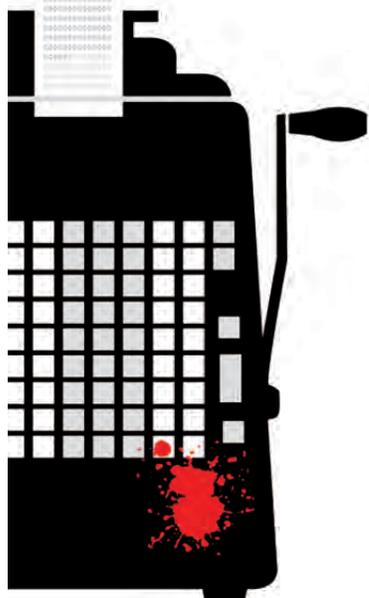


2010-2011  
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IN THIS ISSUE

# ADDING MACHINE

A MUSICAL



Composed by  
**Joshua Schmidt**

Libretto by  
**Jason Loewith & Joshua Schmidt**

Based on the play  
**THE ADDING MACHINE** by Elmer Rice

This project is supported in part by an award  
from the National Endowment for the Arts.



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE ARTS

## AUDIENCE GUIDE

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### Elmer Rice: A tireless crusader for freedom of speech and artistic expression

American playwright and novelist Elmer Rice is little remembered today. But in the '20s and '30s his plays were as popular and acclaimed as the works of Eugene O'Neill, America's first great playwright. Rice's career is an example of the great American success story because his first professionally produced play was an instant hit.

Spanning 50 years and almost 50 plays, his career is a remarkable testament to a man's dedication to his art and personal vision. Often innovative in style, his plays reveal a concern with individual freedom confronted by the tyranny of impersonal institutions and destructive passions. He fought for the integrity of the American drama and earned a place among those few who in the first half of the twentieth century brought the American drama to worldwide recognition.

Rice was born Elmer Leopold Reizenstein in 1892 in New York City. His younger brother died when Elmer was three, making him in effect an only child. Though the family was poor, the second-generation of German-Jewish immigrants, they took him to plays and encouraged his interests in the arts. Rice spent much of his childhood reading and wrote, "Nothing in my life has been more helpful than the simple act of joining the library."

Categorized by many as a crusader and reformer, Rice's work reflects the influence of his close relationship with his paternal grandfather, who lived with the family. The elder Reizenstein was a political activist in the Revolutions of 1848 in Germany and immigrated to the United States to avoid imprisonment. The rebelliousness that he inherited from his grandfather made the playwright, in his own words, "responsive to books that exposed society's weaknesses and the sterility of human behavior."

Rice did not finish high school because of family financial difficulties, and instead took a number of jobs before deciding to get a high school equivalency diploma and go to law school. In spite of finding classes boring, he graduated from New York Law School in 1912 and began a short-lived legal career. In characteristic fashion, and what would be a pattern throughout his life, he resigned in 1914

out of principle because he felt the practice of law was based on hypocrisy and by nature compels lawyers to make ideological compromises that are ultimately unethical and immoral. Rice's resignation, in the face of certain economic disaster, demonstrates his strong will and dedication to his personal vision.

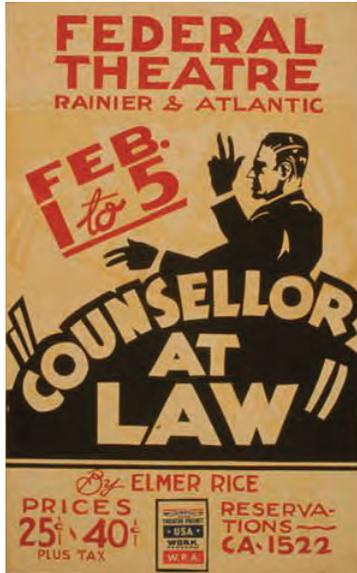
Rice was greatly influenced by George Bernard Shaw's use of the stage as a platform to promote ideas and condemn social ills. Rice personally felt it a duty of the dramatist to correct obvious moral flaws and dedicated himself to improvement of society "through the depiction and excoriation of existing economic and social ills."

As luck would have it, at the age of 21 and within months of leaving the law firm, Rice realized a windfall that few playwrights ever experience. His first professionally produced play, *ON TRIAL*, earned him critical acclaim for its innovative form and dramatic production technique. A murder mystery, the play was a tremendous success and ran for 365 performances in New York, toured the US and throughout the world. Few of his later plays received such acclaim.

Rice's greatest contribution to American theatre is his experimentation. His career as a dramatist is full of firsts. *THE ADDING MACHINE*, one of the first American expressionist plays, satirized the



**Elmer Rice** (1892-1967)



growing regimentation of man in the machine age through the life and death of the arid book-keeper, Mr. Zero. ON TRIAL is heralded as the play that introduced the "flashback" technique.

His Pulitzer Prize winning play, STREET SCENE was the first urban drama, "a groundbreaking depiction of New York tenement life." It later was the source for an opera by Kurt Weill and Langston Hughes. Another first is Rice's inclusion of a childbirth scene in full view of the audience in A NEW LIFE. In THE WINNER, Rice cast an African-American in a role in which race was not an issue.

Because of his long career and his versatility, any effort to label the playwright is problematic. Overall, his oeuvre demonstrates his mastery of form in all styles including melodrama, expressionism, naturalism, propaganda plays and one urban drama. Though critics often



scathingly criticized his works, few denied his technique and deftness in construction. This versatility allowed him to stay current and innovative, granting him staying power.

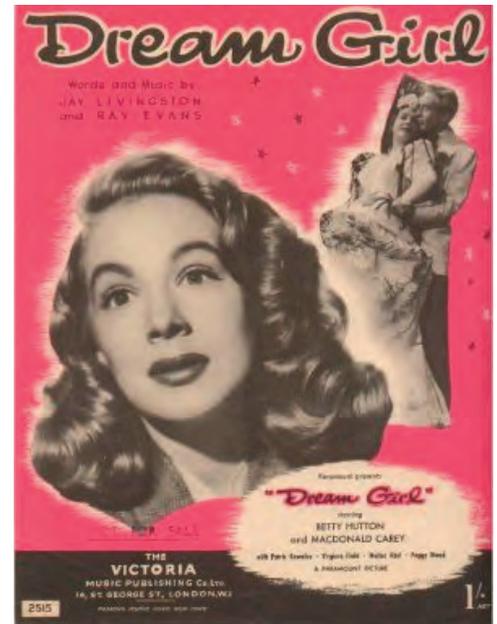
In April 1932, Rice and his son Robert took a trip to Europe, including Germany and the Soviet Union, and heard Hitler and Goebbels speak. In response, Rice was the first American playwright to address Nazism in JUDGMENT DAY, and he was the first to decry Nazism's presence in America in AMERICAN LANDSCAPE.

The impact of the Great Depression and Rice's trip to Russia inspired the controversial WE, THE PEOPLE, which Rice described as, "the misfortunes of a typical workman and his family". He was accused of being communist due to the beliefs expressed in BETWEEN TWO WORLDS.

After the failure of these plays, Rice returned to Broadway in 1937 to write and direct for the Playwrights' Producing Company, which he helped to establish. He resigned from the American stage for a time, after an impassioned speech at Columbia University that condemned the American theater for its crass commercialism and corruption of American theatrical arts; he was notorious for his hotheadedness and staunch idealism. In 1936, he resigned as regional director from the Federal Theatre Project, a public program which he was instrumental in organizing, when an article he wrote condemning Mussolini was censored. Rice felt infringement on artistic freedom to be unacceptable, and he was a tireless crusader for freedom of speech and artistic expression. In his form of protest, he was not above sacrificing all to make his ideals publicly known.

Of his later plays, the most successful was the fantasy DREAM GIRL, in which an over-imaginative girl finds unexpected romance in reality. The play was the basis for a movie starring Betty Hutton (above) and a flop musical called SKYSCRAPER, (1965), with songs by Sammy Cahn and James Van Heusen, starring Julie Harris and Charles Nelson Reilly.

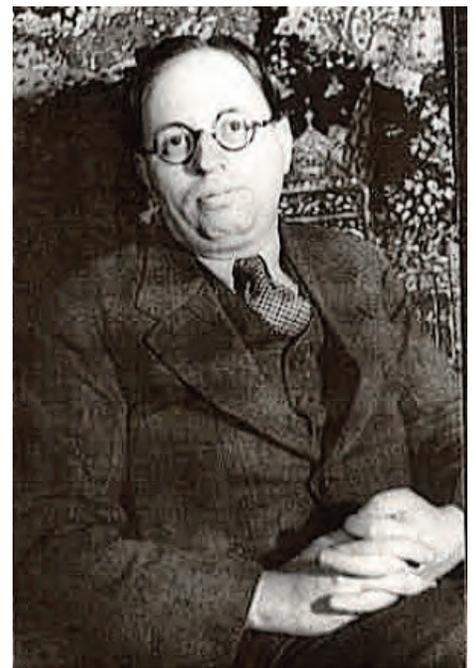
Rice's last play was CUE FOR PASSION, a modern psychoanalytical variation of the Hamlet theme. Rice was the author of a controversial book on American



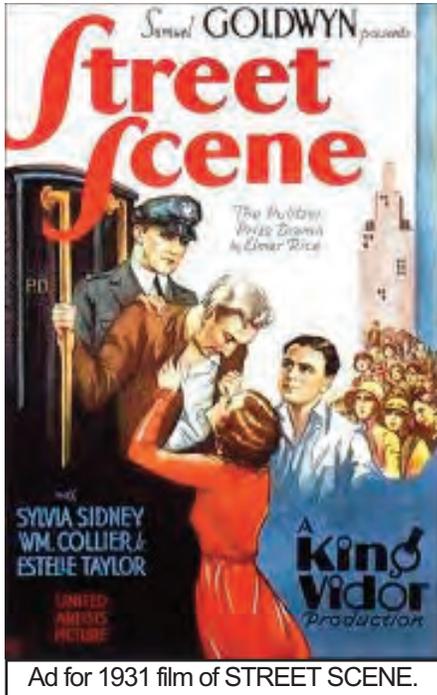
The 1948 film of DREAM GIRL starred Betty Hutton and featured a title song by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans, who also wrote *Silver Bells* and *The Theme from Mr. Ed*.

drama, THE LIVING THEATRE and an autobiography, MINORITY REPORT.

His personal life was tumultuous. Married three times, with five children, he openly admitted to having many extramarital affairs. Yet somehow his personal life never received the negative criticism that his work did.



Elmer Rice (1892-1967)



Ad for 1931 film of STREET SCENE.

His idealism made him a target, but when he died in 1967 he had achieved a career of diehard staying power, able to navigate the commercialism of Broadway and yet maintain his artistic integrity.

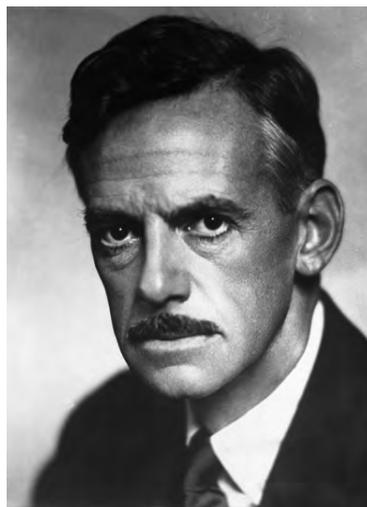
He should be remembered for his tireless efforts toward innovation and experimentation and his striving for true, uncensored expression in the American Theater in the twentieth century.

He summed up his point of view in *MINORITY REPORT: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*:

"Even more essential to a man's conduct of life than his political and religious beliefs is his personal code of behavior. It is better to live than to die; to love than to hate; to create than to destroy; to do something than to do nothing; to be truthful than to lie; to question than to accept; to be strong than to be weak; to hope than to despair; to venture than to fear; to be free than to be bound. However obvious these tenets may seem, I can unhesitatingly say that if I had used them as touchstones for my every thought, word and deed, I would be a better man than I am."

**ELMER RICE'S PRIMARY WORKS**

- ON TRIAL, 1914
- THE IRON CROSS, 1917
- THE HOME OF THE FREE, 1918
- FOR THE DEFENSE, 1919
- WAKE UP, JONATHAN, 1921
- THE ADDING MACHINE, 1923
- CLOSE HARMONY, 1924 (with Dorothy Parker, retitled THE LADY NEXT DOOR)
- IS HE GUILTY?, 1924
- COCK ROBIN, 1928 (in collaboration with Phillip Barry)
- THE SUBWAY, 1929
- STREET SCENE, 1929
- SEE NAPLES AND DIE, 1929
- THE LEFT BANK, 1931
- COUNSELLOR AT LAW, 1931
- WE, THE PEOPLE, A PLAY IN TWENTY SCENES, 1933
- JUDGMENT DAY, 1934
- BETWEEN TWO WORLDS, 1934
- AMERICAN LANDSCAPE, 1938
- TWO ON AN ISLAND, 1940
- FLIGHT TO THE WEST, 1940
- A NEW LIFE, 1943
- DREAM GIRL, 1945
- THE GRAND TOUR, 1951
- THE WINNER, 1954
- CUE FOR PASSION, 1958
- THE LIVING THEATRE, 1959
- LOVE AMONG THE RUINS, 1963
- MINORITY REPORT AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, 1963



**Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953)**

In 1927, Broadway was in its heyday, with 268 plays produced. A much better known contemporary of Elmer Rice was Eugene O'Neill, an American playwright and Nobel laureate in Literature. His plays introduced realism and common vernacular into American drama. O'Neill's first play, *BEYOND THE HORIZON*, opened in 1920 and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

His best-known plays include *ANNA CHRISTIE* (Pulitzer Prize, 1922), *DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS* (1924), *STRANGE INTERLUDE* (Pulitzer Prize, 1928), *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA* (1931) and his only comedy, *AH, WILDERNESS!* (1933), a wistful re-imagining of his youth. In 1936, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. In 1956, three years after his death, his widow arranged for his autobiographical play, *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT* to be produced on stage. It is widely considered to be his finest work and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1957.

**Interview with Co Librettist Jason Loewith**



*Jason Loewith (above) and Joshua Schmidt co-wrote the libretto for ADDING MACHINE A MUSICAL. They discussed their partnership in podcast, Internet and Harvard Arts Beat interviews excerpted here in Skylight's Audience Guide.*

Loewith produced the world premiere of ADDING MACHINE: A MUSICAL at Next Theatre Company, where he served as Artistic Director from 2002-2008. It won a Joseph Jefferson Award for Best New Work, Musical. That production went on to a six-month commercial run Off-Broadway in 2008, winning four Obie Awards for direction, design and performance, four Lortel Awards and two Outer Critics Circle Awards. The New York cast recording was released by PS Classics.

Since moving to Washington in 2008, Loewith was appointed Executive Director of the National New Play Network, the country's alliance of nonprofit theaters that champion the development, production, and continued life of new plays.

**Q. What was there about Elmer Rice's story that inspired you and Joshua Schmidt to adapt it as a musical?**

JASON: ADDING MACHINE was the result of a 12-year artistic crush, which began in 1994 when I first heard STREET SCENE, the Kurt Weill/ Elmer Rice/Langston Hughes musical-opera.

It is a brilliant melding of serious music, serious theatre and the musical-theatre form...so I started reading Rice's plays.

When I opened THE ADDING MACHINE, with its first scene being Mrs. Zero's four-page harangue against her husband, it reminded me of Mozart's "Queen of the Night" aria from THE MAGIC FLUTE. And that's when I thought THE ADDING MACHINE needed to be musicalized. I looked for a composer for many years, but it wasn't until I met Josh in 2004 that I finally felt I'd found a creative partner for the job. He and I went to work in 2004, did a workshop in 2006, and premiered the piece in 2007.

**Q. Why do you think Rice's original play lends itself to musical adaptation?**

JASON: Rice was really young when he tackled THE ADDING MACHINE, and he was interested in this new thing called "expressionism," an artistic movement in which the inner soul of the character is depicted in the work's form. Think of Munch's painting, THE SCREAM, the character's insides are depicted by the fluid and ghoulish form, the angry brushstrokes of paint slathered onto the canvas, the dark and dissonant colors. It's not a realistic picture of a tortured soul, it's expressionism. So Rice was fascinated by the possibilities of this form for theater. So was his contemporary Eugene O'Neill, who gave us EMPEROR JONES and THE HAIRY APE as the other two American expressionist masterworks of the period.

By telling a pretty realistic story, a guy gets fired and kills his boss, in the most diverse and unrealistic way he could, Rice gave me and Josh the tools we needed for a musical adaptation. The story was already lifted out of realism; we just had to add music.

**Q. Do you think ADDING MACHINE is particularly relevant today?**

JASON: The story of the "wage-slave" is nothing new. Since the Industrial Revolution, it's been relevant for art to reflect on how the financial system either promotes or restricts individual freedom. I guess we were sadly lucky that the 2007 world premiere coincided with the steepest rise in oil prices in history, leading to grave economic difficulties. And we all know what happened in 2008. So Rice's story

feels extremely prescient. Today, how many 25-year employees are finding their anniversaries celebrated with pink slips? I think, sadly, a large number of Americans will be able to relate to Mr. Zero's dilemma.

What's different, though, was Rice's take on technology. For him, the rise of technology was worth a cautionary screed... and at that time, he was right. Time and motion studies, Henry Ford's assembly line, efficiency brigades - businesses were squeezing profits by squeezing humanity from the labor force. Though some may disagree, things seem different today. That's why our adaptation of the play attempts to lay some blame at Mr. Zero's feet as well. Whereas Rice's Mr. Zero was an anti-hero condemned to a terrible fate, our Mr. Zero continually makes the wrong choices, continually believes he's entitled to prosperity without sacrifice. And I think that sentiment is one that's particularly relevant today, and for the left-right divide in this country.

**Q. In what ways did you and Josh want to change its message?**

JASON: Rice's original play, clearly has a "message": that capitalism is a dehumanizing machine which strips the worker of his soul. Josh and I felt, 80 years on, that such a stark message wouldn't be interesting to contemporary audiences. We feel that an individual has responsibility for his or her destiny. Mr. Zero, as we reconceived him, "chose the machine" repeatedly throughout his many lives. That's why we fashioned the dramaturgy of the play around three tests that Mr. Zero fails- when he's fired, just before his execution and in the Elysian Fields.

**Q. Joshua Schmidt's score is so unique. How would you describe it?**

JASON: It's a deliriously wild ride from dissonance to heartbreaking melody, with multiple influences that add up to much more than the sum of its parts.... Who else would have thought of putting Gospel and Burt Bacharach in the same scene and make it work.

*Excerpts from dctheatrescene.com, studiotheatre.org, Talking Theatre in Chicagopodcast.*

**All About Schmidt**

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Notes from the Composer from PIANO/VOCAL SELECTIONS FROM ADDING MACHINE, Alfred Music Publishing, 2009

Composer and co-librettist Joshua Schmidt is a Milwaukee native and is now a New York City based composer/sound designer. He attended Homestead High School in Mequon and graduated from UW-Milwaukee.

His second work, A MINISTER'S WIFE, book by Austin Pendleton and lyrics by Jan Tranen, premiered at Writers' Theatre in Glencoe, Illinois in 2009. It received Joseph Jefferson Awards for Best New Work, Musical and Best Supporting Actress for Liz Baltes, (recently seen in Skylight's production of JACQUES BREL...) It is currently playing at Lincoln Center's Mitzi Newhouse Theater in New York City.

Schmidt turned Elmer Rice's play into a musical using his experience as a pianist, synthesizer programmer, and composer of contemporary and electronic music. "All the music I do is based on the Pixies' MOTORWAY TO ROSWELL," Schmidt says. "I listened to that until my CD player died."

**Q. What was the inspiration for using just two pianos and percussion?**

JOSH: For the early part of my career, Skylight Opera was my artistic home outside of my music composition/ technology studies at UWM with Yehuda Yannay and Jon Welstead. At Skylight, three individuals influenced me profoundly as a musician: Jamie Johns, Mike Lorenz and especially Richard Carsey. I remain in awe of what could be accomplished with just those 3 guys playing two pianos and percussion. The music and orchestrations for ADDING MACHINE, in all its sound and fury, is a direct consequence to those 3 guys and what they are capable of.

**Q. Variety said that your score is the central attraction of ADDING MACHINE, appealing to "an intellectual audience."**

JOSH: ADDING MACHINE is meant for everyone and anyone. Rice's play is rich in complex ideas and engaging subject matter that demand much from an audience. But the themes touch all of us on some level. I believe ADDING MACHINE to be a romantic comedy, a very, very dark romantic comedy to be sure, that explores one very simple question: What is a life worth living?

**Notes from the Composer:**

Nothing about the play seemed conventional. Two of the first four scenes were long, near-circular monologues by seemingly unlikable characters in unfortunate situations. Each scene seemed to be a stylistic juxtaposition to the one preceding it. The density in which Rice meditated upon the meaning of life, crisscrossing socialism with reincarnation, xenophobia, the urban experience, love and technology seemed at times impossible to penetrate.

One of the great things about Rice's text is its eclecticism. With my training as a composer, my wide range of musical interests and my short-yet-obsessive attention span, I had become a jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none" composer. ADDING MACHINE gave me the opportunity to explore my compositional voice considering the influences of John Cage, Erik Satie, Steve Reich, Wayne Shorter, Richard Rodgers, Brahms, Stravinsky, Weill, Gershwin, Tom Waits, the list goes on and on.

The first music written for the show was *Daisy's Confession*. I have always felt that the act of openly articulating your love for another person when you have never done so before is maybe the most frightening thing many people experience. When I wrote *I'd Rather Watch You*, I had just watched Leone's film, *ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA*, which uses the old song *Amapola* to great effect in an otherwise violent bloodbath of a movie. I love such juxtapositions.

The first song I presented to Jason was Mrs. Zero's song, *Something to be Proud Of*. I was convinced it would get me booted off the project. The piece did scare him a little and he reminded me that it might be a good idea to not scare people away with the rest of the music. I understood his concern, but said that we were adapting THE ADDING MACHINE and not CHITTY, CHITTY, BANG, BANG. Jason is a wonderful collaborator and did not fire me.

During a workshop of the show, David Cromer, the director said, "If you do not cut the air out of this song and make it go faster, I will lose interest after two minutes." I cut three minutes out of the

original version. This direction made *Something to be Proud Of* the sort of the hell-raising six minute opening number it is now.

One aspect that took two productions to solve was the character of Shrdlu. Jason's original concept was that Shrdlu sings gospel in jail and the blues in heaven. *The Gospel According to Shrdlu* is the beginning of this journey, and its inclusion within the jail scene reflects what we saw in the humor and absurdity of Rice's brilliant writing. The arc of this character did not become clear until we released him of his burdens with the song *Freedom*.

*Zero's Confession* is probably the number I am most attached to. As a piece of music, it operates like something Benjamin Britten might write, if he liked the band Fugazi. At many points during this piece, Mr. Zero, the chorus and each instrument of the pit are playing something completely different and melodically independent of each other.

From this, one can conclude that creating a musical seldom happens in a vacuum. I personally need people to challenge and deepen my ideas or else how could they withstand public scrutiny? Such collaboration does not occur without a certain level of pain and stress over long periods of time.... Perhaps this was just the right time for this project - an experience that everyone seemed to get on board with and give all the attention and care they could to it. For that I am eternally grateful... and isn't that how the theatre should be?



**Synopsis**

*Edited from an essay by Jeffrey Sweet, from The Best Plays Theater Yearbook, 2007-2008.*

**Setting: Here and the afterlife.  
An American city in the 1920s.**

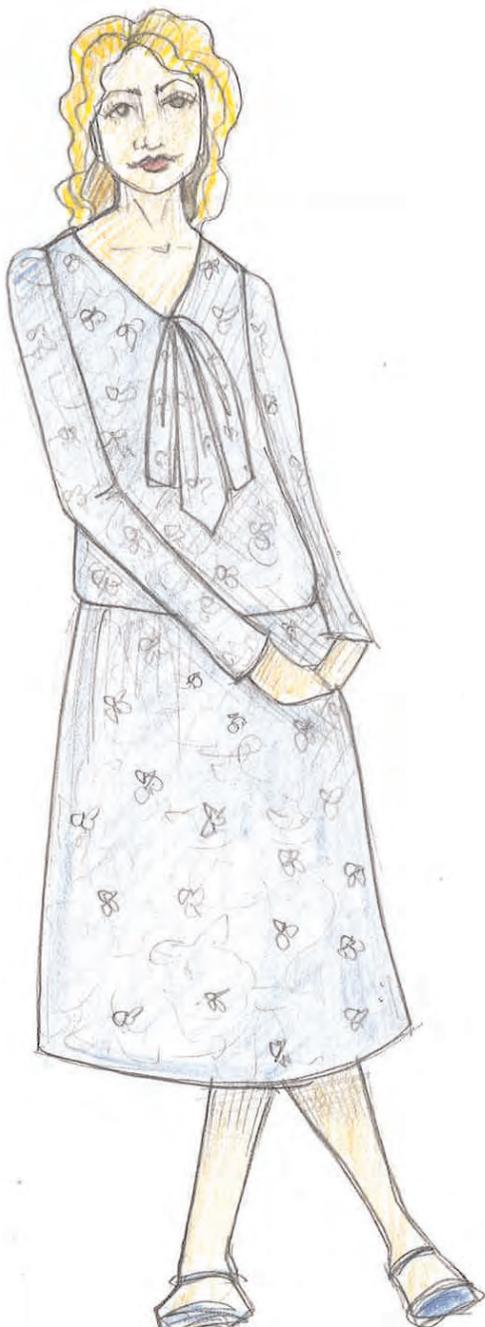
**The play is performed in one act.**

A short prologue is sung by the chorus:

*In numbers*

*The mysteries of life can be revealed*

*In numbers...*



**Costumes Designed by Holly Payne**

In scene one, Mr. and Mrs. Zero are lying in bed. Mrs Zero expresses her affection for wholesome movies, complains that Mr. Zero is too cheap to take her downtown and loudly regrets her marriage, (*Something to Be Proud Of*).

In scene two, three pairs of workers sit in the dimly-lit accounting room of a large department store. As the women read a series of figures, the private thoughts of the men are heard-one is obsessed with women, the other is fixed on beer, (*Harmony, Not Discord*). The focus shifts to the thoughts of Mr. Zero and Daisy Devore, his co-worker. Zero is worried about a woman he reported to the police for parading undressed in front of her window. He is anxious that she will come after him when she is released from her six month sentence. Daisy wants a transfer to escape his crabbiness, (*You Thought Wrong*).

Daisy, meanwhile, remembers when Zero used to be pleasant and attentive. They recall a company picnic when they spent the day together, (*Reverie*).

Today marks Zero's 25th anniversary at his job. He expects that the boss will reward him with a promotion, (*Movin' Up*). But the boss doesn't even know his name and then informs him that he is being replaced by an adding machine. The boss explains that "efficiency is the first consideration, profit the ultimate goal." We leave Zero struggling with the news.

On her way home from work, Daisy sings about how movie stars like Valentino and Douglas Fairbanks pale in comparison to the life she imagines with Mr. Zero, (*I'd Rather Watch You*).

Mrs. Zero is angry that Zero is late for the party they are hosting for two other couples, the Ones and Twos. *The Party* showcases the banality and mean-spirit-edness of their conversation-weather, fashion, the failings of others and their hostility toward foreigners and ethnics. There is a knock on the door. Zero knows it is the police, who have come for him. He killed the boss today.

The setting shifts to a courtroom for *Zero's Confession*. Zero freely admits killing the boss. He was enraged that he

was fired after working for the same company for 25 years. And the boss saying how sorry he was to lose "such an old and faithful employee," only added to Zero's indignation, provoking him to stab the boss with a billfile.

The next scene is death row, the night before Zero is to be executed. Mrs. Zero comes to say goodbye. Zero is ecstatic when he sees that she's brought him his favorite meal, (*Ham and Eggs*). He comforts his wife and they remember the good times they had, (*Didn't We*). Then Zero asks her about the scrapbook she has kept about his life that will end with the accounts of his execution. He makes the mistake of suggesting that if something should happen to her, he'd like Daisy, from down at the store, to have it. Mrs. Zero flares up in jealousy and exits (*Miss Devore/I Was A Fool*).

Zero now meets Shrdlu, another death row inmate, who insists his crime is worse than Zero's: he cut his mother's throat at the dinner table. His mother was an oppressive figure who squelched Shrdlu's healthy impulses as sinful. In *Shrdlu's Gospel*, he looks forward to execution and to freedom in the flames of damnation.

"The Fixer" arrives to escort Zero to his execution. Zero pleads for a second chance and the Fixer asks him what he would do if he got one. Zero says he'd look for another job adding figures, because he "ain't young enough to take up somethin' new!" Zero is dragged offstage to be executed.

Zero finds himself in *A Pleasant Place*, the Elysian Fields.\*\* He encounters a Shrdlu, who is dismayed that this is not the afterlife of pain and suffering he had expected. Not being punished is agonizing to him (*Shrdlu's Blues*).

Shrdlu disappears and Daisy enters. Zero is startled to see her. In *Daisy's Confession*, she reveals that after Zero was executed, she blew out the gas in her kitchen. Eventually, she admits it was "accidental on purpose."

The Elysian Fields remind her of the day she and Zero were together at the company picnic. Now they reveal to each other how important that day was.

She remembers when his knee touched hers. He confesses that it was also “accidental on purpose...I felt like kissin’ you, but I didn’t have the nerve.”

Daisy asks Zero to kiss her saying she’s “never been kissed for real before.” They kiss, then dance clumsily to a lush reprise of Daisy’s song, *I’d Rather Watch You*. But Zero is confused. How could a murderer and a suicide victim be rewarded in the afterlife with happiness?

Shrdlu returns and tells them he’s learned that in this place nobody cares what they did before they arrived. All are free to do as they like. Zero responds, “You mean, like whores? And suicides? And murderers? What kinda dump is this anyway?” Zero decides he does not want to stay in a place with people who are not respectable and exits. In despair, Daisy cries, “I might as well be alive!”

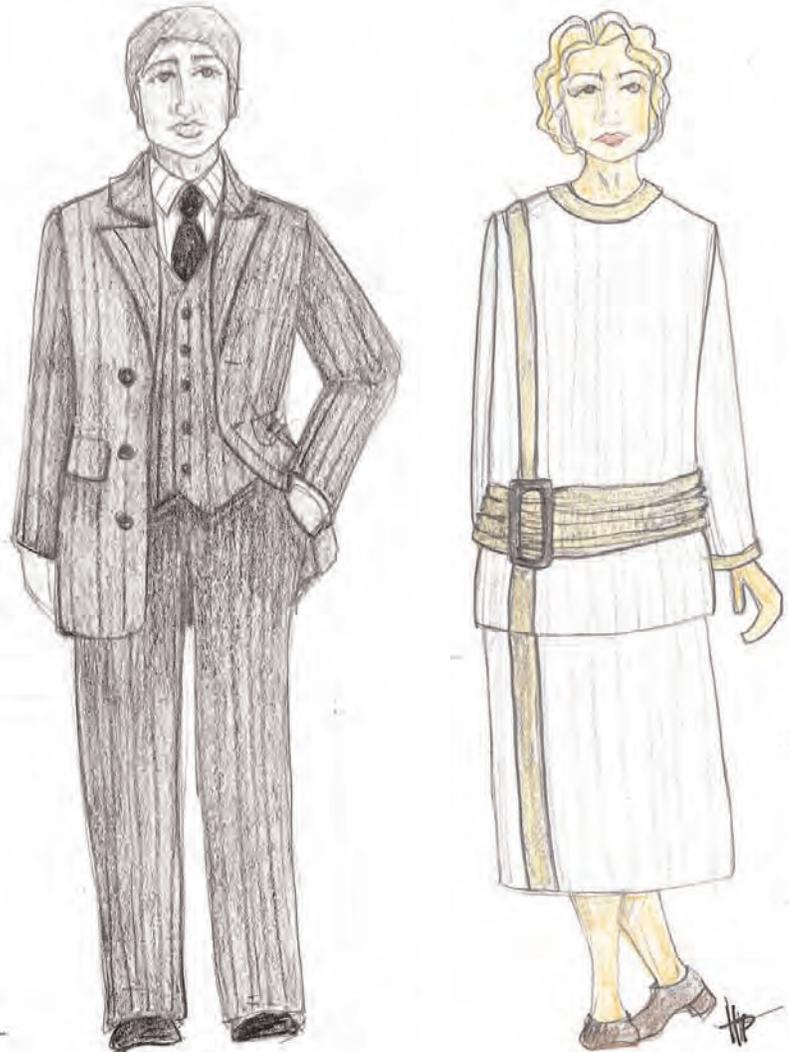
In the next scene, Zero is found working at an adding machine, singing of the blissful certainty of numbers, (*Freedom*). The Fixer interrupts his bliss with the unwelcome information that it is time for Zero to go back. “Do you think they’re going to all the trouble of making a soul just to use it once? Why man, they use a soul over and over again...until it’s worn out.”

The Fixer now reveals the recycling machine that sends refurbished souls to be reborn. Zero protests, but the Fixer orders him to the conveyor belt, knowing that Zero will come to grief again in the same old dumb way. “You chose the machine, Zero! Every time! So it chose you!” Zero sees Daisy on the conveyor belt. He runs to her, embraces and kisses her just before they are shoved back into the world. All action stops and the Fixer says, “I’ll tell the world this is a lousy job.”

End of play.

**\*\*Elysian Fields:**

- From Greek mythology, the Elysian Fields were the final resting place of the souls of the heroic and the virtuous.
- Elysian Fields Avenue in New Orleans is the setting of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
- Elysian Fields is a song by the American thrash metal band Megadeth.



Scenery designed by Nathan Stuber

**Why the Twenties Roared**

The ADDING MACHINE is set in the 1920s, an era that has been called The Roaring '20s, The Jazz Age and The Age of Intolerance. Whatever the moniker, it was a decade of change that marked the beginning of modern America.

Americans were in an upbeat mood following World War I (1914-1918). In the decade ahead, the country would prosper and become the richest nation on earth. Technology played a vital part in the economic growth of America in the '20s. Henry Ford's methods of mass production and efficiency in the automobile industry blazed the way for change. By 1927, more than 1.5 million Model T Fords had been sold.

American demands for consumer goods sky-rocketed during the '20s and the culture of consumerism was born. Americans had an insatiable desire for anything that would make life more convenient. Electricity and plumbing became a standard in American homes. Consumer products ranging from electric toasters and washing machines to vacuum cleaners, radios and telephones flooded the marketplace.

The increased demand for labor increased worker wages, which rose 33 percent from pre-World War I period. Companies began to mechanize tasks once handled by people to cut back on labor requirements. Mr. Zero in THE ADDING MACHINE represents many victims of "progress."



1920s Ku Klux Klan parade in Washington, DC when membership grew into the millions.

Radio was the first mass broadcasting medium and proved revolutionary. Following the first radio broadcast in 1920, thousands of radio stations popped up all over the country. Radio became a national obsession, people would stay up half the night listening to concerts, sermons, news and sports. Radio advertising became the grandstand for mass marketing. Its economic importance led to the mass culture that has dominated our society ever since.

Early in the 1920s free immigration came to an end and racial tensions reached a boiling point. Non-Protestant immigrants had been arriving en masse from southeast Europe since the beginning of the century. Together with the Asian, Mexican and the African-American population, these minorities suffered at the hands of the long established dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (W.A.S.P.) population. Prejudice and racism reared its ugly head with people showing an acceptance of racist views in the media, literature and towards organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. The racial epithets used at the Zero's party in ADDING MACHINE reflect attitudes in the country at the time.

Two significant pieces of legislation enacted during the '20s shaped the era and America's future. In 1920, the manufacture and sale of alcohol was prohibited by the 18th Amendment to the US constitution. Known as "Prohibition," it led to the rise of organized crime, smuggling and gangster associations typified by Chicago's Al Capone.

Women finally won the right to vote with the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920. The new legislation seemed to precipitate other changes in women's lives. The "new women" of the 1920s rejected the restrictions of the older generation, smoked and drank in public, "bobbed" their hair, shortened their skirts, celebrated the sexual revolution and embraced consumer culture.

The movies became America's favorite form of entertainment. Hollywood boomed, producing a new form of entertainment that was cheap and accessible and crowds surged into new downtown movie palaces and neighborhood theatres. The first talking picture, THE JAZZ SINGER was released in 1927 and the "talkies" quickly replaced silent films.



Rudolf Valentino, matinee idol

It seemed that American prosperity would last forever. There were virtually no signs of economic depression; wages were at an all-time high, the Dow Jones Industrial Stock Index never stopped increasing, everyone indulged in luxuries and entertainment, and there was a general atmosphere of hope and promise for the future. Who would have thought that it would all come to an end with the stock market crash on October 24, 1929 and that a decade of despair and depression would follow?

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