

# YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

## SYNOPSIS

Twenty-two year old Alice comes from the Sycamore family, whose members are characterized as less-than-talented artists, laid-back bliss-seekers, and independent-minded, idiosyncratic idealists who create a circus-like atmosphere where it is not unusual for sister Essie to break into ballet, for fireworks to spit from the basement, or for an exiled duchess from Russia to simply drop in for a visit. Unfortunately, Alice is in love with the boss's son, Tony, the product of the conservative Mr. & Mrs. Kirby. It is the meeting of the two families that propels the plot and explores the conflict between two all-American dreams: the pursuit of happiness and economic success.

## HISTORY

*You Can't Take it With You* opened in New York in December of 1936 to instant critical and popular acclaim. The third George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart collaboration, and their most successful play, *You Can't Take it With You* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1936 and went on to run 837 performances on Broadway. Kaufman and Hart sold the film rights to Columbia Pictures for a record-setting amount, and the 1938 film won an Academy Award for best picture. *You Can't Take it With You* has become an American classic. Successful Broadway revivals in 1965 and 1983 also attest to the play's timeless appeal.

*You Can't Take it With You* was written during the Great Depression, as international tensions were catapulting us towards world war. It is often difficult to imagine the Sycamores living through the Depression especially as Kolenkhov remarks on his state of being as: "Magnificent! Life is chasing around inside of me, like a squirrel." The light hearted tone of the play makes one forget the harsh realities of the time, making a strong case for escapist theatre in American history.

Despite a lack of gravity and overbearing politics, the play does inspire some discussion of the 1930s as they are subtly revealed throughout the plot: Donald is "on relief," the characters comment on the Soviet government and on Stalin (Olga is a metaphor for the breakdown of Russia), and of course there is Grandpa and his manifesto on income tax.

The play is also an exploration of All-American ideals. The "I can do anything" attitude in the Sycamore house, focusing on the pursuit of happiness and individualism, conflicts with the Kirbys more conservative and capitalistic views as they rise to the top of the corporate ladder and reach economic success. With the Depression, the American Dream became a nightmare and before the New Deal, it was "every man for himself." People had to re-evaluate their own happiness without economic success, raising many questions about the American Dream, work ethic, and capitalistic economics. *You Can't Take it With You* audiences are asked to consider questions about the value of money, the definition of work, and how far one can pursue happiness.

*You Can't Take it With You* is a manifesto on Happiness. Here happiness is a choice and a state of being that has little to do with the material world. Grandpa insists "nobody can take [my happiness] away from me, no matter what they do to the world." The Sycamores' living room becomes a microcosm of America – a place where anything can happen and each person can pursue happiness along side everyone else.

## LIFE IN THE 1930S

While Americans were looking inward, toward their own domestic problems, the world was in bad shape – civil war raged as **Francisco Franco** erected a fascist state in Spain. **Joseph Stalin's** “great purge” created a totalitarian regime in Russia, and **Adolf Hitler** was rising to power in Germany.

The **Great Depression**, which was to affect the rest of the world (including the rise of those totalitarian regimes in Europe), began with the Stock Market Crash of 1929. The Depression was both a time of unemployment and poverty, and a period of increased government involvement in the economy.

When **Franklin Delanor Roosevelt** was elected in 1932, the Hooverville shacks named after his predecessor dotted city parks, but the city would benefit from the **New Deal** and the **Works Progress Administration**, which among other things financed much public art locally. The New Deal and WPA helped to take the sting out of the Depression, but times were hard for several long years to come. The recently completed Empire State Building (1931) would be known as the “Empty State Building” for many years because it could not attract sufficient tenants in the bleak business climate.

The political and economic tribulations gave rise to public commentary as never before – newspaper editorials on one side or the other of the political debates were more commonplace than ever, and **politically partisan magazines**, such as the *New Republic*, could be found in abundance. At the same time, the public wanted to be relieved of the burdens of daily life, and escapist plays, movies (**Walt Disney's Snow White and The Three Little Pigs**), pulp magazines (*True Detective Stories*) and books became a regular part of living in America. Radio programs like *Fibber McGee and Molly*, and even mystery programs like *The Shadow* provided the listening public with a few hours of relaxation each week.



Special thanks to Capital Theatre Rep Company (New York)

## MOSS HART (1904-1961)

*"I was born on Fifth Avenue," Moss Hart liked to say. Then, when eyebrows had gone up all over the room, he would ricochet the very notion with a punch line: "The wrong end!" The joke always worked, but was never as self-deprecating as it sounded; he wanted you to know how far he'd come.*

*The Life and Times of Moss Hart by Steven Bach*

Hart grew up at 74 East 105th Street in Manhattan, a neighborhood not of carriages and hansom cabs, but of dray wagons, pushcarts, and immigrants.

After working several years as a director of amateur theatrical groups and an entertainment director at summer resorts, he scored his first Broadway hit with *Once In A Lifetime* (1930). The play was written in collaboration with Broadway veteran George S. Kaufman, who regularly wrote with others. During the next decade, Kaufman and Hart teamed on a string of successes, including Hart's most-revived play *You Can't Take It With You* (1936) and *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (1939). Though Kaufman had hits with others, Hart is generally conceded to be his most important collaborator.



Hart continued to write plays after parting with Kaufman, such as *Christopher Blake* (1946) and *Light Up The Sky* (1948), as well as the book for the musical *Lady In The Dark* (1941), with songs by Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin. However, he became best known during this period as a director.

Among the Broadway hits he staged were *Junior Miss* (1941), *Dear Ruth* (1944) and *Anniversary Waltz* (1954). By far his biggest hit was the musical *My Fair Lady* (1956), adapted from George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. The show ran over seven years and won a Tony Award for Best Musical. Hart picked up the Tony for Best Director.

Occasionally, Hart wrote screenplays, including *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) — for which he received an Oscar nomination—*Hans Christian Andersen* (1952) and *A Star Is Born* (1954).

Hart also wrote a best-selling book, *Act One: An Autobiography*, which came out in 1959.

The last show Hart directed was the Lerner and Loewe musical *Camelot* (1960). During a troubled out-of-town tryout, Hart had a heart attack.

Moss Hart died of heart failure at age 57 on December 20, 1961 and was interred in a crypt at Ferncliff Cemetery in Hartsdale, New York. Alan Jay Lerner gave tribute to Hart in his memoir *The Street Where I Live*.

## GEORGE S. KAUFMAN (1889-1961)

*“At dramatic rehearsals, the only author that's better than an absent one is a dead one.”*

(George S. Kaufman)

American playwright George S. Kaufman collaborated on a great number of successful plays that merged theatricality with satiric comedy.

George S. Kaufman was born in Pittsburgh, Pa., on Nov. 16, 1889. After attending public schools in Pittsburgh and Paterson, N.J., he studied law briefly. He worked as a clerk, stenographer, and ribbon salesman before he started contributing humorous verses to the newspaper column of Franklin P. Adams in 1908. With Adams's help, Kaufman joined the *Washington Times* in 1912. After working on the *New York Evening Mail* and the *New York Tribune*, he went to the *New York Times* in 1917 and remained as drama editor until 1930. In 1917 he married Beatrice Bakrow.



Tense and tireless, caustic and witty, Kaufman was somewhat eccentric in his personal mannerisms. His first successful play, *Dulcy* (1921), written with Marc Connelly, is a satire of a vapid woman who is wrecking her bright husband's plans. *To the Ladies* (1922) reverses this, as a bright woman saves her vapid husband's plans. For 20 years one Kaufman collaboration, and sometimes several, appeared annually on Broadway.

Among the best examples of Kaufman's satiric comedy were two collaborations with Edna Ferber: *The Royal Family* (1928) focuses on the American theater's first family, the Barrymores, and *Dinner at Eight* (1932) deals with social climbing. His musical satire, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), written with Morrie Ryskind, hilariously indicts the chicanery of politicians. He collaborated with Ryskind again on the musical *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933). In *First Lady* (1935) he again derided politicians.

Sometimes Kaufman succeeded with sheer theatricality, as in another Pulitzer Prize-winner, *You Can't Take It with You* (1936), written with Moss Hart. The classic *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (1939) was also written with Hart. Working with John P. Marquand on an adaptation of the latter's novel *The Late George Apley* (1944), Kaufman tossed barbs at the proper Bostonians.

After the death of his first wife in 1945, Kaufman married actress Leueen McGrath, whom he divorced in 1957; they wrote *The Small Hours* (1951). After World War II he worked increasingly as a play doctor. His knowledge of play structure was highly valued, and his plays rarely failed. He died on June 2, 1961, in New York City.



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** April 7, 2008

**MEDIA RELEASE**

Please include in APRIL, MAY, & JUNE calendar listings and announcements

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Experience the Swellest Time You'll Ever Have at Pacific Theatre as it Showcases Emerging Artists in the Classic Comedy, *You Can't Take it With You*

**IN SHORT:** Join Pacific Theatre and Theatre at TWU in lauding the remarkable talent of emerging artists, ranging in age and background, and coming to you from Vancouver, all over the Lower Mainland, and as far away as Arlington, Virginia. You can't take them with you, but you can invest in their passion and talent, and laugh out loud all the way home. Starring **Karl Petersen** (*Curious Savage*), **Rebecca Branscom** (*The Importance of Being Earnest*), and **John Voth** (*Pride and Prejudice*), and directed by **Ron Reed** (*A Bright Particular Star*), this first rate comedy is not to be missed!

**Vancouver, BC - May 15-June 14 (opens May 16)**

It's the middle of The Great Depression, but there's nothing depressing about life in the Vanderhof-Sycamore household - they dance, they make plays, they make music and babies and revolutionary tracts, and fireworks in the basement. All is peaceful anarchy until Alice brings home her all-too-ordinary Wall Street boyfriend...

Join Pacific Theatre and Theatre at TWU in lauding the remarkable talent of emerging artists, ranging in age and background, and coming to you from Vancouver, all over the Lower Mainland, and as far away as Arlington, Virginia. You can't take them with you, but you can invest in their passion and talent, and laugh out loud all the way home. Starring **Karl Petersen** (*Curious Savage*), **Rebecca Branscom** (*The Importance of Being Earnest*), and **John Voth** (*Pride and Prejudice*), and directed by **Ron Reed** (*A Bright Particular Star*), this first rate comedy is not to be missed!

George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart's sharply funny classic won the **Pulitzer Prize** in 1937 - it premiered at the Booth Theater and ran for an astonishing 837 performances. It was the basis for the 1938 **Academy Award-winning Frank Capra film** starring Lionel Barrymore and James Stewart. Frank Capra took home the award for Best Director and the show won Best Picture.

For those of you who think you've seen the movie so you don't need to see the play, you're making a big mistake! **Uproarious errors** combined with **acerbic social criticism** will make this play one of the most enjoyable shows ever presented on the Pacific Theatre stage.

<b>Details:</b>	<b>You Can't Take it With You</b> by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart
<b>When:</b>	<b>May 15-June 14</b> (Opens May 16). Wed-Sat at 8pm, Sat at 2pm (Preview May 15)
<b>Where:</b>	<b>Pacific Theatre</b> , 1420 West 12th Ave (at Hemlock St), Vancouver, BC
<b>Tickets:</b>	\$16-\$32 (GST incl.) - To reserve call <b>604.731.5518</b> , or visit <b>pacifictheatre.org</b> , or in person at the Box Office. <b>Tickets on sale at box office or online.</b>

Contact Julie Sutherland for interviews or further information.



Pacific Theatre is a professional theatre company which aims to delight, provoke, entertain, stimulate, and challenge its audience by producing theatre that explores the spiritual aspects of human experience in a non-propagandistic way, that respects all faith orientations, and which strives to operate with artistic, spiritual, relational, and financial integrity.

Since its inception in 1984, Pacific Theatre has mounted sixty-nine professional mainstage productions. The company has also established itself as a developer and producer of new work by Canadian playwrights. Pacific Theatre has developed and premiered seventeen new works by Canadian playwrights, over a dozen of which have gone on to subsequent productions at other theatres in Canada and the United States.

The excellence of the company's artistic work and the evidence of its sound administrative and financial infrastructure has resulted in ongoing operating support from the City of Vancouver and the British Columbia Arts Council, and project/development grants from Canada Council for the Arts, the Vancouver Foundation, the Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation, and the Angus Reid Foundation, among others. We have moved into a valued place in the artistic community, garnering seventy-five Jessie Richardson Award nominations in twelve seasons of eligibility. In June, 2007 Pacific Theatre received 8 Jessie Award nominations and 3 Jessie Awards - including Outstanding Production of the Year for *Grace*. No other theatre received more than 3 awards. In June, 2006 Pacific Theatre received 16 Jessie Award nominations and 4 Jessie Awards - the most nominees and winners from any one theatre company in 2005-2006.

## **THEATRE** at TWU

Trinity Western University's BA in Theatre provides students with a strong liberal arts foundation, a broad range of theory and praxis courses, and the flexibility to specialize. Whether students are interested in acting, playwriting, stage management or dramatic literature, the program can be tailored to each individual. With five distinct theatrical productions each year, Theatre at TWU aims to stretch students while providing quality cultural experience and enlightening entertainment to audiences on campus and beyond. The department not only stages large-scale productions, it also presents bi-weekly comedy improv nights, student-directed one-act plays and touring productions. Students are required to see a great deal of professional theatre and instructors work as professional actors, directors, playwrights, and technicians. Theatre at TWU fosters an environment where students are expected to critically engage issues of faith and art, using their talents to transform culture.