IT'S ONLY A PLAY

BY TERRENCE MCNALLY

★ Broadway Edition

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DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE INC.

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IT'S ONLY A PLAY was originally produced by Manhattan Theatre Club at The Space at City Center Theater, in New York City, on December 17, 1985. It was directed by John Tillinger; the set design was by John Lee Beatty; the costume design was by Rita Ryack; the lighting design was by Pat Collins; the sound design was by Stan Metelits; the hairstyle design was by Brad Scott; and the production stage manager was Tracy B. Cohen. The cast was as follows:

PETER AUSTIN	Mark Blum
JULIA BUDDER	Christine Baranski
IRA DREW	Paul Benedict
FRANK FINGER	David Garrison
VIRGINIA NOYES	Joanna Gleason
JAMES WICKER	
GUS P. HEAD	Jihmi Kennedy
EMMA	Florence Stanley

IT'S ONLY A PLAY was revised and produced by the Center Theatre Group, Ahmanson Theatre at the Doolittle, at the Mark Taper Forum (Gordon Davidson, Artistic Director), in Los Angeles, California, on April 16, 1992. It was directed by John Tillinger; the set design was by Paulie Jenkins; the costume design was by Tom Rand; the sound design was by Jon Gottlieb; the production stage manager was Mark Wright; and the stage manager was James T. McDermott. The cast was as follows:

PETER AUSTIN	Zeljko Ivanek
JULIA BUDDER	
IRA DREW	Paul Benedict
FRANK FINGER	David Pierce
VIRGINIA NOYES	Eileen Brennan
JAMES WICKER	Charles Nelson Reilly
GUS P. HEAD	Sean O'Bryan
EMMA	Doris Roberts

IT'S ONLY A PLAY was originally produced on Broadway by Tom Kirdahy, Roy Furman, and Ken Davenport, at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre, opening on October 9, 2014. It was directed by Jack O'Brien; the set design was by Scott Pask; the costume design was by Ann Roth; the lighting design was by Philip Rosenberg; the sound design was by Fitz Patton; and the production stage manager was Jane Grey. The cast was as follows:

PETER AUSTIN	Matthew Broderick
JULIA BUDDER	Megan Mullally
IRA DREW	F. Murray Abraham
FRANK FINGER	
VIRGINIA NOYES	Stockard Channing
JAMES WICKER	Nathan Lane
GUS P. HEAD	Micah Stock

CHARACTERS

PETER AUSTIN — The playwright. Everything is riding on tonight.

JULIA BUDDER — The producer. Attractive and genuinely nice.

IRA DREW — The critic. Wears glasses and has food stains on his tie.

FRANK FINGER — The director. Soon to be knighted.

VIRGINIA NOYES — The star. She has an electronic bracelet on her ankle.

JAMES WICKER — The best friend. He used to be a stage actor.

GUS P. HEAD — The temporary help. Fresh off the farm.

SETTING

The time of the play is now.

The place of the play is Julia Budder's townhouse.

IT'S ONLY A PLAY

ACT ONE

The bedroom in Julia Budder's townhouse. It is a large room with a king-sized bed, a chaise, several armchairs, a television set with a remote control, a bookcase, and a desk with several telephones all with buttons to access different lines.

There are two doors: One leads to the bathroom and dressing area; the other to the hallway and stairs. Thus, we can see people on the stairs before they enter the room itself. There are two windows, drapes drawn, fronting the street.

At rise: There is a party in progress downstairs. Although the bedroom is empty, we can hear voices, laughter, and piano music drifting up from the living room one floor below. It sounds like a lot of people. Also, the bed is heaped with winter coats, some of them fur, all of them expensive. Gus Head is seen coming up the stairs. He is dressed in a dinner jacket. He is carrying a load of men's and women's coats. He comes into the bedroom and closes the door. The party sounds grow fainter. He tosses the coats onto the pile and crosses to the desk, picks up the phone, and excitedly punch-dials a number.

GUS. (Into phone.) Mr. Piper? It's me again. Guess who just walked in down there and handed me his coat? Al Pacino! Can you believe it? This place is crawling with famous people. Donald Trump looked right at me and asked me for a glass of Dom Perignon. I told him I was taking coats. My first night in New York and I'm high-fiving Denzel Washington. I'm pretty sure I saw Rosie O'Donnell talking to the Pope. Thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Piper, this could be the break I needed. I got the talent, sir. All I need is the opportunity to show it. (James Wicker comes into the room, speaking to someone on the stairs in the hallway just outside. The sounds of the party below swell as the door opens.)

JAMES. Wasn't it wonderful? Yes! I'll be right down. Thank you! (*He closes the door behind him. Party sounds fade.*)

GUS. *(Into phone.)* I've seen this one somewhere, too. *(To James.)* The guest bathroom is across the hall.

JAMES. I'm taking a phone call. I couldn't hear a thing in that mob down there.

GUS. Someone needs this, Mr. Piper, I gotta go. (*He hangs up.*) JAMES. That's all right, take your time.

GUS. It's all yours, sir.

JAMES. Thank you. (Into phone.) Hello? Hello?

GUS. Push the button.

JAMES. The button, of course! I'd almost forgotten how these things work. I dropped my cell phone getting out of the limo and it went completely dead on me. I haven't felt this cut off since I was in rehab. That was a joke.

GUS. Yes, sir. Were you in the play tonight?

JAMES. I don't think so. That was another joke. No, I'm just a guest. GUS. Yes, sir.

JAMES. *(Into phone.)* Hello! This is Jimmy Wicker again, Kylie ... Terrible weather, just terrible. We're having a blizzard. To think I used to put up with this! ... How long has she been on with him? Yes, I'll hold. *(To Gus.)* California. They're all dying to know how the play went tonight.

GUS. Everyone is. Mrs. Budder is calling this the party of the year for the play of the season.

JAMES. That's our Julia.

GUS. What did you think?

JAMES. Wonderful, just wonderful.

GUS. Too bad you're not a critic.

JAMES. Tonight everyone's a critic. You haven't seen the play?

GUS. I'm temporary help. This is a one-night-stand for me.

JAMES. Tonight is a one-night-stand for a lot of people. That was my last joke.

GUS. That's okay, sir, one of these days I'll get one. Hi, I'm Gus. JAMES. James Wicker, but everyone calls me Jimmy. *(Into phone.)* Hello! Hello! *(To Gus.)* False alarm. Are you in the business, Gus?

GUS. No, sir, I'm an actor.

JAMES. I didn't mean to pry.

GUS. I'm an interdisciplinary theatre artist.

JAMES. So you're an unemployed actor.

GUS. I'm an actor-slash-singer-slash-dancer-slash-comedian-slashperformance artist-slash-mime. I have a black belt in karate and can operate heavy farm equipment. Other skills, on request. Favorite role to date: Konstantin in Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*.

JAMES. I'm still with the heavy farm equipment.

GUS. Tractors, threshers, reapers, sowers...!

JAMES. That must come in handy.

GUS. Not so far.

JAMES. I was thinking ahead: The Cherry Orchard.

GUS. Once you've done Chekhov, you don't want to do anything else.

JAMES. That's what Madonna said. I've never done any Chekhov myself.

GUS. Are you an actor?

JAMES. I am.

GUS. Are you Equity?

JAMES. Equity, SAG-AFTRA, AGVA. ASPCA.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. I'm on a series, Out on a Limb.

GUS. Wow. A television series?

JAMES. ABC. Wednesday at nine.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. We just wrapped our ninth season.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. I play a man who has a way with small children and animals.

It takes place on a farm for orphans. It's funny and touching. I'm very proud of it.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. And here I am, five Best Actor Emmy Award nominations later, eagerly awaiting the reception of my best friend's play.

GUS. You're Mr. Austin's best friend?

JAMES. We were like Romulus and Remus: hungry young theatre wannabes suckling at the fecund breast of the not-for-profits — Playwrights Horizons, Manhattan Theatre Club, Second Stage, the Public. Those were the days, Gus. I went West, young man, but we've stayed best friends.

GUS. Wow. That's a beautiful story. I love playwrights.

JAMES. Wait till you work with one. (*Into phone.*) Yes, I'm still here, Kylie! Where else would I be? (*To Gus.*) My agent calls and puts me on hold. She's on with Ryan Seacrest.

GUS. Ryan Seacrest, wow!

JAMES. He's one of my best friends.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. We're in the same Pilates class.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. We both dated Ellen DeGeneres.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. I'll give you a hundred dollars if you stop saying "Wow." *(Into phone.)* Hello? Hello! *(To Gus.)* She's just finishing up. Is this is your first big Broadway opening?

GUS. My first anything. I just got here. There I was, wandering around Times Square, looking pretty green with my suitcase, when a total stranger approached me: a producer-slash-agent-slash-photographer. He could have approached anyone but he approached me.

JAMES. Wow. That's a real New York story.

GUS. He got me this job tonight and he's going to take some pictures of me when I get back.

JAMES. When you get back?

GUS. I'm staying with him. He keeps a spare room for people like me. Maybe you know him, Peter Piper?

JAMES. No, but I know the type. Mr. Piper sounds too good to be true, or maybe in your case: too true to be good. This town's going to eat you alive. *(Into phone.)* Hello? There you are, Suzi, finally! ... I know, Ryan is very needy. Give him my love. "How did the play go tonight?" Wonderful, just wonderful. *(He holds his empty glass up to Gus.)* I'm drinking bourbon, three fingers, neat. Oh, what the hell: Bring a bottle, save yourself a trip.

GUS. Right away, sir. (Torch, the Budders' dog, is heard rampaging in the bathroom. It is a terrible sound to hear.)

JAMES. What in God's name is that?

GUS. The dog.

JAMES. What dog?

GUS. Mrs. Budder's dog, Torch. He got out and bit that woman who's on TV all the time.

JAMES. Not Oprah?

GUS. No, the other one.

JAMES. Torch bit Kelly Ripa?

GUS. He went straight for her face.

JAMES. That's terrible. I'm supposed to be on her show tomorrow. GUS. They took her to Mount Sinai along with Mr. Budder.

JAMES. What happened to Mr. Budder?

GUS. He got mugged before the play tonight.

JAMES. *(Into phone.)* Hold on, darling, this is too good. *(To Gus.)* Where was he mugged?

GUS. In the men's room at Sardi's. It's the first time it's happened and they're a very old restaurant. I'll be right up with your drink, sir. (*He goes. Sounds of the party downstairs increase as he opens the door, they subside when it is closed. This will become a familiar pattern.*)

JAMES. (Into phone.) I'm in New York at an opening night party sitting in the townhouse of a Broadway producer whose dog bit Kelly Ripa and whose husband got mugged in the men's room at Sardi's. Meanwhile there's a raging blizzard and a cab strike. I will never knock Los Angeles again. Where was I? Oh, the play! (He makes himself comfortable for a long haul on the telephone. He takes a silver-plated bowl of snacks from a side table and nibbles on them throughout the phone call that follows.) Darling, what is your traditional Thanksgiving dinner? Well this one is a 300-pound Butterball. Bernadette Peters asked me what I thought at intermission and all I did was flap my arms and go, "Gobble, gobble." She wet herself. ... What about Virginia Noyes? She was terrible, just terrible. I haven't seen a performance like that since her last one. Of course she came back to the theatre. After her last two pictures, she had to go somewhere. I know she used to be good. She used to be wonderful. So was Faye Dunaway ... Terrible direction, just terrible. Boy-wonder he well may be; the new Mike Nichols he's not. Frank something. Of course he's British. They all are. Someone should call Immigration ... Sets? What sets? It took place on a tilted disk ... You heard me, a goddamn tilted disc. Not a stick of furniture. The actors had to stand the entire play. Call me old-fashioned but give me a comfortable chair and a phone for the exposition. Oh, and guess who was sitting next to me? Rita Moreno in a Day-Glo turban. Snoring like a teamster. I wish you could have seen her face when I introduced her as Chita Rivera! I thought she'd bite me. How did who look, Chita or Rita? Terrible, just terrible. Now ask me about Jack Nimble's performance. Terrible, just terrible. But tell me this and tell me no more, when was he ever any good? All of my mannerisms and none of my warmth. Of course I would have been wonderful in the part — it was written for me. Thank

IT'S ONLY A PLAY by Terrence McNally

5M, 2W

It's the opening night of *The Golden Egg* on Broadway, and the wealthy producer Julia Budder is throwing a lavish party in her lavish Manhattan townhouse. Downstairs the celebrities are pouring in, but the real action is upstairs in the bedroom, where a group of insiders have staked themselves out to await the reviews. The group includes the excitable playwright; the possibly unstable wunderkind director; the pillpopping leading lady, treading the boards after becoming infamous in Hollywood; and the playwright's best friend, for whom the play was written but who passed up this production for a television series. Add to this a drama critic who's panned the playwright in the past and a new-in-town aspiring singer, and you have a prime recipe for the narcissism, ambition, childishness, and just plain irrationality that infuse the theatre — and for comedy. But don't worry: This play is sure to be the hit they have all been hoping for.

"This show is without a doubt hilariously, sidesplittingly funny ... These are among the funniest lines to roll off a stage in years ... IT'S ONLY A PLAY deserves only a rave." —The New York Times

"At the heart of the humor is the sublime narcissism of the professional players and their honest conviction that nothing matters except the theater. ... You really must laugh at McNally's unquenchable wit — but those sloppy-kiss tributes to the theater ... are deeply felt and honestly moving." — Variety

"This is the sort of comedy that puts the broad in Broadway, with a genuinely funny script boasting pointed barbs at theater mainstays such as Liza Minnelli, Harvey Fierstein, Audra McDonald, and New York Times critic Ben Brantley ... IT'S ONLY A PLAY is a poison-pen mash note to New York theater, at once gleefully bitchy and affectionate."

-Entertainment Weekly

Also by Terrence McNally MOTHERS AND SONS AND AWAY WE GO LIPS TOGETHER, TEETH APART and others

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