



The Light in the Piazza

Study Guide
-Chloe Munson-



Synopsis

In *The Light in the Piazza*, Clara and her mother, Margaret, are on vacation in Italy. Margaret is showing Clara spots she went on her honeymoon. In Florence, Clara's hat flies off when a gust of wind hits it when a young Italian man, Fabrizio catches it. They have an obvious connection. Clara's mother tries to break this connection at all cost, but we don't know why. Fabrizio is persistent. Clara and Margaret meet his family, the Naccarellis. Margaret calls her husband, Roy. The audience learns from this hostile call that Margaret is trapped in a lonely marriage. Margaret then learns that Clara has run off to meet Fabrizio. Clara gets lost trying to find where they are meeting. She begins to scream and lose control. Margaret finds her and brings her back to the hotel. The audience then learns that when Clara was a young girl she was kicked in the head by a Shetland pony. Because of this accident, her mental and emotional abilities have developed abnormally. This is why Margaret has been keeping her from Fabrizio. She continues to do so. Fabrizio sneaks in and proposes to Clara. Margaret walks in on them. The next day Margaret takes Clara to Rome to stop their love. Clara fights back and Margaret relents. Clara, back in Florence is preparing for their union. She beings converting to Catholicism, and they sign wedding papers. The union is almost broken up by Fabrizio's father because of Clara's age. She is six years older than Fabrizio. Once the wedding is back on track, Margaret calls her husband. He doesn't approve of the union because he doesn't believe Clara can be responsible due to her disabilities, but Margaret doesn't care. She doesn't want Clara to end up lonely like her. Clara hears this conversation and runs to end things with Fabrizio. Fabrizio assures her and calms her down. Before the wedding, Clara tells Margaret she can't leave her. Margaret replies that she can. Margaret reflects alone concluding love outweighs the risks then she joins the wedding ceremony.



Glossary

Beacon: A fire or light set up in a high or prominent position as a warning, signal, or celebration

Bequeathed: Leave (a personal estate or one's body) to a person or other beneficiary by a will

Bohemian: A socially unconventional person, especially one who is involved in the arts

Charioteer: A chariot driver

Clergy: The body of all people ordained for religious duties, especially in the Christian Church

Escapades: An act or incident involving excitement, daring, or adventure

Inferno: A large fire that is dangerously out of control

Inundates: Overwhelm (someone) with things or people to be dealt with

Lagoon: A stretch of salt water separated from the sea by a low sandbank or coral reef

Matron of Honor: A married woman attending the bride at a wedding

Monastery: A building or buildings occupied by a community of monks living under religious vows

Monk: A member of a religious community of men typically living under vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience

Piazza: A public square or marketplace, especially in an Italian town


Tableau: A group of models or motionless figures representing a scene from a story or from history; a tableau vivant

Unfurling: Make or become spread out from a rolled or folded state, especially in order to be open to the wind

What sparked the writing of this musical?

Elizabeth Spencer's book *The Light in the Piazza* written in 1960 was adapted into a musical with the help of brilliant playwright, Craig Lucas, and stellar composer, Adam Guettel.

Elizabeth Spencer



Born on July 19, 1921, in Carrollton, Mississippi, Spencer was under social and familial stress at a young age. She rode her horse to her Uncle Joe McCain's plantation to find escape. The McCain's were big on reading and so was her mother. They deeply cared for characters they read about almost as if they knew them. Spencer graduated from Belhaven College in Jackson with an English degree in 1942 where she served as the president of the literary society her senior year. She met Eudora Welty there who strengthened her desire of writing. Spencer graduated with a master's degree in 1943 from Vanderbilt University. Spencer earned money as a reporter, then wrote her first novel. With money from her first novels royalties, she went to France traveling in Germany and Italy. She taught English and creative writing at the University of Mississippi in 1948-51 and 1952-53. Then she returned back to Italy where she wrote more. Her first three novels were set in Mississippi during the 40s and 50s then her next few were set in Italy including *The Light in the Piazza*. She is the author of novels, short stories, a memoir, and a play. She has received numerous awards over her career that was almost seven-decades long. She lived in Chapel Hill, North Carolina until she died on December 23, 2019.

Craig Lucas

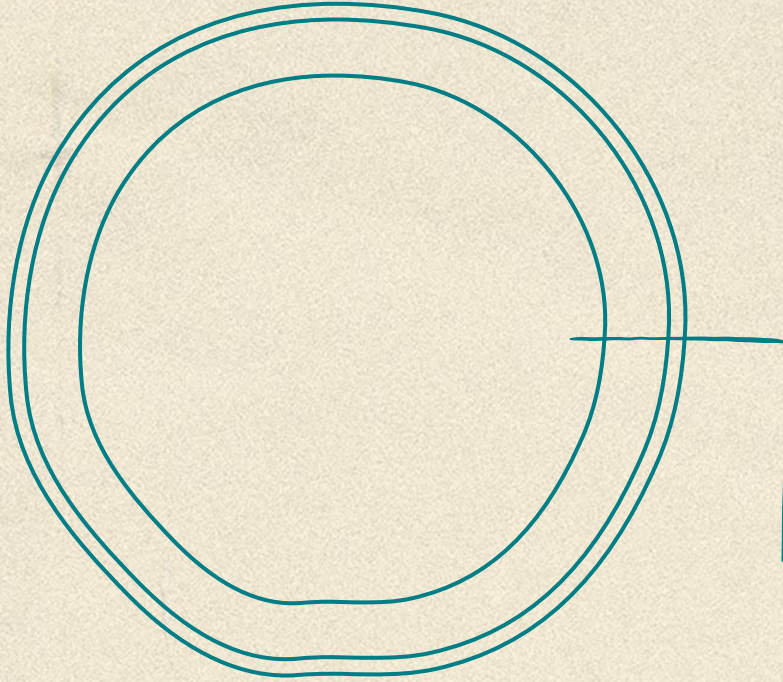
Lucas was found in Atlanta in the back of a car with a note from his mother. In the note, she said she could not care for him. He was adopted and raised outside of Philadelphia. His father worked for the FBI. His mother encouraged his love of singing and acting. Writing poetry and plays was an interest early on. Lucas went on to study creative writing at Boston University. Anne Sexton encouraged him in the route of playwriting, and she helped him gain admission to the Yale School of Drama. After college, he performed in New York and started collaborating with musicians. He has been nominated for both The Tony Award and the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

Adam Guettel

Born on December 16, 1964, Guettel is an American composer and lyricist of opera and musical theater. He is the grandson of Richard Rodgers. He grew up in New York on the Upper West Side. He performed opera as a boy. He was a soprano. He went to Phillips Exeter Academy abroad in France and the Interlochen Center for the Arts. He graduated in 1987 from Yale University. Though Guettel is a talented composer, since 1995, he has also taught masterclasses and seminars for songwriting and performance. He won two Tony Awards (Best Score and Best Orchestrations) and two Drama Desk Awards (Best Music and Best Orchestrations) for *The Light in the Piazza*.



The Writing Process



Guettel started the collaboration process in 1999 with Alfred Uhry. This collaboration failed. Guettel gave up for a bit but then found Lucas and they teamed up. Lucas wrote the book and directed the premiere (at where he served as associate artist director) while Guettel continued to compose. Guettel describes his work as “unrestrained romanticism.” He was glad to have found inspiration in Spencer’s novel, *The Light in the Piazza*.

Production History

Seattle (June 2003)
Intiman Playhouse

Chicago (2004)
Goodman Theatre

Broadway (April 2005- July 2006)
Vivian Beaumont Theatre in Lincoln Center

US National Tour (August 2006-July 2007)
Opened in San Francisco, Closed in Chicago

Japanese Production (December 2007)
Ran for about a month

Australian Concert Version (August 2008)
One Night Only: Lyric Theatre, Star City in Sydney

Vermont: Smaller Chamber Piece (Summer 2008)
Weston Playhouse Theatre Company



Production History

North Carolina: Opera House Premiere (October 2008)
Piedmont Opera in Winston-Salem

Los Angeles Local Premiere (2009)
Covina Center for the Performing Arts

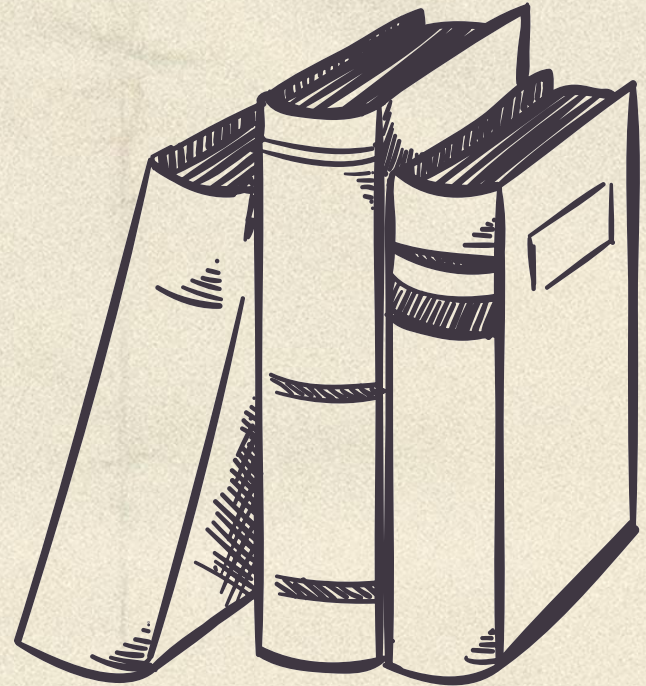
Canadian Premiere (October 19-21 2009)
*Lethbridge Symphony Orchestra in Albert at the
Genevieve E. Yates Memorial Centre*

Toronto, Canada (February 2010)
Berkeley Street Theatre by Acting Up Stage

Washington, DC (March 2010-April 2010)
The Arena Stage

European Premiere (May 2009)
Curve Theatre in Leicester, UK

Australia Production in Victoria (October 2016-November 2016)
Life Like Company at Arts Centre Melbourne



Production History

Chicago Production (March 2012-June 2012)
Theo Ubique Cabaret Theater

Los Angeles Local Premiere (2009)
Covina Center for the Performing Arts

Shaw Festival Production (July 2013-October 2013)
Court House Theatre in Niagara on the Lake, Ontario, Canada

Pittsburg Performance (August 2015)
Front Porch Theatricals

OBC Benefit Concert (April 4, 2016)
Vivian Beaumont Theater

London Production (June 2019-July 2019),
Los Angeles (October 2019), Chicago (December 2019)
Royal Festival Hall, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, The Lyric Opera of Chicago



Historical, Cultural, and Social Background

The *Light in the Piazza* is set in Italy in the summer of 1953. The two places visited by Clara and Margaret were Florence and Rome.

During the 50s, Italy was one of the founding members of the NATO alliance, an ally to the US, and a member of the United Nations. These things all revived the economy through the Marshall Plan. Near the end of the 50s, the impressive growth in the economy was trademarked as “Economic Miracle.” This term is still recognizable today in Italian politics. Many reforms were also launched in the 50s including agrarian reform and fiscal reform.

There was a large divide between the thriving industrial North and the lacking South due to a huge transference of population. In 1947, 230,000 to 350,000 local ethnic Italians emigrated due to an annexation of land. This caused social contrasts. One of these was between the immigrants and the aristocrats. There was also a large contrast between the rich and the poor. It was estimated in 1953 that 24% of families in Italy were going through hardship or were destitute.

At this time, the centrist government ruled politics in Italy. Alcide De Gasperi was Prime Minister in 1953 though it was his last year in term. He was the first republican Prime Minister in Italy. He was also one of the founders of the European Union.

References and Locales

- Page 13, the baedeker referenced is an guide meant for tourists traveling through Italy which is what Clara and Margaret are doing
- Page 13, the name of the monk who was hanged and burnt was Girolamo Savonarola. He was tried and convicted of heresy. This happened in the Piazza in Florence in May of 1494.
- Page 16, when it references that Anna Maria as one of the Medicis, the Medicis were a prominent family in politics and cultural history from the 15th to 17th century. They were a family of merchants, rulers, and bankers in Florence and Tuscany.
- Page 16, Madonna simply means my lady.
- Page 16, Michelangelo is referenced. He was a famous painter, sculptor, poet, and architect of the High Renaissance.
- Page 16, Domenico Ghirlandaio is briefly mentioned. He was an Italian painter.
- Page 16, Leonardo da Vinci was a polymath of the High Renaissance. He is best known for painting the Mona Lisa.
- Page 22, Fabrizio talks about wanting to look like a Van Johnson. Van Johnson was an American actor with manners and a pretty face that every father wanted their daughter to marry in the 40s.
- Page 22, Fred Astaire is also mentioned. He was an American actor who started and was best known for musical, comedy films.

The background is a detailed historical map of the North Atlantic and Arctic regions. It shows the Arctic Circle, Davis Straits, and various islands and sea routes. A prominent red rectangular box is overlaid at the top center, containing the title 'References and Locales' in white, bold, sans-serif font.

References and Locales

- Page 23, the Italian idiom “in the mouth of a wolf” was used in opera and theatre to tell performers good luck before a performance. Similar to the phrase, break a leg used today “in the mouth of a wolf” has a negative origin but is used to wish good luck to not be superstitious. Hunters originated this wishing danger on other hunters. The wolf in Italian and Western culture is dangerous and violent (wolf in sheep’s clothing, cry wolf, etc.)
- Page 25, Duomo means Italian Cathedral Church.
- Page 25, Oly Oly Oxen Free is a term used in kids games meaning the hiding players may come out of hiding.
- Page 19, Margaret and Clara are from Winston-Salem, North Carolina which is known for its historical involvement in the tobacco industry. On page 40, when Margaret mentions that’s what her husband is in the business of, Signor Naccarelli names her city as a guess and she changes the topic.
- Page 49, The Medici Palace is a renaissance palace associated with the Medici family and located in Florence.
- Page 54, the Forum where Julius Caesar was stabbed for trying to become a tyrant. The Forum in Rome is in the center of Rome. It is rectangular surrounded by government buildings.
- Page 56, the Triumphal Arch of Septimius is located at the west end of the Roman Forum. It was built in 203 A.D. to celebrate the Emperor’s victory against Parthians.

Themes

-Dynamics differ from country to country and family to family

-Don't judge a book by its cover

-You never really know what someone else is going through

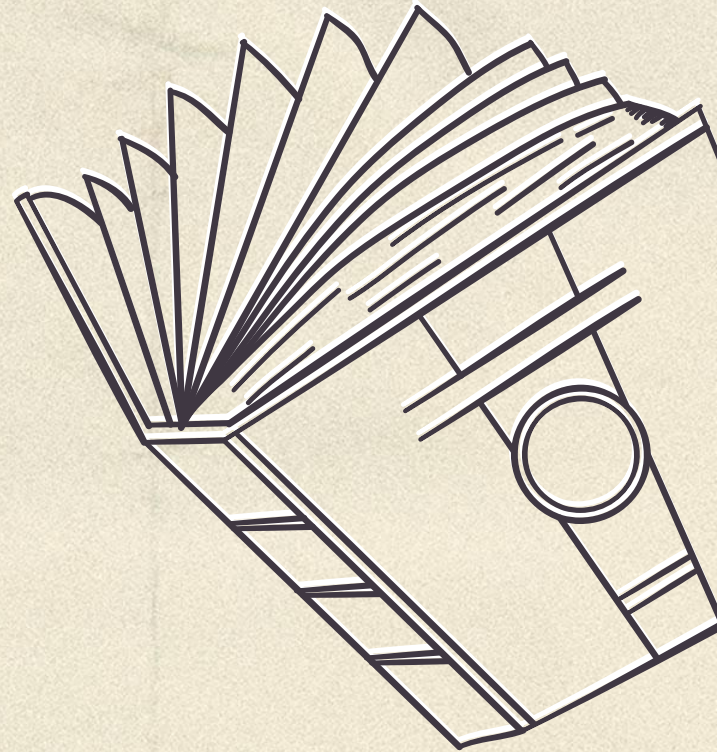
-Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

-Everybody needs somebody they can lean on

-Disabilities can cause heartbreaking barriers

-Everyone deserves a unique and beautiful love

-A person should be able to dictate their own happiness



ACU THEATRE CAST



Rose Lee-Alliston
Margaret Johnson



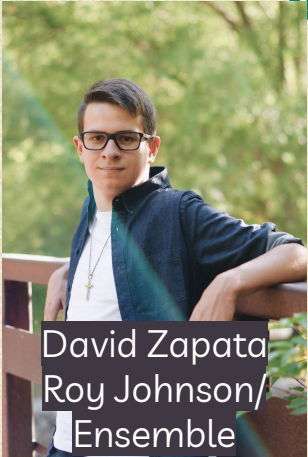
Morgan Whitley
Signor Naccarelli



Brody Jasso
Fabrizio Naccarelli



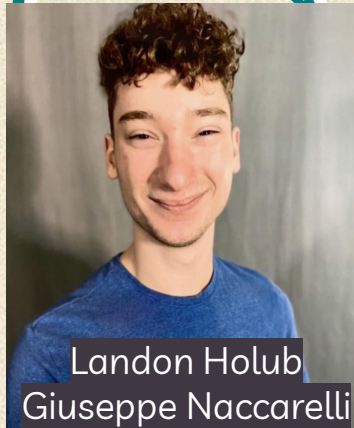
Lauren MacLeod
Clara Johnson



David Zapata
Roy Johnson/
Ensemble



Emilie Reed
Signora Naccarelli



Landon Holub
Giuseppe Naccarelli



Kaycee Humphrey
Franca Naccarelli



Jack Bledsoe
Priest/ u/s Sr. N

ACU THEATRE CAST



Sammy Zapata
u/s Fabrizio/
Giuseppe/Ensemble



Hannah Galambos
u/s Clara/Ensemble



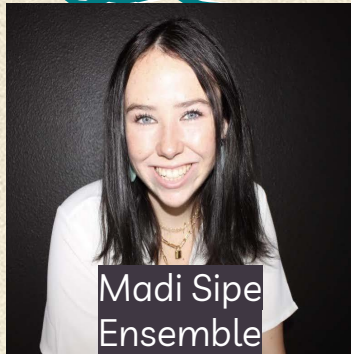
Layla Rorem
u/s Margaret/
Franca/Ensemble



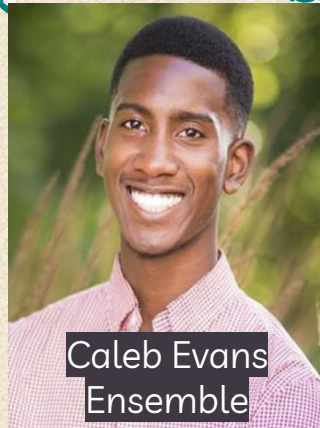
Patti Maisano
u/s Signora N/
Ensemble



Ryan Chu
Ensemble



Madi Sipe
Ensemble



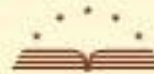
Caleb Evans
Ensemble



Zola Feasel
Ensemble



Ryan Shupe
Ensemble



LOA LIVE Presents

The Light in the Piazza

FROM PAGE TO STAGE

A conversation with Adam Guettel and Adam Gopnik

Featuring musical performances by Elena Shaddow

Accompaniment by Andrew Resnick

Websites Used

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