

A *Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder*

Book & Lyrics by Music & Lyrics by
Robert L. Freedman Steven Lutvak

Based on a Novel by Roy Horniman

Directed by
Brian B. Crowe

Know-the-Show
Audience Guide
researched and written by
the Education Department of

The
SHAKESPEARE
Theatre of
New Jersey





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This production of *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love & Murder* is generously sponsored by:

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Director's Notes

- Brian B. Crowe

I am thrilled to launch my first season as Artistic Director with an unexpected treat. The more I weighed it against the scores of other titles under consideration, the more *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* showed itself to be an oddly perfect fit for us. It's delightfully dark — we like dark here; it's wickedly funny — we love funny here; and, most importantly, it encapsulates so much of what we seek in the Art we present. It's a dynamic tale, smartly retold, filled with wit, style, and inventiveness. Freedman and Lutvak took an amusing but somewhat forgotten novel from 1907 and spun it into something so much more than its source material. With nods to music hall operettas, penny dreadfuls, the Grand Guignol, Gilbert & Sullivan, and even a bit of *Sweeney Todd*, it is not your run-of-the-mill musical comedy, just as we are not your run-of-the-mill Shakespeare Theatre. Sit back and enjoy this roller-coaster of a story with all its sinister, silly, romantic, and absurd twists and turns. I hope you enjoy the experience as much as we have enjoyed bringing it to life.

A Dramaturgical Note on the Sources of the Play

The primary source for *Gentleman's Guide...* is Roy Horniman's 1907 darkly comedic novel, *Israel Rank: The Autobiography of a Criminal*. Set against the backdrop of Edwardian snobbery, the story follows a young Mr. Rank as he "trims his family tree in order to inherit the aristocratic status of his hateful relatives." Along the way he offs half a dozen vile family members (including one child) and writes his tale from a prison cell as he awaits the verdict of his trial.

Humorous for its time, it is much darker than the works that it would later inspire. It is probably best known as the inspiration for the 1949 comic film *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, produced by Ealing Studios and starring Dennis Price and Sir Alec Guinness. Initially, the head of the studio was not sold on the film, stating "I'm not going to make a comedy about eight murders." The film made several changes to the novel. It also cast one actor to play all the ill-fated members of the D'Ascoyne family. This decision was partly inspired by Guinness himself, who was originally only offered to play four of the relatives. Upon reading the script, he insisted on playing them all. Now considered a cult-classic, *Kind Hearts...* was voted the seventh greatest British comedy of all time by readers of *Total Film* magazine in 2004, and it was restored and re-released in 2007 by the Criterion Collection. Patrick Gibbs (*Daily Telegraph*) called it, "A high comedy that is enlivened with cynicism, loaded with dramatic irony and shot through with a suspicion of social satire."



A lobby card from the 70th anniversary release of the 1949 film, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*

Robert L. Freedman

About the Playwright

Robert L. Freedman is a New York and Los Angeles based writer, whose works span a variety of mediums and genres. Freedman's career began in Los Angeles, where he completed an undergraduate degree in Theatre Arts from UCLA. Freedman then pursued graduate study through NYU Tisch School of the Arts and earned MFAs in both Dramatic Writing and Musical Theatre, as well as a friend and collaborator in Steven Lutvak.

Freedman and Lutvak's first musical collaboration, *Campaign of the Century*, received a number of staged readings and workshops, as well as a California Musical Theatre Award. *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, for which Freedman supplied the book and collaborated with Lutvak on the lyrics, premiered at Hartford Stage, continued on to the Old Globe

"A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder," with a book by Robert L. Freedman, music by Steven Lutvak and lyrics — ah, what lyrics! — by Mr. Freedman and Mr. Lutvak, ranks among the most inspired and entertaining new musical comedies I've seen in years."

***—Charles Isherwood,
from his 2012 New York Times review***

Theatre in San Diego, CA, then opened on Broadway November 17, 2013. Freedman's contributions to *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* earned him multiple "Best Book of a Musical" prizes at the Tony Awards, Drama Desk Awards, and Outer Critics Circle Awards. Freedman and Lutvak's music and lyrics for the piece earned them Fred Ebb and Edward Kelban songwriting awards, as well as NYU Tisch's Big Apple Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Theatrical Arts.



Robert L. Freedman

Freedman's additional theatrical writing projects include PBS' *Broadway Sings the Music of Jule Styne*, *The Flamingo Kid*, and Disney's *Camp Rock: The Musical*. Notable film writing projects include *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella* with Brandy and Whitney Houston, *Murder in the Hamptons*, *What Love Sees*, *Unlikely Angel*, and *What Makes a Family*. Freedman's work on the television miniseries *Life with Judy Garland: Me and My Shadows* earned him Emmy and Writer's Guild Award nominations. In 2021, Freedman published his first book, *Notes on the Writing of a Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, an account of crafting a new musical.

Freedman is married to actress Jean Kauffman, with whom he shares a son - Max Freedman.

Steven Lutvak

About the Composer

Steven Lutvak was born on July 18, 1959 to Sylvia and Alfred Lutvak. After a childhood in the Bronx, Lutvak completed an undergraduate degree in music from Binghamton University in 1980. Lutvak then studied musical theatre writing at the graduate level through NYU Tisch. Notably, Lutvak was a member of the first cohort for this program, and first met Robert L. Freedman there. Lutvak was awarded a graduate degree in 1983, and served as an assistant adjunct professor of musical theatre writing at NYU Tisch for several years following his commercial success.

Musicals and collaborations by Steven Lutvak include *Almost September*, *The Golden Age*, *Dream Days*, *Hannah Senesh*, *The Wayside Motor Inn*, and *Esmeralda*. Lutvak also contributed to the music of Paramount's *Mad Hot Ballroom* and *Anything But Love*. Furthermore, Lutvak was a respected cabaret performer and vocal coach. He released two albums - *The Time it Takes* and *Ahead of my Heart*.

Lutvak's *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* journey began roughly 30 years prior to the musical's debut, when he viewed the film *Kind Hearts and Coronets* as a university student. Lutvak was drawn to the comedy, and, upon beginning a collaborative partnership with longtime friend Freedman years later, began adapting the material for the stage. Lutvak and Freedman's first collaboration, *Campaign of the Century*, was featured in a number of concerts and readings. *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* would become Lutvak's Broadway debut.

Lutvak and Freedman were awarded a Drama Desk win, Fred Ebb award, Kleban award, and a Tisch Big Apple Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Performing Arts for their music and lyrics in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*. The musical as a whole took home the "Best Musical" prize for the Drama Desk, Drama League, Outer Critics Circle, and Tony Awards. Lutvak has also been recognized with Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation Awards, a Johnny Mercer Emerging American Songwriter Award, and an ASCAP Foundation Richard Rogers New Horizons Award.



Steven Lutvak

Lutvak passed away unexpectedly in October 2023. He is survived by his husband Michael McGowan and their daughter Eliot Rose Lutvak-McGowan.

"Steve was a gifted composer, lyricist and musician, but more than anything he was a born storyteller...I was able to speak to him in my own language about story, plot and characters in a way that not every composer can do."

—Robert L. Freedman, New York Times

About the Adaptation

A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder is a musical comedy with music by Steven Lutvak, lyrics by Lutvak and Robert L. Freedman, a book by Freedman. It is based on the 1907 fictional novel *Israel Rank: The Autobiography of a Criminal* by Roy Horniman.

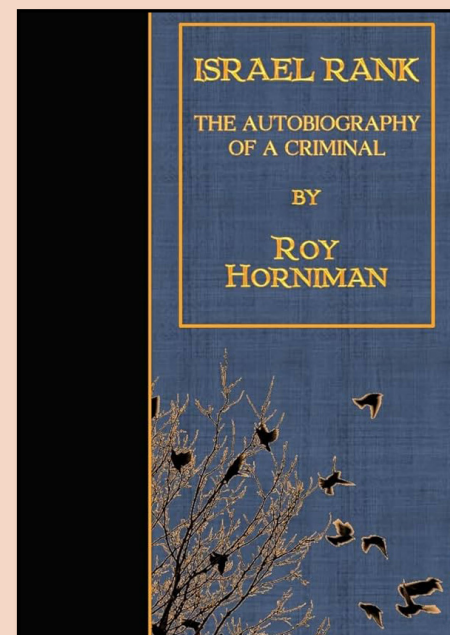
A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder premiered at the Hartford Stage, Hartford, Connecticut, running in October and November 2012, with direction by Darko Tresnjak. The cast featured Jefferson Mays, Ken Barnett and Lisa O'Hare. The show was a co-production of the Hartford Stage and the Old Globe Theatre. The musical then played at the Old Globe Theatre, San Diego, California, in March 2013. Directed by Tresnjak, the cast again featured Mays, Barnett and O'Hare. The show opened

on Broadway at the Walter Kerr Theatre November 17, 2013, running until January 17, 2016. A U.S. national tour of the production opened in September 2015 at the Proctor's Theatre in Schenectady, New York, and closed in March 2017 at the Sacramento Community Center Theater. A second national tour opened in September 2017 at the Overture Center in Madison, Wisconsin, and closed in May 2018 at the Mother Lode Theatre in Butte, Montana. An Australian production opened at the Arts Centre Melbourne for The Production Company in October 2018. It featured Mitchell Butel and Chris Ryan, and was directed by Roger Hodgman.

From the Original Novel

There is an old saying, 'Murder will out.' I am really unable to see why this should be so. At any rate, it is a statement impossible of proof, and one which must always remain a matter of opinion. Because certain clumsy criminals have placed themselves in full view of that dull dog, the Law, we are asked to believe that crime is invariably awkward. The logic is not very obvious. I am convinced that many a delightful member of society has found it necessary at some time or other to remove a human obstacle, and has done so undetected and undisturbed by those pangs of conscience which Society, afraid of itself, would have us believe wait upon the sinner.

–Roy Horniman, Israel Rank: The Autobiography of a Criminal



A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder An Introduction

We open in 1909, where Lord Montague “Monty” D’Ysquith Navarro, Ninth Earl of Highhurst, is in jail awaiting his possible execution. As Monty reflects on the events that lead him to this dire predicament, he begins to write his memoir: “A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder”.

Monty begins his story in 1907, (an unexpected visitor arrives at Monty’s shabby Clapham flat) following the death of his mother. The mysterious Miss Marietta Shingle reveals to Monty that his mother was, unbeknownst to him, a member of the aristocratic D’Ysquith family. Isabel D’Ysquith was disowned after eloping with a Castilian musician and, wishing to spare her son any shame, never disclosed the truth of Monty’s ancestry to him. However, as Isabel has passed, Monty is now ninth-in-line to inherit the earldom of Highhurst. The grieving Monty is heartened by this news—just moments ago he had no living family or funds, and now he is a D’Ysquith! He writes eagerly to Lord Asquith D’Ysquith, his mother’s cousin, introducing himself and inquiring about job openings in the D’Ysquith family stockbroking firm.

Beyond the potential wealth and family connections, Monty hopes this news may improve his situation with Miss Sibella Hallward, a young woman he loves but who refuses to marry him due to his poverty. Sibella dubiously accepts Monty’s story about his lineage, and playfully remarks that eight people would

have to die in order for him to become the Earl of Highhurst. In the meantime, she has drawn the attention of another gentleman of higher status, Lionel Holland. Monty is distressed; his quest to assume his place as a D’Ysquith heir is now all the more urgent.

The news only gets worse as Monty receives a written reply from Lord Asquith’s son, Asquith D’Ysquith Jr., who denies Isabel’s existence and warns Monty against contacting the family again or using their name. Monty is dejected, but refuses to accept his apparent destiny as a poor commoner. Under the guise of a tourist, Monty visits Highhurst Castle, the D’Ysquiths’ ancestral home. He is met with disapproval at Highhurst everywhere he turns—even from supernatural forces. Finally, Lord Adalbert D’Ysquith, the current Earl of Highhurst, catches Monty looking around the ancestral library and angrily drives him out, expressing his disdain for the commoners flooding his home.

Monty decides to attempt another connection with his new (D’Ysquith) family. He reaches out to the clergyman in the family, a dithering old man named the Reverend Lord Ezekial D’Ysquith. Fortunately for Monty, the Reverend remembers Isabel fondly. Her father was his childhood friend. The reverend offers to give him a tour of the ancestral family church. The tour leads them to the highest point of the church, a precarious tower that overlooks the grounds. Despite his pleasant demeanor, at the critical moment where Monty asks his assistance in ending the estrangement, the Reverend demurs. If Isabel’s own father felt strongly enough to disinherit her, then the Reverend feels it is not his place to intervene. There is nothing Monty can do.

Or is there?

When the Reverend nearly slips at the edge of the railing and asks for help, Monty considers an alternate approach to engaging with the family that has rejected him.

Who's Who in the Play

Monty Navarro - The son of a washerwoman who learns he is a distant heir to the Earldom of Highhurst; cunning and charismatic

Sibella Hallward - An upper-middle class young woman who Monty loves; savvy, ambitious, and glamorous

Phoebe D'Ysquith - Monty's cousin; below him in the line of succession but born and raised a D'Ysquith. Earnest, young, and direct.

Miss Shingle - An "eccentric woman of a certain age". A friend and correspondent of Monty's late mother

The D'Ysquith family - An aristocratic family with considerable wealth and influence, rulers of the Earldom of Highhurst

Lord Adalbert D'Ysquith - the eighth to hold the title

Reverend Lord Ezekiel D'YSquith - a clergyman

Asquith D'Ysquith Jr. - a trendy young heir

Henry D'Ysquith - a beekeeper

Lady Hyacinth D'YSquith - a philanthropist

Major Lord Bartholomew D'Ysquith - a bodybuilder

Lady Salome D'Ysquith Pumphery - an actress

Miss Evangeline Barley - Mistress to Asquith D'Ysquith Jr.

Lady Eugenia D'Ysquith - The Countess of Highhurst

Tom Copley - A country farmer, angry with the D'Ysquith family

Detective Pinkey - A Scotland Yard detective

The Magistrate - An official of the court



Costume rendering by designer Austin Blake Conlee

The Edwardian Era

The “Edwardian” Era, named for its monarch King Edward VII, formally spans the length of King Edward VII’s reign: 1901-1910. However, many historians push the ending of the era to the onset of World War I (1914) or even further to 1919.

While this era was brief, it saw the rise of Modernity, brought about by the industrialization and progress begun in the Victorian Era. Literacy rates rose and the middle class grew, as did visible and rampant consumerism.

The Edwardian era is positioned directly between the austere Victorian Era (and the Boer War), and World War I. Accordingly, retrospective historical accounts of the Edwardian Era are often infused with nostalgia. This so-called “Gilded Age” was viewed as a peaceful, leisurely, and elegant time, skewing heavily towards opulence and excess. However, despite these associations, it was not an idyllic period for all. Pervasive class inequality denied most of Edwardian society opportunity and mobility, and subjected many to unsafe labor conditions. The culture of mass production and opulence had sobering consequences, including the sinking of the Titanic. Plus, beneath the surface, WWI was brewing.

In the Edwardian Era, the rigid social class structure influenced daily life far beyond just the economic sphere. One’s positioning in the social hierarchy—working class (70-80% of the population), middle class (15-25% of the population), or upper class (~5% of the population)—influenced and informed their social, political, domestic, and cultural lives.

The upper class, to which the aristocratic D’Ysquiths belong, primarily received income from the land and property they owned, rather than wages and salaries. Many members of this class were titled and politically influential. The fictitious Earl of Highhurst is a good example of this.

Monty, like most of his Edwardian peers, would have belonged to the working class.



King Edward and Queen Alexandra

Sensationalism of the news in the late-Victorian and Edwardian Eras

The late Victorian and Edwardian eras brought about major changes in journalism. Innovations in printing technology and decreased prices of newspapers allowed mass-produced periodical journalism to flourish. These newspapers catered to cultural tastes and drove profit as commercialization of the industry increased. Accordingly, these newspapers and periodicals reflected a fascination with crime and with the sensational. Detectives and criminals became lively characters in the papers. Crimes and cases became fascinating stories, and the line between journalist and detective blurred as reporters adopted increasingly extreme methods of ensuring they would be the first to get the scoop in the latest crime that captured the public imagination.

“Print culture was also large and diverse, aided by relatively high literacy rates. There were hundreds of magazines and newspapers available at ever cheaper prices. The 1880s saw the emergence of ‘the New Journalism,’ which drew in readers with pieces on violent crimes and scandals in high society.”

**-Susie Steinbach, “Victorian Era”
March 28, 2024**

This fascination, coupled with a massive rise in literacy rates during the later part of the 19th century, created not only a demand for more sensational journalism, but also sparked a desire and created a market for more sensational forms of fiction as well; giving rise to the “Penny Dreadful”.

The Penny Dreadful

One of the most popular periodicals of this era was *The Penny Dreadful*. By the middle of the 19th century there were more than 100 publishers pushing out these serialized weekly periodicals, directly aimed at the mostly male working-class segment of the English population.

From a publishing standpoint, the penny dreadful was exceedingly cheap to produce. It used flimsy paper, required little-to-no editing or oversight, and paid writers just a penny per line. The writer's job was to try and create a plot, no matter how sensational or outlandish, that would hook a reader instantly and keep them coming back for more.

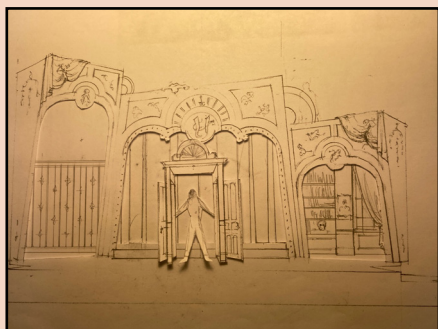
The Penny Dreadful also cost only a penny to purchase at a newsstand (a tenth of what an installment of Dickens' latest work might), and would provide the reader with over-the-top levels of violence, familiar locations, and—counter to the usual morality of a gothic novel—these serials often provided the reader with an underclass anti-hero to root for.

Attend the Tale...

Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, was first introduced to readers through a series of penny dreadfuls called *The String of Pearls*. Over the course of 18 weekly installments, a young woman named Johanna Oakley tries to solve the disappearance of her lover, Mark Thornhill, who was last seen entering Sweeney Todd's barber shop on Fleet Street.

In This Production

Scenic sketches and a set model by Dick Block, Scenic Designer, and selected costume renderings by Austin Blake Conlee, Costume Designer, for the 2024 Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey production of *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder*, directed by Brian B. Crowe.



Commentary & Criticism

"The farcical vaudevillian tour de force features a book by Robert L. Freedman, rousing music by Steven Lutvak, and wry, wonderful lyrics by Freedman and Lutvak that call to mind the light-hearted puns and wit of Noel Coward."

– **Jennifer Farrar, *Associated Press***

"It has become a clichéd grumble amongst those exiting new musicals that you can't remember any tunes, but Lutvak and Freedman buck the modern condition. Their songs, too organic and surprising to be dismissed as pastiche, assimilate influences from Gilbert and Sullivan, Sondheim and English music hall. They range from broadly satiric 'I Don't Understand the Poor' to the campy 'Better With a Man' and the brilliantly constructed operetta-ish trio 'I've Decided to Marry You.'"

– **David Cote, *Time Out New York***

"...This production's secret weapon isn't the poison in Monty's pocket but Lutvak's jaunty score, which sounds both fresh and period-perfect..."

– **Thom Geier, *Entertainment Weekly***

"Half British music hall and half Grand Guignol - garnished with flavors of Oscar Wilde and Gilbert and Sullivan - *Gentleman's Guide* is a pocket-sized musical that dazzles with lyrical wit, dark comedic fun and bravura showmanship"

– **Michael Dale, *BroadwayWorld***

"Bloodlust hasn't sung so sweetly, or provided so much theatrical fun, since Sweeney Todd first wielded his razor with gusto many a long year ago..."

– **Charles Isherwood, *New York Times***

On Steven Lutvak as a Composer and Lyricist

"An upper-middlebrow Billy Joel crossed with a lower-highbrow Tom Lehrer with a pinch of Debussy: that's how you might place the music of the singer, songwriter, pianist and raconteur Steven Lutvak in the artistic hierarchy of contemporary songwriters."

– **Stephen Holden, *New York Times***

"[Lutvak's *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* score] establishes itself as one of the most accomplished (and probably the most literate) to be heard on Broadway in the past dozen years or so, since the less rigorous requirements of pop songwriting have taken over."

– **Charles Isherwood, *New York Times***



The cast of *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* at Hartford Stage. (Photo by Joan Marcus)



Interesting Links & Sources



Robert L. Freedman's Website

www.robertlfreedmanwriter.com



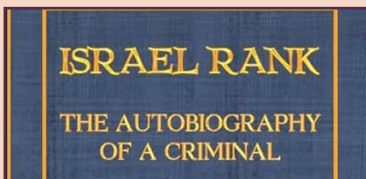
Steven Lutvak's Website

www.stevenlutvak.com



Why Penny Dreadfuls Scandalized Victorian Society

www.crimereads.com/penny-dreadfuls/



Israel Rank: The Autobiography of a Criminal on Project Gutenberg

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