# NEVER THE SINNER

# By John Logan Directed by Justin Lucero



# UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

KATHRINE G. MCGOVERN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

School of Theatre & Dance

Presents



Written by John Logan Directed by Justin Lucero April 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> at 8pm April 11<sup>th</sup> at 2pm

Total running time is approximately 2 hours and 10 minutes, with a brief 15-minute intermission. During intermission, the dramaturgy team will interview the director.

CONTENT WARNING: This production includes child murder, vivid crime scene description, and sounds of graphic violence.

"Never The Sinner" is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com

World Premiere at Stormfield Theatre, Chicago, Terry McCabe, Artistic Director

London Premiere at Playhouse Theatre, Claire Fox, Stephen Graham and Brian Kirk, Producers

Original New York Production by American Jewish Theater

Stanley Brechner, Artistic Director

Original Off-Broadway New York Production by Jeffrey Richards, Richard Gross, Bud Yorkin, Steven M Levy and Harold Reed



Leopold	Riley Capp
Loeb	Chandler Chastain
Darrow	Jake Blagburn
Crowe	Spencer Dooley
Reporter 1/Dr. White/Sgt. Gortland/Bailiff	Anthony Shortt
Reporter 2/Germaine/Dr. Hulbert	Keri Szeklinski
Reporter 3/Dr. Bowman	Colton Johnson

### **ARTISTIC & PRODUCTION STAFF**

Costume Designer	Laura Whittenton
Sound Designer	Andrew Archer
Sound Designer	Heather Ervin
Stage Manager	Meghan Spear
Assistant Stage Manager	Luz Valadez
Dramaturg	Luke Evans
Associate Dramaturg	Trin V. Ho
Associate Dramaturg	Joel Lugo
Assistant Director	Jack Gray
OBS Consultant	Ryan Barrett
Sound Engineer	Austen Gritchen
OBS/Sound Associate	Alex Schumann
Props Supervisor	Lauren Davis
Wardrobe	Alyssa Cantu

### **ABOUT NEVER THE SINNER**

This performance is being presented <u>live</u> and in real-time; that is, *not* pre-recorded. A true "Crime of the Century": Chicago, May 21, 1924. Nathan Leopold Jr., age 18, and Richard Loeb, age 19, killed 14-year-old Bobby Franks... for the thrill of it. Legendary attorney Clarence Darrow defended them, pleading eloquently against capital punishment in a sensational trial. Why would uber-wealthy young men murder an innocent boy? What demons lurked behind Loeb's flashing good looks and behind Leopold's saturnine intellect? Did these self-proclaimed Nietzschean "supermen" function as a double-organism? Were they simply born without human empathy? This exquisite Off-Broadway hit explores the complex relationship between these two who longed to create a private world of fevered intellect and romantic passion.

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### **DRAMATURGY NOTE**

#### Reclaiming or Renouncing History

In the script of *Never the Sinner*, playwright John Logan includes the following note: "this is a love story." Logan does not elaborate on this point, which may be for the better, as the reader is then prompted to try to locate the romance in a story about the gruesome and pointless murder of a child. Whether one is able to view the play in the way Logan does is almost irrelevant. The point is that we are compelled to try, and in doing so, we are challenged to look at the play in a different, potentially subversive way. It prompts us to question whether seeing it as a love story prevents us from also seeing it as a tragic story about a senseless act of violence; can it be both or does one necessarily negate the other?

Logan definitely presents characters who are difficult to sympathize with. We have all seen people like Leopold and Loeb; people who wear their privilege like armor, who brandish it like a universal V.I.P. pass, who practically suffuse it into the air around them. These people see the world at their feet and will not hesitate to kick it if the mood takes them. Consequences bounce right off of them. We have all seen these people. We have been enraged and made to feel insignificant by them. So, how do we approach these people who, in real life, make our blood boil, and attempt to invest in their love? Why should we have to? Why give space for these murderers to be seen? What does it say about us that we are more interested in seeing the villains than the victim?

Although it does not excuse their actions, the queerness of their relationship may provide one entry point to a more sympathetic reading. In his book, *Murder Most Queer: The Homicidal Homosexual in American Theater*, scholar Jordan Schildcrout explores the difficulties of dealing with queer characters who commit unspeakable acts of violence. Advocating for a more nuanced analysis of such characters, Schildcrout cites the musings of Oscar Wilde to challenge our notions of "negative representation" in the art we consume. Noting that Wilde was involved in the Aesthetic Movement and created characters, who, to use the words of Wilde himself, "had monstrous and marvelous sins, monstrous and marvelous virtues," Schildcrout concludes that the playwright "recognized that in the realm of art, one can see the monstrous and the marvelous in the same instance, both in the good and in the bad."

Schildcrout also includes an entire chapter on the various theatrical adaptations of the Leopold and Loeb case, where he argues that plays like *Never the Sinner* incite different readings by positioning the audience as the judge. As such, he provides a number of different lenses through which an audience member may view the trial, running the gamut from praise to condemnation. For example, Leopold and Loeb were queer men, and few among that community do not understand feeling like their identity is being put on trial. However, a queer audience member may not appreciate being associated with child murderers. On the other hand, Leopold and Loeb were also white and very wealthy. It would be easy for a middle or working class audience member to want to see them punished--to see that privilege stripped away. The more well-off audience member, on the other hand, may sympathize with them, prompting introspection about their own level of privilege. Then there is the issue of the death penalty; the main issue on the table is not if they should be acquitted, but if they should be *executed*. Modern studies have found that 43% of Americans oppose the death penalty, the highest number in half a century. How one audience member feels about capital punishment will significantly color how they receive the play.

But these approaches only suggest ways to receive the play. The question remains: why tell the story at all? Why not just condemn them and deny them the historical space they no doubt craved? To me, the answer and the problem are one and the same; in asking ourselves if Leopold and Loeb deserve compassion, we must confront our own impulse to hate them. Why do we feel it is our moral imperative to condemn them? The monstrousness of their act is unquestionable, sure, but must the monstrous fully eclipse the marvelous? Does acknowledging and honoring one necessarily mean ignoring the other? In holding them accountable for their crime, must we banish all notions of their humanity?

Clarence Darrow (Leopold and Loeb's attorney) argues that accountability and mercy are not mutually exclusive; that guilt does not have to mean death. Prosecutor Robert Crowe argues that the punishment must fit the crime. But you are not Darrow. Nor are you Crowe. You are who they are trying to convince. Here and now, you have the chance to become the judge and jury in "The Trial of the Century"; how will you judge them?

#### John Logan: A Biography

John Logan (b. 1961) has loved theatre since he was eight, when his father had him watch Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*. He trained as an actor in college, though he always knew acting was not his path. He did not know what his path *would* be until he took a playwriting class in his senior year, where he wrote his first play: *Never the Sinner*. "That was it," he would say. He had found his niche.

While he has since enjoyed success as a playwright, he struggled initially and turned his attention to film. His screenwriting credits include *Gladiator*, *Hugo*, *The Aviator*, *Star Trek: Nemesis*, and James Bond films *Skyfall* and *Spectre*. He was the sole writer on the Gothic television series *Penny Dreadful* and its spinoff *Penny Dreadful*: *City of Angels*. He has received three Oscar nominations for screenwriting, and a Tony Award for Best Play in 2010.

The balance between light and darkness is a recurring theme throughout Logan's work. In an interview about the characterization of Victorian monsters in *Penny Dreadful*, he said: "It's the only thing that interests me as a dramatist. I don't believe in heroes, and I don't believe in villains." The challenge he issues in most of his work is one that he also issues in *Never the Sinner*: "the trick and challenge and the provocation is to find the poignancy and the pain behind the villainy."

Despite the success he has enjoyed since, Logan still returns to his first play. In talking about writing *Never the Sinner*, Logan echoes a sentiment felt by many at the time of the trial: I was completely captivated by Leopold and Loeb. Their flash and panache and smug brilliance had taken hold. To my mind, they were two of the most magical human beings who had ever lived. All that ended on the single most important day in the writing of this play. I was flipping through a very dusty file (from a source who must still remain confidential) when a photo caught my eye. And then another. And another. I was holding the autopsy photographs of Bobby Franks. Then I wrote the play.

He also finds a fascination with the relationship between Leopold and Loeb, saying: "Leopold and Loeb are not evil; they are simply subject to the forces of their universe... The relationship of Leopold and Loeb is like a gem: you can hold it up, twist it in the light, and see different facets illuminated."

#### The Trial of the Century

When the newspapers hit the stands on May 22, 1924 reporting that the body of 14-year-old Bobby Franks had been found in a culvert, the city of Chicago exploded. The police launched an expansive investigation, rewards were offered for any information, and the city waited with baited breath to find out who had murdered the young boy. It wasn't long before a series of clues led the police to two young, wealthy Jewish boys by the names of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb. Jaws dropped at their arrests. No one wanted to believe that these clean-cut young men from wellrespected families could commit such an atrocity. Nevertheless, after minimal questioning by the police, Leopold and Loeb confessed. "The Trial of the Century" was set into motion.

The trial dragged on for months. On one side was state prosecutor Robert Crowe, a previous judge who was known for hanging murderers. On the other was defense attorney Clarence Darrow, a legendary lawyer and long-time opponent of the death penalty. The case was incredibly high-profile; by the time pre-trial proceedings finished, it had already dominated the newspaper cycle for months. Darrow knew that the people of Chicago were thirsty for blood and that no jury would settle for less than executing the smug boys. So, he made a risky move and took the decision out of their hands by having his clients pivot to a guilty plea. In doing so, he eliminated the need for a jury and placed sole responsibility for their sentencing on the judge; the man who would ultimately decide if Leopold and Loeb lived or died.

While the trial did become a battle ground for opponents of the death penalty, it was also significant for the parade of psychoanalysts who were brought in to offer expert opinions on *why* two boys, not yet 20, would commit such a heinous crime. Everything from their various childhood traumas to their intense fantasy lives to their sexual relationship was revealed. What Darrow did was something that had never before been attempted in a capital punishment trial. His goal was not to prove them insane, but rather to illuminate the pain and the lack of developmental support that made them who they were. He wanted to paint them as children in young adult bodies, and to highlight in the judge's mind the fact that for all their smugness and bravado, they were just boys. Leopold and Loeb met during the summer of 1920, when they were both students at the University of Chicago. Both were certified geniuses who had graduated high school at 15 and 14, respectively. Both were children of privilege who grew up in one of the wealthiest Jewish neighborhoods in Chicago. Both had suffered intense childhood trauma, including sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of the hired caretakers, and these traumas manifested themselves in severely disordered personalities that found in each other a perfect match.

Soon after meeting, their partnership became legendary to all who knew them. They were inseparable companions and partners in crime. They took great joy in committing small crimes like gambling and petty theft (not to mention regular alcohol consumption, though very few in their circle were very mindful of Prohibition laws). They were undoubtedly best friends. They were also manipulatively co-dependent and parasitic enablers. By February 1921, they were also lovers. When Loeb transferred to the University of Michigan that fall, Leopold promptly followed after him.

One of the most telling incidents of their sexual relationship came that fall when Loeb pledged Zeta Beta Tau fraternity and was told that to secure membership, he had to stop seeing Leopold. Rumors had begun to spread that the two had been caught in bed together, and the fraternity did not admit homosexuals. Loeb agreed to the demand and cut all ties with Leopold, who quickly transferred back to Chicago. This "breakup" seems to have had a significant effect on Leopold, who became even more desperate for Loeb's approval.

The two reconnected in 1923 when Loeb returned to Chicago for his graduate studies. They quickly reignited their sexual relationship, as well as their criminal activities. These activities soon escalated into acts of arson, robbery, and vandalism. The seeds of their eventual murder were not planted, however, until November 1923. They had taken a trip to Michigan to rob Loeb's old fraternity house (the same one that instigated their previous separation), and were successful in stealing \$80 of loose change and a typewriter. On the way back, they got into a heated argument.

They came close to terminating their friendship permanently but agreed to instead enter into a *quid pro quo* arrangement: Loeb would provide Leopold with sexual favors on agreed upon dates, in exchange for Leopold's complete and total cooperation with his criminal endeavors. They even agreed that Leopold would drop everything and submit to Loeb whenever given a specific phrase ("For Robert's sake"). This arrangement would continue until that summer, when Leopold was set to depart for Harvard Law School.

Both boys were enamoured with the idea of the *Ubermensch* (German: "superman" or "overman"), philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's construction of the ideal man. While Nietzsche saw the *Ubermensch* as someone with the power to rise above the constrictive social mores of the time and shape society to his own view, Leopold and Loeb latched onto the idea of holding themselves above the laws of men. They began to see themselves as supermen, unaffected by common place morality. This inflation of the ego proved to be their downfall when they decided to move beyond robbery and began crafting their plan to kidnap a child for ransom.

Their reasons for killing Bobby before the ransom was paid remain unknown. Many scholars have pointed to this inconsistency as proof of their instability. Their arrests did not take long. The body was found and identified a day after they dumped it across state lines, and they were brought in for questioning a mere week later. They quickly confessed. Leopold and Loeb found themselves in conflict once more when they gave conflicting confessions, both suggesting that the other had actually dealt the killing blow. Leopold would later report begging Loeb to admit to killing him, to which he only replied, "Mompsie [Loeb's mother] feels less terrible than she might, thinking you did it, and I'm not going to take that shred of comfort away from her."

### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**



Jake Blagburn (Darrow) is a classically trained actor who began his journey at a small-town community college. After falling in love with the art, through the help of great mentors, he found his way to University of Alabama at Birmingham where he furthered his studies. After attending SETC, he met representatives from Stella Adler Studio of Acting where he was offered the chance to hone his skill in NYC. After completing the conservatory, he joined with colleagues and formed Second Hand Theatre Company, through which they created plays, movement pieces, and short films. Jake is incredibly excited to be a part of University of Houston's program and eager to delve back into the craft.



**Riley Capp** (Leopold) is in his first year with the PATP and graduated from Principia College with a B.A. in Theatre in 2019. He has been hooked on theatre for a while now and loves the freeing nature of the art, but also all the wonderful frustrations that come with it too. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged) (Revised)* was one of his favorite shows. He traveled to Wyoming with some friends and his professor from college and toured around the state, playing for anyone who wanted to see the wacky show. It wasn't much, with few props and no set, but the audience's laughter and engagement were more satisfying

than any curtain call.



**Chandler Chastain** (Loeb) Chandler Chastain is a second-year student in The University of Houston's MFA Professional Actor Training Program. Chandler recently appeared in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *An Ideal Husband* at UofH. His previous experience has been in regional musical theatre and as a musician/actor for amusement parks and entertainment groups. Chandler has a B.A. in Theatrical Studies from Ball State University and enjoys learning new instruments and playing scary video games. Aside from performing, he has worked for The Grand Ole Opry and Sweetwater Sound. Chandler is honored by your

presence at this show!



**Spencer Dooley** (Crowe) is a second year MFA student in the UHPATP. For the UHPATP he has performed in *An Ideal Husband* (Sir Robert Chiltern), *Ring Round the Moon* (Messerchmann) and *Spirits to Enforce* (Emory Lawson/Ariel). He has worked at numerous regional and local theatre companies in the Southwest since completing his BFA at the University of Arizona. His favorite roles include *Macbeth*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Algernon), *Opus* (Elliott), *Private Lives* (Elyot), and *Much Ado About Nothing* (Benedick). He has also narrated for the Phoenix Symphony and is a founding company member of the Flagstaff Shakespeare Festival. Love and thanks go to his family and friends.



**Colton Johnson** (Reporter 3/Dr. Bowman) is a junior in the BFA acting program and is happy to be continuing his journey in the program. He most recently was seen in *Kid Simple* as Oliver and in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as the infamous Egghead. He is thankful for his family, friends, professors and supportive ensemble who have continued to make the horror story of 2020 seem a little less scary and is excited to tackle whatever his next project may be, whether that is in person or via zoom.

## **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**



Anthony Shortt (Reporter 1/Dr. White/Sgt. Gortland/Bailiff) is a senior acting major at the School of Theatre and Dance. His favorite roles over his four years have been *A Flea in Her Ear* as Herr Schwartz, *Old Black and White Hollywood* as Ken, *Spirits to Enforce* as Randal James, and most recently *Kid Simple* as the Mercenary. After college he hopes to move out to Austin and continue his work as a performer.



**Keri Szeklinski** (Reporter 2/Germaine/Dr. Hulbert) is a junior BFA acting major at the University of Houston. Her most recent role at UH was Nancy in *Holy Ghosts*, and other credits include UH's Ten Minute Play Festival, and *The Fairytale Lives of Russian Girls*. She is very excited to continue learning at UH this year.

Justin Lucero (Director) is on faculty at Carnegie Mellon University's School of Drama, one of the leading theatre conservatories in the country, as Assistant Professor of Directing for The John Wells Directing Program. Before his CMU appointment, he held a two-year residency with the University of Houston's School of Theatre & Dance as the inaugural Cynthia Woods Mitchell Fellow in Directing & Theatre Studies. For UH, he taught undergraduate and graduate sections of Directing, Theatre Education and Collective Creation, and directed mainstage productions of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle, Luchadora!*, and numerous pieces for the UH 10-Minute Play Festival. Justin is Artistic Director of El Paso Opera and stage directed such productions for El Paso Opera as The Magic Flute, Hänsel & Gretel, Trouble in Tahiti and Pagliacci. Mr. Lucero has been the recipient of a Directing Fellowship with Asolo Repertory Theatre (Florida), a Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation Observership at South Coast Repertory (Los Angeles), a FAIR Assistantship with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and a Directing Attachment at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre (London/West End), where he assisted on the Olivier Award-winning musical revival of *Crazy for You*. Justin is also Co-Founding Artistic Director of New Mexico-based Scaffolding Theatre Company whose "daring" 2014 production of the musical *Chicago* "impressed the national theater community," according to Playbill magazine, who also named the company along with Harvard, Yale, Pace and Stanford as one of the five college shows that think "outside the theatrical box." Training: MFA in Directing with Distinction, London's East 15 Acting School; Associate Member, Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical union. Directing engagements this pandemic year include Abingdon Theatre Company (NY), Kane Repertory Theatre (Chicago), Live & In Color (NY), University of Houston, City Theatre (Pittsburgh), and Pittsburgh Festival Opera.

Jack Gray (Assistant Director) is a third year BFA Technical Production Major. He has worked on several productions including *Caucasian Chalk Circle, Three Sisters, The Nest, Ring Around the Moon, Old Black and White Hollywood* and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. During his three years at UH, he has worked in the following roles: Student Technical Director, Assistant Stage Manager, Assistant Scenic Designer and Master Carpenter. He is looking forward to being back in the theatre and hopes you enjoy the show.

## **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

**Meghan Spear** (Stage Manager) is a junior at the University of Houston earning a BFA in stage management. Her previous UH credits include *The Debasers, The Fairytale Lives of Russian Girls, Old Black and White Hollywood, What We're Up Against,* and *Holy Ghosts*. She wants to thank her family and friends for their continued love and support.

Luz Valadez (Assistant Stage Manager) is a second year BFA stage management major at the University of Houston. Her previous stage management credits at the University of Houston include *Ring Round the Moon* and *Voir Dire*. Other notable previous assignments include *The Children* at The Rec Room Arts, *Newsies, Lion in Winter*, *Shrek Jr*., and *Annie Jr*. at The Ritz Community Theatre. She would like to thank her family for always pushing her to believe in herself and selflessly sacrificing to provide. And most importantly, thanks to those who are supporting the performing arts during these dire times. Thank you all, from the bottom of our hearts.

Luke Evans (Dramaturg) is a first-year graduate student in the UH Theatre Studies program. A Georgia native, he received his B.A. in English and Theatre from Oglethorpe University in Atlanta. Luke got his start as a dramaturg as an intern at Atlanta's Alliance Theatre. He then served as a dramaturg for collegiate productions of *Spring Awakening, The Normal Heart, The Servant of Two Masters, Eurydice, Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Cabaret*. Luke is also a writer whose one-act play, *Pray On It*, was recently read at Atlanta's own Actor's Express. His novel, *The Earth Bound*, releases its second edition on October 13.

Trin V. Ho (Associate Dramaturg) is a native Houstonian Vietnamese American director, dramaturg, playwright, designer, actor, and producer. Her play, *iPhone 12 XZ Plus*, was read, workshopped, and produced at Sartartia Middle School. She also workshopped her ten-minute play, *Fingertips*, at the UH School of Theatre and Dance. She just debuted as director, co-founder, and producer with The Phone Call Collections at Hokatchy Co., a theatre company committed to centering Black, Indigenous, and Global Majority Voices through new works, alongside the brilliant comfort ifeoma katchy. She is currently working on a play *The Melting Faces: A Psychological Thriller* and planning her next moves as a leader in Hokatchy Co.

**Joel Lugo** (Associate Dramaturg) began his interest in writing when competing and creating stories for himself in local Southeast Texas competitions. There he found his hand at other positions in his theatre community. He acted in roles such as Linus in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* and Father in *Eurydice* to playing GreedMonkey in *The Ash Girl*. He is currently in his junior year in the Playwriting/Dramaturgy track at the University of Houston's School of Theatre and Dance.

#### Dr. Robert Shimko Director of the School of Theatre & Dance

**PRODUCTION AND DESIGN AREA Kevin Rigdon** (Head of Graduate Design) Moores Professor, Scenic and Lighting Design

Rachel R. Bush (Head of Stage Management) Associate Professor, Stage Management

**Casey Kearns** (Head of Undergraduate Production and Design) Assistant Professor, Production and Design

**Charles Gary Cooper** Assistant Professor, Theatre Education

Nicholas Jackson Assistant Professor, Technical Direction

PLAYWRITING / DRAMATURGY Dr. Robert Shimko (Program Head) Associate Professor, Playwriting/Dramaturgy

**Theresa Rebeck** Lyndall Finley Wortham Chair in the Performing Arts

DANCE PROGRAM Karen Stokes (Director of Dance Program) Professor, Dance

John Beasant III Assistant Professor, Dance

Theresa Lynn Chapman Associate Professor, Dance

#### **PERFORMANCE AREA**

Adam Noble (Head of Performance Area) Associate Professor, Acting and Movement

Jack Young (Head of M.F.A. Acting) Professor, Acting

Jessica Ferrarone (Head of Summer M.A. Program) Assistant Professor, Acting

ADJUNCT FACULTY, DANCE Jacqueline Bobet Adjunct Faculty, Dance

**Riolama Lorenzo-Lasa** Adjunct Faculty, Dance Barbara Niederer Associate Professor, Costume Technology

Claremarie Verheyen Associate Professor, Makeup and Costume History

Steven W. Wallace Professor, Production and Design

Paige A. Willson Professor, Costume Design and Technology

Alison Christy Instructor, Performance Studies

Rebecca B. Valls Associate Professor, Dance

Toni Valle Professor of Practice, Dance

Jim Johnson Professor, Voice, Speech and Dialects

Stuart Ostrow Distinguished Professor of Musical Theatre

Rosie Ward Assistant Professor, Voice

Firat Kazbek Özsoy Adjunct Faculty, Dance Leslie Scates Adjunct Faculty, Dance Sophia L. Torres Adjunct Faculty, Dance

# FACULTY AND STAFF

# **FACULTY AND STAFF**

ADJUNCT FACULTY, THEATRE Alan Brincks

Adjunct Faculty, theatre

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