Buffalo Theatre Ensemble Presents:



Jan 29 – Mar 1 | Thur - Sat 7:30p, Sun 3p

Playhouse Theatre
$43 Senior | $45 Adult**

Crime doesn't pay, but it sure is funny

By Paul Slade Smith

Directed by Kurt Naebig

Pre-show Discussion Jan 29 at 6:45p-7:15p, MAC Room 117 (Fishbowl)

Laugh out loud funny from start to finish! A pair of inept police officers set up a sting operation to trap an embezzling mayor meeting his female accountant…in a pair of matching hotel rooms, what could go wrong? Confusion fills the stage with doors slamming, clothes flying, and bagpipes bleating, all of which adds up to an over-the-top tale of mix-ups… who took the money, who hired a hitman and why does the accountant keep taking her clothes off?!?

Buffalo Theatre Ensemble sincerely thanks the COD Library for research support and for classes studying the script and production.

Time, Place and Characters

Time: Sometime between the 1990's and now.
Place: Two adjoining motel rooms in a big town/small city somewhere in America.

Cast of Characters

ERIC SHERIDAN - A police officer. A bookish, even-keeled guy who finds himself completely out of his element when called upon to express his feelings for a woman, lie to his boss, disguise himself as someone else, and stand up to an armed mobster – while not wearing any pants.

BILLIE DWYER - A police officer, Eric's partner. Excitable and entirely unthreatening, she seemingly lacks every skill necessary for police work, but is as eager to succeed as she seems destined to fail.

KAREN BROWN - An accountant, who has always taken pride in her accountant-like, professional demeanour – until this morning, when she finds herself filled with a sexual hunger, and unable to keep things under control.

MAYOR MEEKLY - An Innocent, with a capital I. An affable, gentle fellow. Not too quick on the pick-up, but a sweet, sweet soul.

AGENT FRANK - The head of Security at Town Hall, and, frankly, the wrong man for the job. Though he presents the confident, gruff exterior of a secret service agent (or film noir detective, even), he is frequently (and, at moments of crisis, invariably) a man frightened by his own shadow.

TODD - Speaks with a pronounced Scottish accent. A professional hit man. Cool, quiet, and perceptive when at his best, but more frequently an angry Scotsman – and the angrier he becomes, the thicker his accent gets, until he is entirely undecipherable.

MARY MEEKLY - The Mayor's wife. Small in stature and unfailingly sweet, she seems, in every way, the perfect match for her husband.

Director's Note:

Today, the world is moving faster, attitudes are getting sharper, and politics is getting meaner. We know this. We don't want it. And yet… algorithms, corporations, and AI have figured out how to keep dragging us back in.

So we all need a break. A breather. A respite. *A laugh.* Maybe even a place to go… to sit next to strangers and discover we're all laughing at the same ridiculous thing. Together.

Where we're all there for one reason: to enjoy a comedy. Together.

And to glance across the aisle and see somebody laughing with us (or snorting… no judgment).

Unnecessary Farce is exactly that kind of night out. A tried-and-true comedy that runs like a finely crafted timepiece. It's no accident the play has been produced more than 350 times worldwide.

So when the opportunity to direct what can only be described as "comedy gold" came my way, my response was immediate and enthusiastic: "Heck yeah!"

Now, sit back, relax, and enjoy the chaos.

- Kurt Naebig

Playwright



Paul Slade Smith is a writer and actor based in Brooklyn, N.Y. He is thrilled to return (at least on the page) to Buffalo Theatre Ensemble, where he appeared in the dual roles of Victor-Emanuel Chandebise and Poche both in the 1993 world premiere and the 1996 revival of “Hotel D’amour,” a musical based on Georges Feydeau’s “A Flea in Her Ear.”

Paul’s three plays have collectively had nearly 550 productions. His play, UNNECESSARY FARCE, has been produced in Australia, Austria, Canada, Great Britain, Iceland, Japan, Singapore and Switzerland – and translated into French, German, Swiss German and Icelandic for a total of more than 350 productions. As an actor, Paul was most recently seen as Reverend Crisparkle in Goodspeed’s hugely entertaining production of THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD. In New York, he has appeared in the original Broadway casts of FINDING NEVERLAND, CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY, and the

Lincoln Center revival of MY FAIR LADY. Following its Broadway run, Paul starred as Willy Wonka in the Australian premiere of CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY. His TV credits include “The Blacklist,” “The Other Two” and “The Gilded Age.” Paul is the award-winning author of three plays: UNNECESSARY FARCE, THE OUTSIDER and his latest, THEATRE PEOPLE, OR THE ANGEL NEXT DOOR.

Interview with the playwright

Q: Do you often go to see productions of your work? What’s that like?

A: I love being a part of productions, as I have been, and occasionally traveling to see them (if there’s a personal connection for me to the production), but I also love knowing the play is out there on its own, speaking for itself. It’s a joy to hear from theatre artists who reach out to me because they’re having a blast with it and/or are really moved by its message. I love that the script is a little, unassuming book wending its way into people’s lives.

Q: You are an accomplished actor as well as a playwright, having appeared on Broadway and many regional theatres including a recent production of DROOD at the Goodspeed. How does being an actor impact your work as a writer?

A: In countless ways, I suspect. I’ve probably learned dialogue from feeling its rhythm on stage. And suspense, and surprise, and building a joke, and extending a joke. I’ve learned the value of giving each character a first entrance that defines the character. And I definitely always set out to write no “lesser” roles. Some smaller, some larger, but I want every role to be a joy to play. I want every actor cast in my plays to say “oh this is going to be fun”.
https://www.westportplayhouse.org/the-outsiders-paul-slade-smith/

FARCE

Unnecessary Farce **falls into the category of farce, which the Encyclopaedia Britannica describes as "a comic dramatic piece that uses highly improbable situations, stereotyped characterizations, extravagant exaggerations and violent horseplay." Farces have been written by every generation going back to the Greeks and Romans, when playwrights like Aristophanes and Plautus would use stock characters and physical comedic devices to entertain the crowds of their day. Italian performers turned these elements into their own genre called Commedia dell' Arte. This was a street performance where a troupe of actors would tour around Italy improvising comedic situations with standardized movements. The comedy was often very physical and acrobatic, which has become one of the hallmarks of today's comedic farce.**

France became the center of farcical performance in the 15th Century and for hundreds of years produced many of the most influential farces out there. Some of the most important playwrights who contributed to French farce include Moliere, Marivaux, Goldoni, Camoletti and Feydeau. Over the past century, farce has become a regular element in television, film and on stage. The British have created some of the most memorable farces that use witty language along with physicality to great effect. One of the recent developments in the style is the use of slamming doors, which has been used to hilarious effect in many farces, including the hit plays Noises Off and Communicating Doors. We see elements of farce in many of today's most beloved comedic plays, musicals, tv shows and movies. Some examples over the past few decades include *One Man, Two Guvnors*, *Home Alone*, *The Hangover*, *Arrested Development*, *Freaky Friday*, and *Looney Tunes* cartoons.

https://papermill.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2018-THE-OUTSIDER-1.pdf

Characteristics Inherent to Farce

1. The Art of Exaggeration and Physical Comedy:

Central to farce is the art of exaggeration and physicality. Characters find themselves in absurd situations, and the humor derives from their over-the-top reactions and responses to these predicaments.

2. Mistaken Identities and Comic Confusion:

A hallmark of farce is the use of mistaken identities and misunderstandings as central plot devices. Characters frequently assume false roles, leading to a cascade of comedic errors and confusion.

3. Rapid Pacing and Quirky Dialogue:

Farce is known for its breakneck pacing. Quick, witty dialogue and rapid-fire exchanges contribute to the genre's frenetic energy, keeping audiences engaged and amused.

4. Slapstick Flourishes:

Physical comedy takes center stage in farce, featuring slapstick elements like pratfalls, sight gags, and comedic violence. These moments of exaggerated physicality add to the overall hilarity.

Notable Instances of Farce in American Drama

1. *You Can't Take It With You* by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman:

This Pulitzer Prize-winning play unfolds in the eccentric Sycamore household, embodying farcical elements through mistaken identities and chaotic situations. The clash between the unconventional Sycamores and the more traditional Kirbys results in uproarious comedy.

2. *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn:

A meta-farce, *Noises Off* offers a behind-the-scenes look at a group of actors attempting to stage a farcical play. The intricately staged physical comedy and layers of mistaken identities create a hilarious theatrical experience.

3. *Lend Me a Tenor* by Ken Ludwig:

Set in the world of opera, this farce involves mistaken identities and the chaos that ensues when a renowned tenor goes missing. The play unfolds with rapid pacing, witty dialogue, and a cascade of comedic situations.

4. *The Odd Couple* by Neil Simon:

Primarily known as a classic comedy, *The Odd Couple* incorporates farcical elements, particularly in its escalating situations and quirky characters. The interactions between the mismatched roommates lead to comedic misunderstandings and uproarious moments.

Evolution of Farce in Modern American Theatre

1. Farce in Television and Film:

The influence of farce extends beyond the stage to television and film. Classic sitcoms like *I Love Lucy* embraced farcical elements with zany situations and comedic misunderstandings. In film, directors such as the Marx Brothers and Mel Brooks brought farce to the big screen with iconic works like *Duck Soup* and *Blazing Saddles*.

2. Farce in Contemporary Theatre:

Contemporary American playwrights continue to explore and reinvent farce. Christopher Durang's *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* infuses Chekhovian themes with farcical elements, creating a delightful blend of comedy and introspection. What is a Farce in american drama

https://literopedia.com/what-is-a-farce-in-american-drama#Evolution_of_Farce_in_Modern_American_Theatre

CONTROLLED CHAOS: INSIDE *UNNECESSARY FARCE*

What makes *Unnecessary Farce* such a thrilling theatrical experience is that nothing about it is accidental. While the play may appear wildly unpredictable, every moment of chaos is the result of careful planning, precise execution, and deep collaboration. This is comedy built like a machine - one that only works when every piece moves exactly as it should.

Farce demands an extraordinary level of control. Actors must navigate rapid entrances and exits, split-second timing, and complex physical choreography, all while maintaining absolute sincerity. Each character believes wholeheartedly in their objective, even as circumstances spiral beyond reason. That tension - between earnest intention and escalating disorder is where the comedy lives.

In *Unnecessary Farce*, the play's structure functions almost like a puzzle unfolding in real time. Information is revealed selectively, secrets are hidden in plain sight, and misunderstandings compound with breathtaking speed. The audience is often invited to see the whole picture while the characters remain frustratingly - and hilariously - one step behind. That shared anticipation creates laughter not just from surprise, but from recognition and inevitability.

Design plays an equally vital role in orchestrating the chaos. Scenic elements, sightlines, sound cues, and pacing must work in harmony with the performers. Doors must open when they are supposed to, walls must hide what needs hiding, and the physical world of the play must support the increasingly tangled web of action. In farce, design is not decoration - it is storytelling.

What makes *Unnecessary Farce* such a perfect fit for Buffalo Theatre Ensemble is its reliance on ensemble-driven work. This is a play that cannot be carried by a single performance or a single moment. It succeeds because of collective focus, shared rhythm, and a deep commitment to the story being told together. Every laugh is the product of collaboration.

Ultimately, Unnecessary Farce reminds us that chaos, when carefully shaped, can be a thing of beauty. It celebrates the joy of live performance -

the thrill of watching something unfold in the moment, knowing that it only works because a group of artists are breathing, listening, and responding to one another in real time.

For audiences, that means laughter fueled by anticipation and delight. For the actors, it means embracing precision in service of play. And for everyone in the room, it becomes a shared experience of joy - one perfectly timed moment after another

Buffalo Theatre Ensemble's *UNNECESSARY FARCE* Rendering by Set Designer Sarah Lewis







Things to think about prior to the performance:

- What makes a play funny?
- In what ways is a theatrical experience different from a real life experience? How is theater different from film?
- How did the design of the set make you feel before the show began?

Things to watch for in performance:

- Design elements for a play include set, costumes, props, sound and lighting. What was most surprising and/or interesting about the designs for this production?
- Plays in a farcical style usually include very high stakes and an outcome that needs to be resolved in a short and finite amount of time. What are some of the things that the writer includes to keep the stakes very high?
- How did your feelings about the set change from your initial response when you entered?
- Why is this seemingly serious situation so funny? If the playwright wanted to make this show a drama…how would he need to change the script?

Things to think about after the performance:

- What are some of the ways the actors and the designers (Set, Costumes, Lights, Sound, Props) made this show comedic?

- How does setting this play in two identical rooms help to make the play more interesting?

Other Analysis Tools:

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, what happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is 'about?' In a nutshell, how does the playwright drive their point(s) home?

- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwright decide that this was the most quintessential title for his work, do you think?

The running time for this production is approximately 2:00 long, including a 15 minute intermission.

Please join us for a pre-show discussion Thursday, January 29th at 6:45p.m in Room 117 (The Fishbowl) preceding the preview performance. Note that pre-show discussions will include the director and designers, and will be a discussion of the approach to this production.

There will be a post-show discussion following the Friday, February 6th performance. The post-show will be with the director, cast and crew, and we will be fielding questions from the audience.

There will be an ASL interpreted performance on Thursday, February 19th at 7:30pm.

Please join us!