

# About the Playwright KEN LUDWIG

Moon Over  
Buffalo

KEN LUDWIG is a two-time Tony Award nominee and recipient of the coveted Laurence Olivier Award. He is the author of *Lend Me A Tenor*, which has proved to one of the most popular comedies of the past decade and has received more than 200 productions worldwide. It ran for more than a year each on Broadway and in London and Paris. Ken also wrote the screenplay of *Lend Me A Tenor* for Columbia Pictures. His other plays include the very successful *Sullivan & Gilbert*, and *Postmortem* and *Divine Fire*. Ken's play *Moon Over Buffalo* opened successfully in 1995 at the Martin Beck Theatre on Broadway, and starred Carol Burnett and Philip Bosco. He is also a practicing lawyer, specializing in International Law, with the firm of Stoptoe & Johnson, LLP.

## ***Moon Over Buffalo* SYNOPSIS**

*Moon over Buffalo* is a madcap farce not unlike *Noises Off!* -- a zany look at life and love in the theatre. The show opened on Broadway October 1, 1995 and closed June 30, 1996. The original cast starred Phillip Bosco as George Hay, Carol Burnett as Charlotte Hay, Randy Graff as Rosalind, Jane Connell as Ethel, Kate Miller as Eileen, Dennis Ryan as Paul, Andy Taylor as Howard, and James Valentine as Richard Maynard. A second production was mounted in London starring Joan Collins as Charlotte Hay.

Taking the show on the road was the life, love, and livelihood of Broadway actors from the late 1700s into the WWII years (see *Touring*). George and Charlotte are depicted as the last shaky branch on that tree. They consider themselves more famous than the Barrymores (a real and famous theatrical family from the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century). Unfortunately, a couple of flops in legitimate shows on the road send George and Charlotte plummeting into touring repertory theatre where classics are performed back-to-back, city after city. It's 1953, the end of an era. Touring classical repertory is no longer in fashion for a multiplicity of reasons. The road shows that draw now are the American musicals preferably with star names. Television and movies provide the straight drama and comedy that used to tour. They are much more affordable than touring shows. Although drama and comedy still tour even today, their casts and crews are smaller and smaller and their audiences continue to decline even when major stars portray the leading roles. What still sells are musicals and a very few highly touted shows from New York's Broadway season.

George and Charlotte carry on despite the small audiences and their inappropriate roles as young lovers in two classic shows. Their motley company and crew are in Buffalo, New York, (New York's least favorite city), to present Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Noel Coward's *Private Lives*. *Cyrano* is a late-1800s Romantic swordfighting play with a huge cast (George and Charlotte have cut it back to a cast of five, thereby losing most of the point of the play). *Private Lives* is a British drawing-room comedy from the 1930s, fortunately having very few roles). Their egos dictate that George and Charlotte will play the too-young roles of Coward's Elyot and Amanda, and Rostand's Cyrano and Roxanne. Theory and reality are shown to be two very different things when both plays are staged the same day with hysterical results.

*Moon* is told with typical twists, turns, collisions, mistaken identities, ridiculous mis-communications, slapstick antics, some terrifying swordplay, and a stage set with six doors. Add to all that a hostile, near-deaf mother-in-law, a couple of love triangles, an overly square weatherman, and a chance at stardom if Frank Capra (a real person and famous Hollywood director from the 1950s) comes to see the play and chooses George and Charlotte for Hollywood roles.

The play charms us as much with its many moments of genuine affection between the family and company members as it does with the absurdly farcical moments. The characters, despite their egos and farcical foibles, become real for us in their tender moments. *Moon over Buffalo* reminds us in its best moments of a theatrical era that has slipped away from us and left us with lots of glitz and shine and fewer and fewer genuinely human moments.

## **Glossary of Terms Referenced in MOON OVER BUFFALO**

This glossary provides additional information on a variety of people, plays, films, and literary titles that are referenced in *Moon Over Buffalo*. Knowing more about these people and productions will aid your understanding of the factors and environment influencing the characters in the play. Often the jokes and gags in *Moon Over Buffalo* are based on the popular opinions and celebrities of the time. So, brush up on your literary and entertainment history!

### **MOVIES**

*Sergeant Yukon* – *Sergeant Preston Of The Yukon*, a TV Series, 1955

*Apache Woman* – 1955 film starring Lloyd Bridges and Joan Taylor

*The Scarlet Pimpernel* – Filmed 7 times--The hero leads a double life posing as a fop in British society while secretly aiding French Revolutionaries

“Mr. Pimpernel Goes To Washington” - the title is a pun combining *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and a famous Frank Capra film, *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*.

### **FILM & THEATRE PERSONALITIES**

Frank Capra – Famous Hollywood Director – *Arsenic & Old Lace*, *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*, *Lost Horizon*, *You Can't Take It With You*, and many more

Ronald Coleman – British Actor

Katherine Cornell – Broadway star of serious drama

Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt – Broadway couple who frequently starred together

Greer Garson – Hollywood actress, late 1940s through 1960s

Laurence Olivier – One of the most famous actors of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century both on-stage and in film

Eugene O'Neill – American's first international playwright, 1888-1953

Mickey Rooney – Hollywood child star in 1930s;  
character actor in his later years  
Esther Williams – Hollywood actress, 1950s, famous for  
films featuring swimming  
Loretta Young – Hollywood/TV actress, 1940-1960,  
famous for her swirling entrances on TV

### **LITERARY**

*The Hound Of The Baskervilles* – Sir Arthur Conan  
Doyle — A Sherlock Holmes Novella  
*Pride And Prejudice* – Jane Austen novel, also a  
1940 film starring Lawrence Olivier and Greer  
Garson

### **OTHER**

*Forest Of Arden* – The forest in Shakespeare's *As You  
Like It*, Rosalind in *Moon Over Buffalo* is named after  
the central character from *As You Like It*  
*Variety* - Broadway's theatre newspaper and trade  
journal

### **PLAYS**

*Arms And The Man* – George Bernard Shaw, 1894  
*Brutus* – A character in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*  
*Cyrano De Bergerac* – Edmond Rostand, 1897 — A superb  
swordsmen with a huge nose who improvises poetry as he  
duels and fights wars. He secretly loves Roxanne.  
*Falstaff* – a character in three of Shakespeare's plays  
*Henry V* – Shakespeare  
*King Lear* – Shakespeare  
*Much Ado About Nothing* – Shakespeare  
*Private Lives* – Noel Coward, 1930 — British Comedy about a  
man and woman who marry, divorce, and meet again while on  
second honeymoons with new spouses.  
*Pygmalion* – G. B. Shaw, 1912, later adapted as *My Fair Lady*  
*Saint Joan* – G. B. Shaw, 1923, about Joan of Arc  
*She Stoops To Conquer* – Oliver Goldsmith, Restoration  
Comedy, 1773

# ***Moon Over Broadway;*** **A DOCUMENTARY VIDEO**

Recommended for further classroom study

*Moon Over Broadway* – A Documentary Video

Directors: Chris Hegedus and D. A. Pennebaker for DocuRama

With Carol Burnett, Philip Bosco, Ken Ludwig, Tom Moore,

Elizabeth Wilson, Rocco Landesman. 1997, 33mm, runs 97 min.

Pennebaker and Hegedus are the landmark filmmakers who made *The War Room* documentary which won a number of awards. This documentary follows the pre-production process of Ken Ludwig's *Moon over Buffalo*, from the initial press conference through the Boston preview and the eventual Broadway opening. It ends with a few shots of the closing nine months later. What the film reveals won't shock anyone with experience in theatre: it's work--hard work. For weeks on end, the artists struggle to define what will get the big laugh -- or any laugh. Tensions escalate as the key players -- playwright Ken Ludwig, director Tom Moore, stars Carol Burnett and Philip Bosco, and backer Rocco Landesman -- grow progressively more frustrated over parts of the show that don't work. The degree to which the film captures this anxiety and conflict is impressive, but so are the views of complex negotiations over turf and contributions, and the reassurances that keep the show moving forward. Like *The War Room*, *Moon Over Broadway* shares a regard for the grueling work behind the scenes that makes a show happen. The depiction of that work makes the show less glamorous but even more fascinating.

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