



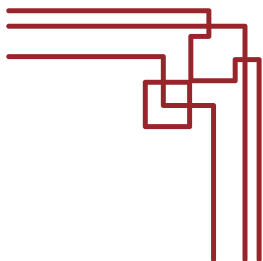
BROADWAY SACRAMENTO PRESENTS

THE  
DROWSY  
CHAPERONE

JULY 9–14, 2019 | EDUCATIONAL GUIDE



BROADWAY  
AT MUSIC CIRCUS



# THE STORY

Wealthy widow **Mrs. Tottendale** is hosting the wedding of the season between oil tycoon **Robert Martin** and Broadway starlet **Janet Van de Graff**. As guests arrive, her unflappable butler **Underling** makes sure the estate is in tiptop shape. Janet, the star of *Feldzieg's Follies*, is leaving the glamor of the stage to marry the man of her dreams, and while Robert loves her madly, he's experiencing wedding day jitters. His panic-prone best man, **George** will do everything in his power to make sure that the wedding comes off without a hitch. Meanwhile, Janet's producer **Mr. Feldzieg**, beside himself over losing his leading lady, hires Latin Lothario, **Aldolpho** to seduce the bride and ruin the wedding. To complicate matters, Feldzieg's chief investor sends two **gangsters** disguised as pastry chefs to ensure, by force if necessary, that Janet stays in the show. Adding to the complications Feldzieg's mistress **Kitty**, a ditzy chorus girl, hopes to take Janet's place as the star of the *Follies*. Finally, there's Janet's confidante, the **Drowsy Chaperone**. Her job, making sure that Janet behaves with propriety before the wedding, is impaired by her frequent alcohol-induced napping. This romantic musical comedy is full of mishaps, mistaken identities, misunderstandings and, of course, plenty of singing and dancing.





FLORENZ ZIEGFELD



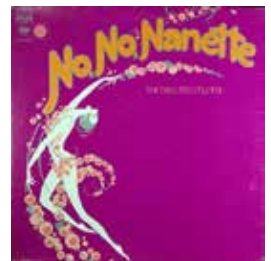
# 1920s Historical Context

*The Drowsy Chaperone* is a *pastiche*, or imitation of the 1920s popular musicals in both style and silliness. Broadway reigned supreme in the Roaring '20s, with as many as 50 new shows opening in a single season. A record number of people gladly paid the \$3.50 ticket price to see hits like *No, No, Nanette* and *Sunny*, which combined operetta and musical comedy to tell stories of madcap young women looking for and finding love. Also popular were sentimental romances such as *The Desert Song* and *The New Moon* with their tales of men in disguise seeking adventure. And of course, the popularity of revue extravaganzas featuring songs, skits, and scantily clad women continued, with *Ziegfeld's Follies* the most prominent.

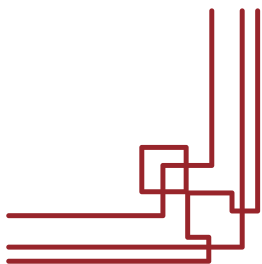
It was a time of amazing artistic development, and notable writers and composers were emerging, including Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein II, Noel Coward, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart. The world of celebrity was also changing, and the Great White Way was creating stars such as the Marx Brothers, Al Jolson and W.C. Fields. *Ziegfeld's Follies* and its glorification of the American girl helped open the door for the rise of the modern woman. Flappers, in their short skirts, heavy makeup, smoking and drinking in public, were becoming high-profile superstars dominating the popular media. Talk of the town trend-setters Louise Brooks, Clara Bow, Gloria Swanson and Josephine Baker were redefining womanhood with new attitudes and new freedoms.

*The Drowsy Chaperone* is a parody of 1920s musical comedies. With its story of a young couple overcoming obstacles before finally marrying, it's a typical "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl" construct. Its stock characters are easily recognizable from books, movies and popular culture. Because the audience already knows the type, the story moves along quickly—no need for a long, drawn-out backstory—we can jump right into the complicated plot! Its characters include a beautiful ingénue, her rich, handsome fiancé, his bumbling best friend, her long-suffering producer, his scatter-brained chorus girlfriend, a couple of comedic gangsters, a Latin lover, a mixed-up matron, her reliable butler, and a comedienne full of breezy references to sex and booze.

The stock characters can be traced back to the vaudeville days, and so take their inspiration from portrayals of the past. Old movies and YouTube clips offer excellent opportunities to see some world-class performances that helped shape the style of the show.



# The Players



**MAN IN CHAIR:** Our narrator; he describes the action and the songs in his favorite musical, *The Drowsy Chaperone*. The Man in Chair, though not a stock character, frames the story and offers insight and commentary on the musical within the play.

**MRS. TOTTENDALE:** The wealthy widow and host of the wedding is flighty, eccentric, often times forgetful. Charming and bubbly, she is oblivious to the confusion her behavior creates. Check out Billie Burke in the film *Dinner at Eight* and Margaret Dumont in *Animal Crackers* to see other examples of the mixed-up matron.

**UNDERLING:** Mrs. Tottendale's stoic and acerbic butler. Arthur Treacher in *Thank You, Jeeves!* and Eric Blore in *Top Hat* are prime examples of scene-stealing stony-faced servants.

**JANET VAN DE GRAFF:** Former showgirl and soon to be a bride. Attractive, vivacious, with an outgoing personality, Janet loves being the center of attention and is the consummate 1920s ingénue. Like Clara Bow, the "it girl" starlet of the '20s and '30s, Janet is a superstar with loads of sex appeal and personality. Watch Clara Bow in *My Lady of Whims* to see just what makes a girl "it"!

**THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Janet's guardian is a carefree woman of the world. She drinks (despite Prohibition) and speaks in double entendres; she's a Mae West type. But perhaps the real inspiration for the Drowsy Chaperone is the Canadian-born British comedienne Beatrice Lillie. Bea Lillie starred in revues and light comedies, becoming known for her parodies of old-fashioned, flowery performances, absurd songs and sketches and, of course, her rousing anthems. Most of her work was done on stage, as she preferred playing for a live audience, but you can check out her final film role as the comic villainess Mrs. Meers in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

**ROBERT MARTIN:** The eternally optimistic groom. He's a typical 1920s romantic lead—debonair and dashing with matinee idol good looks. Check out 1920s actors John Gilbert and Ronald Coleman, and for '30s and '40s inspiration, see Tyrone Power and Cary Grant—all examples of heartthrobs from the stage and screen!

**GEORGE:** Robert's best man. Loyal, sincere, but on pins and needles about doing a good job, George makes looking out for Robert his top priority so that the wedding will come off without a hitch. Check out Edward Everett Horton in *The Gay Divorcee* to see the ultimate befuddled sidekick.

**FELDZIEG:** The producer. Sarcastic, impatient, overbearing and insensitive, his name evokes legendary Florenz Ziegfeld, to date the most important and influential producer in the history of Broadway. His yearly produced revues, the *Ziegfeld Follies*, began in 1907 and continued until 1931. After his death, the *Follies* lived on until 1957. The real-life Flo Ziegfeld was married to Billie Burke (forever remembered as Glinda the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*).

**KITTY:** A typical dumb blonde chorine. Feldzieg's girlfriend, she will do anything to move up from the chorus to the lead. The film *The Gold Diggers of 1933*, gives insight to the unglamorous lives of the hard-working chorus girl. For inspiration for Feldzieg and Kitty's relationship, see comedy duo Gracie Allen and George Burns.

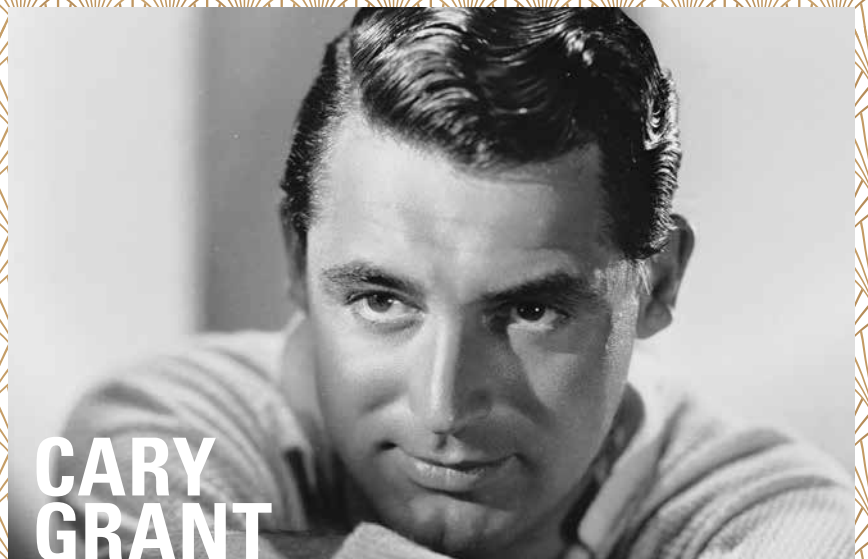
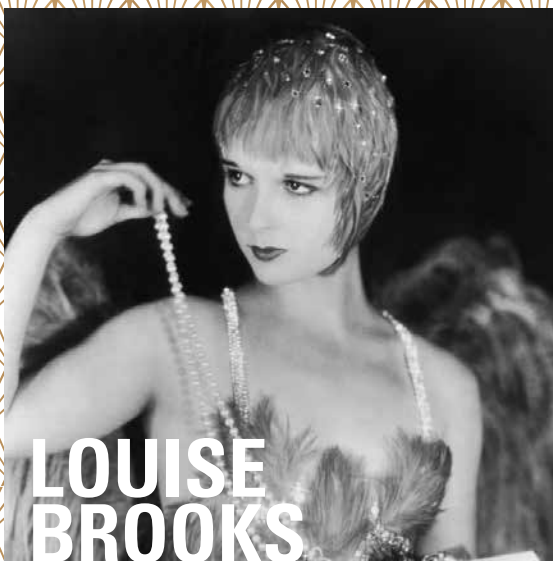
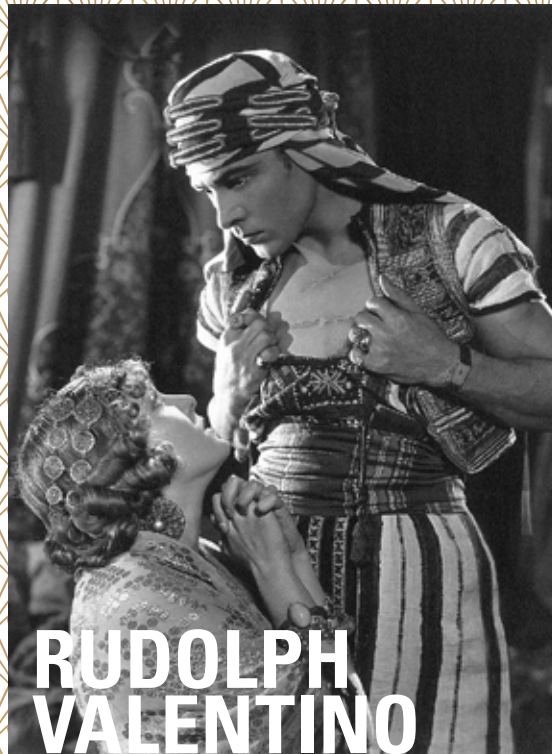
**ALDOLPHO:** The womanizing cad. With his vaudeville-style acting and vaguely Spanish/Italian accent, Aldolpho is the ultimate Casanova. While he desires to be a Rudolph Valentino, he's really more of a Pepe LePew. See Raul Roulien in *Flying Down to Rio* and Cesar Romero in *Weekend in Havana* for examples of lady's men who were the bee's knees!

**THE GANGSTERS:** Two fun-loving hooligans disguised as pastry chefs. They are typical 1920s comics full of puns and slapstick bits. Check out Keenan Wynn and James Whitmore as Lippy and Slug in the film *Kiss Me, Kate*.

**TRIX:** An aviatrix. Trix is what is known as a *deus ex machina*, from the ancient Greek literally meaning god out of a machine, an improbable device to resolve a difficult plot. Trix is there to save the day!









BUSBY BERKELEY

# People, Places and Things

**BUSBY BERKELEY:** a pioneering director-choreographer of theatre and film, he devised elaborate musical production numbers using a large number of showgirls and props that often involved complex geometric patterns

**CHINOISERIE:** a popular 18th-century style of Western art that imitated Chinese and East Asian design elements

**CHORINE:** a chorus girl

**DIXIE:** the southern states of the United States, especially those were part of the Confederacy

**ELOCUTIONIST:** one who gives lessons on the art of public speaking, focusing on voice and gestures

**FOURTH WALL:** a theatre term that describes the space separating the audience from the action onstage. Breaking the fourth wall happens when the actor directly addresses the audience

**LOTHARIO:** a man who seduces and deceives women

**RONNY HOWARD:** Director Ron Howard. Known for his TV roles as Opie in *The Andy Griffiths Show* and Richie Cunningham on *Happy Days*, he also played Winthrop in the film musical *The Music Man* (1962)

**TINY TIM:** a performer best known for playing the ukulele and singing in a falsetto voice

**VAUDEVILLE:** a style of theatrical entertainment popular in the 19th and early 20th century that featured songs, dances, skits, acrobatics, magic and comedy

# Cocktails and Desserts



**GIBSON:** a dry martini garnished with a pickled onion

**GIMLET:** a cocktail with vodka or gin, lime juice and simple syrup

**GIN RICKEY:** a drink with gin, lime juice and soda water

**HIGHBALL:** a cocktail served in a tall glass, typically whiskey and club soda

**OLD FASHIONED:** a cocktail made with whiskey, sugar, water and bitters

**BISCOTTI:** an Italian almond biscuit baked twice, first in a loaf, then sliced

**CANNOLI:** an Italian tube-shaped shell of fried pastry dough with a sweet, creamy filling usually containing ricotta

**ÉCLAIR:** an oblong pastry made with light dough filled with a cream and topped with chocolate icing

**GANACHE:** a glaze, icing, sauce or filling for pastries made from chocolate and cream

**MACAROON:** a small chewy cookie made with sugar, egg whites, ground almonds or coconut.

**PETIT FOUR:** a small, bite-sized piece of cake, frosted and elaborately decorated

**PROFITEROLE:** a small, round cream puff made from pastry dough filled with whipped cream, custard or pastry cream

**TRIFLE:** an English dessert made with fruit, a thin layer of ladyfingers soaked in sherry or brandy, and layers of custard, jam and whipped cream

**TRUFFLE:** a chocolate sweet, traditionally made with a chocolate ganache center coated in chocolate, cocoa powder or chopped toasted nuts





# Recommended Viewing

**ANIMAL CRACKERS** (1930) Mayhem and zaniness ensue when a valuable painting goes missing during a party for African explorer Captain Spaulding.

**DINNER AT EIGHT** (1933) A New York socialite arranges a dinner party where nothing goes as planned except, of course, that dinner is served precisely at eight.

**FLYING DOWN TO RIO** (1933) An aviating band leader who keeps getting fired for his flirtatious behavior falls for a Brazilian beauty who is already engaged to his friend.

**THE GAY DIVORCEE** (1934) Sparks fly and song-and-dance numbers ensue when a soon to be divorcee goes to England and meets a dashing performer.

**THE GEORGE BURNS AND GRACIE ALLEN SHOW** (1950 – 1958) TV situation comedy starring married duo Burns and Allen.

**THE GOLD DIGGERS OF 1933** (1933) Life gets tough for a showgirl and her pals when Broadway closes down until a wealthy composer saves the day by writing and bankrolling a new musical.

**KISS ME, KATE** (1953) Back-stage complications and misunderstandings with mobsters materialize when feuding exes star in a musical version of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*.

**MY LADY OF WHIMS** (1925) A wealthy father hires a detective to protect his carefree daughter from the clutches of her bohemian lifestyle in Greenwich Village. Will he bring her home or fall in love?

**THANK YOU, JEEVES!** (1936) Jeeves attempts to keep his employer Bertie out of trouble, but a damsel in distress foils the plan.

**THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE** (1967) Feisty flapper Millie hopes to marry her rich boss, despite her growing attraction to penniless paperclip salesman Jimmy. Can Millie find true love and save her roommate from being sold into white slavery?

**TOP HAT** (1935) Mistaken identities complicate this screwball comedy in which an American dancer travels to London to star in a show where he meets and attempts (with little success) to impress a wealthy model.

**WEEKEND IN HAVANA** (1941) When a ship accident ruins a stubborn salesclerk's holiday to Havana, a stuffy company fix-it man takes her there himself. He hires a gigolo with gambling debts and a jealous girlfriend to make sure she has a romance filled weekend.

**THE ZIEGFELD FOLLIES** (1945) Legendary showman Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., who now resides in Heaven, hopes to mount one last magical Broadway revue.







## Resources

<http://www.musicals101.com>

Hinton, Peter. *The Drowsy Chaperone Study Guide*, National Arts Centre English Theatre, 2009  
<http://artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/drowsychaperone.pdf>

Royston, Peter. *The Drowsy Chaperone Study Guide*  
[http://sopaa.org/v1/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/Drowsy\\_StudyGuide.pdf](http://sopaa.org/v1/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/Drowsy_StudyGuide.pdf)

<https://www.nypl.org/voices/blogs/blog-channels/musical-of-the-month>

<https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/ziegfelfd-follies/>

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/ziegfelfd-follies>