



CASA VALENTINA

BY HARVEY FIERSTEIN



DRAMATISTS
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The author would like to thank Katherine Cummings, who not only lived it but was willing to tell me about it. She can attest that none of this is true, but all of it is accurate.

CASA VALENTINA was presented on Broadway by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) by special arrangement with Colin Callender, Robert Cole, Frederick Zollo, and the Shubert Organization at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre, opening on April 1, 2014. It was directed by Joe Mantello; the set design was by Scott Pask; the costume design was by Rita Ryack; the lighting design was by Justin Townsend; the music and sound design were by Fitz Patton; the hair, wig, and makeup designs were by Jason P. Hayes; and the production stage manager was William Joseph Barnes. The cast was as follows:

RITA.....	Mare Winningham
JONATHON/MIRANDA	Gabriel Ebert
ALBERT/BESSIE	Tom McGowan
GEORGE/VALENTINA.....	Patrick Page
ISADORE/CHARLOTTE	Reed Birney
MICHAEL/GLORIA	Nick Westrate
THEODORE/TERRY	John Cullum
THE JUDGE/AMY.....	Larry Pine
ELEANOR	Lisa Emery

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

RITA — female, fifties. Ten years older than George. A resigned, determined but worn earth-mother. Her love of the girls barely covers her inner sadness.

JONATHON/MIRANDA — male, thirty. Masculine, shy, and bookish. Overly polite and cautious as a male. As a female, she is ebullient. (Appears in and out of drag.)

ALBERT/BESSIE — male, fifties. Chubby. Willy Loman by day, Ethel Mertz at night. Quick-witted and friendly. Unaffectedly feminine. (Appears in drag only.)

GEORGE/VALENTINA — male, forties. Married to Rita. An insurance-salesman type as a man. Assured and charming as a woman. (Appears in and out of drag.)

ISADORE/CHARLOTTE — male, fifties. The ultimate WASP. A buttoned-down, strict disciplinarian. Not your favorite aunt. (Appears in drag only.)

MICHAEL/GLORIA — male, thirties. A very handsome and sexually-charged chap who is accustomed to compliments, whether dressed as a male or female. (Appears in drag only.)

THEODORE/TERRY — male, seventies. Sweet and gentle and slightly silly, like a favorite old auntie. (Appears in drag only.)

THE JUDGE/AMY — male, seventy. Large, distinguished, powerful, and imposing as a man, and a clunky sort of *Tugboat Annie* woman. (Appears in and out of drag.)

ELEANOR — female, fifty. The Judge's daughter. Brittle, cold, and damaged.

PLACE

A bungalow colony outside Hunter Mountain in the Catskills.

TIME

Fourteen continuous hours in June of 1962.

NOTES

The main level has a porch, dining room, kitchen, and staircase.

The upper level consists of at least three bedrooms appointed with vanities, chairs, clothing racks, etc.

Apart from the main house sits a small barn with a makeshift stage surrounded by colored lightbulbs. There are chairs and a record player and piles of 45s.

The main action always takes focus, but once a character enters the stage they are never lost sight of. Their lives continue, out of focus, in real time, as much as possible. The more time they can spend posing in their mirrors, the better.

At the top of Scene 3, Charlotte declares that “the curse of the Y chromosome [is] punishable by dearth.” This isn’t a typo — the word is “dearth,” rhyming with “earth.”

A NOTE ON GENDER

When our characters are dressed as men, they should over-emphasize their maleness, almost as if putting on the role. As women, however, they are fully at ease: breezy, fluid, and relaxed.

This quote appeared monthly in Transvestia magazine:

“When you make the two one . . . and when you make the
male and female into a single one — then shall you enter
the Kingdom.”

—*The Gospel of Thomas*

CASA VALENTINA

ACT ONE

Prologue

Accompanied by the sounds of glass wind chimes, one by one the vanities are lit, revealing the guests in varying stages of undress. In an upstairs bedroom, Bessie, a plump female figure, turns on the radio, dialing around until she finds a song on the radio — a summer song of the period. Something bouncy and fun, like “I Like It Like That.” Something that will take us back to a time of innocence ...*

Scene 1

Meanwhile, in the kitchen ... Rita has her apron on and stares thoughtfully at the counters and stovetop filled with half-finished cooking projects. She is trying to think of what to do next, but the music ... Through the screened door, she sees a nattily dressed young man wandering the garden path.

JONATHON. Hello?

RITA. Hello!

JONATHON. Hello?

RITA. Hello! (*Calling to upstairs.*) For mother's sake, Bessie, turn that down!

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

JONATHON. Hello?

RITA. Hello. Are you lost?

JONATHON. (*Lost.*) Hello?

RITA. (*Waving.*) Over here. Bessie, please!!! (*Bessie turns down the music and slips into the hallway to eavesdrop.*)

JONATHON. Is this the Chevalier d'Eon?

RITA. What a strong speaking voice. You have to be a teacher.

JONATHON. The sign at the front office read, "Come to the kitchen."

RITA. And you did as told. Good boy.

JONATHON. Am I the only one here? I can wait outside.

RITA. Don't be silly. Please join me. The door's not locked and my husband's not home.

JONATHON. (*More confused.*) Oh.

RITA. (*Opens the door.*) Come in. I like company. Which, as it turns out, is a plus for an innkeeper. "Welcome to the Chevalier d'Eon Resort, where you may live your innermost truth in an environment of peace and friendship." No, that's last year's brochure.

JONATHON. I have it here. (*Producing it from his pocket.*) "You'll think you're in heaven staying at our haven."

RITA. My husband, George, writes those. Loyalty allows me to overlook them.

JONATHON. You're not Rita.

RITA. Why not?

JONATHON. Yes, you are. You look just as I imagined. Sorry. It's not every day I meet someone I've read about in magazines.

RITA. Magazines are easy. To get into newspapers you've got to be dead. Jonathon.

JONATHON. Oh. You know my name.

RITA. You're one of only two first-time guests and I already know what the other one looks like. How was the drive?

JONATHON. A little under three hours with two stops. One for coffee. One ... not. Terrific directions until the road sign for "Silver Springs Bungalow Colony ..."

RITA. Every season we swear we'll change the sign. But no matter how little we do, people keep finding us. So, can you cook?

JONATHON. Sorry.

RITA. There's a wedding at one of the tonier hotels in town and they've hired away our help for the weekend. If I'd known I would have dragged one of the other wives up. Your wife isn't coming?

JONATHON. She's gone to her mother's and I snuck out.

RITA. Well, we have the essentials. (*Indicating a full bar.*) And I can get us through dinner. After that, I'm afraid I'll need to send the girls off to the woods to kill something. Or maybe just to the market.

JONATHON. The market? You mean we actually go to town? Dressed?

RITA. Well, if you'd like you can go naked. There's a nudist camp across the road and they shop in town as well. We still get more stares. Would you like to go to your room? You must be anxious to begin your vacation.

JONATHON. The first since my honeymoon. Lord, I sound like a yokel.

RITA. Welcome to the Catskills. You'll fit right in. But wait. We should toast your escape from routine.

JONATHON. May I help? I can make a drink. (*Goes about making drinks, over-pouring.*)

RITA. Help to your heart's content. There's ice over there. Believe it or not most of our guests like doing housework. They find it completes the experience. So I say, grab a dish towel and make your dreams come true. You're a friend of Michael's, yes?

JONATHON. We met fairly recently. Both shopping for wide-width shoes. He says he spotted me right off. He said, "Rabbits knows rabbits' habits."

RITA. (*Seeing him flustered.*) Are you all right?

JONATHON. I'm ... I'm not sure I belong.

RITA. Well, while you think about it, why don't you and I have our drinks and a nice sit-down. Then, when you are sure, we can figure out what's next.

JONATHON. No wonder Michael raves about you.

RITA. There is no trick to being popular with men. Just never say no.

JONATHON. (*Handing her a drink.*) He says they look to you ...

RITA. Most look nowhere past themselves. (*Seeing liquor to the top of the glass.*) More ice in mine, please?

JONATHON. Am I the first?

RITA. One guest is upstairs dressing and another is in the Wig-Wam, rehearsing. The Wig-Wam is our own little night club. You'll see. Most Fridays find everyone rushing to ready for dinner. Sometimes we're pushing bodies into beds like clowns in a circus car. And sometimes not. But this is going to be a quiet weekend, with the inner circle holding a business meeting.

JONATHON. Michael said it would be all right for me to be here.

RITA. Of course.

JONATHON. (*Lifts his glass in a toast.*) Cheers.

RITA. Cheers. (*Bessie enters in her housecoat, mules, and turban.*)

BESSIE. Hello. I thought I heard the clinking of ice from my room.

RITA. You might have, had you been in your room and not eavesdropping in the hall.

BESSIE. And does the truth enrich your life in untold ways? I hate walking in on a conversation not knowing what it's about. Makes me feel an intruder in my own world.

RITA. Come in and be nice or I'll hide your corset and you can be an intruder in the entire world.

BESSIE. What cruel creatures you GGs are.

JONATHON. GGs. Genuine girls. Right?

RITA. Or genetic girls. (*To Bessie.*) Jonathon's been reading the magazine.

BESSIE. And I'll bet when he does, he doesn't move his lips. (*Offering a genteel hand.*) Welcome, fellow traverser.

JONATHON. I'm Jonathon.

BESSIE. Feel free to change that. Bessie. Which is short for Alberta, which is worlds away from Albert. Rumor has it you teach English. Lit was my major. I wrote my dissertation on Oscar Wilde. "The world is my oyster, but I always use the wrong fork."

JONATHON. Bravo.

RITA. You've stepped in it now. Once unleashed, Bessie will quote Wilde for any occasion.

BESSIE. Sorry to say, I have a wonderful memory but lack the intelligence with which to temper it.

JONATHON. I think it takes great conceptualization to properly employ literary references.

BESSIE. One look at me will tell you that I do not suffer from a lack of imagination.

RITA. Or appetite.

BESSIE. That's affection speaking. As Oscar said, "One can always be kind to those about whom one cares nothing."

RITA. And can I affectionately question that outfit? What are you supposed to be?

BESSIE. A guest. This is naught but a bridge from car park to dinner bell. (*Modeling. Opens the turban to reveal a man's haircut and slaps it closed again.*) Fabulous? No muss. No fuss. On for the milkman, off

for the shower. For those times you're too rushed to be a lady but still feel the need to be a girl. (*Hands a camera to Jonathon. Modeling.*) Take a photo and I'll autograph it for your scrapbook. I'm so pretty I should be set to music.

JONATHON. Now that was Oscar Wilde. (*Shoots a photo.*)

BESSIE. No, that's just me. Oh well. Snap another. We may never meet again. (*Jonathon snaps another photo.*) Look at that skin. Electric or blade?

JONATHON. None of the men in my family are very hairy.

BESSIE. Blesséd be you. When I learned the art of makeup I was Leonardo, my brush gliding surely across a perfectly stretched canvas. Now I'm a palsied old thing finger-painting on crepe paper. I hope your better half won't stay in her room all evening.

JONATHON. My wife isn't with me ... You meant ...

BESSIE. Yes, I did. I'm breathless to meet her.

JONATHON. (*Blushing.*) I should at least bring my bags in from the car.

RITA. And Bessie, without complaint, is going to help you.

BESSIE. I am marvelous, aren't I?

RITA. You will be staying in the Blue Room. We would normally put you in a bungalow of your own, but since we've such a small group I thought you might be lonely with the rest of us in the main house.

BESSIE. It's our sorority days all over again.

RITA. Fetch the keys, carry the luggage, stow the wisecracks.

BESSIE. You are not the boss of me. I only take orders from your husband. Where is she? (*George enters the room in a suit and tie, a garment bag over his arm. He tries hard to cover some agitation.*)

GEORGE. *He* is right here. Didn't we have a chat last weekend about the proper use of pronouns? Perhaps if you weren't drunk ...

BESSIE. Commoners drink to excess. I drink to access.

RITA. I didn't hear your car.

GEORGE. (*Seeing the pots and pans.*) Why isn't Mrs. Jarvis doing that?

RITA. She was hired away for a wedding. I arrived to find a note.

GEORGE. (*Grabbing the phone.*) She can't do that, just not come. Where's her number? Give me her number.

RITA. I phoned. She's not home. I'll manage. (*Still trying to calm him.*) Don't you want to say hello to our guest?

GEORGE. I'm sorry. You must be Jonathon. We spoke when I took your reservation.

BESSIE. Ignore me all you like. I've paid for the entire weekend and I'm staying.

CASA VALENTINA

by Harvey Fierstein

7M, 2W

Nestled in the Catskills — 1962's land of dirty dancing and Borscht Belt comedy — an inconspicuous bungalow colony catered to a very special clientele: heterosexual men who delighted in dressing and acting as women. These white-collar professionals would discreetly escape their families to spend their weekends safely inhabiting their chosen female alter-egos. But given the opportunity to share their secret lives with the world, the members of this sorority had to decide whether the freedom gained by openness was worth the risk of personal ruin. Based on real events and infused with Fierstein's trademark wit, this moving, insightful, and delightfully entertaining work offers a glimpse into the lives of a group of "self-made women" as they search for acceptance and happiness in their very own Garden of Eden.

"[CASA VALENTINA] conveys the blessed consummation that occurs for ordinary people when they're transformed externally into what they think they are inside. As a Tony-winning chronicler of the lives of drag performers ... Mr. Fierstein has dealt with similar material before. But the central characters in those earlier works were gay. The men who populate CASA VALENTINA ... are emphatically heterosexual. Or so they say, and mostly you have no reason to doubt them ... CASA VALENTINA poses some genuinely arresting questions about identity." —**The New York Times**

"Yes, Fierstein fans, there are plenty of belly laughs as the two acts unfold ... But the playwright has much more on his mind and up his chiffon sleeve ... [He] gets around with unflinching concern to intolerance, blackmail and the cruelty of the divided psyche. While at it, he demonstrates his awareness of the destructive potential of compulsive behavior ... an amazing accomplishment." —**The Huffington Post**

"Years of experience in drag shows before he took the theater by storm as a writer taught Harvey Fierstein his way around a girdle, and in CASA VALENTINA ... he shares the laughs, tears, dangers and rewards of cross-dressing in an illuminating work that is moving, hilarious and ultimately heartbreaking ... Bringing the glory and the contradictions of a whispered subculture to the stage with powerful impact, Mr. Fierstein ... tackles every point of view, eloquently explaining the psychology of cross-dressing, the luxury of dual personalities, and the need for compassion." —**New York Observer**

"Never underestimate Harvey Fierstein's gift for revealing new worlds within worlds we think we know well ... [CASA VALENTINA is] moving, beguiling and, yes, again historically significant without lecturing or threatening ... Fierstein wants us to understand the vast spectrum of gender and sexuality. Along the way, bless him, he understands how to entertain." —**Newsday (NY)**

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