The Philadelphia Story
by Philip Barry

Student Matinee Series underwritten by F & M Community Bank
"We Make Banking Easy!"

Directed by Michael Bigelow Dixon

Stage Manager ................ Carolyn Fast
Costume Designer .............. Amanda McGee
Lighting Designer ............. Jason Underferth
Sound Designer ................. Stela Burdt
Set Designer .................... Kit Mayer
Props Designer ................ Carla Joseph

Cast
Tracy Lord .................. Catherine Glynn
Dinah Lord .................. Katie Berger
Margaret Lord .............. Jackie Wolter
Sandy Lord .................. Gary Danciu
Thomas ...................... Ethan Bjelland
Uncle Willie ................. Thom Pinault
Liz Imbrie ................... Ana Hagedorn
Macaulay (Mike) Connor .... Daniel L. Stock
George Kittredge ........... Paul Steffens
C.K. Dexter Haven .......... Jeremy van Meter
Seth Lord ..................... David Hennessey

Setting
1939 – The country house of Seth Lord, near Philadelphia.

This play will be performed with one intermission
THE STORY

ACT ONE

In the country home of the Lord family, just outside Philadelphia, bride-to-be Tracy Lord and her mother, Margaret, are sorting through wedding gifts and writing thank-you notes while Tracy’s younger sister, Dinah, busies herself with a preview copy of a magazine article spotlighting the scandalous behavior of their father, Seth. Their brother, Sandy, arrives from New York, and informs his family that a reporter, Mike Connor, and a photographer, Liz Imbrie, will be staying at the house over the weekend to write a news story about the wedding. When Tracy strongly objects, Sandy explains that their presence is part of a deal he struck with tabloid publisher, Sidney Kidd, in order to keep the embarrassing article about their father out of print. The reporters think they will be undercover, and the family is not supposed to know their true occupation.

Spotting Mike and Liz coming along the hallway, the rest of the family excuse themselves. The two reporters amuse themselves by mocking the trappings of wealth and status, until Dinah and Tracy enter to greet them in a highly-stylized and affected manner. The rest of the family soon arrive, including Tracy’s fiancé, George Kittredge and Tracy’s Uncle Willie, who – for appearance’s sake – she introduces to Mike and Liz as “Seth”. Also showing up for lunch is Tracy’s ex-husband, C.K. Dexter Haven, who still lives nearby and was invited by the mischievous Dinah. The whole party is about to go in to lunch when, to everyone’s amazement, the real Seth Lord enters, now introduced as “Uncle Willie”.

ACT TWO

Later that evening, Mike and Liz compare notes about the various members of the family until “Seth” and “Uncle Willie” come on and take Liz away to other parts of the house. Tracy arrives, and starts to flirt with Mike until Dexter interrupts. Tracy and Dexter begin to verbally spar, as Dexter accuses Tracy of giving up on their marriage because of her inability to excuse or forgive the mistakes of others.

George encounters the two of them arguing, and Dexter takes his leave. The family gathers, urging Tracy and Dinah to dress for the pre-wedding party down the road at Uncle Willie’s house. The Lords are still bristling at feeling under a microscope, and Seth proposes they tell Mike and Liz his true identity and that the family is well-aware of their purpose for being there. Tracy verbally attacks her father for his philandering behavior, which has placed them all in this fix to begin with, and Seth largely echoes what Dexter had said earlier about Tracy’s inability to forgive others for being human.

Mike and Liz enter, true identities are revealed, and the group heads off to the party under a cloud of growing tension.

(INTERMISSION)

SCENE TWO

Very early Saturday morning, out on the patio, Sandy, Mike and Tracy discuss a new plan to blackmail Sidney Kidd into dropping the story about Seth in exchange for their dropping a news
story about Kidd's own scandalous ways. As Sandy dashes off to his room to write the piece, Mike and Tracy – both feeling the effects of an entire evening of wine and champagne – flirt, argue, and then eventually become passionate. At the sound of footsteps, they retreat to the pool, just missing the arrival of Dexter and George, both of whom are concerned about Tracy. Dexter tries to get George to go back to bed, but he refuses and so both are present when Mike returns from the pool with Tracy in his arms – clothed only in a bathrobe. After depositing Tracy in her room, Mike returns to the patio and gets punched in the jaw by Dexter. George stalks off to rethink his feelings for Tracy after what he’s just seen.

ACT THREE

It is now late morning on Saturday, less than an hour before George and Tracy’s wedding. Dinah meets with Uncle Willie to ask his advice on what to do after witnessing the prior events from her bedroom window. Dexter arrives, overhears Dinah’s story, and playfully suggests that it was all a dream.

Tracy, with a hangover, tries to put a good face forward, but Dexter teases her about her fuzzy recollections of the party and its aftermath, before leaving with Uncle Willie in search of an “eye-opener”. Dinah tells Tracy about her “dream”, leaving Tracy with the distinct impression (although no memory whatsoever) that she and Mike slept together. When Mike enters, Dinah makes a hasty exit. Tracy tries to figure out exactly what happened between them the night before without asking directly, but Mike’s oblique comments only confirm her suspicions.

Dexter returns and sends Mike off in search of Uncle Willie and his hangover cure. Tracy looks to Dexter for comfort and advice until the household (including Mike and Liz) gathers in anticipation of the impending nuptials. Tracy begins to read aloud a note she’s received from George as George himself arrives to talk to her. Tracy suggests, in light of her indiscretion, that they should call off the wedding. Mike interjects to tell everyone that nothing actually happened between him and Tracy. The explanation satisfies George, but Tracy suddenly sees in George the same judgmental streak that others have accused her of, and calls off their wedding of her own accord.

Tracy is now in a panic over how to handle all of the guests expecting a wedding. Mike offers to marry Tracy, but she turns him down. Dexter jumps in and coaches Tracy on a quick speech to the assembled guests, announcing that on this day, Tracy will re-marry Dexter. This proposal Tracy does accept, with a newfound sense of humility and forgiveness for others and for herself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Philip Barry (1896 – 1949) was born in Rochester, NY. When Barry was only one year old, his father died, leaving a marble and tile business to his eldest son, Edmund, who left school and raised his brother. Philip Barry’s writing career began when he was nine, and continued throughout his life. His best known work is The Philadelphia Story, written in 1939 and made popular by the film starring Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, and James Stewart, and later remade as a film musical High Society starring Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, and Grace Kelly. Barry’s play, Holiday, was also made into a movie by George Cukor, again starring Grant and Hepburn.
NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Philadelphia Story is Philip Barry’s most successful comedy of manners. It reveals the humanity of the upper classes even while it sports with their eccentric privilege. It also demonstrates, as F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, “The rich are different from you and me,” even as it proves they are the same. And all the while it serves up bubbly laughter on a silver platter.

The play takes place in 1938, an era that seems surprisingly similar to our own. There are tensions between the self-conscious wealthy and the other 99 percent. There are political disputes between Left and Right, and accusations of communism (today it’s Keynesian socialism). There are tabloid journalists who prey upon the foibles of socialites. All that is familiar to us, proving the age-old adage: “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

At its core, this play limns the excruciating process of becoming self-aware. Wealth can insulate a person from external hardship, but a bank account cannot protect that same person from internal truths. The difficulty of seeing ourselves – not just as others see us but as we truly feel we are – is the hardship that Barry toys with in this romantic romp. In matters of the human heart, he suggests, the inverse of that age-old adage is also true: “The more things stay the same, the more we all must change.”

~ Michael Bigelow Dixon

“THE STORY OF The Philadelphia Story”
BY SCOTT DIXON

Philip Barry’s classic romantic comedy has been a favorite of audiences and critics in all its incarnations - as a hit Broadway play, an Academy Award-winning movie, and a Cole Porter musical (under the name High Society). All of this turned out to be very good news for the one star personality who banked her comeback on the success of this single project: Katharine Hepburn.

As a young actress, Hepburn arrived in Hollywood in 1932 and took the movies by storm. Within a year, she’d won the first of her four career Academy Awards for Best Actress, but just as quickly as her star rose, it plummeted. A short series of commercial and critical disappointments combined, perhaps, with her famously unconventional and assertive personality, landed her on the Independent Theatre Owners of America’s list of “box-office poison.” After losing out on the role of Scarlett O’Hara in Gone With the Wind, Hepburn responded by buying out her own contract with RKO Studios in order to have the independence to be in charge of her own comeback in her own way.

The vehicle she chose was a new playscript being developed by a close friend, Broadway playwright Philip Barry. The Philadelphia Story began as a simple comedy of manners about a wealthy family with
all their eccentricities on full display while being interviewed for a magazine article, with real-life socialite Helen Hope Montgomery Scott as the basis for the central character, Tracy Lord. Hepburn was intrigued by the premise and, along with ex-boyfriend Howard Hughes, invested heavily in the stage production. With Hepburn’s involvement, Barry re-worked his script to fit her persona, and the story transformed into that of Tracy Lord’s journey through vulnerability to rediscover her own happiness.

*The Philadelphia Story* opened at the Shubert Theatre in New York in 1939, running for more than 400 performances and grossing in excess of $1.5 million. Hepburn, who had purchased the film rights to the play as part of her initial investment, sold those rights to MGM with certain stipulations. Naturally, she would star in the lead role and also have final authority over the choice of director and co-stars. Although her first choices - Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable - were unavailable, she did land Cary Grant and James Stewart as C.K. Dexter Haven and Mike Connor. The film version of *The Philadelphia Story* broke box office records and to this day, regularly appears on virtually every list of top romantic-comedies. The movie racked up 6 Oscar nominations at the 1940 Academy Awards, winning two - for Best Screenplay (David Ogden Stewart) and Best Actor (James Stewart). Katharine Hepburn received a nomination for Best Actress (losing to Ginger Rogers) and eradicated the brand of “box-office poison” from her name forever.

**Things to look for / Discussion Topics**

1. This play is cited as an example of “screwball comedy.” What does that term mean, and how does it apply to *The Philadelphia Story*?

2. On the eve of her wedding, Tracy Lord finds herself attracted to three very different men for different reasons. What does she find attractive about each of them, and how does each aid her journey?

3. The Lords are scandalized by tabloid journalism coverage of the family patriarch, Seth Lord. How do the tactics and behaviors of Mike Connor and Liz Imbrie differ from how tabloid journalists behave today? How are they the same?

4. Both Seth and Dexter accuse Tracy of being too demanding, and that she’ll never be a true human being unless she learns to forgive the weakness in others. Do you agree? What does it take for Tracy to start to change the way she looks at other people?

5. In the world of *The Philadelphia Story*, a person’s social class is considered an important part of who they are. What are the different classes on display in the story? How are each of them expected to be, and what are they like in reality?

6. The character of Tracy Lord was tailored to fit Katharine Hepburn’s persona. Based on the play, what do you think Ms. Hepburn was like in real life?

7. By the end of the play, Tracy decides to remarry Dexter. Do you think this is a good decision? What signs are there to suggest that their second marriage will last longer than the first?