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Dear Friends,

Frederick Knott’s *Dial M for Murder* is a classic thriller and a favorite among fans of the genre, which is beloved for its gripping narratives, intricate schemes and edge-of-your-seat suspense. Like any good thriller, it sends us on a roller coaster of emotions — curiosity, excitement, fear — as the story relentlessly pursues each unraveling secret and immerses us in a world of intrigue.

We love thrillers because they deliver a rush of adrenaline without placing us in any real danger; we participate in the solve, but from a safe distance. We have the privilege of knowing more details than the characters, which allows us to judge their actions and feel immense satisfaction when we figure things out before they do. In the hands of local playwright Jeffrey Hatcher, this brilliant adaptation offers new themes of identity and risk: When pushed to the brink, which identity do you stand by? What are the consequences of not being true to yourself?

Hatcher has been a key contributor to the artistic legacy of Minnesota and the Guthrie, and we’re honored to feature his work once again. I’m also thrilled that our Senior Artistic Producer Tracy Brigden is making her Guthrie directorial debut and infusing this production with both her expertise and deep love of the genre. She and Hatcher have been friends and collaborators for decades (see page 16 for their joint interview), and their offstage camaraderie only enhances the story about to unfold. *Dial M for Murder* is one of their favorite thrillers, and I’m confident it will soon be one of yours.

Let the games begin,
Dial M for Murder
adapted by Jeffrey Hatcher
from the original by Frederick Knott
directed by Tracy Brigden

CREATIVE TEAM

SCENIC DESIGNER Walt Spangler
COSTUME DESIGNER Valérie Thérèse Bart
LIGHTING DESIGNER Xavier Pierce
SOUND DESIGNER/COMPOSER John Gromada
VOCAL COACH Keely Wolter
FIGHT DIRECTOR Aaron Preusse
INTIMACY BY Doug Scholz-Carlson
RESIDENT CASTING DIRECTOR Jennifer Liestman
STAGE MANAGER Karl Alphonso*
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER Kathryn Sam Houkom*
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Vanessa Brooke Agnes
NYC CASTING CONSULTANT McCorkle Casting, Ltd.
FIGHT CAPTAIN Lori Vega*

Acknowledgments
Dial M for Murder (Hatcher) is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com

Originally commissioned and produced at The Old Globe (Barry Edelstein, Erna Finci Viterbi Artistic Director; Timothy J. Shields, Managing Director).

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CAST
in alphabetical order

INSPECTOR HUBBARD  Brian Thomas Abraham*
MARGOT WENDICE  Gretchen Egolf*
LES GATE  Peter Christian Hansen*
TONY WENDICE  David Andrew Macdonald*
MAXINE HADLEY  Lori Vega*

Recorded Voices
Pearce Bunting* (BBC Interviewer); Jeffrey Hatcher (BBC Newsreader);
David Andrew Macdonald* (Tony Wendice); Lori Vega* (Maxine Hadley)

Understudies
Understudies never substitute for performers unless announced prior to the performance.
Pearce Bunting* (Lesgate/Tony Wendice)
Ann Michels* (Margot Wendice/Maxine Hadley)
John Middleton* (Inspector Hubbard)

*Member of Actors’ Equity Association

SETTING
The living room of the Wendice flat in London, 1954.
This production will be performed with one 15-minute intermission.

SPECIAL THANKS
The Guthrie gratefully recognizes the following producers:

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Associate Producers
Martha Goldberg Aronson & Daniel Aronson, Abdhish & Mary Bhavsar,
Jennifer Reedstrom Bishop & Jon Bishop, Dr. Mary Anne Ebert & Paul Stembler,
Diane & Tony Hofstede, Lisa Johnson Kelly & Chris Kelly, Renee D. Montz,
Anne Paape, ReBecca & Mark Roloff, Gerald & Julie Rudowsky,
The Jan Willette Family, Tom & Nancy Willette

GUTHRIE THEATER \ 7
BIOGRAPHIES

Cast

Brian Thomas Abraham (Inspector Hubbard) GUTHRIE Debut. THEATER Broadway: Original companies of Life of Pi and Harry Potter and the Cursed Child; Regional (selected): The Huntington; Center Theatre Group (Mark Taper Forum); Geffen Playhouse; Berkshire Theatre Festival; Milwaukee Rep; Laguna Playhouse; San Diego Repertory Theatre. FILM/TELEVISION “Super Pumped,” “Brooklyn Nine-Nine,” “The Shield,” “The Young and the Restless,” “Drake & Josh,” “Victorious,” “Good Fortune.” AUDIO Award-winning audiobook narrator. TRAINING University of North Carolina School of the Arts. www.brianthomasabraham.com

Gretchen Egolf (Margot Wendice) GUTHRIE A Streetcar Named Desire. THEATER Broadway: Jackie, Ring Round the Moon (Lincoln Center Theater on Broadway); Off-Broadway (selected): Second Stage; The Flea; Vineyard Theatre; WP Theater; London: The Autumn Garden (Jermyn Street Theatre); International: Suddenly Last Summer (The English Theatre Frankfurt); Regional (selected): Twelfth Night, Candida, As You Like It (Pittsburgh Public Theater); A Picasso, Faith Healer, Private Lives (Barrington Stage Company); The Constant Wife (Denver Center); Betrayal (The Huntington). FILM/TELEVISION Selected: The Son, The Talented Mr. Ripley; “Hijack,” “Doctor Who,” “The Good Wife,” “Law & Order,” “Journeyman.” TEACHING Selected: LAMDA; RCSSD. TRAINING The Juilliard School. www.gretchenegolf.com

Peter Christian Hansen (Lesgate) GUTHRIE Murder on the Orient Express, Freud’s Last Session, Clybourne Park, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Dollhouse, Macbeth, A View From the Bridge, Jane Eyre and others. THEATER Penumbra Theatre: benevolence, Wedding Band; Jungle Theater: Venus in Fur; Park Square Theatre (selected): Holmes and Watson, Agatha Christie: Rule of Thumb, Opus, Enchanted April, Romeo and Juliet; Ten Thousand Things: Othello; Gremlin Theatre (selected): The Thin Place, Journey’s End, Ideation, Rocket to the Moon, H2O, Sea Marks, Burn This, After Miss Julie; Dark & Stormy Productions; Mixed Blood Theatre; Torch Theater; Playwrights’ Center. AWARDS Ivey Awards (Burn This, Clybourne Park)

David Andrew Macdonald (Tony Wendice) GUTHRIE Debut. THEATER Broadway: Skylight, Rocky the Musical, Mamma Mia!, Coram Boy, Two Shakespearean Actors; First National Tour: An Inspector Calls; Off-Broadway: Paradise Lost (Theatre Row); The Green Heart, A Night and Her Stars (MTC); Regional (selected): Alley Theatre; Arena Stage; Cleveland Play House; Geva Theatre Center; Hartford Stage; Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre; McCarter Theatre Center; The Old Globe; Studio Theatre; Yale Rep. FILM/TELEVISION Tommy Battles the Silver Sea Dragon, Movement and Location; “Elementary,” “Person of Interest,” “The Blacklist,” “The Big C,” “Sex and the City,” “Law & Order,” 10 years as Prince Edmund on “Guiding Light.” TRAINING The Juilliard School. He is also a volunteer firefighter and EMR in the state of Minnesota. www.davidandrewmacdonald.com
Lori Vega (Maxine Hadley) GUTHRIE Debut. THEATER Off-Broadway: Downstate (Playwrights Horizons); New York: The Scream Inside (Working Theater); One Night, P*SSY C*CK KNOW NOTHING, Pay No Attention to the Girl (Target Margin Theater); The Bacchae (The Classical Theatre of Harlem); Regional: The Good John Proctor (Trinity Rep); Babel, Ushuaia Blue (CATF); Nonsense and Beauty (Repertory Theatre St. Louis); Roe (Connecticut Repertory Theatre); Halftime With Don (NJRep); A Midsummer Night’s Dream, As You Like It (Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival). AUDIO Audible: The Method, I Think You’re Projecting. FILM/TELEVISION “Pretty Little Liars,” “And Just Like That,” “FBI,” “Bull,” “El Deafo.” TRAINING LAMDA; B.A., Cornell University. @thelorivega (IG), www.lorivega.net

Pearce Bunting (US Lesgate/Tony Wendice) GUTHRIE Debut. THEATER Broadway: Mamma Mia! (Winter Garden Theatre); National Tour: Mamma Mia!; Regional (selected): A Unique Assignment (upcoming), Diesel Heart, Parks, The Things They Carried, All the Way, The Great Society, Radio Man (History Theatre); Five Minutes of Heaven (Illusion Theater); Peter and the Starcatcher (Theater Latté Da); As You Like It, Pericles (Ten Thousand Things); Holmes and Watson (Park Square Theatre); The Seagull, The Master Builder (Theatre Novi Most); A Doll’s House (Jo Strømgren Kompani). FILM/TELEVISION The Public Domain, Meat, First Person Singular; “Boardwalk Empire,” “Law & Order: SVU,” “Homicide: Life on the Street.” AWARDS Barrymore Award (Best Performance by a Lead Actor). TRAINING Yale School of Drama


John Middleton (US Inspector Hubbard) GUTHRIE Debut. THEATER Jungle Theater; Park Square Theatre; Torch Theater; Theater Latté Da; Gremlin Theatre; Frank Theatre; Girl Friday Productions; Sandbox Theatre; Carlyle Brown & Company; Actors Theater of Minnesota
Creative Team

THEATER Broadway: Never Gonna Dance (book); Plays (selected): Three Viewings, Compleat Female Stage Beauty, A Picasso; Adaptations (selected): Mitch Albom’s Tuesdays With Morrie; Henry James’ The Turn of the Screw; Frederick Knott’s Wait Until Dark; Regional/Off-Broadway (selected): MTC; Primary Stages; Red Bull Theater; The Old Globe; Yale Rep; Geffen Playhouse; Seattle Rep; Children’s Theatre Company; History Theatre. FILM/TELEVISION Stage Beauty, Casanova, The Duchess, Mr. Holmes, The Good Liar; “Columbo,” “The Mentalist.” AWARDS Selected: Rosenthal New Play Prize; Charles Frankel Prize; Barrymore Award; Charles MacArthur Fellowship Award; McKnight Fellowship; George Russell Billingham Award; 2013 Ivey Lifetime Achievement Award

Frederick Knott (Author) was a British writer once described by The New York Times as a “notoriously unprolific playwright.” He crafted just three plays in his career, all of which were thrillers: Dial M for Murder (1952), Write Me a Murder (1961) and Wait Until Dark (1966). After leaving the Royal Artillery in 1946, he wrote Dial M for Murder over the course of 18 months. It was rejected by several theater producers until the BBC made it a television series in 1952. A subsequent stage production in London led to the play being staged on Broadway by the end of that same year, running for 16 months. The Alfred Hitchcock film premiered in 1954. Knott died in New York City in 2002.

Tracy Brigden (Director) GUTHRIE Directing debut; Senior Artistic Producer since 2022. THEATER Artistic Director at City Theatre (16 years); Freelance Directing (selected): Atlantic Theater Company; Hartford Stage; Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park; Westport Country Playhouse; New York Stage and Film; Barrington Stage Company; TheaterWorks Hartford; Pittsburgh Public Theater; Prior to City Theatre: Artistic Associate at MTC; Associate Artistic Director at Hartford Stage. AWARDS Finalist for the Zelda Fichandler Award; Multiple Connecticut Critics Circle Awards, including Best Director and Best Production; Berkshire Theatre Critics Award. TRAINING M.F.A., Dramatic Writing, Point Park University; B.S., Theatre – Directing, Northwestern University. www.tracybrigden.com

Walt Spangler (Scenic Designer) GUTHRIE A Christmas Carol (2010–2019), My Fair Lady, Time Stands Still, Arms and the Man, The Importance of Being Earnest (2013). THEATER Broadway: Between Riverside and Crazy, Escape to Margaritaville, Tuck Everlasting, Desire Under the Elms, Scandalous, A Christmas Story, Hollywood Arms; Off-Broadway: MTC; The Public Theater; Atlantic Theater Company; Playwrights Horizons; Classic Stage Company; Signature Theatre; Regional: Goodman Theatre; Steppenwolf; La Jolla Playhouse; Shakespeare Theatre Company; Yale Rep; Williamstown Theatre Festival; Hartford Stage; Long Wharf Theatre; Goodspeed Musicals; Mark Taper Forum; Children’s Theatre Company. OPERA MN Opera; San Francisco Opera; Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre; ENO; Lyric Opera of Chicago. TRAINING M.F.A., Yale School of Drama. www.waltspangler.com
Valérie Thérèse Bart (Costume Designer) GUTHRIE Into the Woods, The Servant of Two Masters. THEATER Regional: Poor Yella Rednecks (South Coast Repertory/MTC, world premiere); It’s Christmas, Carol! (OSF, world premiere); A Doll’s House, Part 2 (Actors Theatre of Louisville); Vietgone (Alley Theatre/Denver Center); The Great Leap (Denver Center/Seattle Rep, world premiere); Off-Broadway: Wives (Playwrights Horizons, world premiere); Little Women (Primary Stages); Too Heavy for Your Pocket (Roundabout Theatre Company, world premiere); Vanity Fair (Pearl Theatre, world premiere). OPERA A Thousand Acres (Des Moines Metro Opera, world premiere); Listen, Wilhelmina! (Wolf Trap Opera, world premiere). OTHER For You, Paige (TikTok musical, world premiere); Tina Packer’s Women of Will. www.valeriebart.com

Xavier Pierce (Lighting Designer) GUTHRIE ‘Art’, The Tempest, Blithe Spirit, Native Gardens, Harvey. THEATER The Public Theater; Steppenwolf; OSF; Asolo Rep; Chicago Shakespeare Theater; Ford’s Theatre; Portland Stage; McCarter Theatre Center; Long Wharf Theatre; Repertory Theatre St. Louis; Seattle Rep; Arena Stage; California Shakes; Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park; Indiana Repertory Theatre; Arden Theatre Company; PlayMakers Repertory Company; Westport Country Playhouse; George Street Playhouse; Syracuse Stage; Two River Theater; Olney Theatre Center; Intiman Theatre; Arizona Theatre Company; Florida Studio Theatre; Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre; Triad Stage. OTHER Member of United Scenic Artists 829. TEACHING Faculty, Florida A&M University. TRAINING M.F.A., Design for Stage and Film, NYU Tisch School of the Arts; Florida A&M University

John Gromada (Sound Designer/Composer) GUTHRIE The Carpetbagger’s Children, Love’s Fire. THEATER Broadway: 40+ productions, including Birthday Candles, All My Sons, Torch Song, The Elephant Man, The Trip to Bountiful, The Best Man, A Bronx Tale, Rabbit Hole, Clybourne Park, Dividing the Estate, Seminar, Proof, Enchanted April and A Few Good Men; Off-Broadway: Drinking in America, A Sherlock Carol, The Cake, Amy and the Orphans, Old Hats, Measure for Measure, The Orphans’ Home Cycle, Shipwrecked!, The Skriker, Machinal; Hundreds of productions at major regional theaters. FILM/TELEVISION A Bronx Tale, The Trip to Bountiful, The Interrogators, Showing Roots. AWARDS Drama Desk Awards; Lucille Lortel Award; Obie Award; Hewes Design Awards; NEA Opera/Musical Theater Fellowship. TRAINING Duke University

Keely Wolter (Vocal Coach) GUTHRIE ‘Art’, For the People, The Importance of Being Earnest, Shane, Blues for an Alabama Sky, Sally & Tom, Vietgone, Sweat, Noura, The Great Leap. THEATER Theater Latté Da: Chicago, Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Five Points, Assassins, Man of La Mancha, Six Degrees of Separation, Peter and the Starcatcher, Ragtime, Lullaby, Sweeney Todd, All Is Calm; Jungle Theater: Georgiana & Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley, Is Edward Snowden Single?, The Wickhams, Miss Bennet, Lone Star Spirits, Le Switch, Constellations; Penumbra Theatre: benevolence, Wedding Band; MN Opera: The Fix. TRAINING Royal Central School of Speech and Drama; Viterbo University
Aaron Preusse (Fight Director) GUTHRIE Over 25 productions, recently including ‘Art’, For the People, Into the Woods and Murder on the Orient Express. THEATER Ordway: Jesus Christ Superstar, The Pirates of Penzance; MN Opera: Carmen; Park Square Theatre: Hamlet; Commonweal Theatre Company: The Three Musketeers; Red Bird Theatre: Buried Child; Gremlin Theatre: Dial M for Murder; Theatre Pro Rata: The Illusion; Lyric Arts: Superior Donuts; Exposed Brick Theatre: Muyehpen; Theatre in the Round: The Three Musketeers; Old Log Theatre: The Play That Goes Wrong. FILM/TELEVISION Stunt Coordinator: Bitcon, Profile of a Killer; Utility Stunts: Marmalade, Body Language, Christmas Break-In, Thin Ice. www.fakefighting.com

Doug Scholz-Carlson (Intimacy) GUTHRIE Intimacy: A Christmas Carol; Fight Direction: Born Yesterday, Long Day’s Journey Into Night; Actor: A Christmas Carol, Sweeney Todd, Gross Indecency. THEATER Artistic Director: Great River Shakespeare Festival; Director: Hamlet (upcoming), The Winter’s Tale, Cymbeline, Macbeth, Shakespeare in Love; Actor: Henry V, The African Company Presents Richard III. OPERA Director: La Fanciulla del West, Albert Herring (MN Opera); Sweeney Todd (Austin Opera); Intimacy Director: Dead Man Walking, Medea, Fire Shut Up in My Bones (Metropolitan Opera); Romeo and Juliet (San Diego Opera); Don Giovanni, Flight (MN Opera). TRAINING M.F.A., University of Washington; B.A., St. Olaf College

Jennifer Liestman (Resident Casting Director) GUTHRIE Artistic Team member since 2003; More than 70 productions, workshops and readings since 2015, including ‘Art’, For the People, The Importance of Being Earnest, Shane, Into the Woods, Murder on the Orient Express, Hamlet, The Little Prince, Sally & Tom, Vietgone, Sweat, A Raisin in the Sun, The Tempest, A Christmas Carol, Dickens’ Holiday Classic, Noura, Floyd’s, West Side Story, Familiar, Watch on the Rhine, Native Gardens and Disgraced. FILM/TELEVISION Casting Consultant: Master Servant. TEACHING University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater B.F.A. Acting Program; Other universities in MN and the U.S. TRAINING B.A., Theatre, MSU Moorhead

Kathryn Sam Houkom (Assistant Stage Manager) GUTHRIE Vietgone, The Tempest, The Glass Menagerie. THEATER Ordway: Beauty and the Beast, Irving Berlin’s White Christmas, In the Heights, Annie; Ten Thousand Things: Twelfth Night; Children’s Theatre Company (19 seasons, selected): Annie, Last Stop on Market Street, A Year With Frog and Toad, The Snowy Day and Other Stories, Cinderella, The Wizard of Oz, Peter Pan, Busytown, Alice in Wonderland, The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins; Artistry: Memphis; PRIME Productions: The Roommate; Minnesota Orchestra; MN Opera; Lookingglass; Virginia Stage Company; Steppenwolf; The Kennedy Center; Pearl Theatre (Off-Broadway); Contemporary American Theater Festival; Park Square Theatre; Mixed Blood Theatre

McCorkle Casting, Ltd. Pat McCorkle, C.S.A., and Rebecca Weiss, C.S.A. (NYC Casting Consultant for 2023-2024 Season) GUTHRIE 100+ productions since 1998. THEATER Broadway: 50+ productions, including On the Town, Amazing Grace, End of the Rainbow and A Few Good Men; Off-Broadway: 60+ productions, including Tribes, Our Town and Driving Miss Daisy; Regional: Hundreds of regional theaters, including Barrington Stage Company, George Street Playhouse and Connecticut Repertory Theatre. FILM/TELEVISION Currently casting six feature films for theatrical release; Previously, over 75 films, including three recent films for Hallmark, Premium Rush, Ghost Town, The Thomas Crown Affair, Die Hard With a Vengeance and Thirteenth Warrior; Select TV credits include “Twisted” (ABC), Humans for “Sesame Street,” “Californication” (Emmy Award nomination) and “Chappelle’s Show.” www.mccorklecasting.com
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Nothing sends a chill down your spine like a meticulously crafted thriller, and *Dial M for Murder* is inarguably one of the greats. Just ask Adapter Jeffrey Hatcher and Director Tracy Brigden, who have been tirelessly preparing to bring the sophisticated and suspenseful world of Frederick Knott’s classic tale to the Guthrie stage. We sat down with these two longtime friends and collaborators to learn more about the show and how they’re working to ensure the audience doesn’t miss a single delicious detail.

**J’KALEIN MADISON:** Rumor has it you two have worked together before. Describe your relationship leading up to *Dial M for Murder* at the Guthrie.

**TRACY BRIGDEN:** Jeffrey and I have worked together several times. I think our first collaboration was when I was the line producer for his play *Three Viewings* at Manhattan Theatre Club in New York City. Later, when I became Artistic Director at City Theatre, I thought: Who is one of my favorite American playwrights? Jeffrey Hatcher, of course. So I started programming his plays as often as I could. I commissioned him to write two plays for City Theatre, and I directed and produced several of his plays there, including *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

**JEFFREY HATCHER:** We also have cocktails a lot. It’s a very martini kind of relationship. [both laugh]

**JM:** I love that. Jeffrey, how does it feel to hear Tracy call you one of her favorite American playwrights?

**JH:** I find that hard to believe, but I’ll take it. It’s always wonderful to have a strong relationship with a director. Whenever Tracy and I work together, it’s very simpatico. The Guthrie is a sacred space, and it’s a great privilege to be here working with Tracy, especially for her Guthrie directorial debut.

**JM:** Jeffrey, what was your creative process like as you developed your stage adaptation of *Dial M for Murder*?
**JH:** *Dial M for Murder* is a nearly perfect play. I’m a big fan of Frederick Knott, who wrote the original play and the screenplay for the 1954 Alfred Hitchcock film. The first rule of adaptation is: Don’t screw it up. Whatever works, leave that alone. It’s like a Swiss watch: You might fiddle around with it, but you don’t want to upend the mechanism. My first challenge was making *Dial M for Murder* current without changing the time period. If you update things too much, suddenly the plot doesn’t work anymore. So I had to retain the original setting but throw in a few twists.

**JM:** Tracy, you’re a big fan of the Hitchcock film. As a director, what were your thoughts when you first read Jeffrey’s script?

**TB:** Jeffrey was so brilliant to keep the bones of the original but give it some new twists and turns to keep contemporary audiences on their toes. For instance, in the original play, Margot has an affair with a man named Max. In Jeffrey’s version, she has an affair with a woman named Maxine, making the extramarital affair a lesbian relationship. In the original play, Margot’s husband, Tony, is a tennis player. In Jeffrey’s version, he’s a failed writer. This ups the ante because now Tony has not only lost his wife to a woman — it’s a woman who is also a successful writer.

**JM:** While the lesbian relationship may be new to this story, history tells us that many closeted same-sex relationships were happening in the 1950s. How are you handling this aspect of the story?

**JH:** Making Margot’s lover a woman greatly increases the stakes. In 1954 England, two women being romantically involved was unheard of — unspoken. These relationships went on but were denied by society. In our costume discussions, we learned that women would wear a specific brooch during this time to signal “I’m available” to other women. It makes the secrets more closely held and the relationship between the lovers more fraught. Because of this, I think the audience will root for Margot and Maxine in ways they wouldn’t root for a heterosexual couple.
TB: It’s clear that Margot and Maxine have true feelings for each other. You know how hard they would have to fight to make that secret relationship work in those circumstances, so you’re more invested in their love story.

JM: Let’s talk about the playmaking process. How have you collaborated and leaned on each other in the rehearsal room?

TB: Jeffrey has the best sense of timing. If it’s not working in the rehearsal room, he can suggest one little thing — like an actor needs to emphasize a word or take a drink before they say the line — and it instantly clicks. Plus, his wicked, dry humor is always a joy to have in the room.

JH: When you’ve worked with someone for 25 years, like I have with Tracy, you don’t need to be so polite. You don’t have to say “That’s a good idea” while thinking “How do I kill this idea?” You can just say “I don’t think so” or “Let me play with it.” There’s less of a dance routine.

JM: Tracy, you mentioned humor earlier. How are you striking the balance between comedy and suspense onstage?

TB: Dial M for Murder isn’t knee-slapping funny, but there’s witty banter and situational humor that comes up. The characters are writers, so they’re smart and eloquent, and sometimes that makes them funny.

JH: Dial M for Murder was written for a proscenium stage where everyone is focused on the same point. Staging it on a thrust stage is exciting, but it’s also challenging. You don’t want people looking at A when they should be looking at B. Sometimes actors have to slow their motions so they go unnoticed. Sometimes you need pinspot lighting. The director must act like a filmmaker — cutting from close-up to medium to long shots so the audience knows exactly where to look. It’s sleight of hand: Don’t look here. Look there.

JM: The storytelling relies heavily on props. How do you keep all the details straight?

TB: Many props are clues, and many behaviors of the era involve props. For instance, the characters are constantly drinking cocktails. We’ve been joking that actor David Andrew Macdonald, who plays Tony, will have his bartender’s license by the end of the run. It’s a lot...
to keep straight, but once all the clues piece together at the end, it’s magic.

**JH:** It’s tricky because you have to play fair with the audience. If you say, “We know he did this because he ate a hot dog earlier,” you want the audience to think, “Did we see him eat a hot dog?” You must present opportunities for the audience to see things and then later suggest that if they were clever, they would have recognized them as clues. Thrillers are always wrestling with the audience in terms of expectations. They can’t get too far ahead of you. You want the audience to figure things out 90 seconds ahead of the characters — not 90 minutes.

**JM:** My last question is probably unfair, but I have to ask: What is your favorite thriller?

**TB:** Before we answer this, I think it’s important to distinguish thrillers from mysteries. In a mystery, we follow the detective sleuthing the crime and discover the clues along with them until the classic whodunit ending. In a thriller, we know right away who committed the crime, and we watch them do it. The question becomes: Will they get away with it?

**JH:** My favorite stage thriller is the original *Dial M for Murder*. My favorite movie thriller is Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest*. And *Laura* is a gorgeous murder-mystery film from the 1940s.

**TB:** My mother was a voracious fan of mysteries and thrillers, and I grew up with all those great stories. The first mystery I read was Nancy Drew’s *The Hidden Staircase*, so that will always have a place in my heart. But *Dial M for Murder* is up there for me.

**JH:** I also have to mention *The Silence of the Lambs*. I remember how my heart was beating during the scene where Clarice Starling is looking for Jame Gumb in the basement. That’s the real test of a thriller: Your body responds at a visceral level. You give your heart and your blood over to the story — with *blood* being the key word.
Both on the stage and on the screen, Frederick Knott’s masterpiece *Dial M for Murder* is widely acknowledged as one of the finest thrillers ever written. The play premiered at the Westminster Theatre in London in June 1952 and subsequently went on to an enormously successful run in New York City. The play was so popular that Warner Bros. purchased the film rights, allowing Alfred Hitchcock, the “Master of Suspense,” to bring Knott’s tale of murder and betrayal to the screen in 1954.

But what made *Dial M for Murder* so well received? Knott only wrote a handful of plays, so his reputation alone was insufficient to drive its reception. Instead, Knott’s crafting of *Dial M for Murder* deftly incorporated the two most important elements of any thriller: suspense and that skin-crawling feeling spectators experience when something that is usually safe and familiar becomes the exact opposite, sometimes referred to as “the uncanny.”

Thrillers themselves may feel relatively modern, but in fact, the genre is quite ancient. Some of the great epic poems of antiquity, like Homer’s “The Odyssey,” share characteristics with and use plot devices similar to present-day thrillers. Perhaps the most notable among these is suspense, which has been part of great storytelling long enough that even Aristotle described its value in *Poetics.*

According to Hitchcock, suspense requires an audience who knows as much information as possible. The central question of a thriller is “how”: How will the killer be caught? How will an innocent person accused of a crime be vindicated? This marks the thriller as distinct from mysteries, which focus on the identity of the crime’s perpetrator. In a thriller, the audience typically knows early on who the criminal is, and they can see and anticipate the action unfolding.

Audience knowledge marks a distinction between an event that is suspenseful and one that is surprising. In his interviews with filmmaker François Truffaut, Hitchcock explains the difference between these two often-confused emotional states with a simple story involving a bomb. If an audience observes a conversation between
two people and suddenly a bomb the audience was unaware of explodes, that is surprising. But if the audience sees the conversation, sees the bomb and can anticipate when the bomb is likely to explode, that knowledge inspires suspense. The audience is led to a heightened emotional state of anticipation. They hope that somehow the explosion will be stopped or the characters will make it to safety in time, and they desire to find a way to warn the characters of the impending danger in which they find themselves.

In *Dial M for Murder*, the audience is positioned as an uninvited voyeur in the dialogue between two characters who plot a murder. As a result, the entire plan is made visible from the outset; the audience is aware of the characters’ treachery in advance and they have no choice but to sit in anticipation of the events that will unfold. And yet, there are still surprises in store! Things don’t go quite as expected, which results in a shift in plans, and the question of how the truth will come to light remains open until the very last moments of the play.

But suspense (or the occasional surprise) alone is not enough to create a truly great thriller. What many of the most memorable thrillers have in common is that they make ordinary lives and places seem strange and suddenly dangerous: They include elements of what Sigmund Freud called “the uncanny.” The term refers to a feeling that most people have experienced but is challenging to fully describe or name. It’s the eerie sensation one has when presented with an object, space or situation that is familiar but unfamiliar at the same time. The most classic example is the feeling you get when looking at
an extremely realistic wax figure (or in more modern times, an incredibly lifelike robot). It might seem almost alive at first, but when viewed for more than a moment, it becomes clear that something is not quite right.

In *Dial M for Murder*, the uncanny presents itself slightly differently. Rather than an object or form creating a sense of disconnection, it is the space itself — the home — that creates a disturbance for the viewer. The setting of the play is the Wendice apartment. Typically we think of homes as places of safety and respite from the pressures of the world, but as the play unfolds, it becomes clear their London flat is anything but a safe home. And while the murder plot at the center of the story is ultimately unearthed within the space of that same apartment, the security of the home is never fully restored.

Hitchcock’s film adaptation of *Dial M for Murder* developed the feeling of the uncanny even further by shooting it in 3D technology to bring the spectator right into the action. In the early 1950s, audiences were still being introduced to 3D techniques, and the experience was quite a departure from sitting comfortably in a theater seat and watching the action unfold simply on the screen. Instead, 3D provoked a sense of mistrust in the viewer’s perception: They knew they were in the cinema and yet found themselves simultaneously within the space of the film. That sensation added to the overall feeling of insecurity developed by the film’s narrative itself. It remains the only movie Hitchcock ever filmed in 3D.

While Knott authored only a few plays, he quickly demonstrated his mastery of the use of both suspense and the uncanny to provide a thriller that continues to inspire audiences over 50 years later. By allowing the audience access to everything they need to know to see the danger arising, he manages the spectator’s anticipation and their hope that all will work out in the end.

---

**Kristen Tregar** received her Ph.D. from the joint program in Theatre at UC San Diego and UC Irvine. Previously, she earned an M.S. in Forensic Science from John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City and spent a year as an intern with the Westchester County Department of Public Safety, assisting the Identification Unit with crime scene processing, fingerprint analysis and ballistics.

This feature originally appeared in the July – August 2022 issue of The Old Globe’s *Performances Magazine*. It has been reprinted with permission and edited for style.
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Peter Artley  
Vivian Santana  
**Props Liaison**  
Jessica Kelley  

**PRODUCTION OVERHIRE**  
*Carpenters*  
Lillian Crawford  
Michael Hall  
**Jonathan Haller**  
**Scenic Artists**  
Annie Henly  
Sara Herman  
Erika Soukup  
**Costume Design Assistant**  
Abby Vaughan  
**Wardrobe Technician**  
Hannah Fiedler  
**Wig Assistants**  
Julii Acton  
**Valencia Montgomery Johnson**  
**Electricians**  
Paul Epton  
Jack Hinz  
**Andy Kedl**  
**Jack Hinz**  
**Karin Olson**  
**Props Artisan**  
Joseph Cruz  

*AS OF JANUARY 11, 2024*  
*M. Member of the Senior Management Team*  

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**GUTHRIE THEATER**  
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Many volunteers give their time and talents in support of the Guthrie’s activities. If you’d like to support the Guthrie by becoming a volunteer, apply at guthrietheater.org or email volunteers@guthrietheater.org.

The Guthrie is a member of the League of Resident Theatres.

The Guthrie is a member of the American Arts Alliance and Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, government advocacy groups at the federal and state levels, respectively.

The actors and stage managers employed in this production are members of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the U.S.

Directors and choreographers are members of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.

The scenic, costume, lighting, sound and projection designers in LORT theaters are represented by United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

Guthrie scenic artists are also represented by United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829.

Guthrie costume and wardrobe employees, stagehands and craftspersons are represented by IATSE Local 13.

All scenery, props and costumes are designed specifically for Guthrie productions and built in the theater’s shops.

OUR MISSION
The Guthrie Theater engages exceptional theater artists in the exploration of both classic and contemporary plays connecting the community we serve to one another and to the world. Through its extraordinary artists, staff and facility, the Guthrie is committed to the people of Minnesota and, from its place rooted deeply in the Twin Cities, influences the field as a leading 21st-century arts organization.

OUR VISION
The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

OUR CORE VALUES

Artistic Excellence

Community

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility

Fiscal Responsibility
MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

TROUPE VERTIGO: CIRQUE FAIRYTALES WITH THE MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

SAT MAR 2  7PM  Sarah Hicks, conductor
SUN MAR 3  2PM  Save 25% on kids' tickets for matinee show

Stunning acrobatics and vivid music combine in a visual and musical extravaganza featuring the Minnesota Orchestra and Troupe Vertigo. The Los Angeles-based circus-dance-theater group dazzles audiences across the country with powerful choreography. Featuring music from Prokofiev’s Cinderella and Tchaikovsky’s Sleeping Beauty. You and your whole family will be entertained by this mind-blowing, magical event!

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All artists, programs, dates and prices subject to change.
Experience Shakespeare’s History Plays performed in rotating repertory at the Guthrie for the first time in 30+ years. Featuring a single company of actors, this epic event will immerse audiences in England’s tumultuous monarchy like never before.

THREE THINGS TO KNOW

• Due to the large cast, multiple sets and extensive costumes, Shakespeare’s History Plays are rarely produced at this scale in the American theater.

• The Guthrie produced the History Plays during our 1990–1991 Season when Artistic Director Joseph Haj was in the acting company. We have not performed in rotating repertory since 1998.

• Seeing all three plays is encouraged, but each story stands on its own if you prefer to see one or two plays.