

# PROSCENIUM

## **The Price**

By Arthur Miller

The Price

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> January to Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010  
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

# The Price

By Arthur Miller

## Cast:

Victor Franz .....Duncan Sykes

Esther Franz .....Denise Bone

Gregory Solomon .....David Pearson

Walter Franz .....Robert Ewen

Directed by .....Linda Hampson

Stage Manager .....Crystal Anthony

Assistant Stage Manager .....Margaret Rudolph  
& Properties

Wardrobe .....Sheila Harvey

Lighting & Sound .....Mark Sutherland

The action takes place in the attic floor of a  
Manhattan Brownstone.

# Arthur Miller

- 1915 17 October - Arthur Miller born in Harlem, New York.
- 1929 Miller family moves to Brooklyn when Isadore Miller's clothing business collapses in the Depression.
- 1932 On graduating from High School, Miller works in an automobile warehouse.
- 1934 Enrols as a student at the University of Michigan, initially to study journalism, but soon changes to English.
- 1936 Wins Avery Hopwood Drama Prize with *No Villain*. Enrols on playwriting course and strongly drawn to the works of Ibsen.
- 1937 *They Too Arise* wins the Theatre Guild's New Plays Award.
- 1938 Graduates from University and begins work with the Federal Theatre Project.
- 1940 Marries fellow student Mary Slattery. Works for nearly two years in the Brooklyn navy yard.
- 1944 *The Man Who Had All The Luck* produced in New York and wins the Theatre Guild National Award.
- 1947 *All My Sons* wins the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.
- 1949 *Death of a Salesman*, produced in new York, wins the Pulitzer Prize.
- 1950 Adapts Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*.
- 1953 *The Crucible*, produced in New York, wins the Antoinette Perry and the Donaldson Prizes, but also incites the enmity of the House Committee of Un-American Activities.
- 1954 Refused a passport to attend the opening of *The Crucible* in Belgium.
- 1955 *A View from the Bridge* and *A Memory of Two Mondays* staged in New York.
- 1956 Divorces Mary Slattery and marries Marilyn Monroe.
- 1957 Fined \$500 and given a suspended 30 day sentence for contempt of Congress, when he refuses to pass on names of people who had attended Communist meetings with him in 1947.
- 1958 Conviction quashed by the Supreme Court.

- 1961 Divorces Marilyn Monroe.
- 1962 Marries Inge Morath, a professional photographer.
- 1965 Elected President of PEN International.
- 1968 *The Price* opens in New York.
- 1969 Miller directs the London production of *The Price*.
- 1972 *The Creation of the World and Other Business* produced in New York.
- 1977 *The Archbishop's Ceiling* produced in Washington D.C.
- 1978 Visits China with Inge Morath.
- 1980 *The American Clock* opens in New York.
- 1983 Miller directs *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing.
- 1986 Miller visits Russia and meets President Gorbachev.
- 1987 An autobiography, *Timebends: A Life* published.
- 1991 *The Ride Down Mt Morgan* opens in the West End.
- 1992 The Young Vic stage *The Last Yankee*.
- 1994 *Broken Glass* opens at the Royal National Theatre.
- 1998 *Mr Peters' Connections* staged at the Almeida.
- 2000 *Resurrection Blues*, Miller's last full length play, staged at the Old Vic.
- 2005 10 February Arthur Miller dies.

# The Price

## Themes:

Two brothers, one a policeman, the other a successful surgeon, meet again after an angry break-up many years before; the time has come to divide the family's possessions after the father's death. Grown men now, they think they have achieved the indifference to the betrayals of the past that maturity confers. But it all comes back; the old angry symbols evoke the old emotions of injustice, and they part unreconciled. Neither can accept that the world needs them both – the dutiful man of order and the ambitious, selfish creator who invents new cures.

Despite my wishes I could not tamper with something the play and life seemed to be telling me: that we were doomed to perpetuate our illusions because truth was too costly to face. At the end of the play Gregory Soloman, listening to an old laughing record, starts to laugh uncontrollably, nostalgically, brutally, having come closest to acceptance rather than denial of the deforming betrayals of time.

A play is bread cast on waters, this one especially; Lev Kopelev, the Russian dissident author, told me that during the Moscow production, Solzhenitsyn came repeatedly to watch and give his notes to the actors, evidently fascinated with some element in the play, precisely which I never learned.

*Arthur Miller, Timebends*

The Price effectively begins in 1929, though it is set thirty five years later. It was in that year that the Franz family began to be displaced from the American Dream. Financially ruined by the Crash, they gradually found their values placed under pressure. What happened to them then, and what they chose to do, shaped their lives.

As in so many other Miller plays the key relationship is between a father and his two sons, though here the father is present only in memory. Here, as in *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, the two sons – Victor and Walter – represent two different approaches to life. In that sense they are a continuation of a debate in Miller's work about the qualities necessary not only for survival but also for survival with dignity and meaning. Here, the debate seems to be one between idealism and self-sacrifice on the one hand,

and cynicism and self-concern on the other. That it is never quite that simple is what gives the play part of its fascination and integrity.

*Christopher Bigsby, 1990*

## **The Furniture:**

In *Timebends* Miller describes the furniture in his parents' 1920s house: About 45 years later that very dining room table was on stage for the first Broadway production of *The Price*. In 1968 I had no idea that our old dining table still existed, but my sister Joan, on hearing that the set required furniture of the twenties, reminded me that it had been given to my father's sister Blanche. I hurried to Brooklyn and Aunt Blanche's apartment and as it turned out she had recently been talking to secondhand dealers about selling the table. I looked at the table, still solid and sound and somehow amusing with its heavy harp trestle legs deeply carved and a scalloped border running round its top. And so it was this table that David Burns, a comic genius, struck with the flat of his little hand, brushed cigarette ashes off the lapel of his drooping black overcoat, and explained, 'Listen! You can't move it. A man sits down at such a table he knows not only he's married, he's got to stay married'.

## **Gregory Solomon:**

To those who thought his work was too self-consciously tragic, Miller told a story against himself. In 1967, having just completed *The Price*, he was taking a holiday in the Caribbean and recognised a man paddling. It turned out to be Mel Brooks, Miller's polar opposite as an artist. When Brooks asked him what his new play was about, Miller began, 'Well, there are these two brothers...' 'Stop!' yelled Brooks. 'I'm crying.'

*The Price* is a pivotal play in his career, and a rich, layered one. Built upon a gut-wrenching Cain-and-Abel encounter between two brothers, it throws a painful light on the dysfunctions and disruptions of their lives and times. But with the arrival of the furniture appraiser, Gregory Solomon, a new note of impish humour overlays the heartache.

'Enter Gregory Solomon', Miller's stage direction begins, becoming almost Dickensian in his portrait of the wily, wise old man. 'In brief, a phenomenon: a man nearly ninety, but still straight-backed and the air of his

massiveness still with him.’ ‘He has perfected a way,’ concludes Miller, ‘of leaning on his cane without appearing weak.’

*Michael Kustow, 2006*

I was given a choice role in *The Price* – Solomon, a used furniture dealer. *The Price* involved the sons’ price for the struggle of their family and the price for the furniture. Solomon was a superb role – full of humour and also pain. In one scene, for example, we learn that his daughter had committed suicide. I called Miller towards the end of the run of the play and begged him to write a new play about the dealer and his daughter. Miller growled, ‘I wrote the play, now I’m busy writing a new play that has no connection to your idea for furniture dealers.’

*Eli Wallach, 2006*

## **The Audience:**

In 1968 I saw *The Price* at an out-of-town try-out in Philadelphia. It was not well received. In a sense, the dramatic construction was that of two brothers, along with wife of one of them, struggling to create a well-made play from the chaos of their shared past. They wanted a history in which sense ruled and order could be found. They wanted agreement regarding assigned faults and attributed motivations. In the end the construction went up in smoke. They could not agree on who was at fault or even on the nature of the narrative they shared. The truth – by that I mean what actually happened – vanished as they grappled with one another to find it. Or perhaps it had vanished before their effort had even commenced. As the play spun to its ending, the very idea of a knowable truth in human affairs evaporated right in front of you while an old man, a near ghost, a junk appraiser who had been called to give value to the human belongings in the attic, laughed.

*David Rabe, 2009*

# **Our Next Production**

## **The Hebrew Lesson, It Should Happen to a Dog and The Bespoke Overcoat, by Wolf Mankowitz**

16th-19th March 2011, Compass Theatre, Ickenham

The author of A Kid for Two Farthings, Wolf Mankowitz, wrote many plays based on his Jewish heritage – some of which he described as a “typically over-long Jewish joke”. He shows a great deal of compassionate fellow feeling and explores themes of love tempered by character frailty. His plays are witty and wistful; full of human desires and inadequacies. They make you laugh, but mostly they make you smile, often a little wryly.

## **About Proscenium**

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week, at the Harrow Arts Centre for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

## **Friends Of Proscenium**

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Artistic Director : Michael Gerrard

Secretary : Izzie Cartwright

Chair : Crystal Anthony

Contact us at [www.proscenium.org.uk](http://www.proscenium.org.uk)