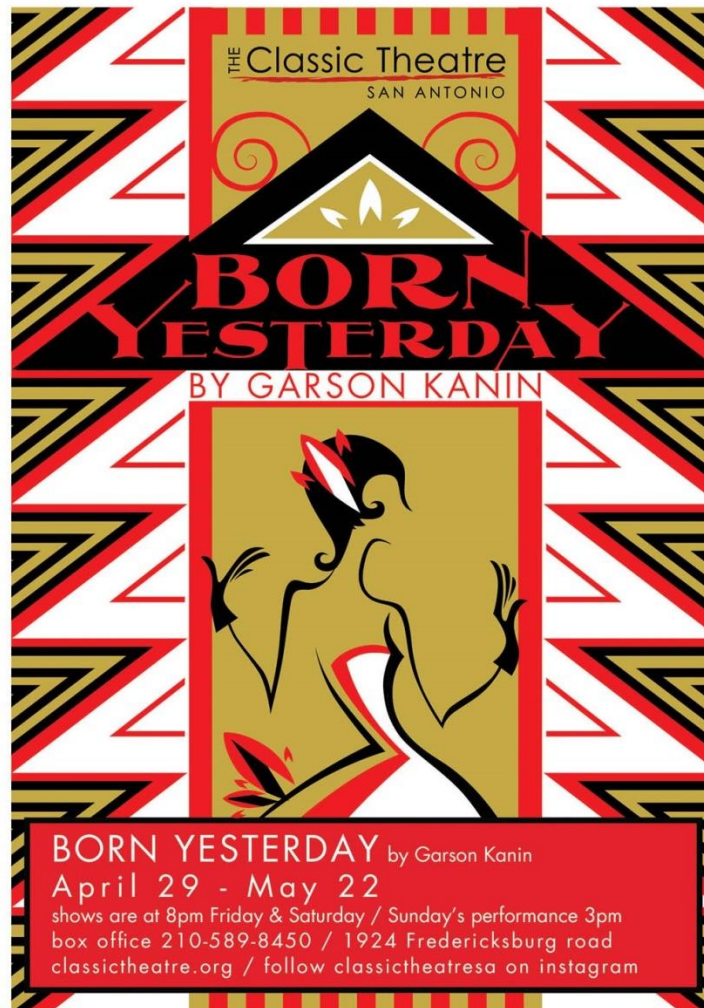


THE Classic Theatre

SAN ANTONIO

Presents

Born Yesterday



This Study Guide was written by Kacey Roye, with selected excerpts from public domain.

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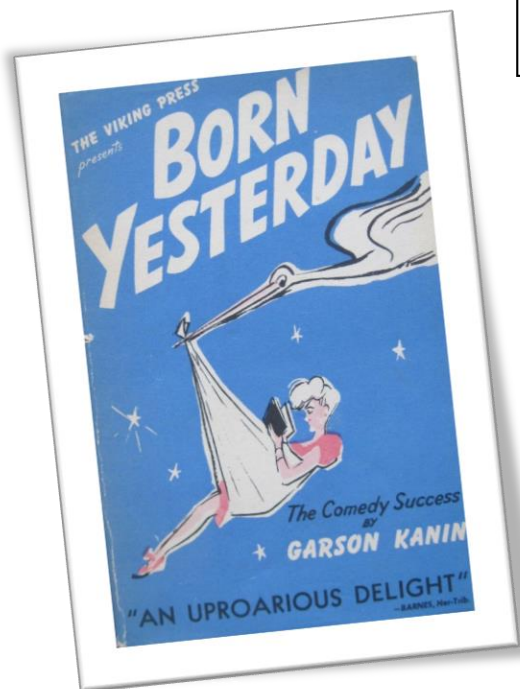
Email Director of Education Kacey Roye for more information:
Kacey@classictheatre.org



AIM High interns,
Rebekka Broyles &
Luis Flores in
rehearsal and
performance in **The
Seagull**, 2016



Synopsis



From the 1950 film starring Harry Brock (Broderick Crawford) Billie Dawn (Judy Holliday)



Harry Brock is an American Businessman, whose drive for materialism has gone into overdrive. In order to create an international junk-dealing empire, he comes to Washington D.C. to obtain the assistance of Senator Norval Hedges in gaining access to a multitude of WWII wreckage. He will go about this through the efforts of his Lawyer, Ed Devery, who has laid the groundwork by finding Hedges and softening him up with a little advance.

Harry brings his girlfriend and business partner (on paper), Billie Dawn, with him to Washington D.C. to act as his hostess. Unfortunately for Harry, it soon becomes extremely apparent that her rough-around-the-edge nature could use a bit of softening. Since capable and literate journalist, **Paul Verrall, is determined to watch Harry's every move** as it is, Brock propositions Verrall to educate Billie, hoping to distract him enough to carry out his plan without outside interference. Billie is naturally resistant to the idea that she needs improvement, but finds Verrall so accommodating, that she swallows her pride and agrees to cooperate under his tutelage, only to discover that knowledge is power. Gaining this new-found knowledge, **Billie becomes painfully aware of Brock's crooked scheming, thus surrounding Brock with "good-doers."** This becomes apparent when Devery unearths sufficient evidence to reveal his disgust at Harry's plan.

Garson Kanin



Photo by Eva Rubinstein, 1974

Playwright Garson Kanin was a 20th Century Renaissance Man: a musician, burlesque comedian, actor, stage and film director, writer, and raconteur. He wrote plays, essays, screenplays, short stories, novels, memoirs, songs, and a libretto; and directed plays, musicals, documentaries and films.

Born in 1912 in Rochester, New York, the young Kanin fell in love with show business when his father, a real estate developer, acquired a movie theater. Kanin used this opportunity to study the silent films – sometimes frame by frame, alone in the projection booth. He dropped out of high school during the Depression to work at Macy's as a stock clerk, and soon formed his own band, Gar Kay and the Red Peppers, featuring himself on clarinet.

In 1936, at the age of 24, Garson Kanin directed his first Broadway play, **Hitch Your Wagon**. Word of his talent spread quickly and that same year he was recruited to become a production assistant with Samuel Goldwyn in Hollywood. After a year's internship, he moved to RKO Studios and directed his first feature film, 1938's **A Man to Remember**, written by Dalton Trumbo. At the time, Kanin was the youngest director in Hollywood. He directed seven more films at RKO, including **Bachelor Mother**, **My Favorite Wife**, and a Ginger Rogers comedy called **Tom, Dick, and Harry**.

He married stage and film actress Ruth Gordon in December, 1942. Months later, the military enlisted Kanin in the Office of Strategic Services and sent him to the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force in London. Kanin, with Carol Reed, co-directed General Dwight D. Eisenhower's official record of the Allied Invasion, a documentary titled **The True Glory**. The documentary was named Best Film of 1945 by the National Board of Review and won the Academy Award for Best Documentary that year. Top- secret while in production, it covered the period from the preparations for D-Day to the liberation of Paris. At night, while Nazi bombs blitzed London, Kanin wrote a draft of **Born Yesterday**, still his most widely performed play. **Born Yesterday** opened on Broadway at the Lyceum Theater on February 4, 1946. Kanin directed the play,

which catapulted the then-unknown Judy Holliday to stardom. The hit comedy ran for four years (1,649 performances), still holding the record for longest-running play at that theater.

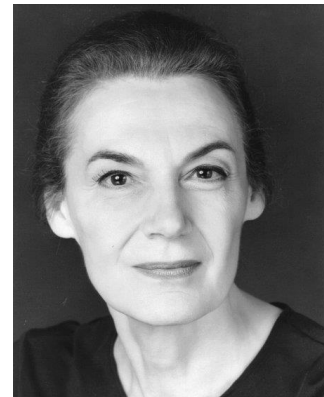
Kanin was exceptionally busy between 1949 and 1950. During those two years he wrote and directed three Broadway plays, **The Smile of the World**, **The Rat Race**, and **The Live Wire**; wrote the libretto for and directed *Fledermaus* at the Metropolitan Opera; and wrote the screenplay for **Born Yesterday** (although he never received credit for it).

Kanin's commitment to theater continued throughout the 1960's. On Broadway, he directed the musical **Do Re Mi**, with music and lyrics by Jule Styne, Betty Comden and Adolph Green. He also directed Robert Redford in Norman Krasna's **Sunday in New York** and Henry Fonda in **A Gift of Time**. In 1964 he directed the young Barbra Streisand in her first starring role on the stage as Fanny Brice in **Funny Girl**. In 1985 he was inducted into The Theater Hall of Fame. That same year, his wife and partner of more than forty years, Ruth Gordon, died in Martha's Vineyard.

During his last decade Kanin reaped the rewards of a successful artistic career. For many years he served on the Dramatists Guild Council, was Vice-president of The Players Club, and president of The Authors League of America. Numerous organizations honored his life and career: he received the William Inge Lifetime Achievement Award (1987); the Writers Guild of America's Valentine Davies Award (1989); The Players' Edwin Booth Lifetime Achievement Award (1996); and the Mr. Abbott Award from the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers (1997). In 1990 Kanin married the actress Marian Seldes. He died in 1999 in New York City.

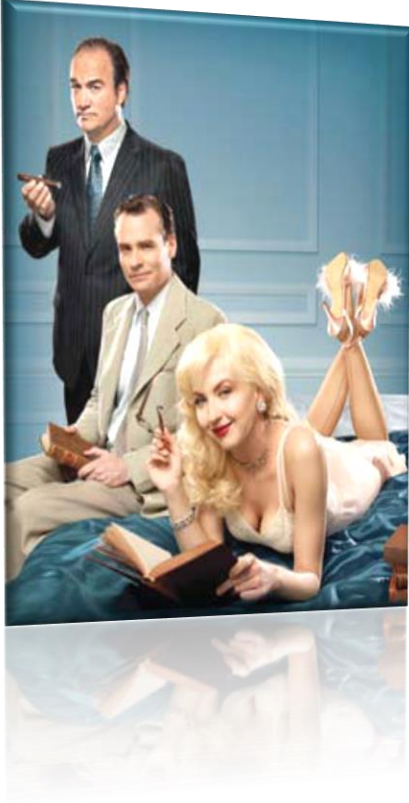


Ruth Gordon photo 1969



Marian Seldes photo 2001

Facts About *Born Yesterday*



Jim Belushi, Robert Sean Leonard and Nina Arianda in Broadway's 2011 production of *Born Yesterday*.

- Premiering on Broadway in 1946, **Born Yesterday** was an immediate success, running for 1,649 **performances over four years at Broadway's Lyceum Theatre**, as well as being adapted into an Academy-award winning film several years later. The play cemented Kanin's place in American theater history, and has been widely performed across the country ever since, including a 2011 Broadway revival featuring Jim Belushi and earning a Tony Award nomination for Nina Arianda. While initially controversial for its scathing and unapologetic portrayal of corruption in Washington, D.C., **Born Yesterday** won over audiences with a combination of charming wit and memorable characters – in particular, the ditzzy yet loveable Billie Dawn.
- Although it was a huge success, *Born Yesterday* stood out among other works of its time for the way it contrasted typical attitudes toward American politics. After the Allied victory in 1945, the American public was infused with new feelings of optimism and patriotism. Having overcome both the Great Depression and World War II, Americans were more trusting of their government than ever before, and were willing to ignore the shady dealings that had become typical in the offices of politicians. **Kanin's play, on the other hand, exposed these corrupt practices**, satirizing both lobbyists and the politicians who bent to their will. While audiences **enjoyed laughing at Kanin's clever take on Washington, others were not so** amused. Kanin later became one of many artists investigated by Congress under **suspicion of "un-American"** activities during the Red Scare of the 1950s.
- Kanin had first planned to turn his experiences from producing propaganda and war films, into a screenplay for **Born Yesterday**, but soon realized that no studio would want to produce such an inflammatory film; he decided that his story would serve its purpose better on the stage.

Analysis of Major Themes

Gender Roles

Kanin uses dictatorship inside modern American culture and through his character Harry Brock, self-made millionaire and scrap-metal war profiteer from Plainfield, New Jersey.

Brock is determined to do business where he wants, how he wants, and as big as he wants. He has come to Washington D.C. to secure legislation that will help his million-dollar junk business and has bought himself a senator, Norvall Hedges, to help ensure this.

Typical of the male tendency to choose beauty and then become dissatisfied with it, when Senator and Mrs. Hedges meet Billie, Harry begins to worry: **“Every time she opened her mouth tonight, something wrong came out.”** Devery, who is paid to give unwanted advice, suggests he send her home, but Brock has a better idea. He will hire Paul Verrall, a reporter with The New Republic, to show her the ropes and hopefully smarten her up a little.

At first, Verrall sees Brock’s proposition only as a way to discover more about him and his business dealings—already alert to the fact that they were not entirely on the level—and to find out exactly what Harry is doing in Washington. Verrall needs names, facts, and specific misdeeds before he can “get it to the people.” However, he knows that “a world full of ignorant people is dangerous”; and, possessing an obvious attraction to the ex-chorus girl, he desires to empower Billie with information which could free her from those who would degrade her through the misuse of their power. She is “breathtakingly beautiful,” but she does not have to stay “breathtakingly stupid.”

Requiring only a jump-start from Verrall, Billie begins to read and to exercise her mind; she visits the National Gallery. She recalls her roots--the worthy care of a concerned father who wanted her to make her way through life reputably and usefully.

It has been said that **Born Yesterday** is a Pygmalion tale in the fact that **Billie’s** intellectual transformation can be compared to the transformation of Eliza Doolittle. **Eliza, in George Bernard Shaw’s famous play, was molded into something beautiful,** something statuesque, but her sculptor was startled when from the statue, a soul emerged. And while, with **Born Yesterday**, we do start to see the woman inside emerge from somewhere blank and uninteresting, what occurs inside of Billie could be more appropriately defined as an awakening rather than a transformation--an awakening to things previously known--an empowerment.

Obvious parallels can be drawn between Billie’s childhood and the American democratic structure and between the non-nurturing environment of stifling dominance and vicarious living which she experienced with Harry Brock and the human condition found under a despotic dictator.

If Harry Brock is a metaphor for dictatorship, Billie Dawn can either be an allegory representing an unconscious America strangely inviting to people in power.

Political Journalism and Activism

While the intrepid journalist Paul Verrall is a fictional personality, his exploits parallel those of events and changing trends in journalistic practices from the early 20th century. Investigative journalism is a common **occurrence in today's world, but was still** a fairly recent and somewhat controversial invention in the 1940s.

As industrial technology was booming in the late 19th century, society was becoming increasingly industrialized. Skilled craftsmen were being replaced by assembly lines and cheap manual labor, and local shops were supplanted by large corporations that could turn out food products, clothing, and other items at a much faster rate. Cities became increasingly crowded, profits of big businesses grew, **and conditions for America's** working class worsened. Laborers lived in squalid tenements and even their children were forced to work 12-hour days in dangerous conditions. Lacking regulation and oversight, companies had free reign over the way they conducted business, mistreating their workers and cutting costs however they could – often to the benefit of the business owners and government officials alike.

Journalists investigated and exposed such poor working conditions and government corruptions by taking advantage of new communications technology, which diminished the cost of printing and distributing newspapers to more people than ever before.

Class Struggle

Harry Brock is a corrupt business tycoon who's made a fortune by ruthlessly stomping out the competition. **He's** an enemy of the working man — his mistress Billie Dawn casually lets it slip that Harry actually arranged the murder of a labor agitator who was trying to organize a union. Harry gets ahead by bribing public officials to eliminate competition, **yet in his play, Garson Kanin has Harry Brock claim that he's** a champion of **“free enterprise.”** Harry was actually just the opposite; monopolization and thuggery are enemies of free-market capitalism. The radical left had a stereotype to promote the capitalist as corrupt and brutish **and that's what Kanin made Harry Brock. Harry might** as well have been one of the cartoon capitalists in **The Daily Worker.**

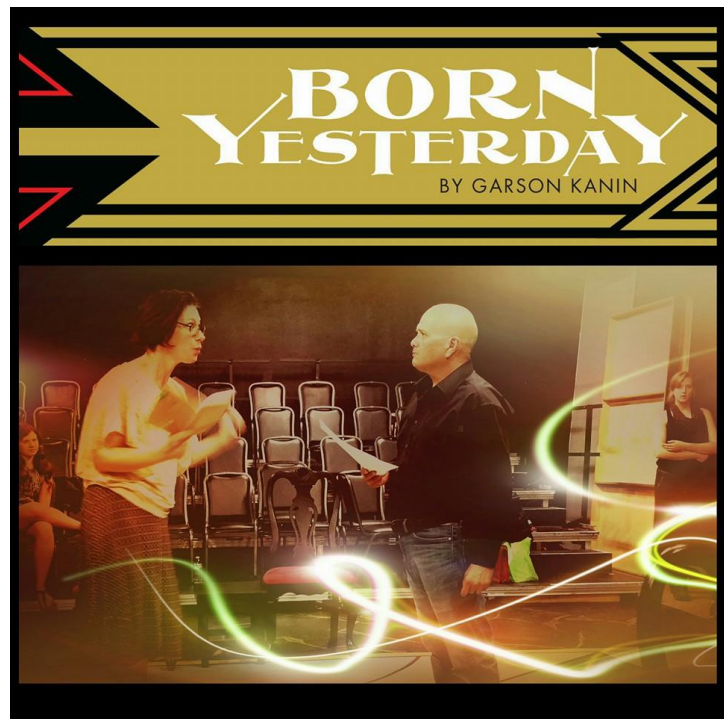
Cast of Characters

Harry Brock	Greg Hinojosa
Paul Verrall	Nick Lawson*
Billie Dawn	Hayley Burnside
Ed Devery	Patrick Donnelly
S. Norval Hedges	Chuck Wigginton
Mrs. Hedges	Alexandra Montgomery
Eddie Brock	Gabriel Sanchez
Bellhop	Alex Pesina
Bellhop	Bekka Broyles**
Helen/Manicurist	Catie Carlisle
Asst. Manager	Ross Avant

***Member of Actor's Equity Association**

**Aim High intern

Hayley Burnside (Billie Dawn) and Greg Hinojosa (Harry Brock) rehearse a scene from The Classic Theatre's 2016 production of *Born Yesterday*



Production Staff:
The Classic Theatre of San Antonio

Director	Matthew Byron Cassi
Stage Manager	Amy Dullnig
Production Liason	Kelly Roush
Tech Director	Allan Ross
Scenic Designer	Karen Arredondo-Starr
Light Designer	Steven Starr
Costume Designer	Diane Malone
Sound Designer	Rick Malone
Prop Master	Bekka Broyles
Box Office	Florence Bunten
Photographer	Slggi Ragnar

Theatre Staff: The Classic Theatre of San Antonio

Executive Director.....Kelly Roush
 Co-Artistic Directors.....Diane Malone, Allan S. Ross
 Director of Education.....Kacey Roye
 Bookkeeper.....Robbye Floyd
 Box Office Manager.....Florence Bunten
 House Manager.....Rita Duggan
 Publicity.....Ariana Trevino

Lesson Ideas /Activities

BEFORE THE SHOW:

- *Born Yesterday* addresses themes that students will find familiar; especially the topic of female empowerment. This topic, amongst others, deserves careful discussion. As a pre-viewing activity, list the play's themes on the board, including: gender roles, political journalism & activism, and class struggle.
- Brainstorm with students: how and where do these themes present themselves in our lives? Have students read or seen other works (literature, films, television) that touch on any of the themes of *Born Yesterday*? Assign students to select one theme and track its development as they watch the play, taking note of particular scenes that present the theme and characters who wrestle with that issue.

DIVING DEEPER:

Knowledge is power! Brock's primary goal in having Paul tutor Billie is to elevate her social skills to the level of a senator's wife, giving her the qualities necessary to entertain guests and support Brock's business. However, the type of education Billie ultimately receives challenges the boundaries of social expectations.

Billie's first interaction with Paul indicates not only her interest in becoming educated, but also her awareness that she is capable of acquiring whatever she wants through her feminine allures. How does Billie's education fall into the same category as her free sexuality?

PERFORMANCE:

The moral superiority of monogamous marriage is exemplified when Billie agrees to marry Paul in Act Three. The play's insistence that Billie ultimately marry demonstrates an overall lingering conservatism regarding women's social roles. The play ends instead with Paul and Billie's impending marriage.

Write and perform a scene that reveals what happens to Billie, Paul and Harry if Billie were to deny Paul's proposal, ultimately dismissing her traditional gender role.

Born Yesterday would be a progressive play pushing the bounds of hegemonic discourse if Billie were to remain single, move away from Brock, and take control of Brock's business.

Write and perform this "deleted scene" from Kanin's play.

Theatre Etiquette

Going to a play is a special experience, one that you will remember for a long time. Everyone in the audience has been looking forward to seeing the performance. A production team puts in many long hours and a lot of hard work to mount a performance for an audience. If you keep in

mind common courtesy for the performers as well as your fellow audience members, everyone's theatre experience will be optimized. What follows are a few reminders for attending the theatre.

1. Plan to arrive thirty minutes before the performance begins.
2. Gum, food, drinks, or candy, are never allowed in the theatre.
3. Please go to the bathroom before seating for performance or at intermission.
4. TURN OFF ALL cell phones, or anything else that can disturb the production, actors and the audience members during the performance. It is very impolite to have your phone go off during the show.
5. Lights will dim just before a performance and then go dark. Show your knowledge by sitting quietly and calmly.
6. Do not talk or whisper during the performance. The actors on stage can hear you, which is why you can hear them so well. Laughter is of course permissible at appropriate times.
7. Keep body movements to a minimum. You can't get up and move around during the performance.
8. No taking of pictures or video recording is allowed.
9. Don't leave your seat until the cast has taken their curtain call at the end.
10. Show your appreciation by clapping. The actors love to hear applause. This shows how much you enjoyed the performance!