

PROSCENIUM

The Odd Couple

Female Version

By Neil Simon

The Odd Couple (Female Version)

Wednesday 14th to Saturday 17th June 2017

Compass Theatre, Ickenham

The Odd Couple

Female Version
By Neil Simon

The Cast

Olive	Debbie Ellis
Florence.....	Madeleine Clifford-Roper
Mickey.....	Mary-Anne Anaradoh
Sylvie.....	Amie Christmas
Vera	Anne Gerrard
Renee	Clare Wooster
Manolo.....	Rob Ewen
Jesus.....	Ben Morris
Directed by.....	Alan Bobroff
Stage Manager.....	Arnold Glickman
Assisted By	Keith Bayross
Lighting and Sound Operation	Charles Anthony

The play is set in Olive Madison's Riverside Drive
apartment in New York City in the 1980s

Act 1

A hot summer's night

Interval

Act 2

Scene 1 : Two weeks later, about 11pm

Scene 2 : A few days later, about 8pm

Scene 3 : The next evening, about 7.30pm

Neil Simon on Neil Simon

In 1983 the Alvin Theatre at 250 West 52nd Street, New York, was renamed the Neil Simon Theatre. Simon said at the dedication:

“Believe me, I am thrilled to death. I have ego enough to have contemplated writing a play called *Neil Simon*, so that people could go to the Neil Simon to see Neil Simon’s *Neil Simon*. But we must keep these things in perspective.”

Neil Simon

Neil Simon is the world’s most commercially successful playwright. He has had dozens of plays and nearly as many major motion pictures produced. He has been showered with more Academy and Tony nominations than any other writer, and is the only playwright to have four Broadway productions running simultaneously. His plays have been produced in dozens of languages.

Born in the Bronx on July 4, 1927, Marvin Neil Simon grew up in Manhattan and for a short time attended New York University and the University of Denver. His most significant writing job came in the early 1950s when he joined the staff of *Your Show of Shows*, a landmark live television comedy series. Sid Caesar’s hilariously cutting-edge program had some of the best comic minds in television working for it. By the 1960s, Simon had begun to concentrate on writing plays for Broadway. His first hit came in 1961 with *Come Blow Your Horn*, and was soon after followed by the very successful comic romance *Barefoot in the Park*.

Simon’s brother, Danny, played a major role in his writing. Eight and a half years older, Danny brought Simon into the business and had shown him the ropes. It was Danny who provided the inspiration for one of Simon’s most enduring hits. After his divorce, Danny moved in with another divorced man, and this situation became the set-up for *The Odd Couple* (1966). Though Danny had begun writing the story himself, he reached a block and eventually handed it off to Simon who soon made it a smash on Broadway. Starring Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau, the

1968 film version was equally successful and prompted a popular television series.

By 1973, Simon was a major voice in contemporary comedy. But that year he entered a low period in his life when his wife of twenty years died. Sometime later he met the actress Marsha Mason, and they were married. His 1977 play, *Chapter Two*, dramatizes the grief of a newly remarried man trying to start over after his wife has died. *Chapter Two* was considered one of his finest works and he followed it with a musical, *They're Playing Our Song*.

Throughout his four-decade career, Simon has drawn extensively on his own life and experience for materials for his plays. Many of his works take place in the working-class New York neighbourhoods he knew so well as a child. One of Simon's great achievements has been the insightful representation of the social atmosphere of those times in New York. With his autobiographical trilogy, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1983), *Biloxi Blues* (1985), and *Broadway Bound* (1986), Simon created a touching portrait of an individual, his family, and the world around them. With these plays, Simon found his greatest critical acclaim, and for his 1991 follow-up, *Lost in Yonkers*, Simon was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

Neil Simon has for almost 40 years invigorated the stage with touching stories and zany characters, but possibly his greatest contribution has been the ability to create humor from the lives and troubles of everyday people. Of Simon, actor Jack Lemmon said, "Neil has the ability to write characters — even the leading characters that we're supposed to root for — that are absolutely flawed. They have foibles. They have faults. But, they are human beings. They are not all bad or all good; they are people we know."

PBS American Masters:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/neil-simon-about-neil-simon/704/>

The Odd Couple and the Female Odd Couple

Following the premier of *The Odd Couple* on Broadway in 1965, the characters were revived in a successful 1968 film and 1970s television series, as well as other derivative works and spin-offs. The plot concerns two mismatched roommates: the neat, uptight Felix Ungar and the slovenly, easygoing Oscar Madison. Simon adapted the play in 1985 to feature a pair of female roommates (Florence Ungar and Olive Madison) in *The Female Odd Couple*. An updated version of the 1965 show appeared in 2002 with the title *Oscar and Felix: A New Look at the Odd Couple*.

The Female Odd Couple was based on the same story line and same lead characters. The poker game became *Trivial Pursuit* with their friends becoming the girlfriends: Mickey, Sylvie, Vera, and Renee. The Pigeon sisters became the Costazuela brothers, Manolo and Jesus.

The Female Odd Couple opened on Broadway at the Broadhurst Theatre on June 11, 1985, and closed on February 23, 1986, after 295 performances and nine previews. Directed by Gene Saks, responsible for the 1968 film version, the leads were Sally Struthers and Rita Moreno as Florence (Felix) and Olive (Oscar), with Lewis J. Stadlen and Tony Shalhoub (in his Broadway debut) as the Costazuela brothers.

A London production of this version ran at the Apollo Theatre in 2001 and starred Paula Wilcox (Florence) and Jenny Seagrove (Olive).

The Odd Couple – Spin-offs and Remakes

Broadway plays (1965-67; 1985-86; 2005-06)

Directed by Mike Nichols, the original production of Simon's comedy about neat freak Felix and easy-going slob Oscar opens in New York in March 1965. It stars Art Carney and Walter Matthau, and runs for nearly 1,000 performances before closing in summer 1967. It's subsequently revived on Broadway, starting with the 1985 revival with a female *Odd Couple* starring Rita Moreno and Sally Struthers; and a 2005 version with Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick, hot from their *The Producers* Broadway pairing, which proves to be a box-office smash.

Film version (1968)

Simon pens the screenplay for this Gene Saks-directed feature film, which stars Jack Lemmon as Felix and Walter Matthau, reprising his Broadway role as Oscar. The film is nominated for two Academy Awards: best adapted screenplay and editing. Lemmon and Matthau reunite for the 1998 film

sequel *The Odd Couple II*, which finds the unlikely friends on a road trip to their son and daughter's wedding.

ABC comedies (1970-75; 1975-77)

Tony Randall and Jack Klugman play the dissimilar chums for five seasons on the beloved ABC comedy remake, which features Al Molinaro (*Happy Days*) and Penny Marshall (*Laverne and Shirley*) in recurring roles. In 1975, a Saturday-morning cartoon called *The Oddball Couple* — an homage to the *Odd Couple*, about a cat and a dog living together — starts on ABC, where it runs for two years.

ABC remake (1982-83)

The comedy gets an African-American remake in this short-lived outing, which runs for 18 episodes on ABC. It stars Ron Glass (*Barney Miller*) and Demond Wilson (*Sanford and Son*), and becomes the network's second unsuccessful attempt at adapting a Simon play with black actors, after the one-season *Barefoot in the Park* in 1970.

CBS sitcom (2015)

The Odd Couple gets a modern update in this newest version, which stars *Friends*' Matthew Perry as Oscar and Thomas Lennon (*Reno 911!*) as Felix. Despite lackluster reviews, the comedy was sampled by 13.6 million viewers in last week's premiere, wedged between ratings juggernauts *The Big Bang Theory* and the *Two and a Half Men* finale.

Patrick Ryan, USA Today, February 25th 2015

How Actors Reshaped The Odd Couple

When Lewis Stadlen showed up to audition for Neil Simon's new version of '*The Odd Couple*,' he found himself in somewhat unnerving company. Only 38 years old and possessed of a perfectly adequate head of dark hair, Mr. Stadlen "walked in and there were 15 bald Hispanic actors in their 50's," he recalled. "They all laughed at me."

Indeed, the part he had come to try out for - that of Manolo Costazuela - did contain an unsettling number of jokes about baldness. However, Mr. Stadlen's audition proved so electrifying that he got the part, which was promptly rewritten to fit.

Mr. Stadlen's casting was followed by that of Tony Shalhoub as his younger brother, Jesus. Together, they play the moustachioed pair of glossy, grinning Spanish gentlemen who show up for a dinner date with their downstairs neighbors, played by Rita Moreno and Sally Struthers. When "The Odd Couple" opened in New York last month, Mr. Simon's judgment was vindicated: the Costazuela brothers' scene deemed hilarious.

Mr. Stadlen and Mr. Shalhoub find a certain humor in their good fortune. "It's ironic that a New York Jew and a Lebanese kid from Green Bay got these two roles," said Mr. Shalhoub, whose father and maternal grandparents were born in Lebanon. "Neither of us even had moustaches."

As the actors cultivated facial hair and Castilian accents, the playwright was busy deleting bald jokes and reshaping the characters to fit the casting. Both actors were amazed at Mr. Simon's facility in reworking material during rehearsal. "Neil picked up on what we were doing, and he would go out of the room and come back 20 minutes later with three new pages," Mr. Shalhoub reported. "It was constantly changing."

Mr. Simon attributes his pivotal casting choice of Mr. Stadlen to the fact that his audition was "brilliant. I had no idea Lewis would be that convincing as a Spanish airline administrator from Barcelona," the playwright said. "When I found the right actor, I knew what the part should be. Once we cast the two boys, I realized how important sex was in the scene. They were sexier men than I had originally envisioned."

For the interaction between the brothers, Mr. Stadlen took his cue from an earlier duo. "There's a great deal of Laurel and Hardy in Manolo's relationship with his brother," he said. "They're both in the same boat, but the one thinks he knows a great deal more than the other one. The reality is that both are pretty lost."

Leslie Bennetts, New York Times, August 13th 1985

Notes from the Director

When I was asked which play I would like to direct this season I had no difficulty in suggesting *The Odd Couple – Female Version* by Neil Simon. Having always enjoyed his plays I found his adaptation of his original hit play and film with the genders swapped an extremely funny read. I have been lucky enough to be able to assemble a very talented cast and I hope you will have as much fun watching our interpretation of this play as we have had rehearsing it. The glorious one-liners and repartees have made it difficult to get through a rehearsal without breaking into laughter ourselves.

I should like to thank the cast for all their hard work over a very short but intense rehearsal period. Watching them develop their characters has been great fun, it has been an enormous pleasure to work with them.

Alan Bobroff

Our Next Production

The Changeling

Thomas Middleton & William Rowley

Classic Jacobean revenge tragedy mixing sex and death with wicked humour.

Beautiful and rich, Beatrice-Joanna is in love, so she hires her father's trusted manservant, the repellent De Flores, to kill her current fiancé. But Beatrice discovers that, in return, De Flores wants something far more precious than money.

Directed by Shirley Wootten & Hannah Lester

1st to 4th November 2017
7:45 pm, Compass Theatre, Ickenham
Box Office : 01895 250 615

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 in Harrow for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Secretary : Clare Wooster

Chair : David Pearson

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk