



Denver Center
Theatre Company

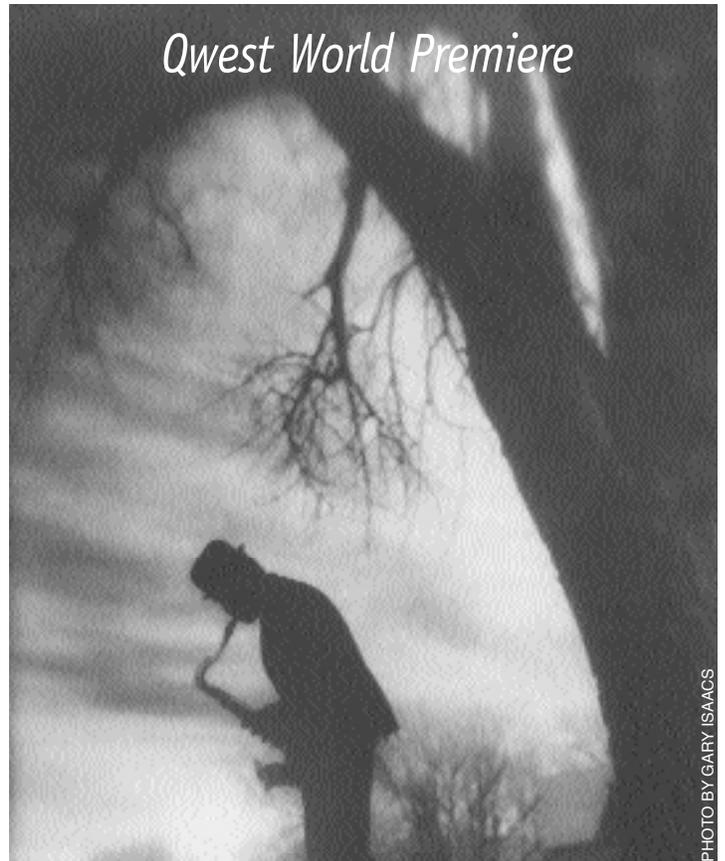
Inside Out

PRODUCED BY THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

APRIL 2001

“MAHALEY: Charlie Butler, will you quit playin’ that Devil’s music and come eat your dinner!” —*Pork Pie*.

The Devil’s music is jazz and Charlie plays it so well on his piano that hair grows on bald men’s heads and the flowers bloom in Darlington County, South Carolina. But one night, Charlie is tempted away from Darlington County and his woman, Mahaley, by the most torrid temptress of them all, the Devil’s Wife, for the glory of wearing the Coolest of the Cool, the Pork Pie hat. To win the hat, Charlie must defeat T.C. (The Champion) in a jazz competition—a cuttin’ contest. In jazz parlance, Charlie gets licked and leaves Mahaley and Darlington County to get his music back. The flowers die, but two years later Mahaley gives birth to a son, Volcy. Volcy stutters but he finds his voice in the saxophone and singing. He also finds love with Maggie Burdette. But no matter how much Mahaley tries to protect him, Volcy also finds jazz. When he blows those crazy notes, Mahaley collapses into a coma. Now Volcy must take on the mantle of a man and find the only thing that will cure his mama and that’s Charlie. In his journey, Volcy encounters temptations, trials and trauma and we groove to the jiviest, joyous jam session ever.



Pork Pie

A Mythic Jazz Fable

“STORYTELLER: It’s an unwritten rule of life that anything glorious is hard to achieve.”

—Pork Pie

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LESTER YOUNG

“Cool jazz: a term applied to diverse styles of modern jazz variously perceived as subdued, understated or emotionally cool.”

—New Grove Dictionary of Jazz

Lester Young (1909-1959), “The Pres,” was a tenor saxophonist who developed one of the most imitated styles in jazz history. He is termed “the most influential jazz artist after Louis Armstrong and before Charlie Parker” because he made the transition from the “hot” jazz style of the 1930s to the more relaxed, behind-the-beat approach known as “cool.”¹

During the late 1930s and early 1940s there were four core African American concepts of “cool.” They were: to control one’s emotions and wear a mask in the face of hostile provocations, to maintain a relaxed attitude in a performance of any kind, to develop a unique individual style or sound that communicated something of the inner spirit and to be emotionally expressive within an artistic framework.

Lester Young was the epitome of cool; his whole life was dedicated to being original in his dress of pork pie hat (that he had designed after seeing a picture in a Victorian lady’s magazine), in his mannerisms and in his detachment from society.

Young was born in Woodville, Mississippi and raised in New Orleans. His father was a school principal and a trumpeter who formed a carnival band that toured the South. While his siblings and cousins danced, clowned and did acrobatics when playing, Lester concentrated on his music. He practiced six to seven

hours a day and listened to recordings of classical saxophone; his idea of jiving was to play the saxophone upside down. In 1928, Lester left his father’s band and toured with the bands of King Oliver, Walter Page and Fletcher Henderson before joining the Count Basie band in 1936.

Young spent his happiest and most productive years with the Basie band (1936-40), first in Kansas City and later in New York. The Basie band worked seven nights a week, from 9pm to 5am. Lester loved to make music so much he would join in jam sessions (much like the cuttin’ contests in the play) and continue to play until noon or one o’clock in the afternoon. He became a jam session legend, renowned for his competitive spirit and creative imagination. “It [the jam session] was the only public forum in American life where black and white men exchanged ideas in a relaxed atmosphere.”² In a jam session, African American men could display their talents and expertise and earn respect from their peers.

In 1944, Lester Young was drafted into the army; he was denied a musical assignment in a band because the bandleader thought he lacked a proper musical education. His inability to submit to military discipline drew the attention of his commanding officer and when marijuana and barbiturates were found in his trunk, he was court-martialed. Sentenced to a year in solitary at Ft. Gordon, Georgia, he was frequently

beaten. When Young returned to playing in 1945 after his army experience, many writers and musicians commented on his expressionless face, weary stride and the lack of joy in his playing.³ His recordings of 1946-47, however, reveal a distinctive musicianship.

Young’s contributions to jazz were many. His “cool” style came through a fast, smooth floating tone in solos in which he maintained his own personal beat. Young introduced the idea of “relaxation” into jazz solos when he combined a use of silence, space and accent into their structure. This form displayed individual self-expression. Another “cool” feature was the wearing of sunglasses on the bandstand. “Young recognized the use of shades as a mask to deflect the gaze of others, without causing conflict, and to create an air of mystery.”⁴ In his keeping a blank face and rejecting a “get along” attitude, Young reflected a larger movement among African Americans to reject the old racial order of accommodation.

In the post-war period, the musical definition of “cool” came to mean “relaxed, cerebral, sophisticated—that is emotional power and intensity restrained in favor of musical complexity.”⁵ The concept of “cool” was adopted by society and by the early 1950s, the word “cool” implied something excellent and admirable.

JAZZ a history

*“Question: What is jazz?
Louis Armstrong: If you got to ask,
you’ll never know.”*

—John F. Szwed, *Jazz* 101

THE ORIGINS OF JAZZ

Jazz is defined as “a music created mainly by African Americans in the early 20th century through an amalgamation of elements drawn from European-American and tribal African music.”⁶ The beginning of jazz was a three-fold process:

- The development of an indigenous black American folk music was created by using African and European musical elements.
- Out of this music, other forms developed such as minstrel songs, ragtime and blues.
- The merging of blues, ragtime and mainstream popular music created jazz.

The rhythms of jazz came from West African instrumental music; it consisted of the piling up of layers of rhythms in which the drum was the most prominent instrument. When African Americans were brought to North America, they recreated the counter-rhythms of West Africa with an under or ground beat, made by hand claps, dancers’ steps, drums or the blows of sledgehammers and axes. Living on the plantations, they were exposed to European instruments, musical devices (such as the diatonic musical scale) and standard tempos in hymns and folk songs. They used these means to reproduce African effects as their music accompanied their work, dance and religious ceremonies. They lowered the third, seventh and fifth tones of the scale to produce “blue” notes; they also coarsened their voices with falsetto (high) or deep throat tones to

provide emotion and drama in their singing.

As white Americans listened to the African American music, they began producing songs in the manner of “plantation music.” Eventually, the music was incorporated into the minstrel shows popular in the 19th century; however, they were “Europeanized” with harmonies and other stylistic elements from Western Europe. Another offspring of 19th century African American music was ragtime. It was highly syncopated (accented on the offbeat) in an attempt to capture a sense of African cross-rhythms. Finally, out of African American music came the blues. Existing as early as the 1860s, it was not used in song form until the 20th century, when it emerged through a combination of field hollers (work songs) and ballads.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF JAZZ

The birthplace of jazz is generally traced back to New Orleans. Why jazz crystallized in New Orleans is unclear, but several elements made that city unique. New Orleans was a center for music of all kinds. Its African American population was generally more musically sophisticated than elsewhere and the city had a brass band tradition that was extremely popular. Also, African Americans had access to band instruments after the Civil War. Further, the Creole culture, unique to New Orleans, added a special rhythmic concept to jazz.

In the African American area of Storyville, the pleasure district of

New Orleans, honky-tonks existed on every corner and the characteristic music was the blues, while the dance of the day was the slow drag. The informal groups of two to four musicians who played there developed into the New Orleans dance band, the model for the early jazz band. The instruments used were usually the violin, cornet, clarinet, trombone, drums, double bass and guitar. The dance band combined ragtime, blues and other popular forms to produce the first jazz.

During the 1920s, many African Americans migrated north bringing jazz to new areas of the country. St. Louis and Kansas City became hubs for jazz, but many musicians headed to Chicago. The Prohibition Law of 1920, which made the sale of alcohol illegal, brought more young people to speakeasies and cabarets where the musical backdrop was jazz. The most important Chicago band, King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band, made a series of recordings that constituted the first substantial body of African American recorded jazz. The development of the recording industry and the craze for social dancing aided jazz in spreading coast to coast.

THE TIMELINE OF JAZZ

In the early 1900s, jazz was called “hot music” because of its intensity and beat. Jazz spread over the USA as part of the “social upheaval that shook American culture in the years between 1890 and 1920.”⁷ The American ethic of hard work and emotional restraint gave way to a new philosophy that empha-

sized pleasure and self-expression as routes to well-being. The shift in philosophy led to the development of dance halls, cabarets, restaurants and theatres including those in African American districts. These new cultural and social trends brought interest, capital and more African Americans into the entertainment industry. "Blacks were seen as liberated, expressive people who typified the new ideal and whose art, music and folkways could be looked to as a guidepost to a better future."⁸ Jazz was seen as central to the new spirit and it lent its name to the 1920s as The Jazz Age.

The economic depression of 1929 hurt the entertainment business and nearly destroyed the recording industry that now faced competition from radio. To offset the effects of the Great Depression, Americans wanted bigger and better forms of entertainment and Fletcher Henderson recognized this desire. He employed more band members playing different instruments (the saxophone was introduced), more arrangers and more soloists. The creation of the Big Band was the result.

The Big Band era, from 1929 to

the mid-1940s, was characterized by two features: "the distinctive ensemble that played written arrangements and the modification of the jazz beat."⁹ The new music used arrangements with plenty of instruments and hot jazz solos; most importantly, it swung! The term "swing" was current by the 1930s, although where it came to describe the rhythmic lilt of jazz is unknown. Swing is detected by certain common practices: the addition of vibrating on longer notes (vibrato); the spiking of a melodic line with accents and dynamic changes such as speech; the placing of notes to either side of the beat; and the division of the beat into uneven eighth notes. These developments led the way for the Big Band boom of 1935-45, when music became dreamy and carefree in order to erase the reality of the Great Depression. Most popular music was played by dance and show bands, though some rhythm sections were grounded in jazz such as the bands of Benny Goodman, Charlie Barnett, Duke Ellington and Count Basie.

By 1941, Big Band jazz was the dominant popular music of the country, but there was a feeling

among some younger musicians that the possibilities of swing had been exhausted. The two men chiefly responsible for finding an alternative were Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Separately and together, they contributed to the evolution of bop or bebop, a more complex jazz form characterized by a highly diverse texture created by the rhythm section. They also rejected elaborate written arrangements in favor of more improvisation. By the late 1940s, bop was commercially accepted, along with the "cool school" of Lester Young, Miles Davis and Gerry Mulligan.

In the 1960s, jazz took several paths: free jazz, modal jazz and jazz rock. In the 1980s, however, considerable interest appeared for the older styles. Jazz has come a long way from its beginnings to its present state of social and artistic respectability. It is now an art form that some writers believe is the most significant music of the 20th century.

*"Drum on your drums, batter on your banjos,
sob on the long cool winding saxophones
Go to it, O jazzmen."*

—Carl Sandburg, *Jazz Fantasia* (1920)

Origin of the Cuttin' Contest

The battle of the bands in New Orleans began the practice of cuttin' contests. Trials of skill originally occurred spontaneously when New Orleans bands, engaged in open-air advertising (or "ballyhoo"), encountered one another in the street. The wheels of the wagons on which the musicians rode were tied together to prevent either one from escaping before the contest was decided. These competitions attracted so much attention that the promoters began to set up similar events for financial gain. During the swing era,

groups of three or four bands toured on the theatre circuit, staging contests at a succession of stops. Some of the contests that took place acquired epic status. The most notable ones were between Benny Goodman and Chick Webb at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem and Count Basie versus Lucky Millinder in Baltimore.

In *Pork Pie*, Volcy embarks on a hero's journey and, to some extent, so does Charlie Butler. Author and mythologist Joseph Campbell spent years studying commonalities in the folklore of different societies; in their stories, he found there was a search for what matters, the path of destiny or the route of individuality. He called this "the hero's journey" and described it thus:

"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are then encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."¹⁴

In the video *The World of Joseph Campbell: The Hero's Journey*, Campbell describes a hero as a personification of a culture's mythology; he/she must have strength and courage like a warrior, but in contemporary society, that could translate to a person being a talented artist, scientist, etc. Whatever the skill, the hero goes on a shape-shifting journey that renews or redefines his/her world, community or tribe. The individual is restless with a feeling that something like destiny beckons. In the journey, the hero is separated from loved ones, but meets mentors to provide spiritual help. In his research of men's secret societies, Campbell found a recurrent theme in myths that "usually involved some kind of bull-roarer, a noise-making machine, a horn of some kind."¹⁵ This theme is reminiscent of the jam sessions in the Pork Pie Bar. Women were not invited to these rites and

are supposed to run away and hide, says Campbell. By hiding, women protect their power against contamination from men's power. However, women have power, "the power in their bodies; the magic of their bodies."¹⁶ Perhaps this is the secret of the Devil's Wife, who, instead, uses her power and does not keep it hidden.

In the journey, the hero descends into an underworld of adventure, a world of tests and trials. He/she must become a "dragon slayer" and/or eliminate the evil; then bring back a "boon which may rebound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet or the 10,000 worlds."¹⁷ In Volcy's case, he must bring back Charlie for a rebirth of the community through music and flowers.

We find the hero's journey in many places. It is in the stories of Gawain, Percival and Galahad's quest for the Holy Grail; it is in Jason's search for the Golden Fleece and in Luke Skywalker's adventures in the *Star Wars* trilogy.

"The hero's journey is a symbol that binds, in the original sense of the word, two distant ideas, the spiritual quest of the ancients with the modern search for identity, always the one marvelously constant story."¹⁸

Fables and Myths

Fables are brief stories that attempt to make abstract ideas of good or bad concrete and are striking enough to be understood and remembered. Whether the characters are animal or human, they have one dominant character trait and engage in one significant act which teaches a moral lesson. Such maxims as "Necessity is the mother of invention" and "Don't count your chickens before they hatch" come directly from fables.

While fables are simple lessons in morality, myths are far more complicated. They attempt to explain through complex symbolism the vital outlines of existence, including cosmic phenomena, peculiarities of natural history, origins of human civilization and/or the origins of social

or religious custom. The "explanations" may seem irrational and inconsistent to modern science and technology but they were created by, and appeal to, the imagination. Filled with a panoply of supernatural but human-behaving gods and goddesses, myths were accepted by primitive peoples because they were so closely connected to their sacred beliefs about nature and society.

In the collections of myths, there are tales of human heroes who are buffeted by gods and men but dare greatly, suffer uncomplainingly and endure staunchly to the end. Some of these heroes (Odysseus, for example) have so many tales written about them that the collections of these stories make an epic. "Epic" comes from the

Greek word "Epos" meaning song, but it has now come to signify some form of "heroic narrative wherein tragedy, comedy, lyric, dirge and idyll are skillfully blended to form an immortal work."¹⁹ The epic transfers our sympathies from gods to men and the man is usually an embodiment of the national ideals of courage, sagacity, beauty and endurance. Thus, we have the Greek Odysseus, the Norse Sigurd the Volsung, the Japanese Momotaro, the English Robin Hood and King Arthur, the Indian Rama, the French Roland, and the American Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill and John Henry. There is little preaching in these epics, but they instruct us in the ideals of conduct in human form.

THE DEVIL'S WIFE

In medieval times, the Roman Church enforced a strict code of sexual morality. Believers who broke it, especially women, were considered to be following in the Devil's footsteps. A document called the *Malleus Malificarum*, the witch hunters' bible, insinuated that women were more genetically predisposed to doing the Devil's deeds than men. In the late medieval era, myths associated with the Inquisition included the charge that certain demon women had copulated with the Devil. These succubae, as they were called, dressed up as women to trick men. Thus, women were more frequently blamed for sinfulness and evil.

Barbara Walker in her book, *The Women's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*, points out that the "[devil's] name was derived ultimately from the Sanskrit 'dev'" meaning goddess, through Persian 'daeva' and Latin 'diva,' 'divus,' or 'deus.'²⁰ Likewise, "diva" in English has come to represent a woman who is bold or arrogant, a prima donna. Walker goes on to say, "Patriarchal Europe always confused woman with devil, her genitalia was 'the mouth of hell,' her very motherhood was the vehicle of original sin; and male artists often painted or sculpted the Christian devil with female breasts."²⁰

***"MAGGIE: I hear she's
[the devil's wife]
prettier than a rainbow,
sweeter than sugar,
and'll lay down with any
man that got money."***

—Pork Pie

Improvisation

Improvisation is the spontaneous creation of music as it is performed. It is generally regarded as the principal element of jazz "since it affords the possibilities of spontaneity, surprise, experiment and discovery, without which most jazz would be devoid of interest."¹¹ Almost all styles of jazz allow some room for improvisation, whether it be a short passage or a chorus during which a soloist improvises over an accompaniment or an entire piece of music after a theme has

been introduced. However, it is not true that all jazz involves improvisation. Symphonic jazz and the Big Bands, such as Duke Ellington's, used precise, notated arrangements from which there was little deviation.

The best improvisation takes place when there is interaction between the members of a musical ensemble; the musicians' goal is the achievement of a groove or feeling. The expressiveness of the solo improvisation depends a great deal on the musical chemistry of the players, and, in turn, their individual personalities. However, jazz musicians usually acquire and develop improvisational expertise through playing with an ever-changing circle of musicians.

Improvisation may be divided into three categories, though in practice a player can use several or even all in the course of one solo. The first is melodic para-

phrase, the ornamentation of the melody or the theme. It can be a few flourishes to the original tune but, at its most inventive, it may involve a complete reworking of the melody. The second category is the use of motifs. Musical fragments, interchangeably called "ideas", "figures", "gestures" or "licks" can be combined and

manipulated into material on which the players improvise. The third category is formulaic improvisation. In this form, "many diverse motifs intertwine and

combine within continuous lines; particular musicians and groups often create a repertory of formulas (their "licks") and draw on it in many different pieces."¹² The essence of this type of improvisation is that the formulas do not call attention to themselves, but are artfully woven, through variation, in the musical lines to form a coherent whole.

As with any improvised music, jazz gives the player an opportunity for self-expression that is limited when he/she has to play composed or arranged music. Some improvisations are like conversations when one player will create a melodic or rhythmic motif that is picked up by another player or the whole band. The ultimate goal of improvisation is for the musician to communicate his/her own images or ideas through the music.

***"I like to paint some
sort of picture — you
know, tell a musical
story according
to how I feel."***

— Roy Haynes, drummer.¹³

NOTES

1. Dinerstein, p. 240.
2. Dinerstein, p. 252.
3. Dinerstein, p. 260.
4. Dinerstein, p. 250.
5. Dinerstein, p. 266.
6. Kernfeld, p. 580.
7. Kernfeld, p. 584.
8. Kernfeld, p. 584.
9. Kernfeld, p. 589.
10. Monson, p. 101.
11. Kernfeld, p. 554.
12. Kernfeld, p. 558.
13. Monson, p. 86.
14. Cousineau, p. xv.
15. Cousineau, p. 129.
16. Cousineau, p. 130.
17. Cousineau, p. 113.
18. Cousineau, p. xv.
19. Arbuthnot, p. 298.
20. Walker, p. 241.

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ACTIVITIES

Students read and understand a variety of materials.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #1

What's the difference between myths, folktales, fables and legends? Read the following definitions and give an example of each. You may want to think about children's stories such as *Cinderella*, Aesop's *The Lion and the Mouse*, *Hercules*, *Pocahontas*, *Anansi the Spider*, etc.

A **Myth** is associated with religious origins: myths focus on those forces that control the world and the relationships between those forces and human beings. Myths are invented to explain the beginnings of cultural ideas or philosophies and typically use Gods and mankind as their characters.

A **Folktale** is a traditional tale told by a culture in order to explain ways of existing, socializing, or getting ahead in the world. Often times, characters are animals or other natural beasts who triumph through hard work or cleverness.

A **Fairy Tale** is similar to folktales but teaches a lesson or a value important to a culture. Goodness triumphs over evil through imagined humans (royalty or common folk) and characters who possess magical abilities.

A **Legend** is associated with a particular person, particular place, and/or particular time in history; legends are sometimes based on fact.

A **Fable** is a short story with a moral. Characters may be human or animal but have one dominant character trait.

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #4

Define the following literary terms and identify an example of each from *Pork Pie*:

- Protagonist
- Antagonist
- Obstacle
- Alliteration
- Personification
- Descriptive Language

Students will listen to, analyze, evaluate and describe music.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Music #4

Students know and apply elements of art, principles of design, and sensory and expressive features of visual arts.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Visual Art #2

Music in theatre, or in life, can greatly affect the mood of a scene or place. Listen to a variety of different styles of music (jazz, classical, rap, swing, rock, country, folk, etc.). Draw the first image that comes to your mind on a piece of paper. Do not try to make a picture, just make lines and shapes. After you have completed the activity, mix up your drawings and share them with the class or your group members. See if they can guess which drawing matches which style of music. What clues helped them to place each image? What emotions does each drawing/music selection evoke? Can you think of specific examples from *Pork Pie* where music was used to set the mood?

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Colorado Model Content Standards: Reading and Writing #2

Pork Pie is considered a “Mythic Jazz Fable.” Create a fable for life in 2001. Be sure your fable includes characters with special powers, supernatural events, a heroic protagonist and an evil antagonist. Also, decide the moral for your fable such as “Never overcharge a credit card” or “Don’t take candy from strangers.” You may wish to illustrate your fables or create a book for your class.

Students will relate music to various historical and

cultural traditions.

Colorado Model Content Standards: Music #5

Select a number of different jazz pieces to listen to from the various genres of jazz (i.e. Jazz, Swing, Big Band, Be-bop or Vocalists). Write as many descriptive words and phrases as you can about each style. What separates each musical style from the others? What is its predominant mood? What images come to mind when listening to the music? Do the images evoke an emotion? Write a brief description of each jazz style to share with your class.

Students understand the chronological organization of history and know how to organize events and people into major eras to identify and explain historical relationships.

Colorado Model Content Standards: History # 1

Create a timeline for the Jazz Era from 1920-1940. What was the political and social landscape of the time? What important movements were occurring in entertainment, politics, race relations, religion, etc.? Identify each of these events on the timeline. Finally, relate your factual research to the fictitious landscape of *Pork Pie*: What historic events or people were referred to in the play? Was there any truth to the setting of the play in comparison to a historical perspective? What in the play was purely fictional, not based on truth? Do you think that any of the themes presented in *Pork Pie* came from a historical understanding of the period? Could the plot of the play be set in any other time period to the same effect? What would need to change?

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 **Denver Center Theatre Company**

Donovan Marley, Artistic Director
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