



Denver Center
Theatre Company

InsideOut

PRODUCED BY THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT OF THE DENVER CENTER THEATRE COMPANY

MARCH 2004

BLITHE SPIRIT

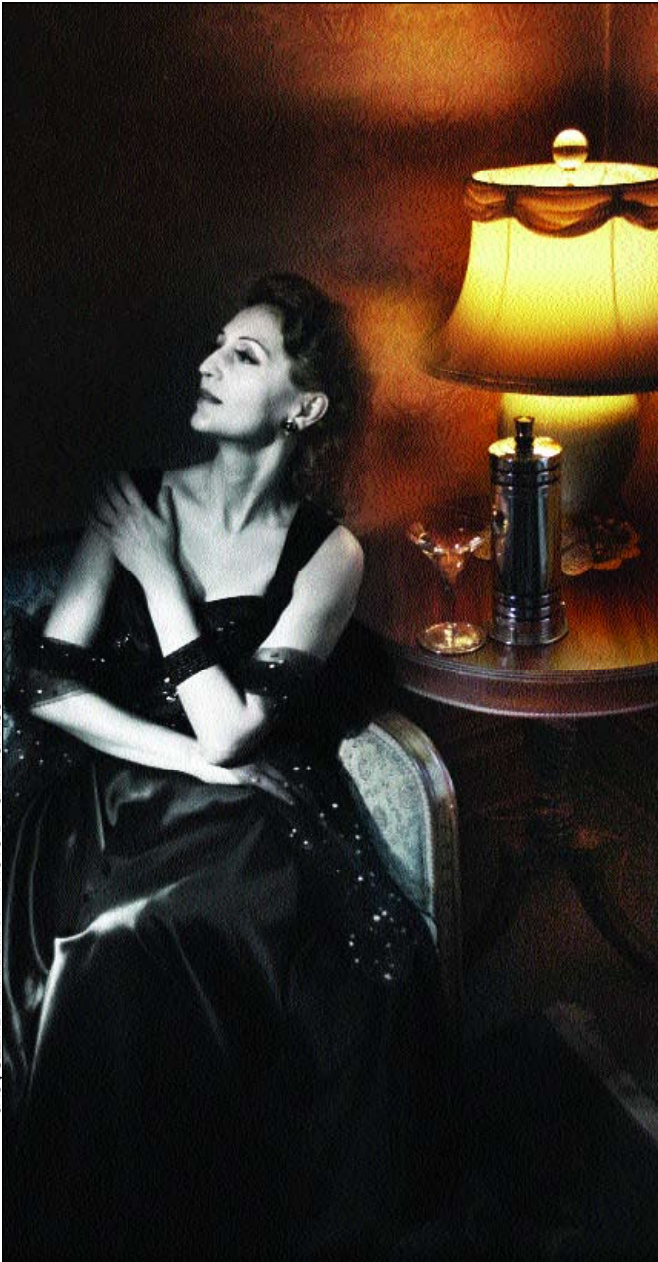
March 18 - April 24 • The Space Theatre

Charles Condomine, a mediocre novelist, summons a medium to his home to study “the techniques” of spiritualists for his new book. Along with Ruth, his second wife, and Dr. and Mrs. Bradman, close friends, he participates in a séance conducted by Madame Arcati, his chosen medium. Madame Arcati supplies Charles with more than he bargained for. She produces a “protoplasmic manifestation” in the form of Elvira, Charles’s deceased first wife whom only he (and the audience) can see and hear. With farce and wit unleashed, Coward presents us with some of his best comic characters in a situation full of spirits and satire.

“CHARLES: I suspect the worst. A real professional charlatan. That’s what I am hoping for anyhow...the character I am planning for my book must be a complete impostor....”

—Blithe Spirit

JACQUELINE ANTARMIAN • PHOTO BY GARY ISAACS



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The Playwright

Noël Pierce Coward was born on December 16, 1899, and received his first name because Christmas was just days away. He was the son of Arthur and Violet Veitch Coward. From day one Noël was the family's star attraction. He was intelligent, temperamental and an instinctive performer. He loved to sing and dance and threw tantrums if he was not summoned to perform for guests. His formal education consisted of a few years at the Chapel Royal Choir School (which he despised) and some dance lessons (which he vastly preferred). In time, his voracious reading habits and keen sense of observation more than made up for his lack of schooling.

With his mother's encouragement, he launched his professional acting career at the age of 12, making his London debut in a children's show called *The Goldfish*. He appeared in several West End productions with the popular comic actor-manager Charles Hawtrey and played the "lost boy" Slightly in an annual production of *Peter Pan*.

In the early 1900's, England was a terribly class-conscious society. As a boy actor born to relatively poor parents, Noël would have normally been snubbed by the upper classes. However, his professional and social ambitions were insatiable, and Coward's extraordinary determination and charm won him entry into the choicest circles. Noël's social ascent began with his youthful friendship with artist Philip Streatfield who asked wealthy socialite Mrs. Ashley Cooper to take Coward under her wing. She made the boy a frequent guest at her country estate, ignoring any complaints about the presence of a lower class child. During his weekends at the Cooper estate, Coward first encountered the writings of Saki, the pen name of Hector Hugh Munro. These witty short stories frequently centered on the wealthy, cynical young men whose world would be shattered by World War I. Coward would essentially pick up where Saki (who would die in the war) left off.

Just as Noël's acting career was taking off, he was drafted in 1918. Unable to get out of service, he used his connections to get an assignment to light duty in the Artists' Rifles corps. Even so, he was miserable, and a minor head injury sent him into a complete nervous collapse. Coward later told a friend his "violent headaches were greatly exaggerated"¹; after nine months of service, a

sympathetic doctor helped Coward obtain an honorable discharge. Although relieved to be a civilian again, Noël found that the demand for his acting talents had evaporated. He continued to audition, but put an increasing amount of energy into playwriting and composing. *I Leave It to You* (1920) was Coward's first full length play produced in the West End with Noël in a leading role---quite an accomplishment for a young man of 21. The brief run brought encouraging reviews, whetting Coward's appetite for more. However, most London producers were unwilling to gamble on a playwright of Coward's age.

In the summer of 1921, he scraped enough money together to come to New York, convinced America would embrace his work. He spent a steamy summer roaming Manhattan, scraping by with the income from a few short stories and wondering why he had ever left England. But he saw several plays and learned about the American theatre's fast-paced performing style, a refreshing change from the stodgy approach of most British productions. Best of all, he spent many evenings in the Manhattan home of playwright Hartley Manners and his eccentric actress wife, Laurette Taylor. Their colorful lifestyle eventually inspired one of Coward's greatest hits, *Hay Fever*.

Coward shrewdly decided his next project should involve a controversial topic, one guaranteed to attract publicity. He wrote, directed and starred in *The Vortex* (1924), a searing look at sexual vanity and drug abuse among the upper classes. *The Vortex* immediately became the talk of London. Some hated it, but the combination of fiery acting and scandalous subject matter made for brisk ticket sales. Other plays had examined drug abuse, but not among the rich and powerful. The play moved to a larger theatre for an extended run, making Coward an "overnight" sensation. During the London run of the play, Coward met Jack Wilson, a handsome American stockbroker who became his lover and business manager for the next decade. Blinded by love, he overlooked Wilson's heavy drinking and blatant stealing---and he demanded that everyone else in his circle overlook these things, too. To make his commitment clear, Coward purchased Goldenhurst Farm in Kent, renovated the place and moved his parents and Wilson there in 1926.

C O N T I N U E D P A G E 3

Coward's stage works played successfully in both London and New York, most notably the comedy *Hay Fever* and the revue *On With the Dance*. But he was working at an unbearable pace; that pressure and the failure of several of his plays caused him to collapse on stage in 1926 and the doctors advised a prolonged rest. When he finally returned to England, he avoided performing for more than a year and focused on his writing. His old fashioned operetta *Bittersweet* (1929) with its sentimental waltz ("I'll See You Again") enjoyed a long London run, but the New York production had the bad luck to open just as Wall Street crashed. Although Coward was not affected directly by the economic depression that followed, the world faced a series of violent changes that forced Coward to look for new ways to keep the world amused.

Coward prospered through the worst of the Great Depression, going on extended journeys to escape the pressures of show business. During a stay in Singapore, he wrote the comedy *Private Lives* (1930). This story of a quarrelsome divorced couple who leave their new spouses to run off together was shocking and hilarious. This was followed by *Cavalcade* (1931), a spectacular stage drama that followed the lives of two London families (one rich, one poor) from 1899 to 1930. Through it all passed the "cavalcade" of recent British history, each event seen in the context of the character's lives. Acclaimed on the London stage, the film version won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1933. Now at the peak of his popularity, Coward seemingly could do no wrong. After adding "Mad Dogs and Englishmen" to his London revue of *Words and Music* (1932), he co-starred with friends Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in one of his most daring plays, *Design for Living* (1933). It involved a bisexual romance between two men and a woman ---an unspeakable subject in those days. The topic and the stellar cast guaranteed sold-out houses every night of its limited run.

When World War II broke out, Coward was determined to make up for his embarrassing efforts in the previous war. After serving for a brief time as a secret agent, he entertained troops in Europe, Africa and the Far East, frequently at his own expense.

In a matter of months, he wrote a trio of hit plays, including the autobiographical *Present Laughter* (1942) and the cockney drama *This Happy Breed* (1942). His biggest wartime hit was *Blithe Spirit* (1942), which became one of Winston Churchill's favorite plays. But times were changing and so were public tastes.

The years following World War II were difficult for Coward. He continued to turn out plays and

musicals, but most met with failure. He knew his writing was better than ever, but his work was now dismissed as frivolous and out of date. In addition, British postwar taxes became crippling and Coward was forced to relocate in Jamaica. The first of many British tax exiles, Coward was viciously attacked in the press as a traitor and his well-deserved knighthood was delayed for decades by spiteful politicians. It was during those difficult years that Coward fell in love with South African actor Graham Payne. Coward hoped to make Payne a star by featuring him in several important productions, but the actor lacked Noël's drive and star quality. Still, they remained devoted companions for the rest of Noël's life.

In the 1950s, Coward's star began to rise again as he found a new audience in America. A nightclub engagement in Las Vegas proved to be a surprise sensation and led to a series of network television appearances, including a production of *Blithe Spirit* with Claudette Colbert, Lauren Bacall and Mildred Natwick. He also made appearances in movies such as *Our Man in Havana*, *Around the World in Eighty Days* and others. In addition, he caused a furor in 1961 with a series of articles criticizing the new "kitchen sink" school of playwrights and the questionable virtues of method acting.

A hit revival of *Private Lives* in 1963 sparked renewed interest in Coward's plays on both sides of the Atlantic. Encouraged by this, he wrote and starred in the London production of three one-acts called *Suite in Three Keys* (1966). This trio included "Song at Twilight", the story of an aging author who fears his homosexuality will be exposed. It was well received, but Noël was suffering from memory lapses and chose to permanently retire from the stage. As his health went into steady decline, he cut back on his public appearances, but enjoyed the ongoing rediscovery of his works. His knighthood was finally granted in 1970. His last public appearance was in January 1973; in March of that year he suffered a stroke and died. He is buried in Jamaica but a memorial to him was installed in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey.

England in 1941

Noël Coward wrote the wildly comic *Blithe Spirit* in 1941 but conditions in England were far from frivolous. In his diary of April, 1941 Coward wrote: "Pretty bad blitz... a couple of bombs fell very near during dinner. Wall bulged a bit and door flew in. Orchestra went on playing ... I sang..."¹

In April, 1940 Germany invaded Denmark and Norway; a month later British troops evacuated Norway. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who two years earlier had appeased Hitler by giving him part of Czechoslovakia, resigned after a no-confidence vote by Parliament. He was succeeded by Winston Churchill as Prime Minister of a coalition government consisting of Labour and Conservative members. In the same month Germany invaded France and British troops again evacuated. In July, the Battle of Britain began and in September, the London Blitz. A series of major nighttime air raids by the Germans on London and most other major British ports and cities lasted from September 7, 1940 to May 10, 1941 resulting in 43,000 civilian deaths. Because of bomb damage to homes and limitations of repairs due to war-time demands on human and material resources, there was severe overcrowding and a massive housing shortage.

"Let us brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for 1,000 years, men will still say: 'This was their finest hour.' "

—Winston Churchill, speech in House of Commons, June 18, 1940.

In 1941 the National Service Act made all citizens liable for national service, military or civilian. In December, the conscription (draft) age was extended from 41 to 50. Those not in service accustomed themselves to rationing (the restriction of sale of certain goods in short supply), the blacking out of windows during the Blitz, air raid sirens and bomb shelters. Nevertheless, British morale remained high and war production never ceased.

And a play like *Blithe Spirit* became popular because it spoke hilariously to the fears of loss and death caused by the war.

"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."

— Winston Churchill, first statement as Prime Minister, House of Commons, May 13, 1940.

Noël COWARD and LIFE and DEATH

ELYOT: Death is very laugh-
able really, such a cunning lit-
tle mystery.

– Noël Coward, *Private Lives*

The 1920s and 1930s saw a surge of interest in the paranormal, clairvoyance and spiritualism and it was reflected in the theatre. Plays such as James M. Barrie's *Mary Rose* and J.B. Priestly's *Johnson over Jordan* reassured audiences that death was not the end. These plays confirmed the belief "that the sacrifices of World War I had not been in vain... and loved ones (had gone) to a place of happiness and content."¹ Coward shattered these assumptions in *Blithe Spirit*. The dead do not exist to make the lives of the living more comfortable; instead their spirits bring a sense of anarchy, danger and sexual energy. The playwright also parodied a huge movie success of the 1940s, Alfred Hitchcock's film of Daphne deMaurier's Gothic novel, *Rebecca*. Here the mousy heroine, the second wife of Maxim deWinter, has to struggle against the powerful personality of her husband's dead first wife, Rebecca. Constantly reminding her of the forceful housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, Mrs. deWinter the second nearly loses her marriage and her mind in her battle with the unseen presence. Rebecca, like Elvira, hangs about the house bringing chaos; but, unlike Elvira, possesses no humor.

Coward was fascinated by death and often observed surgeries. He joked that death could be overcome and his relentless obsession with performing and writing (60 plays, 300 songs, short stories, etc.) were a means of cheating death. "A writer's work is his ghost and Coward took solace in the belief that his spirit would haunt the world long after his body departed it."² When Coward saw a blitzed London in 1941 with the sights and smells of destruction, he felt rage and fear. But as always he turned these feelings into mockery and to keep the Grim Reaper and his creditors at bay, he wrote *Blithe Spirit*.

As a stage device, ghosts inspire aggression. "In tragedy, the panic they generate becomes revenge for injustice; in comedy, they add disorder to order so as to give a sense of the whole."³ The ghosts who materialize in *Blithe Spirit* are passionate and tyrannical; they vie for control of Charles Condomine's life and, in doing so, give Coward's writing an energy and inventiveness he would never again equal. Though the arrogant and selfish Charles is punished, in the end he is victorious over the ghosts and purges fear, guilt and mourning. In Coward's case, perhaps, he absolved himself of his shoddy behavior in World War I and overcame his survivor's guilt.

Though Coward hoped he could put his writing talent to serious use in World War II, it was his frivolity that was most appreciated ("Go out and sing 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen' while the guns are firing----that's your job," Churchill told him").⁴ As Coward embodied it, frivolity was an act of freedom, a denial of meanings and certainties. Though we may look for the substance of Elvira, Ruth, Charles et al, they are grown-up adolescents who have no commitment to anything serious and are created to entertain. And it is Coward's talent to amuse that made his work so popular. Simply, this frivolity acknowledges the futility of life while adding flavor to it.

"I shall ever be grateful for the almost psychic gift that enabled me to write *Blithe Spirit* in five days during one of the darkest years of the war."

– Noël Coward⁵

MEDIUMS

"Physical materializations are rare these days. The most common content of séances (at least in Sweden) are greetings to the living."

– Nils O. Jacobson

A medium is a psychic who, more or less professionally, usually within the spiritualist movement, receives and involves people in séances. During these séances information is received that is considered paranormal. Spiritualists believe that a medium acts as an intermediary linking the physical world with the so-called spirit world in which the dead are thought to exist. Depending on the working methods used, one could refer to a "clairvoyant medium" who primarily describes visual or auditory impressions compared to a "psychometric medium," who uses a guide or control to establish contact with the

source of information. (Daphne is Madame Arcati's control.) Madame Arcati is that rare breed of "physical mediums" who are thought to produce phenomena such as knockings, rappings and even materializations. A medium may work in a totally awakened state or in a trance, which is probably a self-induced hypnotic state.

"We are trying to bring people to an understanding that they are not just flesh and bones capable of looking and seeing. The five senses go beyond that. We are much, much more and we all have a spark of divinity within us. The more we function on a higher level of consciousness, the more attuned we become to higher forces."

– Ena Twigg, medium.¹

Some PLAYS, Movies & SONGS written by NOËL COWARD

Plays

Astonished Heart
Bitter Sweet
Blithe Spirit
Come In To The Garden Maud
Cowardly Custard
Fumed Oak
Fallen Angels
Family Album
Hands Across the Sea
Hay Fever
I'll Leave It To You Still
Life
Noël and Gertie
Nude With Violin
Present Laughter
Private Lives
Red Peppers
Relative Values
Shadow Play
Shadows of the Evening
Still Life
This Happy Breed

Waiting In The Wings
Ways and Means
We Were Dancing

Movies

Boom!
Bunny Lake is Missing
Easy Virtue
In Which We Serve
Noël Coward and Mary Martin
Our Man in Havana
Paris When It Sizzles
Surprise Package
The Astonished Heart
The Grass is Greener
The Italian Job
The Scoundrel

Songs

Any Little Fish
Dance, Little Lady
Dearest Love
Fishy About the French
Has Anybody Seen Our Ship
If Love Were All
I'll Follow My Secret Heart
I'll See You Again
London Pride
Mad About the Boy
Mad Dogs and Englishmen
Parisian Pierrot
Party's Over Now
Poor Little Rich Girl
Regency Rakes
Room With a View
Someday I'll Find You
Stately Homes of England
There's Always Something
There's Life in the Old Girl Yet
You Were There
Zigeuner

Chronology

This chronology is based on one produced by the Noël Coward Centenary Committee (1999) with additional contributions from Sheridan Morley, Mark Fox, Michael Imison and John Knowles.

1899 Born Noël Peirce Coward, (weight seven and a half pounds) at 2:30am, 16 December at "Helmsdale", Waldegrave Road, Teddington, Middlesex to Arthur Sabin Coward and Violet Agnes (Veitch) Coward. Pet name 'Baba'.

1905 Eric Coward, Coward's brother was born.

1907 July 23rd: Coward's first public appearance at an end of term concert at St Margaret's, Sutton.

1911 Made first stage appearance as Prince Mussel in *The Goldfish*.

1912 *The Great Name* with Charles Hawtrey and *Where The Rainbow Ends*. On February 2nd he made his directorial debut with *The Daisy Chain*.

1913 Played Slightly in *Peter Pan*. Noël met Gertrude Lawrence.

1914 Out of work for most of the year until *Peter Pan* again.

1915 *Where The Rainbow Ends* again in a different part. He played his first adult role in *Charley's Aunt*. He also wrote both music and lyrics for his first song "Forbidden Fruit."

1916 Appeared in the *Light Blues* with Cicely Courtneidge. He made his cabaret debut.

1917 *Ida Collaborates* (written with Esme Wynne) produced on a British tour. Made first film appearance in D.W. Griffiths' *Hearts of the World*.

1918 Coward has his second play produced, *Woman and Whiskey* (written with Esme Wynne). Wrote *The Rat Trap*.

1919 First song published: "The Baseball Rag" with music by Doris Joel.

1920 *I'll Leave It To You* (1919) produced in England (1923 in America).

1921 Wrote *Sirocco*. His first trip to America.

1922 *The Young Idea* (1921) produced in England (1932 in America). A *Withered Nosegay* was published.

1923 Played Sholto Brent in *The Young Idea* in the West End. Wrote songs and sketches and appeared with Gertrude Lawrence in *London Calling*!

1924 *The Vortex* (1923) produced with Coward playing Nicky Lancaster. He became a sensation. Also *Fallen Angels* enjoyed a West End production. Also wrote his first radio sketch.

1925 Coward meets John C. Wilson. *Hay Fever* (1924) produced in Britain. *The Vortex* produced on Broadway with Coward in the lead role. He also made his radio debut and first recording.

1926 *The Rat Trap* (1918) and *The Queen Was In Her Parlour* (1922) produced in Britain. Wrote *This Was A Man* produced in America, *The Marquise* produced in Britain (America 1927) and *Semi-Monde*. *Easy Virtue* at The Duke of York's Theatre.

1927 The first film versions of his plays produced; *Easy Virtue*, *The Vortex* and *The Queen Was In Her Parlour*. *Home Chat* produced in Britain (1932 America). Coward composed *A Room With A View*. *Sirocco* (1921) produced in London and was a resounding failure, booed on the first night and Coward spat at in the street.

1928 *This Year of Grace* (1928) was produced in the West End, and on Broadway (with Coward appearing).

1929 Wrote book, lyrics, music and directed *Bitter Sweet* which was produced in the West End and on Broadway. He also wrote *Private Lives* this year.

1930 *Private Lives* produced in London with Noël and Gertrude Lawrence. Wrote *Post-Mortem* and *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*.

1931 *Private Lives* was produced on Broadway starring Noël and Gertrude Lawrence. Coward wrote the book, music and lyrics (including "Twentieth Century Blues"), and directed *Cavalcade* which was also produced this year at Drury Lane in the West End. Coward met Graham Payn at an audition for *Words and Music*.

1932 The Noël Coward Company formed to perform his plays in repertory. *Cavalcade* won the Academy Award for Best Picture. For the revue *Words and Music* Coward wrote book, music and lyrics, including "Mad About the Boy". *The Queen Was In Her Parlour* filmed again as *Tonight Is Ours*.

1933 *Design for Living* (1932) was produced on Broadway with Coward and The Lunts (Alfred Lunt & Lynn Fontanne). *Design for Living* and *Bitter-Sweet* both filmed. Wrote *Don't Put Your*

Daughter on the Stage Mrs. Worthington. Patrick Braybrook wrote *The Amazing Mr. Noël Coward*.

1934 *Conversation Piece* (1933) produced in Britain (starring Coward) and in America. Coward played his first major film role in *The Scoundrel*. He cut ties with C.B.Cochran and formed Transatlantic Productions with John C. Wilson and the Lunts to produce his plays and the plays of others. Wrote *Point Valaine*, produced in America (Britain in 1944).

1935 Wrote and starred in *Tonight At 8.30* in London. Ten one-act plays written by Coward for him to perform with Gertrude Lawrence to avoid the boredom of a normal three month run.

1936 *Tonight At 8.30* was produced in America with Coward.

1937 *Present Indicative* was published, the first volume of his autobiography. Wrote *The Stately Homes of England*.

1938 *Operette* (1937) produced. Adapted *Words and Music* (1932) for American production as *Set to Music*.

1939 *Design for Living* produced in Britain. Wrote *This Happy Breed* and *Present Laughter* but rehearsals interrupted by outbreak of war. From September 1939 to April 1940 Coward held post in Enemy Propaganda Office in Paris. The first television version of his plays produced *Hay Fever*. His first set of short stories was published: *To Step Aside*.

1940 Singing tour to Australia for the Armed Forces. Wrote *Time Remembered (Salute to the Brave)* as yet unperformed.

1941 *Blithe Spirit* (1941) starts a long run at the Piccadilly Theatre in the West End (directed by and starring Coward), and on Broadway. He also began writing *In Which We Serve*. Wrote *London Pride* and toured New Zealand.

1942 Coward took *This Happy Breed* (1939), *Present Laughter* (1939) and *Blithe Spirit* on tour in Britain. London production of *Blithe Spirit* transferred from St. James' and then Duchess' Theatres where its run totaled 1997 performances. Coward played the lead in both and appeared as Captain Kinross (based on Louis Mountbatten) in the film *In Which We Served* which he co-directed with David Lean. Coward won the special Academy Award for Best Production.

1943 *Present Laughter* and *This Happy Breed* were produced in the West End with Coward in the leading roles. *This Happy Breed* filmed with Coward as co-producer.

1944 Coward continued to entertain the troops.

Middle East Diary published and caused an uproar in the US because of the line about mournful boys from Brooklyn. Coward toured extensively in South Africa. *Blithe Spirit* filmed with Rex Harrison. Wrote screenplay for *Brief Encounter*, based on *Still Life in Tonight At 8.30*.

1945 *Brief Encounter* was premiered. Wrote *Sigh No More* which is produced in Britain.

1946 The musical *Pacific 1860* (1945) produced at Drury Lane starring Mary Martin and Graham Payn. *Present Laughter* produced in America.

1947 *Peace in Our Time* (1946) produced. Appeared in *Present Laughter* in Britain. Wrote *Long Island Sound*. Did 13 episodes of a radio series.

1948 Coward made his last appearance with Gertrude Lawrence as a replacement for the ailing Graham Payn in *Tonight at 8.30* on tour in the US. He played *Present Laughter* in French (Joyeux Chagrins) in Paris. Wrote screenplay for *Astonished Heart* from *Tonight at 8.30*.

1949 *This Happy Breed* produced in America. Appears in *The Astonished Heart*. Wrote *Home and Colonial*.

1950 The musical *Ace of Clubs* (1949) produced at Cambridge Theatre.

1951 Coward launched a new career in cabaret at Café de Paris. *Relative Values* (1950) produced at the Savoy Theatre (America 1954). *Star Quality* a volume of short stories published. *Home and Colonial* produced in America as *Island Fling*.

1952 *Quadrille* produced at the Phoenix Theatre. Wrote there are *Bad Times Just Around the Corner*. Three plays from *Tonight at 8.30* filmed as *Meet Me Tonight*. *The Vortex* revived with Dirk Bogarde. Bought land in Blue Harbour, Jamaica and built his home "Firefly."

1953 Coward played in Shaw's *The Apple Cart*. *The Noël Coward Songbook* published.

1954 *After the Ball* (1954) produced in Britain (America 1955). *Future Indefinite*, second autobiography, published. Coward's mother dies on 30th June.

1955 Coward made his television debut in "Together With Music with Mary Martin". He also made his Las Vegas debut.

1956 Coward became a tax exile, giving up residence in England and moving to Bermuda. He made his Carnegie Hall debut narrating *Carnival of the Animals*. *Nude With Violin* (1954) produced at the Globe (now the Gielgud) Theatre. Sir John Gielgud understudied Coward and later took over the role. Appeared on American television in

Blithe Spirit and *This Happy Breed*. Revised *Home and Colonial* for British production of *South Sea Bubble*.

1957 Starred in American production of *Nude With Violin*.

1958 Coward made his first post-war Broadway appearance in *Present Laughter*. Adapted a Feydeau farce as *Look After Lulu* produced in America (and Britain 1959).

1959 Moved to Les Avants in Switzerland. Composed his first score for the ballet *London Morning*. Starred in the films: *Our Man in Havana* with Alec Guinness and *Surprise Package* with Yul Brynner.

1960 *Waiting in The Wings* (1959) produced. Published his novel *Pomp and Circumstance*. *London Morning* produced in Britain.

1961 Wrote and directed *Sail Away* on Broadway. Wrote a series of articles for the *Times* berating the new wave of English drama (Osborne and others)

1962 Wrote music and lyrics for *The Girl Who Came To Supper*. *Sail Away* (1961) produced in Britain.

1963 *Private Lives* was revived in Britain, changing a negative critical trend. *The Girl Who Came To Supper* (1962) was produced on Broadway.

1964 Coward directed *High Spirits* (based on *Blithe Spirit*) and received Tony nominations for directing and book writing. He directed a revival of *Hay Fever*, with Edith Evans, at the National Theatre in London to great acclaim. A collection of stories published under the title *Pretty Polly Barlow*.

1965 *The Lyrics of Noël Coward* was published this year.

1966 Coward appeared in the West End for the last time in his last three one act plays *Suite in Three Keys* (1965).

1967 *Bon Voyage* and *Not Yet The Dodo* were both published. Coward appeared as Caesar in Richard Rogers' TV musical *Androcles and the Lion*. He also worked on the third volume of his autobiography (unfinished) *Past Conditional*. *Fallen Angels* revived with Joan Greenwood and Constance Cummings

1968 *Post-Mortem* (1930) gets its first professional production on British TV. Coward was portrayed by Daniel Massey in a film biography of Gertrude Lawrence Star!. Coward played Mr. Bridger in *The Italian Job*. *Hay Fever* revived with Celia Johnson and Roland Culver.

1969 Coward's 70th birthday was celebrated with

a lunch at Clarence House with the Queen, a mid-night matinee at the Phoenix Theatre, an omnibus documentary on television, a season of Coward films at the National Film Theatre and a dinner at the Savoy. Coward dubbed it 'Holy Week'. Sheridan Morley publishes the first authorised biography, *A Talent To Amuse*.

1970 Noël Coward was Knighted by Her Majesty the Queen (New Year's Honours list).

1971 Received a Tony Award for distinguished achievement in the theatre.

1972 *Cowardy Custard* an anthology of Cowards songs and writings, was produced in London with great success at the Mermaid Theatre. *Oh Coward!* another anthology, produced for a Toronto nightclub, began a tour of North America. Coward received the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Sussex. *Noël* by Charles Castle published. *Private Lives* at the Queen's Theatre with Maggie Smith and Robert Stephens.

1973 *Oh Coward!* opened on Broadway. Coward made his last public appearance at a gala performance of *Oh Coward!* Noël Coward died on March 26th in Jamaica and was buried in the garden at Firefly. Memorial service held at St. Martin's in the Fields. *Design for Living* revived with Vanessa Redgrave, Jeremy Brett and John Stride at the Phoenix Theatre.

1974 *Noël Coward in Two Keys* (a version of *Suite in Three Keys*) produced in America.

1976 First publication of *The Life of Noël Coward* by Cole Lesley.

1977 First fully stage production of *Semi-Monde* (1926) at the Glasgow Citizens Theatre.

1978 *Noël Coward and His Friends* by Cole Lesley, Graham Payn and Sheridan Morley, published. "Firefly" given to Jamaican Heritage Trust.

1979 *The Noël Coward Songbook* was published.

1980 *Tonight at 8.30* with John Standing at the Lyric Theatre.

1981 *Design for Living* with Maria Aitken at the Globe Theatre. *Present Laughter* at Greenwich and in the West End starring Donald Sinden. Publication of *The Noël Coward Diaries* edited by Graham Payn and Sheridan Morley.

1982 Penelope Keith starred in *Hay Fever* at the Queen's Theatre.

1984 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother unveiled a memorial stone to Coward in Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey.

1985 *Cavalcade* revived at the Shaw Festival,

Niagara, Canada.

1988 *Easy Virtue* with Jane How and Zena Walker at the King's Head Theatre and *The Vortex* with Maria Aitken and Rupert Everett (originally at the Glasgow Citizens Theatre) both produced at the Garrick Theatre. *Bitter-Sweet* revived at Sadler's Wells and on tour starring Valerie Masterson.

1989 *Noël Coward* by Milton Levin published. West End premier performance of Sheridan Morley's entertainment based on Coward's writings, *Noël and Gertie*, starred Patricia Hodge and Simon Cadell. (Charity performances had been given previously at Monaco and the Mayfair Theatre in 1981, Kings Head May 1983 and the Donmar in 1986.)

1990 *Private Lives* revived at the Aldwych Theatre starring Joan Collins and Keith Baxter.

1991 *Noël and Gertie* at Duke of York's Theatre with Susan Hampshire and Edward Petheridge.

1992 The plays of *Tonight at 8.30* recorded and broadcast as television plays starring Joan Collins.

1993 *Present Laughter* starring Tom Conti at Gielgud Theatre. Susan Hampshire starred in *Relative Values* at Chichester and the Savoy Theatre. Chris Blackwell buys 25 year lease of "Firefly."

1994 Graham Payn published *My Life with Noël Coward* including previously unpublished writings.

1995 Award winning production of *Design for Living* transferred to the Gielgud from Donmar Warehouse. Publication of *Noël Coward A Biography* by Philip Hoare.

1996 *Present Laughter* starring Peter Bowles at

the Aldwych Theatre and transfers to Wyndham.

1997 *Blithe Spirit* revived at Chichester Festival Theatre with Twiggy and Dora Bryan.

1998 *Noël and Gertie* produced at Sag Harbor, New York starring Twiggy and James Warwick. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother unveiled a statue of Coward by Angela Conner in the foyer of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Publication of *The Complete Lyrics* of Noël Coward by Barry Day.

1999 Centenary of Coward's birth sees a flurry of productions including: *Private Lives* at The Royal National Theatre, *Nude With Violin* at Manchester Royal Exchange, Geraldine McEwan in a West End production of *Hay Fever*, *Easy Virtue* at Chichester and Sheridan Morley's production of *Song At Twilight* at The King's Head Theatre with Vanessa Redgrave, Kika Markham and Corin Redgrave. *If Love Were All (Noël and Gertie)* opened off-Broadway with Twiggy and Harry Groener, directed by Leigh Lawson. Methuen republish *The Complete Works of Noël Coward* in a commemorative series. Oberon Books republishes Sheridan Morley's *A Talent To Amuse* and *A Bright and Particular Star* in one volume under the title *The Private Lives of Noël and Gertie*.

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ACTIVITIES

Colorado Model Content Standards for Reading and Writing

Model 1: Students read and understand a variety of Materials. Model 4: Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing.

1. Why is Ruth so inquisitive about Elvira's physical beauty?
2. Why does Elvira return from the dead?
3. What is the significance of the fact that Charles is a mystery writer? That his book is to be called *The Unseen*?
4. Why must Charles' wives be dead before he can run away to enjoy himself? Does it have anything to do with the fact that the play was written in 1941?
5. Does your attitude toward Elvira change after the death of Ruth? Should it? Why/why not?
6. Despite being a ghost, does Elvira have moral responsibilities? Is she capable of sin—that is, culpable action that deforms the spirit?
7. What is the nature of the afterlife as imagined in this play? Does it involve punishment and reward? What are the implications?
8. Has someone close to you ever died? Do you feel that person's continuing presence in any way?
9. What do you think about the way the people in this play talk? Is it "realistic"—that is, does it sound like the way people you know talk? If not, how would you describe it?
10. Why do you suppose that it is the maid, Edith, who has special psychic power?

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