

GREAT
LAKES
THEATER

TEACHER PREPARATION GUIDE

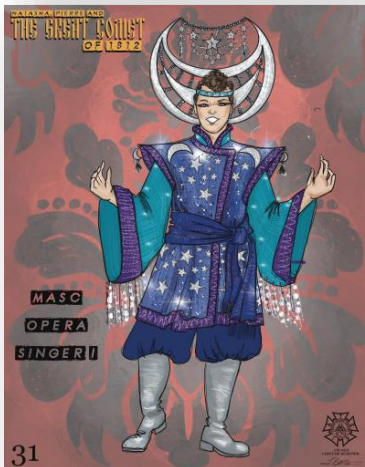
NATASHA, PIERRE & The
GREAT
COMET
of
1812

By Dave Malloy

Adapted from *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy

Directed by Victoria Bussert

CONTENTS



3	Dear Educator
4	A Note to Students: What to Expect at the Theater
5	Director's Note
7	Summary
8	Family Tree
9	Musical Numbers
9	Cast of Characters
10	Playnotes: A Mash-up of Leo Tolstoy Dave Malloy
14	The Making of <i>Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812</i>
16	From Page to Stage
18	Costume Design by Tesia Dugan Benson
22	Scenic Design by Jeff Herrmann
24	<i>Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812</i> onstage at ISF
26	Discussion Questions Prior to Attending the Performance
27	Activities
29	Writing Prompts
30	Discussion Questions After Attending the Performance
32	How to Write a Review
33	A Sample Review Written by a Student
34	Learning Standards
35	A Brief Glossary of Theater Terms
37	2023-2024 Student Matinee Season
38	Residency Program
39	Generous Support
40	About Great Lakes Theater



Fall 2023

Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater's production of *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* by Dave Malloy. This production will be performed in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from September 22—October 8, 2023.

A sensational slice of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* lends inspiration to this bold, imaginative electropop opera from award-winning composer (and Lakewood, OH native!) Dave Malloy. Young, impulsive Natasha, bewitched by handsome and cunning Anatole, falls to scandal. Family friend Pierre, a middle-aged man struggling with his own demons, must pick up the pieces to restore her reputation. This critically acclaimed, Tony award-winning musical is a lively, breathtaking and unforgettable theatrical experience.

This guide is designed – through essays, discussion questions and classroom activities – to give students both an introduction to, and a point of entry for, a personal exploration of *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812*. We offer special thanks to Great Lakes Theater teaching artist Kelly Elliott for her outstanding contributions to this guide.

Great Lakes Theater is proud to provide you with the finest in classic theater and the necessary educational resources to support your work in the classroom. We are thrilled that you will be coming to see us and we welcome your input on how best to support your classroom preparation for our work. Please let us know what you think!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kelly Schaffer Florian".

Kelly Schaffer Florian
Director of Educational Services
Kflorian@greatlakestheater.org

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "David Hansen".

David Hansen
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A NOTE TO STUDENTS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATER

You may or may not have attended a live theater performance before. To increase your enjoyment, it might be helpful to look at the unique qualities of this art form — because it is so different from movies or video.

The live theatrical performance not only involves the actors on the stage; it is meant to involve you, the audience, in ways that film and television cannot. In truth, although you are sitting in an auditorium and the actors are on stage, there is very little separating the audience from the performers. How you react to the play *deeply affects* the actors. Something as seemingly trivial as whispering or unwrapping a candy bar can distract them and disrupt the mood and tone of their performance. Due to the important relationship between actors and audience members, there are certain, perhaps obvious, provisions of live theater we wish to call to your attention.

In the Hanna Theatre, it is important to know that the taking of pictures, either with or without a flash, is strictly prohibited. Also, it is essential that all electronic equipment, including cell phones, music players (even with headphones), alarm watches, etc., be completely powered off once you have entered the theatre. Even the glow from a watch or a silent cell phone (used for checking the time, text messaging, or posting social network updates, for example) can be very distracting to fellow audience members, even if you try to mask it under your hand or an article of clothing. Our goal is to provide every person in the audience with the best possible theatrical experience, so we appreciate your respectful cooperation during the performance.

Other differences live theater provides: in film or video, the camera and editing define what we will see. In the theater, however, each of us works as our own camera and editor, choosing our own personal points of focus. And in the Hanna Theatre, you should know that often we do not use microphones. As audience members you'll need to actively listen and "tune in" to the sound of the unamplified human voice.

As for our lighting and scenery, it might surprise you to know that these are not necessarily meant to be realistic. In this production, for example, there may be design elements that are abstract or metaphorical.

The theater's ability to focus on human experience — distilled through the dialogue and behavior of people on stage and enhanced by the scenery, costumes, lighting, music and dance — is a centuries-old tradition. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect — whether at a baseball game, music concert or theater performance — cannot be duplicated.

The performance you will see at Great Lakes Theater will happen only once. It is unique and personal. Though this play will be performed more than a dozen times, the performance you see belongs only to you.

We hope you enjoy it, and we'd like you to share your response with us.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Let's begin with a little history lesson about the actual Great Comet of 1812. First of all, it was actually the Great Comet of 1811 and was miraculously visible to the naked eye for approximately 270 days. The Comet inspired many artists including John Linnell and William Blake, both of whom saw it with their own eyes and proceeded to draw their unique versions of it. Writer Harriet Martineau mentions seeing it at age 9 in her autobiography and it even makes an appearance in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*; but it is Leo Tolstoy who is credited with renaming it The Great Comet of 1812 in his epic novel/history/philosophical discussion, *War and Peace*.

In 2007, Dave Malloy was working on a cruise ship as the piano player in a show band, when he and his landlocked girlfriend decided to tackle reading *War and Peace* as a way to stay connected while he was at sea. I use the word tackle since it is over 1200 pages (I can personally vouch for the unabridged audio version that comes in at 55 hours). He found himself inspired by one specific section – Volume 2 Book 5. In fact, after reading that entire 70-page slice in one sitting he recalled, “I had the weirdest and clearest epiphany: that this was a perfect story for a musical.” Malloy's ending of the musical is only approximately halfway thru the novel itself. Though many of the lyrics are adaptations of the Aylmer and Louise

Maude 1922 English translation of the novel, Malloy, as composer-lyricist-librettist-orchestrator, shaped those 70-pages into a groundbreaking theatrical event with musical inspiration covering pop/rock/folk/soul/classical opera/electronic dance music/traditional Russian folk and classic Broadway – an amazing creation unlike any musical ever written.

The Great Comet, as the musical is commonly known, began its onstage life in 2012 at the experimental Off-Broadway Ars Nova, a small 99-seat theater located in New York's Hell's Kitchen. It moved from there to Kazino, a temporary structure designed as an opulent Russian supper club placed in New York's meat-packing district which later moved to the midtown Theatre District.

This was followed by a production at Boston's American Repertory Theatre before finally arriving at Broadway's Imperial Theatre in October 2016 – nearly a decade after Malloy first cracked open the novel. Like the real-life comet itself, this beautiful, Tony-nominated production lit up Broadway for only a limited time – 36 previews and 336 performances – and then disappeared into the night sky with no national tours planned in its immediate future to share the production's brilliance with the rest of the country. After waiting for what seemed like a very long five years, the rights to produce *The Great Comet* were finally released in 2022 and this extraordinary musical has started to be performed again in unique, newly-conceived

productions around the US.

Tolstoy's novel tells us that sight of the Comet was often met with fear and dread as it was said to portend all kinds of disasters – perhaps even the end of the world. But for the directionless Pierre, stepping out into the cold winter night and gazing at this dazzling light in the winter sky

seemed “like an arrow piercing the earth – to remain fixed in a chosen spot, vigorously holding its tail erect, shining, and displaying its white light amid countless other scintillating stars. It seemed to Pierre that this comet fully responded to what was passing in his own softened and uplifted soul, now blossoming into a new life.”

“We can only know that we know nothing. And that is the highest degree of human wisdom.”

— Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812 captures Tolstoy's full spectrum of humanity from the tortured Pierre's spiritual search to Natasha crushing melodrama to the nightmare of the Bolkonsky home to Balaga's crazy and wild existence. These stories, along with the others you'll see in tonight's musical, paint a profound picture of what it is to be human in this ever-interconnected universe.

We're glad you've joined us for this special, one-of-a-kind, universal journey.

- Victoria Bussert

SUMMARY

Act I

The musical begins in 1812, Moscow, Russia, by introducing the characters ("Prologue"). The audience is then introduced to Pierre Bezukhov, a depressed, unhappily married man ("Pierre"). He is a good friend of Andrey Bolkonsky, who is away fighting in the war. Andrey has recently become engaged to Natasha Rostova. Natasha and her cousin, Sonya Rostova, arrive in Moscow to visit Natasha's godmother, Marya Dmitrievna, and wait for Andrey to come home ("Moscow"). Natasha is to meet her future in-laws, Andrey's sister, the lonely Mary Bolkonskaya, and his father, the old Prince Bolkonsky ("The Private and Intimate Life of the House"). However, their meeting ends in disaster, as Natasha finds Mary cold, Mary finds Natasha vain, and Bolkonsky behaves bizarrely ("Natasha & Bolkonskys"). Natasha leaves, missing Andrey more than ever ("No One Else").

The next night, Natasha watches an opera with Sonya and Marya. Natasha catches the eye of Anatole Kuragin, a notorious rogue ("The Opera"). Anatole visits Natasha in her box and leaves her with feelings she has never experienced before ("Natasha & Anatole").

Anatole arrives home after the opera and goes out drinking with his friend, Fedya Dolokhov, and Pierre. They are met by Hélène Bezukhova, the unfaithfully promiscuous wife of Pierre and shamelessly suggestive sister of Anatole. Anatole lusts for Natasha, although it is revealed he is already married. Hélène flirts with Dolokhov, who taunts Pierre by raising a toast to "married women and their lovers". A drunk Pierre finds Dolokhov's behavior insulting and challenges him to a duel. Pierre accidentally wounds Dolokhov and Dolokhov miraculously misses him. Before they all leave, Anatole asks Hélène to invite Natasha to a ball that evening and she agrees. ("The Duel"). They leave Pierre, who reflects on his near-death experience and realizes that despite wasting his life, he wishes to live ("Dust and Ashes").

The next morning, as Natasha is preparing for church, she is confused about her feelings from her interaction with Anatole at the opera and questions if she is spoiled of Andrey's love ("Sunday Morning"). Later that day, Hélène visits Natasha and invites her to the ball. Natasha eventually agrees to attend ("Charming").

That night at the ball, Natasha is met by Anatole, and they dance. Anatole professes his love to Natasha, who tries to tell him that she is already engaged. Ignoring this, Anatole kisses Natasha, leading her to fall in love with him in return ("The Ball").

Act II

Natasha is further torn between her feelings for both Andrey and Anatole ("Letters"). Sonya discovers letters between Natasha and Anatole and learns of their relationship. She confronts Natasha and desperately explains her distrust of Anatole, but Natasha bursts out in anger at her and leaves. Natasha writes to Mary and breaks off her engagement with Andrey ("Sonya & Natasha"). Alone, Sonya reflects on her love for her cousin and her determination to save her, even if she will lose her closest friend ("Sonya Alone").

That evening, Anatole and Dolokhov prepare for an elopement between Anatole and Natasha. Dolokhov attempts to change Anatole's mind, but is unsuccessful ("Preparations"). Balaga, their troika driver, arrives to take them to Natasha's house where they will retrieve her before departing ("Balaga"). When they arrive at Natasha's house, citizens of Moscow are there to bid their goodbyes to Anatole and Natasha, but are thwarted at the last moment by Marya. ("The Abduction").

Marya scolds Natasha, who reveals to her and Sonya that she broke off her engagement with Andrey and reaffirms her love for Anatole, whom she still believes is unmarried. Natasha screams at Marya and Sonya and bursts into tears as she waits all night for Anatole ("In My House"). Marya calls on Pierre in the middle of the night and explains the situation to him, begging him to handle the crisis. Pierre tells Marya that Anatole is already married. ("A Call to Pierre"). Pierre, outraged, searches Moscow for Anatole while Marya and Sonya tell a grief-stricken Natasha that Anatole is already married, although she does not believe them. Pierre eventually finds Anatole at Hélène's house ("Find Anatole"). Pierre orders Anatole to leave Moscow and he agrees ("Pierre & Anatole"). Natasha attempts to take her own life by poisoning herself with arsenic, but lives ("Natasha Very Ill").

The next day, Andrey returns home from the war and is disoriented about the refusal of marriage he received from Natasha, which he asks Pierre about. Pierre explains the scandal to him and pleads with him to be compassionate, but Andrey is unable to forgive Natasha and cold-heartedly tells Pierre that he will not ask for her hand in marriage again ("Pierre and Andrey"). Pierre visits a shattered Natasha and comforts her, giving her hope ("Pierre & Natasha"). After their meeting, Pierre experiences a moment of enlightenment as he watches the Great Comet of 1812 soar across the night sky ("The Great Comet of 1812").

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT ONE

Prologue	Company
Pierre	Pierre, Ensemble
Moscow.....	Marya D., Natasha, Sonya
The Private and Intimate Life of the House	Bolkonsky, Mary
Natasha & Bolkonskys	Natasha, Mary, Bolkonsky
No One Else	Natasha
The Opera.....	Natasha, Sonya, Marya D., Hélène, Ensemble
Natasha & Anatole	Natasha, Anatole
The Duel	Anatole, Pierre, Dolokhov, Hélène, Ensemble
Dust and Ashes.....	Pierre, Ensemble
Sunday Morning.....	Natasha, Sonya, Marya D.
Charming.....	Hélène
The Ball	Natasha, Anatole

ACT TWO

Letters.....	Pierre, Natasha, Mary, Anatole, Dlokhov, Ensemble
Sonya & Natasha.....	Sonya, Natasha
Sonya Alone.....	Sonya
Preparations	Dolokhov, Anatole, Pierre
Balaga.....	Balaga, Anatole, Dolokhov, Ensemble
The Abduction	Ensemble, Anatole, Dolokhov, Pierre
In My House	Marya D., Natasha, Sonya
A Call to Pierre	Marya D., Pierre
Find Anatole	Pierre, Anatole, Hélène, Natasha
Pierre & Anatole.....	Pierre, Anatole
Natasha Very Ill.....	Sonya
Pierre & Andrey.....	Pierre, Andrey
Pierre & Natasha.....	Pierre, Natasha
The Great Comet of 1812.....	Pierre, Ensemble

CHARACTERS

Pierre	Alex Syiek*
Natasha.....	Jessi Kirtley*
Anatole.....	Chris McCarrell*
Sonya.....	Alexa Lopez*
Hélène	Jillian Kates*
Marya D.....	Jodi Dominick*
Dolokhov	Dario Alvarez*
Andrey/Bolkonsky	Cole Burden*
Mary/Opera Singer.....	Camille Brooks*
Balaga/Opera Singer.....	Boe Wank*†
Opera Singer.....	Shelby Griswold*
Ensemble	Danny Bò, Shelby Griswold*, Benjamin Michael Hall, Jaedynn Hall, Praise Oranika, Bella Serrano*, Ángela Utrera*

*Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

† Dance Captain

PLAYNOTES

By Margaret Lynch

A MASH-UP OF LEO TOLSTOY AND DAVE MALLOY

It began with an unlikely suggestion for staying in touch. When the young Dave Malloy (1976-) got a gig as a piano player on a cruise ship, he and his then-girlfriend agreed to read and discuss Tolstoy's *War and Peace* during their long months apart. In spare moments at the piano, Malloy tried out song ideas for the characters in the great Russian epic novel.

Raised in Lakewood, Ohio, Malloy studied English literature and music composition at Ohio University. In the year 2000, he headed out to San Francisco. Within two years he had become the resident composer for a San Francisco (and later Brooklyn)-based ensemble theater group with the playful name of Banana Bag & Bodice.

Epic stories were already on Malloy's radar screen. With the theater company Banana Bag & Bodice, he would help to create *Beowulf—A Thousand Years of Baggage*, an adaptation of the ancient epic poem. After *Beowulf* premiered in 2008, *The New Yorker* called the production: "...joyfully raucous and silly... [It] brings out the power and the color of the legend."

Ideas for an adaptation of *War and Peace* kept percolating. And when Ars Nova, a New York-based theater incubator, offered Malloy a commission in 2009, he decided it was time to go to Russia. As Rachel Chavkin, the play's original director, recalled in a forward to the playscript, "At the start of our work,... he told the creative team and I about this magical night he'd experienced while traveling in Russia. He'd found a packed underground café, and amidst the crush of tables topped with vodka and dumplings, a string trio madly played while the audience rocked out with handmade shakers."

Let it be said that Dave Malloy was the first to see *War and Peace* as the stuff of "rocking out with handmade shakers!"

War and Peace is famously a 900+ page novel that was first published serially from 1865 to 1867 and



Composer Dave Malloy as he stepped into the role of Pierre during the final weeks of *Natasha, Pierre and The Great Comet of 1812* on Broadway in 2017. Malloy played Pierre in the earliest iterations of the show, at Ars Nova in 2012, and under the Kazino tent in New York in 2013-2014.

revised and released in its entirety in 1869. Multiple complicated storylines intertwine with extended ruminations on philosophy, spirituality, and military history and strategy. Of the book's 361 chapters, 24 are prose essays on a variety of topics. Some call it a prose epic. Tolstoy wasn't sure it was a novel. Malloy was undaunted. (It's no surprise that he also adapted *Moby Dick*, the equally sprawling 1851 American epic, in 2019.) The similarly structured *Les Misérables*—Victor Hugo's groundbreaking work of 1862 was one of Tolstoy's chief inspirations—had been the basis for the blockbuster



Leo Tolstoy in an 1873 portrait by artist Ivan Kramskoi, a few years after he published *War and Peace* in 1869.



The Red Square in Moscow circa 1801. The action of Tolstoy's novel took place between 1805 and 1820. At the time, St. Petersburg was the capital city of Russia, but as Tsar Peter the Great supposedly claimed, "Moscow is the heart, and St. Petersburg is the head."

1985 musical of the same name. Malloy did follow the lead of the "sung-through" style of *Les Misérables*, with continuous music and little spoken dialogue. But while *Les Misérables* embraced the epic scope of its source material, Malloy went in a more intimate direction.

Malloy found a foothold in a 70-page section at the heart of the book. It's the moment half-way through when love and hope start growing within two broken souls, even though, in the novel, hundreds of pages of complications will be required before Pierre and Natasha can truly unite. Focusing on this 70-page episode narrowed the scope of Malloy's adaptation considerably, tightening the potential for dramatic effect. Still, audiences tend to stress when they hear the phrase "Russian novel." Malloy surmounted such barriers with an unabashedly straightforward approach to storytelling. As American theater critic Steven Suskin has noted, "[The show] immediately grabs you and says, 'Sit back and relax, you're fine. This is going to be fine.'"

By one count, the novel has 580 characters, many belonging to five extended families. The 70-page excerpt has far fewer, but still involves the main players from each family. The musical's opening number introduces each character one by one, providing a key attribute for each, and repeating



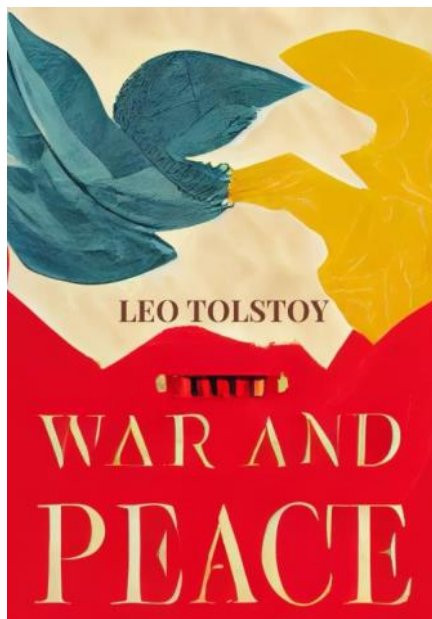
Napoleon Bonaparte was captured by Jacques Louis David at the apex of his power, on the eve of his departure for Russia, in 1812.



Napoleon crossed into Russia in June 1812 and pushed his way to Moscow by September, only to find that the city had been evacuated and fires had been set by its own leaders. Forced by Russian troops onto an unfavorable retreat route, Napoleon's troops were overwhelmed by the coming of winter, typhoid epidemics, marauding Cossacks, and shrewd Russian tactics.

the character names, with attributes, over and over again as each new character is added: "Balaga is fun/ Bolkonsky is crazy/ Mary is plain/ Dolokhov is fierce/ Helene is a slut/ Anatole is hot/ Marya is old school/ Sonya is good/ Natasha is young/ And Andre isn't here/ And what about Pierre?/ Dear bewildered, awkward Pierre?" And what about all the nicknames, diminutives, and pet names for the same person? Again, the solution is straightforward. When two characters meet, each says the other's full formal name, then introduces their own nickname: Marya greets "Countess Natalya Ilyinichna Rostova," and the countess replies "You must call me Natasha."

Adhering closely to the 1922 translation of *War and Peace* by Aylmer and Louise Maude, Malloy retained the novel's narrative voice when helpful.

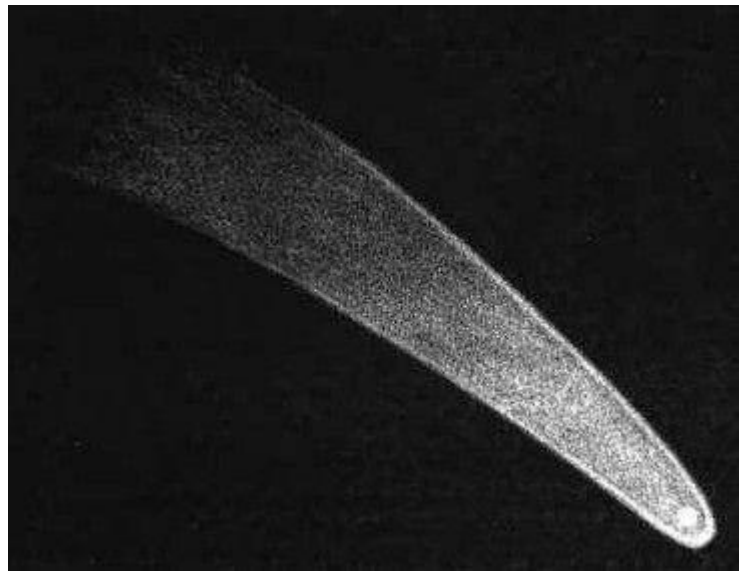


Cover art for the influential 1922 translation of *War and Peace* made by Aylmer and Louise Maude, which was included in the Centenary Edition of Tolstoy's works by Oxford University Press.

For instance, Natasha self-narrates a tense interaction with her friend Sonya: “And with the tender resolve that often comes at the moment of awakening/ I embraced my friend/ But noticing Sonya’s look of embarrassment/ My face expressed confusion and suspicion.” *War and Peace* is interwoven with specific details from Russian military history that could have been intimidating. Tolstoy set his novel sixty years earlier than his own day, at the time when Napoleon Bonaparte turned from securing dominion over France to relentlessly seeking dominion over Europe. Between 1803 and 1815, Napoleon waged seven “wars” against a shifting array of antagonists, colliding especially with Russia, which was also in expansionist mode. When Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812—the year of the portentous comet in the musical’s title—Russia was also fighting on its western border with the Ottoman Empire, on its southern border with Persia, and on its northern border with England.

In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy precisely places his main characters in specific battles. For instance, Prince Andre was wounded in the Battle of Austerlitz, a disastrous defeat for Russia during Napoleon’s Russian campaign, while Dolokhov, another of Pierre’s friends, gained his reputation as a sharpshooter during the Russo-Persian Wars. Malloy decided to shed the details of Tolstoy’s military backdrop. The first lines of the play are: “There’s a war going on/out there somewhere . . .” Once again, the audience is immediately reassured that it won’t be necessary to track the many battles of the Napoleonic and other wars of the era. Malloy has confessed that he identified with Tolstoy’s portrayal of Pierre as a large, awkward man. Malloy played Pierre in the show’s early iterations. His evident sympathy grounds the adaptation emotionally. It’s often been observed that Tolstoy also self-identified with Pierre, whose journey of spiritual discovery already formed the epic’s through-line. Like Pierre, Tolstoy had been a dissolute young aristocrat who wasted his early days drinking and gambling.

Tolstoy had an awakening when he followed his brother into the Russian Army to fight the Ottoman Turks in the Crimean War (1853-56). New technologies for killing, transportation, and communication—the railroad, the telegraph, the photograph, and the bombshell—made the horrors of the Crimean



Depicted here by astronomer William Henry Smyth, the Comet of 1812 was more widely known as the Comet of 1811, even though it could still be seen in parts of the world during the early months of 1812. Tolstoy called it the Comet of 1812 in order to align its appearance as a portent of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia.

War all the more vivid, searing both the collective—and Tolstoy’s—consciousness. A trip to France in 1860-61, where the Russian writer encountered Victor Hugo and *Les Misérables*, crystallized a new sense of purpose. Upon returning home, Tolstoy founded 13 schools for the newly freed serfs on his family’s estate, married in 1862, and became more serious about writing. Pierre’s spiritual crisis in *War and Peace* reflected Tolstoy’s own restless search for meaning, which shaped the rest of his life. He would go on to write *Anna Karenina* (1878), *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (1886), and *Resurrection* (1899). But he also achieved moral and spiritual stature as a proponent of radical poverty and pacificism. The young Mahatma Gandhi read Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God is Within You* and corresponded with the older man, calling him “the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present age has produced.”

But Dave Malloy also recognized that this giant of a world-historical thinker also created an enduring love story; Malloy captured its essence in *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*.

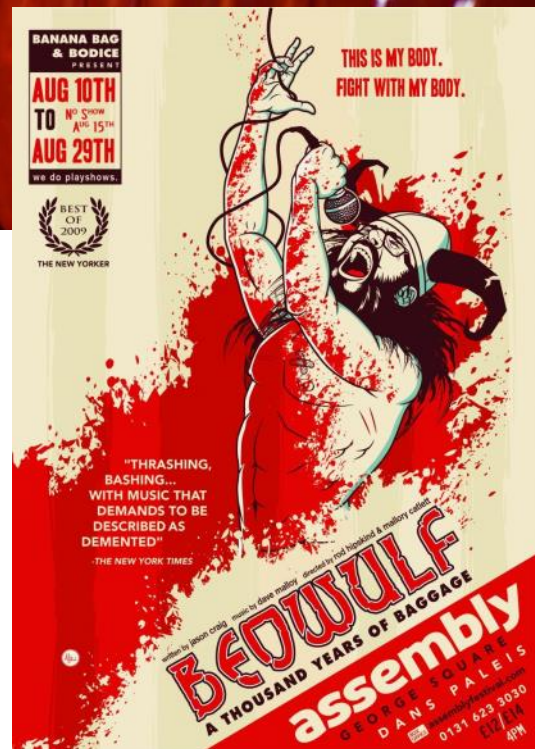
THE MAKING OF *NATASHA, PIERRE & THE GREAT COMET OF 1812*



In 2017, collaborators Dave Malloy and Rachel Chavkin received a Smithsonian American Ingenuity Award and were photographed in the Imperial Theatre on Broadway.

Dave Malloy came up in the wild world of experimental ensemble theater. It was a world where a group of multi-talented people could come together in a warehouse and riff for months on *Beowulf*. It was the perfect place for a double major in English lit and music composition. Malloy brought skills as a writer, composer, and performer to the Banana Bag & Bodice ensemble in San Francisco in 2002. The group's current website describes itself as "mash[ing] together original writing, music composition and collective design."

In Rachel Chavkin, the original director of



Poster for a European production of one of Dave Malloy's Banana Bag & Bodice collaborations: *Beowulf: A Thousand Years of Baggage*.

Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812, Malloy found a fellow traveler. In Chavkin's case, a New York University BFA and a Columbia University MFA led her into New York's ensemble theater world. She currently serves as artistic director of "the TEAM," which boasts productions where "it is nearly impossible to trace any one line of dialogue or image back to a single author's hand."

Malloy eventually thrived as a theater artist thanks to an array of non-profit, new-play development opportunities: a MacDowell Fellowship; commissions and residencies with such New York theater incubators as Ars Nova and the Ontological-Hysteric Theater; and relationships that led to the American Repertory Theater (ART) in Boston and ultimately to Broadway.

Chavkin was building a similar resume when the two theater artists intersected on *Three Pianos*, Malloy's rowdy adaptation of romantic composer Franz Schubert's song cycle "Winterreise." The work premiered in 2010 at the Ontological-Hysteric Theater, won a Special Citation Obie Award, and ran at the New York Theatre Workshop and ART. A commission from another incubator, Ars Nova, enabled Malloy and Chavkin to work together again on *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*, which premiered at Arts Nova in 2012. Ars Nova's commitment "to launching our artists just as far and wide as

their big ideas can take them" led to a run in a purpose-built tent-turned-Russian-night club in New York's Meatpacking District and then in Times Square. A tryout at ART in 2015 led in 2016 to a 336 performance-run at the Imperial Theatre on Broadway starring multi-platinum singer Josh Groban as Pierre and emerging talent Denée Benton as Natasha. (Malloy and Chavkin's next collaboration, on *Moby Dick*, went directly to ART in 2019.)

While Malloy and Chavkin led the creative process of adapting Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, other collaborators were also needed to realize Malloy's vision of telling the story within an immersive night-club experience. Multi-talented singer-actor-musicians had to be able to play instruments as well as sing and act. And the show's designers had to transform vastly different performing spaces—from a tent to a proscenium stage—into a 360° environment. The assembled theater artists also had to be comfortable working in a variety of styles. As Chavkin later recalled, "It was clear that we required a fusion of period and contemporary elements, because it's an old story told with new music." She described Malloy's eclectic "love for the Dirty Projectors and electronica and Joni Mitchell and Russian drinking songs." The designers also integrated period and contemporary elements in an innovative way, leading critic Steven Suskin to exclaim, "We've never seen anything like it before."



A scene from the show during its original iteration at Ars Nova in 2012, with Dave Malloy (at right) as Pierre.

FROM PAGE TO STAGE



Line drawings and color samples come together in final 3-D renderings, such as this stage right view of the set, created by scenic designer Jeff Herrmann and design assistant Michael Gault.



Collages of research images—including both period and contemporary clothing—helped costume designer Tesia Dugan Benson to distill the look for each character, in this case, for the sensual Helene, who helps her brother to seduce the innocent Natasha.

Director Victoria Bussert eagerly sought out *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* in all its New York iterations. “Multiple times,” she added with her trademark laugh. “When I first saw it, I said to myself, ‘I HAVE to direct this.’”

Like Malloy, Bussert also had a life-changing artistic experience in Russia. Just before she joined the Baldwin Wallace (now University) music theater faculty in 1995, she participated in a US government-sponsored artistic exchange. She was invited to observe the rehearsal for a production of *My Fair Lady* at the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts. The students had been working on the musical for nine months. Awed by the raw emotion and physicality of their interpretations of such standards as “I Could Have Danced All Night,” Bussert confided that their work “blew my mind. The intensity never left me. It’s impacted my directing and my teaching ever since.” (The emotional intensity of Bussert’s own direction of *My Fair Lady* for Great Lakes Theater in 2016 was noted by

audiences and critics alike.)

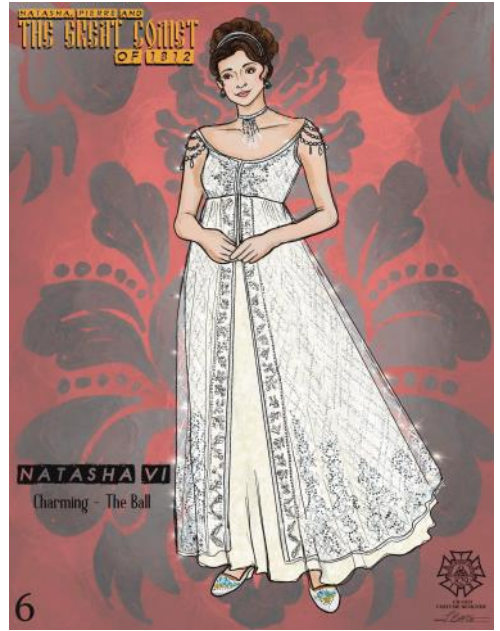
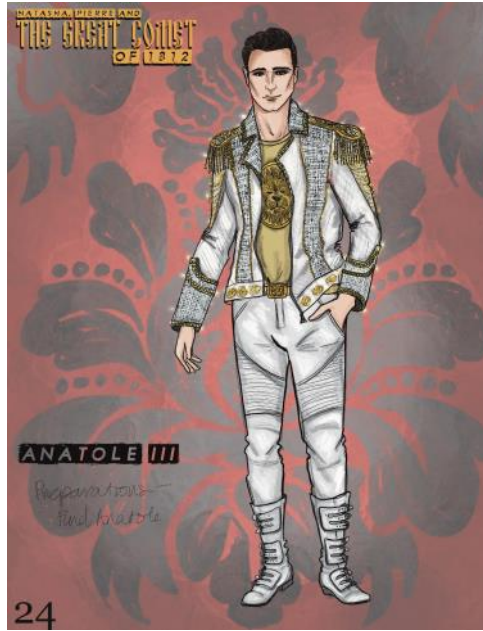
It’s no surprise, then, that Bussert lobbied to direct *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* as soon as the rights became available. The company of theater artists that Great Lakes Theater has built enabled her to tackle this ambitious piece. “You need trust among artists to explore,” she observed of her longtime colleagues. Playing instruments—two accordions, a piano, drums, and guitar—singing in every genre from opera to electropop and mastering an array of dance styles has challenged the performers, music director Matthew Webb, choreographer Jaclyn Miller—and Bussert herself.

For quick recognition in a fast-paced, large-cast show, costume designer Tesia Dugan Benson established a “look” and color palette for each character, supporting the show’s clear, straightforward storytelling. But change and growth have to be depicted as well. After Natasha comes under the sway of the rakish Anatole, she exchanges a girlish dress for the bare arms and neck and fitted bodice of a ball gown, still in her characteristic white but

with flecks of the metallic textures associated with Anatole.

As had to be done on Broadway, GLT scenic designer Jeff Herrmann was tasked with creating an interactive Russian vodka club setting within a more traditional theater space. Scattered tables spill into the stage wings and house, helping to reimagine the show's original vision of an immersive environment. In Herrmann's design, a circular platform and curved walls contain the intimate love story, while the height of the walls and the large scale and color of the red wallpaper design convey what Herrmann called the "large sweeping story" of "the war going on out there" beyond the club walls. He added, "When the audience walks in and sees the set, they're going to sense the passion and energy of the story they're about to experience."

"It's very exciting and very scary," exclaimed Bussert.



Left: Benson's rendering reveals Anatole's characteristic metallic palette in another mix of contemporary and period silhouettes. Right: After Natasha has fallen for Anatole's charms, she relies on Helene's guidance to choose a bare-armed, silver flecked ballgown, with a form-fitting bodice—depicted here in designer Benson's final rendering.



The scenic designer's work involves precisely scaled line drawings that offer a construction blueprint for the technical director and scene shop.

COSTUME DESIGN

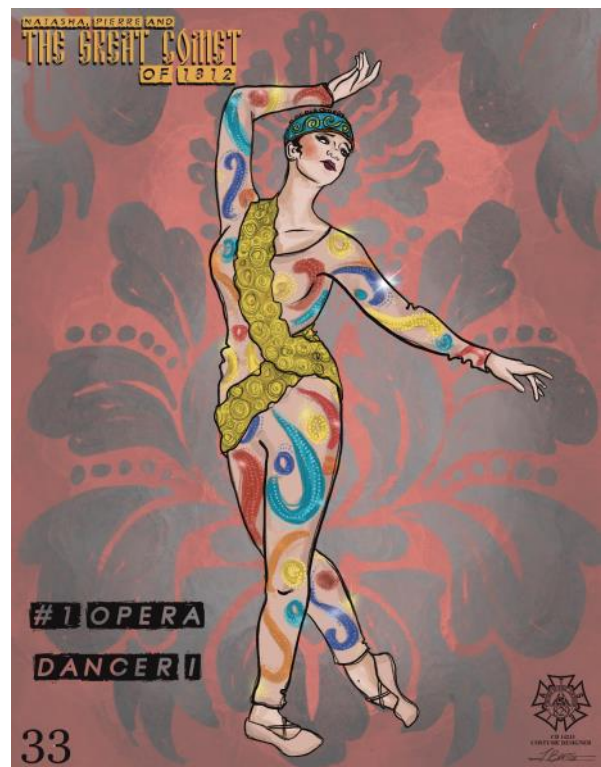
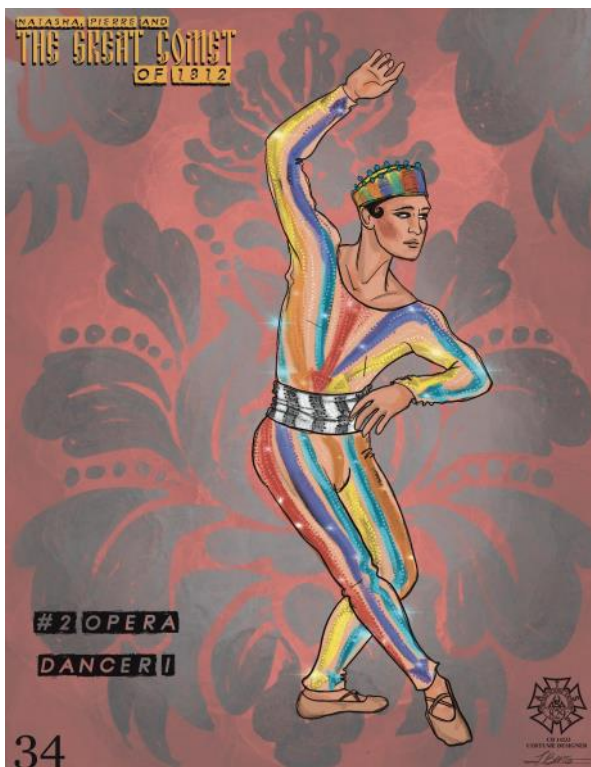
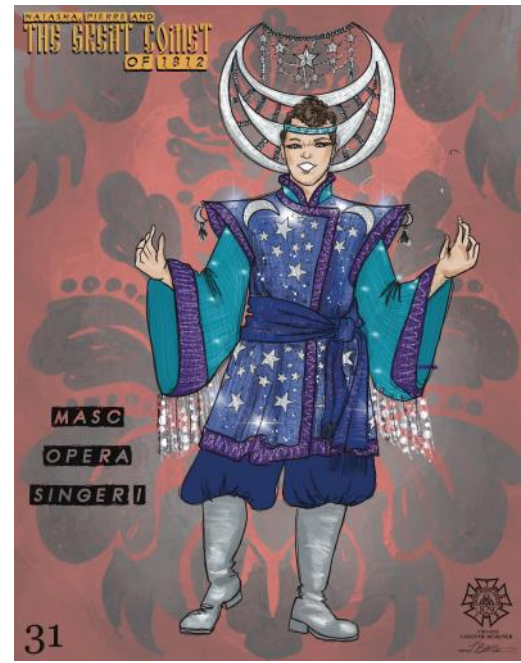
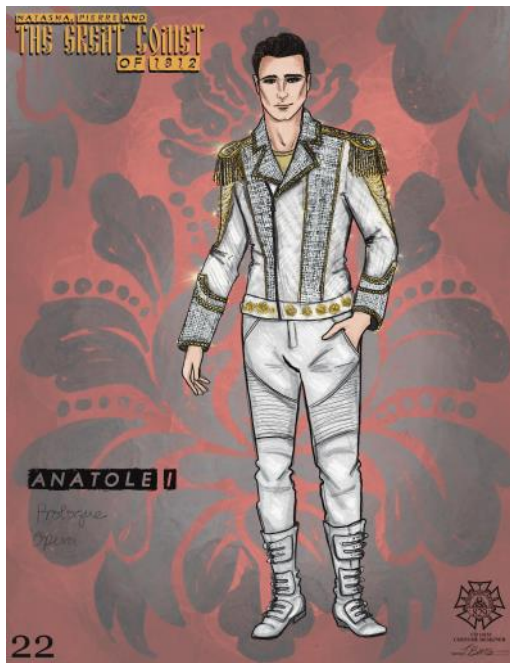
by Tesia Dugan Benson





COSTUME DESIGN

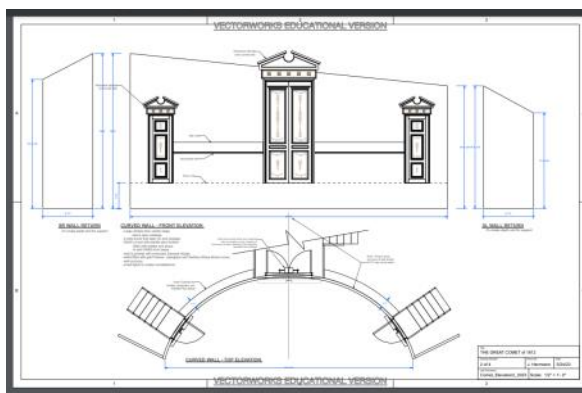
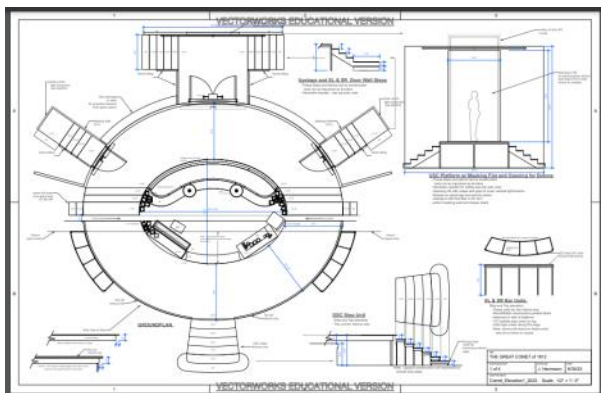
by Tesia Dugan Benson





SCENIC DESIGN

by Jeff Herrmann

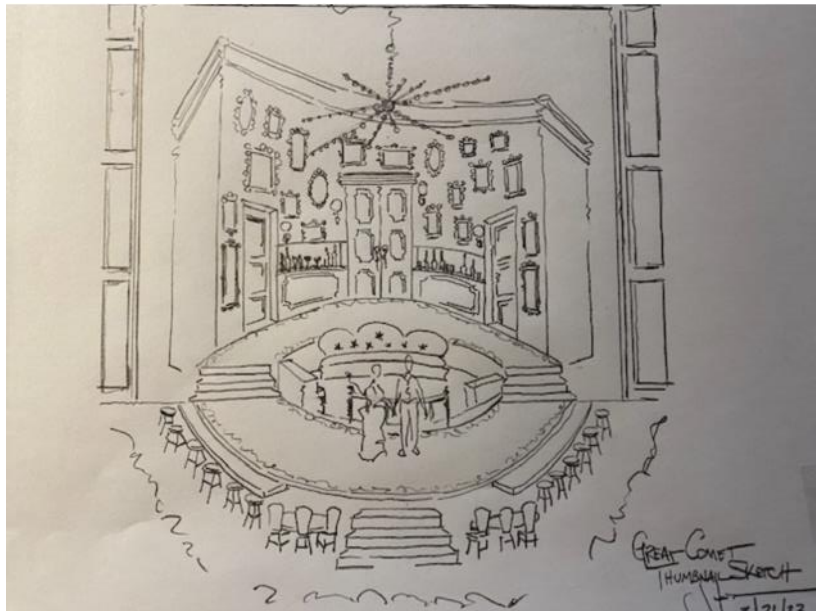


Detailed scenic elevations (left) describe exact measurements and detail elements such as windows, door and trim.



3-D renderings (previous page and left) for the stage at Idaho Shakespeare Festival were created by scenic designer Jeff Herrmann and design assistant Michael Gault. There will be slight modifications for the stage at Great Lakes Theatre.

Preliminary drawing, or "Thumbnail" sketch of the set



Research images and color swatches provide guidance for the set painters, who will have to convey the sense of the Russian night club's flocked damask wallpaper with paint.



Paint elevation of the main up stage door

A model of the set is created for the directors and actors to help visualize the space



NATASHA, PIERRE & THE GREAT COMET OF 1812 ONSTAGE AT IDAHO SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL



This page, clockwise from top left: Dario Alvarez, Jodi Dominick, Jillian Kates & Jessi Kirtley; Ángela Utrera, Camille Brooks & Alex Syiek; the company of *Great Comet*; Chris McCarrell & Jessi Kirtley; Jillian Kates & Jessi Kirtley.

Following page, clockwise from top left: Jessi Kirtley & Chris McCarrell; the company of *Great Comet*; the company of *Great Comet*; Jessi Kirtley & Alex Syiek; the company of *Great Comet*.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRIOR TO ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What is the difference between a musical and opera? *Natasha, Pierre, & The Great Comet of 1812* has almost no spoken dialogue: why do you think it is called a musical?
2. What is the benefit of a musical in this format with no spoken dialogue (think of *Hamilton* or *Sweeney Todd*)? What are the cons? Which kind of musical do you prefer?
3. We find romance in many different types of stories: mystery, action and adventure, and romantic comedies to name just a few. Why do you think art focuses on love and romance so much? What qualities make for a good love story? When you watch or read one, what feels right?
4. Have you ever watched a friend make a choice you disapprove of? How do you communicate to your friend of your disapproval? Should you express your feelings, or should you support your friend in whatever they choose? Why? How far would you go to help and protect your closest friend?
5. How do you feel when you have a big decision to make – a choice between two things you really want? What is your process towards making a decision? Do you have a conversation with a trusted friend or family member? Who? Why do you pick that person? Do you look for signs to point you in the right direction? If so, how do you know what is a sign and what isn't?
6. What does it mean for an audience to “suspend their disbelief” during a performance? Think about a performance (on stage, television, movie, or internet) that drew you in and made you suspend your disbelief. What type of performance was it? What was happening in the moment of the performance that allowed you to suspend your disbelief? What elements (acting, music, costumes, movement, etc.) helped you to do this?
7. Look up the definition of the word “naïve”; Is this a way you would describe yourself or someone you know? What are the benefits of a person being naïve? The negatives? What are the pros and cons of being someone that is “world-weary” from too much experience? Would you rather be one over the other? Why? What qualities of each type of person would you like to adopt?
8. How would you define “love at first sight”? Do you think love at first sight is possible? What is the difference between love at first sight and true love? How do you know when you are in love?
9. Both characters Natasha and Sonya comment on how the Opera they watch in the story is more than just the performance – it's also the audience reactions, the warmth of all the people present, the lights, the sounds, the movement, the performance on stage as well as the performance of the people in the audience feigning (pretending) they like it. How does their description compare to how you feel about seeing a play or musical? A movie in a movie theater? Going to a concert?
10. Why do we want what others have? What is the purpose of the feelings of jealousy and envy? Usually, we cast those feelings in a negative light with descriptions like “the green-eyed monster” but is it possible to use those emotions for the benefit of ourselves and others?

ACTIVITIES

1. The song “Prologue” introduces the characters of the musical in *Natasha, Pierre, & The Great Comet of 1812*, similar to yearbook superlatives (“most likely to [have a certain career]”, most athletic”, etc.). Working in groups of 4-6 people, have the students help each other to come up with a short sentence to describe each person in their group. Dictate the feel of the discussion by suggesting they come up with descriptions that are funny, ironic, thoughtful, and always classroom appropriate.
2. Light is an important part of how this musical is staged. Since the actors go through the audience, the whole room needs to be lit for much of the performance. Play around with light and performance in your classroom. Choose a scene from any play that your class has worked in the past. Invite the students to bring in lights: phones, flashlights, fairy lights, electric candles, lanterns, etc. Split the class into two groups. One group will perform their scene on a “stage” area that you create in your classroom and all the light will be focused on that area. The second group will perform their scene throughout the classroom with the lights both everywhere and focused on specific spots. Compare and contrast the two styles of staging. Which did the students connect to more? Why? Do certain types of plays work better with these two different types of staging?
3. The script of *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* contains moments of French and Russian languages. Play around with language in your classroom by experimenting with this classic improvisation game!

Gibberish interpreter:

- a) Introduce the idea of Gibberish: speaking with silly sounds that don’t mean anything but can still communicate an intention or meaning.
- b) Warm up the students with a gibberish call and response: you say something in gibberish using gesture or emotion and the students repeat what you did.
- c) Get two volunteers to stand up at the front of the class. One will speak in gibberish and the other will “translate” what the first student is trying to communicate.
- d) Get two new volunteers and give them a scenario so the student speaking gibberish can tell a story that the second will translate to the rest of the class. The gibberish speaker should use as much specific emotion and physical movement as possible to help communicate their story.

Some scenarios to give the volunteers:

- Teaching how to juggle
- How to cook their favorite meal
- A scientist explaining a new discovery on Mars
- Going on a terrible first date

Follow-up questions:

- What are helpful strategies when you are trying to communicate something to a person that doesn’t understand you?
- What are some things you do when you are in a situation where you can’t understand what another person is saying (a loud concert or restaurant, for example)?
- Which student did you seem to understand the clearest (with or without the interpreter)? Why?
- What was lost in translation? How did it feel when the translator kept getting the idea wrong? How did it feel for the translator to try to understand the speaker?

4. Narration is working in a fascinating way in this script. The characters speak both as themselves and as an impartial narrator, dictating what action they and others are doing — even some action that the character is but the actor is not. Why do the students think Dave Malloy chose to include narration as a part of the way the characters communicate? Get two student volunteers and have them come up to the front of the classroom. Ask the rest of the class to name an activity for them to do — something that can be done for at least a minute. One student will just do the activity; the other will narrate themselves doing it and how they feel about it as they are doing it. How did it feel while watching and listening to the two different students do the activity? Which felt more theatrical? Was one more interesting or amusing to watch than the other? Why?

Alex Syiek in *Natasha, Pierre and The Great Comet of 1812* at Idaho Shakespeare Festival



WRITING PROMPTS

1. *Natasha, Pierre, & The Great Comet of 1812* is adapted from the novel *War And Peace* by Leo Tolstoy. What classic book would your students like to see adapted as a play or musical? Invite your students to take a moment from that book and turn it into a song or a scene. Try some of them out in class. Finish the new play!
2. Write a review (see page 32 for more information).
3. The comet that is referenced in the musical *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* is a reference to The Great Comet of 1811 (C/1811 F1), which was visible on Earth without the aid of a telescope for 260 days. This comet was interpreted as an omen or sign in many cultures around the world for different types of events, including Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in 1812. Ask the students to pretend they are a spiritual leader for a royal house and a new, large comet is seen over the capital city on the eve of a momentous occasion. What is the occasion and what could it mean for the country? The ruler has come to them to interpret this sign; what do they tell them? Be specific – does this mean victory? If so, how will the country prevail? Does this mean that the ruler should change their course of action? What should they attempt instead?
4. Ask your students: Have you ever had to make a choice between two people you felt strongly about? How did you choose? Should Natasha make her choice on her own, a person new to love and being out in society, or should she turn to someone for help? Who do you turn to for help? Suppose Natasha, your trusted friend, has written to you about her first meeting with Anatole Kuragin. As you write your letter back, what advice, if any, do you give her? She writes to you again, telling you of the party she attended with him, their kiss, and her deepening feelings for him. What does your next letter say?
5. Using a play or novel that you've already read in school, ask the students to write one short, descriptive sentence for each character in the story similar to the descriptions of the characters in the opening song of *Natasha, Pierre, & The Great Comet of 1812*. Why did the students choose the description they did? What actions happen in the story that helped them arrive at that decision? Which characters were easy to create a short description for and which ones took more thought? Is there a consensus in the class as to how a character should be described? Can they arrive at one? How do they support their argument?
6. Take a look at the song "Charming". The character Hélène uses the figure of speech of repetition very strongly. What words are repeated? Why do you think those words are used over and over again? Have your students imagine they are the person that Hélène is addressing this song to; what effect would these words have on them, especially if they came from a person that was popular and admired? What are some strategies they use when they are attempting to convince someone to do something? Have your students write a speech trying to convince someone to come to a party with them predominantly using a figure of speech. Have them read it to a partner to hear how effective it might be. You can assign different partnerships different figures of speech to try.

Examples of figures of speech to try:

- Repetition
 - of an idea
 - of a word
- Metaphor/Simile
- Ellipsis
- Hyperbole
- Euphemism

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

AFTER ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. One of the defining features of *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* is that the action of the performance happens all through the theater and audience. How did you feel as the action happened all around? Have you ever seen a show like that before? Which do you prefer? Why? In what ways did the staging make you feel like you were in the show with the actors? What were the moments where you were able to suspend your disbelief in the performance and let yourself believe you were a part of the story?
2. The action of this musical focuses on three families that are intertwined through friendship or love/marriage. Compare and contrast the families. Which family would you prefer to be a part of? What qualities of that family make it attractive to you?
3. How did the music affect you emotionally throughout the performance? In particular, how did percussion help communicate how a moment was for you? Which musical moment in particular was most effective for you? How did you react?
4. Anatole Kuragin is described as being incredibly handsome and having a very strong air of confidence, which Natasha is immediately attracted to. Why do you think she is? Have you ever been in a room where a person immediately grabbed your attention? What was it about them that attracted you?
5. How did you feel when Natasha met Anatole for the first time? How did the drums affect how you perceived the moment? Do you think Anatole's feelings go beyond a physical attraction? Do you think Natasha's do? Is this love at first sight? How can one tell the difference in the moment?
6. Why do you think the opera in the story is portrayed so alienatingly? How is opera perceived today? Would you ever see one?
7. Which character are you most like? In what ways? If you were that character which choice(s) would you have made differently in the story? How do you think they would have ended up if they did make your choice?
8. In what ways are Natasha and Pierre similar? How are they different? Why do you think this story revolves around them?
9. Pierre sings, "They say we are asleep/until we are in love." What do you think this means? Do you agree with this idea? Who are the they – where do you think this idea comes from? Does Pierre mean he wants to fall in love with another person? What are all the possible loves that this saying might mean? Which do you think would be the best for Pierre? For yourself? How did you feel at the end when it turns out he really does mean romantic love?
10. Natasha keeps looking for signs that her choice of Anatole is the correct one – why do you think she does? Why doesn't she trust herself and her judgement? Why doesn't she turn to someone for help in making this decision? Why are there moments in our life when we feel like we are alone in our choices and no one can help us?
11. How do you think our current society feels about a young woman running away to secretly get married? Do you feel that Marya and Sonya's reactions are justified after they stop Natasha's elopement or are those a reaction a thing of the past? How would your family react if you decided to secretly get married before you were 20? Do you think gender still plays a role in this? If so, how?

12. Pierre, as well as Helene, and even the song "Prologue", repeatedly comment on how Pierre doesn't do much in life except drink and study, implying that he is not very effective at living life; Why do you agree or disagree with this assessment? Would you go to Pierre to help you with a problem? Why does Marya turn to him for help after the thwarted elopement? What are the qualities you look for in a person that you turn to for help?
13. Is Natasha a "fallen woman"? The elopement never happened and she broke off her engagement with Andrey before it did. Why do you think she keeps being described as such? In what ways does our current society describe a "fallen woman"? How much has changed since 1800s? Why do you think this trope endures in our culture?
14. If you were Andrey, would you forgive Natasha? Why? What would it take to forgive her? If you were Natasha, would you want Andrey's forgiveness? Would you try to repair the relationship with him?
15. Why do you think Pierre professes his love for Natasha at the end? Do you think it really is love? Do you think Natasha receives it as such? Do you feel this is a satisfactory way to end the story? In the source material for the musical, *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, Natasha and Pierre get married the year after these events happen. Why do you think Tolstoy pairs them up together?
16. The first song of the show ("Prologue") gives all the characters a short description: "Balaga is fun/Bolkonsky is crazy/Mary is plain/Dolokhov is fierce/Hélène is a slut/Anatole is hot/Marya is old-school/Sonya is Good/Natasha is young/and Andrey isn't here/And what about Pierre?/Dear, Bewildered and awkward Pierre?" Do you feel those descriptions are fair? How do you think you would have felt about the characters if those descriptions hadn't been put on the characters before the action of the play even starts? Do you think those descriptions still apply to each of the characters by the end of the play? Who would you change and why?

HOW TO WRITE A REVIEW

MORE HOW AND LESS WHAT

A theater review is not a book review, you do not need to summarize what happens. Provide the necessary background so the reader knows the name of the play and the basics of what kind of play it is, and then move into your commentary. You do not need to explain WHAT the play is, instead write about HOW successfully it was presented.

THE ACTOR NOT THE CHARACTER

You can disapprove of the decisions a character makes, but how well did the ACTOR perform the role? Was their behavior appropriate to the part as written? Feel free to share your opinions, comparing or contrasting their work with other actors with whom you are familiar.

WHAT IS DIRECTION?

Maybe you have heard of a “director” in theater or film, but do you know what they do? It is not a director’s job to tell the actors how to say every line, but they are the person responsible for creating the general mood and concept for the production. What was your impression of the production as a whole? Was it too funny for a serious play? Or not amusing enough for a comic play? Use words to reflect back to the director how successful the production is as a whole.

DON’T FORGET THE DESIGN

The set you see and the sounds you hear are also unique to this one production of this play. Describe what you see and hear, but also be sure to make clear how successful these designs are in telling the story of the play.

IN CONCLUSION ...

While it is not necessary to give a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” your concluding sentence should summarize your impression of the production as a whole.

THEATER REVIEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA

Reviews in news websites may be 1000 words, they may be as brief as 300 words. Can you write a one-page review? Can you write a 100 word review, to post on Facebook? Do you think you could create a 140-character review that sums up the production for posting on Twitter?

A sample review written by a student follows this page.

A SAMPLE REVIEW WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

"Gambit": More Poetry Than History — Mark Wood

If Aristotle was correct when he said that poetry “is a higher thing than history,” then “Royal Gambit,” which opened Friday night at Pentacle Theater, is, I suppose, on the right track.

For those who were expecting a representational treatment of the life of England’s Henry VIII, “Royal Gambit” was a shock, if not a disappointment. Those who sought poetry got it, although of a very dogmatic and simplistic sort.

This unusual, highly presentational play by Hermann Gressieker, directed by Ed Classen, is an indictment of modern man as a ruthless opportunist. The Tudor king is a representative of a rationalizing, shifty society which has become “superior to the highest” while “wallowing in the depths.”

As Henry uses the banners of “reason” and “humanism” to obtain then dispose of his six wives, so modern man uses them for his own pleasure and glorification, uses them to wage war in the name of peace, to hate in the name of love.

Such is the grim theme pleasingly presented by a company of seven actors, who performed their roles energetically, if unevenly. The presentational acting style employed here is difficult to perfect. It should be theatrical, yet believable; aimed at the head, yet acceptable to the heart.

Louise Larsen was a standout as Catherine of Aragon, Largely because she utilized this presentational approach and was not afraid of open theatricality. Her flamboyant stage presence, which needed to be toned down in her recent role in “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” found full vent here.

Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was portrayed by Gale Rieder, who quickly became an audience favorite. Her thick accent was letter-perfect and her direct humor was a welcome contrast to the bitter satire of the rest of the play.

The other four actresses—Kathy Stratton, Marcia Engblom, Polly Bond and Patricia Sloan—each had their exceptional moments. However, they generally seemed tied to more conventional, representational acting styles.

Ron Fox was superb in the role of Henry. Tuxedoed, leering with the look of a demonic marionette, the vacant stare of a deranged orator, Fox dominated the stage fully, commanding both in voice and stage presence.

The technical elements of the play were more than adequate. Musical accompaniment was appropriately sparse and simple.

At one point the play, King Henry roared, “In my realm I decide what constitutes tragedy!” Ironically, Gressieker strips modern man not only of his possibilities as a tragic figure worthy of any sympathies at all. In the final moments of the play, Catherine of Aragon announces the death of modern man and the birth of a new era. It is a scene of great hope, but it is not as profound as her earlier pronouncement to her husband that “the ways of the world are not so cut and dried!”

For my own part, I wish that “Royal Gambit’s” statement were not so cut and dried. By making man out to be such a simple monster the play defeats its own purposes and turns poetry into scathing dogma, which is probably even less interesting than, say, history.

<http://faculty.chemeketa.edu/jrupert3/eng105/Annrev.html>

LEARNING STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.A

Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1.A

Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.A

Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.B

Analyze nuances in the meaning of words

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6

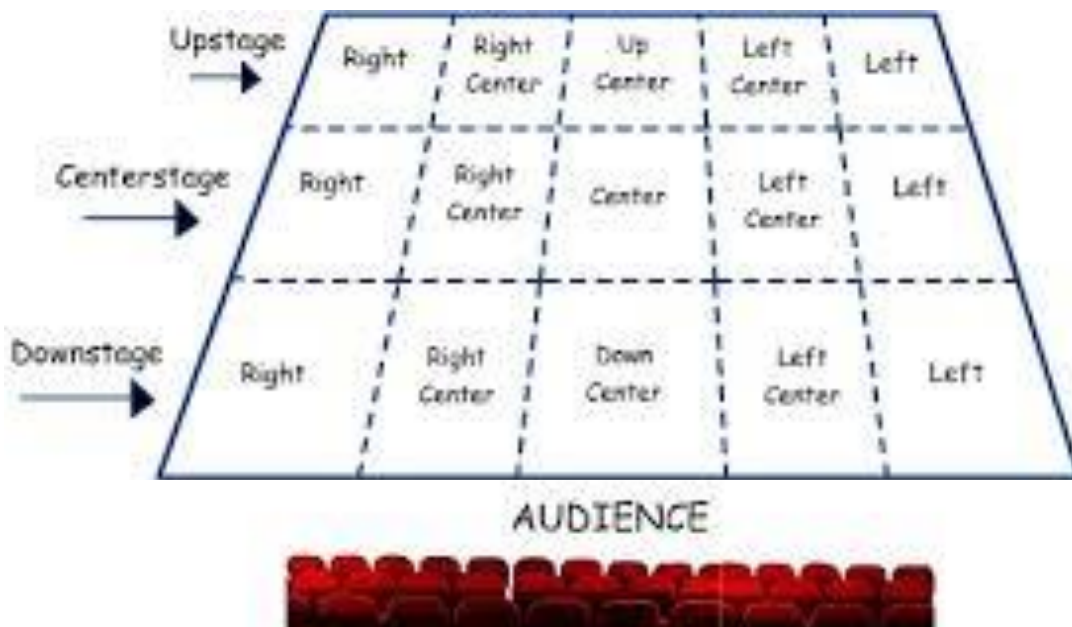
Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF THEATER TERMS

Apron	The part of the stage in front of the curtain
Auditorium or House	Where the audience sits
Beam Spread	The area a single light covers
Blackout	Turning off all the lights in the theatre at once
Board	The control center for lights, sound, or both
Book (The)	A copy of the script containing all notes and blocking
Box Office	Where the audience buys tickets
Box Set	A set in a proscenium with three walls
Call	The time certain members of the production need to be at the theatre
Cheat	When an actor takes a realistic action and modifies it for the audience to see
Cloth	Scenery painted on fabric
Cue	A line or action that immediately leads to another action by the actor (for them to speak) designer or stage manager (to change the lights or sound)
Curtain Call	The bows at the end of the show
Dimmer	Equipment that controls the brightness of a light
Director	The creative head of a production. They create a vision for the show and work with actors, designers, and crew to bring that vision to life
Flat	A frame covered with canvas, cardboard, or some other light material which is then painted as part of the set
Floodlight	A light that has a wide unfocused beam covering most of the stage
Fly	A system used to raise set backgrounds, set pieces, or potentially actors
Follow-spot	A spotlight that can follow an actor as they move across around the stage
Footlights	Floodlights on the floor at the front of the stage.
Gel	A piece of plastic placed over the light to change its color
Greenroom	A room where the company can relax, eat, or potentially watch the show if a TV and a camera has been rigged
Notes	The director's notes on the performance or rehearsal
Pit	An area between the stage and the audience where an orchestra can sit (typically below audience level)
Producer	The person responsible for all logistical and financial aspects of a production (as opposed to the creative head, the director).
Properties or Props	Items used by actors in a show (such as swords, plates, watches, etc.)

Proscenium	A type of stage defined by a proscenium arch. Proscenium theatres typically distinctly separate the audience and stage by a window (defined by the proscenium arch). The stage typically will not go far past the proscenium arch (the Ohio Theatre, for example).
Raked Stage	A stage that is angled (upstage is the top of the hill and downstage the bottom) so that the audience can see the action more clearly
Set	The scenery used in a scene or throughout the play
Set Dressing	Parts of the set that don't serve a practical function but make the set look realistic.
Spotlight	A type of light that is focused so that it can light a very specific area
Strike	Taking apart and removing a set from the theatre
Thrust	A stage that goes beyond the proscenium arch so that the audience is sitting on three sides of the set - in front, and on either side (the Hanna Theatre, for example).
Tracks	The rails on which curtains (tabs) run.
Trap	A hole in the stage covered by a door where actors or set pieces can exit or enter
Understudy	An actor who learns all of the lines and blocking of another actor (typically one of the actors in a lead role) who can perform in case the main actor cannot go on
Upstage	The rear of the stage
Wings	The sides of the stage typically blocked off by curtains where actors and crew can stand and wait for their cues

STAGE DIRECTIONS





**GREAT
LAKES
THEATER**

**Student Matinee Series
2023-2024 Season**

Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812 by Dave Malloy

Dracula: The Bloody Truth by Le Navet Bete & John Nicholson

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

Agatha Christie's **Murder on the Orient Express**, adapted by Ken Ludwig

The Merry Wives of Windsor by William Shakespeare

Always...Patsy Cline - by Ted Swindley

Make Classic Theater Come Alive for Your Students!

Since 1962, students have enjoyed the thrill of experiencing classic plays, professionally produced by Great Lakes Theater. Our student audiences experience the same top-quality productions offered in our public performances, but at a fraction of the cost. The state-of-the-art classical thrust stage configuration in the gorgeously renovated Hanna Theater affords students a dynamic audience experience unequalled in our region.

[Greatlakestheater.org/education](https://greatlakestheater.org/education)



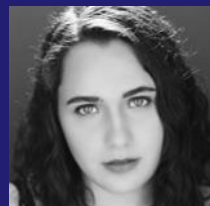
School Residency Program

Bring the Classics to Your Classroom!

Launched in 1981, Great Lakes Theater's in-school residency program is now one of the most successful artist-in-residence programs in the country. Each year over 16,000 students in over 100 schools experience the pleasure, power and relevance of classic literature brought to life in their own classrooms.



From *The Sneetches* to *Romeo and Juliet* (and so many more in between!) each week-long residency uses an



interactive, hands-on approach, and is designed to meet the common core education standards. We visit your school with scripts, props, costumes—and for high schools, swords, daggers and stage blood—to explore classic literature in an unforgettable way!

For more information contact Lisa Ortenzi at 216.453.4446
Greatlakes theater.org/education

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Great Comet is part of the Kulas Musical Theatre Series at Great Lakes Theater



ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER



Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, bringing students to the theater for matinee performances and sending specially trained actor-teachers to the schools for weeklong residencies developed to explore classic drama from a theatrical point of view. GLT is equally dedicated to enhancing the theater experience for adult audiences. To this end, GLT regularly serves as the catalyst for community events and programs in the arts and humanities that illuminate the plays on its stage.

Great Lakes Theater is one of only a handful of American theaters that have stayed the course as a classic theater. As GLT celebrates over a decade in its permanent home at the Hanna Theatre, the company reaffirms its belief in the power of partnership, its determination to make this community a better place in which to live, and its commitment to ensure the legacy of classic theater in Cleveland.

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greatlakestheater.org