



BUYER & CELLAR

BY JONATHAN TOLINS



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Original Off-Broadway Production produced by
Darren Bagert, Dan Shaheen and Ted Snowdon

World premiere produced by Rattlestick Playwrights Theater
(David Van Asselt, Artistic Director; Brian Long, Managing Director)

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For Cary, who knows what to do on Sundays.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When preparing the original production of BUYER & CELLAR, the wonderful director, Stephen Brackett, and I discussed a few guiding principles. The performance should feel like spending time with a friend who has a great story to tell. The connection between the actor and the audience should be direct and immediate. To that end, we wanted a physical production that was simple, one that wouldn't distract from the narrative. Stephen and his expert team of designers came up with a clean white room. The top half of the rear wall was actually a screen on which projections suggested different locations, and the side walls glowed with different lighting effects to change the mood. In every detail, from the actor's costume to the frequent use of sound effects and musical underscoring, we wanted elegance and precision. We sought to create a pristine environment that might even please you-know-who.

BUYER & CELLAR was presented by Rattlestick Playwrights Theater (David Van Asselt, Artistic Director; Brian Long, Managing Director) in New York City, opening on April 3, 2013. It was directed by Stephen Brackett; the set design was by Andrew Boyce; the costume design was by Jessica Pabst; the lighting design was by Eric Southern; the sound design was by Stowe Nelson; the projections were by Alex Koch; the production stage manager was Hannah Woodward; and the production manager was Eugenia Furneaux. The cast was as follows:

ALEX MORE Michael Urie

BUYER & CELLAR opened Off-Broadway at the Barrow Street Theatre in New York City on June 24, 2013. It was produced by Darren Bagert, Dan Shaheen, Ted Snowdon, Daryl Roth, Martin Massman, Pat Flicker Addiss, Doug Nevin, Joan Raffé & Jhett Tolentino, Andrew Tobias, and Rattlestick Playwrights Theater; general management by DR Theatrical Management; and associate produced by Matthew Masten. It was directed by Stephen Brackett; the set design was by Andrew Boyce; the costume design was by Jessica Pabst; the lighting design was by Eric Southern; the sound design was by Stowe Nelson; the projection design was by Alex Koch; the stage manager was Hannah Woodward; and the assistant stage manager was Sam Horwith. The cast was as follows:

ALEX MORE Michael Urie

CHARACTERS

ALEX MORE

BUYER & CELLAR

In the dark, music: the opening phrase of a song associated with Barbra Streisand. Lights up on Alex More, somewhere north of 30, listening for a moment before he addresses the audience.*

ALEX. “Memories light the corners of my mind.” Of course, the brain is basically round so technically it has no corners. At least if you go by the first definition of “corner” in the dictionary, “where two lines or edges meet to form an angle,” which is the first thing one generally thinks of when hearing the word “corner.” The metaphor only really works with the fifth definition, “a remote, secluded, or secret place,” which is probably what it means. And what she wanted. (*He thinks a moment, then gets down to business.*)

Before I tell you this story, we need to get a few things straight. First, this is a work of fiction. You know that, right? I mean, the premise is preposterous. What I’m going to tell you could not possibly have happened with a person as famous, talented, and litigious as Barbra Streisand. This is not journalism. There will be no excerpts on *This American Life*. I’m an actor. Perhaps you know my work. And this is a play written by a guy named Jon, who only met her once. She came to see another play he wrote, and before it started she offered him a piece of her Kit Kat bar. And to this day he regrets not taking it. He was afraid of making a mess. But enough about him, nobody cares.

The second thing you need to know is that I don’t “do” her. I don’t do impressions in general. And anyway, enough people do her — even some women — so you don’t need me to. When I tell you about the conversations we had — which never really took place — I’ll just *be* her and you can fill in the rest.

None of this is real. I don’t exist. What does exist ... is this book. (*He hoists a copy of My Passion for Design by Barbra Streisand.*)

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

My Passion for Design by Barbra Streisand. Published by Viking, out in time for Christmas, 2010. It says so right here in the back, under the photography credits that begin with “Principal Photography by Barbra Streisand.” I know, “How’d she get her?”

According to the front flap, *My Passion for Design* is Barbra’s ... (*Reading.*) “ ... account of the creation and construction of her newest home — the dream refuge she has longed for since the days when she shared a small Brooklyn apartment with her mother, brother, and grandparents, and a culmination and reflection of her love of American architecture and design from the 18th to the 20th centuries.” This is some serious shit, and we’ll get into it.

But what most concerns us begins on page 190. (*Reading.*) “Underground ... a Basement?? ... No ... a Street.” Here’s the deal. After decades of fame and fortune and unbridled acquisition, Barbra has a lot of stuff. Who doesn’t? But Barbra didn’t want some run-of-the-mill basement to keep it all in. Barbra doesn’t like run-of-the-mill anything, although she does, in fact, run a mill ... (*He shows the picture, pages 10-11, then cites the chapter on ...*) ... page 44. No, Barbra wanted something special. Let us quote the relevant passage ... (*Reading from the book.*) “I had another idea for this space. Why not do a street of shops like I had seen at Winterthur?” (*Looking up from the book.*) Jon had to look it up, too. Winterthur is some decorative arts museum in Delaware. We’re supposed to know that. (*Back to the book.*) “In one section of the museum, they recreated all these little stores ... A china shop, a country store ... just the way they would have looked in the early 1800s. And then they used them to display various collections. Wouldn’t it be fun to do something similar?” *Wouldn’t it?*

So that’s what she did. She built a shopping mall in her basement. (*Holding up the book.*) Remember, *this is the part that’s real*. There’s a doll shop. An Antiques store. A Gift Shoppe ... (*He pronounces it “shoppie.”*) ... where they sell extra letter p’s and e’s, apparently. Even an Antique Clothes boutique where she keeps her old dresses. All of it displayed with totalitarian precision. It’s as if your grandma designed the Apple Store.

Barbra’s basement is just like any other mall, except for the total lack of customers or employees. Or, maybe not. What if somebody had to work down there? Jon, the playwright we don’t care about, became obsessed with this idea. About an actor who gets the job. A character that I could play.

So. Here's what happened. (*The lights change, and Alex launches into his story.*) I was living the life of an actor in L.A., going to auditions, doing Equity-waiver shows, making money as a "Cast Member" at Disneyland. I was the Mayor of Toontown for a while, but there was a scandal. I was filling in for a friend as Roger Rabbit, and some eight-year-old kid eating a churro looked right at me through the giant mesh eyes and said, "Hot enough in there, loser?" So I threatened to shove a churro up his ass. Really quietly, but he told his mom, and she had, like, no sense of humor, and, well, I got fired. There's a reason they call it Mouse-schwitz. I had an acting teacher who said I need to demand respect, but it seems like if you do, you get fired. It's fine, I hated the drive to Anaheim anyway. I live in a studio apartment in Los Feliz, which is close to the 5, but still ...

And, hey, I thought, leaving the Magic Kingdom would give me more time to do L.A. theater! — which is exactly as tragic as it sounds. I dreamed of working at the Taper or the Geffen, but that's like a totally closed whatever. Instead, I got offered a role in a new play at the Zephyr, you know, by the Johnny Rockets on Melrose. I would play a guy who comes out to his mother, who doesn't accept him. I know, but the director was in the same acting class — well, school — as Doris Roberts, and she was going to play the mom. So I had to say yes, because who knows who would come to see it? But then Doris Roberts ended up not doing it because she read the script, and my mom was played by Dee Wallace Stone. The mother in *E.T.* Totally nice. (*He sighs.*)

I was broke. I was uninsured. I was nowhere. I started to wonder why I ever left Wisconsin.

The day after my last performance in *Accepting Steven*, I got a call from Vincent in Human Resources at Disney. He felt bad about what went down in Toontown and wanted to help me out. We also had made out once on the Matterhorn, which was really hot because of the decapitation risk. I never told Barry about that. We'll get to him.

Vincent had gotten a weird call at the office. Somebody needed a person with Main Street, U.S.A., experience for a job on the west side. He remembered that I did some time stocking shelves at The Mad Hatter, and he knew I'd worked at Banana Republic. (He kept cracking jokes about getting into my Banana Republic, which is how we ended up on the Matterhorn.)

“But what’s the job?” (*Throughout the play, Alex plays every role, performing both sides of conversations.*)

VINCENT. I’m not totally sure, but it’s in Malibu.

ALEX. Shit, that’s further than Anaheim. The gas alone ...

VINCENT. Hey, it’s near the ocean with rich people. You said you wanted to get in good with the Geffen.

ALEX. The Geffen Playhouse. Not David Geffen himself. Do people actually refer to him as “The Geffen”?

VINCENT. I’ve heard it. So, can I tell them you’re interested?

ALEX. I don’t know ...

VINCENT. Come on. Let me help you. Whatever the job is, it’s gotta be better than working the *Lilo & Stitch* Aloha Breakfast.

ALEX. They want me back?

VINCENT. No. But I do. And so does my Matterhorn.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I know. Ick. But I needed money, and a job’s a job. So what if it kept me from auditions, I never get any anyway. At least I could tell my agent I was busy. In Malibu! (*Lights change. Music.*) Okay, there is no fast way to someplace in Malibu. Even from someplace else in Malibu. So I was in a really foul mood long before I found the address. I pulled my unwashed, used Jetta up to the gate that looked oddly like an old-fashioned but brand new barn door, and pushed the button on the intercom. (*He presses the button and waits.*) I hate gates at the end of people’s driveways. I mean, who the fuck do you think you — ? (*A tone from the intercom.*)

SHARON. Yes?

ALEX. Hi, it’s Alex More. I’m here for the interview.

SHARON. Oh, good, you’re almost on time.

ALEX. Yeah, sorry, there was traffic.

SHARON. There’s always traffic. Never say that again. Go to the barn, to the left, past the mill. (*Lights change. Music.*)

ALEX. And the gates opened. And suddenly, I was in another world, like when Dorothy steps from sepia into Technicolor. The grass was Irish golf course green. The leaves on the trees shimmered in the breeze like sequins on Liza Minnelli. A babbling brook slowly turned the giant red mill, while fish, all of them a tasteful black and white, swam happily but not too fast. I steered my Jetta along an irregular stone road, and yet the ride was smooth. It was like a dream until ... (*We hear the sound of chickens flapping their wings and clucking in alarm.*) I nearly ran over a chicken! Who has chickens in Malibu?

The house manager's name was Sharon, and she looked like she'd been through it. Picture Cloris Leachman right after she found out *Phyllis* was cancelled. She looked especially disgusted when she saw my dirty car and had me park it quickly behind some bushes, like we were hiding from the Nazis. Sharon then took me inside the enormous barn, to a tiny office off the gigantic kitchen.

SHARON. The lady of the house needs someone to work in the mall in her basement.

ALEX. I'm sorry?

SHARON. Downstairs. There's a mall with shops where she keeps her things. Sometimes she likes to go down there, but she doesn't like to be alone.

ALEX. So I would ...

SHARON. Take care of the inventory. Work the floor. Greet the customer. Just act normally. Vincent says you've worked retail.

ALEX. I have.

SHARON. Well, it's like that. It's all about making it feel real. The lady of the house likes every detail to be true. Truth is very important to her.

ALEX. To me, too.

SHARON. Good. So what happened in Toontown?

ALEX. (*To audience.*) This woman doesn't mess around. (*To Sharon.*) If you must know, something bad went down in Toontown. I forgot that I was working in an artificial environment. That takes a special kind of discipline, to never spoil the illusion. I won't make that mistake again. (*To audience.*) Sharon stared at me a long time, then pushed a huge stack of paper across the desk.

SHARON. Sign this.

ALEX. What is it?

SHARON. Confidentiality agreement.

ALEX. Should I talk to a lawyer?

SHARON. No.

ALEX. (*To audience.*) I picked up the pen and stared at the document. (*To Sharon.*) Look, before I sign anything, you gotta at least tell me who I'm working for. (*To audience.*) Sharon sighed and looked at me with a mix of conspiratorial wonder and fear of what lies ahead, the way Judi Dench looks at James Bond. Finally, she said, in almost a whisper ...

SHARON. Her name is Barbra.

BUYER & CELLAR

by Jonathan Tolins

WINNER OF THE 2014–2015 LUCILLE LORTEL AWARD
FOR OUTSTANDING SOLO SHOW

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Alex More has a story to tell. A struggling actor in L.A., he takes a job working in the Malibu basement of a beloved megastar. One day, the Lady Herself comes downstairs to play. It feels like real bonding in the basement, but will their relationship ever make it upstairs? BUYER & CELLAR is an outrageous comedy about the price of fame, the cost of things, and the oddest of odd jobs.

“Jonathan Tolins has concocted an irresistible one-man play from the most peculiar of fictitious premises — an underemployed Los Angeles actor goes to work in Barbra Streisand’s Malibu, Calif., basement — allowing the playwright to ruminate with delicious wit and perspicacity on the solitude of celebrity, the love-hate attraction between gay men and divas, and the melancholy that lurks beneath narcissism. This seriously funny slice of absurdist whimsy creates the illusion of a stage filled with multiple people, all of them with their own droll point of view.”

—The New York Times

“A fantasy so delightful you wish it were true.”

—The New Yorker

“Hilarious! Beyond brilliant. This show will go down like butta!”

—Entertainment Weekly

“Fantastically funny.”

—The New York Post

Also by Jonathan Tolins
THE LAST SUNDAY IN JUNE

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