OUR MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR

BY RICHARD GREENBERG

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE INC.
OUR MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR
Copyright © 2016, Richard Greenberg

All Rights Reserved

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performance of OUR MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission for which must be secured from the Author’s agent in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for OUR MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR are controlled exclusively by DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., 440 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., and paying the requisite fee.

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Creative Artists Agency, 405 Lexington Avenue, 19th Floor, New York NY 10174. Attn: George Lane.

SPECIAL NOTE
Anyone receiving permission to produce OUR MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears, including printed or digital materials for advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. Please see your production license for font size and typeface requirements.

Be advised that there may be additional credits required in all programs and promotional material. Such language will be listed under the “Additional Billing” section of production licenses. It is the licensee’s responsibility to ensure any and all required billing is included in the requisite places, per the terms of the license.

SPECIAL NOTE ON SONGS AND RECORDINGS
Permission for performances of copyrighted songs, arrangements or recordings mentioned in this Play is not included in our license agreement. The permission of the copyright owner(s) must be obtained for any such use. Dramatists Play Service, Inc. neither holds the rights to nor grants permission to use any songs or recordings mentioned in the Play. For any songs and/or recordings mentioned in the Play, other songs, arrangements, or recordings may be substituted provided permission from the copyright owner(s) of such songs, arrangements or recordings is obtained; or songs, arrangements or recordings in the public domain may be substituted.
AUTHOR’S NOTE

I’d imagined the setting (the default setting) would be an abstraction of a vest-pocket playground.

A few benches in the foreground, maybe a couple recessed where actors can go when they’re out of the scene for a stretch of time.

Other spaces—hospital, hotels, house, etcetera—can be achieved any number of ways: lights, slides…

Necessary props: they have to come from somewhere; happily, where is not for me to decide.

The play never pauses, unless a moment’s punctuation is thought desirable.

No one changes costume, although, I suppose, accessories and outer garments can be played with.

Anna, of course, wears the “costume of sophisticated adultery” that’s described in the play.

The play moves fluidly from presentational scenes to direct address; some of the direct address is prescribed in the stage directions; other instances seem pretty obvious.

Lover and Abe are played by the same actor; something blatant might be done to differentiate the two—hair or glasses or hat or something.

That’s all I can think of for now…
OUR MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR was originally produced in New York by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre, opening on December 28, 2015. It was directed by Lynne Meadow; the set design was by Santo Loquasto; the lighting design was by Peter Kaczorowski; the sound design was by Fitz Patton; the costume design was by Tom Broecker; the production stage manager was Diane Divita; and the stage manager was Jenna Woods. The cast was as follows:

ANNA ................................................................. Linda Lavin
SETH ................................................................ Greg Keller
ABBY ................................................................. Kate Arrington
LOVER/ABE ...................................................... John Procaccino

OUR MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR was commissioned and first produced by South Coast Repertory (David Emmes, Producing Artistic Director; Martin Benson, Artistic Director), opening on April 3rd, 2009. It was directed by Pam MacKinnon; the set design was by Sibyl Wickersheimer; the lighting design was by Lap-Chi Chu; the sound design was by Michael K. Hooker; the costume design was by Rachel Myers; the dramaturg was John Glore, the production manager was Joshua Marchesi; and the stage manager was Kathryn Davies. The cast was as follows:

ANNA ................................................................. Jenny O’Hara
SETH ................................................................. Arye Gross
ABBY ................................................................. Marin Hinkle
LOVER/ABE ...................................................... Matthew Arkin
CHARACTERS

ANNA
SETH
ABBY
LOVER
ABE

TIME

Fall of 2003
OUR MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR

ACT ONE

Anna in her Burberry and scarf. Seth on another bench.

SETH. Who was she?
ANNA. I love the fall colors.
SETH. She looked good in Russian hats.
ANNA. Air-conditioning is the key to civilization.
SETH. She could be intensely absent.
ANNA. The houses in Great Neck with their manicured lawns!
SETH. She was an average situational liar but not at all a maker of fables.
ANNA. I barely bumped the fender, I bet there’s not even a scratch, shut your mouth, and let’s go!
SETH. She had a tendency to be still.
ANNA. “Is there a mirror?”
SETH. She asked on her deathbed, on, it turned out, her long series of deathbeds. The heart was no longer charging, the lipstick was.
ANNA. The potato chip is nature’s most perfect food.
SETH. As the one pleasing-looking member of a squat family, her beauty was never in doubt.
ANNA. In high school, I won a scholarship to attend any college in New York State; but we were poor, I had to work.
SETH. She was thinner than the other moms. And less able.
ANNA. As I sew, so shall I rip.
SETH. She said five or six witty things, then repeated them.
ANNA. My mother was a miserable woman. Your father is a miserable man.
SETH. She was nostalgic but not for anything that had ever happened.
ANNA. I was close to Sophie, but Miri and I were best friends.
SETH. By way of contrast to nobody, her life was seamed with tragic events.
ANNA. Miri died at twenty-one of lupus. Just like Flannery O’Connor twenty years later. When I found that out I took a book of Flannery O’Connor’s out of the library.
SETH. She was a big reader.
ANNA. I didn’t care for it.
SETH. She liked to read crap.
ANNA. I love literature!
SETH. As the senility ripened, you’d see the same acetate-wrapped library copy of Mary Higgins Clark over and over again. “But you’ve read this!” you’d say.
ANNA. Did I?
SETH. She never used endearments or nicknames. You were never called “sweetie” or “booger.”
ANNA. Seth.
SETH. If your name was “Seth,” you were called “Seth” because you can’t diminish “Seth” except by extending it and who’s gonna bother with the extra syllable?
ANNA. I love October.
SETH. She liked October.
  Orange, the color
  Shag rugs
  Fudgsicles
  Iceberg lettuce with bottled dressing. She
  made excellent stews. She…
  Um
  No. That’s all (Lights flicker. People will think it’s a mistake.)
ANNA. Did I ever tell you about my affair? (Pause.)
SETH. As I think I mentioned, she was an average situational liar but not at all a maker of fables so when she asked:
ANNA. Did I ever tell you about my affair? (Pause.)
SETH. I could only think it was some kind of etherized fantasy, a bit of mental mayhem natural to someone who’d had too many operations, and way too much anesthesia, and was rising dotty to boot.
And of course, it was a surprise even as illusion.
Did I mention my mother was a cold woman? Well.
Warm-cold.
Think, I don’t know: Julie Andrews: Tundra or hearth?
Impossible to tell
Nice to us, to the kids.
But... one imagined, when one imagined, which was never,
that when it came to...
Oh, well, you try talking this way about your mom.
ANNA. You must have been a teenager.

Back when you were about fifteen, were you a teenager then?
SETH. This was from her hospital room, which by that time we
were grimly referring to as her “pied-à-terre.” So... Hospital psy-
chosis! Sure! Why not? I was, yes, a teenager at fifteen—but then I
was precocious.
ANNA. What?
SETH. Nothing
ANNA. You’re a nutty.
SETH. Yes I am.
ANNA. What was that instrument?
SETH. U-u-u-um: stethoscope?
ANNA. What?
SETH. What?
ANNA. That you played!
SETH. Oh!
ANNA. (Considers.) Stethoscope?
    No that’s not right.
SETH. Viola.
ANNA. Trombone!
SETH. Viola.
ANNA. Or was it trumpet? Which has the slide?
SETH. Trombone.
ANNA. That’s right: trombone.
SETH. Yes.
    But I played viola.
ANNA. You played trombone.
SETH. No—well yes. But only for a year.
    The band teacher was a psycho; he was exactly like Dad; I
switched to viola.
ANNA. That’s right.
SETH. Thank you.
ANNA. The viola…
SETH. Yes?
ANNA. That’s like the violin only nobody cares about it?
SETH. Right.
ANNA. Oh, we were so proud of you!
Why did you choose an instrument like that?
SETH. The orchestra teacher insisted. The section was short.
I didn’t mind. I didn’t have a passion either way, except to get away from Mr. Crowther, the bandmaster—Harold Hill by way of Bellevue.
ANNA. So you accommodated.
SETH. … Yes.
ANNA. That’s when it happened.
SETH. When I accommodated.
ANNA. At Juilliard.
SETH. I did not accommodate at Juilliard; I failed at Juilliard.
ANNA. We were so proud. A son at Juilliard pre-school.
SETH. It wasn’t pre-school. I was, what, fifteen? It was pre-college.
ANNA. I would take you in, Saturday mornings.
Long Island Railroad to Penn Station. Then the subway to Sixty-sixth Street. Except when we were feeling fancy and we’d take a cab. I loved October.
SETH. It wasn’t always October.
ANNA. It’s always October when the school is expensive; don’t you go to the movies?
SETH. No.
ANNA. Then you’ll have to take my word for it. I wore my Burberry.
SETH. Oh God yes.
ANNA. And that scarf!
SETH. You certainly did wear that scarf.
ANNA. I had to. It was costly.
SETH. It was a nice scarf.
ANNA. Your father bought it for me but I wore it anyway. It was smart looking.
I was well put together.
My trench coat, my scarf.
SETH. Your absent gaze.
ANNA. And that’s when I had my affair.
SETH. And that’s when I summoned my sister. (Lights flicker.
Abby’s here.) How was the flight?
ABBY. Oh! Squashed, bumpy, endless. We were all buckled in, they announced from the terminal that takeoff would be delayed “at least two hours or less.” I didn’t know what to make of that! But finally, it started and went in the right direction so it was a happy thing. (*A moment. More serious.*) Is this it?
SETH. The last of her many deaths, you mean?
ABBY. (*Laughs loosely; regrets it.*) Oh, that’s awful.
SETH. Probably not.
ABBY. Good I’m here, anyway; just in case. I mean I don’t mind, even if it’s a false alarm. I like being here, not where I was.
SETH. She looks like a breeze hung from a bone, but she’s not even made of human material, really; she’s galvanized.
ABBY. I miss her.
SETH. Do you?
ABBY. I don’t know
  Maybe
  Don’t ask these questions.
SETH. She misses you. A lot.
ABBY. Does she?
SETH. I have no idea.
  She’s…
  Laguna?
ABBY. What about it?
SETH. How is
ABBY. Oh it’s dreadful
  It’s worse than you can possibly
  The weather is lovely; and the sunsets
  Though they’re suspect, the sunsets, they’re part of something insidious, climate change
  It’s
  You walk in the malls
  One tour of any mall and you understand why they all vote
that way
  You know what they’re missing there?
SETH. Tell me.
ABBY. A sense of apocalyptic intimacy.
SETH. Welcome to New York.
ABBY. Thank God or oy vey or something.
  I’ve been reading about holocausts and cataclysms of the past.
On the verge of death for the umpteenth time, Anna makes a shocking confession to her grown children: an affair from her past that just might have resonance beyond the family. But how much of what she says is true? While her children try to separate fact from fiction, Anna fights for a legacy she can be proud of. With razor-sharp wit and extraordinary insight, OUR MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR considers the sweeping, surprising impact of indiscretions both large and small.

“Our MOTHER’S BRIEF AFFAIR is the sort of everyday detective story in which the prolific Mr. Greenberg has long specialized… he juxtaposes a generational then and now to consider how little we know about the lives that impinge upon and shape our own. … [It] provides an uncannily perceptive portrait of colliding reminiscences.” —The New York Times

“Greenberg’s writing is elegant and keenly epigrammatic, and the identity he assigns to Anna’s lover at the end of Act I is a first-class punch line: a historical left hook…”

—Time Out (New York)

“Richard Greenberg always amazes with his precise selection of words and images…”

—The Observer