



NOISES OFF

By **MICHAEL FRAYN**
Directed by **JACOB TIERNEY**



Noises Off is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.



AUDIENCE GUIDE

January 29th –
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PRODUCTION SPONSOR



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ABOUT THIS AUDIENCE GUIDE

This audience guide was compiled and edited by Patrick Lloyd Brennan with the generous support of the Mitzi & Mel Dobrin Family Foundation. This audience guide is meant to enhance and deepen our audience's experience and understanding. All content is intended for educational purposes only.

To reserve group tickets at a reduced rate, or for questions, comments, citations or references, please contact:

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PRODUCTION CREDITS

A SEGAL CENTRE PRODUCTION

CAST

DOTTY OTLEY	Martha Burns
LLOYD DALLAS	David Julian Hirsh
BELINDA BLAIR	Chala Hunter
FREDERICK (FREDDY) FELLOWES	Marcel Jeannin
SELSDON MOWBRAY	Daniel Lillford
BROOKE ASHTON	Amanda Lisman
TIMOTHY ALLGOOD	Michael Musi
POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR	Kaitlyn Riordan
GARRY LEJEUNE	Andrew Shaver

CREATIVE TEAM

PLAYWRIGHT	Michael Frayn
DIRECTOR	Jacob Tierney
SET DESIGNER	Pierre-Étienne Locas
COSTUME DESIGNER	Louise Bourret
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Nicolas Descôteaux
SOUND DESIGNER	Dmitri Marine
STAGE MANAGER	Samira Rose
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	Birdie Gregor
APPRENTICE STAGE MANAGER	Emlyn VanBruinswaardt

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Welcome to the Segal! We are so pleased to have you join us at our production *Noises Off*. To make the most of your viewing experience and in consideration of actors and audience members around you, please be mindful of the following:

1. Cell phone use in the theatre is not permitted. Please put your cell phone on silent and refrain from taking pictures, videos or texting during the performance.
2. Please refrain from talking or opening candies during the performance.
3. Food and beverages are not permitted in the theatre.
4. Please do not kick or step over the seats when entering and exiting.
5. If you are taking notes for the purposes of writing a response or review, please be discreet to avoid distracting others.
6. Enjoy the show!

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The play premiered at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London in 1982, directed by Michael Blakemore and starring Patricia Routledge, Paul Eddington, and Nicky Henson. It opened to universally ecstatic reviews and shortly after transferred to the Savoy Theatre in the West End, where it ran until 1987 with five successive casts. It won the Evening Standard Award for Best Comedy.

On December 11, 1983, a production directed again by Blakemore and starring Dorothy Loudon, Victor Garber, Brian Murray, Deborah Rush, Douglas Seale, and Amy Wright opened on Broadway at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, where it ran for 553 performances. It earned Tony Award nominations for Best Play and for Blakemore, Rush, and Seale, and won a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Ensemble.

Noises Off has become a staple of both professional theatre companies and community theatres on both sides of the Atlantic. On October 5, 2000, the National Theatre in London mounted a revival, directed by Jeremy Sams and starring Patricia Hodge, Peter Egan and Aden Gillett, that ran for two years, transferring to the Piccadilly Theatre in the West End on May 14, 2001 with Lynn Redgrave and Stephen Mangan replacing Hodge and Egan, respectively. Sams' production transferred to Broadway, again at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, on November 1, 2001, with Patti LuPone, Peter Gallagher, Faith Prince, T.R. Knight, and Katie Finneran. The production was nominated for a Tony and Drama Desk Award as Best Revival of a Play, and Finneran was named Best Featured Actress by both groups.

Frayn has repeatedly rewritten the play over the years. The last revision was in 2000 at the request of Jeremy Sams. There are numerous differences between the 1982 and 2000 scripts. Some new sequences have been added (e.g., an introduction to Act Three, in which Tim, the Company Stage Manager, and Poppy, the Assistant Stage Manager, make simultaneous apologies – the former in front of the curtain, the latter over the PA – for the delay in the performance). Other sequences have been altered or cut entirely. References that tend to date the play (such as Mrs. Clackett's to the Brents having colour television) have been eliminated or rewritten.

A London production ran from December 3, 2011 to March 10, 2012 at the Old Vic Theatre, directed by Lindsay Posner and starring Jonathan Coy, Janie Dee, Robert Glenister, Jamie

Glover, Celia Imrie, Karl Johnson, Aisling Loftus, Amy Nuttall and Paul Ready. This production transferred to the Novello Theatre in the West End from March 24 to June 30, 2012, and then toured Britain and Ireland with a different cast.

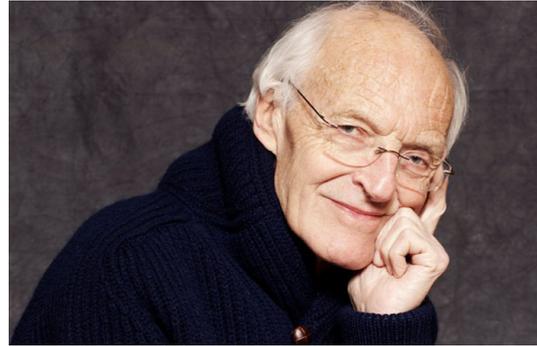
A Broadway revival, produced by Roundabout Theatre Company, started in previews at the American Airlines Theatre on December 17, 2015, and opened on January 14, 2016. The cast featured Andrea Martin (Dotty Otley), Megan Hilty (Brooke Ashton), Campbell Scott (Lloyd Dallas), Jeremy Shamos (Frederick Fellowes), David Furr (Gary Lejeune), Rob McClure (Tim Allgood), Daniel Davis (Seldon Mowbray), Kate Jennings Grant (Belinda Blair), and Tracee Chimo (Poppy Norton-Taylor). The revival ran its limited run through March 13, 2016, extending by one week due to popular demand.

The production was nominated at the 2016 Tony Awards for Best Revival of Play, Best Featured Actress for Martin and Hilty, Best Featured Actor for Furr, and Best Costume Design.

(i) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noises_Off#Production_history

PROFILE OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

Michael Frayn was born in London in 1933, and began his writing career as a reporter at *The Guardian* and *The Observer*. His subsequent plays include *Alphabetical Order*, *Clouds*, *Donkeys' Years*, *Make and Break*, *Benefactors*, *Democracy*, and *Afterlife*, which was developed for the Royal National Theatre in 2008. *Copenhagen*, first staged at the National, won the 1998 Evening Standard Award for Best Play of the Year and the 2000 Tony Award for Best Play. Mr. Frayn was awarded the Writer's Guild Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010 and received the South Bank Show Outstanding Achievement Award in 2012. In that year the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield put on The Michael Frayn Season. *Noises Off*, which also became a successful film, opened at the Old Vic in 2012 and transferred to the West End, picking up a Laurence Olivier Nomination for Best Revival along the way. The author of ten novels, one of which won him the 2002 Heywood Hill Literary Prize, he has also produced multiple films for BBC Television. Mr. Frayn is married to the biographer and critic Claire Tomalin.



- (i) Source: <http://www.samuelfrench.com/p/2894/noises-off>
- (ii) Photo Source: Jillian Edelstein

PROFILE OF THE DIRECTOR

Jacob Tierney is an actor, director and screenwriter. Feature acting credits include: *Rainbow*, co-starring and directed by Bob Hoskins, *This is my Father* starring James Caan, and *The Life Before This* featuring Sarah Polley, Catherine O'Hara and Emily Hampshire. Jacob recently portrayed the title character in the CBC mini-series *St. Urbain's Horseman*. Jacob began his directorial career in 2002 with the comedic short film *DAD*, which he also wrote, produced and appeared in. His feature debut *Twist*, a modern take on Charles Dickens' "Oliver Twist" premiered at the Venice Film Festival and received Genie nominations for Jacob's screenplay, as well as for Best Actor and Supporting Actor, and won the Genie for Best Original Song. His second feature, the festival hit *The Trotsky*, starring Jay Baruchel, won the 2011 Genie Awards for Best Original Screenplay and Best Original Song, and picked up Best Writing and Directing awards at the 2010 Canadian Comedy Awards. Jacob also won the 2010 WGC Award for best feature film script. *Good Neighbours (Notre Dame de Grace)* is his third film, which premiered at the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival. His latest film, *Preggoland*, written by and starring Sonja Bennett, premiered at TIFF 2014. In the television world, Jacob shot the pilot of *Gavin's Wild West*, a half-hour comedy created by and starring Gavin Crawford for the CBC and followed up with perennial episodes of *Mr. D*, also for the CBC, and the pilot for *Leilah and Jenn* (E1 & CBC). He directed season one of *The Game* for YTV . Surprisingly, Jacob had his theatre directing debut only recently with the Tom Stoppard play, *Travesties*, opening to great reviews at the Segal Centre in Montreal in the spring of 2015.



(i) Photo Source: <http://www.garygoddardagency.com/tierney/>

CHARACTER PROFILES

NOISES OFF

TIMOTHY ALLGOOD - An overworked stage manager, carpenter and anything else that needs to be done for the touring production of *Nothing On*. He is chronically exhausted and sleep-deprived. He understudies the roles played by Selsdon and Freddy.

BROOKE ASHTON - Cast in the role of Vicki in *Nothing On*, Brooke is a young, inexperienced actress often in search of a missing contact lens. She is part of a love triangle with Lloyd and Poppy.

BELINDA BLAIR - A reliable, good-natured actress who is protective of Freddy. She plays Flavia Brent in *Nothing On*.

LLOYD DALLAS - The director of *Nothing On*. He is a temperamental, yet charismatic man, and part of the love triangle with Poppy and Brooke.

FREDERICK (FREDDY) FELLOWES - An insecure, overthinking actor gets a nosebleed at the first hint of violence and needs to know his motivation. He is double-cast in *Nothing On* as both Philip Brent and the Sheikh.

GARRY LEJEUNE - Cast in the role of Roger Tramplemain the estate agent, Garry often leaves thoughts dangling and doesn't finish his sentences. His romantic interest in Dotty drives him to repeatedly attack Freddy.

SELSDON MOWBRAY - An elderly overly dramatic actor with an inconvenient drinking problem.

POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR - As the assistant stage manager for *Nothing On*, Poppy is emotional and prone to outbursts. She is also Brooke's understudy, which further complicates the Lloyd-Poppy-Brooke love triangle.

DOTTY OTLEY - A late-middle-aged actress cast in the role of Mrs. Clackett. She is very forgetful, but mostly good-natured.

NOTHING ON

Noises Off is a play within a play, in this case a dreadful farce called *Nothing On*. Below are the characters you will see in *Nothing On*

MRS. CLACKETT (played by Dotty Otley) - The housekeeper for the Brent's home.

ROGER TRAMPLEMAIN (played by Garry Lejeune) - An estate agent looking to rent Flavia and Philip's house, on a date with Vicki.

VICKI (played by Brooke Ashton) - Works for the tax authorities and is on a date with Roger.

PHILIP AND FLAVIA BRENT (played by Frederick Fellowes and Belinda Blair) - Husband and wife owners of the country home; they live out of the country in order to avoid paying taxes. They are secretly visiting their home for their anniversary.

BURGLAR (played by Selsdon Mowbray) - Elderly man breaking into the Brent's house.

SHEIKH - A wealthy Arab man interested in renting the house.

(i) Source: <https://actorstheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/.../Noises-Off-Play-Guide-2013.pdf>

PLAY SYNOPSIS

ACT I

The play begins during the final dress rehearsal at the Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare* for the regional tour of the new British farce *Nothing On*. It is late at night and the play is supposed to open tomorrow. Tensions are running high as the director, Lloyd Dallas, struggles with the cast, who are tired and frustrated. The play itself is not very good, a formulaic farce involving tax evasion, a Sheikh, and various plates of sardines. Among the many problems being faced by the company; Leading Actress, Dotty Otley, appears to have forgotten all of her blocking. The alcoholic Selsdon Mowbray keeps disappearing, Frederick Fellowes' wife left him this morning, and Brooke Ashton keeps losing her contact lenses. To make matters worse, Lloyd is having an affair with Brooke and the inexperienced assistant stage manager, Poppy. As the rehearsal continues, more revelations and dilemmas come to light, leading to tears, arguments, sickness, and nosebleeds, before they finally reach the end of their Act I runthrough.

ACT II

Act II takes place one month later when *Nothing On* is open and running. The cast are about to perform a matinée at the Theatre Royal*. This time the action takes place backstage before and during the performance. The cracks that were beginning to show in Act I have grown larger and the relationships within the company have become more complicated and are rapidly deteriorating. Dotty and Garry have locked themselves in their respective dressing rooms after an argument. Lloyd sneaks backstage to see Brooke, which just makes things worse. When the performance starts, the backstage actions continue as a dumbshow with the actors struggling to deal with another disappearance by Selsdon, Garry's jealousy of Freddy, and Brooke's threats to walk out of the show. As props are misplaced, entrances are missed, and pranks are played, the performance descends into chaos and Act II ends with Poppy loudly revealing to Lloyd that she is pregnant with his baby.

ACT III

Nothing On is wrapping up its 10-week tour and about to perform at the Municipal Theatre*. Tim announces that the show will be slightly delayed, as we hear Dotty and Belinda screaming at each other backstage. When the show begins, Dotty is limping and distracted, getting lines and blocking completely wrong. Things go from bad to worse as the action continues, with the actors changing the play considerably, making mistakes, trying to cover them up, and making things worse. With Lloyd's guidance, the cast manages to stumble towards a vaguely happy ending.

*The Segal Centre has adapted the play's setting; *Noises Off*'s fictional play *Nothing On* now takes places in fictional Canadian locations.

(i) Source: www.pcpa.org/studyguide/noisesoff.html

VOCABULARY & TERMS

Noises Off is a play-within-a-play that invites the audience to see what is usually unseen to those not involved in the creation process. There are a number of theatrical terms and jobs that are mentioned in the production that non-theatre people may be unfamiliar with. Below are some of these terms to help you better understand the play and the world of the theatre.

PRODUCER	The producer oversees the whole of the production process while supporting the creative. They are in charge of the production budget and finance.
WRITER	The writer is responsible for writing the play.
DIRECTOR	The director is responsible for the overall vision of the production and by collaborating with the cast and creative team, they bring their vision to life.
DESIGNERS	The designers are responsible for the way a production looks. Designers include scenic, costumes, lighting, and sound.
STAGE MANAGER	The stage manager is responsible for the smooth running of the show once rehearsals have finished. During the rehearsal process they are in charge of running rehearsals, writing down blocking, maintaining prop lists and making sure the actors know their lines.
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	The assistant stage manager supports the stage manager throughout the rehearsal and performance period. They are responsible for being “on book” and making sure that all the cues (lights, sound, actor entrances and lines) are met.
AUDITORIUM	The auditorium is the space which contains both the stage and audience seating.
DOWNSTAGE (DS)	The area on stage closest to the audience.
UPSTAGE (US)	The area on stage furthest away from the audience.
STAGE LEFT (SL)	The area on stage to an actor’s left, or to the audience’s right.
STAGE RIGHT (SR)	The area on stage to an actor’s right, or to the audience’s left.
CENTRE STAGE (CS)	The area on stage in the centre.
DRESSING ROOMS	Where the actors prepare to go on stage, with facilities for them to get changed and apply makeup.
GREEN ROOM	The area for the cast and crew to relax before and during a performance. It can typically be painted green, but not always.
WINGS	The areas to either side of the stage, where the actors make their entrances and exits.
BEGINNERS	The actors who appear onstage in the first scene of a play.

VOCABULARY & TERMS (CONT'D)

BLOCKING	All of the moves that an actor makes on stage, including entrances, exits, sitting down, standing up and gestures.
CALLS	Announcements made to the actors or audience by the stage manager, or assistant stage manager, over the PA system, informing them when the performance is about to begin.
CORPSING	A phrase used to describe actors who lose focus or laugh on stage.
CURTAIN	Refers to the physical curtain that traditionally is raised and lowered at the beginning and end of the show.
DIGS	An actor's digs are their temporary lodgings during a tour.
DRESS REHEARSAL	The dress rehearsal or 'dress' is the final run through of a production before it is performed for the general public. Usually these are run without stopping, under performance conditions, with full costume, lights and makeup.
(LX)	Elecs – short for "electricals" and is used by the production team to refer to the lighting cues of a show.
EXEUNT	A stage direction given when more than one character has to leave stage.
MATINEE	A performance that takes place during the day rather than in the evening.
NOISES OFF	Term referring to sound, specifically heard offstage or backstage during a performance.
PROPS	or Properties are items used by actors during a performance. Examples include boxes, bags, and plates of sardines.
TECHNICAL REHEARSAL	or Tech is the rehearsal in which the elements of lighting, sound, costumes, and sets are added into the rehearsal process before opening for an audience. Typically they are long rehearsals with frequent stopping and starting.

(i) Source: www.pcpa.org/studyguide/noisesoff.html

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FARCE

Noises Off is the prime example of farce cited in many modern day discussions of the genre. Frayn's play perfectly matches the following definition: "a comic genre that depends on an elaborately contrived, usually improbable plot, broadly drawn stock characters, and physical humour. Most farces are amoral and exist to entertain." The early Greeks and Romans were the first in recorded history to use farcical techniques, and the subject matter and techniques they developed have remained constant to the present day. Early examples of farce in Aristophanes, Plautus, and Terence still amuse us in modern updates like *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. The term "farce" was first used in the Middle Ages to designate interpolations made in the church litany by the clergy. Later it came to mean comic scenes inserted into church plays.

Farce emerged full blown in 15th century France with such plays as the anonymous Pierre Patelin (c.1470). In England two of the earliest and best known farces are *Ralph Roister Doister* (1566) and Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* (c.1593). Farcical elements like broad, ribald humour, physical buffoonery, and absurd situations can also be found in plays that are not called farces. Molière's comedies often include farcical scenes, but are defined as comedy because of the veracity of their characters. During the 19th and early 20th century, farces were often termed "bedroom farces", thanks to the French.

French playwright Feydeau exemplifies this genre. His plays use suggestive dialogue, erring husbands and wives, silly servants, and mistaken identity. Americans joined the parade with the films of Charlie Chaplin, the Keystone Kops, and the Marx Brothers and plays like *You Can't Take It with You* by Kaufman and Hart. Farce probably developed before comedy. It is simple and direct without literary pretensions. Plots are often complicated and result in the confusion of the characters for our amusement. It is said that the expression "there is nothing new under the sun" applies particularly well to farce. The term "stock" in the theatre refers to successful things that are kept and reused as a kind of recycling. Stock plots involve misunderstandings, confusing twins, disguises, hiding, and

chases. Stock characters are cartoonish exaggerations of real people. Sitcom characters personify these techniques. There is an abundance of physical humour which runs the gamut from such sight gags as spilling a drink, to slips and falls, and finally to physical assault. In farce the audience is asked to accept the convention that no real harm results from such mock violence. In classical farces a double slatted paddle that made an exaggeratedly loud noise was often used to punish miscreants. The term slapstick humor is still with us, but actual slapsticks appear only in period farces.

A comparison of farce and comedy often helps clarify both types of humour. In comedy, truth is central; in farce, it is incidental. Comedy is rooted in reality; farce throws logic and probability out the window. Comedy draws characters from life; farce cartoons its characters. Farce relies on physical rather than intellectual humour, and all elements (especially plot and character) are grossly exaggerated for comic effect. In comedy, humour is used in the service of truth, in farce, humour is used for its own sake. The purpose of farce is to create big laughs as often as possible without any claim to logic or any progression towards meaning or message. Farce provides a wonderful outlet for the stress of modern life. We spend our lives being repressed by our culture restricted in what we may do, especially in expressing our own anger, frustration, and contempt for which there are stiff penalties. Farce permits us to act out those expressions vicariously, without suffering consequences. Subjects for farce include: any form of pretentiousness, sex, morals, religion, sanctity of death, race or ethnic background, anything that is taken seriously by those who pretend to order the world. The well-kept secret of farce is that an audience can laugh at people suffering in ludicrous situations while they avoid the consequences suffered by the characters.

(i) Source: www.pcpa.org/studyguide/noisesoff.html

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Noises Off* is a farce comedy. Define farce and what theatrical conventions are used to elevate the farce.
2. *Noises Off* employs a play-within-a-play. How do the actors show that they are playing a character and when they are playing the actor? Which actors only play one character? What vocal and physical changes do the actors make to show which character they are playing?
3. What props or costume pieces serve the humour of the production?
4. After seeing the production, what are the similarities and differences in each act?
5. Why is timing so important in comedy? Where do we see the importance of comedic timing in the production? What are some problems that may arise if the timing of the humour is off?
6. The characters in the play have very complicated relationships. Make a list of all of the characters, the roles they play, and the relationships that they have with the other characters.

7. The set is a major design element for *Noises Off* because we see both the onstage and backstage sides of *Nothing On*. What scenic elements are required to tell this story? How would you show the onstage and backstage sides of the set?
8. The humour in *Noises Off* uses the rule of three, where you set up an expectation with the first two examples and then break the pattern with the last example. The structure of the play is even divided into three acts. Can you identify moments within the play where an expectation was set up and then broken? Did you find those moments amusing? Why or why not?
9. Physical comedy is a key ingredient in the humour of the show. What were some physical moments in the show that were humorous to you?
10. When people hear the word "choreography" they immediately relate it to dance, however, this production has a great deal of choreography without there being any dance numbers. What would another description of choreography for this specific production be?
11. The play is about putting on a play and all the challenges that arise with that, including the difficulties that can arise from live performance. What are some of the things that went wrong in *Nothing On*? What was your favourite mistake that was made?

(i) www.pcpa.org/studyguide/noisesoff.html

(ii) <https://actorstheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/.../Noises-Off-Play-Guide-2013.pdf>

ABOUT THE SEGAL CENTRE FOR PERFORMING ARTS

The Segal Centre for Performing Arts is a not-for-profit theatre company dedicated to nurturing, producing and presenting world-class English-language theatre and to showcasing the best professional artists from Montreal and beyond.

A part of the community since 1967, the organization was reborn in 2007 as the Segal Centre and has since expanded to become a nationally recognized venue for the performing arts with a focus on creation, innovation, diversity and cross-cultural collaborations.

Driven by a belief in the power of the arts to strengthen and connect communities, the Segal's programming emphasizes original interpretations of popular classic and contemporary works, new Canadian musicals and engaging productions with universal appeal.