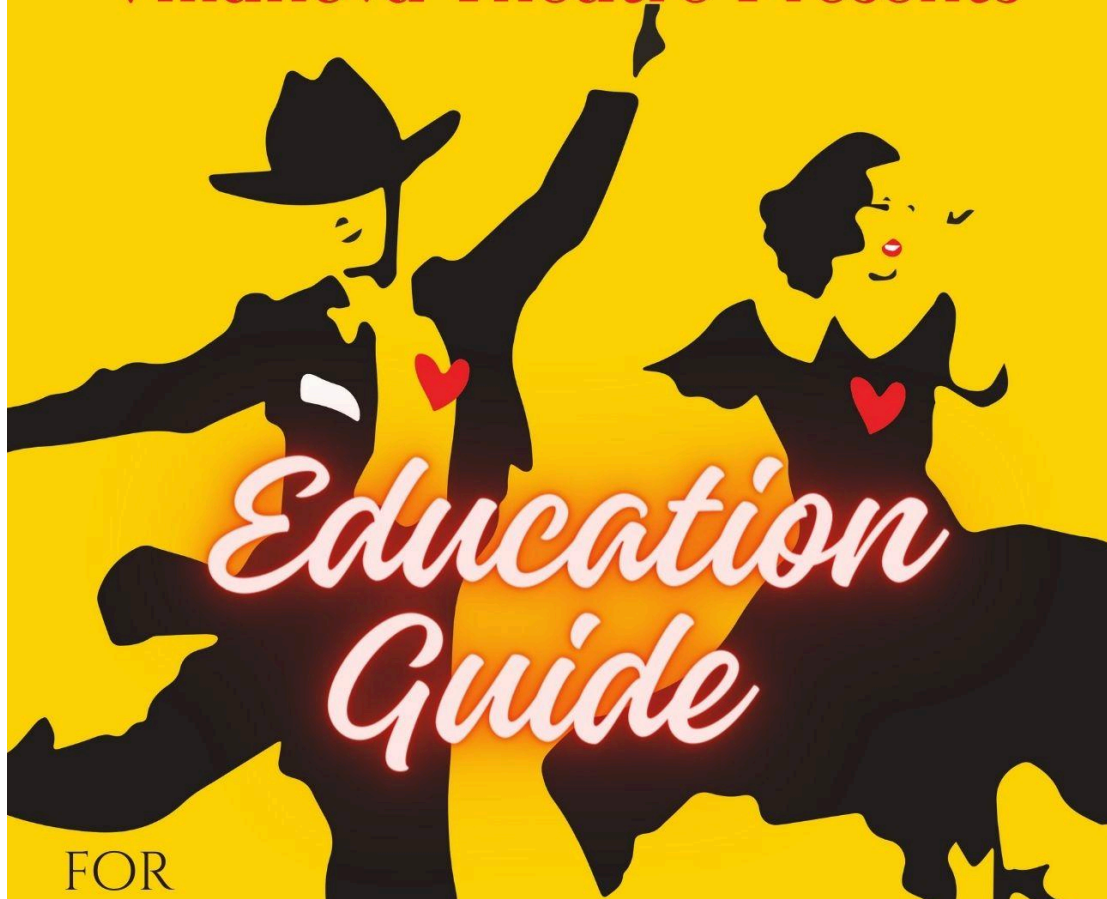


**Villanova Theatre Presents**



# *Education Guide*

FOR

# **CRAZY**

FOR

**FEBRUARY 15 - 25**

# **YOU**

**MUSIC AND LYRICS BY  
GEORGE GERSHWIN &  
IRA GERSHWIN**

**BOOK BY  
KEN LUDWIG**

**CO-CONCEPTION BY  
KEN LUDWIG &  
MIKE OCKRENT**

**DIRECTED BY  
REV. PETER M.  
DONOHUE, OSA, PHD**

**Villanova University Theatre Department**  
**Education Guide for**

***Crazy for You***

**Music and lyrics by George and Ira Gershwin**  
**Book by Ken Ludwig**  
**Directed by Rev. Peter M. Donohue, OSA**  
**February 14th - 25th, 2023**

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**How to Use This Guide**

This Education Guide is intended to help guide and inspire conversation, reflection and further research connected to Villanova Theatre's production of *Crazy for You*, by George and Ira Gershwin and Ken Ludwig. It contains a series of prompts and topics for discussion organized around the work itself, Villanova Theatre's production concept, and broader themes. They are designed to be used in any order and can be approached as singular topics for reflection or in combination with one another to support a more nuanced conversation about identity, culture and inclusion.

## Synopsis of the Play

Bobby Child dreams of stardom, but in an audition with the renowned Bela Zangler of the “Zangler Follies,” he steps on Zangler’s foot. Dejected, Bobby heads outside and is met with his fiancée, Irene, and his mother. Bobby’s mother, a banker, informs him that he is being tasked with going to Deadrock, Nevada, to foreclose on the Gaiety Theater. Before Bobby’s arrival, Everett Baker receives notice that Bobby will be arriving to foreclose on the theater, and despite an offer for purchase from the town proprietor, Lank, Everett refuses to part with the theater due to his memories of his wife in her peak of stardom. Everett’s daughter, Polly, is the only woman left in Deadrock. She vows to get even with Bobby for closing the theater if she ever sees him. Upon arrival in Deadrock, it is clear to Bobby that the former gold mining town has hit hard times. Not knowing who he is, Polly and Bobby share a dance, to the dismay of Lank who is a contender for Polly’s affections. Once Polly realizes who Bobby is she expresses her disgust in him. In order to win back the girl of his dreams, Bobby decides to pretend to be Bela Zangler and put on a show with the Zangler follies to save the theater. What ensues is a comedy of mistaken identity, confusion, and of course, plenty of musical numbers by the Gershwins.

## Content Note

This play discusses the following:

- Drinking
- Gun violence
- Misogyny (depiction of misogynistic characters and dialogue)
- Suicide

## Meet Ken Ludwig

Ken Ludwig has had six shows on Broadway, seven in London's West End, and many of his works have become a standard part of the American repertoire. His 32 plays and musicals have been performed in over 30 countries in more than 20 languages and are produced throughout the United States every night of the year. *Crazy For You* was on Broadway for 5 years and won the Tony and Olivier Awards for Best Musical. His plays have starred, among others, Alec Baldwin, Carol Burnett, Tony Shaloub, Joan Collins and Hal Holbrook. His stage version of *Murder on the Orient Express* was written expressly at the request of the Agatha Christie Estate, and had its European premiere at the Chichester Festival Theatre in June of 2022. His book *How To Teach Your Children Shakespeare*, published by Penguin Random House, won the Falstaff Award for Best Shakespeare Book of the Year, and his essays are published in the Yale Review. He is a graduate of Harvard and Cambridge and is a frequent guest speaker for groups as varied as The Oxford-Cambridge Society, The Jane Austen Society of North America, The Folger Shakespeare Library, and The Baker Street Irregulars. For more information, see his website at [www.kenludwig.com](http://www.kenludwig.com)<sup>1</sup>.



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<sup>1</sup> Bio provided by [www.kenludwig.com](http://www.kenludwig.com)

### Meet the Director

The Rev. Peter M. Donohue, OSA, PhD, has served as Villanova University's 32nd president since June 1, 2006. Born in Bronx, NY, and raised in Royal Oak, Michigan, Father Donohue earned a BA, with a concentration in theatre and communication arts, from Villanova University in 1975 and was ordained an Augustinian priest in 1979. He holds an MA in theatre from the Catholic University of America, a MDiv from the Washington Theological Union, and a PhD in theatre from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While pursuing his doctorate, Father Donohue taught theatre at the University of Illinois, where he received honors for outstanding teaching. He is a member of Phi Kappa Phi, the nation's oldest, largest, and most selective all-discipline honor society. Father Donohue is a tenured full professor at Villanova who served as chair of the University's department of theatre from 1992 to 2006. He annually directed musical theatre productions on campus, earning six Barrymore Award nominations and one Barrymore Award for Outstanding Direction of a Musical from the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia<sup>2</sup>.



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<sup>2</sup> Bio provided by [https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/president/about\\_office/biography.html](https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/president/about_office/biography.html)

## Meet the Dramaturgs

**Emma Drennen** is the author of this guide and is a second year graduate student in theatre. She will be serving as the Education Dramaturg for the upcoming production season. Her credits at Villanova include playing Leonor in *House of Desires*, Bessie in *Sometimes the Rain*, *Sometimes the Sea*, Hannah/Lydia in *Posterity* and assistant stage managing *Sunday in the Park with George*. She will be the point of contact for all dramaturgical questions for educators using this guide.



**Brandon Hunter-Smith** is a third year part time graduate student in theatre and is the production dramaturg for *Crazy for You*. His Villanova credits include *Curtains*, *House of Desires*, and *Sunday in the Park with George*. He is currently on staff at People's Light and Theatre. His dramaturgy website will be linked in the resources section of this guide.



## Topics for Discussion

### The Gershwins

George and Ira Gershwin are children of immigrant parents (Morris Gershovitz & Rose Bruskin) from St. Petersburg, Russia, they immigrated to NYC, and settled in Manhattan in the year 1890. Ira was always quiet and reserved, and found solace in his reading, grammar work, and poetry. He found great inspiration in participating in his high school newspaper, alongside classmate Yip Harburg. George on the other hand was boisterous, and found himself in more trouble, he was often coming home with a black eye, bruises, and new girlfriends. Ira and Yip wrote for their school newspaper *The Academic Herald* (1910). In these papers they would write limericks, short stories, prose, poetry, ballads, and songs. They were inspired by the work of early operettas by Gilbert and Sullivan. Meanwhile, George began to take an interest in music, much to the surprise of Rose Gershwin. She had ordered a piano for Ira intentionally, but when George began to play, it started to get him out of trouble.

George dropped out of high school and got a job as a "piano plugger" at age 15 for Remicks's Music Company. A plugger was a musician who would play new music at events, concerts, silent pictures, and buyers who visited the publishing house. All while working day and night for low-pay piano playing, George was still taking lessons and learning classical and ragtime music. He earned \$15 a week for piano plugging. The American Musical Comedy was non-existent at this time. But there was a high demand for large scale productions from vaudeville, operettas, and the Ziegfeld Follies. George worked with Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern through his work at Tin Pan Alley. Kern and Berlin were looking for new sounds to introduce to the theater space, thus they employed George to work as a rehearsal pianist. He gained the trust of those in the musical theater scene, and first composed with William Daley, and wrote a string of multiple scores, including writing his own compositions. George and Ira went on to write a multitude of songs and musicals, their first collaboration *Lady, Be Good!* (1924) premiered December 1st at the Liberty Theater, their first Broadway Debut. Around the same time, George debuted *Rhapsody in Blue*. While George became an accomplished composer, the Gershwins continued on their track to write many of their greatest work during this time including *Girl Crazy*, *Funny Face*, *Oh, Kay!*, *Strike Up The Band*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *An American in Paris*.

### Discussion Prompts:

You may know more Gershwin music than you think! "Summertime" has been recorded countless times by singers like Billie Holiday and Janis Joplin, and is sampled in the Sublime song "Doin' Time," which Lana Del Rey has recorded a Gershwin version of. *Rhapsody in Blue* is featured in Disney's *Fantasia*. Do you recognize any of these or know of other Gershwin music in popular culture?

## The Ziegfeld Follies

Named after *Florenz Ziegfeld Jr.*, the main producer and creator of the Follies, a popular American event of the early 20th century. The Follies were an extravagant revue, starting in 1907. These were events that involved costumes, numbers, large scale choreographed numbers with the famous *Ziegfeld Girls*. Ziegfeld Girls were hot off the heels of the Florodora Girls, who were inspired by the Gibson Girl, a black and ink magazine design of the feminine beauty standard of the 1850s. Florodora Girls were Edwardian favorite pastime in London. They came to Broadway in 1900, where it ran for 522 performances.

The Florodora Girls was a two act dancing extravaganza that is rooted in orientalism. Revolving around the "florodora fragrance" that grows in the Philippines, about an American businessman attempting to revive a dying perfume business as the sole inheritor. Meanwhile, Detective Tweedlepunch (yes that is the legit character name) is searching for the girl who is the rightful owner of the Florodora Perfume Business. Within the show are marriages, miscommunications, farcical jokes, and bawdy costumes; this is where the Follies originated from, it was this show that inspired the vaudevillian practices of American Theatre for the early 20th century.

The Follies were also heavily inspired by the French Cabaret Scene of the 1890s, *Folies Bergere*. The French Folies were more opera oriented, but opera mixed with the allure of showgirls along with gymnastics, dances, and comedic bits with loosely related plots. These were spots for drinking and gawking. Out of the Folies Bergere, many famous showgirls would make a name, including Josephine Baker, the first ever black woman in France to headline a show in 1927.

### Questions for Discussion:

Can you think of any contemporary groups or performances that may have been influenced by the Follies?

## Theater Etiquette and Phenomenology

Like a concert or a movie, seeing a live performance comes with its own set of etiquette guidelines. While some of these may seem obvious, it's important to bear in mind the following etiquette guidelines as a theatergoer. The study of Phenomenology is a concept explored by Bert O. States, which examines the moments in which something happens in a play that "takes us out" of the play. It's interesting and exciting to examine these moments as theatergoers.

Things to keep in mind:

- Actors can see you! While it may seem like due to bright lights and distractions, the actors are not looking at audience members, this is not always the case. Keep in mind actors can see your face as an audience member! Be mindful of your facial expressions, actors love to see an engaged and interested audience member.
- Phenomenology discusses moments when something is "too real" onstage and it reminds us that we're watching a play. It's okay (and welcome!) to react to things happening onstage. Applaud, laugh, and react as you please as long as you are being respectful to the actors and other audience members.
- In a musical, there may be applause after each musical number or during especially impressive moments of song or dance. Applaud when you feel moved to do so!
- Keep electronics on silent and out of sight. Again, actors can see you!

### Questions for Discussion:

Can you remember some moments in a live performance that took you out of the moment and reminded you that you were watching a show? These don't have to be negative, sometimes this is done intentionally!

