

BIRKENSHAW
MR. BREWER
MISS HOOPER
MISS JANUS
MISS PAT MILLIGAN
MISS WILLESDEN
MR. HEC. HAMMOND
MISS BUFTON
MR. WALKER

MATTHEW GUMLEY
STEPHEN PLUNKETT
ALEX TROW
JULIA COFFEY
ELISE KIBLER
LAURIE KENNEDY
CHRISTOPHER SEARS
KATIE GIBSON
JONATHAN HOGAN

ACT One

The general office of Messers. Walker, Windermere & Co., in London Wall. Lunchtime.

- Intermission -

ACT Two

Scene One: Mr Walker's room in the office. 3:00 in the afternoon. Three weeks later.

Scene Two: The general office. 5:45 on the same day.

- Intermission -

ACT Three:

Scene One: Mr Walker's Room. 9:30 the next morning.
 Scene Two: The general office. 3:00 on the same afternoon.



Matthew Gumley



Stephen Plunkett



Alex Trow



Julia Coffey



Elise Kibler



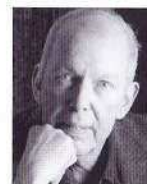
Laurie Kennedy



Christopher Sears



Katie Gibson



Jonathan Hogan

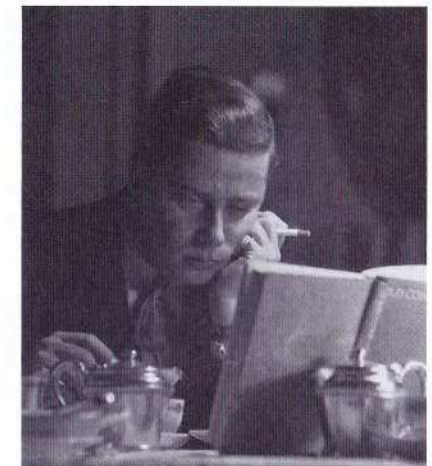
From the mid-1920s through the mid-1950s, the prolific British-born playwright and director John Van Druten captivated audiences on both sides of the Atlantic with his bittersweet dramas and "delicious comedies on that peculiarly warm and sophisticated level that is his alone" (as described by William Hawkins of *The New York World-Telegram*). Best known today for such Broadway hits as *Old Acquaintance*, *The Voice of the Turtle*, *I Remember Mama*, *I Am a Camera*, and *Bell, Book and Candle*, Van Druten wrote deftly observed, character-driven plays that ranged from the realistic atmosphere of his early West End plays, to the sentimental charm of his wartime hits, to the daring allurements of his final works.

Born on June 1, 1901, the son of Dutch banker Wilhelmus Van Druten and his English-born wife Eva, Van Druten grew up in a cultured middle-class London household. Though a precociously well-read and stage-struck youth, who scrawled his first play at the age of seven (on *Mary, Queen of Scots*), Van Druten dutifully obeyed his father and studied law. After earning his law degree at London University in 1922, Van Druten qualified as a solicitor of the Supreme Court Judicature and taught legal history at the University College of Wales. During this time, Van Druten continued to write plays, and with *Young Woodley*, the 24 year-old Van Druten realized his dream of writing professionally for the West End theatre. Banned in London until 1928, for its frank sexuality and caustic "attack on the British public school system," *Young Woodley* arrived on Broadway in 1925.

Following the New York success of *Young Woodley*, Van Druten won acclaim as among "the most popular of our serious dramatists in the younger generation" (according to *The London Times'* Charles Morgan). In such early West End plays as *After All* (1929), *There's Always Juliet* (1932), and *The Distaff Side* (1933), Van Druten became noted for the "truthful naturalism" of his settings, as well as for his sensitive portrayals of young romantics and would-be bohemians. For *London Wall* (1931), Van Druten drew upon his former experience as a clerk in a solicitor's

office. Although the playwright, in his memoirs, recalled the job as "sordid and routine," with "almost none of the drama of litigation of which...a lawyer's life is full," it inspired a play of which *The Play Pictorial* noted, "Nothing in the office of Walker, Windermere and Co. is dull while Mr. Van Druten presides over it." With numerous Broadway productions of his London hits throughout the Depression, Van Druten enjoyed a transatlantic success that carried him to Hollywood, where he co-wrote the screenplays of such classics as *Night Must Fall* (1937) and *Gaslight* (1944), and also contributed (uncredited) to *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

Van Druten enjoyed phenomenal Broadway success in the WWII era, with a string of critically acclaimed smash hits. After the effervescent *Old Acquaintance* (1940), centered on two best friends and rival women of letters, Van Druten wrote the three-character romantic comedy *The Voice of the Turtle* (1943), which ran for a stunning 1,557 performances (the play was revived in 2001 by the Keen Company, whose production was later presented at the Mint). Recounting an actress's whirlwind affair with a soldier on leave, the play frankly explored themes of female desire and premarital sex, while also striking resonant wartime chords as "a civilized, highly polished entertainment in which New Yorkers could recognize some ideal of themselves," according to *The Guardian*.



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The nostalgic *I Remember Mama*, based on Kathryn Forbes' novel *Mama's Bank Account*, similarly moved wartime audiences as an impressionistic "family album" set among the Norwegian immigrant community of turn-of-the-century San Francisco. Van Druten – who had emigrated to the United States in 1940 – himself became a naturalized American citizen in 1944. A second-generation Englishman, the playwright reflected in his memoirs, "I had absorbed much from (England)...but I had little feeling that I was one of its sons. I knew that I loved America, and that I was at home there." As handsomely produced by Rodgers and Hammerstein, the memory play ran for 713 performances.

The late 1940s and early 1950s brought Van Druten continued success as a playwright, with works streaked with poetic realism and political allegory. His *Bell, Book and Candle* (1950), about a seductive witch secretly practicing sorcery in modern Manhattan, was not only a "wonderfully suave and impish fancy" that served as an inspiration for TV's "Bewitched," but as a subtle affirmation of Van Druten's homosexual identity in the midst of the McCarthy-era witch hunts (the play was revived, to glowing reviews, at Hartford Stage in 2012). A gay subtext similarly informed 1951's *I Am a Camera*, adapted from his close friend Christopher Isherwood's *The Berlin*

Stories, which provided an iconic role for Julie Harris as the decadent Weimar chanteuse Sally Bowles. Together, Isherwood's stories and Van Druten's play inspired the landmark 1966 musical *Cabaret*. Van Druten, who directed all of his plays from 1942 onward, also left his mark on Broadway musical theater with his graceful direction of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1951 classic *The King and I*.

In his later years, Van Druten spent much time on his ranch in California's Coachella Valley, writing fiction, plays and a series of critically praised memoirs (including *Playwright at Work*, 1953; and *The Widening Circle*, 1957). His final Broadway play, *I've Got Sixpence* (1952), about lovers searching for religious faith, reflected the playwright's late-life spirituality and interests in Christian Science and Vedantic Buddhism (he served on the editorial board of the journal *Vedanta and the West* alongside fellow British expatriates Isherwood and Aldous Huxley from 1951 onward). The industrious playwright died of a heart ailment in Indio, California on December 20, 1957, having written twenty-five produced plays and over a dozen screenplays.

Now in the midst of a theatrical resurgence, with more revivals in the works (including the Transport Group's *I Remember Mama* in March 2014), Van Druten merits critical reevaluation. In his own lifetime, the playwright was



(l-r) Michael Keyloun, Ruth Williamson & Kate MacCluggage in the Hartford Stage revival of *Bell Book and Candle*. Photo by T. Charles Erickson

esteemed, but often overshadowed by more thematically ambitious dramatists. In his *Best Plays of the American Theatre Vol. 2*, critic John Gassner observed, "Mr. Van Druten happens to be one of those playwrights who do not evoke lengthy critical ponderings. This is the case because instead of heaving with the world's problems and proffering political or philosophical comment, he has been content to study people and mores, and to set them down for what they are rather than what they may be worth as symbols." In a 1951 interview, Van Druten himself asserted, "I have never been a man for messages."

Yet throughout his plays, Van Druten created non-didactic yet nuanced explorations of personal politics and sexual identity. With unusually detailed attention to the desires of his female characters, Van Druten portrayed British and American moderns uncertainly

but wholeheartedly navigating the changing moral landscape between the two World Wars. His plays consistently examine the effects of institutions upon the choices of the individual, whether influenced by the forces of home and family, or (as in *London Wall*) the economy and the workplace. Infused with wit and generosity, as well as keen social insight, Van Druten's "amusing, touching plays, written lightly and expertly, and with beguiling style" (as described by *The New York Times*' Brooks Atkinson) continue to offer seductive and substantial enchantments.

MAYA CANTU

Maya Cantu is a theater historian, scholar and a dramaturgical adviser for the Mint, where she most recently worked on George Kelly's Philip Goes Forth. She is currently completing her Doctor of Fine Arts degree at Yale School of Drama, where she received her MFA in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism in 2010.

JOHN VAN DRUTEN: A WRITER'S WRITER

FEATURING TREASURES FROM THE JOHN VAN DRUTEN PAPERS

AT THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Bruno Walter Auditorium, 65th & Amsterdam

Join Mint Theater Company and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts for an intimate celebration of LONDON WALL playwright, John Van Druten.

Some writers are not only commercial successes admired by the public—but are so excellent at what they do that their talents are admired and respected by their literary peers. John Van Druten was one of those writers. His correspondence and journal entries—which are contained in the New York Public Library's Billy Rose Theatre Collection—reveal a writer who was in constant contact with other playwrights and novelists. These treasures prove Van Druten to be a thoughtful artist who valued the critiques of his literary peers and who formed critiques of established writers as a means of further developing his own craft.

Excerpts from Van Druten's unpublished essays, letters, diary and plays will be read, revealing the playwright's relationship with such literary peers as Tennessee Williams, Christopher Isherwood, Carson McCullers, and Rodgers & Hammerstein.

MARCH 17th at 6PM