Audio Description Notes for Sweat

WELCOME

Welcome to the Guthrie Theater's production of Sweat. This play was written by Lynn Nottage and directed by Tamilla Woodard.

My name is Laura Wiebers, and I will be your audio describer for this performance, which is approximately 2 hours, 30 minutes and includes one 20-minute intermission.

Sweat takes place in the Rust Belt town of Reading, Pennsylvania — a blue-collar community with generations of hardworking folks, many of whom work at Olstead’s factory and down cold beers together after hours. But the post-Y2K economy is changing, NAFTA is a new reality and rumors fly about layoffs. Promotions and pride inevitably collide, forming cracks in decades-old friendships that crumble when the factory breaks with the union.

From the politically charged opening scene to its electrifying conclusion, Sweat boldly confronts issues of race, immigration, deindustrialization and the ever-slipping grip on middle-class life — all with Nottage’s signature humor and heart.

This production contains profanity, racial slurs, sexual/suggestive content, references to substance abuse and suicide, the use of prop cigarettes and depictions of physical violence, including one scene with stage blood.

STAGING

The play is set in a local bar and various places in Reading, Pennsylvania, which is located in Berks County. Scenes move between 2000 and 2008.

The stage is framed with panels of metal joined together, running along the left, top and right sides of the stage. Each panel can become a screen onto which news headlines and clips are projected, sometimes at the same time.

The curtain is down at the start of the show, but it’s not a typical fabric curtain. It has the appearance of many sheets of rusted, corrugated metal riveted together. During scene changes, new headlines scroll across the top of the metal curtain. Two, three or four headlines are displayed at the same time, all for different news stories. The stories cover topics such as the presidential election of 2008, stock exchange updates, local Reading news and more.

At the beginning of each act, the scenes are staged in front of the metal curtain, and they happen in 2008. Then the curtain is raised to reveal the local bar where most of the story unfolds. The majority of the bar scenes take place in 2000.
STAGING (continued)

The back wall of the bar contains several shelves holding a variety of items, such as bottles of liquor, illuminated neon signs advertising brands of beer, a small TV, colored lights strung across one of the shelves and a baseball bat.

The floor has a worn checkerboard pattern. Three black, vinyl stools sit in front of the bar. At the left side of the stage, closer to the audience, there are a few small, round tables and black, vinyl chairs. At the right side of the stage, closer to the audience, there is an old jukebox. Next to the jukebox is a green, vinyl booth with a table in front of it.

The bar has two doors. The door at the left is a swinging door that leads to a storage area used by the people who work in the bar. The door at the right is where patrons enter and exit the bar. Behind the bar is a dimly lit backstage area where pieces of industrial metal equipment are barely visible in the shadows.

One section of the corrugated metal curtain can be raised on its own, and characters sit or stand in front of it. This area is just outside the bar, likely in the back alley, where patrons smoke and employees take their breaks.

CAST, CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

The first scene in Act One takes place in front of the metal curtain in 2008. A parole officer holds two separate conversations with two of his parolees: Jason, on the right side of the stage, and Chris, on the left side of the stage, each in a separate pool of light.

**Evan**, the parole officer, is played by Darius Dotch. He is a middle-aged Black man wearing a leather jacket, dark trousers and leather shoes.

**Jason**, one of his parolees, is played by Noah Plomgren. He is a young white man wearing a knit cap, which he removes to reveal a shaved head. He has white supremacist tattoos across his forehead, a black eye and a cut lip. He wears a hoodie, camouflage pants and tennis shoes. He is Tracey’s son, and in later scenes, we meet his younger self back in 2000, where he wears a baseball cap over red, curly hair, a tan jacket, jeans and work boots.

**Chris**, the other parolee, is played by Terry Bell. He is a young Black man wearing a hoodie, jeans and tennis shoes. He fidgets and has clenched fists throughout the conversation. He is Cynthia’s son, and in later scenes, we meet his younger self back in 2000, where he also wears a baseball cap, a tan jacket, jeans and work boots.

Later scenes in Acts One and Two take place at the local bar eight years earlier.

**Stan**, the bartender, is played by Terry Hempleman. He is a middle-aged, balding white man wearing a checked flannel shirt, jeans and tennis shoes. He is unable to bend his right leg and walks with a pronounced limp.
CAST, CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES (continued)

Tracey, an employee at Olstead’s factory and Jason’s mother, is played by Mary Bacon. She is a middle-aged white woman wearing a sparkly, tight-fitting top, a denim miniskirt, black tights and black, high-heeled boots.

Cynthia, Tracey’s best friend and Chris’s mother, also works at Olstead’s and is played by Lynnette R. Freeman. She is a middle-aged Black woman wearing a sequined tank top and jeans. She is dancing in bare feet (her shoes are tucked under a nearby table).

Jessie, their friend and fellow employee at Olstead’s, is played by Amy Staats. She is a middle-aged white woman wearing a full-length, bright pink dress and sparkly platform shoes. At the start of the scene, she is passed out in the booth with her face planted on the table.

In later scenes, the women are dressed in casual shirts, jeans and work boots with their hair tied back in ponytails or with scarves.

Oscar, the busser at the bar, is played by Antonio Rios-Luna. He is a young Latinx man with long, dark hair worn in a braid down his back. He wears an apron over a simple work shirt, pants and work shoes.

Brucie, Cynthia’s estranged husband and Chris’s father, is played by Ansa Akyea. He is a middle-aged, balding Black man with a graying beard. He wears a worn leather jacket, jeans and work shoes.

THINGS TO KNOW

Playwright Lynn Nottage is the first, and remains the only, woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice (Ruined in 2009 and Sweat in 2017).

She began working on Sweat in 2011 after reading an article in The New York Times about Reading, Pennsylvania, which had the dubious distinction of being among the poorest municipalities in the nation. She wrote Sweat after conducting extensive interviews with the citizens of Reading. The play was originally slated to be part of the Guthrie’s 2019–2020 Season, but the production was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nottage completed a second play based on her Reading research. Formerly titled Floyd’s but renamed Clyde’s after the death of George Floyd, the play was commissioned by former Guthrie Artistic Director Joe Dowling and its world premiere at the Guthrie in 2019. Clyde’s opened on Broadway in 2021 and received several Tony Award nominations.

Nottage had two shows open on Broadway in fall 2021: Clyde’s and MJ the Musical featuring the music of pop icon Michael Jackson.