

PAPER MILL PLAYHOUSE

Program Notes – *The Great Gatsby*

Program notes provided by Michael Dundon and will be shared in advance of scheduled audio-described performances.

Anyone who is familiar with the location and time frame of *The Great Gatsby* would expect the sets and costume plots to be as extravagant and flashy as to befit the socio-economic status of the characters and what we historically know of as the “roaring” twenties. This production’s set and costume plot does not disappoint. However, since just about every locale depicted in the show is either owned by or associated with one of the characters, it’s best to talk first about those characters.

JAY GATSBY – Our lead character in his early 30s - he has both a dashing and obsessive personality. Gatsby is “new money.” Having pulled himself up by his bootstraps through shady business dealings that he’ll never admit, he is now the paragon of the American Dream. Gatsby is played by Jeremy Jordan, a dark and wavy-haired man standing about 5’9”. He has a broad white smile and a square jaw. Most often Gatsby can be found in a white double-breasted suit with white and tan buck shoes. Gatsby is first introduced to us gazing across the bay towards what we will come to know as Daisy’s green light which can be seen pulsating on Daisy Buchanan’s dock on the “East Egg” of the North Shore of Long Island. Gatsby’s estate is on the “West Egg.” Throughout the show Gatsby wears the very finest in men’s fashion, tailored sports jackets and smoking jackets as well as fine silk shirts.

NICK CARRAWAY – Cousin to our female lead Daisy. He is 29 - Thoughtful, observant and optimistic on his arrival in New York City, Nick is swept up by the wealth and the glamor he’s surrounded by. When we first meet Nick, he wears a simple 3-piece brown flannel suit. The suit is relatively conservative in comparison to some of the sparkly sequined jackets worn by most of the men attending one of Jay Gatsby’s parties. Nick is about 5’11, handsome with short close-cropped dark hair. He is played by Noah J. Ricketts, who has light brown skin.

DAISY BUCHANAN – Our lead female character in her late 20s - Nick’s cousin. She is petite, pretty, charming and witty. Daisy was once a debutante of the highest order, and now she’s a wife and relatively new mother. She is considered to come from old money and enjoys the privilege that comes with that status. Daisy can most often be found wearing light-toned flowing summer dresses with a scalloped hemline worn below the knee. She has short wavy hair parted on the side. Daisy is

played by Eva Noblezada, a woman of Philippine decent, with darker skin and a big white smile.

TOM BUCHANAN - Daisy's husband in his early 30's. "Old money", classic boys-will-be-boys "gentleman" who has never had to work a day in his life. Tom is played by John Zdrojeski, standing about 6 feet tall. He wears his hair slicked back and like Gatsby has finely tailored clothing, sometimes a three piece suit with suspenders, sometimes on the sportier side without a jacket but wearing a pair of knee-high riding boots. To use a slang term, Tom presents himself as a stuffed shirt with an air of pompous conservativeness one might expect from his "old-money" wealth.

JORDAN BAKER – Is in her 20s and is Daisy's best friend. Unmarried and a pro-golfer. Jordan has her finger on the pulse of what makes New York City tick. Always has a wisecrack ready, always wants to have the last word. An average height woman, she wears her brown hair short and straight. Unlike all the other women in the show, Jordan is most always found wearing slacks. When hanging at the Buchanan estate, she wears full length flowing palazzo pants with a silk short-sleeved blouse with a rounded buttoned-up collar. But when sneaking off to a party at Gatsby's, her manner of dress is much more glitzy, still in pants but more part of a jump suit whose lower neckline and sleeveless top is trimmed with sparkles and beads. When not at a party with a cocktail in her hand, she can be found with a golf club at the Buchanan Estate gardens. Jordan is played by Samantha Pauly.

MYRTLE WILSON – a common woman in her 30s - the life of the party if she weren't stuck living above a garage in Queens. Myrtle is a striver, a flirt, and a loud mouth with a passion for the finer things. Married to George Wilson. Myrtle is played by Sara Chase. She has shoulder length curly red hair. Myrtle is average height and would be considered quite buxom, and her manner of dress accentuates her curviness and large chest.

GEORGE WILSON – a man in his 30s - a loner with a penchant for talking to a large billboard that hangs over his garage. He is desperately trying to get out of Queens, and regain the love of his wife Myrtle, who feels like she's slipping through his fingers. George is a bit of a moper, who moves slowly about his daily work at the auto service station. He stands about 6 feet tall, a bit overweight and always wearing his work coveralls. Being an auto service worker he is most often found

with dirt on his hands and face. And his hair is usually messy. George is played by Paul Whitty.

Meyer WOLFSHEIM - a large man in his 50s - Wolfsheim is essentially a gangster who is equal parts warm and menacing. He is a sharp dresser usually topped off with a fedora. Wolfsheim is often found slithering himself through the crowd and insinuating himself into conversations. Wolfsheim is played by Stanley W. Mathis, an African-American man standing about 5-10 or 5-11, and perhaps 40 pounds overweight. At times Wolfsheim comes off as Gatsby's right-hand man, and other times his boss. But whenever something "shady" is going on, Wolfsheim can most certainly be found not far behind.

There are a number of ancillary characters that we will meet throughout the show mostly in the second act. **Gilda Gray** was a Polish-American dancer and actress who popularized a dance called the "shimmy" which became fashionable in 1920s films and theater productions. During one of Gatsby's extravagant parties, Jay invites Gilda Gray to lead the ensemble in a patriotic salute. She wears a long floor length red sparkled cape with a studded tiara on top of her head. Her outfit is reminiscent of the Statue of Liberty, and even perhaps Miss Columbia a personification of America in the 1920's later adopted by Columbia Pictures as their most familiar logo. Later in the first act, we also meet some unsavory sorts, namely **Catherine**, and her friends **Mr. and Mrs. McKee** in a Harlem flophouse. Catherine is Myrtle's sister, and Mr. McKee is a freelance photographer obsessed with capturing his wife's derriere as well as the shady goings-on in this seedy hotel room.

Jay Gatsby is known for his parties, and invites the best of the best to attend each night. Outfits worn by the elite ensemble can range from full-length gowns on women and formal wear on men, to flapper dresses, short and adorned with sparkling sequins around the bodice and layers of fringe hanging from the hem. Generally speaking, male party guests dress in black slacks and shiny black shoes. But like their female counterparts, they are topped off with sparkling sequins on their jackets. Ladies hair fashions were mostly short, just below the ears, with wavy curls close cropped to the head and adorned by a studded tiara or decorative headband commonly called *Bandeaus* and often decorated with ostrich feathers and highly jeweled hair combs.

The entire story takes place at multiple locations in and around New York City in the 1920's. To start, the show curtain is a moving image of Manhasset Bay on the North Shore of Long Island, which sits within the frame of the stage opening which itself is framed in decorative gold art deco style. The vantage point is from what is called the West Egg where the Gatsby estate is located looking across the bay to the East Egg where the Buchanan estate is located. Geographically, the actual towns represented are Great Neck, which is the West Egg and Port Washington or Manhasset, here known as the East Egg. The East Egg is known for its old money while the West Egg is new money that in the 1920's was often associated with unsavory and questionable means of acquiring that wealth.

The décor of the **Gatsby's estate** is Art Deco, characterized by symmetrical geometric shapes as well as curved scalloped shapes all starkly trimmed with gold and black lines. Each room of the Gatsby estate has this design; the Ballroom has an added circular stage, trimmed with footlights and framed by massive columns and 8-foot-tall Moroccan lamps, all which cast a golden glow to the room which overlooks a starlit bay. As we move from room to room, a large desk in front of floor to ceiling bookcases reveal Gatsby's library or study. We move about the mansion through cavernous vestibules leading to an open air veranda once again overlooking the starlit bay, then back inside to Gatsby's bedroom with a large queen bed beneath a floor to ceiling wall of finely tailored and impeccably pressed silk shirts.

One last mention about the Gatsby estate is **the built-in pool**, relatively unseen, but none the less a focal point. The unseen pool in actuality is the orchestra pit. The tiny bit that can be seen is merely a blue tile top trim of the pool and two metal ladders that hang off each end of the stage and are lowered into the pool/orchestra pit. Later, at one of Gatsby's parties, bubbles can be seen floating out of the pool along with two ladies in swim suits and caps climbing the ladders.

Across the bay, is **the Buchanan estate** on the East Egg. The Buchanan mansion is a much more conservative 3-story Georgian Revival estate, style named after the four British Monarchs of the House of Hanover between 1714 and 1830, then revived in the late 19th century. The style is characterized by symmetry, proportion and balance and lacking in ornamentation. Traditionally with taller windows on the first floor and dormers on the top. All quite in contrast with the Gatsby estate's opulence and what some old money people would call garish. The view of the

estate is from the garden veranda where a wrought iron bench sit left and café table and chairs right. The estate is seen across the large green lawn that is lined with tall topiaries.

Other places we visit will be **Wilson's garage**, owned by George and Myrtle Wilson. The setting is off highway 25 leading into Queens, just east of Manhattan. The backdrop is a smog filled sky lined with smokestacks from nearby industry. A far cry from the clear starlit sky over Manhasset Bay. The Service Station is depicted by a run-down store front with a single gas pump in front which is surrounded by debris and empty wooden crates. The focal point of the scene is a very large billboard which hangs tilted overhead and bearing the image of a man's face wearing yellow glasses over his large blue eyes. The writing on the billboard reads Oculist Queens. The billboard is large enough to attract the people riding the highway. But has a severely imposing affect when viewed close up as from the service station.

There are two cars driven on stage, both are convertibles, one a yellow Rolls-Royce owned by Jay Gatsby and the other a blue Pierce-Arrow owned by Tom Buchanan. Both cars will be seen gassing up at the Wilson Garage, then travelling onto other locations in Manhattan. As the cars travel, moving images of the smokestacks disappearing in the background are played against the back wall of the stage giving the illusion of cars moving along the highway out of Queens and into Manhattan. There is even a moving image of the overhead girders of a bridge (in this case, the Queensboro Bridge) as we travel into Manhattan, first to a swanky department store with high glass ceilings and a couple of racks of clothes meant for a personal shopping spree for Myrtle Wilson. Then onto a Harlem flop-house where Nick meets Myrtle's sister Catherine and her two friends Mr. and Mrs. McKee. The flop-house by nature is a rundown apartment with dingy wallpaper and a beaten up couch and chair. Against the rear wall there is the entrance to the apartment, a door to the bathroom then a door to a bedroom. In between doors there is cheap artwork and dull wall sconces. There is a rolling cart used as a bar, and used often by Nick, Tom, Myrtle and friends.

Act two will take us to a few additional locales, the first is still the Gatsby Ballroom, but it is spiffed up even more than its usual rich décor. It now has red, white and blue bunting draped across the ceiling and gold lit columns. There is now a fountain design decoration against the back wall and behind the circular stage. Party guests wear patriotic costumes, some men in blue waistcoats and tails, red shoes and ties

and white shirts and pants. The women wear similar colors but on short skirts adorned with sparkling sequins, and bejeweled headpieces. Some men, including Gatsby and Tom, wear their uniforms from WW1. This spectacularly decorated ballroom is where we meet Gilda Gray, the showgirl who wears a floor length gown and cape in sparkling red and white reminiscent of the Statue of Liberty.

In act two, we will also visit a hotel room at the **Plaza Hotel**. The room is bright and cheery, decorated with fine art and wall sconces that frame a beautiful fireplace. There is a free standing bar on the left and a comfortable couch in the center. Two French windows that undoubtedly look out onto Midtown Manhattan and Central Park. One cannot help but notice the comparison of this fancy hotel room as opposed to the Harlem flop-house we visited in the first act.

This concludes program notes for *The Great Gatsby*. These notes will be shared in advance of scheduled audio-described performances. To purchase tickets for upcoming audio-described performances, [click here](#).