



# The Great Gatsby

Resource Pack

A Wardrobe Ensemble and Wardrobe Theatre co-production of

## **The Great Gatsby**

Adapted by the company from the novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald

### **Cast**

Tamsin Hurtado Clarke

Jesse Meadows

### **Creative Team**

Director

Tom Brennan

Designer

Katie Sykes

Composer & Sound Design

Tom Crosley-Thorne

Lighting Design

Chris Collier

Movement Director

Deepraj Singh

Dramaturg

James Newton

Outside Eye

Helena Middleton

Stage Manager

Dean Sudron

Voice Coach

Kat Hicks

Assistant Director

Frazer Meakin

Assistant Stage Manager

Caitlin Ravenscroft

Photography, Filming & Editing

Jack Offord

Camera Operators

Matthew Joiner & Michael Sides

The Wardrobe Ensemble Producer

Hannah Smith

The Wardrobe Theatre Producers

Matthew Whittle, Bébhinn Cronin & Cherie Demmery

Resource pack written and compiled by Emily Greenslade

The live theatre production of **The Great Gatsby** opened at The Wardrobe Theatre 8 September - 2 October before playing at The North Wall Arts Centre 7 - 9 October, The Corn Exchange Newbury 13 October and Theatre Royal Plymouth 19 - 23 October 2021.

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“I’m going to fix everything just the way it was before,”  
he said, nodding determinedly.

Invited to an extravagant party in a Long Island mansion, young bachelor Nick Carraway is intrigued by the flamboyant host, Jay Gatsby; a self-made, self-invented millionaire with a mysterious past. As the two strike up an unlikely friendship, a cocktail soaked story of memory, money and lost love unfolds.



# The Novel

The Great Gatsby, is F. Scott Fitzgerald's third novel, published in 1925. Set in Jazz Age New York, the novel tells the tragic story of Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire, and his pursuit of Daisy Buchanan, a wealthy young woman whom he loved in his youth.

The novel is narrated by Nick Carraway, a Yale University graduate from the Midwest who moves to New York after World War I to pursue a career in bonds. He recounts the events of the summer he spent in the East two years later, reconstructing his story through a series of flashbacks not always told in chronological order.

# The Play

*The Great Gatsby* by The Wardrobe Ensemble and The Wardrobe Theatre is a two-woman theatrical retelling of F. Scott Fitzgerald's masterpiece, where all the words spoken in the play have been lifted from the original text but edited down into a 90 minute piece of live theatre.

The show was created for Christmas 2020, but sadly the country was hit with another Covid-19 lockdown and so the show couldn't be performed as expected. But like many other theatre-makers at the time, we decided to make a filmed version of production, which proved to be a new and fruitful experience. A year on however, the cast and creative team have been able to put up the show again and perform it in front of a live audience as they had intended.



# Interview

## Tom Brennan - Director

### **The Editing Process**

If we'd literally just read the novel, it would have taken eight hours (see [GATZ by Elevator Repair Service](#))

So the first draft was mainly about separating the characters from the ideas in the text and putting that in chronological order. Then we went through the text a number of times and each time we hacked away at bits that we felt were unnecessary or superfluous. We wanted to capture the essence of the novel and the essence of the poetry. Throwing away bits that didn't serve the story we wanted to tell. The more we rehearsed the more obvious it felt to remove sections. We developed confidence in hacking away till we found the purest nugget of story that could be presented on stage.

In rehearsals, we were always questioning how we might transpose a line, a concept or a poetic idea onto the stage. Sometimes we needed spoken text to help us present the idea but other times a lighting state, a sound effect or a silent stage picture could express that idea better, and so we'd remove the text according to how we staged it as well.

### **The Narration**

Narration forms a key part of the way we tell the story on stage and we spent a long time trying to whittle down Nick's narration of the events.

We tried to be really efficient about which moments were narrated and which moments were visual. An example is at the beginning of the play, where we have Nick describe a lot about the layout of his home. But later in the play, at the moment where Daisy enters Nick's house and sees Gatsby for the first time in five years, we didn't want to have any narration. We just had the sound of thunder, and rain, and we just let those two characters see each other for the first time, because we felt like that communicated the essence of that idea and we didn't need any of Fitzgerald's narration, we could just have it purely through performance.





## The Other Versions

One of the things that drove us in the process was the fact that we didn't really like the film versions very much because they indulged in the glitz and the glamour of the novel. They had a lot of budget and a lot of people and a lot of stuff. But for us, they missed some of the detail of the emotion or the detail of the sadness of it or the particular strange images that Fitzgerald picks out so beautifully. So we wanted to make an antidote to that sort of grand, opulent, bombastic approach that indulged in some of the smaller moments, while also capturing the fun of the novel and the fun of Gatsby's parties. We knew that the strongest moments for us would be about saying look at this small thing, look at the relationship between Nick and Gatsby, think again about the way that we hear Gatsby's description, maybe it means something a little bit different to what we first thought. So that was important to us.

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# The Pandemic

**“You can only do what you can do”**

Katie Sykes, Designer

When we decided to make the show, we thought that COVID-19 would be easing up a little bit but we were very much mistaken. When we started rehearsals, it was quickly apparent that it would be very unlikely that an audience would see it. And so every day after rehearsals, we would check government advice to find out whether we could still be in rehearsals and if an audience might be able to see it.

Because of this we really designed the whole show from scratch, knowing that the show needed to have social distancing embedded into the way that it was told, which was a really interesting, creative constraint.

If you've got a two person play, you want those two actors to have as much contact as possible. And instead, we forced them to keep their distance from each other. The story at some level is about longing and wishing for love, wishing for someone that you can't have. So it actually felt like a useful, creative constraint to have these two performers not be able to touch each other, not be able to kiss and not be able to make contact across the stage.

Also, because we didn't know if we'd be shut down each day, it just meant that we didn't hold any grand expectations for the show. Instead, we were working within our very tight limitations and trying to create the best possible decisions from that space. And it created very fruitful results.





# Limitations

## “Limitations breeds creativity”

Tom Brennan, Director

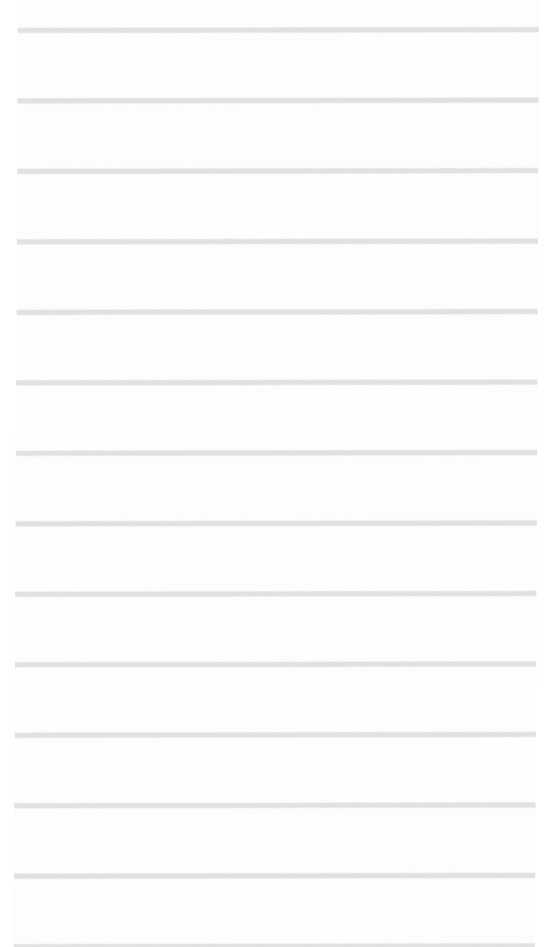
This show had many creative constraints:

- Working from a dense and poetic text
- Having two performers on stage at all times
- The performers being socially distanced and not touching
- Depicting nearly all the characters in the novel with only two performers
- Rehearsing and performing in The Wardrobe Theatre, a cube shaped theatre space

All of these creative constraints led to a fruitful project, because rather than having 100 different ways of depicting a moment, we had a structure to work within.

A socially distanced room where the characters couldn't touch created meaning. Gatsby longed to touch Daisy but he couldn't.

The limitation of having only two performers play all the characters meant that strong physical choices needed to be made in order to distinguish each character.



A vertical stack of 15 horizontal grey lines, providing a writing area.

# Character

## Discuss

- How many characters does each performer play? Can you list them?

## Discuss

- What are the different techniques used in the play to differentiate between characters.
- Did you think these techniques were successful?

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# Character Descriptions

## Tom Buchanan

Now he was a sturdy, straw haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining, arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body.

## Daisy Buchanan

I looked back at my cousin who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth—but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered “Listen,” a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour.

## Jay Gatsby

He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on YOU with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey.

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### Jordan Baker

She was a slender, small breasted girl, with an erect carriage which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet. Her grey sun-strained eyes looked back at me with polite reciprocal curiosity out of a wan, charming discontented face.

### Catherine

The sister, Catherine, was a slender, worldly girl of about thirty with a solid sticky bob of red hair and a complexion powdered milky white. Her eyebrows had been plucked and then drawn on again at a more rakish angle but the efforts of nature toward the restoration of the old alignment gave a blurred air to her face. When she moved about there was an incessant clicking as innumerable pottery bracelets jingled up and down upon her arms.

### Myrtle Wilson

Then I heard footsteps on a stairs and in a moment the thickish figure of a woman blocked out the light from the office door. She was in the middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her surplus flesh sensuously as some women can. Her face, above a spotted dress of dark blue crepe-de-chine, contained no facet or gleam of beauty but there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering.

### George B. Wilson

He was a blonde, spiritless man, anaemic and faintly handsome. When he saw us a damp gleam of hope sprang into his light blue eyes.

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## Discuss

- There isn't a character description for Nick Carraway. Why not?
- Can you write your own character description of Nick from what you've learnt about him?

# Exercise One

## Creating Character (10 - 15 mins)

- In small groups, take one character description per group (see above). One person reads the description out loud.
- You will present this character back to the wider group, but you must decide together how you will do that.
- Depending on the group size and ability, you might decide to be different versions of the character. Someone might be a director. Someone might be a narrator. It's entirely up to you.

### Think about...

- Do you narrate the whole text?
- Does the narrator become the character or are they two separate roles? When does the transformation take place?
- What characteristics do you think are the most important and how can you distil them down to just present those?
- How can you show the character just through physicality? Is it subtle? Is it extreme?
- Is there a key piece of costume that can be used?
- Try a few different versions. Do just settle with the first.
- Be specific and clear!



### Extract from *The Great Gatsby* (Chapter 4)

At nine o'clock, one morning late in July, Gatsby's gorgeous car lurched up the rocky drive to my door and gave out a burst of melody from its three noted horn. It was the first time he had called on me though I had gone to two of his parties, mounted in his hydroplane, and, at his urgent invitation, made frequent use of his beach.

"Good morning, old sport. You're having lunch with me today and I thought we'd ride up together."

He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand. He saw me looking with admiration at his car.

"It's pretty, isn't it, old sport." He jumped off to give me a better view. "Haven't you ever seen it before?"

I'd seen it. Everybody had seen it. It was a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hatboxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns. Sitting down behind many layers of glass in a sort of green leather conservatory we started to town.





# Exercise Two

## Working from the text (30 mins)

Read the extract from the beginning of Chapter 4 of *The Great Gatsby*. There are some tricky words. Look them up online or get your teacher to help you.

### *Task one*

- In small groups, bullet point everything that is happening narratively (i.e. the plot or story not the description)
- Pick out three moments from the extract that you think will convey what is happening narratively. This will be your new adaptation.
- Highlight the three bits of text you have chosen.
- You might want to share back to the wider group and discuss the differences and similarities between the groups. Remember the importance of editing and not holding onto the bits you like. What tells the story efficiently?

### *Task Two*

- In the same groups, focus on the description of the car. If you were reading the book you could imagine the car. If you were watching the film you see the car. But how can you show the car theatrically?
- You can't have a car on stage. How are you going to evoke the sense of this car on stage? How little language do you need in order to evoke the sense of the poetry in the text?
- Highlight key words.
- Now stage your theatrical adaptation of the car. You could use sound such as angelic noises. You could animate objects. You could use the ensemble - think theatrically!

### Task Three

- Bring it all together and stage the whole extract! Remember the skills you've developed. Editing the text and making poetic moments theatrical. Refer back to your three narrative bullet points.
- How do you show the different characters' physical qualities (e.g. the impatient hand)?
- Make sure you pause half way through to share moments of your work to the wider group. Can you refine it even more and really get to the essence of the moment?
- Share your final adaptation to the wider group. When you're watching you should forget about your own piece and observe your peer's creations. You are directors! Think about what worked well and why, and what didn't work so well. Discuss with the group.



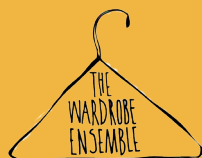


## Further Resources

- Watch the theatre film of *The Great Gatsby* [here](#)
- Watch the Q&A with the cast and creative team [here](#)
- Read The Guardian review of the theatre film [here](#)
- The Wardrobe Ensemble website [here](#)
- The Wardrobe Theatre website [here](#)



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