



LIGHTS OUT:
NAT "KING"
COLE

STUDY GUIDE

GEFFEN
PLAYHOUSE

LIGHTS OUT: NAT "KING" COLE

WEST COAST PREMIERE MUSICAL
GIL CATES THEATER AT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE
FEBRUARY 5 - MARCH 24, 2019

SPECIAL THANKS TO

**Amy Levinson, Rachel Weigardt-Egel, Brian Dunning, Wendell Pascual,
Joannarae Ibañez, Ellen Catania and Jessica Brusilow Rollins.**

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SECTION 1

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION



WRITTEN BY

**Colman Domingo
& Patricia McGregor**

DIRECTED BY

Patricia McGregor

MUSIC SUPERVISION, ARRANGEMENTS
& ORCHESTRATIONS BY

John McDaniel

SET DESIGN BY

Clint Ramos & Ryan Howell

COSTUME DESIGNER

Katherine O'Neill

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Alan C. Edwards

SOUND DESIGNER

Alex Hawthorn

MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

David Witham

CHOREOGRAPHER

Edgar Godineaux

TAP & ADDITIONAL CHOREOGRAPHY BY

Jared Grimes

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Dennis Whitehead Darling

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

Ross Jackson

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Lindsay Lowy

CASTING DIRECTOR

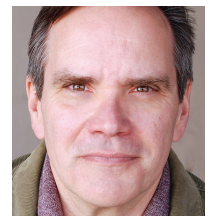
Phyllis Schuringa, CSA



Gisela Adisa
as Eartha Kitt
and others



**Connor Amacio
Matthews**
as Billy Preston
and others



Bryan Dobson
as Producer
and others



Mary-Pat Green
as Candy
and others



Dulé Hill
as Nat "King" Cole



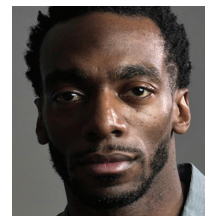
Ruby Lewis
as Betty Hutton,
Peggy Lee and others



Zonya Love
as Perlina
and others



Brandon Rüter
as Stage Manager
and others



Daniel J. Watts
as Sammy Davis Jr.

SYNOPSIS

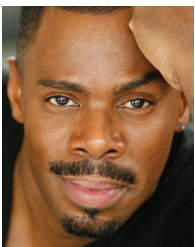
It's the last broadcast of *The Nat King Cole Show*, which has struggled to find a national sponsor because of resistance in the American South. A revered jazz pianist and hugely popular singer, Nat King Cole is the first African American to star in a television variety show and he is determined to end it with his head held high. A producer's insistence that he lighten his skin with makeup spins him into a surreal "fever dream," in which his songs are cast in a different light, colleagues and family members voice conflicting thoughts, and his fellow entertainer and friend Sammy Davis, Jr. challenges him to peel back his elegant veneer and reveal his feelings about contending with racism in 1950s America.

TIME: December 17th, 1957 at 7:44pm

RUNNING TIME: Approximately 90 minutes. *There will be no intermission.*

PRODUCTION NOTES : There is occasional profanity, the use of the N-word, and smoking.

ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES



COLMAN DOMINGO (Playwright)

A Tony, Olivier, Drama Desk and Drama League Award nominated artist, Mr. Domingo's plays include *Dot* (Samuel French), *Wild with Happy* (Dramatist Play Service) and *A Boy and His Soul* (Oberon Books), among others. He co-wrote the Broadway musical *Summer: The Donna Summer Musical*. His work has been produced by the Public Theater, Vineyard Theatre, Humana Festival of New American Plays, New York Stage and Film, A.C.T, Tricycle Theatre in London, Brisbane Powerhouse in Australia, among others. He is the recipient of a Lucille Lortel, Obie, Audelco and GLAAD Award. His theater career of over 26 years spans the West End, Broadway, Off-Broadway, Australia, France and regional theaters across America. The multi-hyphenate has two television series in the works for AMC and HBO, which he will executive produce and write. He stars in the Golden Globe-nominated film *If Beale Street Could Talk* and on television on AMC's *Fear the Walking Dead*.



PATRICIA MCGREGOR (Playwright / Director)

Patricia McGregor is a director and writer from St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. She has been profiled by *The New York Times* three times for her direction of world premieres. Recent credits include *Place* (world premiere at BAM Next Wave Festival), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Old Globe), *Skeleton Crew* (Geffen Playhouse), *Lights Out: Nat "King" Cole* (People's Light), *Skeleton Crew* (Studio Theatre), *Measure for Measure* (The Old Globe), *The Parchman Hour* (Guthrie Theater), *Hamlet* (Public Theater), *Ugly Lies the Bone* (Roundabout Theatre Company), *brownsville song* (b-side for tray) (Lincoln Center Theater) and the world premieres of *Good Grief* (Center Theatre Group), *Stagger Lee* (Dallas Theater Center), *Hurt Village* (Signature Theatre), *Holding It Down* and *Blood Dazzler* (Harlem Stage) and *The House That Would Not Stand* (Berkeley Rep/Yale Rep). Other credits include *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Spunk*, *Becky Shaw*, *Adoration of the Old Woman*, *Four Electric Ghosts* and *Nothing Personal*. She has directed the 24 Hour Plays on Broadway and staged readings for HBO's writer's Access program. She was a Paul & Daisy Soros Fellow at Yale School of Drama where she earned her M.F.A. and served as Artistic Director of the Yale Cabaret.

JOHN McDANIEL (Music Supervision)

John McDaniel is a Grammy and Emmy Award winning Music Director, Composer, Arranger, Orchestrator and Producer and is an Artistic Director at the Tony Award-winning O'Neill Theater Center. Recently he has directed *Sondheim Originals* at 54 Below, *Piano Men* at Birdland and *HAIR in Concert* at the historic Patchogue Theater. On Broadway: *Bonnie and Clyde* (Drama Desk Nomination for Best Orchestrations), *Catch Me If You Can*, *Brooklyn* (Producer and Orchestrator), *Annie Get Your Gun* (Grammy Award), *Taboo*, *Chicago*, *Grease*, *Patti LuPone on Broadway* and *Company - the Original Cast in Concert* at Lincoln Center. Television: *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* (two Emmy Awards). John has collaborated with Cab Calloway, Shirley MacLaine, George Burns, Joel Grey, Carol Burnett, Betty Buckley, Bette Midler and has guest conducted at 15 Symphony Orchestras across America, including five concerts with his hometown St. Louis Symphony. John received a B.F.A. in Drama from Carnegie Mellon University.

SECTION 2

THEMES & TOPICS

A VERY SPECIAL MAN



SOURCES

Nat King Cole,
by Daniel Mark Epstein, Farrar,
Straus and Giroux, 1999

*Nat King Cole:
Afraid of the Dark*/Netflix

tinyurl.com/AmerMastersCole
tinyurl.com/LATimesColeObit

PHOTO CREDIT

© Capitol Photo Archives

When Nat King Cole sings, joy shines from him. He does not have the forced energy of performers who seek to please or impress others, but the ease of someone who takes pleasure in bringing great music to life and sharing it.

His success as a pianist and singer over his thirty-year career was the result of his passionate dedication to his craft and what biographer Daniel Epstein has termed his “steely work ethic.” Born in 1919 in Montgomery, Alabama, he was four years old when his father moved the family to Chicago and his mother taught him to play the organ. He took classical piano lessons at age 12, played music in his pastor father’s church and while in high school came under the influence of the demanding bandmasters hired by the publisher of the local newspaper Cole delivered, to involve the young people working for him in a marching band.

Growing up during the Golden Era of jazz in Chicago (1924-1934), Cole was strongly influenced by legendary pianist Earl Hines, whom Epstein describes as his “jazz father,” and Duke Ellington. According to Epstein, at the time “Jazz was bigger than any varsity sport on the South Side of Chicago.” Besides being extraordinarily gifted as a musician, Cole was a natural leader and arranger and by age 15 he had his own group of musicians. With them and then a band led by his older brother Eddie, he played in clubs every night. In 1935, he quit high school to play music full time, much to the disappointment of his parents who had moved north seeking better educational and, therefore, professional opportunities for him and his siblings.

While struggling to find work after moving to Los Angeles, he developed his own unique style as a pianist. The King Cole Trio, which included a guitarist and double bassist, came into being when he was offered steady work if he formed an ensemble. Though known for his piano skills, Cole worked hard on his singing, and in 1939 the group had its first hit with “Sweet Lorraine.” Gradually the group moved away from pure jazz and into popular music, and he became a solo singer, backed by a quartet and untethered from a piano.

He had phenomenal success as a recording artist for Capitol Records and while on tour throughout the United States and internationally. By 1952 he had sold 15 million singles and 5 million albums. Many top popular music artists of the 1940s and 50s, such as Frank Sinatra, Harry Belafonte, Sammy Davis, Jr., Peggy Lee and Eartha Kitt were friends as well as admirers.

A lifelong smoker, Cole died of lung cancer in 1965 at age 45. His recordings have endured to this day, perhaps one reason being, as musician Stevie Wonder has noted about the man, “He had an everlasting light.”

DISCUSSION POINT

What memories or associations come to mind when you think of Nat King Cole?

TV ENTERTAINMENT IN 1950s AMERICA



SOCIAL MEDIA

In today's world of Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and Snapchat, social media has gone beyond television and radio to provide celebrities, artists, and influencers various platforms that allow them to reach many people at once and make their lives and work accessible at a click of a button any time of day. (researchgate.net)

SOURCES

tinyurl.com/
 BritannicaTVGenres
 tinyurl.com/
 50sEntertainOverview
 tinyurl.com/
 TVMuseumGoldenAge
 tinyurl.com/
 TVMuseumVariety

PHOTO CREDIT

Wikipedia Commons/PD

A New Medium: Prior to the 1950s, people used to gather around the radio and go out to plays, vaudeville shows and movie theaters to experience entertainment. As the technology of broadcasting images onto screens in people's homes grew, the major television networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) offered a range of shows to fill hours of airtime, which included plays with renowned actors and variety shows, hosted by comedians with the latest popular songs, comic sketches, and specialty acts such as magicians and ventriloquists. In Los Angeles, with its dry climate and access to rocky landscapes, companies produced Westerns that focused on the adventures of cowboys. The situation comedy (or sitcom) in which a regular cast of characters appeared every week also emerged.

Representation: According to the article "Television in the United States," by Robert J. Thompson and Steve Allen, "Among the more emblematic series of the mid-to late 1950s was the suburban family sitcom, which presented traditional happy families in pristine suburban environments." The main characters in these sitcoms were white. The only show led by African American characters was *Amos 'n Andy*, which trafficked in stereotypes. Created and acted by white men on radio and played on television by black actors, the show had its roots in the blatantly racist minstrel shows of the mid-1800s.

Television Commercials: Free to whoever could afford television sets and the electricity to run them, TV shows were paid for, as many continue to be to this day, by fees from advertisers, which placed commercials on the air for companies that created products such as soft drinks, soap and cigarettes they aimed to sell. The rates of what companies paid to advertise were based on how many people watched the shows, and the public's viewing habits were measured by Nielsen rating meters, which were installed in the TV sets of a sampling of households. The companies, also known as sponsors, sought to reach a large national audience in order to sell its goods to the American public. The commercials were usually accompanied by catchy tunes known as jingles. Stars of variety shows, like Cole, often promoted products within their shows by singing these jingles.

The Nat King Cole Show: When his ground-breaking and critically acclaimed variety show could not find a national sponsor because companies had concerns about their products being boycotted in the American South, Cole famously said that the advertising business, known as Madison Avenue because of its location in New York City, was "afraid of the dark." Then he left the show. *Lights Out* explores the moments during his last broadcast and takes a hard look at the relationship between advertising and the life of a television show. In Cole's "fever dream," the cast sings beer commercial jingles in ironic ways and he is faced with promoting harmful behavior among African Americans in order to gain a national sponsor.

DISCUSSION POINT

What is or was a favorite television show for you and your family or friends to watch over time and discuss? Why?

THE COSTS OF BREAKING BARRIERS

COLORISM (noun)

Prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group (oxforddictionaries.com)

Nat King Cole's fever dream is triggered by the pressure to lighten his skin with powder to be more widely accepted by a white audience. According to the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ), colorism is a practice of discrimination by which those with lighter skin are treated more favorably than those with darker skin. This practice is a product of racism in the United States, in that it upholds the white standards of beauty and benefits white people in the institutions of oppression.

Colorism is still an issue that is often seen in Hollywood and media representation today. Celebrities of color considered light-skinned are often favored with better roles and opportunities. Movements like the Black Mirror Project by Deddeh Howard strive to create diverse representation in media and break the stereotypes that white beauty standards have created in Hollywood and entertainment.

SOURCES

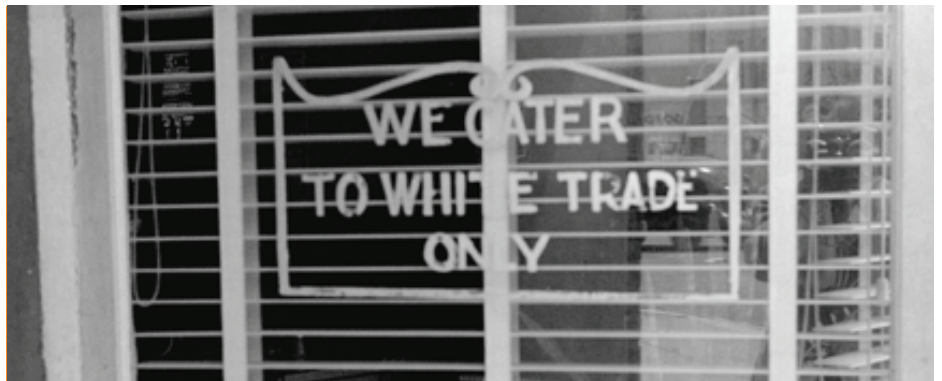
Equal Justice Initiative

Nat King Cole by Daniel Mark Epstein, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999

tinyurl.com/MLKStigma
 tinyurl.com/PsychToday
 ShadowSelf
 tinyurl.com/StanfordSDJr

PHOTO CREDIT

Public Domain



While *Lights Out* presents Nat King Cole as the stylish singer and positive person the American public adored, it also bravely explores the psychic costs of breaking through the barriers of entrenched racism he encountered as a citizen and artist.

The Legacy of Slavery: When Cole was a young boy in the early 1900s, Alabama, like other states in the Deep South, had not moved on beyond the divisions of the Civil War. The white supremacist Klu Klux Klan was powerful and beatings and lynchings were ever present. There was no equal pay for work or access to legal justice. While housing, schools and clubs were still segregated in northern states, there were more economic opportunities for African Americans in cities like Chicago, where Cole's father moved his family in 1923.

The Challenges: While pursuing his musical career in Los Angeles, Cole "crossed over" and sold records to white as well as black audiences. His success enabled him to buy a house in the wealthy neighborhood of Hancock Park, where his neighbors sued to keep the "covenant" blocking African Americans and Jews from purchasing property in tact. They lost the case and the Cole family remained, but the N-word was burnt into their lawn and their dog was poisoned. After his manager pointed out the numerous audience members Cole was drawing to clubs and concerts throughout the United States, the NBC television network invited him to become the first African American host of a TV variety show. He had much artistic freedom on the show but was prohibited from being too close to or touching white female singers. He walked away after being unable to secure a national sponsor because companies feared audiences in the South would boycott their products if they saw an African American leading a show.

While on a concert tour in the South, he and the black musicians in his band could not "sleep in the same hotels, eat in the same diners, or use the same rest rooms [as whites]. In many towns well-known black performers avoided these indignities by staying in private homes (Epstein, *Nat King Cole*, 1999)." Facing the same conditions in Las Vegas, Cole "broke the color line" there, by making a deal with a hotel owner to appear there exclusively as long as the whole band could stay together.

An Attack and Consequences: In 1956, while performing for a white audience in segregated Birmingham, Alabama, members of the White Citizens Council of Greater Birmingham, which was affiliated with the KKK, attacked Cole onstage. He was injured and chose not to continue the tour. When asked about the incident by reporters, he said it wasn't about him, but the larger challenges of integration, and

SAMMY DAVIS, JR. (1925-1990)

Davis began performing at the age of three and succeeded as a singer, dancer, actor and comedian during his long career. Where Cole adopted a consistently elegant persona as a performer, Davis was a highly energetic and emotional entertainer. Subjected to prejudice in life, the U.S. Army and show business, Davis became a major supporter of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the NAACP in the struggles against racism.

MICROAGGRESSION (noun)

a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (merriam.webster.com)

In *Lights Out*, Cole cuts to a word from the show's local sponsor "Smile Bright Toothpaste," a product advertised to help people of color deal with day-to-day microaggressions.

he was just trying to bring people together as an entertainer. According to biographer Epstein he said, "I can't settle the issue...but I can help to ease the tension by gaining the respect of both races all over the country." His willingness to play for separate audiences in the South, which to some was the same as sanctioning segregation, and his refusal to take a strong stand against his attack inspired criticism from African American activists, including Sammy Davis, Jr.

Unequal Treatment & Expectations: White people from Europe colonized and assumed power in what became the United States, brought Africans to the U.S. against their will to work in enforced servitude for hundreds of years, provided no economic support and instituted segregationist policies once slavery ended, and, as Martin Luther King, Jr. noted in a televised interview, "stigmatized" the color of African Americans' skin. Because of this history and the automatic privilege conferred on being white, many of European descent do not understand how it feels to be treated as socially, intellectually and morally inferior, because of how they look. Those who break the white, usually male, dominated aspects of American life and culture can feel as if they need to work twice as hard, be inordinately talented, and present themselves in ways that overcome the fear and disapproval harbored by certain citizens for the "other" — those who are different from them. These attitudes lie at the heart of intolerance, including white supremacism.

The Costs: No matter how strong on the outside, people have vulnerabilities and complex responses to being denigrated that can build up regardless of how much they try to ignore such treatment. When they believe they must be perfect and non-threatening in order to break barriers, their basic human needs and authentic voices can be stifled. Cole's public face, which radiated good spirits and the calm of transcendence, is what playwrights Domingo and McGregor have chosen to challenge in *Lights Out*. In the dream-like whirlwind within his mind, co-workers, family members and professional friends provoke him with reminders of the racism he has encountered and soothe him with assurances that he can "tap into his dark side" and express himself honestly. As Sammy Davis, Jr. urges, rather than fearing his "rage and pain...it's your silence that's strangling you, so you better tell your truth while you've still got breath in your lungs to speak it."

When Cole and Davis engage in a blazing rendition of "Me and My Shadow," the playwrights seem to suggest that Davis is serving as Cole's "shadow self" within his dream. Such a self, as proposed by psychologist Carl Jung (1875-1961), is the repository of strong feelings, conflicts and impulses our conscious self finds unacceptable. The more we deny this self, the more its pressure can build up inside until we either break, as Cole mentions fearing, or explode. After their dance, a liberated Cole reads aloud a rant he has written based on "The Night Before Christmas," which references crimes perpetrated against African Americans. The catharsis of speaking his poem leads to informing the show's producer, once he and the audience have snapped out of the dream and back into real time, "In this little half hour we have been able to gracefully inhabit an act of quiet revolution but there's no time for easy anymore." In this way, the graceful and generous-spirited Nat King Cole audiences fell in love with over 50 years ago once again steps up to navigate the ever-present challenges of our country's social and political landscape, fueled, this time, by raw and deeply human power.

**DISCUSSION
POINT**

What personal, social, or political barriers would you like to break or see broken? What might be some of the challenges and costs? What would help you or others overcome the challenges and manage the costs?

WHAT MAKES A SONG TIMELESS?

“SMILE”

by John Turner and Geoffrey Parsons

Smile though your heart is
aching

Smile even though it's
breaking

When there are clouds in the
sky, you'll get by

If you smile through your
fear and sorrow

Smile and maybe tomorrow
You'll see the sun come
shining
through for you

Light up your face with
gladness

Hide every trace of sadness
Although a tear may be
ever so near

That's the time you must
keep on trying

Smile, what's the use of
crying?

You'll find that life is still
worthwhile

If you just smile

That's the time you must
keep on trying

Smile, what's the use of
crying?

You'll find that life is still
worthwhile

If you just smile

SOURCEStinyurl.com/Brittanica-PopMusictinyurl.com/Psych-FavoriteMusictinyurl.com/Music-Arranger-Role**PHOTO CREDIT**

© Capitol Photo Archives



In the United States, popular songs have been rooted in the early 20th century fusion of lyrical folk songs and operetta that became what we know as musical theater and ragtime, in which African rhythms were combined with European harmonizing and resulted in jazz. “By the 1950s the migration of African Americans to cities in the North had resulted in the cross-fertilization of elements of blues with the up-tempo rhythms of jazz to create rhythm and blues (britannica.com).” Rock and roll “soon developed as an amalgam of rhythm and blues with country music,” was transformed by British rock groups, concurrently emerged as the music of Motown, and gave birth to heavy metal, disco, punk and hip-hop, which has now surpassed rock in popularity.

Each era has had its “classics,” songs which since their popularity often lasts to this day are considered “timeless.” No matter what the era, the elements of an enduring song include its compelling sounds — the tones and rhythms of the vocal melody line — and its lyrics, or words. Lyrics convey meaning but also combine with the melody to express what the song is about. Another key element is the song arrangement — how instruments harmonize with the vocal melody and layer in different rhythms. Last but not least, a song can remain popular through how an artist interprets and sings it.

In 1954, Nat King Cole was the first to release the classic “Smile.” Iconic actor and director Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977) had written it as a musical theme for his movie *Modern Times* (1936). John Turner and Geoffrey Parsons added words and the title in 1954. Popular song artists ranging from Judy Garland to Janelle Monae have recorded it.

Listen to Nat King Cole’s recording of “Smile” at tinyurl.com/You-TubeSmile and read through the lyrics. **Why do you think this song has endured for over 50 years?**

**DISCUSSION
POINT**

What is a song you consider or predict will be timeless? Why?

SONGS IN MUSICAL THEATER

In musical theater, songs help the audience learn more about the characters — who they are or what they want — as well as the circumstances in which they find themselves. They can also help move the plot along by inspiring action. There is usually a “book” or written story, with which a composer and lyricist, or someone who does both jobs, work to create different kinds of songs. In some productions, as with *Lights Out*, the creators work with existing songs and build a story around them.

While all the songs in *Lights Out* were hits for Nat King Cole, they are not all sung by the character of Cole or presented with the energy and intention with which Cole sang them. Since they are a part of his “fever dream,” the creators have used them to heighten and express what is happening in Cole’s mind as he “goes off the rails.”

Place a Song in Your Own Musical

Listen to “Smile” (at tinyurl.com/You-TubeSmile) once through.

What images, memories, or feelings come to mind?

Listen again while reading the lyrics on page 10.

What is the song about? How would describe its mood?

Envision and write down a scenario in which a character singing “Smile” would express who they are or what they want, or would prompt them to take action.

- What would be happening in the scenario **before** the character sings the song?
- What would happen **as a result** of the character singing the song?

Share your scenario with a partner. How similar or different were your choices?

SECTION 3

PERSONNEL PROFILE

AN INTERVIEW WITH WENDELL PASCUAL

What is your title and how long have you worked at the Geffen?

I've been working as a Production Artist in graphic design at the Geffen for almost a year.

What educational and/or professional experiences led to your work at the Geffen?

I became a graphic designer out of necessity and have no formal training or credentials. As a community arts organizer it was essential to develop marketing materials with limited resources—so I learned to design posters/flyers, publish 'zines, and print T-shirts/stickers. Being resourceful eventually led me to work at Kinko's (FedEx Office) and then from there I was hired by a design firm that was a customer. I was mentored by James Robie who began his design career in the '50s. This refinement eventually led me to an 8-year stint as the Principal Graphic Designer for UCLA Performing Arts (UCLA Live/CAP UCLA). I came to the Geffen from a referral by Jodi Feigenbaum (a former Geffen employee) who I worked with at Grand Performances in Downtown LA.

What are your primary responsibilities?

Under the guidance of the Director of Content and Creative, I create graphic assets to maintain the branding standards of the Geffen by designing postcards, brochures, web graphics, signage and other materials like this Study Guide.

What key skills and dispositions do graphic designers need to possess in this day and age?

It's important to have a grasp of software but I've learned that the computer is just one of the many tools required. It's also important to have a keen sense of observation and critical thinking... to understand theories of representation and design history. Being a good listener is also an asset. We are bombarded by so much information and technology helps to "make things look pretty," but it is more difficult to communicate with a sense of grace and poetry through an appropriate solution to a design problem.

How do graphic designers think visually? What is essential to the design of materials that contain images and text?

My computer was too slow to run Photoshop when I started so I learned how to use type (letters). Looking back, it was



this deficiency that created an opportunity to develop a strong command of typography. It's fun to add filters and effects but they often distract from the message. I'm mindful about using only what's needed—noting the interaction with image and text, language and icons, colors and shapes. Utilizing concepts of scale, minimalism, balance (or imbalance) are also helpful.

What part does graphic design play in helping to create and communicate an organization's "brand?"

Graphic design maintains consistency over how a brand is presented. Even when the actual brand (logo) is not present a well-designed visual asset can set off instant recognition and a connection.

What do you find most challenging about your work?

Probably the most challenging thing about being a designer is the perception that we push a few buttons and it's done. There's also the ever-changing priorities from clients—but that's to be expected.

What do you find most satisfying?

Being part of a team engaged in a creative process that seeks to inspire. To drive down the street and see banners you worked on or seeing a total stranger wearing a shirt you designed feels pretty nice as well. "To make the ordinary extraordinary is the purpose of design." —Paul Rand ■

SECTION 4

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Going to the theater is a unique experience, and we all need to be mindful of “audience etiquette,” or how to behave at the theater.

The Audience’s Role: The audience plays an essential role at the performance of a play. Without an audience, the actors are only rehearsing. Audience members’ concentrated silence and responses, such as laughing and applauding, provide energy to the actors as they bring the performance to life.

Behaviors to Avoid: Since the actors can hear the audience so clearly, it is important not to engage in behaviors that might disturb or distract them—and fellow audience members.

These actions include:

- Talking
- Texting
- Allowing cell phones to ring
- Taking photographs or video
- Getting up to leave before intermission or the end of the show (unless it is a true emergency)
- Eating or drinking
- Unwrapping candy or cough drops.

Use of Social Media: We appreciate you sharing your Geffen Playhouse experience via social media, but ask that you **do not do so inside the theater, where the use of electronic devices is prohibited.**

We recommend that you post your status **in the lobby after the performance**, and invite you to tag @GeffenPlayhouse and use #GeffenPlayhouse to share your experience and continue the conversation with us online.

Audience Awareness Activity: Before going to the Geffen Playhouse for the first time, compare and contrast the experience of seeing a live play with:

- going to the movies
- attending a live sporting event
- watching television.

DISCUSSION POINT

If you were onstage performing a play, how would you want the audience to behave?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Depending on the time available and your group members' interests, guide them to respond to questions selected from those suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate, while having respect for differing opinions. Individuals can share their thoughts with a partner or in a small group. Ask for several volunteers to share their groups' answers with the larger group.

- Overall, how did you feel while watching *Lights Out: Nat "King" Cole*? Engrossed? Distanced? Entertained? Bored? Conflicted? Moved? Inspired? What made you feel this way?
- At which points were you most engaged in the story? Why? At which points were you least engaged? Why? (Provide evidence from the production.)
- What did you learn about Nat King Cole as an artist? As a human being?
- How did this production illuminate the racism African American entertainers faced in 1950s America? Have things changed? If so, how? If not, what injustices remain?
- What did you find surprising about this production? Exhilarating? Disturbing? Why?
- How did the structure of the show reflect the way dreams can unfold in our minds?
- How did the show's creators weave in the songs Nat King Cole made famous and his TV show's commercial jingles to convey what was happening in his "fever dream?"
- What did you appreciate most about the performances by the actors?
- How did the set, costumes, props, lighting, and visuals contribute to the impact of the show?
- How did this production differ from conventional musical theater productions? Which approach do you prefer? Why?
- Would you recommend this production of *Lights Out: Nat "King" Cole* to other theatergoers? Why, or why not?

SECTION 5

RESOURCES

WATCH the documentary *Nat King Cole: Afraid of the Dark* to learn about his life, entertainment era, artistry and encounters with racism during his career. (Available on Netflix and Amazon Prime.)

LISTEN to a recording of Cole's greatest hits on *The Extraordinary Nat King Cole*. (Available on Spotify; CD is available at the Los Angeles Public Library.)

LEARN about the history of racial inequality and economic injustice in the United States at the website for the Equal Justice initiative (EJI), based in Montgomery, Alabama.

WATCH Martin Luther King, Jr. explain the difference between European immigrants and Africans brought to the U.S. as slaves and the injustice of white society placing a "stigma" on skin color at tinyurl.com/MLKStigma.

LEARN about Cole's television show tinyurl.com/NKCTVShow.

WATCH an entire episode of Cole's television show in which he welcomes musical guests Peggy Lee and Julius LaRosa at tinyurl.com/NKCTVEpisode.

WATCH Cole and Sammy Davis, Jr. have fun while impersonating each other's singing styles at tinyurl.com/NKC-SDJrStyles.

LEARN ABOUT how jazz influenced hip-hop in an article by Henry Adaso in ThoughtCo at tinyurl.com/Jazz-InfluenceHipHop.

VISIT the Paley Center for Media in Los Angeles to learn about the history of television and attend events that highlight past and current TV shows. (Information is available at media.paleycenter.org.)

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