

WESTON PLAYHOUSE
THEATRE COMPANY

2017

History and Background

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SYNOPSIS

Meet the eccentric Kurnitz family! After the death of his wife, ne'er-do-well Eddie deposits his two young sons on his mother's doorstep to contend with their stern Grandma, flighty aunt Bella (and her secret romance), and Uncle Louie, a small-time hooligan. Set in 1942, this is a heartfelt coming of age story by one of America's greatest comic playwrights.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Neil Simon, one of America's most celebrated playwrights, has written dozens of plays and films. He has been nominated for more Tonys and Oscars than any other modern writer, and is the only playwright to have four Broadway productions running at once.

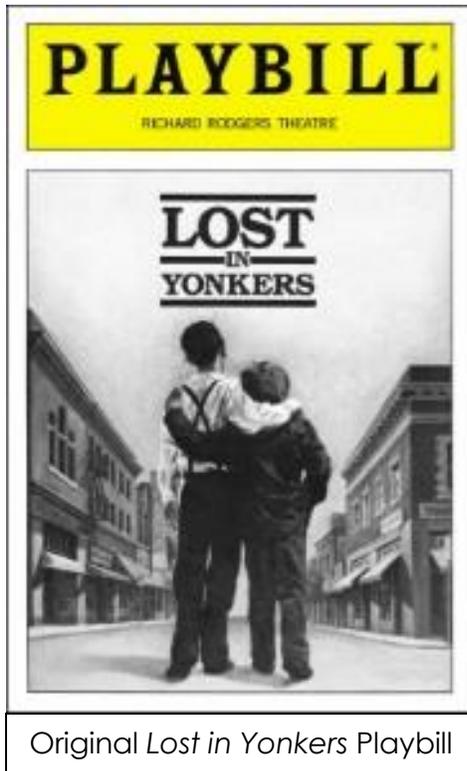
Simon was born in the Bronx in 1927. He briefly attended New York University, but left to sign up for the Air Force, where he continued his studies at the University of Denver. After his discharge, he became a mailroom clerk at the Warner Brothers Manhattan office. His first writing job was on the television series "Your Show of Shows," where he launched his career alongside Mel Brooks, Woody Allen, Larry Gelbart, and Carl Reiner. He began to dabble in writing for the stage while still employed as a television writer. He co-wrote the musical *Catch a Star!* with his brother, Danny. While they had some success with the show, the brothers parted ways to work on separate projects.



<http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-tKhgRQQ1ExU/VT7JP5uqHWI/AAAAAAAAQmQ/SXx0tLix6tM/s1600/Neil-Simon.jpg>

Simon's first play, *Come Blow Your Horn*, premiered on Broadway in 1961. The run of the show sold out, but only garnered moderate attention for the young writer. Two years later, however, Simon launched *Barefoot in the Park*, his high-acclaimed second play. In the following years, *The Odd Couple*, *The Apartment*, *The Sunshine Boys*, and *Promises, Promises* were produced on Broadway.

Never one to turn away from the difficult (and hilarious) moments in life, Simon often drew inspiration from his own life and the life of his loved ones. *The Odd Couple* is based on his brother Danny's living situation after his divorce. *Chapter Two* came about after Simon lost his first wife. Most famously, Simon created an autobiographical trilogy, better known as the Eugene Trilogy. *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, *Biloxi Blues*, and *Broadway Bound* chronicle the relationship between Simon and his brother, their time in the military, and their partnership as writers.



Original *Lost in Yonkers* Playbill

<http://static.playbill.com/dims4/default/23b20fd/2147483647/resize/250x/quality/90/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fstatic.playbill.com%2Fb6%2Fc6%2Fc9422e824b9a9d8b74bc430b2468%2Flost-in-ynkers-playbill-1991-02-web.jpg>

In 1991, Simon established himself as a master comedian and critical force with *Lost in Yonkers*. Not only was the show a commercial hit, but it also won Simon the Tony Award for best play and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

In recent years, Simon has stopped writing for the stage. He has published two memoirs, *Rewrites* and *The Play Goes On*. In 2006 he was awarded with Mark Twain Prize for American Humor at the Kennedy Center Honors. He has

been inducted in the American Theater Hall of Fame and is one of the only living playwrights to have a Broadway Theater named after him.

Sources:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/neil-simon-about-neil-simon/704/>

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/22/us/neil-simon-fast-facts/index.html>

<https://www.biography.com/people/neil-simon-9484352>

1940s YONKERS

Since its incorporation in the 1700s, Yonkers has grown from a small agricultural



Map of Yonkers, 1940s (US Census Bureau)

village to a fully industrialized city. Its 18-square miles are nestled between the Bronx and Hudson rivers, with the New York City Borough to the south. *Lost in Yonkers* takes place in the 1942, when an estimated 142,000 people called the city home.

1942 was roughly the middle of the Second World War. While soldiers were stationed in the European and Pacific Theaters, the Nazis were beginning to organize Hitler's "Final Solution"—death camps. During this year, thousands of Jews, Roma, people with disabilities, and

LGBT people were taken from their homes and sent to Extermination Camps. 300,000 Jews alone were sent from the Warsaw

ghetto to the Treblinka Concentration Camp. On August 4, the first train departed to Auschwitz. This dark movement hangs over the lives of the Kurnitz family, whether they are aware of it or not.

In the 1940s, Yonkers was populated primarily by Polish, Italian, and Slavic families. There was as a significant Jewish population at the time, one the Kurnitz's would have been a part of. The city underwent serious reform in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s as they battled a history of racial, housing, and educational discrimination. It is estimated that nearly 300,000 people call Yonkers home in 2017.

Sources:

<http://www.yonkerschamber.com/city-of-yonkers/early-yonkers-history/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/17/nyregion/yonkers-at-a-glance-yonkers-geography.html>

<https://1940census.archives.gov/>

<http://www.onthisday.com/date/1942>

OUR WESTON PRODUCTION

Lost in Yonkers is our second MainStage production of the season. This story is, for the brothers, legendary. At the same time, it's merely a peak into the quotidian lives

of the Kurnitz family. Take a peek at how the scenic designer made this story come to life.



Images courtesy of scenic designer Edward Morris.