





MARCEL



ON THE TRAIN

SHOW GUIDE



WELCOME

We're delighted to share this Show Guide for Classic Stage Company's production of *Marcel on the Train*, which gives you a deeper look into this production.



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A NOTE FROM JILL RAFSON

CSC PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Welcome to *Marcel on the Train*, the second production in CSC's 2025-26 season.

You might be wondering how a world premiere play found its way into a theater called Classic Stage Company. Doesn't a classic have to be...old?



One of my favorite things about CSC is that we get to push at the boundaries of what's considered to be a classic, and that push can take many forms. It can be stunning work that was left behind by history primarily because of the identity of its author (*Wine in the Wilderness*), a piece from some of musical theater's greatest minds that had been waiting over 50 years to make it to New York (*The Baker's Wife*), or even a complete reimagining of one of the most familiar tales ever told (*black odyssey*).

With *Marcel*, we get the opportunity to share a new story about an undeniably classic figure, Marcel Marceau. The great French mime is an absolute icon, but this play beautifully humanizes and illuminates the man he would become by taking us into one specific moment from his past. The way that our playwrights, Ethan Slater and Marshall Paillet, are able to tell this story with enormous theatricality and a sense of true urgency makes me confident that the word classic belongs in any conversation about this play.

I hope you'll enjoy going on the ride with us today and throughout the season. In addition to this thrilling production, we have many readings and events ahead, including our final production for the season, Thornton Wilder's *The Emporium*, which starts performances at the end of April. I can't wait to welcome you back over and over again to this incredible space to enjoy everything that every kind of classic can offer.

Enjoy the show!

A CONVERSATION WITH MARSHALL PAILET AND ETHAN SLATER, CO-CREATORS OF *MARCEL ON THE TRAIN*

CSC Producing Artistic Director Jill Rafson interviews Marshall (Co-Writer/Director) and Ethan (Co-Writer/Performer) about their collaboration and creative process with Marcel on the Train.

Transcribed and edited by CSC Teaching Artist Harmony Harris



JILL: Can you talk about how you came upon this Marcel Marceau story and knew you wanted to tell it?

ETHAN: I was doing research on silent film comedians because I'm obsessed with them, and I was looking up Charlie Chaplin. He was "accused" of being Jewish, a communist, a Bolshevik. I was googling "Charlie Chaplin Jewish," and I came across this story of somebody who was deeply inspired by Charlie Chaplin, Marcel Marceau, who it turns out is Jewish. I'm reading this story, and it

links me to another article about how not only was he Jewish and inspired by Charlie Chaplin, but he was part of the French Resistance during World War II. I thought that was unbelievable. I called Marshall, and Marshall picked up the phone, and I said, "Marsh, how's Kelly? How's Finnegan?" He said, "Kelly's doing well. Finnegan, he's 11 hours old, and he's a bundle of joy." I said, "I do have an idea for something we should write together. It's really good. I'm not going to tell you right now. It's a terrible time, but I am really excited about this, and I can't wait for us to get back to work together after you've had time with the newborn."

MARSHALL: The way I remember it is that Ethan calls and says, "Oh my God, how are you? This is probably not the right time, but do you know the story that in 1943, a young Jewish Marcel Marceau smuggled these Jewish..." And I was like, "Ethan, stop!" But then the next day or some point later, I said, "Did you pitch me a Marcel Marceau train play a couple days ago?" And he was like, "Yeah." And we started beating out the idea. So that's the origin of the origin story.

ETHAN: The first thing that we talked about was there's so many ways to do this, but there's something thrilling about...being trapped on a train car, right? I wouldn't say that *Marcel on the Train* is a horror thriller play, but we were really compelled by this idea of what it means to be in a single location, trying to keep quiet,

and all of the obstacles are not what's in front of you but what's in your head and the obstacles that you're creating. That was the starting place creatively of the idea.

JILL: The structure of the piece is that you contain it on the train, but we're allowed sort of outside of it in memory and in future. How quickly did you know this is the right structure for this? How did you immediately know that this is meant to be a play and not some other form? How did all those pieces come together in the development of the piece?

MARSHALL: In 1943, Marcel Marceau smuggled Jewish orphans (in three trips) on trains from Nazi-occupied France into the Swiss Alps. In physical storytelling circles, there's kind of a tall tale that this was an invention of his act. In order to keep the children quiet, he would play games with his face and pretend he was walking down stairs. Whether that's true or not, I think that story is interesting on its face. Especially for people like me and Ethan who are obviously theatre makers, both trained in physical storytelling and both Jewish. We have a lot at stake in this story, so there were a lot of access points for us.

The most interesting thing about this story is how we can use the tools of Marcel Marceau to tell a story about Marcel Marceau. Those tools obviously being stillness in silence and delight in shadows. How can we marry content and form in an inherently theatrical way? The

brilliance of Marcel Marceau, in Ethan and I's opinion, was how he broke some fundamental rules of mime, for example, like object permanence.

How can we tell this story using those techniques? How can we have fun and flair and stillness inside this? And then we unveil the mask and reveal this universal human sadness underneath it. As we go back and forth in time, it follows these kids on the train ride, and then we see flash forwards of those kids in the future. All of those vignettes would follow the form and structure of a Marceau vignette, revealing some sort of universal sadness. That's how we started to think about it.

JILL: I think that transformation is a big part of it too, that goes into having adults of different ages play the children. The way you utilize Marcel's father is the same actor who plays the Nazi, right? I think there is something that is so simple about transformation that feels really baked into the Marceau aesthetic and therefore kind of takes over the play. Is that a fair assessment?

MARSHALL: For sure. The thing about saving a child's life is you're not just saving the life, you're saving the whole lifetime, right? You're saving who that person is going to become. In these flash forwards, we're not showing glamorous lives. It's like they became fully fleshed-out human adults with flaws and contradictions like us, like the full beauty and

ugliness that is an adult person.

ETHAN: We're also experiencing a moment where these people are really traumatized, and they never lose this moment of being a child, and we are revisiting that time. To have them be that age that they grow to in that moment also pulls in the childlikeness into their futures in a way that felt exciting for us.

JILL: Why did you guys feel like we have to get this story out now in this moment? Why does the world need this story?

ETHAN: In 2021, when we started writing this, it meant a very different thing than it does now. In a lot of ways stuff has changed, and in a lot of ways it hasn't. Something that has been very sort of emotional for me in working on this is we are focusing on this concept that children have the right to grow up. This is a play about children under threat and under siege and trying to find beautiful moments in the pain. It's not just for the moment; it is so that you can grow up and move through it and move past it and help the next generation of children to grow up.

Something that Marshall and I talked a lot about is that we as artists are really invested in the origin of artists, and we have that built in, but it isn't the core of the story. It really is about a young person that takes on responsibility that they feel they aren't equipped for. I do think that is another theme that is ever-present

in humanity: we are faced with things that seem impossible. We are forced into positions of responsibility, whether we like it or not. And how do we treat those around us when we are struggling with those things?

MARSHALL: It took us five years to get this from inception to CSC, and that's incredibly fast. Sometimes a show loses its relevance in that period of maturation, and unfortunately, our show has become more relevant and a show we didn't want to be true. We have trouble reckoning with the direction our world is going in and these atrocities that are happening. It's supposed to be things that we learned from, and yet it's still happening.

When we started this project, I had a child and Ethan didn't. Now we both do. We have Jewish children. Our parents are public vocal distrusters of our current government. We have difficulty reckoning with our place inside the world. How do you survive all the obstacles and events? But more interesting to us was how do these children incorporate this trauma into their kind of personal mythos, even in ways that they don't realize it? What does someone whose life purpose is to bring delight to other people have to offer in a world like that? That definitely ties into how Ethan and I struggle with the world. We're clowns by nature. We're on this earth to bring smiles.

JILL: I think all of that is extremely helpful as a lens for looking at the play. Does it matter to

you guys how much people know about Marcel Marceau when they walk into the theater? How much of a difference do you think it makes?

MARSHALL: We expect that the audience will know absolutely nothing, and that is how we have to approach it. We're treating it like a stand-alone story with a beginning and a middle and an end. The audience needs to invest in it because of what we show them. We can't rely on them bringing any knowledge to the table, or I think we won't succeed.

ETHAN: I agree. We are playing with some tropes that Marcel brought to a broader audience 30 or 40 years ago that you might not recognize as a Marceau thing, and it might be a hook point. It's partially why we're not really trading on his full name for the title. It's *Marcel on the Train*. I don't think it's "Come see Marcel Marceau, your favorite performer of all time." It's "come see a really beautiful story about an artist in the French Resistance."

TIMELINE: THE LIFE OF MARCEL MARCEAU AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Compiled by CSC Teaching Artist Thalia Ranjbar

History remembers Marcel Marceau as the world's greatest mime. But before the spotlight, he was a young man in Nazi-occupied France, guiding Jewish children to safety with nothing but courage and imagination.

**MAR.
1923**

Marcel Mangel is born in Strasbourg, France, to parents Ann Werzberg Mangel and Charles Mangel.



1928

Young Marcel discovers Charlie Chaplin at 5 years old and begins entertaining his friends with imitations of his newfound inspiration. This marks the beginning of Marcel's dreams to star in silent films.

**JAN.
1933**

Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany.

1939

World War II takes place. This war is known as the deadliest conflict in history, with 50 million to 70 million deaths incurred.

1945

The first official shot is fired on September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland.

**SEPT.
1939**

France declares war on Nazi Germany. Marcel, age 16, flees with his family to Limoges, France. Marcel and his younger brother Alain adopt the last name "Marceau" during the German occupation of France to avoid being identified as Jewish. The name was chosen as a reference to François Séverin Marceau-Desgraviers, a general of the French Revolution. The brothers are part of the French Resistance in Limoges, where they save hundreds of Jewish children from the race laws and concentration camps. Marcel utilizes mime in order to keep children quiet while he helps them escape to Switzerland.

**DEC.
1941**

Japanese forces attack Pearl Harbor, which escalates the war to another level as the United States is thrust into the global conflict.

1944

Marcel's father is captured and taken to Auschwitz concentration camp, where he is killed.

**AUG.
1944**

After four years of Nazi occupation, Paris is liberated by the French 2nd Armored Division and the US 4th Infantry Division. The German commander of Paris, Lieutenant-General Choltitz, is ordered to crush the insurrection and to destroy the city, as the Germans did in Warsaw. In order to prevent this, Charles de Gaulle interferes. Allied Command sends in Major-General Leclerc's 2nd French Armored Division, supported by the U.S. 4th Infantry Division of Major-General Barton. A first group manages to infiltrate into the heart of Paris on the evening of 24 August.

**AUG.
1944**

The following day, the German commander Choltitz and his staff are captured at the Meurice Hotel. The capitulation is signed at the Police Department on the Île de la Cité. After, Choltitz is taken to the Montparnasse train station, from which he orders his troops to surrender. The next day, de Gaulle leads the triumphal parade on the Champs-Élysées.

Following the Liberation of Paris, Marcel entertains 3,000 US troops and joins the French Army with his brother.

Crowds of French patriots line the Champs Elysees to view Free French tanks and half tracks of General Leclerc's 2nd Armored Division passes through the Arc du Triomphe, after Paris was liberated on August 26, 1944. Among the crowd can be seen banners in support of Charles de Gaulle.



**AUG.
1945**

US Secretary of State James Byrnes conveys that upon Japan's surrender, "the authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government" is subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). The United States issues orders to all commands to cease fire, end active operations, and transport prisoners of war and civilian internees to places of safety.

On August 14th, Japan publicly announces their intention to surrender. While the formal surrender ceremony doesn't take place until September 2nd, celebrations erupt across the United States and the globe as World War II is brought to an end.

1946

Marcel attends Charles Dullin's School of Dramatic Art in the Sarah Bernhardt Theater in Paris. Here Marcel trains under great teachers like Charles Dullin and the great master, Étienne Decrou.

1947

Marcel creates "Bip the Clown," a character who represents life's fragility. He first performs Bip at the Théâtre de Poche (Pocket Theatre) in Paris. This character quickly becomes Marcel's alter ego.

Marcel as Bip



1949

Subsequent to receiving the distinguished Deburau Prize for his second mimodrama, "Death before Dawn," Marcel creates Compagnie de Mime Marcel Marceau—the only pantomime troupe in the world at the time. The ensemble plays the leading Paris theaters—Le Theatre des Champs-Elysees, Le Theatre de la Renaissance, and the Sarah Bernhardt—as well as other playhouses throughout the world.

1950s & 60s

In the aftermath of the war, Parisians face significant hardships, rationing bread until February 1948, as well as coffee, cooking oil, sugar, and rice until May 1949. Further, the factories bombed during the war remain in ruins for quite some time, and a housing crisis is on the rise. In 1950, the government starts a new large-scale project to construct apartment buildings for low-income Parisians, named HLMS (habitations à loyers modérés), usually on the edges of the city or in the suburbs.

1955
-
1956

Following his North American debut at the Stratford Festival of Canada, Marcel embarks on tours in the United States that include Phoenix, New York City, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and beyond.



Marcel Marceau in 1964 in civil attire (Photo by Jack de Nijs for Anefo, licence wikimedia commons)

1966

Marcel performs on the [American television variety show, *Hollywood Palace*](#), hosted by Bing Crosby.

1973

Marcel appears on the BBC as Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*.

1975

A series of [films](#) in which Marcel Marceau introduces and performs works from his repertoire is released.

1978

Marcel opens *École Internationale de Mimodrame de Paris, Marcel Marceau* (International School of Mimodrame of Paris, Marcel Marceau)



Poster of Marcel Marceau - Theatre de la Porte St Martin at Paris, France

1996

Marcel establishes the Marceau Foundation to promote mime in the United States.

2000

Marceau brings his full mime company to New York City for the presentation of his new mimodrama, *The Bowler Hat*, previously seen in Paris, London, Tokyo, Taipei, Caracas, Santo Domingo, Valencia (Venezuela), and Munich.

Pop star Michael Jackson credits Marcel with inspiring his famous moonwalk.

2001

Marcel is awarded the Wallenberg Medal for his acts of courage during the Holocaust.

SEPT.
2007

Marcel Marceau dies in Cahors, France. He is buried at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, France.

Tombstone of Marcel Marceau: Wikicommons.



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FRENCH RESISTANCE DURING WWII UNDER THE VICHY REGIME

By CSC Teaching Artist Emmy Weissman

Marcel on the Train is set in Nazi-occupied France during World War II, where Marcel Marceau, alongside many others, joins the resistance against German forces.

After Germany invaded and conquered Northern France in 1940, Philippe Pétain, who had only recently become Prime Minister of France after the resignation of Paul Reynaud, announced from Vichy, a town in central France along the Allier River, that he was seeking an armistice with the Germans. The armistice began officially in June 1940, dividing France into a northern, German-occupied zone and a southern zone run by the Vichy regime, headed by Pétain.

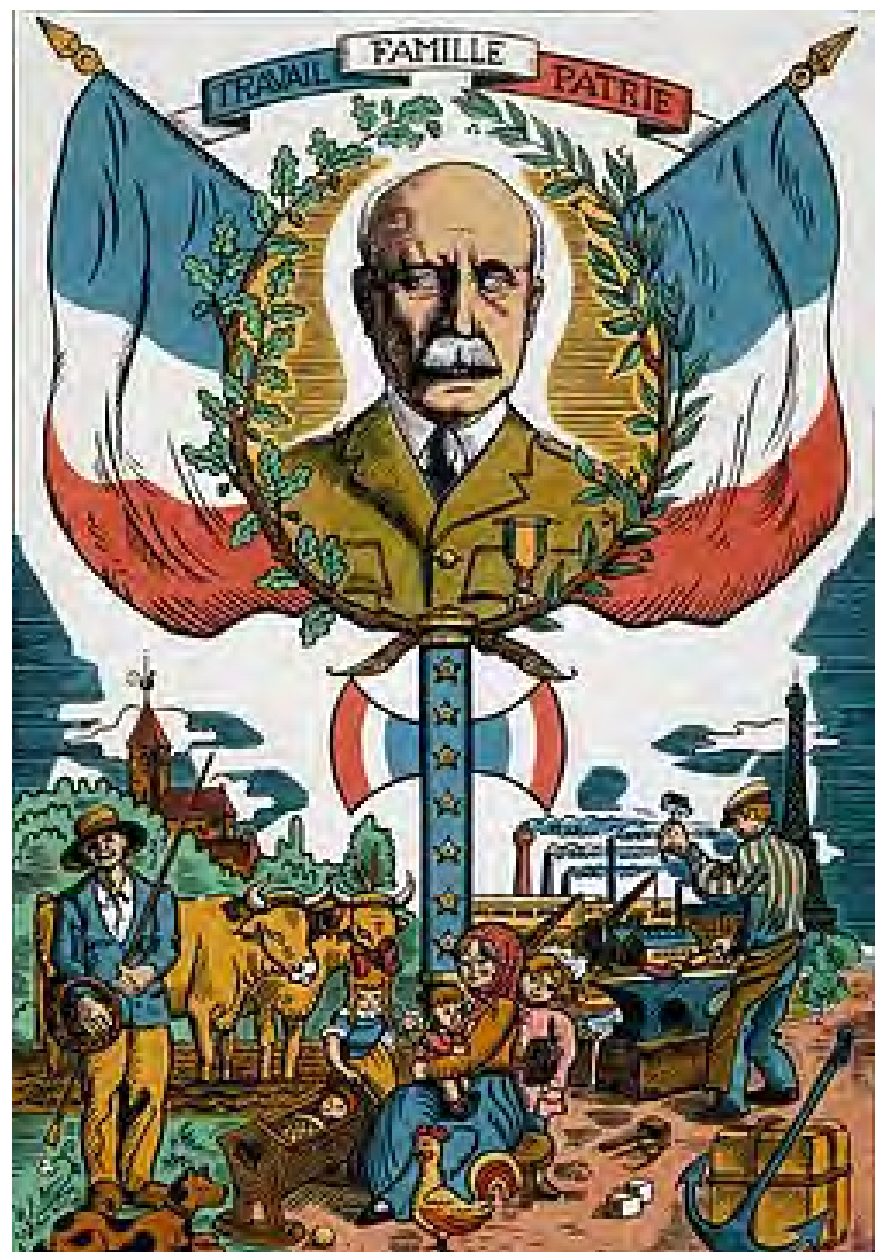


Map of France during WWII.
Wikicommons.

Pétain enforced authoritarian policies, eliminated democratic elections and unions, and discriminated against Jews. This began with barring Jews from holding certain jobs and would soon escalate to the deportation and murder of Jewish people. Pétain met with Hitler in October 1940 and officially announced a policy of collaboration with Nazi Germany. The Vichy regime became a puppet government, never ratifying its own constitution and carrying out Nazi doctrine.

In response to France's occupation, Charles De Gaulle, at the time a military general, fled to England. In 1940, he gave a radio address encouraging French citizens to "fight on" and continue dissenting against Germany's occupation. While still abroad, he later formed the Free French movement, which served as a government in exile, and worked with the Allied forces to defeat the Germans.

The French Resistance was born out of opposition to Germany's occupation of France and the Vichy regime. Resistance groups emerged in both the northern and southern zones, determined to fight back against Nazi ideology and human



Vichy propaganda poster, featuring Philippe Pétain and the Vichy Regime's motto "travail, famille, patrie," meaning "work, family, homeland." Wikicommons.

rights abuses. The Resistance comprised people from all over France, who were from all walks of life—students, laborers, business owners, and more. Members of the resistance collaborated with the Allied forces and were able to sabotage the Nazis through a wide array of methods, including sending Allied forces intelligence reports, maps, and Nazi troop locations, as well as more forceful methods such as bombing and blocking Nazi transportation and military supply factories, cutting phone and electrical wires to disrupt German communications, and assassinating members of the Nazi regime, including Julius Ritter, who oversaw the forced labor program.

Nazi Germany ensured the Vichy government's collaboration by keeping French prisoners of war as ransom so that Vichy would keep sending supplies to Germany. The Milice, headed by Vichy's Prime Minister, Pierre Laval, was a paramilitary police, similar to the Gestapo, created by the Vichy regime to fight against the French Resistance and to deport Jews. Over 70,000 Jews were deported from Vichy and murdered in concentration camps.

By November 1941, German forces had continued south, occupying all of France. Germany introduced forced labor laws, forcing France to send workers to Germany. As conditions worsened and the Vichy government lost its credibility with French citizens, the French Resistance grew in strength and numbers. A sect of the French

Resistance named the Maquis (“underbrush,” named after where they hid in the mountains) emerged, made up of French people refusing forced labor service. The Maquis fought back against the Vichy regime’s forced labor by using guerrilla warfare tactics and disrupting enemy communications.

Members of the Resistance risked their safety and lives for their cause.

Those suspected of being part of the Resistance faced torture, deportation to concentration camps, or worse. In Oradour-sur-Glane, Nazis massacred 642 civilians (including women, the elderly, and children) and burned down the village

as punishment for suspected resistance activities. This suspicion was unsubstantiated, as no one in Oradour was known to have actually taken part in the resistance.

Jean Moulin, a leader of the Resistance who helped unify its different sects, was eventually tortured and murdered by the Nazis.



Monument to Jean Moulin. Wikicommons.

By 1944, D-Day had arrived. The French Resistance helped win D-Day by disrupting German trains that were bringing reinforcements to Normandy. After this, the Allied Forces began to push further into France, eventually making it to Paris. The Resistance fought alongside the Allied forces, liberating towns and villages on the way to Paris, and eventually became known as the French Forces of the Interior.



Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower and Omar Bradley talk with a young member of the French Resistance in the American sector during the liberation of Lower Normandy in the summer of 1944. Wikicommons.



French Resistance armband made from parachute material. Wikicommons.

In 1941, Marcel Marceau and his family fled Strasbourg in northern France after the city fell under German occupation. The following year, Marcel and his brother joined the French Resistance in Limoges, then under Vichy control. They eventually joined the French army and rescued children from concentration camps and further abuses brought on by the Nazi regime's Nuremberg Race Laws.

EDUCATION SECTION

FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

This section was developed to help students and teachers prepare to see *Marcel on the Train*. Feel free to share it!

SUMMARY

History remembers Marcel Marceau as the world's greatest mime. But before the spotlight, he was a young man in Nazi-occupied France, guiding Jewish children to safety with nothing but courage and imagination. In the shadows of World War II, *Marcel on the Train* reveals the man behind the invisible mask. Co-written by and starring Tony Award® nominee **Ethan Slater** (*SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Wicked*), this inventive new play shows us how, sometimes, the loudest resistance begins in the most quiet places.



MADDIE CORMAN



TEDRA MILLAN



MAX GORDON MOORE



AARON SEROTSKY



ETHAN SLATER



ALEX WYSE



RORA BRODWIN



HARRISON BRYAN



JOSH ODSEESS-RUBIN

THIS SECTION CONTAINS SPOILERS!

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS



MARCEL: Before he became Bip, Marcel Marceau was just Marcel Mangel: a 20-year-old Jewish kid trying to figure out what to do with his life. A painter, an artist, and a bit of a clown, Marcel is tasked with the safety of Jewish orphans as they take the perilous train ride out of Nazi occupied France. And though he is technically the adult in a room of children, as the children are eager to point out, he is often the most childlike. Marcel initially has full confidence in his mission of optimism, but as the journey wears on, he begins to lose his sense of self. It is only through embracing the darkness, and the silence, that he is able to become the person to lead them all to safety.



BERTHE: In the past, at 12 years old, Berthe is a Jewish orphan being smuggled out of Nazi occupied France. Deeply intelligent and a contrarian by nature, Berthe is genetically compelled to reveal every one of Marcel's glasses to be half-empty. But beneath her performative gloominess she possesses a profound need to be proven wrong, to expose the childlike appreciation for life that lies covered up. She is deceptively upbeat for such a pessimist.

In the future, Berthe lives a boring existence with absolutely nothing special about it. If she even has a future.



HENRI: In the past, at 12 years old, Henri is a Jewish orphan being smuggled out of Nazi occupied France. You know that kid whose mouth works faster than his brain? That's this kid. Impulsive and adaptable, some might call him the clown of the group, but in truth Henri is a survivor - he will say, do, or believe anything to get himself through the night.

In the future, Henri is the recipient of a major prize in Philosophy - is Henri a generational talent or completely full of it? The world will never know. (He's full of it.)



ETIENNETTE: In the past, at 10 years old, Etienneette is the youngest Jewish orphan being smuggled out of Nazi occupied France. Sensitive and shy, Etienneette is silent – likely a byproduct of psychogenic mutism, or an inability to speak in the wake of trauma. But what she lacks in speech she makes up for in physical expression, as she quickly fashions herself the star pupil of her makeshift scout leader.

In the future, Etienneette is once again auditioning for Marceau’s world-famous mime school, desperate to get an audience with the master of mime himself. The auditioner applauds her devotion, if not her talent...



ADOLPHE: In the past, at 12 years old, Adolphe is one of the older Jewish orphans being smuggled out of Nazi occupied France. Principled and proud, Adolphe fashions himself a leader, but, being a child, his instincts towards leadership fail to align with his experience or knowledge, which are limited to be generous. If he’s a comic character, he doesn’t know it, as he takes his charge seriously.

In the future, Adolphe is a low-level officer for the French army, taken prisoner in the Vietnam War. The principled child grew up to be a principled company man, a truster of systems right up until the moment his own army’s bombs fall on the prison.



EVERYONE ELSE: Plays various roles including Charles, Marcel’s father; the Nazi; and Georges, leader of the resistance.

THIS SECTION CONTAINS SPOILERS!

THE STORY

By CSC Teaching Artist Kea Trevett

Set in the shadow of World War II, a young artist named Marcel Mangel is recruited by the French Resistance to guide Jewish children from Nazi-occupied France to safety across the Swiss border. The play weaves the little-known story of Marcel Marceau and his young companions across decades, moving between the present action on a train, flashbacks to the preparation for the expedition, and flash-forwards to the children's adult lives in the years following their escape.

On a train to Switzerland, a young girl named Berthe wakes from a nightmare in which she was the only one who was not old, because she never got to grow up. Despite Marcel's best efforts to soothe her, she doesn't think he is a good chaperone or a good entertainer.

In a flashback, Marcel helps his friend Georges fake ID papers for a group of Jewish children from a local orphanage. Georges recruits Marcel to escort several of the children halfway on the train, where the groups are to meet in Roanne, and enter Switzerland under the ruse that they are Boy Scouts traveling to the Alps for a weekend of camping.

On the train, Marcel attempts to entertain the four children in his escort, Berthe, Etiennette, Henri, and Adolphe, in hopes of distracting the hungry passengers from eating the mayonnaise sandwiches that hide their forged travel papers. Having already been touched by the war in their own private way, each child has a different strategy for navigating their world. At 12 years old, Berthe has already lost her whole family. Her deep intelligence and gloomy worldview cause her realist's sensibility to easily tip into pessimism. Humorless, principled and proud, Adolph has grown up too quickly; but his instincts towards leadership are inhibited by the limited life experience of a 12-year-old. Henri, the "clown" of the group, uses his keen observation of humanity and adaptable nature as a means of survival. The youngest of the group, Etiennette doesn't speak, but she is an imaginative communicator, and a bold dreamer.

In a flashback, Marcel visits his father Charles's kosher butcher shop and shares the escape plan. The mayonnaise sandwiches are designed to deter the German soldiers, who don't like oily food soiling their clothing. Charles provides the mayonnaise but disapproves of his son's involvement, insisting he should focus on his career. Marcel urges his father to escape with them, warning that danger is coming, but Charles refuses-- he's fled too many times before.

Georges and his group of "Boy Scouts" do not board the train at Roanne. Berthe assumes the worst has happened. Marcel is unsure he is fit for the task of leading this expedition to the Alps alone. Just as Marcel begins to calm the frightened children with another performance, the train stops.

German soldiers speak just outside the car. Marcel attempts to reassure the children, but Adolphe knows enough German to know he isn't telling them the truth. A soldier approaches the car, and the children hide. Marcel makes a shadow butterfly on the wall. Etiennette joins him. Her butterfly makes everyone laugh so hard they are almost discovered.

When Berthe urgently needs to use the bathroom, the group creates a makeshift toilet from a fire bucket lined with clothing to dampen the sound. They name it the "pee bucket." Adolphe hopes God will let him forget the pee bucket in the future. Marcel says he hopes to remember it: the pee bucket will be a good, ridiculous memory to have from a time of so many rotten memories of cruelty and indifference. Adolphe reveals that he understands German and tells the others that the soldiers are searching the train for "kinder" (German for "children") from the orphanages. He says he does not like people who lie. Marcel hopes Adolphe will remember the pee bucket, instead of how he disliked him for lying.

The story flashes forward thirty years to a Vietnam POW camp, where Adolphe is an officer. Bombs explode, and a frightened soldier questions why they are at war. Adolphe tells the private that he was once a refugee from France and explains that they are stopping evil before it spreads. He calls killing evil "in the crib" an act of righteousness. The private accuses him of being an "angry little child" who beats people up on the playground because he got beat up at home; then he asks for the "piss bucket." Adolphe smiles.

After some coaxing and much protestation, Berthe pees in the bucket. She admits she has a bad kidney and lives in fear of "exploding," or "however it will happen." Marcel insists they will live and says he has imagined Berthe's future. Berthe is sure she has no interesting future, that her life will be full of "nothing days doing nothing of consequence." Marcel hopes she will remember him and smile.

Adolphe reports that German soldiers are boarding the train to search it. Marcel proposes a game: whoever falls asleep first wins 100 francs, the loser cleans the pee bucket. Etiennette stays awake and plays tic-tac-toe with Marcel on the fogged window. The game board evolves into a picture of a "devil in the window". Etiennette adds a Jewish star to the devil's jacket. Henri awakes just as the German soldiers approach their car-- he dreamt that he survived by cheering on the enemy and pretending not to be a Jew.

but they'll kill him like one, and history will remember him for being an idiot.

Flash forward to Henri Dreyfuss receiving the 1965 Bergman Award in Philosophy and NonFiction.

A Nazi soldier enters the car. Marcel presents the forged papers and attempts to make him laugh. The soldier is French and a former Boy Scout. He searches their belongings and questions Henri and Adolphe about the Limoges orphanage. He finds their lunch bag, including the mayonnaise sandwiches. He inspects the food but stops before opening the sandwiches-- the oil might soil his uniform. He tells Marcel he hates when adults teach children to lie because they are not natural liars. He says he knew everything he needed to know when he saw the picture of the Jewish devil in the window. "A Jew would never draw those horns. Children can't lie." He exits to continue his search.

Afterward, the children argue about whether they fooled the soldier or whether he spared them intentionally. Marcel can only think of what's next. He prays for good weather for their hike from the train station. Berthe thinks it will storm. Marcel pities Berthe's exhausting worldview: every path leading to doom. Berthe envies Marcel's ability to see a rainbow when everyone sees storm clouds, but she is a realist. She knows Marcel didn't save them-- they got lucky. Marcel retreats from the conversation and sits with Etiennette. He

He compliments her drawing, claiming her art saved their lives, as he hoped his art might save lives. He asks if they can make art together in the future. She smiles.

Flash forward to an audition studio in 1985. Etiennette is not given entry to Marcel's school of mime. Etiennette speaks by writing on a portable chalkboard. The audition monitor won't let her see Marcel and asks her to leave; she writes, "ANNEMASSE. HE'LL REMEMBER. WE WERE SMILING."

At Annemasse, five kilometers from Switzerland, they disembark into falling snow and begin their hike. As the sun sets, gunshots start in the distance. Eventually, the pain is too much for Berthe to walk. She collapses, certain they are going to die. Marcel encourages the children to imagine they are a whole army. The children pretend to be soldiers as Marcel impersonates an officer, demanding that the men hiding in the trees surrender. The ruse works, and everyone runs. Marcel crashes into one of the men in the trees-- it's Georges! He was delayed because he tried to convince Marcel's father to leave with them, but Charles was put on "another train."

Berthe speaks again of her dream where everyone else is old, but she is young because she never got to grow up. She says in her dream Marcel is young, too. Marcel asks if she still thinks they are going to die. She says

she thinks he will live, but he'll never grow up. Marcel insists they will both grow up, that her life will be full of ridiculous memories, and they will meet again someday.

Alone onstage, Marcel paints his face with the snow and becomes Bip. He performs his famous routine, "BIP HUNTS BUTTERFLIES"

The scene shifts to a 1970s television program about Marcel, "an eloquent poet of silence who manages to express through the language of a disciplined body the universality of man's struggle against life's minor problems." An adult Berthe turns off the television; she goes about a nothing day, doing nothing of consequence, just as she imagined it so many years ago. On a train car in London, she sees Marcel, older, imagining her remembering him.



FOUNDATIONS

HISTORIC FIGURES, PLACES, AND MORE MENTIONED IN THE SHOW:

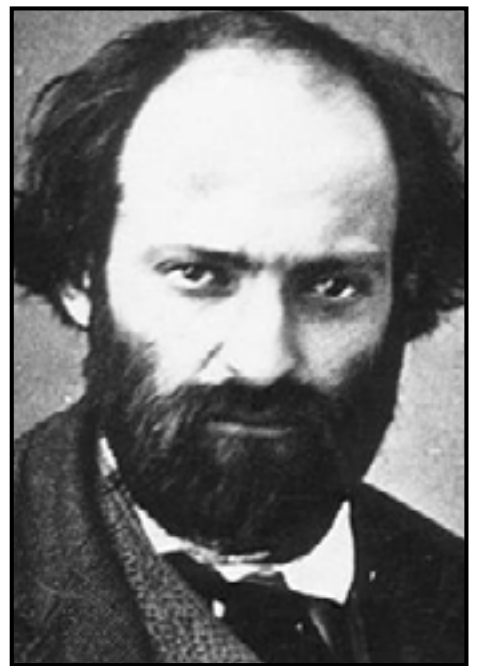
CHARLIE CHAPLIN (1889-1977)

A British comedian, producer, writer, director, and composer who is widely regarded as the greatest comic artist of the screen and one of the most important figures in motion-picture history.



PAUL CÉZANNE (1839-1906)

A French painter, one of the greatest of the Post-Impressionists, whose works and ideas were influential in the aesthetic development of many 20th century artists and art movements, especially Cubism.



JEAN-GASPARD DEBURAU (1796-1846)

A Bohemian-born French pantomime actor, who transformed the character of Pierrot in the traditional harlequinade. Born into a family of acrobats, Deburau from an early age performed with them on European tour and at age 15 joined the Théâtre des Funambules, a company of tightrope walkers, jugglers, and other circuslike performers in Paris. He performed with the Funambules for the rest of his life.



Gradually Deburau changed the robust simpleton of the commedia dell'arte figure Pierrot to the poignant character, dressed in baggy white

costume, whose childlike manner, often as the optimistic but disappointed lover, charmed audiences and critics alike. The character influenced Marcel Marceau's Bip.

STANISŁAW MONIUSZKO (1819-1872)

Polish composer and conductor referred to as the father of Polish National Opera. In the 19th century Stanisław Moniuszko wrote a series of popular operas, including *Halka*, *Straszny dwór* ("The Haunted Manor"), and *Hrabina* ("The Countess").



PABLO PICASSO (1881-1973)

A Spanish expatriate painter, sculptor, printmaker, ceramicist, and stage designer. He was one of the greatest and most influential artists of the 20th century and the creator (with Georges Braque) of Cubism.



PIERROT

The popular French theatrical character Pierrot is based on Pedrolino, a stock character of the Italian commedia dell'arte. One of the comic servants, or *zanni*, the simple-minded, honest Pedrolino was usually portrayed as a young and personable valet. He functioned in the commedia as an unsuccessful

lover and a victim of the pranks of his fellow comedians. His costume consisted of a white jacket with a neck ruff and large buttons down the front, loose trousers, and a hat with a wide, floppy brim. Unlike most of the other stock characters, he played without a mask, his face whitened with powder.



FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY (1821-1881)

Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky is regarded as one of the world's great novelists. He specialized in the analysis of states of mind that lead to insanity, murder, and suicide and in the exploration of the emotions of humiliation, self-destruction, tyrannical domination, and murderous rage.

Prestupleniye i nakazaniye (1866; *Crime and Punishment*), *Idiot* (1868–69; *The Idiot*), *Besy* (1872; *The Possessed*), and *Bratya Karamazovy* (1879–80; *The Brothers Karamazov*), considered by many critics to be the finest novel ever written.



NAPOLEON BONAPARTE (1769-1821)

A French general, First Consul (1799–1804), emperor of France (1804–1814/15), and one of the most celebrated personages in the history of the West. He revolutionized military organization and training; sponsored the Napoleonic Code, the prototype of later civil-law codes; reorganized education; and established the long-lived Concordat with the papacy. He was the moving spirit behind the intertwined series of conflicts known as the Napoleonic Wars, which had revolutionary repercussions, both militarily and politically, in Europe as well as other parts of the world.



THE ALPS

A small segment of a discontinuous mountain chain that stretches from the Atlas Mountains of North Africa across southern Europe and Asia to beyond the Himalayas. The Alps extend north from the subtropical Mediterranean coast near Nice, France, to Lake Geneva before trending east-northeast to Vienna (at the Vienna Woods). There they touch the Danube River and meld with the adjacent plain. The Alps form part of France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and Albania. Only Switzerland and Austria can be considered true Alpine countries, however.



WARSAW

Capital of Poland located in the east-central part of the country. Warsaw is notable among Europe's capital cities not for its size, its age, or its beauty but for its indestructibility. It is a phoenix that has risen repeatedly from the ashes of war.



ANNEMASSE, FRANCE

Town, Loire *département*, Haute-Savoie *région*, east-central France, on the Loire River directly across the border from Geneva, Switzerland. It is an important industrial and commercial center of the region.



The Hôtel de Ville (town hall) Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

LIMOGES, FRANCE

Capital of Haute-Vienne *département* and of the Nouvelle-Aquitaine *région*, southeastern France (formerly in the province of Limousin), south-southwest of Paris, on the right bank of the Vienne River.



Jardin de l'Évêché de Limoges and the Champ de Juillet.
Photo from Wikimedia Commons.



ORLÉANS, FRANCE

Capital of Loiret *département*, Centre *région*, north-central France. It is located south-southwest of Paris. The city stands on the banks of the Loire River in a fertile valley on the edge of the Beauce plain.

ROANNE, FRANCE

Town, Loire *département*, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes *région*, east-central France, on the Loire River. Roanne is an important commercial and industrial center. It has a long tradition of textile manufacturing, and, although this activity has declined in importance, Roanne is still noted as a centre for knitwear.



Bridge over the Loire, RoannePhoto from Wikimedia Commons.

STRASBOURG, FRANCE

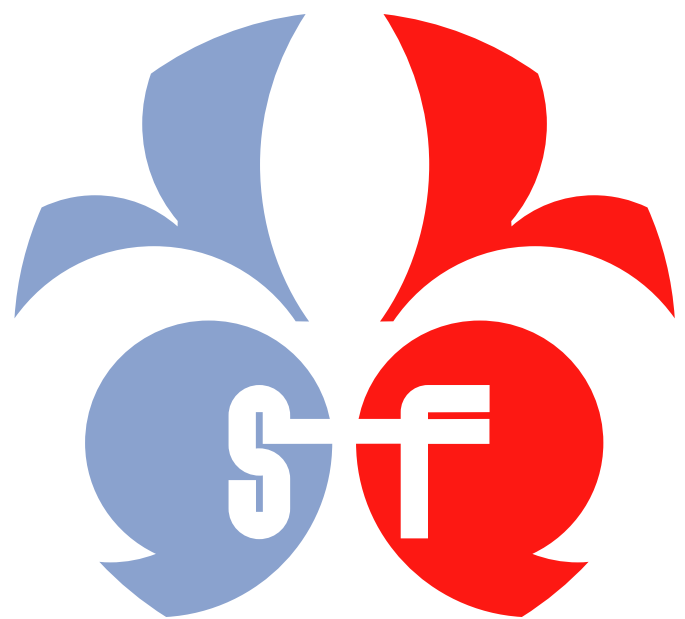
Often called the crossroads of Europe, Strasbourg is a prosperous inland port in northeastern France. It is the capital of Bas-Rhin department in the Grand Est region. Strasbourg lies along the Ill River on France's border with Germany, in the historical region of Alsace. Two miles (3 kilometers) away the Ill joins the Rhine River, which is linked by canals to the Rhône and Marne rivers.



Le Petit France Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

FÉDÉRATION DU SCOUTISME FRANÇAIS (FEDERATION OF FRENCH SCOUTING):

Scoutisme Français was founded in 1940, with the help of Vichy regime, by the Eclaireurs de France (founded in 1911, secular), the Eclaireurs Unionistes de France (founded in 1911, Protestant), the Scouts de France and Guides de France (founded in 1920, Catholic), the Eclaireurs Israélites de France (founded in 1923, Jewish) and the Fédération française des éclaireuses (founded in 1921, Girl Scouts).



POST-IMPRESSIONISM

Movement in Western painting that represented both an extension of Impressionism and a rejection of its limitations. The term was coined by Roger Fry for the works of Paul Cézanne, Georges Seurat, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and others. Most of these painters first pursued Impressionism, a style based, in its strictest sense, on the objective recording of nature in terms of the fugitive effects of color and light. The Post-Impressionists rejected this aim in favor of more ambitious expression, admitting their debt, however, to the pure, brilliant colors of Impressionism, its freedom from traditional subject matter, and its technique of defining form with short brushstrokes of broken color.



A Sunday on La Grande Jatte, Georges Seurat, 1884

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Underground railway system that services the London metropolitan area. The Piccadilly line runs between the west and north of London.



VICHY FRANCE (JULY 1940–SEPTEMBER 1944)

France under the regime of Marshal Philippe Pétain from the Nazi German defeat of France to the Allied liberation in World War II.



VIETNAM WAR (1954-1975)

A protracted conflict that pitted the communist government of North Vietnam and its allies in South Vietnam, known as the Viet Cong, against the government of South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. Called the “American War” in Vietnam (or, in full, the “War Against the Americans to Save the Nation”), the war was also part of a larger regional conflict and a manifestation of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies.

B-66

The Douglas B-66 Destroyer is a light bomber that was designed and produced by the American aviation manufacturer Douglas Aircraft Company. They flew in the Vietnam War, typically operating as support aircraft for other aircraft that were active over the skies of North Vietnam and Laos. The last examples of the type were withdrawn from service in 1975.



Photo Wikicommons

B-52 (ALSO CALLED STRATOFORTRESS)

U.S. long-range heavy bomber, designed by the Boeing Company in 1948, first flown in 1952, and first delivered for military service in 1955. Though originally intended to be an atomic-bomb carrier capable of reaching the Soviet Union, it has proved adaptable to a number of missions, and dozens of B-52s remained in service in the 21st century.



A B-52H from Barksdale AFB flying over Texas - Photo from Wikicommons

F-4 (ALSO CALLED PHANTOM II)

Two-seat, twin-engine jet fighter-bomber built by the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation (later the McDonnell-Douglas Corporation) for the United States and many other countries. The first F-4 was delivered to the U.S. Navy in 1960 and to the Air Force in 1963. By the time it went out of production in 1979, more than 5,000 Phantoms had been built, and it had become one of the most successful fighter aircraft since.



A U.S. Air Force F-4E - Photo from Wikicommons

ACTIVITY (MIME ROUTINE)

MARCEL MARCEAU ON THE HISTORY OF MIME



"It's a very ancient form of art of course, and I would say that Mime has existed as long as men have existed because the need of representing the life of man of portraying the characters has built up with society of course. But I would say the first mimes were in primitive societies. And later among the Greeks and Roman civilization. It started in Greece, the first mimodramas. Even later in the Shakespearean period in the theater the mimes were very important because they were representing the little man, the underdogs, the people who get kicks and can't express themselves and through the art they could cry out in silence of course."

-Marcel Marceau

Prompt: Create your own mime routine!

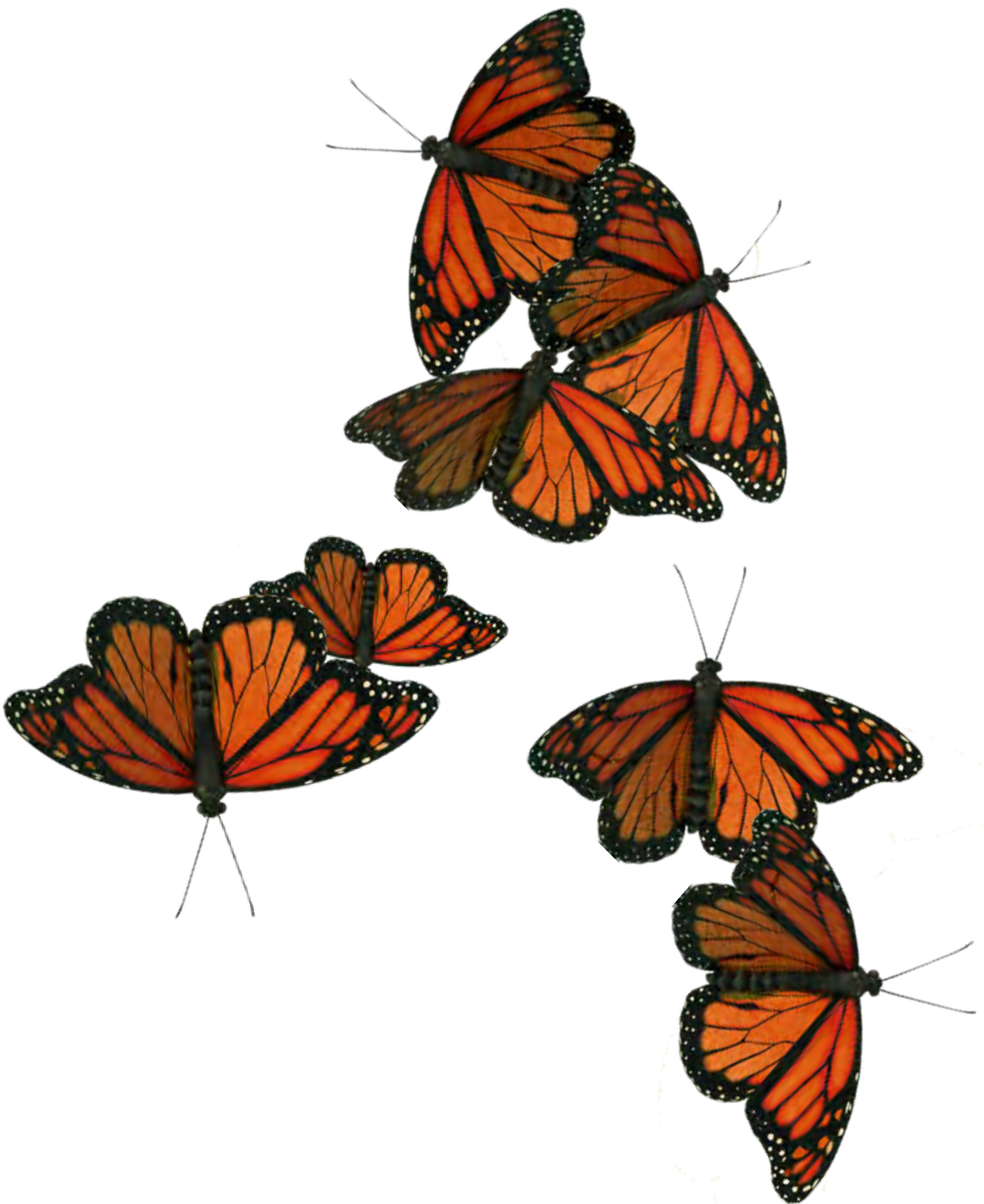
STEP 1: Pick an activity you do every day such as doing homework, reading a book, traveling to school, etc.

STEP 2: Using your artist's tools of physicality, facial expressions, and imagination, go through the motions of your activity. Give your routine a clear beginning, middle, and end. (If helpful, narrate these moves while rehearsing your activity.)

STEP 3: Repeat the physicality and pick a moment in the routine to have a silent, heightened emotional reaction. What does your “mime mask” look like with that emotion?

STEP 4: Now, add a “take” to the audience before your big emotion. A take is a moment when the performer checks in with the audience and confides in them before reacting.

STEP 5: Share your mime routine with your audience! As a fun game, have them guess the activity you’re miming.



TRIVIA

Did you know that Marcel Marceau changed his name from Marcel Mangel, using the surname of the French Revolutionary General François Séverin Marceau?

Match the following famous Jewish figures with their birth names.

Bob Dylan
(singer-songwriter)

Bea Arthur
(actress and comedienne)

Carole King
(singer-songwriter
and musician)

Harry Houdini
(illusionist)

Heddy Lamarr
(actress and inventor)

Mark Rothko
(painter)

Mel Brooks
(filmmaker)

Natalie Portman
(actress and producer)

Stan Lee
(comic book writer
and editor)

Tamara Łempicka
(painter)

Winona Ryder
(actress)

Bernice Frankel

Natalie Hershlag

**Stanley Martin
Lieber**

**Robert Allen
Zimmerman**

**Markus Yakovlevich
Rothkowitz**

Carole Klein

**Eva Marie
Kiesler**

**Winona Laura
Horowitz**

Erik Weisz

**Tamara Rosa
Hurwitz**

Melvin Kaminsky

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION QUESTIONS

THEMES

Marcel on the Train deals with many themes. Choose the theme co-creator Ethan Slater speaks about below or identify your own, then talk with a partner about how that theme is revealed over the course of the play. How does this theme impact the characters?

“It really is about a young person that takes on responsibility that they feel they aren’t equipped for. I do think that is another theme that is ever-present in humanity: we are faced with things that seem impossible. We are forced into positions of responsibility, whether we like it or not. And how do we treat those around us when we are struggling with those things?”

– Co-Creator and Performer, Ethan Slater

ADAPTATIONS

This show portrays a moment in the life of a legendary theater artist.

Question: What artistic figure from the past and what aspect of their life would you portray in a play? How would it be imagined on stage?



RESOURCES AND RELATED WORKS

To broaden your familiarity with *Marcel on the Train* and the key topics in the play, consider consulting the following resources:

Books

- *Mimes on Miming: Writings on the Art of Mime* by Bari Rolfe (1979)
- *Marcel Marceau: Master of Mime* by Gloria Spielman and Manon Gauthier (2011)

Films

- [The Art of Silence](#) (2023)

Articles

- [“To be silly is quite an art’: The weekend I became a mime”](#) (The Guardian, 2020)

The Guardian’s writer takes lessons from Marcel Marceau’s former student.

- [“The French Resistance’s Secret Weapon? The Mime Marcel Marceau”](#)
(History.com, 2019, updated 2025)

Trivia Answers:

Bob Dylan - Robert Allen Zimmerman, Bea Arthur - Bernice Frankel, Carole King - Carole Klein, Harry Houdini - Erik Weisz, Heddy Lamarr - Eva Marie Kiesler, Mark Rothko - Markus Yakovlevich Rothkowitz, Mel Brooks - Melvin Kaminsky, Natalie Portman - Natalie Hershlag, Stan Lee - Stanley Martin Lieber, Tamara Łempicka - Tamara Rosa Hurwitz, Winona Ryder - Winona Laura Horowitz