THE NICETIES

WRITTEN BY ELEANOR BURGESS
DIRECTED BY MARTI LYONS

PICTURED: AYANNA BRIA BAKARI AND MARY BETH FISHER. PHOTO BY SAVERIO TRUGLIA.

WRITERS' THEATRE
Begins November 6th
Performed in the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre
Dear Friends,

Welcome back to the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre for Eleanor Burgess’s thrilling new play, *The Niceties*. If this is your first time in the Nichols this year, you no doubt will have noticed that the space has been reconfigured to be “in the round”—placing you, the audience, all around the two powerhouse performers that will breathe life into this play. (If you happened to catch our season opener, *Into the Woods*, this configuration should feel familiar!)

As you take in the compelling arguments put forth by these two brilliant characters, we hope that the material provided in this issue of *The Brief Chronicle* encourages you to consider the many facets and nuances of each issue presented. You may even find yourself being swayed by one person’s statements in one scene, only to be persuaded by the other soon after.

After hearing directly from Burgess herself about the real-life inspiration for the play, we will address the generation gap between those known as “Baby Boomers” and “Millennials,” investigating how these groups are defined and attempting to analyze what is at the root of the tension between them.

After providing an update on our Literary Development Initiative, we will introduce you to the idea of the “two-hander,” also known as a two-person play. It is interesting to note that Writers Theatre has quite a history with two-handers, due in part to our commitment to intimacy as an essential piece of the WT experience. We will share a brief history of the two-hander, highlighting the many examples to be found in our own production history.

WT Education will then share an excerpt from the study guide for *The Niceties* they created for our student matinee productions, aligned with principles in the Common Core. In this section, you will learn that although the gap seems wide between “Baby Boomers” and “Millennials,” there are parallels to be found in the history of social movements and activism that, in many cases, define a generation.

It is hard to believe that we are almost at the halfway point of the 2019/20 Season! We hope to see you again in the new year as we bring you to Martha’s Vineyard (for Lydia R. Diamond’s bitingly funny *Stick Fly*, directed by Ron OJ Parson), at the U.S. Open tennis semifinals (for the dynamic play *The Last Match* by Anna Ziegler, directed by Keira Fromm) and out west to Hollywood for *Mementos Mori* by performance group Manual Cinema (recently named “Company of the Year” by *Chicago Tribune*). However, we wouldn’t be surprised if we see you again sooner; *The Niceties* is a play you may want to experience more than once!

With deepest thanks and gratitude,

Michael Halberstam
Artistic Director

Kathryn M. Lipuma
Executive Director
It is a play about self-discovery. It is a play about personal growth. It is a play about the generation gap.

STATE OF THE ART

by Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director

Bobby Kennedy, our superb Director of New Work & Dramaturgy, first introduced me to Eleanor Burgess’s play The Niceties a year or so before its premiere in 2018. I was utterly engrossed and when I saw it produced in Boston at Huntington Theatre Company in a wonderfully compelling production directed by Kimberly Senior, I was convinced of its vitality and essential conversation. Not unlike the play Doubt, I found myself changing my allegiances throughout the performance and as the lights came down, the audience rose as one to applaud the audacity of the narrative.

So, what is The Niceties about? I won’t give too much away. Suffice to say, it captures almost perfectly the generational and racial arguments that characterize the current moment in time. Furthermore, and to no small degree, the play articulates the dangers of holding inflexible perspectives and the dangers that lie in looking for certainty where the ground should be ambiguous. I believe, as the title suggests, the play is also about civility or at least the lack thereof in the current sphere of public debate. I believe this play will give you much to think about and talk about following the performance. If you come with friends, consider sticking around in the lobby for a signature cocktail and having a conversation about the piece. Who knows; the actors may even join you at the WT Bar on occasion. And don’t forget—we have talk-backs after performances on Tuesdays and Wednesdays every night of the run after Opening.
We are incredibly fortunate to have Marti Lyons at the helm. Marti, who directed last season's beautiful and very successful world premiere staging of Jen Silverman's *Witch* (which recently enjoyed a successful second production at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles, which she also directed), is rapidly becoming one of the foremost directors of new works in the country. She has a gift for working with contemporary playwrights and helping them to draw out the narrative they want to tell and giving them superb casts and design teams to bring their texts to life. With *The Niceties*, Kimberly Senior has already worked with playwright Eleanor Burgess in premiering the play so Marti's job is to create a production tailor-made for you. She and her design team were really taken by the idea of putting the play in the round, and given the success we enjoyed with Gary Griffin’s gorgeous staging of *Into the Woods* in the same format, we decided to adapt the structures already in place to make it happen. The play is only two actors, but the themes and emotions are epic and so we all agreed the play would make more sense in the Nichols Theatre than the Gillian Theatre, although the setting still allows for a level of intimacy that we believe will make the play soar.

I hope you find the piece as exhilarating as we do.
**IN CONVERSATION: ELEANOR BURGESS**

The author of *The Niceties* discusses her love of history and the inspiration for the play with Director of New Work & Dramaturgy Bobby Kennedy.

**Bobby Kennedy:** You studied history in undergrad and then taught the subject for several years—and *The Niceties* isn’t the first play of yours to deal with the education system. What do you love about history and education? What makes you want to write about them in your plays?

**Eleanor Burgess:** My love of history is part of my love of writing because I think of history as storytelling. Why do things happen? What are people capable of? Where do we come from? What’s the right thing to do? What’s the wrong thing to do? What are our responsibilities to each other? These are the core issues of history. I find it compelling to wonder—what is our story as Americans? And as individuals? What happens when we can’t agree on what the story is? So much of what historians do is say, “well, I look here and I see these facts,” and then, “I look here and I see different facts,” and I think that’s sort of what a play is. Even when it’s like a family drama, you have one sibling saying, “I look at our past and I see this,” and you have another sibling saying, “I look at our past and I see something else.” Drama, like history, is about the construction—and the questioning—of a narrative.

I also think that my love of history led me into writing because, to some degree, writing for me starts where the work of the historian stops. First of all, there’s the people whose stories never got told. There’s the stuff that the official public record doesn’t say. What was going on with that person that made them write that letter or support that battle or vote that way? How does the personal interact with the public? And then there’s also stories that have been lost on a grand scale. We
have to write fiction about women’s experience in history because the factual record is too patchy. We have to write fiction to make up for the class disparity in the records that were left behind, because there’s so many parts of history that we don’t know what was going on with ordinary people, we only know what was going on with the wealthiest people. And then, of course, with race in America, the people whose stories were written down and retold are mostly white Americans. A wonderful thing that storytelling and fiction can do is supplement the telling of collective history with untold stories and speculation. I really see those two pieces of my life as complementary.

BK: There was an incident that occurred at Yale University in 2015 that partially inspired you to write The Niceties. Can you tell us about it and why it had such an impact on you?

EB: In brief, the incident started with a disagreement where some administrators sent out an email—Halloween was coming up—asking students to be sensitive to the fact that wearing other students’ identities as costumes can be very hurtful. They were trying to forestall things that had happened on other campuses. One professor sent out a response, saying that the administrator’s email was a bad idea—that the whole point of college is for young people to figure out how they want to be in the world and what they consider transgressive. That it should be up to students, rather than administrators, to talk to each other about what bothers them. So the professor was trying to start a conversation—but the email came across as not thinking that it was the school’s job to do anything to prevent things like blackface. All of that tipped off a much, much larger conversation about race at Yale and about the experience students of color were having and whether or not they were having the nourishing, encouraging experience that you’re supposed to have at an elite school. The initial debate about Halloween costumes doesn’t show up anywhere in the play and didn’t particularly interest me. What really interested me was the aftermath. This was something a lot of my friends were talking about and a lot of my former professors were talking about, and I think what I got obsessed with was
how badly the conversations went. How much trouble people had speaking across experiences and how much trouble people had finding any sort of balance. People sort of picked sides, and once they picked a side, they had a lot of trouble believing the people who felt differently from them could possibly have valid reasons for disagreeing. I was fascinated by how a bunch of people who really have a lot in common in terms of politics, academic background, conversational style and training could all have so much trouble having a successful conversation and an empathetic conversation. That total breakdown of communication fascinated me, and I think that really became the journey of *The Niceties*.

**BK:** You’ve written two characters from different generations and backgrounds, one a Baby Boomer and one a Millennial. Why do you think it is that there can be such conflict between these two generations?

**EB:** I think social media has really retooled people’s beliefs about who gets to speak up. Baby Boomers came of age in an era when Walter Cronkite got on the news every night and told you what the facts were, and Millennials are living in an era where the person on the news can say one thing, the person on the other news channel can say something else, and then 82 million people on social media can all give their own perspectives and they might all be different. So this idea that there is a truth is in question. I also think that there’s a much deeper, much more eternal thing which is that every generation has a parent-child conflict. Every generation as it comes of age claims its own perspective as the one deserving attention, and that's always a struggle for the previous generation. Every generation of children comes of age, looks at their parents, and asks, “what god-awful mess did you create that you have left me with?” and the parents say “how can you be so ungrateful, I’ve left you with the best thing that I knew how to leave you with.” In a lot of ways, I see *The Niceties* as resembling a parent-child conflict. There’s something just absolutely eternal about it. Socrates famously said something like, “this new generation they have no respect, they have no manners, they don’t know how to work hard….” It’s just happening all over again, but these are two generations with two huge platforms to speak up and so we’re hearing it even more than we’ve ever heard it before.

**BK:** *The Niceties* is set in the spring of 2016. Why set it at that specific point in time?

**EB:** So I wrote it in the spring of 2016 and then I first sat down to do a serious rewrite after the November 2016 election. I thought about “do I want to update this story to factor in what’s happened since I wrote the first draft?” And pretty quickly I realized that I thought that that would be fundamentally untrue to the story that I had written. I didn’t want to go back and pretend that I knew what was going to happen. I didn’t want the characters to have conversations that they wouldn’t have had. There was something about that moment in 2016. We have never gotten back to the place of having some of these conversations because for a lot of people, since the election, there’s always a crisis. “What do we do this week about immigrant detention centers? What are we gonna do this week about Charlottesville? What are we gonna do this week about Iran, or this week about Israel?” We’re not actually engaging with the deeper level questions of, “what is our national story? How do we agree about where we come from? How do we fix our present if we don’t agree about our past?” We haven’t had a chance to return to those conversations that were
bubbling up everywhere in the spring of 2016. To some degree, I think of Act I as being set in the past, and I think of Act II, not literally but intellectually, as set in the future. It’s the conversation we never got to have where they both sort of sit back down and say, “can we try to imagine a better version of all of this? Can we try to imagine a way forward?” I don’t think we’ve ever gotten back to imagining a positive way forward. “How do we get a more just society?” has been supplanted by “how do we avoid having a more unjust society?” The play happens in this moment frozen in time where they are both taken aback by how major the issues that they’ve opened up are, but they both have the bandwidth to engage with those issues. It’s a moment in time that we have temporarily lost and I wanted the audience to return to it.

**BK:** You’ve had a long journey with The Niceties. The play had two developmental productions before embarking on a multi-theatre rolling world premiere from Boston to New York to New Jersey to L.A. What sorts of discoveries did you make as the play continued to be staged for different audiences in different parts of the country?

**EB:** I think the discoveries are almost less about the play and more about theatre itself because the biggest thing that I found was that every night was different. For a long time there’d be individual performances where I’d think, “oh my god I have to rewrite this whole section because people are really turning on this person here.” But then the next night the section worked the way I thought it would. The play played differently depending on who was in the audience every night. It played differently based on what city you were in. It played differently based on what was in the news that day. My goal was always to encompass enough parts of this real and complicated conversation that wherever audiences were, they could both see themselves represented and also learn something. I felt very proud that I basically got there in the end; no matter who is in the audience there is something for them here. On a much deeper level, I’ve learned how different theatre is from any other artform because the show is utterly transformed by the people that are in the room. They go on a journey together that is completely unique. Even though we may have the same cast and creative team, every single night was a different show. With some audience members, I sometimes said, “you know, if you’re up for it, come back in a couple days and see it one more time.” And if they did they’d sometimes write back to say that it was different and they did experience the play differently. I love that about theatre—how it is an experience created in part by the artists and in part by the audience. ■
In Eleanor Burgess’s *The Niceties*, Zoe, a bright, ambitious, black Political Science major, goes to the office hours of her acclaimed, renowned (and white) professor, Janine, to seek feedback on a paper she has written for Janine’s “History of Revolutions” class. However, the conversation quickly spirals from polite disagreements into heated arguments. These two characters cannot see eye-to-eye with their fundamentally different points of view on America, its history and their experiences within it. This dynamic—the Baby Boomer versus the Millennial—is a familiar one. A generation that’s stubborn, technologically deficient and behind the times versus one that is lazy, entitled and killing industries like doorbells, mayonnaise and cable television. These unfair evaluations are frequently made by each of the other, but why is it that these two groups clash so often and on so many fronts?

It’s important to understand who Baby Boomers and Millennials are and what the country was like when they came of age. The Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964) are the children of the generation who lived through World War II, and they grew up during the subsequent “booming” post-war economy. They experienced Cold War anxiety, President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society of
the 60s and the energy crisis of the 70s. Boomers saw their schools desegregated, watched the passing of the Civil Rights Act, protested the Vietnam War and fought for the Equal Rights Amendment. They were the first generation to grow up with TV, danced to rock n’ roll and brought counterculture into the mainstream. They grew up in a much more homogenous America—75% of Boomers are white, 10% are Hispanic and 12% are black—and their communities remained largely segregated, due to the redlining of urban neighborhoods and the White Flight to the suburbs that accompanied a sizable black migration from the rural South into the metropolitan areas of the North and East.

Most Boomers grew up with the American Dream still attainable: goals of “pulling themselves up by the bootstraps” to buy themselves a single family home, find a spouse, have 2.5 children and retire on their well-stocked 401(k)s.

In contrast, Millennials (born between 1981-1995) came of age during the Great Recession of the mid-2000s. They grew up with the national trauma of 9/11, heard the declaration of the War on Terror and witnessed the swearing-in of the country’s first black president. They are the most diverse and urban generation in history. 44% identify as people of color and 88% live in metropolitan areas. Many Millennials were born into a world where technologies like personal computers, the internet and smartphones were becoming exponentially more commonplace as the technological revolution that began in the 1990s continued. Information and communications could be accessed instantaneously, changing the way that tech users interacted with each other and the world around them. News, messages and other alerts could update moment-to-moment, allowing for a connected and aware global citizenry. Because of social media and mobile news, there is an urgency, transparency and personalization in incoming information. The mind of a Millennial has grown up with a demand for speed and immediate access that Boomers simply did not have at their same age. This translates into a different way of navigating not only technology, but societal ills and modern political movements as well.

Each generation had its trials and tribulations as they reached adulthood, and these contexts impacted their worldviews and the way they interact with others. As they entered the workforce and graduated college, the Boomers’ expectations were completely different than Millennials’. In the 1970s, getting into college was less competitive. For example, Stanford University had an acceptance rate of about 31% in comparison to 4.3% in 2019. Tuitions were 213% less expensive than they are now, and textbooks were 813% cheaper. As programs like Medicaid and Medicare were being introduced and the War on Poverty created more jobs, Boomers were able to take the workforce by storm post-graduation while remaining financially stable enough to self-support and confident their future was secure.

“Boomers entered a company and were expected to pay their dues in order to move forward. The understanding was if they worked hard for the company for several years, and the company benefitted from their work, they’d be rewarded with pay raises and promotions. If they stayed with the company long enough, they’d have a pension and a 401(k). This was the bargain struck between an employee and company in the old days: you work hard and in exchange, we’ll give you security and stability.”

Millennials, on the other hand, are a bit more existential about their employment
prospects. They graduated to find the American economy in disarray, the housing bubble burst and the stock market tanked. Employers were shrinking their workforce to make up for lost revenue, making post-graduation employment opportunities sparse. The economic situation that Millennials entered was worse than that of their parents, a rarity in recent history, resulting in a stalling of socio-economic mobility. Alongside the rising costs of living and higher education, Millennials have also accumulated baffling amounts of student loan debt to acquire degrees, with the national student debt total reaching $1.52 trillion in 2019.8 Despite the rising percentage of individuals with college degrees, the worth of those degrees to employers is steadily dropping.9 Where once a bachelor’s degree was an exceptional demarcation of qualification, it has now become an expected prerequisite in order to be considered even for entry level jobs. Millennials are facing a disturbingly insecure future, so they seek career paths that fulfill them more immediately:

“With little hope of debt freedom, Millennials chase what makes them happy instead of what makes them wealthy. They aren’t climbing the corporate ladder—they’re starting their own businesses, driving social impact and bringing focus back to community and family by starting or involving themselves in influential causes. They see work and life as an integrated concept and strive to make careers of their passions. Since their college degrees have done little to fast track their careers, Millennials are thirsty for knowledge and crave learning through their own experiences and the experiences of others.”10
This discrepancy in upbringing and experience resulted in a massive shift of values from one generation to the next. For example, more than half of Boomers were married by the time they were 21-23 years old. Today, Millennials are pushing back their monogamous commitments. They are, on average, waiting 5-10 years longer than their parents to marry, and only 37% are currently married by the age of 36. The Boomer focus on family and security feels less accessible to the latter generation, especially with the deep psychological impact of the environmental crisis taking a toll on their concept of futurity. As a result, Millennials tend to aim their energies towards securing their ability to live before taking on the responsibility of building a family. It is a common trope from older individuals that Millennials “kill” certain businesses or “waste” their money on frivolous goods (e.g. avocado toast). But the reality of the situation is that Millennials simply choose to spend their money differently than Boomers did at their same age and opt to live differently due to changes in their personal values as well as the need to accommodate a very different economic, environmental and social climate.

It makes sense that, with all of these dissimilar facets of their experience, Boomers and Millennials often come into conflict when discussing our nation’s history, its merits and its failures. Whether it be moralistic, practical or personal, their disagreements span all aspects of life and can cause rifts in professional and, in the case of The Niceties, academic settings. Janine understands progress as a slow but steady arc towards justice, but Zoe insists that change comes with a radical, fast paced agenda. This puts them at odds initially over Zoe’s schoolwork, but it is clear that the division runs deeper than the classroom.

3. Fry, Igielnik, and Patton.
11. Fry, Igielnik, and Patton.
NEW WORK AT WT

Eleanor Burgess, author of *The Niceties*, is under commission to write an original play for Writers Theatre. Entitled *Wife of a Salesman*, the play explores where women fit in the American dream. The commission is being co-developed with Milwaukee Repertory Theatre.

A commission is when a Theatre contracts and pays a playwright (or multiple writers/lyricists/composers) to create an original work specifically for that theatre. Writers Theatre has a long history of commissioning writers to create work for us to premiere on our stages. Some past commissions have included Jen Silverman’s *Witch*, Laura Eason and Alan Schmuckler’s *Days Like Today*, Brett Neveu’s *Old Glory*, Austin Pendleton, Jan Levy Tranen and Joshua Schmidt’s *A Minister’s Wife* and Marilyn Campbell and Curt Columbus’s adaptation of *Crime and Punishment*.

Writers Theatre has several new projects under commission, including:

A new play by **Lydia R. Diamond**, the award-winning author of *Stick Fly* and *Smart People*. Diamond’s work has been produced on Broadway and at many of America’s leading regional theatres, including Roundabout Theatre Company, Denver Center Theatre Company, Arena Stage, Second Stage Theatre, Huntington Theatre Company, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, McCarter Theatre Center and Goodman Theatre.

A new musical about Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple, written by playwright **Randall Colburn** and lyricist/composer **Michael Mahler**.


An ad-RAP-tation of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo & Juliet* by **The Q Brothers Collective**.

The Q Brothers Collective are an award-winning and internationally acclaimed group that create original work that fuses classic plays and literature with hip-hop. Their works include *Othello: The Remix, Funk It Up About Nothin’, The Bomb-itty of Errors*, and *A Q Brothers’ Christmas Carol*.

Commissions are one of the many endeavors of WT’s new work program, the Literary Development Initiative. For more information on new work at WT, visit writerstheatre.org/LDI.
OUR HANDS embrace THE ARTS.

Allstate is a proud sponsor of Writers Theatre’s year-round Education Programs.
LEAN FORWARD AND ENGAGE!

Join us for these exciting events, tailored to enhance your WT experience! For more information and to RSVP visit writerstheatre.org/events.

FROM PAGE TO STAGE
Writers Theatre and select North Shore libraries and community partners are proud to present this series of special events, lectures and workshops designed to enhance your appreciation of the art. From Page to Stage is generously sponsored by Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin. For an up-to-date list of new events, visit writerstheatre.org/fpts.

POST-SHOW CONVERSATION: THE WORD
Join us after every Tuesday evening performance (excluding First Week and any extension weeks) of every production in our 2019/20 Season for a 15-minute discussion of the play facilitated by a member of the WT Artistic Team.

POST-SHOW CONVERSATION: THE ARTIST
Join us after every Wednesday evening performance (excluding First Week and any extension weeks) of every production in our 2019/20 Season for a 15-minute discussion with actors from the production facilitated by a member of the WT Artistic Team.

PRE-SHOW CONVERSATION: UP CLOSE
Join us at 7:00pm in the Patron’s Lounge before every Thursday evening performance (excluding First Week and any extension weeks) for a 15-minute primer on the context and content of the play, facilitated by a member of the WT Artistic Team.

SOCIAL HOUR AT WT
Remember that the WT Bar is open for an hour before and after our performances! You are welcome to enjoy a snack or beverage and discuss the play in the Litowitz Atrium, on our Grand Gallery Walk or on the Stephanie and Bill Sick Rooftop Terrace.
THERE IS STILL TIME TO GUARANTEE THE REST OF THE 2019/20 SEASON!

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A two-person play is playwriting at its most concentrated and essential.

Everything—exposition, conflict, intrigue, poetry—must come from the mouths of only two people, often in one location with the story playing out in real time from lights up to lights down. After the classic Broadway musical, the two-hander (as it is called in the industry) might be the American theatre’s most significant contribution to world drama.

If you take the less stringent definition of the term two-hander, the Ancient Greek playwright Aeschylus was the first person to write one. Before him, Greek tragedies featured a Chorus interacting with a single actor playing the main character. Aeschylus added a second actor, allowing the two characters to interact with and come into conflict with each other. The chorus...
remained, however, and so there was never only two people on stage for an entire play. Subsequent eras also had no need for economy when it came to the number of performers in a play. Sophocles, Euripides, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Molière, Schiller, Wilde, Shaw: none of these classic writers ever wrote a full-length play for just two actors.

The first true experimenter with minimal cast sizes was Swedish playwright August Strindberg. Most of Strindberg’s plays feature a central couple whose lives are disrupted by an outsider. *The Dance of Death*, which WT produced at Books on Vernon in 2014, tells the story of how Edgar and Alice escalate their marital gamesmanship after the arrival of Alice’s cousin, Kurt. *The Father, Miss Julie* and *Creditors* all follow a similar structure of an upended status quo. With his 1889 play, *Pariah*, Strindberg reduced his cast to two actors for the first time. The play about two men sheltering in a barn during a storm is the first to tell a full-length dramatic narrative in real time with only two performers.

Another Strindberg two-hander from 1889, *The Stronger*, featured only two actors, one who speaks and one who doesn’t. This conceit is called a dramatic monologue. Other dramatists would utilize this form as well, writing plays where one character does all or most of the talking. Notable examples include Eugene O’Neill’s *Hughie*, Terrence McNally’s *Andre’s Mother* and Craig Wright’s *Mistakes Were Made*.

Strindberg’s innovations had a profound influence on mid-20th century absurdist playwrights who continued his economy of scale even as they moved their stories out of naturalism. Samuel Beckett’s masterpiece, *Waiting for Godot*, follows two characters in isolation for most of its length, as does Eugene Ionesco’s *The Chairs*, another absurdist classic. Harold Pinter would write a true two-hander with *The Dumb Waiter*, taking a step towards realism while maintaining an otherworldly sense of menace.

However, the golden age of the two-hander would begin with Edward Albee’s breakthrough play, *The Zoo Story*. The story of two strangers who have a life-changing chance encounter in Central Park, Albee followed Strindberg’s lead in writing a play that progresses in real time with only two actors. The 1960 Off-Broadway production of *The Zoo Story* ran for over a year and would have a profound influence on playwriting for the remainder of the 20th century. In the play’s wake, American playwrights continued to refine and popularize the two-hander form. Some landmark examples include Donald L. Colburn’s *The Gin Game*, Lanford Wilson’s *Talley’s Folly*, Marsha Norman’s *night, Mother*, Charles Ludlam’s *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, Terrence McNally’s *Frankie & Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, A.R. Gurney’s *Love Letters*, David Mamet’s *Oleanna* and Suzan-Lori Parks’s *Topdog/Underdog*. Most of these plays were winners or finalists for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and all of them have been produced regularly around the country.

The two-hander continues to thrive in the 21st century, and playwrights continue to innovate with the form. History has been dramatized (Katori Hall’s *The Mountaintop* about MLK, Mark St. Germain’s *Freud’s Last Session* about Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis, and John Logan’s *Red* about Mark Rothko) and so have legends (Rajiv Joseph’s *Guard at the Taj*). Stories can span one-long scene (David Ives’s *Venus in Fur*), a couple of scenes over a short period.
of time (Jen Silverman’s *The Roommate*),
an entire life (Duncan MacMillan’s *Lungs*),
or several dimensions at once (Nick Payne’s *Constellations*). Dramatic monologues survive (Keith Huff’s *A Steady Rain*) and even musicals have toyed with the form (Jason Robert Brown’s *The Last Five Years*).

Given the intimate spaces that have always been a hallmark of Writers Theatre, two-handers have been an important part of our production history. The Books on Vernon venue was a perfect environment for two-handers, and WT’s earlier years featured many of them: Dorothy Bryant’s *Dear Master*, Stephen McDonald’s *Not About Heroes*, Jerome Kilty’s *Dear Liar*, Elliot Hayes’s *Blake*, John Murrell’s *Memoir*. One of WT’s biggest successes was Russell Lees’s *Nixon’s Nixon* starring Larry Yando as Richard Nixon and William Brown as Henry Kissinger. The 2000 hit production was revived again in 2008 for an encore run. Another two-hander hit was John Lowell’s *The Letters* starring Kate Fry and Mark Montgomery. WT’s fondness for two-handers has continued after the move into our new home. In 2017, WT produced the American premiere of Monica Hoth and Claudio Valdes Kuri’s *Quixote: On the Conquest of Self*, and last season included a staging of Caryl Churchill’s sci-fi thriller, *A Number*.

*The Niceties* has the distinction of being the first two-hander to play in the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre. With its mix of thoughtful ideas, bold characters, disarming humor and explosive conflict, Eleanor Burgess’s breakout play shows the two-hander still has the power to entertain.
For the 2019/20 Season, Writers Theatre Education will host student matinees for five out of six productions presented in the theatre center. Each performance includes a post-show discussion with the actors and a comprehensive Study Guide, aligned to the Common Core. Below you can preview a section from the study guide for *The Niceties* and test your knowledge before and after the performance!

Seeing a live performance activates students’ imagination, can increase critical thinking-skills and emotional literacy and create connections to classic and new works of art.

Study guide content written by Education Intern, Gracie Nayman.
World of the Play: A History of Social Activism on College Campuses

In Eleanor Burgess’ *The Niceties*, Zoe and her professor Janine meet to discuss Zoe’s paper. Over the course of their discussion, the two women with traditionally liberal convictions debate about the niceties between their world views. Janine searches for the truth through hard evidence, but Zoe argues that not every story lives on through primary source accounts. Zoe is also actively involved in student activism on campus. Provided below are a few examples of how campus activism has evolved and persisted in the U.S.

**Activism on Black campuses (1920s)**
In the 1920s, student activism appeared on the collegiate campuses which were historically attended predominantly by black students. These colleges and universities included Fisk, Florida A&M, Hampton, Howard and Tuskegee. Students on these campuses began to react to segregation on campus, the presence of white Presidents and Trustees at historically black institutions and enforcement of extremely severe student codes of conduct. Students were inspired by the personal papers of W. E. B. DuBois. As unrest spread, a movement began. Protests included refusal to abide by the 10pm curfew, staged walkouts and protests. At Fisk University, students were especially inspired by DuBois’ commencement speech in 1924. They focused their campus activism in a demand to have their current President, Fayette Avery McKenzie fired. The student’s efforts of resistance and protest were actualized when McKenzie was forced to resign one year later.

**Civil Rights (1960s)**
The Civil Rights Movement contains numerous anecdotes which chronicle the role of college students during the 1960s who fought for the Civil Rights Acts. One of the most famous of these examples was ignited by four black college students at North Carolina A&T in Greensboro, NC. These students walked into a Woolworth’s department store in February of 1960. They then proceeded to sit at the “whites only” section of the counter. The sit-in continued at Woolworth’s for six months as more students joined each day. These non violent protests spread like wildfire as sit-ins took hold in cities across the south by college students. On July 26, 1960, Woolworth desegregated their counter. The sit-in movement ended. These collegiate initiated sit-ins involved 700,000 protesters, 3,000 of whom were arrested.

**Black Lives Matter (2010s)**
Black Lives Matter is a nationwide movement which originated around 2014. Inspired by a fight for justice for the young black lives taken in the face of police brutality, BLM has touched and protested all parts of the country. In 2015, a student group called Concerned Student 1950 began protesting at the University of Missouri under the influence of BLM. Specific incidents of racism, bias and bigotry on campus from years 2010-15 were at the focus of the protests. In 2015, 40-50 students participated in a protest called “Racism Lives Here” directing focus at the administration’s pattern of doing nothing in the face
hate crimes on campus. Jonathan Butler soon started a hunger strike demanding the resignation of the current Missouri president, Timothy Wolfe. Soon the football team joined the fight, demanding that Wolfe resign. They announced the team could cease to play any games until their demands were met. The next day, the president and the chancellor of the University of Missouri resigned.

**Anti-Nuclear Weapons/Pacifism (1950s-60s)**

Also known as the College Peace Union, the Student’s Peace Union was a national organization which utilized social presence on college campuses to protest war and spread pacifist agenda. The Union’s headquarters were near the University of Chicago. The group founder, Ken Calkins, traveled around the Midwest and Northeast to high schools and colleges delivering seminars on peace. The SPU organized a myriad of protests at the White House. The SPU held a vigil against the continuation of nuclear testing in 1961 at the White House. President Kennedy reportedly sent officials to collect the SPU’s petitions on the matter. The SPU protested for several years against nuclear testing and in October 1962, the Union organized national protests during the Cuban Missile Crisis. This national collegiate movement of activism led to the signing of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

**Anti-War/Pacifism (1970s)**

The 1960s was an extremely involved decade of college campus activism in the United States. Students were captivated by the Civil Rights Movement, Second-Wave Feminism and anti-war protests. It is theorized that the heavy social presence in collegiate atmospheres is linked to the position of the students. College students in the 1960s possessed intellectual resources which informed them of political happenings. They also balanced financial privilege while maintaining the economic freedom of youth to support protests. In relation to anti-war demonstrations of the 60s and 70s, students would often host draft card burning protests. The anti-war movement from 1969-1970 was illustrated by media as very combative. However, truthfully, only 10% of anti-war protests during that time turned violent. These demonstrations lost momentum after 1970 when political figures depicted the movements as ineffective and made promises to diffuse war efforts.

**Anti-Gun Protests (2010s)**

On February 14, 2018, a mass shooting occurred at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Seventeen people were killed and seventeen were injured. This spurred a gun control movement more widespread and powerful than any other. The movement is referred to as #neveragain and is student led. Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) students organized a nationwide student walkout on March 14, 2018. On March 24, 2018, the students organized a march on Washington entitled “March for Our Lives.” The United States is the only country with a mass shooting problem. High school students created lasting organization to raise money and lobby for gun control. These student-led organizations have rapidly multiplied across the country at high schools and colleges since 2018. College campuses used this momentum to stage walkouts and protests in line with the events led by the students at MSD.

**LGBTQ Rights Queer Art (1920s)**
In the 1920s, it was common to encounter love poems between women published in yearbooks at all women’s colleges. Prominently, Oberlin College hosted an organization called the “Oberlin Lesbian Society.” At the time, “lesbian” merely referred to women poets. However, the group unabashedly published affectionate poems by women clearly written to women. Oberlin refused to acknowledge the group. It was custom for institutions of higher education to expel students who were suspected to be LGBTQ and out them to their families. This ruthless practice sadly resulted in numerous student suicides. However, some colleges aimed to ignore LGBTQ presence on campus to deny their existence. This was Oberlin’s approach. The more Oberlin refused to acknowledge them, the more obvious, affectionate and sensual the lesbian poems became. Thus, a tradition began. LGBTQ art continues to utilize self-expression as a form of activism for the queer community.

**LGBTQ Rights Campus Recognition (1960s)**

LGBTQ rights began to be advocated for in the United States, mostly in secret, during the 1950s and 60s. In 1966, several students from Columbia University created an underground organization called the Student Homophile League. The group received no funding or meeting location from the school because the members wished to remain anonymous and Columbia required a list of students in order to protect them. Group leaders fought for recognition and eventually won. Thus, while membership was low and most members used pseudonyms, SHL became the first recognized gay rights group in the U.S.

**LGBTQ Rights on Campus (2019)**

Baylor University is a Baptist college known as one of the most religious campuses in the United States. LGBTQ activism groups, current students and alumni on campus have recently been writing to the president of the National Collegiate Athletic Association urging him to look at Baylor’s history of discrimination toward queer students. Examples of this discrimination include verbal harassment while walking to class, physical threats from other students and an administrative refusal to officialize student groups advocating for LGBTQ rights. Until 2015, Baylor’s student code of conduct included condemnation forbidding homosexual acts and declared these acts as “misuse of God’s gifts.” The fight for rights at Baylor remains difficult as LGBTQ groups aren’t allowed to advertise group posters, meet formally or speak at board meetings. The trustees are afraid of losing support from the Baptist church. In the face of this adversity, queer students continue to get their message out by writing letters to administration and organizing unofficial meetings.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

Here are a few resources which can be tools if you’re interested in learning more about inclusive American social history:

Writers Theatre is committed to making our Theatre accessible for everyone. We are proud to offer Access Subscriptions and the following services:

For People with Mobility Difficulties
- Accessible parking spaces along Tudor Court
- Drop-off lane by the building’s main entrance
- Accessible entrances to the building
- Doorbell at the main entrance to request assistance with the front doors
- Courtesy wheelchair to assist with entering the building and theatre spaces
- Wheelchair-accessible seating*
- Elevator Access to second-level seating, Grand Gallery Walk and Stephanie and Bill Sick Rooftop Terrace and Garden

*Depending on your preference, you may transfer into a theatre seat or request to have the theatre seat removed to remain in the wheelchair. When purchasing your tickets, please let the Box Office know if you would like the theatre seat removed.

For People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
We are pleased to offer assistive listening devices in each of our performance spaces. Contact the Box Office with questions or for advance reservations. Assistive listening devices are offered free of charge.

In all of the performance spaces in our new theatre center, we have **t-coil induction loop technology**. For anyone with a telecoil built into their hearing aid or cochlear implant, by switching it on you will be able to hear our performances with additional amplification and clarity. Check with your audiologist for specific instructions on how to operate your personal telecoil-equipped device.
We are happy to connect you with scripts for our shows to read prior to your attendance. For details, review our Script Policy at writerstheatre.org/script-policy or contact the Box Office.

**For People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision**

Large print programs are available at every performance at the Box Office.

Braille programs are available by prior request through the Box Office. Contact the Box Office at least two weeks prior to your scheduled performance with this request.

We can accommodate seating needs for guests with service animals. Contact the Box Office to request this accommodation.

Open-Captioned performance: **Saturday, December 7 at 3pm**

For additional information on accessibility services and subscriptions, contact access@writerstheatre.org or 847-242-6005.

The Accessibility Fund is a gift of Doris Conant and the Conant Family Foundation.

Box Office: 847-242-6000
WT BAR

WINE

RED
Alpamanta Malbec ................................................................. $9
Smith and Perry Pinot Noir ................................................... $9
Shadow Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon ..................................... $10

ROSÉ
Ostatu Rosado ............................................................................ $10

WHITE
Santome Chardonnay ............................................................. $9
Conti di Buscareto Verdicchio................................................. $10
Emile Balland Sauvignon Blanc ............................................. $10

SPARKLING
Sgajo Prosecco............................................................................... $9

Our beer and wine products are subject to change, please ask your bartender for an up to date listing of our current selection.
## BEER & CIDER

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<th>Brewery</th>
<th>Beer Style</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solemn Oath</td>
<td>Snaggletooth Bandana, IPA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Original Sin</td>
<td>McIntosh Unfiltered, Cider</td>
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<td>Two Brothers</td>
<td>Domaine DuPage, French Country Ale</td>
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<td>Two Brothers</td>
<td>Prairie Path, Golden Ale</td>
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<td>Off Color Brewing</td>
<td>Apex Predator, Saison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Off Color Brewing</td>
<td>Tooth and Claw, Pilsner</td>
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## LIQUOR

A selection of **Koval** and other premium liquors

## DESSERTS

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<td>Assorted cookies</td>
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<td>Assorted bars</td>
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<td>Ethereal Confections chocolate bar</td>
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## ADDITIONAL CONCESSIONS

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<td>Coffee (Regular, Decaf)</td>
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<td>Rishi Hot Tea (Chamomile, Earl Grey, Peppermint)</td>
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<td>Soda (Coke, Diet Coke, Sprite, Ginger Ale)</td>
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<td>Water</td>
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CUSTOM COCKTAILS

Enjoy a custom cocktail from the WT Bar—specially created for each of our productions by Mixed metaPours!

HEATED DEBATE

LIBELULA TEQUILA
PELOTON DE LA MUERTA MEZCAL
SPICED BLOODY MARY MIX
SEASONED BLACK PEPPER BLEND

All of our signature cocktail creations are designed by WT Cocktail Consultant Cheryl Rich Heisler & Mixed metaPours.
STAY IN TOUCH WITH WRITERS THEATRE
JOIN THE CONVERSATION! #TheNiceties

Share your thoughts on the show!

Take this survey about *The Niceties*: bit.ly/WTTheNiceties

Write a review of your experience on Yelp: bit.ly/WTonYelp

Find us on Facebook: facebook.com/writers-theatre

Follow us on Twitter: @WritersTheatre

Follow us on Instagram: @writers_theatre

Check in to Writers Theatre on Swarm

Sign up for our email list to receive news updates, backstage stories, photos, videos and more: writerstheatre.org/email

Follow our company on LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/writers-theatre

We look forward to hearing from you!
# THE NICETIES

## NOVEMBER

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### Times:
- 7:30
- 2:00
- 3:00/7:30
- 2:00/6:00

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### Times:
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- 2:00
- 3:00/7:30
- 2:00/6:00

- **Private Event**
- D Post-Show Conversation
- U Pre-Show Conversation
Student tickets only $20 (with valid student ID).

Ticket discounts are available for groups of 10 or more. Call 847-242-6005 for more details.