



relativity

BY **MARK
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DRAMATISTS
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INC.



relativity

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*relativity is dedicated to Mike Nussbaum,
a theatrical treasure,
who in playing Albert Einstein
gave unforgettable pleasure to me and all theatergoers fortunate
to see his performances.*

relativity received its first professional reading as part of PlayFest at the Orlando Shakespeare Theater (Jim Helsinger, Artistic Director; PJ Albert, Managing Director) in 2015. It was directed by Cynthia White. The cast was as follows:

MARGARET HARDING Meghan Colleen Moroney
ALBERT EINSTEIN Eric Zivot
HELEN DUKAS Suzanne O'Donnell

relativity was commissioned by Florida Studio Theatre (Richard Hopkins, Producing Artistic Director; Rebecca Hopkins, Managing Director), opening on June 22, 2016. It was directed by Jason Cannon, the scenic design was by Bruce Price, the costume design was by Donna K. Riggs, the lighting design was by Tom Hansen, and the production stage manager was Stephen M. Ray, Jr. The cast was as follows:

MARGARET HARDING Ginger Lee McDermott
ALBERT EINSTEIN Robert Zukerman
HELEN DUKAS Sally Bondi

relativity was first produced as a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere by Florida Studio Theatre (Florida), Riverside Theatre (Iowa), Northlight Theatre (Illinois), and Taproot Theatre Company (Washington), as part of NNPN's Continued Life Program. For more information please visit www.nnpn.org.

relativity was subsequently produced at TheaterWorks (Rob Ruggiero, Producing Artistic Director), Hartford, Connecticut, opening on October 7, 2016. It was directed by Rob Ruggiero, the scenic design was by Brian Prather, the costume design was by Alejo Vietti, the lighting design was by Philip Rosenberg, the sound design was by Michael Miceli and Lucas Clopton, and the production stage manager was Kate J. Cudworth. The cast was as follows:

MARGARET HARDING Christa Scott-Reed
ALBERT EINSTEIN Richard Dreyfuss
HELEN DUKAS Lori Wilner

relativity was also produced at Penguin Rep Theatre (Joe Brancato, Founding Artistic Director; Andrew M. Horn, Executive Director), Stony Point, New York, in 2018. It was directed by Joe Brancato, the scenic design was by Brian Prather, the costume design was by Patricia E. Doherty, the lighting design was by Martin E. Vreeland, the original music and sound design were by William Neal, and the production stage manager was Michael Palmer. The cast was as follows:

MARGARET HARDING Celeste Ciulla
ALBERT EINSTEIN Robert Zukerman
HELEN DUKAS Susan Pellegrino

CHARACTERS

ALBERT EINSTEIN, 70

MARGARET HARDING, 47

MISS DUKAS, 53

TIME

December 9th, 1949

PLACE

Princeton, New Jersey

relativity

Lights slowly up on Albert Einstein, standing on the sidewalk of Mercer Street in Princeton. It's noon on a cold winter day, December 9th, 1949.

Einstein, 70, wears a shabby coat and black knit cap. Humming, he looks up into the distance.

Margaret Harding, 47, enters. She is wearing a topcoat, high heels, gloves, scarf over her hair, and carrying a large handbag. She's fashionable and attractive.

Seeing Einstein she stops, tense. Taking a breath, she approaches.

MARGARET. Professor?

Church bell rings. Einstein stops humming, holds up a finger as if to say "wait," not looking at her.

EINSTEIN. Noon. We are triangulated by three churches that ring their bells every hour.

Second bell begins to ring.

Second church. And now...

Third bell.

The third and last. They are controlled electronically. There is no possibility of human error.

All three ring, discordant. The discord continues.

By counting all their rings we know it will be 36 o'clock.

MARGARET. Then someone got it right. Time is relative.

EINSTEIN. If I went to church I would have discovered it sooner.

He turns to her, pleased to see an attractive woman.

MARGARET. Professor, I've been in Princeton three days trying to meet you. I've called your office many times and tried leaving notes at your home, but the woman who answers the door refuses to take them.

EINSTEIN. That's her job. Telling people I am out when I am in.

MARGARET. I'm Margaret Harding. I'd like to interview you for the *Jewish Daily*.

EINSTEIN. We have not met, Miss Harding. I certainly would remember.

MARGARET. I've just started and I can't imagine a more exciting first story than an interview with Albert Einstein.

EINSTEIN. Flatterer. Go on.

MARGARET. A man so treasured, almost worshipped—

EINSTEIN. I could listen all day, but unfortunately, I am expected at my office. I agreed to attend a departmental meeting, so I will be sleeping for at least two hours.

MARGARET. I'm happy to wait.

EINSTEIN. Has anyone ever said "no" to you? You are not dressed for the cold. Perhaps you would be more comfortable talking in my home, it is closer than the Institute.

MARGARET. I'd like that. Maybe I'll feel my fingers again.

EINSTEIN. Then we are off.

He looks up and down the street.

MARGARET. (*Indicates behind her.*) You live this way.

EINSTEIN. Ah!

MARGARET. I thought all the Absent-Minded Professor stories were apocryphal.

EINSTEIN. Sadly, no. I once had to call the dean to find out my own address.

They start to walk.

This sidewalk is a sheet of glass. Please take my arm.

MARGARET. I'm fine, thanks. Is it true you really don't wear socks, even when it's freezing?

EINSTEIN. It could be worse. I could have no socks and be wearing your high heels.

They exit.

Sound of 1940s Hoover vacuum cleaner.

Lights up on Miss Helen Dukas, vacuuming Einstein's study on the second floor of 132 Mercer Street. Two walls of bookshelves. A large picture window overlooks the backyard. A desk is buried in papers.

A chalkboard is mounted on the wall, and three portraits hang: James Maxwell, Michael Faraday, and Mahatma Gandhi.

A well-worn gray chair.

A blackboard is prominent. On it is written HALF of the formula:

$$|\psi^-\rangle = 1/\sqrt{2} [|H\rangle_A |V\rangle_B - |V\rangle_A |H\rangle_B]$$

(Einstein calculation for "spooky action at a distance.")

In the corner of the room is a cage containing an unseen African Grey Parrot, his cage half-covered with a cloth.

Einstein and Margaret appear.

EINSTEIN. *(Shouting.)* MISS DUKAS!

Dukas looks up in surprise.

DUKAS. Back so soon?

Her eyes go immediately to Margaret. She turns off the vacuum, her posture grows defensive.

You again.

MARGARET. I'm persistent. If I hadn't spotted the Professor today I might have come down the chimney.

DUKAS. And to think I almost built a fire.

Margaret crosses to look at the portraits.

(Crossing to Einstein, lowers voice.) Warum bringst du eine Kakerlake ins Haus? Sie kann doch eine von denen sein.

EINSTEIN. Miss Harding, coffee or tea?

MARGARET. This cockroach prefers coffee. *(Looks to Dukas.)* Did I get it wrong? You did say, "Why did you bring a cockroach into the house?"

EINSTEIN. *(Amused, to Dukas.)* She speaks German.

MARGARET. And French and some Italian.

EINSTEIN. Miss Dukas, you must learn Mandarin. Leave the kaffees

on the hallway table. And phone the Institute. Tell them my ulcers have come calling.

DUKAS. Of course. (*Directed at Margaret.*) I hope they will soon be gone.

Dukas picks up her vacuum and leaves. Einstein shuts the door after her.

EINSTEIN. Miss Dukas is happiest when she is unhappy.

MARGARET. Is she a relative?

EINSTEIN. No, she is my jailor. Secretary and housekeeper as well.

MARGARET. What did she mean: I might be “one of them”? Who is “them”?

EINSTEIN. Miss Dukas believes we are under surveillance: Our phones are tapped and our letters opened.

MARGARET. Do you believe her?

EINSTEIN. (*Shrugs.*) Belief is a different thing than truth. Miss Dukas still insists Dewey beat Truman.

Margaret looks in Bibo’s cage; he gives her the wolf whistle. She smiles, goes to him.

MARGARET. Thank you.

EINSTEIN. Do not flatter yourself, he whistles at Miss Dukas too. Bibo was a birthday present from students at the Medical Institute. I do not know what I did to them. Now the bird has a cold. I give him drops in his water and tell him jokes to make him feel better.

(*Turns to Bibo.*) A Priest, a Politician, and a Scientist are led to the guillotine. The Priest puts his head on the block, the Executioner pulls the lever and the blade stops halfway down its track. The crowd shouts, “A Miracle!”

The Politician is next, he gets to his knees, lowers his head and the blade stops again. “Another Miracle!” they cry.

At last, the Scientist. He looks up at the guillotine and says to the Executioner, “You know, if you tighten that bolt the blade will work right.”

Margaret smiles, Bibo doesn’t make a sound.

MARGARET. African Greys are supposed to be bright, aren’t they?

EINSTEIN. This is why he never laughs. Please sit.

He indicates a chair. Margaret points to another chair.

MARGARET. Would you mind?

EINSTEIN. Not at all.

MARGARET. I have to say; I'm impressed you do this so effortlessly.

EINSTEIN. Do what?

MARGARET. Play "Einstein." You stay true to this image you've created of yourself.

EINSTEIN. It is simple to stay true to the truth.

MARGARET. Said the humble genius.

EINSTEIN. Miss Harding—

MARGARET. "Margaret." Please.

EINSTEIN. Margaret. Everyone has "genius." But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree—

MARGARET. (*Finishing.*) "...it will live its whole life believing it is stupid." That's one of my favorites.

She takes a notebook from her briefcase.

And you are everyone's. George Bernard Shaw: "Albert Einstein [is] a...maker of the universe. We should have declared war on Germany the moment...Hitler's troopers stole [his] violin." Now, *that's* funny.

EINSTEIN. Shaw also says the funniest joke in the world is telling the truth.

MARGARET. Charlie Chaplin: "People cheer me because they understand me. People cheer Einstein because they—"

BOTH. "—don't understand him."

MARGARET. What about this one? The little girl down the block comes to your door for help with her homework. You tell her, "Don't worry about your problems with mathematics. I assure you, mine are much greater." Then, even cuter, you give her milk and cookies. Really?

EINSTEIN. Not true! I gave her milk and brownies.

Margaret spots his violin on the shelf.

MARGARET. The famous violin. Do you still play?

relativity

by Mark St. Germain

1 man, 2 women

In 1902, Albert and Mileva Einstein had a daughter. After 1904, the child was never seen or spoken of again. It is now 1942, and a reporter has come to interview Einstein about his mysterious family history, only to discover far more secrets under the surface. As the reporter questions Einstein about his theory of relativity and personal past, she develops a new, more pressing query: To be a great man, does one first need to be a good man?

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