

# InsideOUT

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## ANIMAL CRACKERS

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**ANIMAL CRACKERS**  
BOOK BY GEORGE S. KAUFMAN & MORRIE RYSKIND  
MUSIC & LYRICS BY BERT KALMAR & HARRY RUBY  
ADAPTED BY HENRY WISHCAMPER  
ORIGINAL ORCHESTRATIONS BY DOUG PECK

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# InsideOUT

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## SYNOPSIS

*"I never forget a face, but in your case I'll be glad to make an exception."*

—Groucho Marx

The luxurious Rittenhouse Manor is agog with preparations for the most important social event of the season. Mrs. Rittenhouse, a New York society matron, is throwing a lavish weekend party in honor of Captain Jeffrey T. Spaulding, famed African explorer. She has arranged to unveil the priceless Beaugard painting "After the Hunt" on loan to her for the occasion by Roscoe W. Chandler, well-known art collector and businessman.

The guest list for the *soirée* includes Mrs. Rittenhouse's daughter Arabella, whom she is eager to marry off to Wally Winston, eligible bachelor and society columnist who is covering the party; her Long Island neighbors—and society rivals—Mrs. Whitehead and her sister Grace; Monsieur Doucet, Chandler's personal art dealer, and the young lovers John Parker, a struggling painter, and Mary Stewart, a reporter.

Captain Spaulding (Groucho Marx) arrives in elegant fashion along with his secretary Jamison. As the guests are greeting him, Signor Emanuel Ravelli (Chico) and his consort the Professor (Harpo) join the festivities. Ravelli, who has been hired to entertain at the party, recognizes Chandler as an impostor from Czechoslovakia. Chandler buys Ravelli's silence; Arabella overhears them and gives the scoop to Winston. Thrilled with this information and with Arabella, Winston confesses his love for her and rushes off to file his story.

When the guests gather for the unveiling of the painting, the picture is gone and so is the fake. While everyone waits for the police to arrive, Wally is informed by his newspaper that he's been fired for his scoop because the impostor Chandler is the owner of the paper.

As would only be expected of the Marx Brothers, the play ends with a nonsensical resolution that leaves everyone in the house happier than ever.

This plot serves mostly as a framework upon which the Marx Brothers hang their trademark comedy sketches, musical numbers, routines, one-liners and sight-gags. ■

## THE MARX BROTHERS

*“How can the Marxes be brothers? For one thing, you fellows don’t look alike. One talks with an Italian accent; one doesn’t talk at all and the third talks too much.”*

—President Lyndon Baines Johnson to Groucho Marx<sup>1</sup>.

Minnie Schoenberg Marx gave birth in New York City to Leonard (1887), Adolph (1888), Milton (1892), Julius (1890) and Herbert (1901). Leonard became Chico; Adolph became Harpo; Milton turned into Gummo; Julius converted to Groucho, and Herbert changed to Zeppo. Their mother, the daughter of music hall performers, encouraged her boys to play musical instruments, so Harpo took up the harp, Chico the piano and Groucho the guitar. She had the boys in vaudeville before they were teenagers despite protests of father, Samuel Marx, a tailor on the Lower East Side of New York. They started as singers, but later the boys became the Manhattan Comedy Four and developed their act in Texas. In 1924, the brothers, now grown men, left vaudeville and went to New York to open their own show, *I’ll Say She Is*. Critic Alexander Woollcott, saw them, loved them and touted them.

With writers such as S. J. Perelman, George Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, they had stage successes with *Cocoanuts* (1925) and *Animal Crackers* (1928), though the brothers were prone to improvisation. In 1929 they filmed *Cocoanuts*. That same year Minnie died, whom Alexander Woollcott eulogized in *The New Yorker* with these words: “She invented the boys.”<sup>2</sup> The Wall Street Crash happened the same year. In 1931 the brothers moved to Hollywood where they filmed a sequence of hits: *Animal Crackers* (1930), *Monkey Business* (1931), *Horsefeathers* (1932), *Duck Soup* (1933) and *A Night at the Opera* (1938).

The Marx Brothers’ talents developed because they were each playing a character they invented, open to improvising even if it wasn’t in the script. Their humor was anti-establishment—the court jesters who ridiculed the rich.

Chico died in 1961, Harpo in 1964, Gummo and Groucho in 1977 and Zeppo in 1979. ■

1. Anobile, p. 7.  
2. Louvish, p. 198.

Anobile, Richard J. *Why a Duck?* New York: Darien House, Inc., 1971.  
Louvish, Simon. *Monkey Business: the Lives and Legends of the Marx Brothers*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999.

[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/source/biography/Marx\\_Brothers.htm](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/source/biography/Marx_Brothers.htm)



# GROUCHO MARX

**G**roucho was born Julius Henry Marx on Oct. 2, 1890 in New York. He was the third of the five surviving sons of Sam and Minnie Marx. He was the first of the brothers to start a stage career at the age of 15 in an act called The Leroy Trio. Other acts followed, but none was a great success. His mother wanted the boys to have musical training, so Groucho studied the guitar. His brothers followed him on stage, and after years on the vaudeville circuit they finally had a success on Broadway with the musical comedy *I'll Say She Is*. It was at one of the performances of this show that Groucho got his painted moustache. He arrived late to the theatre and used greasepaint to create a moustache; he found this so much easier than a glued-on moustache that he insisted on using this technique from then on. *I'll Say She Is* was followed by two more Broadway hits—*The Cocomanuts* and *Animal Crackers*. The latter show featured the character of Captain Spaulding that, with the song “Hooray for Captain Spaulding,” remained a trademark for Groucho for the rest of his life.

**L**ater in his career, Groucho started working on radio. His greatest success was the comedy quiz show “You Bet Your Life” that began in 1947. The show moved to television and was on the air until 1961.

Always a liberal, Groucho sometimes made critical remarks about politics and had friends who were regarded as communists in the US of the 1950s and the McCarthy era. These relationships led to an FBI investigation.

**W**hen the Marx Brothers became popular again in the late 1960s/early 1970s, Groucho made a comeback with a show at Carnegie Hall in 1972. At the film festival in Cannes the same year he was made Commandeur des Arts et Lettres; in 1974 he received a special Academy Award for the achievements of the Marx Brothers. He died in 1977 in Los Angeles. ■

# CHICO MARX

**C**hico, whose birthname was Leonard, was the second child in the Marx family, but when his older brother Manfred died in infancy, Chico took on the mantle of the oldest. The legend for his nickname “Chico” was that he received it because he was fond of chasing women. He was the favorite son of Mother Minnie who let him get away with almost anything. He was always willing to take any bet and had a life-long gambling addict.

Chico always had a smile, a game of pinochle and a lady. He was probably the most reckless of the group, but it often was beneficial for all of them. His ideas and drive inspired his brothers during the hard times; it was Chico who led them to further success when he saw the first musical tabloid shows and decided it was a perfect format for the group. He acted as the manager of the group right after Minnie retired. Chico was the focus of the group’s energies, leading

the group to Broadway and the silver screen. It was also Chico’s charisma that caught the attention of Irving Thalberg, a prominent Hollywood producer.

**C**hico played in all the Marx Brothers vaudeville shows and films. He was also a talented pianist who played gigs to help the family’s finances during the early days. He remained a performer all his life, often working the same small circuits as an old man that he had worked as a boy. This was necessary this because of the huge gambling debts he amassed over the years. When asked how much money he’d lost, he replied, “Ask Harpo how much he’s made, and that’s how much I’ve lost.”<sup>1</sup> Chico died in 1961, after a long battle with heart disease.

His films include *Many Kisses*, *Monkey Business*, *The Cocomanuts*, *Horse Feathers*, *Duck Soup*, *A Night at the Opera*, *A Day at the Races*, *Room Service* and *Go West*. ■

1. [www.marx-brothers.org/biography](http://www.marx-brothers.org/biography)

# HARPO MARX

**H**arpo was born in 1888 in New York City. He was the second oldest of the Marx Brothers, and the one who never spoke in performance. His original name was Adolph, but he changed it to Arthur in World War I because it sounded “too German.” A critic’s review stunned Harpo into silence when he wrote that the young man spoiled a pantomime by speaking. Therefore, Harpo decided he could do a better job of stealing the focus by not speaking.

Harpo received little formal education and left grade school at age eight during his second attempt to pass the second grade. He began to work, taking on numerous odd jobs to add to the family income including selling newspapers, working in a butcher

shop and as an errand boy.

Harpo’s musical training was on the harp which earned him his nickname. He learned how to hold the instrument properly from a picture of an angel playing a harp in a five-and-dime-store. He tuned it himself in an unorthodox way. He rarely played the same harp twice in a movie, although in some movies he didn’t play the harp at all.

**S**everal of his distinctive roles include The Professor in *Animal Crackers*; a Stowaway in *Monkey Business*; Pinky in *Horsefeathers*, and the Village Peter Pan in *Too Many Kisses*.

He died in 1964 in Los Angeles. ■

# ZEPPPO MARX

**Z**eppo was the youngest of the five brothers; his real name was Herbert, and his nickname is said to have come from the Zeppelin airship. As a boy he was constantly involved in fights which, unlike Harpo or Groucho, he would win. He had a reputation for being quite a hooligan so it’s always been a Marx Brothers’ legend that Minnie put Zeppo in the act so she could keep track of him. In the act, he took over the straight man and romantic leads from older brother Gummo. He always seemed to be in the background, acting as a foil for Chico or Groucho.

It always seemed to Zeppo that he stood in everyone else’s shadow; he hated the roles he played and longed to be the comedian. According to his brothers, he was the funniest of them all. Zeppo did a perfect turn as Groucho when he had his appendix removed. After Zeppo left the act, each film would have a Zeppo-like actor in it, but none was as good as he had been.

Zeppo was also talented in the mechanical world, and he was involved in making machine parts for the war effort in World War II. He later ran a theatrical agency with brother Gummo.

**I**n recent years a surge of adamant Zeppo admirers has risen to challenge the notion that he did not develop a comic persona in his films. Zeppo’s parts were always intended to be a parody of the juvenile role often found in sappy musicals of the 1920s and 30s. In her book *Hello, I Must Be Going: Groucho and His Friends*, author Charlotte Chandler defends Zeppo as being “...neither totally a straight man nor totally a comedian, but combining elements of both. Zeppo’s importance to the Marx Brothers’ initial success was as a brother who could ‘pass’ as a normal person.”<sup>1</sup> He also dressed as a normal person, in contrast to Groucho’s formal attire, Harpo’s rags and Chico’s immigrant hand-me-downs.

He appeared in *The Cocoanuts*, *Animal Crackers*, *Monkey Business*, *Horsefeathers* and *Duck Soup*. He died in 1979. ■

1. [www.marx-brothers.org](http://www.marx-brothers.org).  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harpo\\_Marx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harpo_Marx)  
<http://www.marx-brothers.org/biography>  
Louvish, Simon. *Monkey Business: the Lives and Legends of the Marx Brothers*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000.

# THE WRITERS, SONGWRITERS AND ADAPTERS

## I Morrie Ryskind

was born in Brooklyn on Oct. 20, 1895, the son of Russian immigrants. His writing career got off to an inauspicious start when, in 1917, he was expelled from the Columbia University School of Journalism six weeks before he was to graduate. As editor of *The Jester*, the university's humor magazine, he had written an editorial calling the university's president, Nicholas Murray Butler, "Czar Nicholas."

In 1924, he wrote skits for the *Garrick Gaieties*, drawing the attention of George Kaufman who asked him to collaborate on the musical *The Cocoanuts*. From then on, his career as a comedy writer was set although, in appearance and demeanor—a slight, bald man with thick glasses—he seemed more

the professor than the humorist. His heroes were Gilbert and Sullivan because their works punctured pretensions.

His plays and screenplays, written in the 1920s, 30s and 40s, poked fun at the rich, the powerful, the pompous. His collaborations with Kaufman included such Marx Brothers vehicles as the film *A Night at the Opera*, *The Cocoanuts* and *Animal Crackers*. With Kaufman and the Gershwin Brothers he wrote the musical *Of Thee I Sing* for which they shared the Pulitzer Prize.

He died in 1985 at the age of 89.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1985/08/25/nyregion/morrie-ryskind.html>

## I George S. Kaufman

was one of the most successful playwrights in the American theatre during Broadway's golden years between the two World Wars. His particular brand of sharp comedy and satire produced 45 Broadway plays; all but one was written in collaboration with other authors. He also was a talented and precise director of his own work and of several other popular plays and musicals. Kaufman worked with most of the major theatrical talents of his era and was the recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes for drama, including the first Pulitzer ever awarded to a musical, *Of Thee I Sing*.

He was born on November 16, 1888, into a middle-class Jewish Pittsburgh family that, according to him, "managed to get in on every business as it was finishing and made a total of \$4 among them."<sup>1</sup>

Young Kaufman immersed himself in plays and books—particularly those of Mark Twain. After high school, he thought of studying law, but soon gave that up and moved to Manhattan in 1909. Instead of pursuing a college education, he supported himself by working in a hatband factory and contributing small pieces of verse to Franklin Pierce Adams'

widely read column in the *Evening Mail*. Adams, recognizing a good comic writer, took Kaufman under his wing and got him a job first on the *Washington Times* and, in 1917, as a drama desk reporter on the *New York Tribune*. Kaufman then moved to the *New York Times* where he became drama editor, a post he held until 1930.

By the middle of the 1920s, vaudeville was dying out and the Marx Brothers were looking to make the transition to the legitimate stage. Kaufman met with the brothers and composer-lyricist Irving Berlin to craft a major musical for the comedians. The result, *The Cocoanuts* (1925), was enormously successful and launched several projects for Kaufman and the comedy team. Another musical followed, *Animal Crackers* (1928), this time with a score by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby. Kaufman collaborated with Morrie Ryskind on the book; these two went on to write the screenplays for other Marx Brothers films including *A Night at the Opera*. Though Groucho was prone to ad-lib, he credited Kaufman with writing his best lines.

### George S. Kaufman continued

Perhaps Kaufman's best collaboration was with Moss Hart in the 1930s. Their second effort, *You Can't Take It With You*, is one of America's great plays and certainly one that is most characteristically American. The play—a culture clash between two families, one representing American capitalism and the other American individualism—captivated audiences and won Kaufman, another Pulitzer. Another successful Kaufman play was *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, based on critic (and friend) Alexander Woollcott's

egotistical personality and his invasion of a quiet midwestern family.

Kaufman, lionized as a grandmaster of the Broadway scene when he died in 1961, never thought his works would live beyond his time. His insight into the American character was as biting as Mark Twain's; his craftsmanship and the construction of his plays have served as models for stage, film and television.

1. [www.biography.com](http://www.biography.com)

[www.biography.com/people/george-s-kaufman/9360927](http://www.biography.com/people/george-s-kaufman/9360927)

## Harry Ruby,

one half of the famed Kalmar and Ruby songwriting team, was born in New York City on January 17, 1895. In his early career he worked as a pianist and song plugger for the Gus Edwards and Harry Von Tilzer publishing firms. He also played in vaudeville acts, nickelodeons and cafés throughout New York.

Ruby met Kalmar in 1920 and together they wrote a great succession of hits. Songs from their catalog include: "Who's Sorry Now", "All

Alone Monday", "I Wanna Be Loved by You" and "Three Little Words."

In 1930 Ruby moved to Hollywood where he contributed songs for films including *The Cuckoos*, *Horsefeathers* and *The Kid from Spain*. He also wrote screenplays such films as *Look for the Silver Lining*, *Duck Soup* and *The Kid from Spain*.

He died on February 23, 1974.

<http://www.songwritershalloffame.org/exhibits/C308>

## Bert Kalmar,

a lyricist, was born in New York City on February 16, 1884. Growing up, he performed as a magician in tent shows and then as a comedian in vaudeville acts. He met Harry Ruby at a publisher's house on Tin Pan Alley. They began a collaboration that included such songs as: "She's Mine, All Mine," "Up in the Clouds" and "A Kiss to Build a Dream On."

The team moved to Hollywood in 1930 and contributed songs to films such as *Check and Double Check*, *The Cuckoos* and *Bright Lights*.

He died on September 18, 1947.

<http://www.songwritershalloffame.org/exhibits/C266>

## Henry Wishcamper

is the adapter of *Animal Crackers*. His directing credits in New York City include Horton Foote's *Talking Pictures*, *Spirit Control*, *Graceland*, *Elvis People*, and 'Tis a Pity She's a Whore. Regional credits include *Art*, *The Good Thief*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It* and *Midsummer Night's*

*Dream*. He was the assistant director of *August, Osage County* on Broadway. Mr. Wishcamper is a Drama League directing fellow and a graduate of Yale University.

<http://www.goodmantheatre.org/artists-archive/collective/henry-wishcamper/>



# TYPES OF MARX BROTHERS HUMOR

The Marx brothers liked brisk, sharp humor. Chico and Harpo used few words and a lot of physical action, while Groucho liked wisecracks—the sly, sharp line that bolstered the speaker’s ego or deflated his opponent’s.

Groucho also enjoyed one-liners, a single sentence that includes both the set up and the punch line of a joke. An example from *Animal Crackers*

is: “You go Uruguay and I’ll go mine.”<sup>1</sup> Chico liked to use puns, jokes that rely on ambiguous language. Since he spoke with an Italian accent, Chico used words that have multiple meanings or sound like another word to give multiple interpretations to a sentence. ■

1. [www.goodmantheatre.org](http://www.goodmantheatre.org).  
[www.goodmantheatre.org/Documents/StudyGuides/0910%20Season/AnimalCrackersStudyGuide](http://www.goodmantheatre.org/Documents/StudyGuides/0910%20Season/AnimalCrackersStudyGuide)

## MARGARET DUMONT, THE FIFTH MARX BROTHER

Margaret Dumont was called the “fifth Marx brother” by Groucho because she was the perfect foil for their fast paced comedy.<sup>1</sup> She acted alongside the wild quartet from 1920 to 1941. Dumont was featured as the befuddled dowager in many of the Marx Brothers’ films, including Mrs. Rittenhouse in *Animal Crackers*. In other words, one of the best straight men in the history of comedy was a woman.

She was born in Brooklyn, NY, in 1882 as Daisy Juliette Baker. Though trained as an opera singer, she became an actress at age 20 when she went to Atlantic City to perform in vaudeville. Five years after her debut, she took the stage name of Margaret Dumont; she played the role of the wealthy and matronly widower in seven of the Marx Brothers’ films, including *The Cocoanuts* (1929), *Animal Crackers* (1930), *Duck Soup* (1933), *A Night at the Opera* (1935), *A Day at the Races* (1937), *At the Circus* (1939) and *The Big Store* (1941).

Her success continued with her haughty characterizations alongside other comedians such as Abbott and Costello, Laurel and Hardy and Danny Kaye. When she died in 1965 she left a legacy of more than 50 films.

Dumont’s character with the Marx Brothers exemplifies the comedic foil in a double act, or two-person routine. In a double act, the “straight man”(foil) remains poised and calm while the comic plays jokes off the foil’s composure. This comedic structure evolved from vaudeville out of necessity—the straight man would repeat the comedian’s jokes loudly over the rowdy crowd in order for the joke to be heard. This technique has been used by comedic partners Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis and Cheech and Chong.

Dumont took the idea of the comedic foil further as she molded characters who did not comprehend her partner’s sense of humor. Groucho’s quick wit paired with her unassuming naiveté made for wonderful comedy. This was so successful that many fans assumed Groucho and Dumont were married.

The target of the brothers’ comic riffs, Dumont often found herself missing insinuations about marriage, age or her weight. Groucho frequently flattered her, and then, with a quick change of wit and wording, turned the joke back on her. ■

1. [www.goodmantheatre.org](http://www.goodmantheatre.org).  
[www.goodmantheatre.org/Documents/StudyGuides/0910%20Season/AnimalCrackersstudyguide](http://www.goodmantheatre.org/Documents/StudyGuides/0910%20Season/AnimalCrackersstudyguide)  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret\\_Dumont](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Dumont)



# VAUDEVILLE

*"Everything I know I learned in vaudeville."*

—James Cagney

At the turn of the century in America, the Wright Brothers made their first successful flight, Jack London wrote *The Call of the Wild*, Henry Ford started his motorcar company and thousands of people escaped small apartments in big cities to see the amazing acts of vaudeville. Vaudeville was made up of comedians, singers, plate-spinners, ventriloquists, dancers, musicians, acrobats, animal trainers and anyone who could keep an audience's interest for more than three minutes.

{ Beginning in the 1880s and through the 1920s, vaudeville was home to more than 25,000 performers and was the most popular form of entertainment in America. From the local small town stage to New York's Palace Theatre, vaudeville was an essential part of every community.

Throughout the 1850s and 60s, variety entertainment became popular among the frontier settlements and urban centers. These shows, intended for an all-male audience, were often obscenely comical. In 1881 Tony Pastor, a ballad and minstrel singer, created a variety show for families. Other managers recognized that a wider audience meant more money and followed his lead. With an influx of recent immigrants and quickly growing urban populations, vaudeville soon became a central point for American life.

Benjamin Franklin Keith earned the distinction of Father of American vaudeville. Keith began his career in show business working variously as a grifter and barker with traveling circuses in the 1870s and for dime museums in New York. Returning to his home state of Massachusetts in

1883, he established his own museum in Boston featuring "Baby Alice the Midget Wonder" and other acts. His success in this endeavor allowed Keith to build the Bijou Theatre, a lavishly appointed, state of the art, fireproof theatre that set the standard for the shape of things to come. At the Bijou, Keith established a "fixed policy of cleanliness and order." <sup>1</sup> He forbade the use of vulgarity or coarse material in his acts "...so that the house and the entertainment would directly appeal to the support of women and children." <sup>2</sup> He ruled his theatre with an iron fist.

There were usually a dozen or more acts in every vaudeville performance. Starting and ending with the weakest, the shows went on for hours. The performances ranged from the truly talented to the simply quirky. There were musicians, such as the piano player Eubie Blake, the child star, Baby Rose Marie and such dancers as the Nicholas Brothers. The real focus of vaudeville was comedy; great comic acts such as Wilt and Berg or Burns and Allen brought in the biggest crowds.

Vaudeville was symbolic of the cultural diversity of early 20<sup>th</sup> century America because it was a fusion of centuries-old cultural traditions, including the English Music Hall, minstrel shows of antebellum America and Yiddish theatre. Though certainly not free from the prejudices of the times, vaudeville was the earliest entertainment form to cross racial and class boundaries.

Vaudeville was a family affair with singing sisters, dancing brothers and flying families. Once an act worked, performers repeated it in front of audience after audience. Many performers became known by their signature act. With the advent of radio, however, Americans found a free and easy way to tap into the variety of entertainment they had found in vaudeville. The performers continued their acts in front of smaller audiences until

theatres began to show films; the few vaudevillians left took what work they could get performing between reels.

**I**ronically, it is through the film and TV industries that vaudeville left its greatest mark. Many vaudeville stars such as Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin incorporated the animated comedy of the vaudeville stage into their film performances. The list would also include such names as Will Rogers, Bob Hope, Burns

and Allen and Fanny Brice. Even today, shows such as “Late Night with David Letterman” and “Saturday Night Live” continue the traditions of vaudeville. ■

1. [xroads.virginia.edu](http://xroads.virginia.edu).
2. Ibid.

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/-ma02/eastern/vaudeville/vaudevilleain.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/vaudeville/about-vaudiville/721>

## IMPROVISATION

**I**mprovisational theatre, often called improv, is a form of drama where most or all of what is performed is created spontaneously, at the moment it is performed. In its purest form, the dialogue, the action, the story and even its characters are created collaboratively by the players as the improvisation unfolds. Improvisation is sometimes used in film and television, both to develop characters and scripts and occasionally as part of the final product.

**T**he earliest well documented use of improvisational theatre in Western history is found in the Atellan Farce of Rome circa 391 B.C. that used masks, slapstick and burlesque. From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, *Commedia dell'Arte* performers in Italy improvised their shows based on a broad outline. Theatrical theorists and directors such as the Russian director Constantin Stanislavski and the French Jacques Copeau, founders of two major streams of acting theory, used improvisation in acting training and rehearsal.

**M**any directors have used improvisation in the creation of both mainstream and experimental films. Silent filmmakers such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton used it in the making of their movies, developing their gags while filming and altering the plot to fit. The Marx Brothers were notorious for departing from the script they were given, their ad libs often becoming part of the standard routine and making their way into their films.

**T**he Second City troupe of Chicago developed improvisation into an art form. Many of the original and subsequent casts of *Saturday Night Live* came from The Second City and from the Los Angeles Groundlings, including Tina Fey, Stephen Colbert, Eugene Levy, Steve Carell, Dan Akyroyd and John Belushi. ■

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/improvisational\\_theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/improvisational_theatre)  
 Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theatre*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1983.

# 1920s AMERICA

## THE HISTORIC EVENTS OF THAT DECADE INCLUDED:

- Henry Ford and his mass production of cars that could be purchased for as little as \$290.
- Passage of The Volstead Act, which became effective in January of 1920 and made the sale of a drink containing as much as one half-ounce of alcohol unlawful. This was a period of prohibition and intolerance, speakeasies, gangsters and crime; alcohol was supplied by many, including Dutch Schultz and Al Capone.
- The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment had passed in 1919 giving women the right to vote. Racial tensions were high and quotas were set for immigrants coming into America.
- The Ku Klux Klan was very active during this period with their lynchings, cross burnings and scurrilous propaganda. “They entered homes without search warrants and flogged errant husbands and wives. They tarred and feathered drunks.”<sup>1</sup>
- Buying on credit or installments was an outcome of the industrial age; in the fall of 1929, the New York Stock Exchange was the highest it had ever been. But in October 1929, the stock market crashed and panic broke out. The nation stayed in this Great Depression through the end of the 20s and most of the 30s.

The 1920s was called the Flapper Age because women wore dresses with no bosom, no waistline and hair neatly hidden under a cloche hat. In this decade the present urge for cosmetics began; powder, lipstick, rouge, eyebrow pencil and eye shadow.

The credo of the 1920s was Irving Berlin’s song “Ain’t We Got Fun”. The lyrics included the line “There’s nothing surer; the rich get rich and the poor get poorer.”<sup>2</sup> Harlem was hot with jazz; The Cotton Club was open to blacks and whites and was always packed. Bessie Smith sang the blues, but most of the big pop hits were sentimental ballads like “I’ll Be With You in Apple Blossom Time,” “Three O’clock in the Morning” and “Deep in my Heart.” Nonsense songs such as “Yes, We Have No Bananas” and “I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate” were also popular. People were traveling places and singing about them: “Chicago,” “Carolina in the Morning,”

“Way Down Yonder in New Orleans” and “California, Here I Come.”

Broadway reached an all time peak.

George Gershwin was popular with *An American in Paris* as was Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein with *Showboat*. Fred and Adele Astaire opened in *Funny Face*. The Silent Screen stars included the mysterious Rudolph Valentino, sexy Clara Bow and Rudy Vallee who sang through his megaphone. The first talking picture was released in 1927. The first Oscars were given in 1927, with *Wings* winning Best Picture and Janet Gaynor and Emil Jennings winning the Best Actor awards. Radio networks began during this decade; David Sarnoff’s NBC and William Paley’s CBS both went on the air.

Skyscrapers (first designed in the 1870s) were erected and hundreds of architects competed for



the work. The first successful design was the Woolworth Building in New York. In Chicago the Wrigley Building was designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. Art Deco design was exemplified by the Chrysler and Empire State Buildings. Frank Lloyd Wright was creating homes in California and hotels in Japan. Visual arts movements included the modernist movement (George Luks, Charles W. Hawthorne), abstract expressionism (Willem de Kooning), surrealism and Dadaism (Georgia O'Keefe, Morgan Russell, Man Ray) and realism (Thomas Hart Benton, Edward Hopper, Grant Wood). The best museums exhibited their works.

In literature the Lost Generation, self-exiled expatriates, lived and wrote in Paris between the wars. Realistic and rebellious, they wrote what they wanted and fought censorship for the use of profanity and sexuality. This group included

Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos, Henry Miller and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In this country e.e. cummings experimented with language and punctuation; William Faulkner was an important part of the Southern Renaissance and Edna St. Vincent Millay expressed the defiance and desires of her generation.

The Harlem Renaissance is considered the first important movement of black artists and writers in the U.S. Centered in New York and other urban areas during the 1920s, black writers published more and received their first serious critical appraisal. This group included Zora Neale Huston, W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer and Alain Locke. ■

1. Zeitz, p. 74.
2. [kclibrary.lonestar.edu](http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu)  
<http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade20html>

Zeitz, Joshua. *Flapper*. New York: Three River Press, 2006.

## THE FLAPPER

It's not clear how the term "flapper" first found its way into the American vernacular; the expression probably originated in pre-World War I England. According to a 1920s fashion writer a "flapper described the sort of teenage girl whose gawky frame and posture were supposed to need a certain type of clothing—long, straight lines to cover her awkwardness."<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after the end of World War I, the word came to designate young women in their teens and 20s who believed in the libertine principles of writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and the portrayals of screen actress Clara Bow. An early reference in Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defined the flapper as "a young girl, esp. one somewhat daring in conduct, speech and dress."<sup>2</sup>

By the 1920s, every social ill in the United States was attributed to flappers—smoking cigarettes, drinking gin, wearing short skirts and frequenting jazz clubs where they danced with a revolving cast of men.

After World War I, men and women of that generation had broken out of society's structures and found it difficult to return. Women were as anxious as men to avoid returning to society's rules and roles. So many young men perished in the war that young women decided they were going to enjoy life. Gainfully employed and earning their own money, they became participants in a consumer culture that promoted indulgence and pleasure over restraint and constraint.

The people who helped create the flapper culture were a diverse lot. There was Coco Chanel, the French designer who redefined the feminine form and silhouette. In Hollywood, Clara Bow, Colleen Moore and Louise Brooks fired the imagination of young girls. In New York, Bruce Barton and Edward Bernays promoted the flapper through advertising and public relations.

The New Woman of the 1920s represented a dramatic break with traditional American values. “Her story is the story of America in the 1920s—the first modern decade when everyday life came under the full sway of mass media, celebrity and consumerism.”<sup>3</sup> ■

1. Zeitz, p.5.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid, p.9.
- Zeitx, Joshua. *Flapper*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006.

<http://history1900s.about.com/od/1920s/a/flapper/htm>.

## THE ALGONQUIN ROUND TABLE

The Algonquin Round Table was the name given to the informal group of sophisticated New York literati who traded lunch entrées, witticisms and verbal sorties in the 1920s right up to the stock market crash. Its members included the drama critic and radio personality Alexander Woollcott, playwright George S. Kaufman, writers Dorothy Parker and Robert Benchley, playwright Robert E. Sherwood, critic Heywood Hale Broun, comedians Harpo and Groucho Marx, composer Irving Berlin, and playwright Marc Connelly.

The Round Table has become part of America’s cultural legend with its epigrams and anecdotes. The saying “All the things I really like are immoral, illegal or fattening” is attributed to Alexander Woollcott. ■

[www.biography.com/people/george-s.-kaufman/9360927](http://www.biography.com/people/george-s.-kaufman/9360927)  
<http://kclibrary/lonestar.edu/decade20.html>

## TERMS USED IN THE PLAY

**KANSAS CITY STOMP**—a composition by Jelly Roll Morton.

**DOUCET**—a fashion designer

**MADAME DUBARRY**—the mistress of Louis XV of France

**ZULU**—the largest South African ethnic group

# ANIMAL CRACKERS QUESTIONS

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## PRE-PERFORMANCE QUESTION

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1. What makes a comic routine funny? Are there certain comic moments that are funny today that were also funny 80 years ago? Is there comic material that would not be funny to a contemporary audience?
2. What would be the modern day equivalent to a vaudeville style show today?

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## POST-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

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1. How do the costumes and other scenic elements add to the humor of the production?
2. How is social class portrayed in the performance? Why is making light of social constructs still funny today?
3. What are some of the physical comedic moments that stand out from the production? What are some of the verbal comedic moments? Why did you find them funny?
4. The Marx Brothers used characters from their vaudeville act and put them in their movie. What is a “stock” character? How are they used in *Animal Crackers*?
5. What elements from vaudeville are in the performance? How are they packaged together to create a story?
6. How would you describe the plot of *Animal Crackers*?
7. How is journalism portrayed in the play? Has tabloid journalism changed over time?
8. How would you describe the production to someone who does not know the Marx Brothers or vaudeville comedy?



# ANIMAL CRACKERS ACTIVITIES

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## WRITING A ONE-LINE JOKE

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1. Discuss what a one-line joke is and what elements are needed to make it work. A one-liner has two parts to the joke; the set-up and the punch line are both in the same sentence. If possible, try to incorporate a reversal. A reversal is when the audience is expecting one answer and is given a different answer.
2. Share a few one-liners from the play, *Animal Crackers*.
  - a. *Well, you go Uruguay and I'll go mine.*
  - b. *Guatemala every night or you can't Mala at all.*
3. Write a few one-liners and then share with the group.
4. Discuss why some one-liners were funny and others may not have worked. Do not be discouraged if the joke doesn't land.

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**Colorado Writing PG:** Effectively use content-specific language, style, tone and text structure to compose or adapt writing for different audiences and purposes.

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## CHANGE THREE THINGS

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Materials: none

1. Students line up in two lines facing each other so that each person has a partner who is standing across from them. One row is A and the other is B.
2. Tell the group that they will have 30 seconds to observe their partners. At the signal, they will turn their backs to each other.
3. While their backs are turned, each person must change three things about their appearance. All changes must be visible. This can be simple; taking off a shoe, switching their hair style or more difficult; removing an earring.
4. At the signal, the two rows turn back and face each other. They have one minute to figure out what their partner changed.
5. Discuss which were easy changes to spot and which were more difficult. How many people caught all three changes?

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**Colorado Drama and Theatre PG:** Employ drama and theatre skills, and articulate the aesthetics of a variety of characters and roles.

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TABLOID JOURNALISM WRITING

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Materials: Newspapers, pen and paper

For this exercise, students are going to take an actual event or a moment in time and exaggerate the event to make it even more exciting.

1. Select a newspaper article from a local newspaper.
2. Identify some key moments, some people involved and a couple of facts about the story. Change these details and facts into a headline for the *Evening Traffic*.
3. Manipulate the story by using phrases, vocabulary and inference to slant the story into a new perspective. If we have an eyewitness account of an event, how can we keep the details the same but completely change the perspective?
4. Compose a new article that incorporates this new perspective.
5. Discussion questions: Discuss how the story may or may not have changed. How did the manipulating author change the perspective of the article? How effective were the changes?

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**Colorado Writing PG:** Effectively use content-specific language, style, tone and text structure to compose or adapt writing for different audiences and purposes.

**Colorado Writing PG:** Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

Designed to enhance your theatre experience, the CONNECT program offers a variety of opportunities, including moderated discussions with the cast and creatives, educational resources, tours, and other special events

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**PERSPECTIVES** - Gain a unique behind-the-scenes perspective on each production when you participate in a professionally moderated discussion with the Denver Center Theatre Company's own creative team.

- **Apr 4, 6pm, Jones Theatre**

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**TALKBACKS** - Engage in a stimulating dialogue with your fellow audience members and actors just off the stage to hear their insights and answers to audience questions. Talkbacks are moderated by trained professionals. Higher Education Advisory Council (HEAC) talkbacks are facilitated by faculty members from regional colleges and universities. Theatre & Theology talkbacks are led by Pastor Dan Bollman of the Rocky Mountain Evangelical Lutheran Synod and explore connections between a play's themes and theology.

**Held in the theatre, post-show**

- **May 4, Talkback**
- **Apr 27, HEAC Talkback**
- **May 6, Theatre & Theology Talkback**

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Visit [WWW.DENVERCENTER.ORG/CONNECT](http://WWW.DENVERCENTER.ORG/CONNECT) and learn about:

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- **The Page to the Stage: Book Lovers Club**
- **Our educational resources**
- **Accessibility and more**



# THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

## AT THE DENVER CENTER THEATRE COMPANY also offers the following programs:

**DENVER CENTER THEATRE ACADEMY ON-SITE CLASSES:** affordable, high-quality theatre classes for children, teens and adults taught by industry professionals. Classes are offered on-site four times a year. Classes are available for all interest and skill levels for ages 3-103. Scholarships are available. Call 303/446-4892 for information.

**DRAMATIC LEARNING:** Teaching Artists from the Academy bring the creative process into classrooms to support and enhance core curriculum. Workshops and residencies in any discipline are tailored for each classroom. Dramatic Learning benefits more than 90 schools and 5,000 students annually. Call 303/446-4897 for more information.

**FAMILY FUN FORUM:** This event is FREE. Families act, dance and sing in this two-hour performing arts skills hunt. Families will rotate from classroom to classroom, learning new skills and winning tokens for the entire family. Families spend their “earnings” on face painting and fun prizes. Call 303/446-4892 for more information.

### **SECOND ACT: LIFELONG LEARNING FOR OLDER ADULTS**

Open To Students 50+

Recent studies in the *New York Times* and *Cognitive Daily* suggest that training skills used by actors may increase overall cognitive health. With this in mind, the Academy has put together a sampling of one-time workshops that introduce basic principles in a fun and social setting. Don't take our word for it, here are some recent articles:

<http://www.denvercenter.org/science-blog>

<http://www.denvercenter.org/new-york-times>

ACTivate the brain and have fun doing it at the Denver Center Theatre Academy.

For more information: 303/446.4892

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For more information also check out our website at [WWW.DENVERCENTER.ORG/EDUCATION](http://WWW.DENVERCENTER.ORG/EDUCATION)

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# WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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## THE DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY RECOMMENDS:

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- Read!** *Chasing Cézanne* by Peter Mayles  
Eager for more madcap art adventures? Novelist and travel writer Mayles will take you on a rollicking tour of southern France in this hilarious mystery. When photographer André Kelly witnesses the theft of a valuable Cézanne painting, he finds himself investigating a huge fraud scam that penetrates the heart of the French art scene.
- Watch!** *Another Fine Mess* (MGM, 1930)  
Laurel and Hardy's short film *Another Fine Mess* was released the same year as *Animal Crackers*. The comedic duo play two vagabonds who take refuge in the home of big-game hunter Colonel Buckshot. When a couple comes calling to inquire about renting the house, Hardy pretends to be Colonel Buckshot while Laurel masquerades as both butler and maid. All is well until the real Colonel Buckshot returns unexpectedly. The outrageous antics will have you laughing out loud.
- Listen!** *'S Marvelous: The Gershwin Songbook* (Verve, 1994)  
For many, George Gershwin's music is the quintessential sound of the 1930's. This wonderful collection perfectly evokes that time period. Dive into Gershwin's songbook, including such iconic classics as "I Got Rhythm" and "Embraceable You," from the Gershwin brothers' 1930 musical, *Girl Crazy*.
- Download!** *The Code of the Woosters* by P.G. Wodehouse  
Nobody can top the Marx Brothers for sheer manic silliness, but society gentleman Bertie Wooster and his top-notch manservant, Jeeves, have a silly charm all their own. In this adventure, Bertie becomes entangled in his aunt's plot to steal an antique jug. As usual, only Jeeves will be able to extricate him from the resulting mess. Audiobooks are a wonderful way to enjoy Wodehouse's trademark wit and sparkling dialogue. You can find this one, as well as other titles in the Jeeves and Wooster series, available for download at [downloadmedia.denverlibrary.org](http://downloadmedia.denverlibrary.org).



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