



STUDY GUIDE

THE LEGEND OF GEORGIA MCBRIDE by Matthew Lopez

March 4-27, 2022 in the Gibson Theater

Directed by Perry Medlin

The play runs for approximately 135 minutes with one fifteen minute intermission.

“Stitch-in-your-side funny ... full of sass and good spirits.” – *The New York Times*

“ ... a cheering portrayal of what it means to be fully human and loving while celebrating the positive audacity and triumph of individuality and difference.”

– *DC Metro Theater Arts*

“...a delightful, genderbending farce...a funny and often glorious tribute to the art of drag...López delivers a strong message on tolerance for the entire spectrum of human sexuality, while creating a barrelful of fun in the process.” —*Variety*

“‘GEORGIA MCBRIDE’ is about a group of people who don’t really fit in anywhere else. I call them my misfit toys, and they build a home together at the bar. Drag, as it’s practiced in these small Southern gay bars, enables a sense of transgression, a sense of rebellion, a sense of resistance. And it’s also a hell of a lot of fun.” – Playwright Matthew Lopez in *The Los Angeles Times*

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Study Guide compiled for Live Arts by Education Director Miller Susen



Promo photo by Will Kerner featuring Brandon Bolick as CASEY and Randy Risher as MISS TRACY MILLS

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Plot Summary

He's young, he's broke, his landlord's knocking at the door, and he's just found out his wife is going to have a baby. To make matters even more desperate, Casey is fired from his gig as an Elvis impersonator in a run-down, small-town Florida bar. When the bar owner brings in a B-level drag show to replace his act, Casey finds that he has a whole lot to learn about show business—and himself.

Synopsis

Casey is an Elvis impersonator and tribute artist with everything going for him, including a flashy sequin jumpsuit. There's no question that he's a natural, but he's in the wrong place at the wrong time – at least so far – and his act just doesn't make it at Cleo's, a failing bar in Panama City Beach.

When Eddie, the bar's owner, decides to give his cousin Tracy a chance to resurrect his club and her drag act, things start to pick up – but not for Casey. His long-suffering wife Jo is growing weary of their always- bouncing rent checks while Casey continues to drop cash on slices of pizza or yet another rhinestone-bedazzled jumpsuit. And as their finances hit rock bottom, Jo discovers she's pregnant.

Their future seems bleak until one fateful night at Cleo's, when Tracy's partner Remy has one too many pre-show drinks and can't take the stage as Anorexia Nervosa. It's the big break Casey's dreamed of, but only if he's willing to trade in his jumpsuit for a pair of stilettos. He agrees, and "The King" transforms into an all-out queen with the help of some new friends. As his success and reputation grow, so do his personal conflicts with this newfound work that – much to Casey's surprise – gives him the artistic fulfillment and family he's always wanted.

Setting

Panama City Beach, Florida, 2010.

Character Descriptions

CASEY: An Elvis impersonator who works at Cleo's Bar

JO: Casey's wife

EDDIE: The owner of Cleo's bar

TRACY: Eddie's cousin and an elegant, down-on-her-luck drag queen named Miss Tracy Mills (sometimes referred to as Bobby)

REXY*: a not-so- elegant drag queen named Miss Anorexia Nervosa

JASON*: Casey's lifelong friend, neighbor, and landlord

**REXY and JASON are played by the same actor*



Promo Photo by Will Kerner featuring Brandon Bolick as CASEY

[Playwright Bio](#)

Matthew Lopez is the author of THE WHIPPING MAN, one of the most widely produced new American plays of the last several years. The play premiered at Luna Stage in Montclair, NJ, and debuted in New York at Manhattan Theatre Club. That production was directed by Doug Hughes and starred Andre Braugher. The sold-out production extended four times, ultimately running 101 performances off-Broadway and garnering Obie and Lucille Lortel Awards. Lopez was awarded the John Gassner New Play Award from the New York Outer Critics Circle for the play. Since then, it has been received over 40 productions worldwide. Lopez's play, SOMEWHERE, has been produced at the Old Globe, TheatreWorks in Palo Alto and most

recently at Hartford Stage Company, where his play REVERBERATION also received its world premiere in 2015.

Lopez's play, THE LEGEND OF GEORGIA MCBRIDE, premiered in 2015 at the Denver Theatre Center for the Performing Arts. His latest play, the two-part epic THE INHERITANCE, premiered at the Young Vic Theatre in London 2018 and is based on E.M. Forster's novel, Howards End. This production earned eight nominations at the 2019 Olivier Awards and arrived at Broadway's Ethel Barrymore Theatre on September 27, 2019.

Lopez currently holds new play commissions from Roundabout Theatre Company, Manhattan Theatre Club, Hartford Stage, and South Coast Rep. Lopez was a staff writer on HBO's "The Newsroom" and is currently adapting Javier Marias' trilogy "Your Face Tomorrow" for the screen.

Lopez was born in Panama City, Florida, to two public school teachers. His father, born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, is the older brother of actor Priscilla Lopez. Lopez graduated from the University of South Florida with a Bachelor's degree in theatre performance.

Outer Critics Circle Awards Nominee - 2016 - Outstanding New Off-Broadway Play Matthew Lopez, THE LEGEND OF GEORGIA MCBRIDE

[From American Theatre Magazine 2014:](#)

GEORGIA MCBRIDE is more than a love letter to the chameleonic aspects of drag—it is also an affectionate look at Panama City, where Lopez grew up, and where he first came out. It was at a local gay bar that a group of drag queens took him under their wings. "My tutelage as a young gay man was at the hands of drag queens," Lopez recalls.

[From The Los Angeles Blade 2017:](#)

"A friend of a friend of my then boyfriend (now husband) had put together a music playlist for her boyfriend who was experimenting with drag as performance art. He was putting together a persona, and the playlist was filled with female country singers: Dolly, Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette, etc. It's a great mix, and it got me thinking: What would it take for a straight man to become a drag queen? Who would he be, and what would that journey look like? I'm fascinated by people who leave their bubble and willingly place themselves in foreign territory.

Then I decided he needed to be someone whose bubble is as far from drag as possible: a straight white redneck Elvis impersonator from the Florida panhandle, where I was raised. I was eager to watch that guy transform into something new and beautiful.

Personally, I spent much of my teenage years with drag queens. I had a friend who had started doing drag, and I would sneak into the one gay bar in my hometown and watch him perform. I'd hang out in the dressing room with him and all the other queens as they prepared for their

shows. That energy backstage was intoxicating, (sometimes literally), and I wanted to capture my memories of that time in this play.”



Playwright Matthew Lopez poses at the opening night of the new Matthew Lopez play "The Inheritance" on Broadway at The Barrymore Theatre on November 17, 2019 in New York City. (Bruce Glikas / Bruce Glikas/FilmMagic)

Understanding Drag

Drag is a type of entertainment where people dress up and perform, often in highly stylized ways. The term originated as British theater slang in the 19th century and was used to describe women's clothing worn by men.

Today, many prominent drag artists are still people who identify as men and present themselves in exaggeratedly feminine ways as part of their performance, and are known as drag queens. While some drag queens live their lives as men outside of their drag personae, people of any gender can be drag queens. Drag kings, who wear men's clothing and perform stylized forms of masculinity, are less common, but do exist. Many drag kings are women, but people of any gender can be drag kings as well.

As part of their performance, many drag queens and kings have a separate drag persona in addition to the self they live as every day. This persona will of course look different, but may also have a different name and ask to be referred to by different gender pronouns.

This does not mean they are transgender. Just as actors do not keep being referred to by their characters' names after stepping offstage, drag performers do not necessarily keep the names or pronouns they use while performing. Drag performers are artists and entertainers, so being in drag is not an integral part of their identity in the same way that gender is.

On the other hand, when a transgender person comes out and asks people to use a different name and different gender pronouns to refer to them, it is not part of a performance. It is an important part of their identity, and can be a critical part of affirming their gender identity. Don't assume that someone in drag is transgender, or vice versa. Just as the vast majority of the general population does not do drag, most transgender people also are not drag performers. It can be hurtful to refer to a transgender person's presentation as drag, because it suggests that their deeply held identity is just a show they are putting on—which is untrue.

Being respectful of a drag performer's gender is the same as being respectful of anyone else's gender. If you're not sure, for example, of which pronouns to use when referring to someone, just ask.

Like transgender people, drag performers can experience discrimination and harassment because of their gender expression.

[A Brief History of Drag](#)

Men have performed as women for centuries in nearly every culture, due in large part to the fact that women were not permitted to perform onstage before the 17th century. In the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, men were cast to perform women's roles.

Drag as we know it, however, presents a very different embodiment. Today, a drag queen is a performer who creates and develops a persona for personal, artistic or political reasons – and the alter ego can be completely original or modeled after other famous performers with a unique twist.

[In his definitive study of the drag art form entitled *DRAG: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*, Roger Baker](#) notes that while a man embodying a woman through drag is not necessarily a reflection of sexual orientation, the majority of drag artists identify as gay men. Drag performance allowed gay men to express themselves honestly and safely while entertaining audiences during a time when displaying their identity outside of their performance could lead to serious trouble.

In the 1960s, many gay clubs were being raided, and drag queens paid the price in beatings and arrests. Their acts of resistance, which began in [1969 during a raid at New York City's Stonewall Inn](#), were rooted in a stance of opposition to the discrimination and violent treatment they had endured. This unwavering defiance played a major role in galvanizing the gay liberation movement and defeating oppressive laws in many states.

As the character REXY so profoundly states in THE LEGEND OF GEORGIA MCBRIDE, “Drag ain’t a hobby, baby. Drag ain’t a night job. Drag is a protest. Drag is a raised fist inside a sequined glove. Drag is a lot of things, baby, but drag is not for sissies.”

Is Female Drag Sexist?

Since drag performers often embody “hyper-femininity” associated with how women are objectified by men, and, in effect, are commenting on this quality as male performers, some feminists consider drag an insulting “appropriation” of what it means to be female. Kevin Nixon, who has considered the question of sexism in drag performance, notes that a majority of performers he interviewed believe drag allows them to explore and feel empowered by their inner feminine natures, and that they do not intend to demean women. ([“Are Drag Queens Sexist? Female Impersonation and the Sociocultural Construction of Normative Femininity” by Kevin Nixon, 2009, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada](#))

Glossary and Cultural Context

“PADAM, PADAM”

A song that was written for Édith Piaf by Henri Contet (lyrics) and Norbert Glanzberg (music) and originally released in 1951. The lyrics are about experiencing a memory of a song that cannot be forgotten and describing how a certain melody evokes memories of a former lover.

“SKATE TOWARD THE LIGHT, CAROL ANN.”

TRACY’s take on a famous line from the 1982 film *Poltergeist*: “Run to the light, Carol Anne. Run as fast as you can! Mommy is in the light! Mommy is waiting for you in the light!”

THE LADY CHABLIS

A transgender performer featured in the 1994 bestselling book *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and the subsequent film version.

MONTROSE MINING COMPANY

A gay bar in the Montrose neighborhood of Houston, Texas, that opened in March 1978. When it closed in September 2016, it was known as the oldest gay bar in Houston.

ZIMA

Zima Clearmalt is a clear, lightly carbonated alcoholic drink made and distributed by Coors Brewing Company. Introduced in 1993, it was marketed as an alternative to beer, an example of what is now often referred to as a cooler. U.S. production ceased in 2008, but in June, 2017, MillerCoors announced a limited release of Zima for the U.S. market.

STONEWALL RIOTS

Just after 3 a.m. on June 28, 1969, a police raid of the Stonewall Inn, a gay club located on Christopher Street in New York City, turned violent as patrons and local sympathizers began rioting against police.

Although the police were legally justified in raiding the club, which was serving liquor without a license among other violations, New York's gay community had grown weary of the police targeting gay clubs, many of which had already been closed. Soon the crowd began throwing bottles at the police.

The protest spilled over into the neighboring streets, and order was not restored until the deployment of New York City's riot police. The Stonewall Riots were followed by several days of demonstrations in New York and acted as the impetus for the formation of the Gay Liberation Front as well as other gay, lesbian and bisexual civil rights organizations. It is regarded by many as history's first major protest on behalf of equal rights for the Gay Community.

ELVIS PRESLEY

(1935 – 1977)

American singer and actor. Regarded as one of the most significant cultural icons of the 20th century, he is often referred to as the "King of Rock and Roll," or simply "the King."

ELVIS IMPERSONATOR

An Elvis impersonator is someone who impersonates or copies the look and sound of musician Elvis Presley. Professional Elvis impersonators are more commonly known as Elvis Tribute Artists (ETAs). There are many different types of Elvis impersonators and levels of impersonation, which depends largely on who is doing the impersonation and for what purpose:

Professional: Full-time and part-time ETAs who perform for a living. Reenactments of a typical 70s Elvis concert is a preferred choice of most ETAs, however some may portray various phases of Elvis' career in a single show.

Amateur: Enthusiasts who impersonate Elvis in contests, as a hobby or at social gatherings and parties. Most have aspirations to perform as a professional ETA.

Comedic: Usually performed as part of a parody. There is even 10-member skydiving team called The Flying Elvi who were first featured in the movie Honeymoon in Vegas and perform at events around the world. Learn more at www.flyingelvi.com.

[“WE’RE ANGRY AT THE RUSSIANS RIGHT NOW.”](#)

A line Tracy says in the play after requesting Grey Goose, a French brand of vodka, which refers to the federal law unanimously passed by the Russian State Duma “for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values,” also referred to in western media as the “gay propaganda law.” It was signed into law by President Vladimir Putin on June 30, 2013.

The law placed severe restrictions on the free expression rights of LGBTQI+ people and gave a tacit nod of encouragement to those who seek to persecute them. The law makes the vaguely-worded “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships among minors” a criminal offence.

In June 2017, The European Court of Human Rights ruled that the law breached European treaty rules. Under the legislation, any event or act regarded by the authorities as an attempt to promote homosexuality to minors is illegal and punishable by a fine. The law has been used to stop gay pride marches and detain gay rights activists. The Strasbourg court ruled the law violated people’s right to freedom of expression and discriminated against gay people.

Shortly after the law was enacted, a movement began to boycott Russian vodka. Gay bars around the world joined the #dumpstoli campaign, a movement created by Dan Savage in July 2017 that asked gay and straight bars across the country to boycott Russian vodka to protest the country’s aggressive, anti-gay laws.

[PANAMA CITY BEACH](#)

Panama City Beach is a city located in Bay County, Florida, along the coast of the beautiful emerald waters of the Gulf of Mexico in the Florida panhandle. Panama City Beach’s population was estimated to be 12,741 permanent residents in 2017, but it increases to a peak daily population of more than 100,000 in July. More than 17 million people visit Panama City Beach each year. To learn more, visit their official city website at www.pcbgov.com.

[SERENITY PRAYER](#)

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.” This prayer was written by American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) and was a staple in Niebuhr’s sermons and church groups in the 1930s and 1940s. It was later adopted and popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs.



Promo Photo by Will Kerner featuring Danait Haddish as JO and Brandon Bolick as CASEY

Further Reading and Resources

[Playwright Matthew Lopez discusses THE LEGEND OF GEORGIA MCBRIDE as it was being developed by the Denver Center Theatre Company](#)

[Learn about the history of drag performance in *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts* by Roger Baker](#) (New York University Press, 1994)

[Why Drag? by Magnus Hastings](#) (Chronicle Books, 2006)

[Explore the largest existing collection of LGBTQ materials at ONE Archives at the University of Southern California Libraries](#)

The [It Gets Better Project](#), whose mission is to hold out hope to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people facing overwhelming personal and social challenges.

Mentor/Apprentice Program Information

Live Arts is excited to announce THE LEGEND OF GEORGIA MCBRIDE as the reIGNITE Season Mentor/Apprentice Program show, with teens apprenticing in the areas of stage

management, scenic design, lighting design, sound design, costume design, and properties design. Our Mentor/Apprentice Program provides a unique, hands-on opportunity for teens to work on a mainstage production, alongside experienced designers and staff, to create the look, sound, and feel of a production.

2022 Mentor/Apprentice Program participants

Liz Howard, Production Stage Manager

Maddie Chin, Stage Management Apprentice (below)



Etta Feigert, Sound Designer

Patrick O'Brien, Sound Design Apprentice/Board Op

Dan Feigert, Scenic Designer

Savannah Meriwether, Set Design Apprentice (below)



Mimi Halpern, Props Designer
Georgia Wyatt, Props Apprentice

Michael Giovinco, Lighting Designer
Thomas Lancaster, Lighting Design Apprentice

Bruce Young, Costume Designer
Eden Radifera, Costume Apprentice (below)



Talkback Information

The audience talkback for Live Arts' THE LEGEND OF GEORGIA MCBRIDE is scheduled for 9:30pm on Thursday, March 17, 2022 in Gibson Theater (123 E. Water St., 2nd floor) with members of the cast and crew, facilitated by Education Director Miller Susen. You do not have to purchase a ticket to the 3/17 show to attend the talkback. This program is provided free of charge to the Charlottesville community. Please email Education Director Miller Susen at miller@livearts.org with questions about the event.

Bibliography

https://www.guthrietheater.org/globalassets/2-shows--tickets/201718/the-legend-of-georgia-mcbride/georgiamcbride_playguide.pdf

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