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stage

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study guide

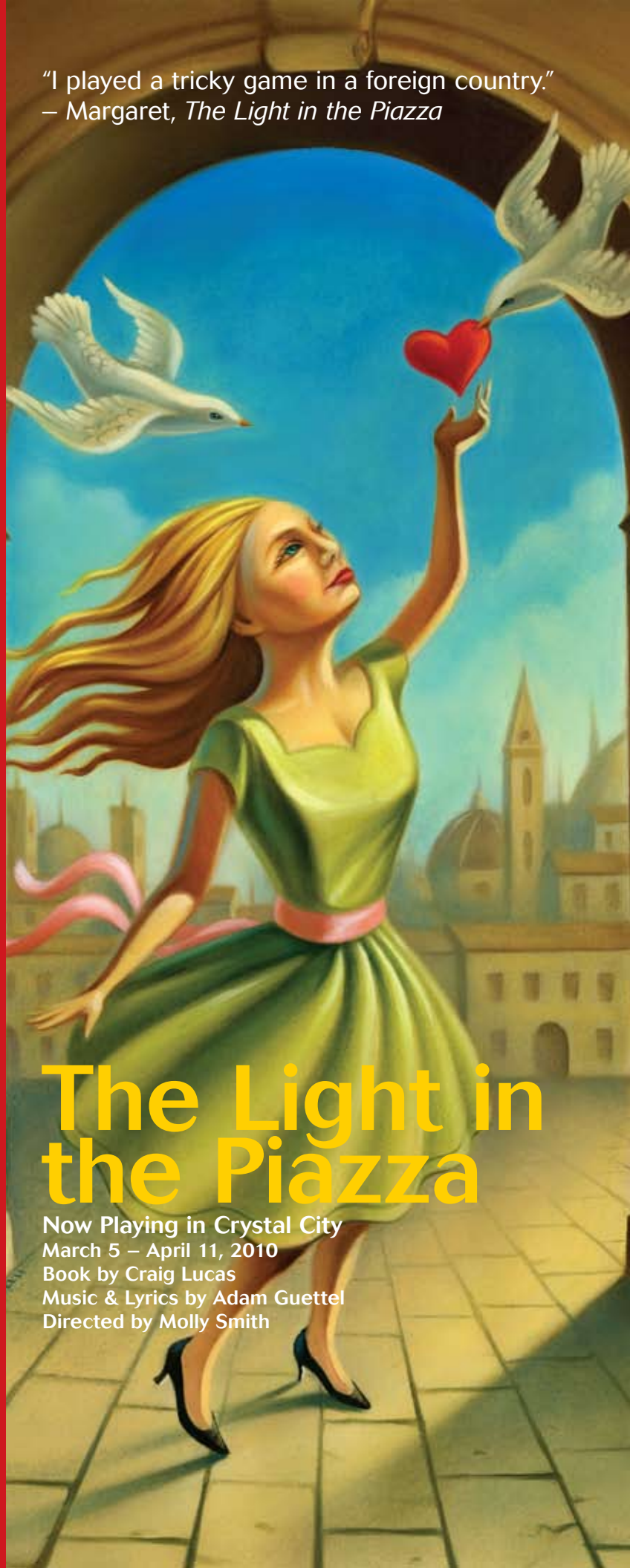
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the play

Twenty-something Clara and her mother, Margaret, are on vacation in Italy in the summer of 1953. One day, as they wander through the town square (*piazza*) of Florence, a gust of wind blows Clara's hat to the feet of a young Italian man named Fabrizio. It seems like fate! Much to her mother's dismay, Clara quickly falls in love with the charming Fabrizio. When he proposes to her, it is Margaret who must make a quick decision. Will she reveal a family secret and stop the wedding, or will she stay silent?

"I played a tricky game in a foreign country."
— Margaret, *The Light in the Piazza*



The Light in the Piazza

Now Playing in Crystal City
March 5 – April 11, 2010
Book by Craig Lucas
Music & Lyrics by Adam Guettel
Directed by Molly Smith

meet the playwright

Craig Lucas

Everything that is worth doing artistically is scary."

– Craig Lucas, in an interview with *The New York Times*, May 26, 2002

Craig Lucas was born on April 30, 1951, in Atlanta, Georgia. On that day, his mother abandoned him in the backseat of a car with a note explaining that she could not take care of him. Eight months later, he was adopted by a couple from Pennsylvania.

Growing up outside Philadelphia, Lucas took acting lessons and started writing plays as a teenager. At Boston University he majored in theater and creative writing. After graduation, he moved to New York, where he was cast in numerous shows, including a few on Broadway.

When he wasn't acting, Lucas wrote plays. It was his 1988 play, *Prelude to a Kiss*, which put him on the map. It won an **Obie Award** and earned Lucas a **Tony Award** nomination. The play soon moved to Broadway and was later made into a movie. In 2005, Lucas received another Tony nomination for *The Light in the Piazza*.

Obie Award & Tony Award – among the most prestigious awards for professional theater

Adam Guettel's Soaring Score

Combining Italian, English, musical theater and classical and popular music, the score (music) of *The Light in the Piazza* was written by award-winning musician and composer Adam Guettel.

Music helps set the tone. The show's music director, Paul Sportelli, said, "The first thing you notice about the score is its romance. It is one of the most romantic music scores ever written. It shimmers; it thrills; it soars. The music reaches out to you."

In musicals, characters break into song when they cannot express themselves by speaking. *The Light in the Piazza* characters have a lot to sing about! They struggle not only with a language barrier but also with explaining their deepest, most complicated emotions.

"He [Guettel] really goes for something quite big through his lyrics," Sportelli said. "He attempts to get the cast to express something that is inexpressible because, ultimately, language always lets us down." ●



Composer and lyricist Guettel comes from a musical family. He is the grandson of Richard Rodgers (*Oklahoma!*, *The Sound of Music*, *South Pacific*) and son of Mary Rodgers (*Once upon a Mattress*).



From the Director's Notebook

"The Light in the Piazza asks big questions. How does love change us? Can we ever really know what's inside a person? What is the difference between intellectual knowledge versus emotional intelligence? It's about the human condition and what it means to be human." – Molly Smith, director & Arena Stage artistic director

"What would that be? Where is that?" – Clara, *The Light in the Piazza*



Today's Baedeker



A Vintage Baedeker

In the 1950s, the most famous travel guidebook was the Baedeker. Originally published in Germany, Baedekers quickly became the go-to guides for international travelers. They highlighted art, architecture and history as well providing practical information about routes, dining and lodging. ●



Activity! Create a mini-Baedeker for your town. Include historical and cultural landmarks. If applicable, include some art!

Speaking Italian

“No, no, not my hair. The scar. Scar.

How do you say that in Italiano?”

– Clara, *The Light in the Piazza*

As you watch the play, you’ll notice that some of the characters speak Italian. Here are some common Italian words and phrases to help you along. ●

Bella (bell-la) – beautiful

Bene (be-nay) – good

Capisce? (ca-peesh-ay) – understand?

Ciao (chow) – hello, goodbye

Grazie (graht-zee-ay) – thank you

Sì (see) – yes



Activity!

Stage a short skit using only the words above. Be creative!

Listening in Another Language

It can be intimidating and exciting to listen to music or see a show in another language without subtitles or a translation. Fortunately, emotions are a universal language.

Watch the actors’ body language and facial expressions to help you understand the feelings and main idea behind what they are saying. Allow the emotion, sound and texture of the music to help tell the story. Keep in mind that words are only one way we communicate with each other. ●



An Italian Art Gallery

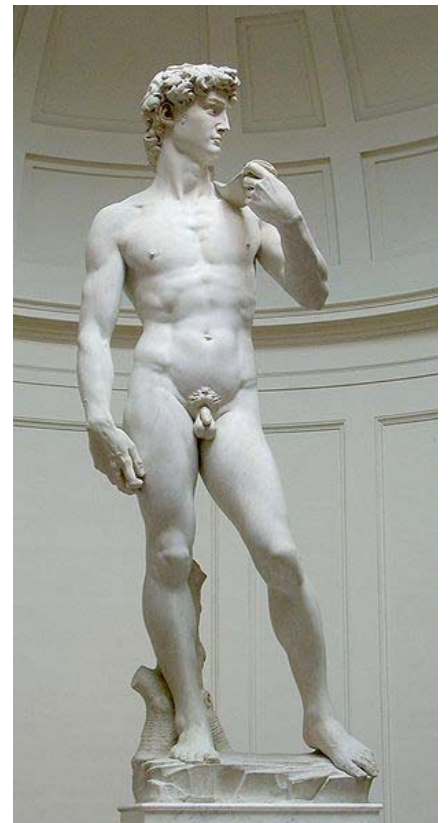
“There were princes, painters, noblemen of logic and art.”

– Margaret, *The Light in the Piazza*

In *The Light in the Piazza*, Margaret and Clara encounter the work of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Michelangelo (1475-1564), two of Italy’s most famous artists. Both men lived during the Renaissance (approx. 1400-1600), a period of cultural “rebirth” that began in Florence, Italy, and spread throughout much of Europe. Influenced by the ancient Greeks and Romans, Renaissance art celebrates the human figure in its most realistic and beautiful form. ●



Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Annunciation*



Michelangelo’s *David*

The Chamber Production

When Lucas and Guettel began writing *The Light in the Piazza*, they imagined a small, intimate musical. However, once it reached Broadway, the show had become larger than life. Succumbing to the industry pressures of ticket sales and spectacle, the creators increased the size of the cast and the orchestra to fill the show's New York home in Lincoln Center's 1,100-seat Vivian Beaumont Theater.

The Light in the Piazza that you're seeing now at Arena is the chamber (small room) version of the show, and it's a perfect fit for our 460-seat Crystal City theater. For this production, Lucas and Guettel have returned to their original intent. The score is now simpler, and the orchestra is smaller. The cast, too, has shrunk, with some of the extra parts now cut.



Enjoying a Passeggiata in Venice

Passeggiata!

"Walk with me in the place that I know
— La Passeggiata." — Fabrizio, *The Light in the Piazza*

One evening, Clara, Fabrizio, Margaret, and Signor Naccarelli pair off and take a leisurely stroll through the streets of Florence. Italians typically dress up for this sunset walk — *passeggiata* (pahs-se-jaw-tah) — through the streets of their historic district. Fine dresses, furs, and jewelry are not uncommon. For many, the *passeggiata* is as much about being seen as seeing the sights and their acquaintances.



Activity! Use a variety of fashion and travel magazines to create a collage of Italian fashions and architecture. If you were taking a *passeggiata*, what would you wear? Through what city would you take your stroll?

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers, and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
- Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.

- Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
- Do not talk, whisper, sing, or hum.
- Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
- Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.

Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.

Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

Enjoy the show!

Additional Resources

Books/Plays

- Art and Architecture: Florence* by Rolf C. Wirtz
- Art and Architecture: Rome* by Brigitte Hintzen-Bohlen
- The Light in the Piazza and Other Italian Tales* by Elizabeth Spencer

On the Web

- Interactive Tour of Florence
<http://www.pbs.org/empires/medici/florence/index.html>

On DVD

- Florence: Cradle of the Renaissance*, 1992

Sub/Text

For links and research related to Arena Stage productions, compiled by Arena Stage **dramaturgs**, please visit **Sub/Text: Your Virtual Dramaturg** at www.arenastage.org/season/08-09/sub-text/.

dramaturg— a theater specialist who does research for productions and represents the intentions of the playwright



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Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.