



WAIT UNTIL DARK

BY FREDERICK KNOTT

Directed by Ron OJ Parson

March 5 – April 5, 2009

at Court Theatre

-STUDY GUIDE-

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



Frederick Knott

(August 28, 1916 – December 17, 2002)

- Frederick Knott was born in Hankow, China to English Missionaries
- He received a law degree from Cambridge University in 1938
- Knott served in the British Army from 1939 – 1946
- He wrote three plays: *Dial M for Murder* (1952), *Write Me a Murder* (1960), and *Wait Until Dark* (1966)
- *Dial M for Murder* was turned down (and called “trivial”) by many producers before the BBC made it into a television play. It went on to receive great critical acclaim and has been produced in over 30 countries
- Knott’s wife has said that he “hated writing” and “wrote only for the money” because of how difficult it was to get his plays produced
- Knott also had a great passion for cheese (especially Roquefort), which sometimes appears in his plays

ABOUT THE PLAY



- *Wait Until Dark* was first produced in October 1961 at Broadway’s Ethyl Barrymore Theatre and ran for 11 months
- Lee Remick, the show’s star, was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Actress in 1962
- Later that year, the show opened at the Strand Theatre in London’s West End and ran for two years
- A movie version of *Wait Until Dark* was released in 1967 directed by Terence Young (director of many films, including *Dr. No* and *From Russia with Love*) and starring Audrey Hepburn as Susy Hendrix and Alan Arkin as Roat/Roat Jr./Roat Sr.
- *Wait Until Dark* was revived on Broadway in 1998 starring Marisa Tomei as Susy Hendrix and Quentin Tarantino as Roat/Roat Jr./Roat Sr.

WAIT UNTIL DARK: CHARACTERS & PLOT SYNOPSIS

Characters (in order of appearance)

Mike Talman, a con man

Sgt. Carlino, a con man

Harry Roat, Jr., mastermind of the con

Susy Hendrix, a blind woman

Sam Hendrix, her husband, a photographer

Gloria, a young girl who lives upstairs from Susy & Sam

Policemen (2)



Plot Synopsis

The action takes place in a basement apartment in Greenwich Village, New York City, in 1966. Susy Hendrix, a recently blinded woman who is unwittingly in possession of a doll full of drugs, is alone when three con men (Talman, Carlino and Roat) wrangle their way in pretending to be people they are not. Eventually Susy figures out what's really going on and takes control of the situation, throwing the con men off their game.

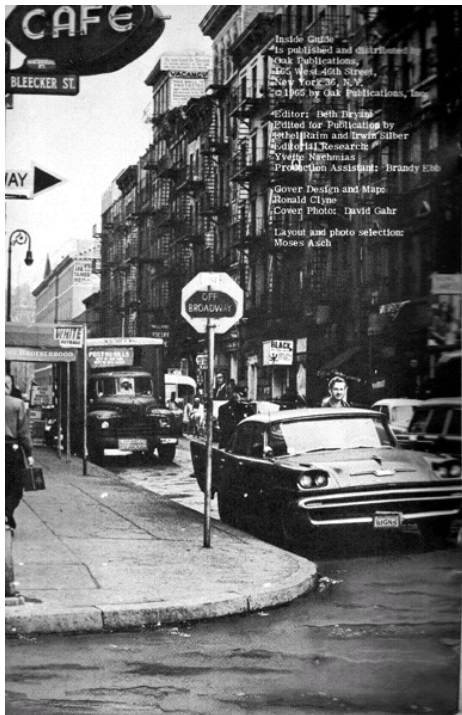
While the audience knows the secret of the con before Susy does, it remains unclear whether her plan to foil Mike, Carlino and Roat will work.



THE 1960's

Greenwich Village in the 1960's

- Greenwich Village (known as "The Village") became important to the bohemian scene during the 1950s, when the Beat Generation focused their energies there.
- Fleeing from what they saw as oppressive social conformity, a loose collection of writers, poets, artists, and students (later known as the Beats) and the Beatniks, moved to Greenwich Village
- The Village (and surrounding New York City) played a central role in the writings of, among others, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Dylan Thomas
- Greenwich Village also played a major role in the development of the folk music scene of the 1960s (Village residents included Bob Dylan and members of The Mamas and the Papas)



Technology in the 1960's

- Inventions of the 1960's included the communication satellite, the answering machine, the portable calculator, the tape cassette, the etch-a-sketch, the ATM, the hologram, and the pacemaker.
- Most telephones were still rotary-dial, and none were portable
- Washing machines were just becoming popular in the early 1960s
- The refrigerator was still commonly referred to as the "ice box"



Historical Events of the 1960's

- The 60's were a decade dominated by war: the Vietnam war, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Cold War
- Both John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated, Kennedy on November 22, 1963 and King on April 4, 1968
- Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first men on the moon in 1969
- The Civil Rights Act was signed into law in 1964 and The Voting Rights Act was signed into law in 1965, ensuring equal rights for all people

Pop Culture in the 1960's

- This was the decade of the Smiley Face, found on anything and everything
- Popular musicians of the decade included the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, The Supremes, Bob Dylan, The Who, and Aretha Franklin



ELEMENTS OF A CON

- ⇒ “Con” is short for “confidence”
- ⇒ A con artist uses the victim’s confidence in the con artist to get what he/she wants
- ⇒ Con artists are also referred to as “grafters”; a “grift” is the same thing as a con
- ⇒ The “mark” is the victim of a con
- ⇒ Con games are crimes of persuasion and deception – you think you’re getting one thing, but you’re really getting another
- ⇒ Violence is rarely part of a traditional con; con artists do not rely on weapons, but on cleverness and sleight-of-hand to perpetrate their crimes
- ⇒ Con artists are responsible for the theft of billions of dollars every year
- ⇒ The simple con game only requires two people: the con artist and the victim. More complicated cons involve more people.
- ⇒ Most cons are “short cons.” Short cons:
 - Require a small number of meetings between the con artist and the mark
 - Have six components: the motivation, the come-on, the skill, the swap, the stress, and the block

The Six Steps of a Short Con:

1. The motivation: the con artist promises to give some kind of reward to the mark (it doesn’t have to be money, although it often is)
2. The come-on: the con artist pitches his story to the mark, usually including something to hold the mark’s attention and something to keep him/her interested
3. The skill: A co-conspirator comes to reinforce the scam
4. The swap: The physical trade of the genuine with the phony (whether items, people or concepts)
5. The stress: The con artist applies pressure in some way (ie, time is running out) so that the mark has no time to think about what’s happening
6. The block: The sting at the end of the con meant to dissuade the mark from going to the police (either by threats or implicating the mark in the illegality of the con)

*Some cons may skip or combine steps, but all involve two critical components: the **motivation** and the **swap**.*

“The grift has a gentle touch. It takes its toll from the verdant sucker by means of the skilled hand or the sharp wit. In this, it differs from all other forms of crime, and especially from the heavy-rackets. It never employs violence to separate a mark from his money.”

--David W. Maurer, *The Big Con* (1940)

WAIT UNTIL DARK: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How might Susy's blindness help or hurt the con men as they perpetrate their con? How can a blind woman defend herself from being misled by using her other senses?
2. What is important about the time and location of the play's setting? How would the plot of the play be affected if the production were set today instead of in the 1960's?
3. What are the elements of a thriller? How might a play be more thrilling than a movie?
4. What are some examples of modern-day cons? Which of the six 'elements of a con' can you find in them?