

BLUES IN THE NIGHT



atc

ARIZONA
THEATRE
COMPANY

STUDY GUIDE



ABOUT ARIZONA THEATRE COMPANY

Welcome to Arizona Theatre Company: Founded in 1967, and originally performing in the ballroom of the Santa Rita Hotel, Arizona Theatre Company became a fully accredited professional theatre and a member of the League of Resident Theatres in 1972. The company moved to the Temple of Music and Art in 1990. The Temple, built in 1927 and refurbished for ATC's residency, is a beautiful representation of Spanish Colonial

architecture and a welcoming, intimate performance space.

The company began performing in Phoenix in 1977, and had its first full season in both Tucson and Phoenix in 1983. The company's Phoenix-area home is the Tempe Center for the Arts, a stunning state-of-the-art performance center overlooking Tempe Town Lake.



The Temple of Music and Art, the home of ATC shows in downtown Tucson - 330 S. Scott Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85701



Tempe Center for the Arts, ATC's performance venue in Tempe - 700 W. Rio Salado Parkway, Tempe, AZ 85281

LOGLINE

In a cheap hotel, three women and a saloon singer explore their lives and memories over the course of one long, emotional evening. They tell us their stories using the great blues and jazz songs of the 1920s and '30s."

PLOT DESCRIPTION

Three women and a male saloon singer appear before us in various rooms of a worn-down dive of a hotel. Their style of dress and the rooms' appointments put us in mind of Chicago in the 1930s. They speak very little, but their interwoven stories are told to us through the wonderful songs of the great uniquely American musical forms—jazz and the blues. They tell us of pain and pleasure, misery, life, and love. And they tell us of the determination and grit it takes to get through it all—the essence of the blues. It's a night of good music, hard lives, and the dreams of better tomorrows.

SETTING

Chicago in the 1930s. A cheap hotel next to a train station where north meets south, east meets west.



Darryl Reuben Hall & Roz White in ATC's *Blues in the Night*. Photo: Tim Fuller.

CHARACTERS

- **The Lady From The Road:** A warm and beautiful Black woman. Her humor and experience could only have come from a long life, but age means nothing to her. She loves to gossip. She was once on top of the world as a performer but has since fallen. She has no doubt that she will rise again. She is the embodiment of the blues, in all its variety.
- **The Woman of the World:** Beautiful, stylish, and ageless. She seems to have come from a more lavish and grand background than the Lady, and we perhaps wonder why she is here – just one of her many mysteries. Charming and sophisticated, she nevertheless has a wonderful capacity for humor, sensuality, and emotion.
- **The Girl With A Date:** A very young girl full of energy and enthusiasm, making a new start in the city. She is bright and clever, but innocent and easily hurt. Beneath her vulnerability is a vein of emotion and bitterness that can come out when she is disappointed or wounded.
- **The Man In The Saloon:** He's charming. He's dangerous. He thinks he knows it all and that everyone loves him, both onstage and in the audience. He is also lonely and frustrated—and with good reason; he is too good a singer to be cooling his heels in this dump of a dive bar.



Left to Right: April Nixon (The Woman of the World), Camryn Hamm (The Girl with a Date), Darryl Reuben Hall (The Man from the Saloon) & Roz White (The Lady from the Road). Photos: Tim Fuller

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Since *Blues in the Night* tells its stories with song, the authors are the people who wrote those songs. *Blues in the Night* was conceived and originally directed by Sheldon Epps.

Bessie Smith: Known as the “Empress of the Blues,” Smith’s soulful voice and emotive performances defined the blues of the 1920s and 1930s. Her songs often told vivid stories of love and hardship, solidifying her legacy as a trailblazer in American music.

Duke Ellington: A legendary jazz composer, pianist, and bandleader, Ellington’s innovative style and vast repertoire – including classics like “Mood Indigo” – cemented his status as a cornerstone of jazz history.

Johnny Mercer: One of America’s greatest lyricists, Mercer wrote over 1,500 songs, blending humor, wit, and pathos in hits like “Moon River” and “Blues in the Night.”

Harold Arlen: Celebrated for his ability to weave jazz and blues into popular music, Arlen composed timeless standards, including “Over the Rainbow” and the eponymous “Blues in the Night.”

Billy Strayhorn: Best known for his collaboration with Duke Ellington, Strayhorn was a master composer and arranger whose works, including “Lush Life,” embody elegance and emotional depth.

Ida Cox: A pioneering blues singer and songwriter, Cox brought sophistication and defiance to her performances, earning her the title “Uncrowned Queen of the Blues.”

Benny Goodman: Dubbed the “King of Swing,” Goodman revolutionized jazz in the 1930s, blending precision with improvisation in iconic tunes like “Sing, Sing, Sing.”

Vernon Duke: A versatile composer known for jazz standards and Broadway hits, Duke wrote

classics like “Autumn in New York,” showcasing his gift for evocative melodies.

Gordon Jenkins: A talented arranger, composer, and conductor, Jenkins is remembered for his lush orchestrations and collaborations with artists like Frank Sinatra and Louis Armstrong.

Alberta Hunter: A trailblazing blues singer and songwriter, Hunter’s rich voice and powerful lyrics spanned decades, from the 1920s to her remarkable comeback in the 1970s.



Duke Ellington



Bessie Smith

ABOUT SHELDON EPPS



Blues in the Night was conceived and originally directed by Sheldon Epps. The Broadway production was nominated for a Tony Award as Best Musical of the Year, and the London production, which he also directed, was nominated for two Laurence Olivier Awards and ran for over a year on the West End before being broadcast in Europe by Thames Television. Epps also conceived and directed the Duke Ellington musical *Play On!*, which received three Tony Award nominations and was produced at Seattle Repertory Theatre and the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, where it received four Jefferson Awards including Best Musical. The Pasadena Playhouse production was taped by PBS for broadcast as part of the Great Performances series.

Epps was a co-founder and the associate artistic director of the off-Broadway theater The Production Company. His directorial assignments for that company included *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Incandescent Tones*, and *Scenes and Revelations*, which he also directed on Broadway at the Circle In The Square Theatre. Epps has directed plays and musicals for many of the country's major theatres including the Guthrie, the Old Globe Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Crossroads Theatre, Cleveland Play House, Arizona Theatre Company, Goodspeed Opera House, Coconut Grove Playhouse, Walnut St. Theatre, George Street Playhouse, and Asolo State Theatre.

For television, he has directed episodes of *Frasier*, *Friends*, *Girlfriends*, *My Wife and Kids*, *Veronica's Closet*, *Evening Shade*, and *Sister, Sister*. He is currently a member of the executive board of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers. Epps is a two-time recipient of the Theatre Communications Group/Pew Charitable Trust National Theatre Artists Residency Grant, which supported his four-year tenure at the Old Globe Theatre as associate artistic director. Epps was pleased to join the Pasadena Playhouse as artistic director in 1997. His directing credits at this theater include *Blue*, *Play On!*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Old Settler*, *The Real Thing*, *On Borrowed Time*, *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting*, and *Blues in the Night*, and he was production consultant for the musical *Sisterella*. He directed the world premiere of *Blue* at Arena Stage Theatre, which was also produced off-Broadway at the Roundabout Theatre. Following its record-breaking engagement in Pasadena, *Blue* began a national tour co-produced by the Pasadena Playhouse.

VOCABULARY

Airish: “Putting on airs” – Behaving as if you are better than those around you.

Theatre Owners Booking Association: The vaudeville (an old form of variety show-type entertainment) circuit for African American performers.

Chitlin Circuit: A network of entertainment venues that featured Black performers entertaining Black audiences during the Jim Crow era. The Jim Crow era lasted from the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) until the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Savoy: The Savoy Ballroom, a nightclub in Harlem, New York.

Spoon: An old-fashioned term for kissing and hugging. Necking, making out.

Buggy: A lightweight four-wheeled carriage usually drawn by a single horse.

Footman: A uniformed servant who admits visitors and waits at table.

Succotash: A dish of corn and lima beans cooked together.

Astor’s Horse: Caroline Astor was a famous socialite in the 19th century, and a gigantic snob. The connotation here being that her horse was equally well-dressed.

Strife: Anger or bitter disagreement. Conflict.

Bootleg liquor: Alcohol that is illegally made, sold, or transported. The term was widely used in the United States during Prohibition (1920-1933).



Roz White in ATC's *Blues in the Night*. Photo: Tim Fuller

WHO CREATES A THEATRE SHOW

Playwright: Crafts the script, creating a compelling narrative with engaging characters and settings. Defines the period, style, and overall story.

Composer: Creates the music for the show.

Producer: A person who oversees the financial and managerial aspects of the show.

Director: Creates and Manages the vision of the entire production, provides guidance and management for all teams involved, provides blocking to actors, and helps them in their storytelling.

Choreographer: Creates and teaches dance routines and movement sequences for musical numbers and dramatic scenes.

Music Director: Oversees the use of live music in a show. Helps the musicians and singers to play and sing their songs correctly.

Scenic Designer: Designs and constructs the physical scenery and structures that form the backdrop of a production.

Costume Designer: Designs and creates all the clothing the actors wear that reflects the characters' personalities, time periods, and settings of the production.

Lighting Designer: Creates and designs the lighting for a production, enhancing mood, atmosphere, and visibility on stage. They create a plot and program the instruments used, timing, cross-fades, and cues that orchestrate each scene with light.

Sound Designer: Creates the microphone plot, sound effects, and amplification systems for a production, ensuring that actors' voices and music are heard clearly.

Props Designer: Designs, sources, constructs, and maintains the various props (things the actors handle or use) needed for a production, ensuring they are safe and functional during performances.

Stage Manager: The boss in charge of each live show, ensuring that all elements of the live production go as planned. Provides cues for stage crew, lighting, sound, fly system and actors for timing and consistency

Deck Crew: A group of people who work on the physical aspects of a show, primarily moving furniture and scenery, operating a fly system (which moves pieces on and offstage from above), and keeping the stage clean and safe and ready for performance.

Light Crew: The people who handle the actual operation of the lights during a show. Board operators work the light board and make sure the light cues happen correctly. Spotlight operators aim and keep movable spotlights on the correct actors, and Master Electricians keep everything repaired and working correctly

Marketing Staff: Thinks of ways to sell the show to the public. Create posters, ads, commercials, and social media content.

Box Office Staff: Creates every event with the date, time, tickets, prices, and any restrictions. Manages all ticket sales and will-call along with their staff.

House Manager: Manages and coordinates ushers and front-of-house staff, overseeing customer experience and ensuring safety and service, venue readiness, as well as handling illnesses and emergencies during performances.

Development Staff: Works to secure financing for plays, primarily through grants and donations.

Accountants: Track spending and profit for the show or the producing company. Help to create workable budgets for shows.

Actors: Bring characters to life, performing lines and movements as directed. They interpret and embody the story, choreography, and music according to the Director's vision.

WHAT IS THEATRE?

- A **theater** is a room or a building ordinarily containing a stage and space for an audience to gather and view the action on the stage.
- **Theatre** refers to that action taking place on the stage—one of more performers presenting a story of one kind or another to an audience in hopes of eliciting a number of different possible reactions.
- These performers are aided by various artistic elements—costume, light, sound, sets, etc.—which support and clarify the themes or the mood of the story being told.

WHAT MAKES THEATRE SPECIAL?

- Theatre is a communal experience; the audience and the performers are all in the same room together.
- Theatre also exists in time differently than other forms of entertainment – once a play is over, you cannot watch the same performance again.

HOW TO WATCH THE SHOW

The basic rule is: **Don't Disrupt the Show, and Don't Distract Fellow Audience Members.** Don't talk, text, eat, or drink. Don't record or photograph the show. Use the restroom before the show and at intermission. Don't talk back to the actors. Stay seated during the performance. -Use common sense and common courtesy.

There are a few things you want to be conscious of in the theatre as well – walk carefully, as the light can be low. Don't lean over the balcony rail or set anything on the railing. Use handrails where they are available. Listen to the ushers and your chaperones and be cooperative.

That said: this show is all about music, both raucous good-time music and more emotional, sad music, so appropriate displays of your appreciation are expected and desired! Applause at the ends of songs, clapping along, are all lovely. Whistle and stomp your feet at curtain call (the part where the actors bow at the end). If something is funny, by all means, laugh! Always remember, the performers are here for you—your enjoyment and attention are their favorite things in the time you have together. Don't let them down, and they won't let you down.

A FUN ACTIVITY

Check out this production of *Blues In The Night* that aired on television in Britain:
[Click here to watch!](#)



The blues is a vital artform that is still practiced today. Today's show contains early jazz and blues music, but there is a lot that comes after. All of it is out there, and not hard to find. Using Spotify or YouTube, explore the work of other blues artists. Here are some names to start you off:



Howlin' Wolf: [Down in the Bottom](#)



John Lee Hooker: [Boom Boom](#)



Taj Mahal: [Queen Bee](#)



Koko Taylor: [Wang Dang Doodle](#)

TEACHER RESOURCE

Plot – The story and action of the play: The plot of *Blues In The Night* is minimal—three women and one man spend a long night singing about their sadness and joy.

Setting – When and where the play takes place: A cheap dive of a hotel in Chicago, sometime in the 1930s.

Point of View – Where the play is coming from: How the creators feel about or view the subject or action of the piece: It is obvious that the creators take great joy in the music they love; empathy and compassion for the characters is palpable. Point of View can also refer to where the characters are coming from and how they feel about what is going on. Compare the Woman's attitude about life to the Man's; The Woman is primarily joyful, with some sadness and regret. The Man is bitter and angry about how his life has gone. Every character in a story has their own point of view.

Characters – The people (or animals, or fairies, or just about anything you care to mention) who populate the play and interact with one another or with us to tell the story: The Lady from the Road, The Woman of the World, The Girl With a Date, and the Man in the Saloon.

Resolution – How the story comes out—ideally, a satisfactory tying-up of all of the various strands of the plot: All the characters come together and claim their (and our) right to sing the blues.

Dramatic Irony – When the audience knows more about what is going on than the characters. Can be used to create all kinds of effects, from suspense to comedy: It seems that the Girl

With A Date's date is the Man In The Saloon, who The Lady From the Road informs us is a scoundrel.

Situational Irony – When the outcome of a situation is the opposite of or different from what is expected: As the night goes on, it seems that the women's attitude toward the Man changes. They develop some sympathy for him. They allow him to get closer.

Imagery & Symbolism – Using what we see onstage (the imagery) to convey a deeper meaning beyond what we are seeing. An image symbolizes a larger idea: Think of the Lady of the Road's costumes, the Girl's suitcase, the Woman's brandy bottle.

Literal Language – Factual, non-poetic speech: For example, "The sun is a ball of flaming gasses suspended in space very far from us." Many of the songs tell straightforward stories, i.e. "My mama done told me, when I was in pigtailed ..."

Figurative Language – Poetic, symbolic, or otherwise fanciful speech: For example, "The sun is the eye of nature looking down upon the earth." Figurative Language can be found primarily in the bawdier songs "Take Me For A Buggy Ride" and "Kitchen Man," which are almost entirely made up of simile and metaphor.

Themes – The central idea(s) or message(s) that a story is concerned with: Themes can be reinforced and clarified though all of the components that make up a play, from the writing to the costumes. We all share similar kinds of sadness. Often, we dwell on a better time somewhere in the past. Song and good company can take away some of the pain.