilogy didn't make it to Broadway until 1983, the play won Fierstein two Tony's including Best Play and Best Actor (Fierstein starred in the lead role). *Torch Song Trilogy* was later turned into a film in 1988 with Fierstein again as lead. The film also starred Matthew Broderick and Anne Bancroft.

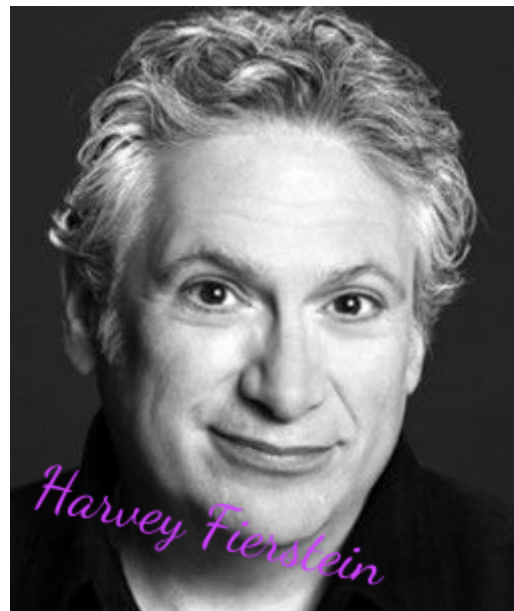
His work in theater and his honest, funny, and smart perspective inside the lives of the homosexual community is what brought him into the *La Cage Aux Folles* production. He was young but could provide a fresh voice and normalcy to a gay relationship. *La Cage Aux Folles* is taken from Jean Poiret's well written 1973 play of the same title. Fierstein had to fit the play into a musical production. His adaptation of *La Cage Aux Folles* won him the Tony for Best Book of a Musical.

Notable Films/Television Fierstein

<i>Hairspray Live!</i>	Actor (2016)
<i>Mulan</i>	Actor (1998)
<i>Independence Day</i>	Actor (1996)
<i>Mrs. Doubtfire</i>	Actor (1993)
<i>Cheers</i>	Actor (1992)
<i>The Simpsons</i>	Actor (1990)
<i>Torch Song Trilogy</i>	Actor (1988)

Musical/Play Productions

<i>Casa Valentina</i>	Play (2014)
<i>Kinky Boots</i>	Book (2013)
<i>Newsies The Musical</i>	Book (2012)
<i>A Catered Affair</i>	Book, Actor (2008)
<i>Legs Diamond</i>	Book (1988)
<i>Safe Sex</i>	Play, Actor (1987)
<i>La Cage aux Folles</i>	Book (1983)
<i>Torch Song Trilogy</i>	Book, Actor (1982)



Production History

Opening

La Cage aux Folles opened at the Palace Theatre on August 21, 1983. The show was directed by Arthur Laurents who was originally intended to write the book but wanted to direct instead. The show starred George Hearn as Albin and Gene Barry as Georges. According to Stephen Citron (author of Jerry Herman's biography) "Balancing Barry's lyric tenor as the more masculine of the couple against Hearn's deep baritone for the drag queen was brilliant, nontraditional casting. It helped banish the gay stereotype that the French play and the film promulgated." *La Cage Aux Folles* was nominated for 9 Tony Awards and 9 Drama Desk Awards.

Awards Won

- Tony Award for Best Musical
- Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical [Harvey Fierstein]
- Tony Award for Best Original Score [Jerry Herman music & lyrics]
- Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical [George Hearn]
- Tony Award for Best Costume Design [Theoni V. Aldredge]
- Tony Award for Best Direction of a Musical [Arthur Laurents]
- Drama Desk Award for Actor in a Musical [George Hearn]
- Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Music [Jerry Herman]
- Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Costume Design [Theoni V. Aldredge]



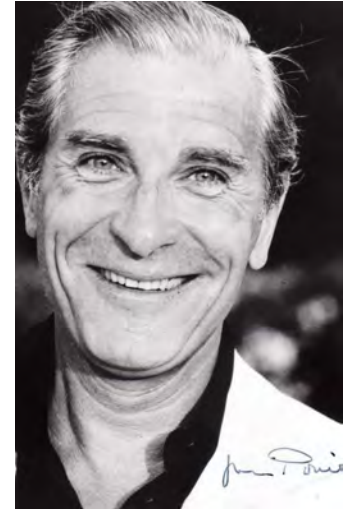
Revivals on Broadway

La Cage Aux Folles had a revival 2004 and 2010. The 2004 revival starred Gary Beach as Albin and Daniel Davis as Georges. It won a Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical and Best Choreography (Jerry Mitchell). The most recent revival starred Kelsey Grammer as Georges and making his Broadway debut as Albin was Douglas Hodge. Hodge won a Tony for Best Actor in a Musical and *La Cage Aux Folles* won its second Best Revival of a Musical Tony. The 2010 revival also won a Tony for Best Direction of a Musical with Terry Johnson taking home the Tony.

Look Over Here: *The Play & Two Film Adaptations*

Jean Poiret & the Original Play

Jean Poiret is a French actor and playwright. He was born on August 17, 1926. He attended Ru Blanche's drama school in Paris. The first play he produced was *Douce Amere* or "Bittersweet" in 1970. *La Cage aux Folles* came three years later. He's written several other plays and even helped write screen adaptation of *La Cage*.



La Cage aux Folles the musical is taken from Jean Poiret's French farce of the same title. The play's setting is the same as that of the musical: St. Tropez, in Paris. The play opened at the Theatre du Palais Royale in 1973. The show was an incredibly successful and has ended up being one of Paris' longest running plays. It ran for seven years.



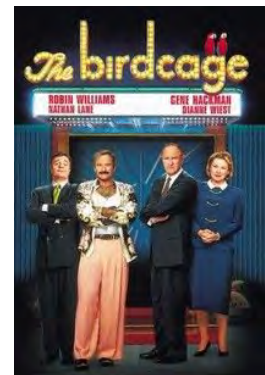
The 1979 French Film

La Cage Aux Folles was directed by Edouard Molinaro and starred Ugo Tognazzi as Georges and Michel Serrault as Albin. It was filmed in St. Tropez like the original setting of the play and eventually the musical. The film was successful in France but also internationally, releasing in the States in March of the same year. The film made over forty million dollars. This international film was the highest France could boast for releasing in the US until *Amelie* in 2001. *La Cage* is an important success for film by beginning to normalize homosexual relationships especially in a family structure. Two sequels were made over the next couple of years titled

La Cage aux Folles II (1980) and *La Cage aux Folles: The Wedding* (1985). This film also brought about the musical in 1983 and then an American version of the film in 1996.

The 1996 American Film

Mike Nichols directed the American version of *La Cage* titled *The Birdcage*. Mike Nichols has directed several play to film adaptations. There was *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in 1966. Then he worked on *Birdcage* which starred Robin Williams as Georges, Nathan Lane as Albin, and Gene Hackman as Dindon. However in this particular version the setting has been moved to Miami and most of the character's names have been changed. After *The Birdcage* Nichols directed t.v. *Wit* based on the play by Margaret Edson in 2001 and *Angels in America*, t.v. mini series based on the classic American plays by Tony Kushner. This version of *La Cage* was successful but seemed dull compared to the shining & exciting play and original film.



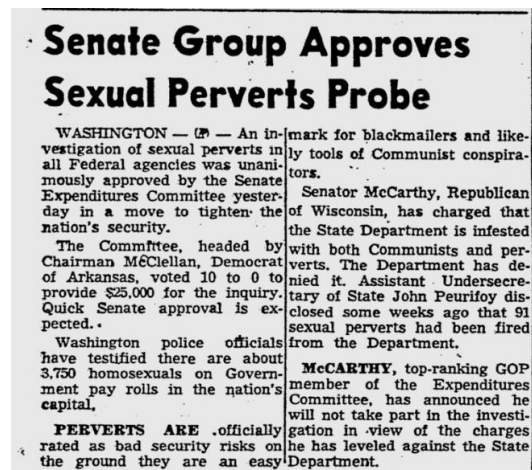
Song on the Sands of Time: *The Setting*

The Gay Revolution in America

Jean Poiret's play, *La Cage Aux Folles* was written and set in the early 1970's in Paris, France.. The American musical *La Cage Aux Folles* opened in 1983. Georges and Albin's relationship as well as Albin's career as a Drag Performer is central to the show. Though the show's time period isn't stated and it is important to know what was going on in America leading up to the early 70's & 80's. The LGBTQ Revolution has been through huge obstacles and victories over the last couple decades. The character of Mr. Dindon and his aversion to homosexuality is perhaps better understood with these key historical moments in America.

1950's: The Lavender Scare

In the 1950's homosexuality was hidden, ridiculed, and illegal. The Lavender Scare refers to the government's hunt for gays and lesbians. They would harass and interrogate men and women to learn if they were homosexual. If they were caught in or admitted to homosexuality they would often be fired from jobs. Riots and uprisings were unknowingly on the way in the upcoming sixties. However in 1959 in Los Angeles there were a handful of mini-riots that took place between cops and some drag queens lead by John Rechy. The drag queens were growing sick of the harassment at the often visited and welcoming establishment called "Cooper's Doughnuts". During the 50's there is also more writing on gay and lesbian minority life. "The Homosexual's in America" was written by Donald Webster Cory. During the 50's and 60's it was common for men and women to be locked up or even institutionalized for being homosexual.



1960's: The Stonewall Riots

In the 1960's homosexuality is appearing in the public more, but there were still next to no rights. It was still illegal to display homosexuality and men could even be arrested for being in drag, or dressing like a woman. But gays and lesbians were starting to become more bold and met out in public at bars and clubs. During the 60's it was common for police raids to happen at gay or lesbian bars. Homosexuals were singled out and were often harassed and even arrested. One particular nightclub would change the whole course of the gay movement by sparking a flame of revolution.

In 1966 a popular club was opened in Greenwich Village in New York City, called Stonewall Inn. Club-goers during this time were used to the police raids. However one night on June 28 1969 there was a police raid that quickly turned into a full on riot. Reports say it was when a lesbian was being dragged out of the club and thrown into a cop car, when it all broke loose. The gay and lesbian community had had enough and this outward display of brutality from the police ignited the fight. Soon eight policemen and

women were up against thousands of rioters. The rioters threw objects at the police from bottles to bricks. At one point they even trapped the cops in the bar and attempted to set it on fire. Eventually the rioters were subdued. There would be four more nights of riots. These riots brought publicity and boldness to the



homosexual community. Gays and Lesbians were standing up and fighting for themselves and for their rights as Americans. Different groups began to organize. A growing popular mantra at the time was “Gay is Good”.

The 1970’s: Pride

The 1970’s focus on sexuality in pop culture was influential to America for many reasons. From Women’s Rights to the porno industry taking off and especially to homosexuality finally on its way to becoming a socially acceptable normality. This is

when the French playwright, Poirer wrote *La Cage Aux Folles*. The seventies would also mark the first gay minister, The Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays support group, and in 1979 the first ever march on Washington for gay rights.

On June 28, 1970, a year after the Stonewall Riots, the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations (ERCHO) planned the first ever Pride March. The march would take place in New York City, 51 blocks long, and have a “no dress or age regulations” which was a first for gay marches up to that point. L. Craig Schoonmaker was the one to title the march, “Pride”. This would give a revival to the revolution: being gay was something to be proud of. Thousands showed up to be a part of this historical demonstration.

The 1980’s: The AIDS-Age Musical

The 80’s were hit with the AIDS epidemic. So many gay men lost their lives to this disease. AIDS would draw an even darker line between those who accepted homosexuals and those who did not. The theatre was a huge supporter to the gay community during this time with theatre groups like AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power starting up. Though Jerry Herman fell in love with Poirer’s story back in 1978 with the film’s release, it wouldn’t be until the early 80’s when America would have its shot at it with the Tony Award winning musical *La Cage Aux Folles*. The musical hits on the theme of “I am What I am”, a honest defense for homosexuals at the time. The musical also focuses on the performance/theatre side of particularly drag performance. It also focuses on the love and family of two gay men and their son. But Georges and Albin’s relationship is relatable to all kinds of families and relationships. This musical’s compassion would come at a much needed time for the gay community.

History of Drag in Theatre

The use of the actual phrase, *drag*, was first used in theatre for men who wore long skirts when they played female roles. The skirt of this costume would literally drag about backstage on the floor. This use of the word can be dated back to 1887. Today Drag is used in several different ways. Merriam-Webster

Dictionary defines the term as “clothing typical of one sex worn by someone of the opposite sex.” 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.”

Drag in Showbusiness

The history of Drag is long and can be traced back to the 18th century. Even before that men have been impersonating women for entertainment for hundreds of years. In Shakespeare’s time there were no female actors, but a good amount of written female roles. Men would play them. In Italy there were male singers that would be castrated before puberty so as to keep the much coveted high singing voice. Women weren’t allowed to sing in churches so Castrati were used. Once women began to be used as singers and actors it removed the need for men to impersonate so much. But Drag Performing would slowly evolve from purely presentational to a lifestyle.

There have been cases of men dressing as women and even taking on the identity of a woman throughout history. A big time for Drag was in the 1920’s during Prohibition. The lines between femininity and masculinity were growing more grey with women wearing their hair short and wearing less constricting clothing. This freedom of sexuality, plus the great parties of the Prohibition, provided a way for Drag Performers to come out at night for entertaining purposes. “Pansies” were what men in drag were called during the 20’s and early 30’s. Also with the theatre form of Vaudeville, men were impersonating women more frequently. Francis Renault was one of the most popular entertainers in the 20’s and 30’s. He made his career by impersonating historical women or celebrities of the time.



Men in drag were impersonating, singing, and dancing. The popularity of drag entertainment ebbed and flowed throughout the years. Early on a popular character for men performing in drag was the older “Dame”. Though often men performing in drag were also gay, it wasn’t necessarily always connected. The 1940’s favored post WWII theater sketches performed by all men. It was 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 50’s and drag performed all but disappeared.

The 60’s brought about a slow revival and by the 1970’s, drag was coming back as a strong form of entertainment and even lifestyle. Harvey Fierstein’s *Torch Song Trilogy* brought beautiful understanding not only to the performance of drag but also to the sexual identity side of the man beneath the drag. The 70’s also gave us Jean Poiret’s play and internationally successful films. Then by 1983 *La Cage Aux Folles* was an American musical. Since then Drag performing has grown more popular and accessible. In

2009 the widely watched and widely popular Rupaul's Drag Race t.v. series was first aired. This year it is in its 9th season.

*FUN FACT: There's a particular reason Albin removes his wig after his great performances. It became a tradition from back when it was French Law at a transvestite club for male performers to remove their wig.

Salome

GEORGES. "Oh, I see where this headed. Forget it!"

ALBIN. "Forget what?"

GEORGES. "You want me to drag out that old warhorse production of *Salome* again, don't you? Well, you can forget it."

ALBIN. "Audiences adored my *Salome*. I'll have you know that when I finished the dance of the Seven Veils and raised the head of John the Baptist to my lips, the audiences cried out, tears in their eyes, handkerchiefs stuffed in their mouths."

In ACT I, scene 2 Albin and Georges discuss the character of *Salome*. *Salome* is originally from a Gustave Moreau painting which Gustave Flaubert later interpreted into a short story called *Herodias*. Later an opera by Massenet titled *Herodiade* was inspired as well as, and most famously, a play written by popular Victorian gay playwright Oscar Wilde.



Gustave Moreau's painting titled "Salome Dancing Before Herod"

Salome is taken from the biblical story of the beheading of John the Baptist done by Herod's wife and daughter. *Salome* is the daughter character who is ordered by Herod to dance for he and his men. She dances so beautifully that he grants her one wish and prompted by her mother she says, "John the Baptist's head." There is a famous photo of supposedly Oscar Wilde himself dressed in drag as *Salome*.

Throughout history *Salome* is often played by a man. Because *Salome* is veiled and admired by the gaze of men, it is interesting look at sexuality and femininity vs. masculinity. In 1977 the Lindsay Kemp Company in London performed Oscar Wilde's play with a many drag influences including a man playing *Salome* and a man playing Herod's wife.

Themes: *Family and Acceptance*

Through the whole course of *La Cage Aux Folles* narrative, we witness Jean-Michel's journey of *accepting* his adoptive father the way he is, and in so doing, understanding the value of *family*.

The climactic moment of *La Cage Aux Folles* occurs when Albin cuts out from the routined number of "We Are What We Are" with the Cagelles and gives a passionate solo declaration of "I Am What I Am". This bold and beautiful move displays the power and importance of *acceptance* in oneself. He sings, "I don't want pity. I bang my own drum, some think it's noise I think it's pretty. And so what if I love each feather and each spangle? Why not try and see things from a different angle? Your life is a sham till you can shout-out loud, I am what I am!"

Hearing the news that his "adopted son" has rejected Albin and his lifestyle is crushing. Albin sings not just to remind himself, but to the world including his son. He's saying "this is how I am!" and "take it or leave it!" He's not going to hide who he is no matter what other people do or say. The club, *La Cage Aux Folles*, does not hide. "It's a little gaudy and a little grand." The club and the performers within it, do not hold back.

Though Albin storms out of the theatre, he quickly comes back because Jean-Michel is his *family*. The emotional and empathetic power of *La Cage Aux Folles* lies not just in self-acceptance (which is presented beautifully), but in the acceptance of others and the strength of family. The family is held strongly together by Georges and Albin's love for each other. Their son puts their love to the test with his demand that Albin not be present to meet his fiance and her family. Georges tries to explain what Jean-Michel is doing to Albin, but Jean-Michel is self absorbed and can only see his own embarrassment at having two dad and one who is a transvestite. Later 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."

Finally after Albin has dressed up as a mother and given all his efforts to making the Dindons happy resulting does Jean-Michel see Albin's love. Mr. Dindon attacks Georges and Albin's club and mocks their relationship. This unfeeling person who can't accept people who are different than him is what awakens the rejection in Jean-Michel's heart. He apologizes to Albin and their family is restored.

The ending of *La Cage Aux Folles* is heart warming with Georges and Albin's acceptance of Anne into their family, despite her judgemental and rude parents. Albin declares he will be her *Maman*. *La Cage* awakens an inner spark of acceptance for ourselves as well as others different from us. Also, we should draw closer to family and to "hold this moment fast and live and love as only you know how and make this moment last because the best of times is now."

The French!

“Bonsoir!”	“Good evening!”
“Messieurs-dames”	“Ladies and Gentlemen”
“Mon doux”	“My sweet”
“Mon Coeur”	“My heart/love”
“Comment merveilleux”	“How marvelous!”
“Merci”	“Thank you”
“Pardonnez-moi”	“Excuse me”
“Au revoir”	“Goodbye”
“Mille fois”	“A thousand times”
“Bienvenue, mes cher amis.”	“Welcome, my dear friends. “
“N’est pas?”	“Is it not?”
“Oui, tu parle”	“Yes, you say”
“Excusez-moi?”	“Excuse me”
“Mes enfants. . . j’approche!”	“My children. . . I come!”
“Hors d’oeuvres”	“Appetizers”
“Vous et moi”	“You and me”
“Les Cagelles”	The chorus girls at <i>La Cage Aux Folles</i>
“La Cage Aux Folles”	*“The Cage of Crazies”
“Solo Perduta Abbandonata.” (Italian)	“One lost and abandoned.”
“Dindon”	**“turkey cock”
“Distingue”	“Distinguished”
“Maman”	“Mom”
“Veni”(Latin)	“Come”
“Chanson”	“Song”
“Je suis dispose”	“I am disposed”
“Merde!”	“Shit”
“En garde”	“Warning”

*The literal translation is “The Cage of Crazies”. However, *folle* is also a derogatory French slang for “Mad homosexual queen”.

**Dinde means “Turkey”. Dindon means “turkey cock” and in French slang it means “ninny, blockhead”.

Other Words to Know

Cabaret: entertainment at a nightclub while the audience eats and drinks

Drag: Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines as dressing in *drag* as the “clothing typical of one sex worn by someone of the opposite sex.”

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.”

Francs: the basic monetary unit of Switzerland, France, Belgium, and Luxembourg before the introduction of the Euro

French Foreign Legionnaire: military service branch of the French Army, established in 1831

Transvestite: According to The Gender Equity Resource Center, “Individuals who regularly or occasionally wear the clothing socially assigned to a gender that is not their own, but are usually comfortable with their anatomy and do not wish to change it. (This is different than transsexuals).



Activities

Writing Prompts:

- 1) Write about a time when you were embarrassed or ashamed of a parent(s).
How did you feel? How did you react? Have you forgiven them?
- 2) Reflecting on that same memory of 1), write about the memory through your parent(s) eyes.
Can you understand their motivation for doing what they did?
- 3) Write about a time when you were surprised by the insensitivity or hurt done to you by a close friend or son/daughter.
Why was it a shock that this person hurt you in this way? Did it make you change how look at this person? Have you forgiven them? Do they know about this hurt they've done to you? Do you think you deserved what they did to you?
- 4) Reflecting on that same memory of 3), write about the memory through your friend/child's eyes.
Can you understand their motivation for doing what they did? Would you ever do something like that to someone else?
- 5) Write about a time when someone couldn't accept who you are:
Why do you think they couldn't accept you? Could you still accept yourself?

Pop Quiz!

- 1) Who originally wrote the play *La Cage aux Folles* that inspired the musical?
- 2) Who won a Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical for the 2010 revival of *La Cage aux Folles*?
- 3) What year did *La Cage Aux Folles* first open on Broadway?
- 4) When a telegram arrives at the apartment from Sybil, what does Albin say it's really about?
a) a request for an interview b) an adoring fan c) an ex-lover d) his own mother
- 5) Finish the lyric to the song "With Anne on My Arm":
"I'm suddenly in, I'm suddenly on, I'm suddenly ____!"
- 6) Finish the lyrics to the song "La Cage Aux Folles":
"It's rather _____, but it's also rather _____."
- 7) Which character says, "But I had to lie. They would never have accepted that you were. . .in show business"?
a) Georges b) Albin c) Jean-Michel d) Anne
- 8) Which character sings, "She's a prude, he's a prig, she's a pill, he's a pig"?
a) Albin b) Georges c) Mr. Dindon d) Jacob

ANSWERS: 1) Jean Poiret 2) Douglas Hodge 3) 1983 4) a. 5) it 6) Gaudy, Grand 7) b. 8) d.

Post Production Questions

TOPICS FOR THOUGHT: Use the following prompts as conversation starters with your students after attending *La Cage Aux Folles* at the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre. Following the discussion, you may want to have your students write a review of the production. We'd love to hear from them! Please share student responses with Eunice Wadewitz, Music & Education Director, at ewadewitz@fwcivic.org.

The Production

1. Review the expectations about the set, costumes, lighting, and sound that you had for production. Were the design elements what you expected? Why or why not?
2. What do you think were the strengths of the production? What were the weaknesses?
3. Think about the different people who were involved in the Civic's production of *La Cage Aux Folles*. You may want to consult your program for the listing of the various designers and other theatre personnel. Are there any particular positions that appeal to you? Explain. What educational background, skills and abilities might you need to fill this role? How might you go about learning more about this type of position?

The Characters & Story

1. Discuss the main characters in *La Cage Aux Folles*. How is their worldview, or outlook on life, of each different from each other or from your own? Similar?
2. How is the Jean-Michel different from the beginning of the musical to the end? What caused his change?
3. How do you think Georges should have handled Jean-Michel's request?
5. Though *La Cage Aux Folles* is set in a specific time and place, how is the story universal?
6. What do you think is the central theme, or message, of the play?

The Music

1. What moments or songs do you find replaying in your mind?
2. How did the songs move the plot forward?
3. What did you think of the setting of the musical taking place in a club where singing actually happens? Did you appreciate the transitions from normal musical number to songs being performed "on stage" within the narrative of the musical?

Reflect & Connect

1. What do the themes of facades, stories, and the power of love mean for you? Were they clear in the story?
2. Are the themes of *La Cage Aux Folles* relevant today? What could we still have to learn from this musical?
3. Watch one of the film versions of *La Cage Aux Folles*. Which mode of storytelling was the most compelling? Film or Musical?

Resources

Websites

https://www.songhall.org/profile/Jerry_Herman
<https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/jerry-herman-6278>
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/stars/harvey-fierstein/>
<https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/harvey-fierstein-6157>
<https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/la-cage-aux-folles-484929/#awards>
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/edouard-molinaro-film-director-whose-comedy-la-cage-aux-folles-played-a-part-in-establishing-9013897.html>
<http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/1207%7C1213/La-Cage-Aux-Folles.html>
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<https://www.glaad.org/2011/06/28/42-years-later-lgbt-americans-remember-the-impact-of-the-stonewall-riots-more-than-ever>
<http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/in-the-early-20th-century-america-was-awash-in-incredible-queer-nightlife>
<http://www.hrc.org/blog/lgbt-history-month-the-1950s-and-the-roots-of-lgbt-politics>
<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/history.aspx>
<http://www.sparknotes.com/drama/salome/character/salom/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/mar/16/la-cage-aux-folles-theatre-gay-marriage-john-partridge>

Books

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