



February 8-9, 2025
at the Embassy Theatre

Fort Wayne Civic Theatre's In the Wings Study Guide

Waitress the Musical

The Role of the Audience

Theatre needs its audience! We are happy to have you here. Every staff person, actor, and crew member backstage plays an important part in your experience, and you also have a role in the experience of cast, crew and the people around you.

Arrive Early: Please make sure you give yourself enough time to find your seat before the performance starts. Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. We ask schools and other groups to arrive at least 20-30 minutes before the show.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please turn off your cell phone/mp3 player /gaming system/camera/smart watch. Texting, surfing, and gaming during performances is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. Using cameras and recording devices during a performance is never allowed.

Talking During the Performance: Even when you whisper, you can be heard by performers and people around you. Unless it is a relaxed performance, disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait until after the performance to share your words with others.

Food/Drinks: Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. When there is an intermission, snacks and drinks may be available for purchase.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, cry, gasp – responding to the performance is part of the nature of theatre! As you get involved in the story, try to balance your reactions with respecting the people around you. The curtain call is part of the performance too – it gives you a chance to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause, and for them to thank you for your attention. We all appreciate it when you stay at your seat and join in the applause!

Playwright Biographies

Jessie Nelson: Book

Jessie Nelson wrote the musical *Waitress* with music and lyrics by Sara Bareilles. The show played on Broadway for four years and moved to the West End in London. Sara and Jessie went on to create the show *Little Voice* which they Executive Produced with JJ Abrams for Apple TV. Jessie wrote, directed and produced *Corrina Corrina* and *I Am Sam* starring Sean Penn, who received an Academy Award nomination for his performance. Among her other directing credits are *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Love, the Coopers* with Diane Keaton. Her writing credits include *Step Mom* and *The Story of Us*. She produced *Fred Claus* and *Danny Collins*. In London, Jessie directed *Alice By Heart* which she co-wrote with Steven Sater with music by Duncan Sheik at the National Theater Connections Program and again at MCC in NYC. She began her career as an actress at the Public Theater working with the award-winning experimental theater Mabou Mines and at the New York Shakespeare Festival. She wrote the children's book *Labracadabra*. She has been the Artistic Director of the Sundance Screen Writers Lab.

Sara Bareilles: Music and Lyrics

Sara Bareilles, singer, songwriter, and pianist, was born in 1979 in California. She first achieved mainstream critical praise in 2007 with her hit "Love Song," which reached #1 in 22 countries from her debut album *Little Voice*. She has received nine Grammy nominations, which include Song of the Year and Best Female Pop Vocal Performance for "Love Song" and Album of the Year for her third album, *The Blessed Unrest* (2013). Her book *Sounds Like Me: My Life (So Far) in Song* (2015) by Simon & Schuster is a New York Times best seller. Sara composed the music and lyrics for her Broadway debut *Waitress*, for which she received her first Tony Award nomination for Best Score and a 2017 Grammy Award nomination for Best Musical Theater Album *Inside: Songs from Waitress*. She also made her Broadway acting debut in 2017 as the lead role in *Waitress*. In 2018 she co-hosted the Tony Awards, was nominated for an Emmy and Grammy for her role in *Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert* and was awarded the Songwriters Hall of Fame's Hal David Starlight Award. Sara also teamed up with Apple TV as an Executive Producer for *Little Voice*, a 10-episode series, for which she created the original music. She can also be seen starring in Tina Fey's series *GIRLS5EVA*.

From Screen to Stage

Waitress began as a 2007 film written and directed by Adrienne Shelly. It was an indie hit, produced with a small budget of 1\$.5 million and earning over \$23 million. Shortly after the film premiered, New Jersey couple Fran and Barry Weissler, who have produced several Broadway musicals, bought the rights, choosing it because it was a story “that [would] fill audiences’ hearts.” In 2013 they announced that a musical was in the works in 2013. By this point, Adrienne Shelly had died, and writer Jessie Nelson, whose daughter loved the film, was given permission by Shelley’s husband to use some unfinished scripts as references so that Shelly’s voice was still part of this new project. Nelson had written movies before, but this was her first Broadway production. Director Diane Paulus on the other hand, was an experienced theatre artist. Paulus was attracted to the film by its quirky tone and whimsical qualities that had behind them “very serious issues and a punch to the gut emotional impact” and to her that was what made Bareilles the perfect choice – as an adaptation of an indie film, she wanted someone who wasn’t in the Broadway world. Her first choice for music and lyrics writer was Sara Bareilles, a successful pop singer-songwriter who loves musical theatre. Bareilles says she “writes autobiographically” so she found connections between herself and each character in order to tell their stories. The first song she wrote after watching the film, inspired by the character Jenna at her lowest point, was “‘She Used to be Mine,’ which is about that phenomenon of waking up and looking at yourself and realizing there’s a part of you that doesn’t recognize who you are anymore.”

After years of development including multiple readings and workshops, *Waitress* opened on Broadway in 2016. With the two writers, director, and choreographer (Lorin Lotarro) all being women, it was the first Broadway show in history to have an all-female team in the top-billed creative spots. Paulus says that this wasn’t intentional – every woman in the production got their job “because they’re at the top of their game” but that she was happy the premiere reflected that so that young people could see that it was possible.

Adrienne Shelley and Her Legacy

Waitress - The Musical is based on the 2007 film *Waitress* with Keri Russell. But the story of film writer, director, and co-star, Adrienne Shelly is a bittersweet story in itself. Shelly was considered an indie movie star, and had struggled for years finding her place in the film industry, where women are not always in the positions of power. When she created *Waitress*, she made the film of her dreams that mirrored much of her own life.

Like the main character of *Waitress* (Jenna), Shelly was a new mother, a creator, an artist who dreamed of more, and worked and wrote the screenplay for *Waitress* while she was pregnant with her daughter Sophie. This multitalented woman then wrote, directed, set designed, costume designed, and acted in her film *Waitress*.

While Adrienne Shelly was thrilled to be accepted into the Sundance Film Festival, she sadly had another parallel with *Waitress* lead character Jenna when she became the victim of violence. On November 1, 2006, Shelly's husband Andy Ostroy found her body at the office that she used in Manhattan's West Village. Although the door was unlocked and money was missing, NYPD at first thought she had taken her own life.

However, her autopsy showed neck compression, and with her husband's insistence that she would never take her own life, the investigation continued and found footprints near where her body was found. This sneaker print matched other prints from construction being done in her building, and shortly after a 19-year old construction worker confessed to her murder. Shelly was unable to see her film debut at Sundance in January 2007, and also missed seeing the film's great success, the Tony-nominated musical that came after, and watching her daughter grow up.

Her husband honored his wife's legacy by establishing the Adrienne Shelly Foundation, a nonprofit that supports women filmmakers by providing them with grants, scholarships, living stipends and other funds. These winners are further supported by the foundation's partnerships with organizations like NYU, Columbia University, Sundance Institute, Tribeca Film Institute and more.

<https://adrienneshellyfoundation.org/>

Content Overview

Strong language, raunchy jokes, open talk about sex. Infidelity, spousal abuse, unwanted pregnancy; abortion is not fully explored but it is mentioned by a doctor as a possibility (and quickly dismissed).

Characters

JENNA –A woman stuck in her life as an unhappily married waitress in a small town. Finds some happiness and expression through her meticulous baking of pies and her friendships with her coworkers, Dawn and Becky. Lives her life paycheck-to-paycheck, day by day, and wants nothing more than to get away and start fresh, unbeknownst to her destructive husband, Earl.

DAWN –She youngest of the waitresses. Eccentric is the nice way to say she’s slightly unusual.

BECKY –The oldest of the three waitresses. Irreverent, irascible, been there, made it back, and somehow kept her wicked sense of humor.

DR. POMATTER – Jenna’s gynecologist with whom an unexpected extramarital affair is born. Has a quirky sense of humor and a big heart.

EARL – Jenna’s husband. Peaked in high school.

OGIE – Strange, yet oddly lovable. Becomes slightly obsessed with Dawn (in a hilarious yet endearing way) after she goes on a 5-minute date with him. Quirky, incredibly persistent, and odd, yet kind.

JOE – The owner of the diner where Jenna, Dawn, Becky, and Cal work. An old, curmudgeonly man who has a soft spot for Jenna (and her pie), warm at heart. A sarcastically funny and no-nonsense guy with a keen ability to read people.

CAL – A cook at the diner. A “Salt of the Earth” guy’s guy surrounded by gals. Brash, impatient, unsentimental.

ENSEMBLE

Plot Summary

Jenna is employed at a small-town café and is known for the unique pie recipes she creates. Unfortunately, she is in an abusive marriage. She witnessed her parents' abusive marriage as a child. Jenna names her pies after the situations she faces as they unfold. The other staff members at the café, along with one elderly customer, represent her only social connections. When Jenna realizes she is pregnant, her chances of escaping her life seem bleak until her obstetrician sparks a romance and her self-confidence. Jenna and her loyal friends and colleagues navigate friendship, love, and self-discovery. Sara Bareilles' talented score compliments the themes of resilience, hope, and sisterhood.

Synopsis

This section contains spoilers. Adapted from Music Theatre International.

Act 1

Fort Wayne Civic Theatre's production is set in modern day around the early 2000s, in the American South, somewhere near the border of Texas and Oklahoma in Arkansas. We meet Jenna, a waitress, as she's engrossed in the process of making a pie at the diner where she works ("What's Inside"). Her two friends and fellow waitresses, Becky and Dawn enter as they get started with their day at work, just like they always do ("Opening Up"). Jenna is taking an order from Joe, a loveable curmudgeon, when she's overcome with nausea. She rushes to the bathroom, where Becky and Dawn follow her. Becky hands Jenna a pregnancy test and tells her that she needs to face the music and take the test ("The Negative"). The results prove Jenna's worst fear: she's pregnant. To cope with the panic, Jenna creates a recipe for Betrayed By My Eggs Pie.

Earl, Jenna's husband, enters the diner — and takes Jenna's tips, as he normally does. When Jenna tells Earl how quickly one of her pies sold out, he tells her not to get any lofty ideas and that she's "no Sara Lee". Jenna retreats into her mind to create My Husband's A Jerk Chicken Pot Pie. Earl leaves, and Becky tells Jenna that he isn't worth staying married to. Jenna explains that he's just had a tough time lately and that she can't afford to leave him anyway. Jenna gets back to work, finding an escape from her troubles through baking ("What Baking Can Do").

Jenna is in the waiting room at her doctor's office. An imaginary trio of pregnant women sing to her ("Club Knocked Up"). Jenna meets Dr. Pomatter, a young doctor who is new in town. She had expected to see Dr. Perkins, who had been her doctor her whole life. They have an awkward introduction, and as Jenna leaves the appointment, she hands him a pie she

originally made for Dr. Perkins. Dr. Pomatter takes a bite and is blown away ("Pomatter Pie").

Jenna is working another day at the diner. Cal, the boss and cook, scolds all the waitresses for being late. Becky and Dawn surprise Jenna with a book for expectant mothers, and show her the suggestion in the book about writing a letter to her baby. Dawn reads her online dating profile to Becky and Jenna, who encourages her to post it that night. Dawn is worried that meeting someone will be a disaster ("When He Sees Me").

Joe enters. It's revealed that he owns the diner, Joe's Pie Diner — and many other businesses in town. Joe senses that Jenna is pregnant, and she begs him to not tell 6 anyone. He changes the subject to the National Pie Bake Off that's happening nearby and nudges Jenna to enter. The \$20,000 prize makes her consider it.

As Jenna waits for the bus to go home, she invents pies in her head. Dr. Pomatter shows up at the bus stop. He tells Jenna how she reminds him of another woman who worked at a bakery he loved ("It Only Takes a Taste"). This woman used to make the best pies — but Jenna's are far better. Jenna is clearly touched by his kindness and attention.

Not long after she gets home, Earl comes home with beer and a ton of rage. He was fired for constantly being late. Jenna turns down his advances and his demand that she "take my bad day away". This infuriates Earl and just as he's about to hit her, Jenna blurts out that she's pregnant. Earl is overjoyed but also makes Jenna promise that she won't love the baby more than him ("You Will Still Be Mine").

Back at the diner, Dawn has scheduled a date and is freaking out. Jenna agrees to make a Meet Your Dream Chocolate Cream Pie for the date. She tells Becky and Dawn that she's going to do the pie bake off and use the prize money to leave Earl. The three of them contemplate their dreams ("A Soft Place to Land"). Jenna starts hiding some of her tips from Earl.

Ogie, Dawn's persistent suitor, comes to the diner and insists on seeing Dawn. Dawn tells Becky and Jenna about their date and how peculiar he is. Dawn tells Ogie to leave her alone, but he declares they're meant to be together ("Never Ever Getting Rid of Me"). Dawn agrees to another date and is then impressed that he wants to take her to a reading of the Federalist Papers, and that he was in Revolutionary War re-enactments. Dawn begins falling for Ogie. Watching them, Jenna makes Almost Makes You Believe Again Pie. She calls Dr. Pomatter about some bleeding and makes an appointment.

Jenna arrives at Dr. Pomatter's office for a 7 AM appointment. Dr. Pomatter tells her that everything is fine for early pregnancy. Jenna demands to know why he had her come in early, before the office opens, to tell her that, and Dr. Pomatter can't give her a direct

answer. Jenna storms out, only to come back to get her purse and kiss him. They both agree that since they're both married and Jenna's pregnant, acting on their feelings would be a "Bad Idea". They give in to temptation anyway.

Act 2

Jenna is at the diner coming up with new pies when she catches Becky and Cal kissing. Jenna asks Becky how she can cheat on her elderly husband, but Becky won't let Jenna judge and shame her, especially when she knows Jenna is sneaking around herself, and says indulging her feelings can be a good thing ("I Didn't Plan It").

Jenna goes to Dr. Pomatter's office a month after their kiss. He asks her to not spend a month without contacting him again. They kiss again, and their affair continues ("Bad Idea – Reprise"). At the diner, Joe immediately can tell Jenna is having an affair and lectures her on why it's not a good idea. Meanwhile, Dawn is having a passionate relationship with Ogie.

Jenna goes in for a doctor's appointment, only to learn he had to leave town with his wife for a wedding. Jenna listens to her baby's heartbeat and imagines her letter to her baby. Later, Dr. Pomatter surprises Jenna at work. She tells him she can't live with herself if they keep seeing each other. He surprises her with a golden pie plate and asks her to make a pie with him. As they do, he tells Jenna about the impact she's had on him ("You Matter to Me").

At Ogie and Dawn's wedding, Ogie composes a poem on the spot ("I Love You Like a Table"). At the reception, Joe dances with Jenna and gives her advice about going for what she wants in life ("Take It From an Old Man"). Earl enters in a fury and makes Jenna leave. He brings her home and shows her that he's found all the money she's hidden. Jenna lies, telling him that she was saving it to buy a crib and toys for the baby. Earl takes all the money. Jenna, crushed, imagines another letter to the baby ("Dear Baby") and explains she won't be able to make it to the pie bake-off. Jenna thinks about the kind of person she once was and how her life has disappointed her ("She Used to Be Mine"). Jenna begins to go into labor ("Contraction Ballet").

In the hospital, Jenna is in agony. Joe is wheeled into her room. He's about to have surgery but wanted to hand her a card first. Earl enters, ready to film the baby's birth. A group of hospital residents come to observe and one of them introduces herself as Francine, Dr. Pomatter's wife. Jenna is mortified. The residents leave, and Jenna gives birth to a girl. Jenna holds her daughter for the first time and is immediately in love ("What's Inside – Reprise"). She tells Earl she's leaving him and to get out. He leaves, and she is free ("Everything Changes – Part I"). Dr. Pomatter checks in on her, and Jenna tells him that meeting his wife has made her realize that the affair needs to end now. He agrees, and they thank each other for changing their lives.

Jenna marvels at her daughter and names her Lulu ("Everything Changes – Part II"). Jenna opens the card Joe gave her and learns that she is inheriting the diner. She realizes he hadn't expected to survive the surgery. In the note, he asked her to name a pie after him.

Years pass. We're back at the diner where tons and tons of pies are being boxed up for orders. Lulu is now a little girl, and Jenna is running a business with the support of her diner family. The day is starting at the re-named diner, Lulu's Pies, and everyone's lives are moving forward ("Opening Up – Finale").

A Scene from Waitress

BECKY

(Jenna's sassy co-worker and closest friend)

Honey, you all right?

JENNA

(a soulful, pie-baking waitress)

Shh. I'm inventing a new pie in my head.

BECKY

Of course you are.

JENNA

I'm calling it, "I Don't Want Earl's Baby Pie."

DAWN

(a waitress learning to break out of her shell)

I don't think we can write that on the menu board.

JENNA

Then I'll just call it "Betrayed By My Eggs Pie."

DAWN

What's gonna be in it?

JENNA

Crack an egg, combine with sausage, soak it in beer, mix in cheesy red dressing, use extra shortening in your crust to trap the moisture in. Forever-

BECKY

Jenna this ain't somethin' you can tuck into a pie.

CAL

(Jenna's gruff boss at Joe's Pie Diner)

HEY! Pledge the sorority later! You don't do your work I'll dock your pay. *(to Becky)* And lady, you are really pushing my buttons today.

BECKY

Which one is mute?

EARL

(Jenna's husband, an almost-talented musician who peaked in high school. His voice cuts through the clatter of the diner.)

Waitress! Who do you have to know around here to get a piece of pie?

JENNA

Earl -

EARL

Hey sweet thang -

JENNA

What are you doin' here?

EARL

Takin' the rest of the day off.

JENNA

What about work?

EARL

Friggin foreman was on my ass for bein' late yesterday. I said don't blame the line at Taco Bell on me! I don't belong in that shit job... Hey, where's my kiss?

JENNA

Earl, I gotta get back to –

EARL

They can wait. *(Jenna kisses him on the cheek.)* How we doin' today? *(He holds out his hand, their ritual. She reaches into her pocket and hands him her tips then gets him a piece of pie.)* Not bad... not great... You know I've been thinking. I'm not really sure it's worth your working at this diner. I don't like those girls. That one looks at me like I just killed her dog. I think I might rather have you be home. Makin' me pies all day long. *(Taking a bite of pie)*
Damn this is tasty.

JENNA

Last piece left. Sold so fast today couldn't quite believe it –

EARL

(jealous, a tad threatened) Yeah, well, don't go getting a big head or nothin'. I mean this is good but let's face it... you're no Sara Lee.

JENNA

You used to say my pies were so good I could open my own shop.

EARL

Yeah, well I was just tryin' to get laid.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM SCENE

1. How does humor and drama function in this scene?
2. How would you describe Jenna and Earl's relationship based on this scene?
3. Do you think Jenna wants to change her life, and are her friends helping her?
4. When you are stuck in a bad situation, what does it take to change it? Who do you trust to call you out?

A Song from Waitress

“She Used to Be Mine”

Jenna

It's not simple to say that most days I don't recognize me
That these shoes and this apron, that place and its patrons have
Taken more than I gave them.

It's not easy to know I'm not anything like I used to be although
It's true I was never attention's sweet center
But I still remember that girl:

She's imperfect but she tries
She is good but she lies
She is hard on herself
She is broken and won't ask for help
She is messy but she's kind
She is lonely most of the time
She is all of this mixed up and baked in a beautiful pie
She is gone but she used to be mine.

It's not what I asked for. Sometimes life just slips in
Through a back door
And carves out a person and makes you believe it's all true
And now I've got you
And you're not what I asked for, if I'm honest I know I would give it all back
For a chance to start over and rewrite an ending or two
For that girl that I knew:

Who'll be reckless just enough
Who gets hurt but who learns how to toughen up
When she's bruised and gets used by a man who can't love

And then she'll get stuck
And be scared of the life that's inside her
Getting stronger each day till it finally reminds her
To fight just a little to bring back the fire in her eyes
That's been gone, but it used to be mine.
She is messy but she's kind
She is lonely most of the time
She is all of this mixed up and baked in a beautiful pie
She is gone but she used to be mine.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM SONG

1. How have you changed from when you were younger?
2. What kind of person do you aspire to be?
3. Is there anything getting in the way of your aspirations?
4. What might you have to give up or change to achieve your dreams?

Sources

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