

PARFUMERIE



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STUDY GUIDE CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

II. THE AUTHOR & THE ADAPTOR: MIKLOS LASZLO & E.P. DOWDALL

III. THE PARFUMERIE STORY: ADAPTATIONS IN THE 20TH C.

IV. OUR PRODUCTION: NOTES FROM SCOTT & CASSIE

V. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & WRITING ACTIVITIES

VI. SOURCES & FURTHER READING

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Arianne Jacques
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**BAG &
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Real. Provocative. Theatre.

Artistic Director Scott Palmer

PARFUMERIE

By Miklos Laszlo

Adapted by E.P. Dowdall
From the English translation by Florence Laszlo
Of the Hungarian play *illatszertar*

Directed by Scott Palmer and Cassie Greer
November 25 - December 23, 2016

CAST

Mr. Miklos Hammerschmidt David Heath
Mr. George Horvath Joey Copsey**
Mr. Sipos Patrick Spike
Mr. Steven Kadar Andrew Beck*
Miss Amalia Balash Arianne Jacques*
Miss Ilona Ritter Stephanie Leppert
Miss Elizabeth Molnar Leslie Gale
Arpad Novack Eric St. Cyr**
Fritz/Police Officer Trevor Jackson
Detective/Customer Sam Jones
Customer and others Lalanya Gunn
Customer and others Zoe Flach◇
Customer and others Dawson Oliver◇

CREW/PRODUCTION TEAM

Co-Directors Scott Palmer & Cassie Greer*
Stage Manager & Props Master Ephriam Harnsberger
Costume Designer Melissa Heller
Scenic Designer Megan Wilkerson
Lighting Designer & Technical Director Jim Ricks-White
Sound Designer Kelly Green◇
Assistant Stage Manager Mackenzie Joseph

*Member of the Bag&Baggage Resident Acting Company

**Bag&Baggage Associate Artist

◇Bag&Baggage Pre-Professional Development Intern

Parfumerie is generously sponsored by Ralph and Marilyn Helzerman

I. INTRODUCTION



This new adaptation of the 1936 Czechoslovakian play that inspired a trio of iconic films (*The Shop Around the Corner*, *In the Good Old Summertime*, and *You've Got Mail*), and the popular Broadway musical *She Loves Me*, is a warm, gentle comedy that follows the tangled tale of parfumerie employee George Horvath.

Just days before Christmas, George's boss fires him after mistakenly suspecting him to be the lover of his unfaithful wife. Meanwhile, George's own love life goes awry when he discovers that the stranger he has fallen in love with through a secret correspondence is none other than Amalia Balash, a co-worker with whom he constantly feuds.

For the employees of the parfumerie, only the truth can lead to a happy resolution in this old-fashioned, romantic Christmas tale.



Joey Copsey, Patrick Spike, Arianne Jacques, and David Heath play Mr. George Horvath, Mr. Sipos, Miss Amalia Balash, and Mr. Hammerschmidt in Bag&Baggage's production of *Parfumerie*.

II: THE AUTHOR & THE ADAPTOR: MIKLÓS LÁSZLÓ & E.P. DOWDALL

Miklós László was born Nicholas Leitner in Budapest, Hungary in 1903, to Henrik and Ilona Fischer Leitner, and their large family of German Jewish extraction. Emperor Franz Josef ruled the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Great War was still a few years away, and it had been decreed by the government that all ethnic non-Magyar (non-Hungarian) citizens should take an indigenous name as part of the “cultural unification” of the population. The name “László” was chosen for the Leitner family, for no particular reason other than it being a well-known Hungarian name which was vaguely similar to the original family name “Leitner”.

Nicholaus, or Niki as he was called, grew up in the metropolitan hustle and bustle of wartime Budapest. His family was a successful pillar of the Budapest entertainment business, and consequently, he naturally gravitated toward entertainment as well, rubbing elbows with the Hungarian literati of the day. As a young adult, László began to produce his own little one-scene plays for the various small theatres and cabarets around the city, gaining notoriety particularly within the theatrical community, and earning a living for himself as he worked on other, more serious full-length pieces on the side.

Before his career could fully take off, however, poor management, high living, wild spending, and the unexpected death of his father brought the László family to total destitution. Nicholas was left as the sole provider for his mother and eight siblings, and quickly found that writing was not sufficient to feed a family and pay the bills. László turned to a host of jobs, working as a candy-maker, collar salesman, necktie agent, script typist, clerk, and laborer in a petroleum factory, until his siblings grew up and gradually took responsibility for their own lives and livelihoods.



*Miklós László in 1937,
the year Illatszertár premiered*



Vaci Street - or Váci Utca in Hungarian - the historic shopping district in Budapest where Hammerschmidt's fictitious parfumerie is located. This photo is from the 1930s.

Amid all of this, László continued writing on the side, and when, at the age of 31, his first full three-act play was published, it garnered him the prestigious Hungarian Royal Academy Award for Literature in 1934, the Hungarian equivalent of the American Pulitzer Prize. This play, *A legboldogabb ember* (or *The Happiest Man*) was an ironically titled piece about an embittered factory worker and the dreamworld to which he escapes for solace, blending László's penchant for humor with the harsh reality of post-World War I Budapest in which he struggled to survive. His most famous play, *Illatszertár* (or *Parfumerie*) premiered at the Pest Theatre in Budapest in 1937, also blending comedy and romance against the backdrop of a pre-war fascist regime.

In 1938, with the Second World War quickly approaching, and mounting unease among Hungarians of Jewish extraction, Nicholas emigrated to the United States. He quickly established himself in the local Hungarian community on the lower east side of New York City, bringing his charm and reputation to an immigrant audience clamoring for all things Hungarian and, as everyone else, for relief from the Great Depression that was gripping the nation. He left behind his first name in favor of the purely Hungarian “Miklós” - giving him full acceptance and cachet within his newfound community.



In the fall of 1939 he married Florence Herrman, an aspiring young actress and the daughter of a successful local entrepreneur - a Cunard Line travel agent, landlord and financial exchange merchant. On December 28, 1944 he became a fully naturalized American citizen and officially adopted the single name now most frequently referenced, Miklós László. During his lifetime he had numerous writing contracts with MGM, of which a few resulting projects became major motion pictures, though most did not. In the early 1940s, his screenplay *Katherine* was picked up by MGM and became the motion picture *The Big City* (1948) starring Margaret O'Brien, Robert Preston, Danny Thomas, and George Murphy. The screenplay examined the diversity and underlying unity of human cultures in the microcosm of a New York City adoption.

Throughout the majority of his adult life in America, the writing experiments and the accompanying studio advances kept Miki and Florence able to make ends meet, but barely, and again other jobs became a necessary part of their reality. Miklós László died in New York City in 1973 at the age of 69. Florence died in 1987.

Only one of László's plays was ever widely produced in the Americas: *St. Lazar's Pharmacy*. Perhaps the reason we have not seen many early László plays is because they were never effectively translated from Hungarian to English, and as such, never reached American audiences. Translations exist for many of his works in French and even German, but few in English. In 1956, László worked with his wife Florence on translating *Illatszertár* into English, though it was never produced. The original Hungarian - in addition to the original scripts of many of his works - continues to be performed to this day throughout Hungary on an ongoing basis.

E.P. Dowdall is the nephew of Miklós and Florence László, and serves as the head of his uncle's literary estate. Dowdall is a writer, composer, and IT consultant - a graduate of the University of Arizona (Tucson) School of Music, and the Pace University Lubin Business School's MBA program, and is a member of BMI and the Dramatist's Guild. In the early 2000s, Dowdall began re-working and adapting his uncle's play from the literal English translation that Miklós and Florence had done in the 1950s. His focus was to recapture the original spirit and intent of *Illatszertár*, rather than make sure it had a word-for-word English translation, and as a non-Hungarian speaker himself, Dowdall worked to fill the text with the lively humor and poignant undertones which characterize the rest of his uncle's theatrical work. *Parfumerie* premiered in 2009, and remains a sturdy piece of dramatic invention - sentimental yet surprisingly socially aware of workplace dynamics and the class system.



E.P. Dowdall

Dowdall had two short plays of his own produced at the SlamBoston 10-minute play festival in fall 2008 and spring 2009, and currently resides in Westchester County with his actress/videographer wife Jill.



◀ The set for the 2013 Los Angeles production of *Parfumerie* at the Bram Goldsmith Theater at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts

III: THE *PARFUMERIE* STORY: ADAPTATIONS THROUGHOUT THE 20TH CENTURY

Parfumerie - or *Illatszertár* in Hungarian - received its premiere at the Pest Theatre in Budapest in 1937.

When László moved to America in 1938, his script for *Parfumerie* was picked up by screenwriter Samson Raphaelson and adapted into a film, resulting in the Ernst Lubitsch movie ***The Shop Around the Corner***, starring Jimmy Stewart and Margaret Sullavan. The film remains popular to this day, appearing on TIME magazine's list of the top 100 movies of all time in 2011.



In 1949, *The Shop Around the Corner* was remade as a musical, ***In the Good Old Summertime***, to showcase the vocal talent of Judy Garland, who played the female lead. The musical retains the plot of the earlier film, but transplants the story from a Hungarian perfume shop to a Chicago music shop at the turn of the century.



In 1963, the play was produced as a full Broadway musical. In adapting the story for the Broadway stage, director Harold Prince and writer Joe Masteroff decided to return to the original setting of the play in 1930s Hungary. The score was written by lyricist-composer duo Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock, who would go on to write the songs for *Fiddler on the Roof* the following year. ***She Loves Me*** ran for 302 performances and was nominated for 5 Tony Awards, including Best Musical. *She Loves Me* was the first adaptation of *Parfumerie* in which the main characters are named George and Amalia - before that, they had been Veronica and Andrew (in *In the Good Old Summertime*), and Alfred and Klara (in *The Shop Around the Corner*). Fun fact: E.P. Dowdall went to see *She Loves Me* with his uncle Miklos at the age of ten, and reported that he enjoyed the production.



She Loves Me saw its first revival in 1993 by the Roundabout Theatre Company, and ran for 354 performances. It was nominated for 9 Tony Awards, including Best Revival of a Musical. It was revived again in 2016 for a limited run at Studio 54 from February to July and was nominated for 8 Tony Awards, including Best Revival of a Musical.

In 1998, the play was used once again as the inspiration for a screenplay, by Nora Ephron, which became the motion picture ***You've Got Mail***, with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. The movie cleverly updates the story for the digital age, reimagining the main characters as the owner of a small children's book shop (called *The Shop Around the Corner*, in a nod to the initial film adaptation) and the executive of the large bookstore chain that's driving her out of business. As in the previous forms of the story, the two feud by day but are unknowingly each other's romantic pen pals. Unlike the other versions, their relationship takes place by email.





In 2001, the Laszlo/Raphaelson MGM script was adapted for the stage in France and was produced as a straight play *La Boutique au Coin de la Rue* ("The Shop at the Corner of the Street"). This production was a faithful adaptation of the MGM movie script *The Shop Around the Corner* and ran for the 2002 season in Paris at the Théâtre Montparnasse, winning top honors. The production garnered 5 Molière Awards, the French equivalent of the American Tony Award - for Best New Play, Best Adaptation of a Foreign Work, Best Director, Best Set Design, and Best Lighting.

In 2009, *Parfumerie* was finally produced for the first time in the United States as an English-language play. The new adaptation by E.P. Dowdall took the play back to its original roots, exploring with equal emphasis both the story of the young lovers and the troubled marriage of the shop owner Mr. Hammerschmidt. The play premiered as *The Perfume Shop* in December 2009 at the Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota, Florida. Almost simultaneously, a separate Canadian production, translated, adapted (Robins/Pettle), and produced by the Soulepepper Theatre Company under a Canadian arts grant also premiered in Toronto. *Parfumerie* has now been staged by multiple theatre companies around the country, receiving its Pacific Northwest Premiere on the Bag&Baggage stage.



Asolo Rep's 2009 premiere of E. P. Dowdall's *The Perfume Shop*.

IV. OUR PRODUCTION: NOTES FROM SCOTT PALMER & CASSIE GREER

Parfumerie is a remarkable play, not only as a stand-alone script, but also because of its amazing pedigree. Written in 1937 by Hungarian playwright Miklós László, *Parfumerie* remains one of Europe's most popular holiday plays, and was responsible for inspiring some of the most iconic films and musicals in American history. Think about how powerful and timeless a story has to be in order to inspire so many other successful treatments, and over such a long period of time! There has to be something there, right? Something timeless and inspiring that brings such a range of artists back, time and again, to the lovely story of a little Hungarian perfume shop just before Christmas.



Arianne Jacaues, Patrick Spike, Joey Copsey, and David Heath (below) play Amalia, Sipos, George, and Hammerschmidt in our *Parfumerie*



There is so much heart in this play; romantic entanglements, confusion and conundrums, mistaken identities, betrayal and justice, and the always heartwarming feeling of new love and new hope. All of the later treatments and adaptations of *Parfumerie* retained some (if not all) of these qualities, but none of them retained what we feel is a more powerful context embedded in László's original story; a story set in Eastern Europe just a few years before the rise of fascism and the start of the Second World War.

László's own family experience with "cultural unification" (leaving behind the German/Jewish "Leitner" in favor of the purely Hungarian "László"), and his personal witnessing of the storm clouds of hatred and paranoia leading up to the Second World War leave a distinct mark on this play. We see the troubling rise of Anti-Semitic sentiment targeted at shop keepers and business people; we feel the oppression of the law enforcement patrol; we witness the personal unease, need for secrecy, and thinly veiled attacks and fears of the people living under a fascist regime. Although László's *Parfumerie* is ultimately a story of love and redemption, there are very real storm clouds behind the charm.

In our approach to this work, we have tried to find ways of bringing some of these storm clouds forward to help create a context for our audiences. This isn't a Tom Hanks/Meg Ryan romantic comedy completely - in fact, Miklós László's story is a specific one, set in a very particular time and place, and with a darker, more threatening atmosphere swirling underneath the scent of perfume and the witty banter. The holidays are a time to celebrate; to honor our loved ones and friends, to be thankful for all of our bounty, to remember those we have lost, and glory in the love we are given. But they are also a time to reflect on the serious issues we face as a people, as a country, as a city, and as a community. For all that we love each other, and grow to care for each other more and more, let us not ignore the storm clouds that may be gathering on the horizon. In fact, it is because we are a community that the storm clouds matter. It is because we are a community that we will overcome.



Joey Copsey and Arianne Jacaues, reconciling as George and Amalia

"The hero is the one who kindles a great light in the world, who sets up blazing torches in the dark streets of life for men to see by. The saint is the man who walks through the dark paths of the world, himself a light." -Felix Adler

V. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & WRITING ACTIVITIES

Before you see the show:

1. 1937 Budapest, Hungary - the backdrop for our story - is being dominated by a fascist regime. Fascism is when a government, headed by a single dictator, controls business and labor, and no opposition is tolerated. Can you imagine some ways in which living in a fascist country might affect or impact the dynamics of your work, your leisure activities, your family, and your relationships? What do we take for granted as Americans?
2. In *Parfumerie*, George and Amalia correspond anonymously with each other by letter.
 - a. What are the unique things about letter-writing as a form of communication that set it apart from talking face-to-face, on the phone, texting, using social media, or even emailing?
 - b. Think about one thing you recently posted to your favorite form of social media. Who were attempting to reach and what were you trying to accomplish when you shared that post? Sit down and translate that post (and your intention behind it) into a handwritten letter.
 - c. What are the differences between social media posting and letter writing? What are the similarities? What challenges did you encounter in attempting to translate one form into another form?

After you see the show:

- 3 Amalia and George seem to be unable to do anything except fight with each other for the entire first half of the show. Sipos tries to point out to each of them that perhaps they do this because they actually have feelings for each other. Do you think Sipos is right? Why or why not?
4. Many companies producing *Parfumerie* choose to design Hammerschmidt's shop in a lavish, luxurious way. Our set designer, Megan Wilkerson, chose to create a more stark, utilitarian environment for the Bag&Baggage production. Why do you think she made this choice?
5. There are a broad range of characters who enter the doors of Hammerschmidt's Parfumerie, coming from a variety of social classes. What choices did you notice the actors making to help communicate their characters' status to the audience?
6. Arpad himself admits that his own thinking "isn't entirely thought out" all of the time. Why do you think Hammerschmidt keeps him around? Do you think this bothers any of the other parfumerie employees?
7. Sipos explains that he wrote the anonymous letter to Hammerschmidt because he was afraid of losing his job. If you were in Sipos' situation, living with the reality he is faced with, do you think you would have done the same thing? Why or why not?
8. In *Parfumerie*, there are several characters that set or change the tone for everyone else on stage. Write about or discuss a time in your life when the mood of a parent, teacher, supervisor, or authority figure in your life had an impact on you. What was it like to be controlled by someone else's mood or tone? Why is it important for people in positions of power to be aware of the influence they have in these situations? Have you ever been the person to set or change a tone for a group of people? If so, what was it like?

VI. SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

To read:

Miklós László biographical information on szineszkonyvtar.hu (translated from Hungarian): <http://www.szineszkonyvtar.hu/contents/k-o/laszlomelet.htm>

Parfumerie info: <http://www.parfumerietheplay.com/>

The Hollywood Reporter Review of the 2013 Los Angeles production of *Parfumerie*: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/parfumerie-theater-review-663987>

The LA Times Preview of the 2013 Los Angeles production of *Parfumerie*: <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-parfumerie-play-20131127-story.html>

"The Evolution of She Loves Me" on the Arts Alive blog of Loyola University Chicago: <http://blogs.luc.edu/artsalive/2016/04/06/the-evolution-of-she-loves-me/>

Budapest Info: The Official Web Site of Budapest Tourism: <http://www.budapestinfo.hu/en/>

To watch:

Video clips of the Vaci Street district in Budapest in the 1930s on Footage123.com: <http://footage123.com/video/13223243-circa-1930s-shots-of-the-vaci-utca-fashion-district-in-budapest-in-the-1930s>

The Shop Around the Corner trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=du-BSYQETIk>

"An Inside Look: Melissa Heller" interview with Bag&Baggage's *Parfumerie* costume designer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkzZ6hPJy7U>

"One on One: Jum Ricks-White" interview with Bag&Baggage's *Parfumerie* lighting designer and technical director: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkzZ6hPJy7U>
