

A Deeper Look

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30
YEARS

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
PROFESSIONAL
LIVE
THEATRE

A LIVE RADIO PLAY

**IT'S A WONDERFUL
LIFE**

NOVEMBER 16 - DECEMBER 22
BY JOE LANDRY

photo: Peterson Creative Photography & Design

Compiled by Ian Sutherland

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY

by Joe Landry

Director	Philip Muehe
Assistant Director	Ian Sutherland
Production Stage Manager	Bailey Otto
Stage Manager	Gabriel Peñaloza-Hernandez
Set Designer	Justin Hooper
Costume Designer	Jason Resler
Lighting Designer	Thomas White
Assistant Lighting Designer & Production Assistant	Brandon Cayetano
Sound Designer	Kelsey Heathcote
Props & Sound Effects Designer	Brandt Roberts

CAST

Jake Laurents	Jeremy van Meter
Freddie Filmore	Eric Lee
Sally Applewhite	Lizzy Andretta
Lana Sherwood	Lauren Schulke
Harry "Jazzbo" Heywood	David Hennessey
C. C. Capps	Brandt Roberts

Setting

The abandoned stage and auditorium of Studio A at WBFR,
Manhattan, New York.
Christmas Eve, present day.



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

A Live Radio Play

by Joe Landry

Presented by the
Commonwealth Theatre Company
November 16 - December 22, 2018

ESSENTIALS

The Plot

Our production opens in present-day New York City, in an abandoned radio station. A man enters, clearly down on his luck and in a bad way, ready to end it all. To his surprise, a radio theatre troupe appears, dressed as though it's 1945. They draw him into their impending radio broadcast of *It's a Wonderful Life*, where he is called upon to play George Bailey, which he does.

The story begins on Christmas Eve, 1945, as prayers are heard in heaven for George Bailey of Bedford Falls, New York. To help George, Clarence Oddbody, an angel who has not yet earned his wings, is being sent to earth to keep the despairing George from killing himself on this crucial night.

To prepare him for his task, Clarence reviews George's life. As a child, George stops his younger brother, Harry, from drowning in an icy pond, then catches a bad cold and loses his hearing in one ear.

Weeks later, George goes back to work at his after-school job in Mr. Gower's drugstore and prevents Gower, who has gotten drunk after learning that his son has died of influenza, from accidentally dispensing arsenic-filled capsules to a sick child. George promises the remorseful Gower never to tell anyone about the incident and he never does.

In 1928, as a grown young man, George, who has always dreamed of travel to exotic places, is about to leave on a world tour with money he has saved since high school. That night, at his younger brother Harry's high school graduation party, he becomes attracted to Mary Hatch, a girl who has secretly loved him since childhood. They discuss their different ideas for the future until George's Uncle Billy comes for him with the news that his father has had a stroke. After Mr. Bailey's death, George's trip is canceled, but he still plans to leave

for college until he learns that the board of directors of his father's financially tenuous Building and Loan can't remain open unless George manages it. Fearing that Mr. Potter, the town's richest and meanest man, will then have financial control of the town, George agrees to stay.

Four years later, when Harry returns from college, financed by his brother, George again looks forward to leaving the stifling atmosphere of Bedford Falls and letting Harry run the business.

But he learns that Harry has just married Ruth Dakin, whose father has offered Harry a good job elsewhere. George again sacrifices his own future to ensure Harry's.

That night, George wanders over to Mary's house. Though he is adamant that he never intends to marry, he realizes that he loves her. Soon they are married, but as they are about to leave for their hon-

eyymoon, a run on the bank convinces George to check on the building and loan. Because the bank has called in their loan, they have no money, only the honeymoon cash that Mary offers. Through George's persuasive words, most of the anxious customers settle for a minimal cashout, and they end the day with two dollars left.

That night, Ernie the cab driver and Bert the cop show George his new "home," an abandoned mansion that Mary had wished for on the night of the graduation dance.

As the years pass, George continues to help the people of Bedford Falls avoid Potter's financial stranglehold and Mary rears their four children. On the day before Christmas after the end of World War II, George elatedly shows off news articles about Harry, who became a Medal-of-Honor-winning flier. Uncle Billy goes to make an \$8,000 deposit at the bank. Distracted by an



A promotional image for the 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life* directed by Frank Capra



exchange with Potter, Billy accidentally puts his deposit envelope inside Potter's newspaper, and Potter does not return it when he finds it.

Later, after Billy reveals the loss to George, they search vainly while a bank examiner waits. On the verge of hysteria over the possibility of bankruptcy and a prison term for embezzlement, George goes home, angry and sullen. He yells at everyone except their youngest child, Zuzu, who has caught a cold on the way home from school. He berates Zuzu's teacher on the telephone, then leaves after a confrontation with Mary. He desperately goes to Potter to borrow the money against the Building and Loan—or even his own life insurance—but Potter dismisses him, taunting him that he is worth more dead than alive.

At a tavern run by his friend, Mr. Martini, George is punched by Mr. Welch, the teacher's husband. Now on the verge of suicide, George is about to jump off a bridge when Clarence comes to earth and intervenes by jumping in himself. George saves him, and as they dry out in the toll-house, Clarence tells George that he is his guard-

ian angel. George doesn't believe him, but when he says that he wishes he had never been born, Clarence grants his wish. Revisiting Martini's and other places in town, no one recognizes George; he discovers that everything has changed. Harry drowned as a boy and Gower went to jail for poisoning the sick child. The town was renamed Pottersville and is full of vice and poverty. When George finally makes Clarence show him Mary, he finds that she is a lonely, unmarried librarian.

Finally, unable to face what might have been, George begs to live again and discovers that his wish is granted when Bert finds him back at the bridge. At home, an elated George is soon greeted by Mary, who has brought their friends and relatives, all of whom have contributed money to help bail out the Building and Loan. Harry arrives and offers a toast to his "big brother George, the richest man in town."

As a bell on the Christmas tree rings, Zuzu says that every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings, and George knows that this time it was Clarence.

Joe Landry—Playwright



Joe Landry's plays have been produced across the country and internationally, and include *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*, *Reefer Madness*, *Vintage Hitchcock: A Live Radio*

Play, *Eve & Co.*, *Beautiful*, *Hollywood Babylon*, and *Numb*. Mr. Landry attended Playwright's Horizons/NYU, founded Second Guess Theatre Company in Connecticut and is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America. He is currently developing new projects for the stage and screen.

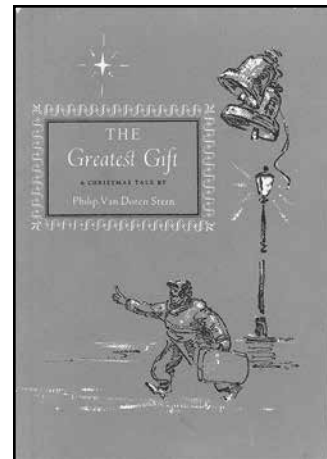
Origin

The 1946 movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, directed by Frank Capra, was based on a short story called "The Greatest Gift" written by Phillip Van Doren Stern in 1943.

In it, a man named George Pratt comes close to committing suicide by jumping off a bridge on Christmas Eve, but is stopped by a friendly stranger. The two strike up a conversation in which George wishes he had never been born. The stranger grants his wish and George wanders his town, masquerading as a brush salesman. He discovers that no one knows him, not even his wife, to whom he gives a brush. He returns to the bridge and begs the stranger to give him his life back, and the stranger again grants his wish. George runs back home to his wife to find that everything is back to normal, and as he

hugs his wife, he discovers the brush that he gave her earlier.

Stern tried and failed to get his story published and subsequently sent it to his friends and family as a Christmas present. RKO Pictures heard about the story and bought exclusive rights to it. But though a few different screenwriters attempted to adapt the story, RKO Pictures was never satisfied with the results. Finally, the story





Director Frank Capra in 1937

(Best Director) and one Oscar (Technical

made its way to Frank Capra, who wrote a new screen adaptation with a team of writers. The film was released in late 1946 to make it eligible for the 1946 film awards. Though it did win one Golden Globe

Achievement Award), the movie ended up losing money at the box office.

Over the years, the film gained popularity as a Christmas movie, though Capra did not originally intend it as one. The Library of Congress marked the film as culturally significant and set it aside for preservation in 1990. Today, though some critics still question the film's sentimentality, many see the movie as one of the great American classics. Joe Landry adapted this version in 1996, and it has been produced all across the United States since.

Christmas Suicide Myth

Popular press perpetuates the idea that suicide rates spike during the Christmas season. However, according to numerous studies on how suicide rates in the United States change on a monthly basis, this idea has no grounding in reality. In fact, suicide rates drop in December, and though they bounce back in January they are not quite as high as their peak times: fall and spring. Some link the popularity of the belief that suicide rates spike on Christmas to the fame of *It's A Wonderful Life*—ironic, given that George Bailey ultimately chose not to end his own life.



Building & Loan Associations



George at the Bailey Building & Loan during the bank crisis

Building & Loan Associations, like the one depicted in the show, were popular institutions during the early 20th century in the United States, though their roots can be traced as far back as the 1770s.

These associations, usually owned privately and locally through a federal charter, offered a place for community members to hold savings accounts. With the money from these accounts, a Building & Loan could then offer mortgages to community members who would normally have difficulty obtaining them. Building & Loans offered long-term

payment options at reasonable interest rates. In addition, most Building & Loans were mutually held, and all loaners and borrowers had voting rights in their association.

In 1932, the United States Congress passed the Federal Home Loan Bank Act, which encouraged banks and Building & Loan associations to offer mortgages. Prior to this act, insurance companies handled the majority of mortgages in the United States. These companies often used predatory practices meant to either keep borrowers in perpetual debt or force them into foreclosure. Congress hoped to halt these practices and protect current and future homeowners by shifting control of the American mortgages to banks and Building & Loan Associations, and they were largely successful.



Building & Loan Associations mostly died out during the 1980s due to a confluence of factors, most significant of which was the

simple fact that most owners did not receive enough oversight and support to operate efficiently and compete with commercial banks.

A History of Early Radio



Guglielmo Marconi and his early radio equipment

Based on the research and development of radio technology by Guglielmo Marconi, the pioneers of radio began broadcasting in 1906. These broadcasts were unlicensed, unregulated, one-time events, and the few listeners were radio enthusiasts who had built their own receivers. During the first World War, the Federal government launched a campaign to restrict the use of radio, which halted developments in radio broadcasting. After the war, however, broadcasting exploded. Newspapers launched stations which eventually outgrew the amateur broadcasts of earlier years.

In the early 1920s, station owners asked the U.S. Congress for increased regulation. Until the Radio Act of 1927, only a few fre-

quencies were allowed for broadcasting. Thus, stations had to divide time between them. The Radio Act opened more frequencies and established the Federal Radio Commission to oversee distribution of frequencies to radio stations and regulate broadcasting. By the end of the 1920s, advertising became the primary means for stations to support the financial demands of broadcasting, despite pushback from station operators and President Herbert Hoover.



Radio programs became nationally popular through the creation of distribution systems like the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Radio Corporation of America (RCA). People began to plan their days around their favorite hosts and programs, usually broadcasts from New York City or Chicago, the early radio hubs. By the 1940s, however, most nationally popular broadcasts came from Hollywood, though Detroit and New York City continued to have thriving radio scenes. This period of time, between the 1930s and 1950s, is considered the American Golden Age of Radio, as the medium was hugely popular and influential.

Radio Drama

In the 1920s, radio stations began broadcasting radio plays that used aural techniques borrowed from phonograph recordings of stage plays and dramas. Performers quickly moved away from stage plays in favor of work specifically written for the radio, providing a new avenue for developing writers. By the 1940s, recurring shows and stories like *The Lone Ranger*, *Escape*, *Suspense*, *Dimension X*, *Lights Out* and *The Adventures of Superman*, captured the attention of radio listeners across the nation.

Regular and visiting performers on these





shows became part of a large group of individuals who became incredibly talented at using their voice to captivate radio audiences. Performers often played more than one character, and trained themselves to quickly switch between multiple voices. But because performers were not required to memorize their lines, rehearsals for radio dramas were short and, by many reports, incredibly informal. Additionally, high demand for performers lead some to schedule performances with almost no break between them. Orson Welles



Orson Welles' company The Mercury Theatre on the Air was very popular



became infamous for hiring ambulances to rush him between live shows. Additionally, because of this busy scheduling, the most talented performers did not even attend rehears-

al and read their lines cold during live shows.

The advent of the television in the 1960s signaled the end of the radio drama. Once audiences had the option to see the story, most did not want to return to a medium that required them imagine the visual action. Still, many radio personalities and shows successfully made the transition from radio to TV, and remained popular. For example, *I Love Lucy* grew out of a radio show called *My Favorite Husband*, also starring Lucille Ball. Though radio dramas remain a popular entertainment in some countries, most radio stations no longer produce them.

Foley

Foley artistry, named after sound effects artist Jack Foley, was developed to add atmospheric and supporting sounds to radio dramas. Pre-recording sound effects for radio dramas was not an option because of the low quality of existing recording methods. Thus, all sounds had to be made live for the broadcasts, and foley artists developed a language all their own to mimic common sounds.

In our production, notice how the foley artist uses a vast array of devices and materi-



Radio foley artists at work in the 1930s



als to produce the required sound effects.

The advent of “talkie” movies (with sound) gave foley artists a further avenue of expression. Foley artists would record a separate sound track to support the action. To this day, foley artists work to diversify the aural atmosphere of movies.



Guardian Angels



Clarence Oddbody, AS2, and George Bailey

Tutelary spirits are defined as guardians or protectors of people, places, objects, jobs, nations, and families, and they appear in some form in many spiritual traditions around the world. Some mythologies describe them as beings similar to gods, while in others they are merely the souls of one's ancestors. In all

cases, they have some means by which they communicate with mortal humans.

For nations whose citizens subscribe mainly to the Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—angels are the most well known tutelary spirits. The word angel comes from the Greek word ἄγγελος (angelos), which means “messenger.” Jewish Rabbinical writing claims that God assigns a guardian angel to every believer. Honorius of Autun, a Christian theologian of the 12th century, was the first to write on how Christians had guardian angels, a belief which some Christian theologians continue to support. In Islam, belief in angels is one of the six central pillars of the faith, and the Qur'an teaches that each person has not only one, but four guardian angels that assist them and speak for them at final judgment.

Auld Lang Syne

In 1788, Robert Burns submitted a song called “Auld Lang Syne” to the Scots Musical Museum, a publication from Edinburgh, Scotland. The melody appears to be an old Scottish folk tune, while the lyrics are Burns' additions to the folk tune's original words. “Auld Lang Syne” roughly translates to “old times past,” and the lyrics seem to encourage one to remember old friends and memories.

In Scotland, the song is sung at Hogmanay (New Year's Eve), weddings, funerals and, in general, many events that represent an end or beginning. The song has gained worldwide popularity, not only as a New Year's Eve song, but also as an ending ceremony for Boy Scout meetings and sports matches, among other events.

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