

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

BY

ROBERTO AGUIRRE-SACASA

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY

OSCAR WILDE



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY was commissioned by
The Roundhouse Theatre in Bethesda, Maryland
(Blake Robson, Producing Artistic Director)
and received its world premiere there in September 2009.

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THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY was commissioned by and received its world premiere at The Roundhouse Theatre (Blake Robison, Producing Artistic Director) in Bethesda, Maryland, opening on September 9, 2009. It was directed by Blake Robison; the scenic design was by James Kronzer; the costume design was by Helen Q. Huang; the lighting design was by Daniel MacLean Wagner; the sound design and original music were by Matthew M. Neilson; the prop design was by Michelle Elwyn; the fight choreography was by Casey Kaleba; and the production stage manager was Jennifer Schwartz. The cast was as follows:

DORIAN GRAY Roderick Hill
HARRY WOTTEN Sean Dugan
BASIL HALLWOOD Clinton Brandhagen
SIBYL VANE/CHRISTINA/
ELLIE/MARIA BELLA/KAREN Julia Proctor
ALAN CAMPBELL/JAMES VANE Joel Reuben Ganz
VICTORIA FROST Kaytie Morris
DETECTIVE MORSE/FRITZ/SENATOR/
THEODORE Timothy Andres Pabon

CHARACTERS

HARRY WOTTON, 20, big personality, a bit of a shyster/huckster

BASIL HALLWOOD, 20, an artist, rumped, nervous

DORIAN GRAY, eternally 20, EXTREMELY handsome,
immortal and amoral

ALAN CAMPBELL, 20, one of the boys, a chemist

SIBYL VANE, 19, an actress, spunky and beautiful

JAMES VANE, 21, rough-and-tumble, a football player,
prone to violence

VICTORIA FROST, 19, Harry's better half, fabulous and withering

DETECTIVE TREVOR MORSE, early 30s

CHRISTINA, 18 or 19, beautiful, possibly a nymphomaniac

ELLIE GARDNER, a young British woman Dorian meets on a
train

FRITZ (OR ROLF), a young German man Dorian meets in
Berlin

MARIA BELLA, a young Italian woman Dorian murders in
Florence

An American SENATOR Dorian indoctrinates into the Hellfire
Club

THEODORE RUXPIN, an old friend of Victoria's, American,
late 40s

KAREN OLIVER, a young American actress, the spitting image
of Sibyl

PLACE

Act One is set in London, various locations.

Act Two is set all over the place, various locations, then lands in Los Angeles, various locations.

TIME

Act One is set in 1988.

Act Two is set from 1988 to the present, then lands in the present.

A NOTE ABOUT CASTING

This play can be performed with seven actors, with the following doubling:

One actor plays Dorian, never aging.

One actor plays Harry, who ages during Act Two.

One actor plays Basil, who ages during Act Two.

One actress plays Victoria, who ages during Act Two.

One actress plays Sibyl, Christina, Ellie, Maria Bella, and Karen.

One actor plays Alan Campbell and James Vane.

One actor plays Detective Morse, the Senator, and Theodore Ruxpin.

A NOTE ABOUT HISTORY

In Act One, Harry Wotton is preparing for an art exhibition called “Frieze.” In 1988, in London, there really was a “Frieze,” but it wasn’t assembled by a fictional character. The real artist-curator behind it was Damien Hirst, who was as responsible for launching the Young British Artist movement as anyone (and who created the shark exhibit Alan’s so fond of in Act One). Though I’ve included some real-world events and references in this adaptation of *Dorian Gray*, I played fast-and-loose with their dates and many of their specifics — always in service, I hope, of The Drama. So, in other words, if there are any factual inaccuracies in the play ... they may be intentional.

A NOTE ABOUT PRODUCTION AND STAGING

Transitions should be fluid and fast and actor-driven. Locations are suggested minimally, with pieces of furniture that do double- and triple-duty. Lights, blackouts, music, and sound are all important, but nothing is more important than the words the characters speak — to each other and to us.

FINALLY

Let’s give it up for Oscar Wilde.

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

ACT ONE

The stage has been filling with gothic fog ... Big Ben tolls in the distance ...

Then: A throbbing song from 1988 blasts on, full volume.

The fog is now the artificial fog of a nightclub. Swirling, pulsing, colored lights cut through it.

Faceless throbbing bodies fill the club, dancing and sweating.

Then: As suddenly as the music started, it cuts out, and a spot finds Harry, sweaty, out of breath, alone, talking to us.

HARRY. My friend Basil is an artist, a painter. While the rest of his classmates — our classmates — at Goldsmiths College — explore other media? Forge ahead boldly? Basil clutches onto his pigments and his oils and his gesso with all the tenacity of a lanced bull. And he is not without skill, my friend — no, he's very, very good, in fact — but this is London, ladies and gentlemen. The year is 1988. And Contemporary Art is sitting on one of those freakishly large lily pads — do you know the ones I mean? And the lily pad is sinking ... And forgive me, but oil painting won't save it. (I tell him.) *(Beat.)* Basil's been in seclusion for three weeks. Even I'm concerned. *(The lights change. Harry in Basil's studio/flat. An attic apartment; dozens of canvases stacked against the walls. Stained drops cover the furniture. Basil — who, like Harry, is*

about twenty — is working on a large canvas we can't see. Basil's wearing dark pants and a white undershirt — paint-stained. He's good-looking, but messy — in contrast to Harry, who's very put-together. The impression we should get, from Basil, from his wrecked flat, is that he hasn't slept in a while.)

BASIL. I'm sorry, I've been — Harry, I've been working.

HARRY. Yes, it certainly smells like work in here. *(Going to them.)*

Do those windows — ?

BASIL. DON'T! *(Harry stops.)* Whatever's in here, whatever genie I've managed to catch, by luck, or fate, or, or, or some darker, occult power, I don't want it escaping.

HARRY. Genie, Basil?

BASIL. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I haven't called. I shut off my service, Harry.

HARRY. Why? I have money, I can pay.

BASIL. No phone, less interruption. I've been focused on — Oh, Harry, a painting, the painting!

HARRY. Yes?

BASIL. The one from which — *(Beat.)* There is Before this painting, and there will be After this painting. Everything I've done, leading up to this canvas, every sketch, every study, every treatment —

HARRY. Every assignment.

BASIL. Burn them all! *(Beat.)* They've all been practice — prelude — to this one painting. The soil from which everything else will spring ... Every answer ... Color, composition ... I see the world now, Harry ... Style, balance ... The past, the future ... The interconnectedness of it all, the universe ... Harmony, form ... The mercy we show each other, the violence we inflict ... It's the most terrible, most beautiful thing in the world, isn't it? Humanity? Civilization? The cruelest, most sorrowful ... *(A pause. Harry looks at his overwrought friend.)*

HARRY. Basil, are you drunk?

BASIL. Yes. *(Beat.)* No. *(Beat.)* Yes, but not how you think.

HARRY. Explain it to me, then, because I'm beginning to feel something akin to concern, and that annoys me.

BASIL. I'm not making any sense, I know that, forgive me. I haven't slept, I haven't eaten —

HARRY. You haven't bathed, you haven't been to class. Victoria's wondered if you were even alive still.

BASIL. I am ... I am alive ... *Through* this painting — *with* it.

Alive, and awake, and, and *engorged*.

HARRY. I have to see it, you realize — and none of your usual protestations, thank you very much.

BASIL. Harry —

HARRY. I won't beg you, but I beg you.

BASIL. Yes. (*Mini-beat.*) All right. (*Mini-beat.*) You can.

HARRY. Thank you.

BASIL. Though I warn you — (*He gestures for Harry to look; Harry starts to circle around.*) If you cut this down with, with one of your barbs, I will strangle you on the spot. (*Harry looks at the canvas. For several beats, nothing. The two men are barely breathing.*) Well?

HARRY. Basil —

BASIL. Am I insane? Do you hate it?

HARRY. It's extraordinary.

BASIL. Really? You really think so?

HARRY. It is, without question, the best thing you've ever done.

BASIL. I think so, too! Yes! Isn't it?

HARRY. You and Dorian did this behind my back? In secret?

BASIL. We didn't plan to.

HARRY. When in God's name did you find the time? Dorian takes some literature classes — is allegedly working on some thesis or other — but you, you actually have academic responsibilities.

BASIL. It started as a, a lark — at his suggestion, actually; one morning, he came by; disheveled, in that way of his — and I thought: "Well, all right, a sketch, nothing more," and then — Day by day, stroke by stroke, it started accumulating ...

HARRY. Meaning. Life. (*Beat.*) Basil, you have to let me include this in my show.

BASIL. I've already been rejected from your show. That is to say: You already rejected me from your show.

HARRY. A painting — one painting — a still life with, with vegetables, for God's sake — has been rejected.

BASIL. Oranges.

HARRY. If you'd shown me this —

BASIL. I'm not sure it's a fit, Harry, I've seen your catalogue. A shark in formaldehyde. A disheveled bed, surrounded by, by condoms and sneakers.

HARRY. This portrait is as "new," and as revelatory, as anything Damien's produced. Or Tracy. Or Georgina. Or Douglas. I have a theory —

BASIL. Oh, *many* theories.

HARRY. About Art, only one: Something is either new — Damien's shark — or something is so good, it makes the old *seem* new. You — Dorian — this painting — make the old seem new.

BASIL. I won't show it, Harry, I'm sorry.

HARRY. You're having your revenge on me for the vegetables —

BASIL. Oranges.

HARRY. — But how's this? Allow me to include Dorian's portrait ... and I'll show the vegetables, too. In a place of honor, I promise. Right as you come in the front door.

BASIL. I can't; I won't.

HARRY. (*Seriously angry here.*) Goddamn you artists! All you want is recognition and acceptance, but all you do is self-sabotage!

BASIL. There's too much of myself in the painting to exhibit. (*A pause. Again, Harry just stares at his friend. Then, exasperated.*)

HARRY. It means NOTHING when you say that.

BASIL. Every portrait painted with feeling is as much a portrait of the artist as it is of the sitter.

HARRY. (*Sarcastic.*) Ah! I see!

BASIL. Anyway, it's not my decision to make. The painting belongs to —

HARRY. (*An exclamation "hello!"*) Dorian! (*Basil turns towards his studio's door — Dorian Gray is there. Like the book says, he's extraordinarily handsome. The MOST handsome, in fact. Twenty years old, effortlessly, perfectly in-shape, beautiful, charismatic, the works.*)

DORIAN. Gentlemen. Harry, Basil.

HARRY. Dorian, I'm absolutely livid that you and Basil have been keeping all these secrets from me, but all will be forgiven — provided you let me include your portrait in my show.

DORIAN. I haven't even seen it yet, Harry.

HARRY. Well, then, come, come look — (*Dorian approaches them.*) And prepare to be awestruck. (*Harry swings Basil's easel around so Dorian can see — and we can see — his portrait. It is an excellent likeness, Dorian in all his glory, seemingly capturing ... what? Something portraits don't usually capture.*)

BASIL. I'm still debating the background, and the contouring around the nose, the cheeks.

DORIAN. Basil ...

BASIL. I had no intention of showing it to anyone before you, but Harry insisted, and, and —

DORIAN. (*Thunderstruck.*) Is that me...? Is that how I look to you...?

BASIL. In my mind's eye. Yes, Dorian.

DORIAN. But ... (*He can't make sense of it.*) I barely recognize myself.

HARRY. That's what I'm trying to say, exactly: This isn't you, Dorian. If it were just a portrait of, of your corporeal self, well, that would be one thing — (and Lord knows, there would be a market for that) — but Basil — (if he'll let me say this) — Basil hasn't merely painted your body, Dorian. He's somehow managed, with the crudest, the most rudimentary tools —

DORIAN. To paint my soul. (*Beat.*) That's my soul.

BASIL. I painted what I saw, what I believe you to be; that's all.

HARRY. The harmony of your body and soul. The seen, the unseen. (*A sudden spot on Dorian; everything else goes dark.*)

DORIAN. (*Eyes glued to the canvas.*) It won't ever age ... (*Short pause, then:*) It will remain, always, as it is now — today — never older than, than this particular day in June ... (*Pause. Searchingly.*) God, what if it could be — what if it were — the other way around? If the portrait aged instead of me? What would such a thing cost? (*The lights go back to normal.*)

HARRY. Something not even I could afford.

DORIAN. I'd pay it, whatever the price.

BASIL. It would be pretty rough going for my poor painting ...

HARRY. You must let me exhibit it, Dorian. (*Beat. He starts pitching.*) I've rented a warehouse, in the Docklands, near Limehouse Bay — No gallery will touch the show I've put together — I'm calling it "Frieze," after one of the photographs I'm including — A photo of a bullet and a man's head, the second before the bullet *hits* the man's head — Frieze: a moment in time — The moment before impact — Frozen forever — No artist over the age of twenty-five; Simon, the youngest, is sixteen — All are unknown, most are still students — But the world will be hailing their genius in five years — Five months, in Basil's case, if I include this portrait. (*A pause, then Dorian decides.*)

DORIAN. Just to show, Harry. You can't — I won't allow anyone else to own it.

HARRY. Fine — just to show — I'm not greedy.

DORIAN. Why did you make it, Basil? To, to mock me?

BASIL. Mock you?

HARRY. Dorian?

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

based on the novel by Oscar Wilde

5M, 2W (doubling)

Oscar Wilde's Faustian tale of a young man who sells his soul for eternal youth is updated as a bold, stylish, and bloody contemporary thriller. London, 1988: Preternaturally handsome Dorian Gray has his portrait painted by his college classmate, the on-the-rise artist Basil Hallwood. When their mutual friend Henry Wotton offers to include it in a show, Dorian makes a fateful wish — that his portrait should grow old instead of him — and strikes an unspeakable bargain with the devil. So begins Dorian's steady decline into a life of depravity, following a twisted path that will lead him towards sexual deviance, violence, and much, *much* worse. However, Dorian's vile acts are not reflected upon his own visage, but rather upon Basil's portrait, which seems to rot from within, every one of Dorian's sins warping it more and more. The portrait is Dorian's secret, and he will do anything to keep it hidden and safe — even kill, if he has to ...

"The debauchery and gothic abandon of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's modern adaptation is such a sight for stingy eyes ... it's very Grand Guignol ... As Mr. Wilde said, the only way to rid oneself of a temptation is to yield to it, so sink into the dark pleasures and cheeky wit of THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY." —**The Washington Times**

"Gritting, gripping, and at times gut-wrenching, this provocative adaptation transplants Wilde's characters from the late eighteenth century to 1980s London, but the scandalous, often shocking heart of the story remains." —**The Washingtonian**

"Stylish, sexy and unspeakably cool ... brilliantly drawn ... a thoroughly engaging collection of images ... a clever take on a classic story. A smartly dressed, intriguing adaptation." —**Metro Weekly**

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