



OSLO

BY

J.T. ROGERS



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PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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For Bartlett Sher and André Bishop

OSLO was originally produced by Lincoln Center Theater (André Bishop, Producing Artistic Director; Adam Siegel, Managing Director; Hattie K. Jutagir, Executive Director of Development and Planning), New York City. Performances began June 16, 2016, in the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater. The production then transferred to Broadway at the Vivian Beaumont Theater, beginning performances on March 23, 2017. It was directed by Bartlett Sher, the set design was by Michael Yeargan, the costume design was by Catherine Zuber, the lighting design was by Donald Holder, the sound design was by Peter John Still, the projection design was by 59 Productions, and the stage manager was Cambra Overend. The cast was as follows:

JOHAN JØRGEN HOLST/FINN GRANDAL T. Ryder Smith
JAN EGELAND/RON PUNDAK Daniel Jenkins
MONA JUUL Jennifer Ehle
TERJE RØD-LARSEN Jefferson Mays
MARIANNE HEIBERG/TORIL GRANDAL/
SWEDISH HOSTESS Henny Russell
THOR BJORNEVOG/
AMERICAN DIPLOMAT Christopher McHale
TROND GUNDERSEN/
GERMAN HUSBAND Jeb Kreager
AHMED QURIE Anthony Azizi
HASSAN ASFOUR Dariush Kashani
SHIMON PERES/YAIR HIRSCHFELD Daniel Oreskes
YOSSI BEILIN Adam Dannheisser
URI SAVIR Michael Aronov
JOEL SINGER Joseph Siravo
GERMAN WIFE Angela Pierce

OSLO was developed with the support of PlayPenn (Paul Meshejian, Artistic Director).

The UK premiere of OSLO was presented by the National Theatre, produced in association with Ambassador Theatre Group/Gavin Kalin Productions/Glass Half Full Productions, at the Lyttelton Theatre in September 2017. The production transferred to the Harold Pinter Theatre in the West End on October 2, 2017. It was directed by Bartlett Sher, the set design was by Michael Yeargan, the costume design was by Catherine Zuber, the lighting design was by Donald Holder, the sound design was by Peter John Still, the projection design was by 59 Productions, and the stage manager was Matthew Cullum. The cast was as follows:

JOHAN JØRGEN HOLST/FINN GRANDAL Howard Ward
JAN EGELAND/RON PUNDAK Thomas Arnold
MONA JUUL Lydia Leonard
TERJE RØD-LARSEN Toby Stephens
MARIANNE HEIBERG/
TORIL GRANDAL Geraldine Alexander
THOR BJORNEVOG/
AMERICAN DIPLOMAT Daniel Stewart
TROND GUNDERSEN/
GERMAN HUSBAND Anthony Shuster
AHMED QURIE Peter Polycarpou
HASSAN ASFOUR Nabil Elouahabi
SHIMON PERES/YAIR HIRSCHFELD Paul Herzberg
YOSSI BEILIN Jacob Krichefski
URI SAVIR Philip Arditti
JOEL SINGER Yair Jonah Lotan
GERMAN WIFE/SWEDISH HOSTESS Karoline Gable

INTRODUCTION

In early 2012, as my play *Blood and Gifts* was finishing its run at Lincoln Center Theater, my director, Bartlett Sher, arranged for me to have a drink with a friend of his. Terje Rød-Larsen was then a United Nations special envoy, focused on Lebanon. The two men and their families had become friends through their daughters, who attended middle school together. Bart had invited his friend to rehearsals of *Blood and Gifts* to talk to the cast about his work as a diplomatic negotiator in the Middle East. “I’ve asked him to meet with you,” Bart told me. “Ask him questions about everything he’s done. You’ll find it fascinating.”

Late on a bitterly cold January night, we met for warm drinks at an Upper West Side haunt a few blocks from the theater. Mr. Larsen had just seen my play. He was vivacious and charming, draped in understated European finery—including dress shoes so elegant I filed the detail away under the mental heading “Interesting Character Trait.” Peppering him with questions, I learned that his wife, Mona Juul, was Ambassador, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Norway Mission to the UN. Further, that they had both been deeply involved for years in the politics of the Middle East.

“Twenty years ago, Mona and I were part of an historic event,” Mr. Larsen said. As we ordered our second round, I asked him to tell me more.

As a playwright, I look to tell stories that are framed against great political rupture. I am obsessed with putting characters onstage who struggle with, and against, cascading world events—and who are changed forever through that struggle. While journalism sharpens our minds, the theater can expand our sense of what it means to be human. It is where we can come together in a communal space to hear ideas that grip us, surprise us—even infuriate us—as we learn of things we didn’t know. For me, that is a deeply, thrillingly, political act. I hunt perpetually for these kinds of stories. I look for them everywhere, but sometimes the story finds you.

In that restaurant, Mr. Larsen explained that he and his wife were intimately involved with the making of the Oslo Accords. I knew of the first-ever peace deal between the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. I’ll never forget watching the

signing ceremony in the White House Rose Garden on television, on September 13, 1993, seeing President Clinton preside over that historic handshake between the bitterest of enemies, Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel, and Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization. I already knew the joy and the rage that handshake caused around the world.

Then he told me something I did not know: that there was a clandestine diplomatic back channel that had made the Accords possible. That without a handful of men and women—Israeli, Palestinian, and Norwegian—working in secret to try to alter the political reality of two peoples, those Accords never would have happened. And when I heard that, I knew the writing of my next play had begun.

I contacted Ms. Juul and asked if we could meet. She was surprised at my interest in these events, but eventually agreed to talk to me. In person she was charming as well, but far more reserved than her husband. She deftly steered the conversation away from her own career and achievements, graciously but firmly keeping herself from being the center of attention. “Yes, we were part of this back channel,” she confirmed. “But the story is not us. The story is about those in that channel who risked their lives to try and change the world.”

I began a years-long process of reading, travel, and interviews with multiple participants as I sought to understand the full history of the secret channel—what came to be known as the Oslo Channel—through which the Accords were birthed. Everything that Mr. Larsen and Ms. Juul had told me turned out to be in the public record—but they had downplayed their own involvement. Throughout our conversations they had focused on the accomplishments of the Israelis and Palestinians who were involved, but Mr. Larsen and Ms. Juul were the ones who midwived the entire process. And, like the agreements themselves, their involvement proved to be deeply controversial. There are those who saw the Oslo Channel as a necessary and bold attempt to bring peace to the Middle East; there are others who saw it as reckless, naive meddling that only added to the anguish in this region.

The further I dug, the more gripped I became as a dramatist. Here was the stuff of theater—events that were almost preposterous

in their strangeness: clandestine meetings, often run by those who had no experience with such things; people's lives constantly put at risk; governments threatened with calamity; emotions rising and falling at an operatic scale; people pushed to the brink of what they thought possible as friendships were fused and torn apart.

It became clear that Mr. Larsen and Ms. Juul would be characters at the very heart of the play. These were the sort of protagonists a writer looks for: two complicated, articulate people driven to achieve something far greater than themselves—people who stumble, make mistakes, but keep pushing on. As I researched, I drew a tight bracket around the historic events directly preceding and occurring during the time of the Channel's existence. I burrowed into this sliver of history as deeply as I could, in order to summon a specific moment in time and place. Then I took the who, what, when, and where of journalism and threw them into a blender. I wanted to write a play, not a textbook or a reenactment. I sought to capture the spirit of those real events—their craziness, fear, joy, and heartbreak. I wanted to tell a story about men and women risking their own lives and challenging their own beliefs as they struggle without a road map toward peace.

The historic events in OSLO are all true, but I have taken dramatic liberties. I have theatricalized and reinvented—all to focus my play on the radical act at the center of the actual Oslo Channel.

In the middle of endless bloodshed and hatred, members of the Israeli Government and the PLO chose to sit across from their enemies and see them as human beings. Each side listened to the other and was permanently changed by that listening. I am awed by the personal and political courage that took. It is a moment of history that I do not want forgotten.

— J.T. Rogers
Hastings-on-Hudson, NY
January 2017

CHARACTERS

The Norwegians

JOHAN JØRGEN HOLST

Foreign Minister; married to Marianne Heiberg

JAN EGELAND

Deputy Foreign Minister

MONA JUUL

*Official in the Foreign Ministry; reports to Jan Egeland;
married to Terje Larsen*

TERJE RØD-LARSEN

*Director of the Fafo Institute for Applied Social Sciences;
married to Mona Juul*

MARIANNE HEIBERG

*Executive with the Fafo Institute; works for Terje Larsen;
married to Johan Jørgen Holst*

TORIL GRANDAL

*Housekeeper and cook at the Borregaard estate outside Oslo;
married to Finn*

FINN GRANDAL

Groundsman at the Borregaard estate outside Oslo; married to Toril

THOR BJORNEVOG

Senior officer with the Police Intelligence Service

TROND GUNDERSEN

Officer with the Police Intelligence Service

The Palestinians

AHMED QURIE (also known as “Abu Ala”)

Finance Minister for the Palestine Liberation Organization

HASSAN ASFOUR

Official PLO liaison

The Israelis

SHIMON PERES

Foreign Minister

YOSSI BEILIN

Deputy Foreign Minister

URI SAVIR

Director-General of the Foreign Ministry

JOEL SINGER

*Legal advisor to the Foreign Ministry; senior law partner for a
Washington, D.C. firm*

YAIR HIRSCHFELD

Senior professor of Economics at the University of Haifa

RON PUNDAK

Junior professor of Economics at the University of Haifa

Supporting roles (played by members of the company)

AMERICAN DIPLOMAT

PALESTINIAN DIPLOMAT

ISRAELI DIPLOMAT

OTHER DIPLOMATS

DELEGATES

JOURNALISTS

PALESTINIAN CITIZENS

ISRAELI CITIZENS

WAITERS

AIRPORT PASSENGERS

GERMAN HUSBAND

GERMAN WIFE

SWEDISH HOSTESS

“Out of the crooked timbers of humanity, no straight thing was ever made.”

—Immanuel Kant

OSLO

ACT ONE

Oslo, Norway. March 1993. Evening. An elegant flat mid-dinner. Laughter and champagne.

Terje Rød-Larsen, 40s, mid-story to his guests: Johan Jørgen Holst, 50s, and his wife, Marianne Heiberg, 40s.

LARSEN. It's all true. I'm not making this up. I'm sitting there in his office, in Tel Aviv, straight across from him, and before either of us even speak, I realize: It's not even noon, and he's drunk.

MARIANNE. No!

HOLST. He's exaggerating. Terje *always* embellishes.

LARSEN. Johan Jørgen, his words were completely slurred. I could *smell* the scotch on his breath!

MARIANNE. Are you saying that Yitzhak Rabin is an alcoholic?

LARSEN. Not at all. Just that he drinks. Heavily. (*Seamlessly back to it.*) I start to introduce myself—and he cuts me off, just launches in! About the Israeli Labour Party, as its chairman; the upcoming elections; and *then* he says: (*As Rabin, in a gravelly voice.*) “Mr. Larsen, as a French politician, you will understand what I am saying.” (*As himself again.*) “Excuse me.” I am polite, but firm. “I am a Norwegian and I am not a politician.”

HOLST. Not by a long shot.

MARIANNE. Johan Jørgen, let him talk.

LARSEN. And he goes on, as if I've said nothing. And once again:

(As Rabin.) “As a Frenchman, you will—”

And I completely break protocol.

(Himself, to Rabin.) “Listen! I am Norwegian, I run the Fafø Institute in Norway, and I want that to be clear!”

The meeting ends, I leave, and I think to myself: What the fuck is this guy doing running the Israeli Labour Party?

As Mona Juul, 30s, enters with a fresh bottle of champagne...

MARIANNE. Mona, can you believe Terje said that to Yitzhak Rabin?

MONA. My husband shows no deference to power.

LARSEN. Well, what is a throne but a stool covered in velvet?

MONA. You’ve used that one before.

LARSEN. Have I?

MARIANNE. Yes, / you have. Repeatedly.

HOLST. Many, many / times. Over and over.

LARSEN. The *point* of this story is this: Six months later, Rabin is prime minister and I am a fool. Why? Because I saw one side of this man and assumed this meant I knew all of him. Now I tell you all this, not to speak of myself—

HOLST. Well, this *is* an occasion.

LARSEN. But to speak of you, Johan Jørgen.

Had *you* been there, *you* would have seen to the very core of this man. For like Rabin himself, you are a visionary and bold statesman. Tomorrow you are foreign minister, and all of us in this country will be better off under your stewardship.

(Raising his glass.) To Johan Jørgen Holst. May your eyes be open to the new as you steer our ship toward uncharted shores.

They toast.¹ Mona turns to us.

MONA. To clarify: Johan Jørgen is married to Marianne, who works for Terje, who is married to me, who, as of tomorrow, works for Johan Jørgen. Norway is a very small country. We take nepotism to an entirely new level.

She is back with them. Larsen has ceded the floor to Holst.

HOLST. I’ll tell you what I’m *not* looking forward to: dealing with

1 See transliterations on page 108.

Warren Christopher.

Mona, have you met him?

MONA. Not yet.

HOLST. My God, what a wet fish. *This* is the new US Secretary of State? No wonder the Americans can't make peace in the Middle East.

LARSEN. Then why don't you?

HOLST. What, make peace in the Middle East?

LARSEN. Why not?

MARIANNE. Because it's the Middle East, Terje. They don't *do* peace.

LARSEN. Ah, but my friends, look at what is happening in the world: The grip of history is loosening. The Berlin Wall has just fallen; the Soviet Empire, disbanded. My God, if Leningrad can revert to St. Petersburg, anything is possible.

MARIANNE. Terje, if the Americans can't force the Israelis and Palestinians to make a deal, what chance has Johan Jørgen?

LARSEN. But *we* have what the US can never have: the appearance of neutrality. The Americans flood Israel with foreign aid.

(*Cutting Marianne off before she can speak.*) Which, as you know, I support one thousand percent.

(*Back to Holst.*) But the perception is bias.

HOLST. So now I should take advice from a sociologist.

(*To Marianne.*) Is this what you two are doing at your think tank? Sitting in your offices, funded by *my* ministry, is this what you're all saying?

LARSEN. It is what *I* am saying, Johan Jørgen. *Me*.

MONA. Terje does have a point.

Host and Marianne look at her in surprise.

We *are* trusted by both sides. We have always supported Israel *and* the Palestinian cause, / while maintaining a strict neutrality on the issue of statehood.

HOLST. Mona! The Palestinian cause is led by Arafat and the PLO, who wish to wipe Israel off the map. Are you seriously suggesting Rabin talk peace with the man the Israelis call Hitler in his lair?

LARSEN. Johan Jørgen, you don't make peace with the people you

have dinner parties with. You make peace with the people who bomb your markets and blow up your buses.

MARIANNE. Please, let's not talk politics. / It's Johan Jørgen's last night as a free man.

HOLST. (*Straight at Larsen.*) While dinner was superb, / I cannot say the same thing for your ideas. You seem not to realize, Terje, that the job of the Foreign Minister is not to joust with windmills.

LARSEN. (*Straight at Holst.*) What are you afraid of, Johan Jørgen? The world is cracking open. All I am saying is to think about new possibilities. Imagine what can be achieved *now!*

A phone rings. Larsen and Mona freeze.

The two of them gesture to each other:

"They're early!"

"What do we do?"

Holst and Marianne watch in confusion as a second phone starts to ring. Larsen answers the first just as Mona answers the second.

MONA. Good evening.

LARSEN. This is Larsen.

First phone to his ear, Larsen looks to Mona; second phone to her ear, she nods.

LARSEN. (*Into first phone.*) Yes, Those Across The Sea are with us. Now, to pick up where we last—

Mona holds the second phone away from her and whispers in Larsen's ear.

(*Into first phone.*) ...Just one—hold on, please.

Larsen switches phones with Mona. He listens to someone on the second phone. Then they switch back. Larsen, speaking into the first phone again:

Those Across the Sea have a message they wish the Son to pass on to the Father.

HOLST. Terje, who are you talking to?

Larsen and Mona gesture silently and wildly: "For God's sake, be quiet!"

LARSEN. (*First phone.*) They say they have waited long enough and they must know if the Grandfather is on board.

He listens to the voice on the other end. It finishes. He gestures for Mona to give him the second phone. He holds both phones now.

(Into second phone.) The Son wishes me to inform you that it is too early to say the ways of his Grandfather.

The voice down the line starts screaming. We can't hear the words, but the rage is volcanic. Larsen throws that phone to Mona, who muffles the shouting with her hand.

(Back into first phone.) They say that's fine, no problem, talk soon.

Larsen and Mona hang up their phones as one.

HOLST. What the hell was that?

LARSEN. My apologies. I had the time zones wrong, clearly. I thought they were calling much later.

HOLST. Terje. Who were you talking to?

LARSEN. *(Raising first phone.)* The Israeli government...

(Pointing at the second phone.) ...and the PLO.

Holst and Marianne burst into laughter. They stop laughing. They realize Larsen is serious.

I was going to tell you before they called. I'm truly sorry.

HOLST. What is this?

What the hell is going on?

LARSEN. I am facilitating secret conversations between the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

They are meeting, here in Norway, face-to-face.

Silence. Then, cacophony.

HOLST. Are you mad? / Have you gone completely mad?

MARIANNE. Terje! How could you not tell me?

HOLST. You have / absolutely no authority to do this!

LARSEN. Please, my friends, please!

MARIANNE. I am your partner!

LARSEN. I think *associate* is the / official title, yes?

MARIANNE. You would risk our entire organization / like this without my involvement?

OSLO

by J.T. Rogers

WINNER OF THE 2017 TONY AWARD FOR BEST PLAY

11M, 3W

Everyone remembers the stunning and iconic moment in 1993 when Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat shook hands on the South Lawn of the White House. But among the many questions that laced the hope of the moment was that of Norway's role. How did such high-profile negotiations come to be held secretly in a castle in the middle of a forest outside Oslo? A darkly funny and sweeping play, OSLO tells the surprising true story of the back-channel talks, unlikely friendships, and quiet heroics that led to the Oslo Peace Accords between the Israelis and Palestinians. J.T. Rogers presents a deeply personal story set against a complex historical canvas: a story about the individuals behind world history and their all too human ambitions.

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—**The New York Times**

"...unequivocally fascinating...This is what we call drama, and it's what we live for."
—**Variety**

"...a madly engrossing play...gripping human drama. ...[OSLO makes] diplomacy not just interesting but moving..." —**New York Magazine**

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