

**THE PANTIES,
THE PARTNER,
AND THE
ONE PERCENT
SCENES FROM THE HEROIC
LIFE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS**

BY DAVID IVES

**INSPIRED BY THE WORK OF CARL
STERNHEIM**



**DRAMATISTS
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*To Christian Conn, Carson Elrod, Amelia Pedlow,
and Tony Roach, great players all.
For all those plays we made together.
And all the fun.*

The world premiere of THE PANTIES, THE PARTNER, AND THE ONE PERCENT: SCENES FROM THE HEROIC LIFE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS was presented by Shakespeare Theatre Company (Michael Kahn, Artistic Director, Chris Jennings; Executive Director) in Washington, D.C., on December 10, 2018, at the Lansburgh Theatre. It was directed by Michael Kahn; the scenic design was by Alexander Dodge; the costume design was by Frank Labovitz; the lighting design was by Nancy Schertler; the original sound and music design was by Elisheba Ittoop; the production stage manager was Joseph Smelser. The cast was as follows:

The Panties

JOSEPH MASK Carson Elrod
 LOUISE MASK Kimberly Gilbert
 TRUDY REEZNER Julia Coffey
 JOCK REVERE Tony Roach
 BENJAMIN MANDELSHTAM Kevin Isola
 A YOUNG WOMAN Turna Mete

The Partner

CHRISTIAN MASK Kevin Isola
 SYBIL RITTENHOUSE Julia Coffey
 WILLIAM HAMILTON Tony Roach
 JOSEPH MASK Carson Elrod
 LOUISE MASK Kimberly Gilbert
 MILLY HAMILTON Turna Mete

The One Percent

LOUISE MASK Kimberly Gilbert
 JACK REVERE Tony Roach
 JOE JONES Carson Elrod
 URSULA MASK Turna Mete
 OMEGA Julia Coffey
 RABBI MANDELSHTAM Kevin Isola

HOW I GOT INTO PANTIES, PARTNERS, AND THE ONE PERCENT

Michael Kahn, as Artistic Director of Washington's Shakespeare Theatre Company, commissioned three adaptations from me over several years and directed them to perfection, both in D.C. and then in New York. They were *The Liar* (2010, adapted from Corneille), *The Heir Apparent* (2011, adapted from Regnard), and *The Metromaniacs* (2015, adapted from Piron). Having at that point announced his retirement from STC, Michael wanted us to do one more show together, so I started looking for something to adapt. Given his upcoming departure, we had a ticking clock.

With *The Metromaniacs* I felt I'd finished with French classical comedy, while French classical drama (Racine and company) held little interest for me as a translator/adaptor, not to mention the immense difficulties of bringing those extraordinary plays into English. I looked at Goldoni but his works didn't call out to me. I visited the comedies of Plautus and Terence. The trouble is, after *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, there's no need to adapt Roman comedies. That show brings us all of them in one perfect package.

Then I remembered Carl Sternheim.

As an undergraduate at Northwestern decades ago, I did an independent study on German Expressionism and came to admire the work of Sternheim (1878–1942), whose social-satiric plays, particularly up to the First World War, had been successful in Germany as well as in England and America. Probably his best or best-known work is a series of plays about the Maske family that he collected under the heading *Aus dem bürgerlichen Heldenleben*, "from the heroic life of the middle class."

The play that most stuck in my mind was *Die Hose*, the first play in the Maske family series, sometimes known in English as *The Underpants*. It centers around a working-class woman, Louise Maske, whose bloomers fall down while she's watching a parade. Effectively, Sternheim brings into the open not just hidden garments but what lies under the surface socially, culturally and familiarly.

Michael agreed to let me give the play a go. At first I thought I'd just adapt *Die Hose*, updating it and changing the setting to America.

Then, reading deeper into Sternheim's series, I thought that it would be far more interesting to do the three major Maske family plays compressed into one evening. For a contemporary audience, the pieces needed a good deal of trimming in any case, and the chronicle of the Maskes moving up from lower middle class to upper middle class to filthy rich seemed a story that might speak to an American audience today.

So I took Sternheim's three full-length plays, *Die Hose*, *Der Snob*, and *1913* and turned them into *The Panties*, *The Partner*, and *The One Percent: Scenes from the Heroic Life of the Middle Class*. The series now begins in Boston in 1950 ("The Panties"), goes on to New York and Wall Street in 1986 ("The Partner"), and brings the family up to date in our own day with the grandchildren now rich in Malibu ("The One Percent"). As always with my "translaptations," I took immense liberties with my source material—liberties that got larger with each successive Sternheim play. In fact, the third section in this evening bears only the breath of a connection to Sternheim. Hence the credits call this a three-part play "inspired by" him.

All the while I was at work, I felt as if Carl Sternheim were sitting on my shoulder. For what he saw in his own time was that money had trumped everything. He saw small-minded nationalism on the rise and civil society in tatters. He saw cultural ignorance, rampant greed, and sex craziness. He even predicted apocalypse—an apocalypse that arrived with the First World War. In other words, like all writers of satire from Aristophanes to Shaw, Carl Sternheim saw that the world was in a parlous state.

I have no doubt that, were he with us today, he would be writing his butt off.

—David Ives
2019

Part One

THE PANTIES

(adapted from Sternheim's *Die Hose*)

THE CHARACTERS

JOSEPH MASK, late 20s

LOUISE MASK, late 20s

TRUDY REEZNER, a neighbor, 30s

JOCK REVERE, 40s

BENJAMIN MANDELSHTAM, 35

A YOUNG WOMAN, 25

THE TIME

July 4, 1950. Morning.

THE SETTING

The Charlestown, Boston, apartment of Joseph and Louise Mask. Low-rent and working-class. There is a door to the building's hallway right of center. Two doors up and down right. A kitchen table at center. A sink, an icebox, and a stove at left. A door down left to the Masks' bedroom. A stopped clock says 11:07. On the wall, a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

THE PANTIES

Joseph and Louise. She in a hat. Joseph is brandishing a flag on a stick.

JOSEPH. Humiliated. *Humiliated!*

LOUISE. Put the flag down, Joe.

JOSEPH. How are we supposed to live after this, huh? Can you tell me that, Louise? How do we live? And why do I ask?

LOUISE. Because my panties fell down.

JOSEPH. Yes. Out in the open street, His Honor the Mayor on parade fifty feet away *next to George and Martha Washington*, Mrs. Joseph Mask loses her panties!

LOUISE. I didn't lose them. They fell down.

JOSEPH. *Unbelievable!* And why?

LOUISE. Because the elastic snapped.

JOSEPH. Because you don't plan for the future. You got your eyes in the clouds, you don't look at the world. You know where the world is? It's not up there. It's down here, Louise. It's down here where your hat is always crooked, it's where our clock always says 11:07 for some odd reason, it's where consequences have effects and strange men see your panties *on Boston Common*.

LOUISE. It wasn't *on* the Common.

JOSEPH. Who's gonna rent rooms from a woman without elastic? And somebody mentions this to *Sanitation*? Goodbye to twenty-seven hundred sixty-nine dollars fifteen cents a year! Gone! Into the abyss, Louise!

LOUISE. I was thinking pork chops for supper.

JOSEPH. Thank God we got no child to suffer the results!—Pork chops...?

LOUISE. And papaya Jell-O with whip cream for dessert.

JOSEPH. Yeah, where you gonna find whip cream on the 4th of July?

LOUISE. I bet Miss Reezner across the hall has some.

JOSEPH. And why? Because Miss Reezner *plans for the future!* Okay, well, good. Pork chops it is.

LOUISE. And they'll be just how you like them, Joe.

Louise spreads open a newspaper on the table and shows him meat.

Look there. You see that meat, how beautiful?

JOSEPH. *Unbelievable...!*

LOUISE. You're not still mad...?

JOSEPH. (*Pointing to something in the newspaper.*) No, this here. Somebody spotted a giant sea-snake off of India.

LOUISE. A giant sea-snake?

JOSEPH. Good thing Bombay don't read the *Boston Globe*.

LOUISE. What do you think a giant sea-snake lives on?

JOSEPH. Who cares? It's in India! I'm gonna go see what people are saying about your panties. With luck, maybe nobody heard.

Joseph exits. Louise takes a breath.

LOUISE. Yeah. Maybe nobody heard...

Trudy Reezner enters.

TRUDY. The news is *everywhere*.

LOUISE. About my underthings?

TRUDY. Mrs. Kieswetter is saying you dropped them on purpose.

LOUISE. She said that?

TRUDY. Mrs. Mask, a woman of your attractions, who cares what anybody says? So *tell*.

LOUISE. Well, I was leaning over to see George Washington—

TRUDY. And you lost your panties?

LOUISE. I didn't lose them, they fell down.

TRUDY. And then? You *bent* over?

LOUISE. I had to. And I picked them up and tossed them in my bag.

TRUDY. Turning the heads of about a thousand men.

LOUISE. I know. My husband is totally beside himself.

TRUDY. Your husband will have to learn to accept such male attentions.

LOUISE. They're only plain white cotton.

TRUDY. This is 1950. To men, *girdle ads* look dirty. And you, Mrs. Mask, are a love magnet.

LOUISE. Miss Reezner, I am a happily married woman—and a Roman Catholic.

TRUDY. Well, luckily, your panties are non-denominational. But is that *the purse*? Don't tell me you're *going without*?

LOUISE. I haven't had time! Oh my God, papaya Jell-O. Could you lend me some whip cream?

TRUDY. With those two eyes, you can have my whole darn kitchen. And it's Trudy.

Trudy exits, leaving the door ajar.

LOUISE. "A love magnet"...

Jock Revere slips in. Straw hat.

REVERE. Good morning.

Louise screams.

I'm sorry, did I startle you?

LOUISE. What apartment are you looking for?

REVERE. This one.

LOUISE. My husband's coming back in a second. *Joe...!*

REVERE. (*Blocking her way.*) Will you allow me a metaphor, madam?

LOUISE. No, I will *not*.

REVERE. Then I shall leave you. Crushed. Eradicated. No longer master of my soul, since that's been cruelly destroyed. I had it a moment ago. It was dancing here between us. Now—poof!

LOUISE. Do you have a reason to be here?

REVERE. *Boston Common.*

LOUISE. Oh my God!

REVERE. Yes I, who daily race around this city hungry for a miracle, found my miracle beneath a humble sycamore, a cottony-white

cloud about her feet. Oh how I suffered with you as you bent, bent, *bent* to the earth. And then enchantment flooded my every member as I forgot everything I ever wanted...but you. The name is Revere. Jock Revere.

LOUISE. You mean Revere of the Paul...?

REVERE. The Paul Revere Reveres. And you are...?

LOUISE. Louise Mask.

REVERE. But who and what are you down in your deepest soul?

LOUISE. Um. Louise Mask.

REVERE. Is that...*the purse?*

Trudy enters with a can of whipped cream.

TRUDY. One can of whip cream coming up...

She sees Revere.

Well, well. You have a visitor.

LOUISE. Miss Reezner, this is Mr. Revere.

TRUDY. You mean Revere of the...?

REVERE. The Paul Revere Reveres. But call me Jock.

TRUDY. The British are coming, the British are coming!

Trudy goes out, leaving the can of whipped cream.

LOUISE. So your family saved America.

REVERE. Forget the past. Just hear your future. From this day forth I shall desire you with all the power of my soul. I'll take your acquiescence for granted.

LOUISE. If my husband comes back...

REVERE. Simple. I came about the room you're advertising in the window.

LOUISE. It's two rooms, ten apiece a week.

REVERE. I'll give you twenty-two fifty for both and a one-year lease. Plus happiness for all eternity.

LOUISE. Mr. Revere...

REVERE. I am the North Church bell. Pull my rope and you shall hear a ringing hymn to love! Enough. I'm going. Off to find pen and ink, that I may set this day on paper. I shall immortalize you—

and myself, of course—in a work of art! Shall I come back? Louise Mask, *shall I come back?*

LOUISE. Yes, please.

Revere exits. Trudy enters.

TRUDY. Who is he? So *tell*.

LOUISE. He seen me this morning. Now he wants these rooms we got.

TRUDY. Perfect. Your way to paradise is paved. Because in my bottom drawer I happen to have a pair of red silk panties. Which now are yours.

LOUISE. *No*. Genuine silk?

TRUDY. Almost. I been saving them for my wedding, but alas, I am fated to be a canary without a cuttlebone. While you, Mrs. Mask, will be my proxy, in panties worthy of a panting Paul Revere!

LOUISE. Trudy, really...

TRUDY. I presume your husband is performing his conjugal duty? Why no little visitor?

LOUISE. We can't afford one, so we been practicing Christian contraception.

TRUDY. Which means?

LOUISE. The duty is there but it's not too conjugal.

TRUDY. He's a barbarian!

LOUISE. Joe's really sweet, once you get underneath. Though I do sometimes wish I was...I dunno...

TRUDY. Out from underneath?

LOUISE. Out of these four walls. Out from under that wagging finger. I love Joe. I do. But there are some days when I feel as if I almost hate him. When I *do* hate him. When I could take a drill and stick it in the middle of his chest and suck out whatever's in there! Is that wrong?

TRUDY. No. We women have a right to happiness. Like a man who doesn't need a drill.

LOUISE. Even if a man was standing here I wouldn't know what to do.

THE PANTIES, THE PARTNER, AND THE ONE PERCENT: SCENES FROM THE HEROIC LIFE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

by David Ives

3 men, 3 women (doubling)

The apocalypse is imminent in David Ives' three-part reworking of Carl Sternheim's *Scenes from the Heroic Lives of the Middle Classes*. Leaping through time, we visit three generations of the Mask family: from a household in 1950s Boston, to 1987 Wall Street, all the way to a modern techie home in the Pacific Palisades. Capitalism is on trial, secrets are exposed, and existentialism runs in the family in this rambunctious satire for the ages.

"...curiously clever and titillating... If you enjoyed Ives' 'translaptations' of French comedies—The Metromaniacs, The Liar and The School for Lies—you will fall hard for this riotous gem."
—WhiskandQuill.com

"Ives...has penned a hilarious and thought provoking social commentary that is perfect comic fare..."
—Prince George's Sentinel (Maryland)

"[THE PANTIES...] is a cute, rather endearing comedy (three well-connected playlets), inspired by the work of Carl Sternheim... an appealing, sugar-coated farce to indulge audiences. ...engages in generous social commentary, while never becoming dark."
—DCMetroTheaterArts.com

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