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Director of Educational Outreach
Lauren Unbekant
(315) 443-1150

Assistant Director of Education
Kate Laissle
(315) 442-7755

Group Sales & Student Matinees
Tracey White
(315) 443-9844

Box Office
(315) 443-3275
DEATHTRAP

WRITTEN BY
Ira Levin

DIRECTED BY
Paul Barnes

SCENIC DESIGNER
William Bloodgood

COSTUME DESIGNER
Susan Branch Towne

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Lonnie Rafael Alcaraz

SOUND DESIGNER
Joe Payne

FIGHT DIRECTOR
Alec Barbour

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
Stuart Plymesser

CASTING
Harriet Bass

Deathtrap is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York.

May 10 - 28, 2017
As you take your students on the exciting journey into the world of live theatre we hope that you’ll take a moment to help prepare them to make the most of their experience. Unlike movies or television, live theatre offers the thrill of unpredictability.

With the actors present on stage, the audience response becomes an integral part of the performance and the overall experience: the more involved and attentive the audience, the better the show. Please remind your students that they play an important part in the success of the performance.

BE PROMPT
Give your students plenty of time to arrive, find their seats, and get situated. Have them visit the restrooms before the show begins.

RESPECT OTHERS
Please remind your students that their behavior and responses affect the quality of the performance and the enjoyment of the production for the entire audience. Live theatre means the actors and the audience are in the same room, and just as the audience can see and hear the performers, the performers can see and hear the audience. Please ask your students to avoid disturbing those around them. Please no talking or unnecessary or disruptive movement during the performance. Also, please remind students that cellphones should be switched off completely. No texting or tweeting, please. When students give their full attention to the action on the stage, they will be rewarded with the best performance possible.

GOOD NOISE, BAD NOISE
Instead of instructing students to remain totally silent, please discuss the difference between appropriate responses (laughter, applause, participation when requested) and inappropriate noise (talking, cell phones, etc).

STAY WITH US
Please do not leave or allow students to leave during the performance except in absolute emergencies. Again, reminding them to use the restrooms before the performance will help eliminate unnecessary disruption.
Dear Educator,

Live theatre is a place for people to gather and experience the joys, triumphs, and sorrows life has to offer.

The Syracuse Stage education department is committed to providing the tools to make learning in and through the arts possible to address varied learning styles and to make connections to curricula and life itself. It is our goal in the education department to maximize the theatre experience for our education partners with experiential learning and in-depth arts programming. Thank you for your interest and support.

Sincerely,

Lauren Unbekant
Director of Educational Outreach

2016/2017 EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH SPONSORS

Syracuse Stage is committed to providing students with rich theatre experiences that explore and examine what it is to be human. Research shows that children who participate in or are exposed to the arts show higher academic achievement, stronger self-esteem, and improved ability to plan and work toward a future goal.

Many students in our community have their first taste of live theatre through Syracuse Stage’s outreach programs. Last season more than 15,500 students from across New York State attended or participated in the Bank of America Children’s Tour, artsEmerging, the Young Playwrights Festival, the Franklin Project, Young Adult Council, and our Student Matinee Program.

We gratefully acknowledge the corporations and foundations who support our commitment to in-depth arts education for our community.
Born in 1929, novelist, playwright, and songwriter Ira Levin spent his early career writing training film scripts and scripts for radio and television. He first came to national attention in 1953 with the award-winning crime novel *A Kiss Before Dying*. His first Broadway success was *No Time For Sergeants*, which made Andy Griffith a star. Three of Levin’s novels have entered the collective consciousness: *Rosemary’s Baby* about a woman who is carrying Satan’s child, *The Stepford Wives*, in which robots have been substituted for suburban housewives to their husbands’ delight, and *The Boys From Brazil*, which speculates that a notorious Nazi doctor is still at work in South America. *Deathtrap*, which opened on Broadway in 1978, ran for 1,793 performances, making it the 37th longest running Broadway play, and the only thriller on the list. Levin’s other plays include the mysteries *Dr. Cook’s Garden* and *Veronica’s Room* as well as the musical *Drate! The Cat!*, for which he wrote both the book and lyrics. Ira Levin died in 2007.

“Ira Levin

“Being happy or unhappy - is that really the most important thing? Knowing the truth would be a different kind of happiness - a more satisfying kind, I think, even if it turned out to be a sad kind.”

-Ira Levin

PHOTO: Associated Press, 2003
Characters

**Sidney Bruhl**, a 50ish successful playwright whose body of work consists of mystery thrillers.

**Myra Bruhl** his wife, in her forties. A nervous sort, she suffers from a heart condition.

**Clifford Anderson**, an attractive and eager young playwright in his early twenties.

**Helga ten Dorp** a famous Dutch psychic who has rented a neighboring home.

**Porter Milgrim**, mid-fifties, Sidney’s attorney.

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PHOTO:
A movie still from *Deathtrap*, featuring Michael Caine, Christopher Reeve, and Dyan Cannon
SYNOPSIS

Mystery playwright Sidney Bruhl, who has been going through a creative dry spell, shows his wife Myra a script he has received from student at a workshop he taught. It seems that young Clifford Anderson has written a very good play and Sidney wants to cash in. When Clifford arrives, seeking advice from his mentor, the elder writer suggests they collaborate on the play, a comedy-thriller called Deathtrap. Since the walls of the Bruhls’ Connecticut home are covered with weapons and instruments of violence used as props in stage murder mysteries, it’s only a matter of time before they prove inspiring.

Sidney Bruhl’s new play, which opened at the Music Box is billed as a comedy-thriller. So much for truth in advertising.
Carbon copies: Before personal computers were used for word processing, people wrote on manual or electric typewriters. To make an immediate copy, you used carbon paper, a sheet with waxy carbon on one side, which you sandwiched between two sheets of paper. As the typewriter struck each letter forcefully, a carbon replica would transfer to the second sheet. It was possible to add a second carbon and third sheet of paper, but the second copy would be fainter.

*Dial M For Murder*: a murder mystery play by Frederick Knott about a wife framed for murder. The popular Alfred Hitchcock film is a close copy of the play.

George C. Scott, Trish VanDevere, and Liv Ullmann were popular film actors in the 1970s. Scott and VanDevere were married at the time and often appeared together.

The Magic Show: This long-running Broadway musical starred Canadian magician Doug Henning. It opened in 1974 and closed in 1978 when *Deathtrap* opened.

*The Merv Griffin Show*: This popular syndicated talk show followed the format of the late night shows, but was often broadcast at dinnertime or in late afternoon. When broadcast from New York, many guests were Broadway actors and New York personalities and eccentrics.

*Sleuth*: A popular two-character comedy thriller by Anthony Shaffer was a model for *Deathtrap*. The film versions of each both starred Michael Caine.

Theatre vérité: A play on the film genre cinema vérité, a type of documentary that recorded life as it happened.

Tin Pan Alley: The name given to the publishers of popular American music from the late nineteenth century through the 1950’s. Originally, the publishers were clustered around West 28th Street in Manhattan.

Peter Hurkos: a Dutch psychic who became a popular entertainer, he claimed to have solved many criminal cases through his psychic powers.

quertyuiop: The letter lineup of the top line of a typewriter. Computers still use this arrangement.

Reverend Son Myung Moon: led the Unification Church. His followers were often called Moonies and the church was often regarded as a cult. Moon was famous for conducting mass weddings in which thousands were married.

Smith-Corona: The most popular American brand of typewriters. The company was first headquartered in Syracuse.

Xerox machine: The first commercially successful copy machines lent their brand name to the entire category. Copy machines were not found in every office in the 1970’s and personal copiers were not yet on the market. A copy shop was a lucrative business.
Notable Murder Mystery Plays

Sherlock Holmes (1899) by Arthur Conan-Doyle and William Gillette. The famed detective made his first stage appearance in this very popular play which was based on “A Scandal in Bohemia”, “A Study in Scarlet”, and “The Final Problem”.

Sorry, Wrong Number * (1943) by Lucille Fletcher is a radio play about a bed-ridden woman who overhears a murder plan on a telephone party line.

Night Must Fall* (1935) by Emlyn Williams is once again set in a country house with cantankerous old woman in a wheelchair and a mysterious stranger who just may have something horrifying in the locked hatbox he carries around.

Arsenic and Old Lace* (1939 ) by Joseph Kesselring is a thriller farce about two little old ladies who kill lonely old men with elderberry wine laced with a very special ingredient.

Angel Street* (1941) by Patrick Hamilton features an evil man trying to convince his new wife that she is going mad. Filmed twice, the American film version called Gaslight has given us the term “gaslighting”, meaning trying to make people doubt what they have seen with their own eyes.

Mystery novel queen Agatha Christie wrote several plays based on her fiction. The three most popular are And Then There Were None *(1942) , sometime called Ten Little Indians, which places ten strangers, each harboring a secret, on a remote island where one by one they are murdered. The Mousetrap (1952) is about murder in a picturesque old manor house serving as an inn. It is the longest-running play in the English language. Its London production has been running for sixty-five years. Witness for the Prosecution* (1953) is a fast-moving courtroom drama with a shocking and satisfying final twist.

Deathtrap is a comedy thriller about a play called Deathtrap. Today, we would call the play within a play structure “meta,” a term for a dramatic or fictional piece that refers to itself or the conventions of the genre. The show consciously and humorously stands on its forbears, plays meant to scare us and sometimes to make us laugh along the way. The plays listed here in chronological order are especially influential and enjoyable. Plays with notable film versions are asterisked (*)

An Inspector Calls* (1946) by J. B. Priestly is not only an investigation into a suicide, but a stinging indictment of the English class system.

Dial M For Murder * (1952) by Frederick Knott finds a wife framed for the murder of a man hired to kill her. Can the man she is having an affair with save her?

The Bad Seed* (1954) by Maxwell Anderson, based on the novel by William March, poses an interesting question. Can a sweet little girl have inherited a murdering disposition?

“The Real Inspector Hound” (1962) by Tom Stoppard is a one-act satire of the genre in which two theatre critics find themselves onstage in a mystery they have been reviewing.

Sleuth* (1970) by Anthony Shaffer, a famous mystery writer lures his wife’s lover to his country manor, which houses an elaborate collection of games and puzzles.

Wait Until Dark *(1966) by Frederick Knott pits a blind woman against three sinister strangers with murder on their minds.
Psychic Detectives

In *Deathtrap*, comic psychic Helga ten Dorp announces that she will be appearing on the popular Merv Griffin TV talk show. Television has been very good to people claiming psychic power. John Edward had a syndicated daily show called *Crossing Over*, where he did readings for people in his studio audience. On her TV reality show *Long Island Medium*, big-haired housewife Theresa Caputo goes about everyday life taking care of her family and accosting fellow shoppers in the supermarket with tidbits of advice from loved ones on the other side. The television drama *Medium* (2005-2011), starring Patricia Arquette, was very loosely based on the life of Allison Dubois, who claimed to have helped solve several crimes in Arizona and Texas.

Like Dubois, Helga is a type of psychic detective, a medium or clairvoyant who claims to be able to solve crimes through psychic powers. While Helga bumbles her way through the play, real life psychic detectives have made headlines, but they have also had spectacular failures.

On her website, psychic detective Noreen Renier claims to have been instrumental in many cases and sports a long list of testimonials to her talent at locating missing persons. Her exploits have been featured on the show *Psychic Detectives*.

More often than not, however, psychics have exaggerated their importance to the police and have had spectacular failures. The real Allison Dubois, for example, had been an intern with the Phoenix police and later did serve as a jury consultant, but both the Phoenix police and the Texas Rangers have said that any information she gave them did not lead to any progress in solving a crime.

In 2002, on *The Montel Williams Show*, famed psychic Sylvia Browne weighed in on the case of Shawn Hornbeck, an eleven-year-old who had disappeared while riding his bike. He was dead, she pronounced to his parents, and the kidnapper had long dark hair and dreadlocks. Five years later, the boy was found alive. His captor had never had either long hair or dreadlocks.

The entertaining Peter Hurkos, who Helga mocks in *Deathtrap*, claimed to be a successful psychic detective, citing solution of 27 murder cases in 17 countries. However, he was often either vague enough to claim success no matter what the outcome or was outright wrong. For example, media savvy Hurkos claimed that Adolph Hitler was alive and living in Argentina. He also identified an innocent man as the Boston Strangler. He was once caught impersonating a police office in order to gather information to be used as a “psychic” insight in a case. Hurkos was prosecuted and fined $1000.
Projects

Clue! Using the game as a springboard for writing
Using the familiar board game Clue, divide the class into teams corresponding to the number of allowable player. Then, play the game to determine the who, where, and with what weapon of the classic game (eg. Colonel Mustard in the library with the rope.) Then the four teams meet to develop short stories that explain what happened. Within the groups, one student writes a story from the perspective of the detective, another becomes a narrator, and the others become witnesses or the killer.

The observation game
Before students arrive for class, the instructor subtly changes details of the classroom (perhaps remove or replace a poster, change position of objects on the desk, etc.) and his/her personal appearance (two different socks, mismatched shoes, etc.) Perhaps there is an enigmatic message on the blackboard. Group—discover the changes, individuals students write a story explaining the changes.

Riddle me this…
In the classroom, mystery riddles are a fun way to sharpen critical thinking skills. Riddles of varying levels of sophistication are easily accessible on the web.

One classic (and easy example) of murder mystery riddles is the following:

A man is found murdered on Sunday morning. His wife calls the police who question the wife and staff and are given the following alibis:
The wife says she was sleeping
The butler was cleaning the closet
The gardener was picking vegetables
The maid was getting the mail
The cook was preparing the breakfast

Immediately, the police arrested the murderer
Who did it?
How did the police know?

Solution: The maid. There is no mail on Sunday.
Other more challenging mystery riddles can be found at:
http://diply.com/murder-mystery-riddles?publisher=did-you-know
http://dailybrainteaser.blogspot.com/2014/03/murder-riddles.html
https://www.braingle.com/Mystery.html

It’s All Game…
The more adventurous class might try interactive murder mystery games. Several variations of the popular party games adapted to the classroom can be found on the internet. Some interesting examples are:

http://www.edteck.com/rigor/lessons/detective/

http://www.englishcurrent.com/games/esl-murder-mystery-game-grims-mansion/ This games is intended for ESL students.


https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Game-The-Will-Murder-Mystery-activityscript-lesson-plans-20409?gclid=COfs8ZSepNMCFQ9LDQodj6AD_Q Teachers Pay Teachers is a purchase site. The fees are very small.
elements of drama

PLOT
What is the story line? What happened before the play started? What do the characters want? What do they do to achieve their goals? What do they stand to gain/lose?

THEME
What ideas are wrestled with in the play? What questions does the play pose? Does it present an opinion?

CHARACTER
Who are the people in the story? What are their relationships? Why do they do what they do? How does age/status/etc. affect them?

LANGUAGE
What do the characters say? How do they say it? When do they say it?

MUSIC
How do music and sound help to tell the story?

SPECTACLE
How do the elements come together to create the whole performance?

Other Elements: Conflict/Resolution, Action, Improvisation, Non-verbal communication, Staging, Humor, Realism and other styles, Metaphor, Language, Tone, Pattern & Repetition, Emotion, Point of view.

Any piece of theatre comprises multiple art forms. As you explore this production with your students, examine the use of:

WRITING
VISUAL ART/DESIGN
MUSIC/SOUND
DANCE/MOVEMENT

ACTIVITY
At its core, drama is about characters working toward goals and overcoming obstacles. Ask students to use their bodies and voices to create characters who are: very old, very young, very strong, very weak, very tired, very energetic, very cold, very warm. Have their characters interact with others. Give them an objective to fulfill despite environmental obstacles. Later, recap by asking how these obstacles affected their characters and the pursuit of their objectives.

INQUIRY
How are each of these art forms used in this production? Why are they used? How do they help to tell the story?
**elements of design**

**LINE** can have length, width, texture, direction, and curve. There are five basic varieties: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, and zig-zag.

**SHAPE** is two-dimensional and encloses space. It can be geometric (e.g. squares and circles), man-made, or free-form.

**FORM** is three-dimensional. It encloses space and fills space. It can be geometric (e.g. cubes and cylinders), man-made, or free-form.

**COLOR** has three basic properties: **HUE** is the name of the color (e.g. red, blue, green), **INTENSITY** is the strength of the color (bright or dull), **VALUE** is the range of lightness to darkness.

**TEXTURE** refers to the “feel” of an object’s surface. It can be smooth, rough, soft, etc. Textures may be **ACTUAL** (able to be felt) or **IMPLIED** (suggested visually through the artist’s technique).

**SPACE** is defined and determined by shapes and forms. Positive space is enclosed by shapes and forms, while negative space exists around them.
Sources and Resources:

   The playwright’s website.

Thrillers


Psychics


An entire 20/20 broadcast examination of contemporary psychics can be found here.

Mcfadden, Dennis. “The Psychic Detectives!”

GREAT EXPECTATIONS
OCTOBER 19 – NOVEMBER 6

DISNEY AND CAMERON MACKINTOSH’S
MARY POPPINS
NOVEMBER 26 – JANUARY 8

DISGRACED
JANUARY 25 – FEBRUARY 12

AIN’T MISBEHAVIN’
THE FATS WALLER MUSICAL SHOW
MARCH 1 – 26

HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE
APRIL 5 – 23

DEATHTRAP
MAY 10 – 28

16
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