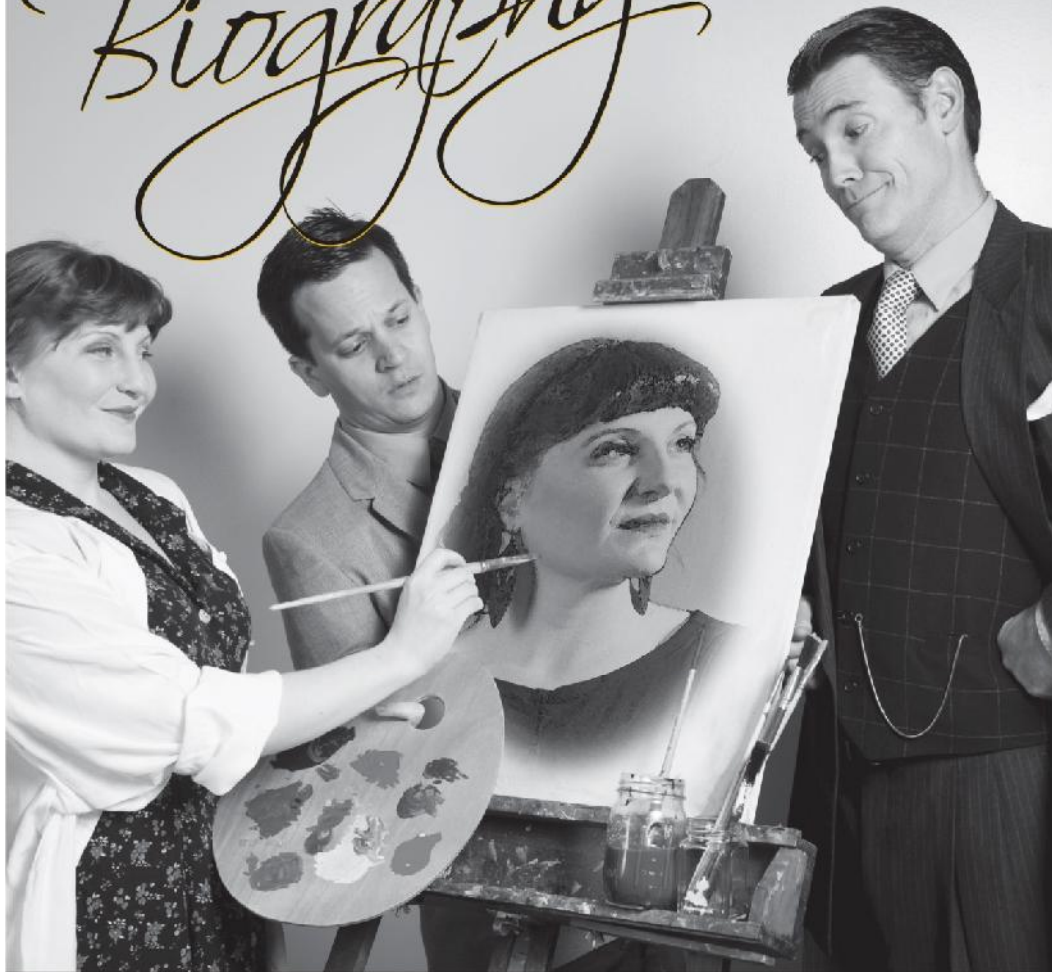


The American Century Theater

by S N Behrman

Biography



Audience Guide

Compiled and Written by Jack Marshall



*Theater you can afford to see—
plays you can't afford to miss!*

About The American Century Theater

The American Century Theater was founded in 1994. We are a professional company dedicated to presenting great, important, but overlooked American plays of the twentieth century . . . what Henry Luce called “the American Century.”

The company’s mission is one of rediscovery, enlightenment, and perspective, not nostalgia or preservation. Americans must not lose the extraordinary vision and wisdom of past playwrights, nor can we afford to surrender our moorings to our shared cultural heritage.

Our mission is also driven by a conviction that communities need theater, and theater needs audiences. To those ends, this company is committed to producing plays that challenge and move all Americans, of all ages, origins and points of view. In particular, we strive to create theatrical experiences that entire families can watch, enjoy, and discuss long afterward.

These audience guides are part of our effort to enhance the appreciation of these works, so rich in history, content, and grist for debate.

The American Century Theater is a 501(c)(3) professional nonprofit theater company dedicated to producing significant 20th Century American plays and musicals at risk of being forgotten.

This program is supported in part by Arlington County through the Arlington Commission for the Arts and Arlington Cultural Affairs, a division of Arlington Economic Development; the Virginia Commission for the Arts; the National Endowment for the Arts; and many generous donors.

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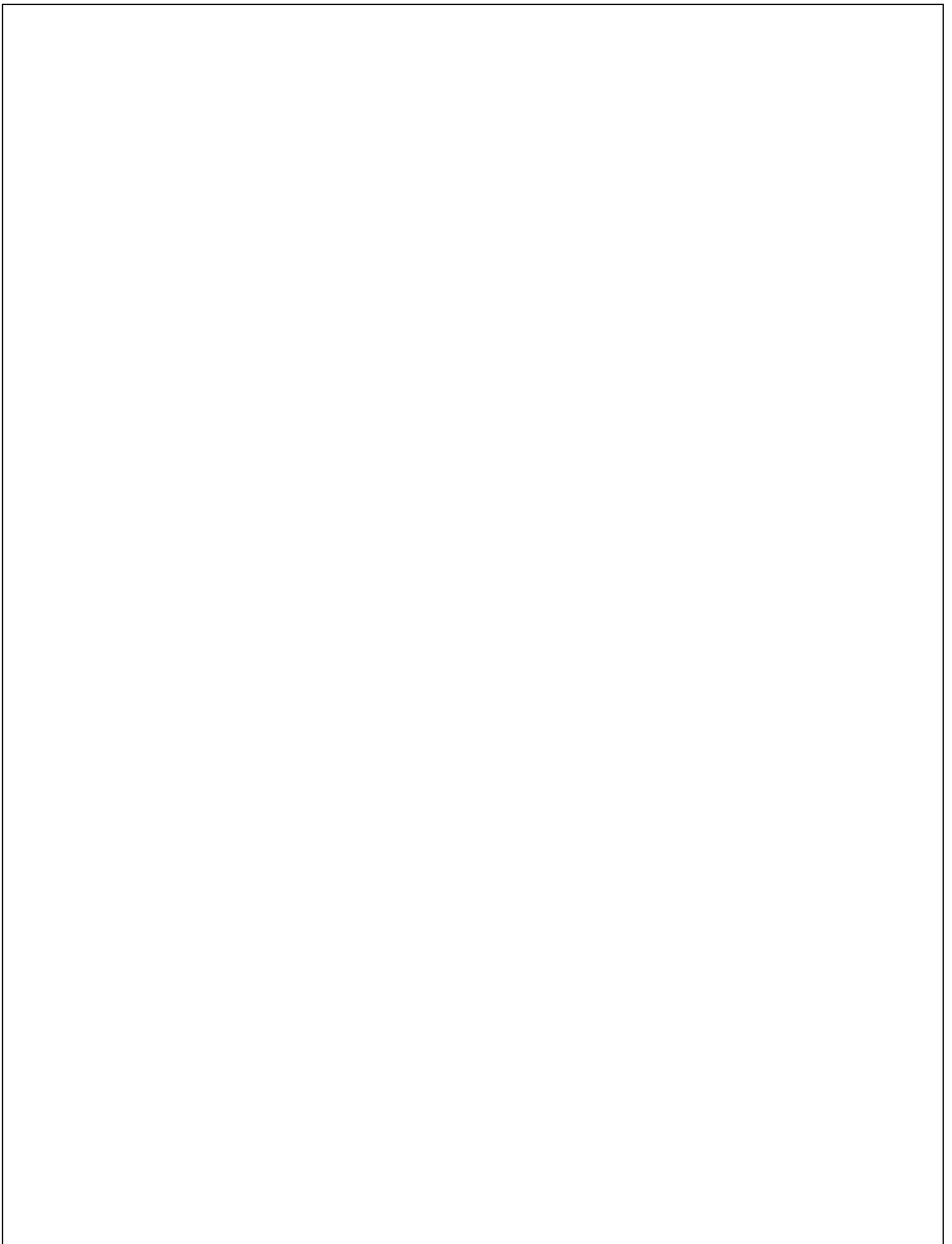
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The Playwright: S.N. Behrman (1893–1973)

—*Jack Marshall*

As he himself related in his entertaining, episodic, and auto-biographical *The Worcester Account*, Samuel Nathaniel Behrman was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on June 9, 1893, the third child of Jewish immigrants Joseph and Zelda Behrman. He was the first of their three children to be born in America.

Early on, Behrman developed a love of literature and the written word, spending hours in the library stacks and reading everything from old newspapers to paperbacks. Behrman toured the vaudeville circuit when he was eighteen, performing a skit that he wrote, his first “professional” writing accomplishment. Back in Worcester in 1912 because of illness, Behrman entered Clark College, now Clark University.

He got tossed out of Clark and was forced to finish his education at Harvard, where he sold his first story, “La Vie Parisienne,” for fifteen dollars. There he enrolled in Professor George Baker’s “47 Workshop,” actually the course English 47, dedicated to the art of playwriting. Baker’s class is a legend in the history of American theater, and Behrman was one of its brightest lights, though perhaps not the brightest: it also produced Philip Barry, George Abbott, Sidney Howard, and Eugene O’Neill, among others. The unique course, launched in 1913, gave aspiring student writers the opportunity to produce their own plays.

S.N. graduated from Harvard in 1916 with a Bachelor’s degree and headed to New York City to try to live and work as a writer. He received his Master’s at Columbia University in 1918 and spent the next two years working for the *New York Times*. In the early 1920s, Behrman wrote a few plays, including a couple while collaborating with Kenyon Richardson (later famous for *Sailor, Beware!*). His efforts were failures, and by 1925 Behrman was about ready to get a real job and abandon the theater. Luckily, he didn’t.

In 1926 he had the opportunity to collaborate with playwright Owen Davis, who had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for his play, *Icebound*. The Davis-Behrman work was called *The Man Who Forgot*. It was forgettable, but it recharged Behrman's creative batteries and bolstered his flagging confidence. Soon afterwards the Theatre Guild presented his play, *The Second Man* (1927), which The American Century Theater presented ten years ago. It was a surprise hit, and S.N. Behrman was on his way. The play also began what was a long and mutually beneficial relationship with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontaine, who subsequently starred in many of Behrman's plays.

Three less-than-smashingly successful comedies later, he wrote his greatest Broadway hit, *Biography*. A typical review (by Robert Garland) called it "adult and provocative . . . an evening of rare play going felicity." This could be a generic review for all Behrman plays, but *Biography* was especially popular. He followed with *Rain from Heaven* (1934), *End of Summer* (1936), *Wine of Choice* (1938) (a flop), and another huge hit, *No Time for Comedy* (1939). By this point, Behrman was churning out a play a year. Some were more successful than others, but none was so unsuccessful that he couldn't find producers and enough of an audience to pay the bills. Six years after *No Time for Comedy*, his adaptation of a Franz Werfel play, *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*, gave him another big hit. Behrman later wrote the screenplay for the film version, called *Me and the Colonel*. It won an Academy Award nomination for Danny Kaye.

Behrman was drawn to writing for the movies, and his way with airy dialogue brought the movie producers to him. Unlike many of his successful playwright contemporaries, he was good at screenwriting. Among his screenplays are classics you can still catch on Turner Classic Movies like *Ninotchka*, *Waterloo Bridge*, and *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum!*, which featured music by Rodgers and Hart and starred Al Jolson.

Between 1924 and 1964, Behrman wrote twenty-five plays and the libretto for one hit musical, *Fanny*. Though not as celebrated for his work on the page, Behrman was a regular contributor of essays and short pieces to the *New Yorker* and one of the less flamboyant and more occasional members of the Algonquin Round Table. His first nonfiction book, *Duveen*, a biography of a renowned art dealer, appeared in 1952. Shortly afterwards, in 1954, *The Worcester Account* was published,

mostly built from earlier *New Yorker* pieces, recounting tales of his Worcester boyhood. The year before he died, Behrman published *People in a Diary*, his autobiography.

Heart failure claimed him in 1973. His last Broadway play had been *But for Charlie* in 1964. He had managed to grace the Great White Way with new plays for five decades. It is a record that Arthur Miller shattered, but few others have even approached.

As critic Gerald Boardman has pointed out, Behrman's gradual obsession with left-leaning politics hurt both his business dealings and his playwriting over time. But he was the master of what Joseph Wood Krutch called "the comedy of illumination." Krutch wrote: "Behrman's wit enables him to make discussion really illuminating and hence to write comedies which are neither merely didactic nor merely trivial." That takes the measure of Behrman pretty well.

He is one of those master craftsmen that his world, the theater, really has forgotten, and it is our loss. Nobody could turn a phrase or plot out a sparkling argument like S.N. Behrman. *Biography*, as you will see, shows his talents at their best.



The Theatre Guild

—*Jack Marshall*

The New York theater company that launched the career of S.N. Behrman in 1927 also can be said to have launched modern professional theater. It was called The Theatre Guild, an offshoot of the defunct Washington Square Players, and it was the most daring, professional, and influential producing company of the 1920s and '30s.

Its original board was a “Who’s Who” of early twentieth century theater, now a “Who’s That?” as the shroud of permanent fame has slipped from all, despite impressive achievements in their time: Lawrence Langner, Philip Moeller, Rollo Peters, Helen Westley, and Lee Simonson. (Do you recognize *any* of them?) They began by producing foreign imports, like Shaw’s *Heartbreak House* (1920). But with the premiere of Elmer Rice’s *The Adding Machine* in 1923, The Theatre Guild made it clear that it would be producing cutting edge American fare.

In this it was greatly assisted by the commitment of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, later known just as “The Lunts,” “The First Couple of American Theater,” or “That Famous Acting Team You Never See Unless You Live in New York Because They Don’t Make Movies Much.”

Today, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne are still considered the greatest acting team in the history of theatre (Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy come in a distant second), even though their memory is fading rapidly. Their farewell play together was in 1958, and Lunt has been dead for three decades, Fontanne for nearly two.

Not willing to simply coast on their extraordinary natural talent, the Lunts were renowned for being consummate professionals. Their passion for excellence and commitment to the art of live theatre was legendary, even at the beginning of their careers, and it led to a remarkable partnership with The Theatre Guild, to the success and prominence of which they were indispensable.

By the mid 1920s, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne were the two most respected, most popular, most critically acclaimed, and highest-paid stage actors in the country. At the height of their individual careers, they made a remarkable decision, taking an enormous pay cut (from \$900 per week to \$300 per week) to sign on with The Theatre Guild. The Lunts believed strongly that creating great theatre with broad impact was far more important than money (an attitude that is fading from memory almost as quickly as the Lunts . . . but I digress.) Their bargain with the Guild had some other provisions that made theatre history as well.

First, the Lunts insisted that they be allowed to act together—and only together. From the time they signed on with The Theatre Guild to the time they both retired from the stage, the Lunts only appeared as a team. As a team, and with the collaboration of their increasingly passive directors, the Lunts took the forefront in

the transition of American theatre from declamation to naturalism. They championed innovations that we now accept as commonplace—overlapping dialogue, turning their backs to the audience, passionate physical contact, and a level of truth and realism in everything they did that simply could not easily be found on the American stage prior to their arrival. Ironically, the couple is believed to have been what was euphemistically referred to as a show business “marriage of convenience,” despite the smoldering sexual attraction these two actors could convey from the stage.

Lunt-Fontanne began their run with the Guild with *The Guardsman* in 1924 (currently being revived by The Kennedy Center). Meanwhile, the Theatre Guild was starting an impressive run of hits, including *They Knew What They Wanted*, *The Garrick Gaieties*, *The Silver Cord*, *The Second Man* (Behrman’s first hit); a string of O’Neill premieres (*Marco Millions*, *Strange Interlude*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Ah, Wilderness!*); both DuBose Heyward’s *Porgy* and the Gershwin opera it spawned, *Porgy and Bess*; Philip Barry’s *Hotel Universe*; Behrman’s *Biography* and *End of Summer* (with the Lunts in command); and *Idiot’s Delight*. It was as remarkable a record of bringing new classics to the stage as American theatre has ever seen, before or since.

By the mid-1930s, political, artistic, and financial disagreements had begun to tear at the fabric of the Guild, and two factions broke away. One was made up primarily of actors (though not the Lunts) and formed the leftist, politically active Group Theatre, led by Harold Clurman and others. The second faction was the Playwrights’ Company, supposedly dedicated (in the words of cofounder Maxwell Anderson) “to make a center for ourselves within the theatre, and possibly rally the theatre as a whole to new levels by setting a high standard of writing and production.” Of course, its founders, all established playwrights (Anderson, Behrman, Sidney Howard, Elmer Rice and Robert Sherwood), already had established the “high standards,” and there was nothing wrong with the Theatre Guild’s production standards. The real reason for the break was administrative and financial disagreements.

Behrman took a major role in this breakaway company, and it produced important works for two decades, notably Anderson’s *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* and *Key Largo*, Behrman’s *No Time for Comedy*, Kurt Weill’s musicals (like *Knickerbocker*

Holiday), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and its last hit, Gore Vidal's *The Best Man* in 1960. By then Behrman had left the Playwrights' Company and had gone back to The Theatre Guild.

It had never been as successful after the split, though Philip Barry, one of the playwrights who did not jump ship, gave it a smash success with *The Philadelphia Story* (1940). But the Guild was on life support again by 1943, and again, a mega-hit saved it, the ground-breaking musical *Oklahoma!* This provided enough momentum to get the group through fifteen more years. The hits came less frequently, but they came: O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*, Inge's *Come Back Little Sheba*, and others. But by the time of the Lunts' farewell in 1958, the Guild was through as a producing organization.

It had earned its rest. In the previous forty years, The Theatre Guild had planted the seeds of virtually every important movement in American theatre, spanning playwriting, production, acting, and musical theater.



Playing “Six Degrees of S.N. Behrman”

—*Jack Marshall*

Many of the playwrights featured in American Century Theater productions have been successful as Hollywood screen writers, but the witty, urbane, sophisticated S.N. Behrman not only was more successful than most, he was also more versatile—and surprisingly so.

To illustrate how versatile, let us play the by now moldy parlor game, “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon,” but with the author of *Biography* instead of Kevin. Supposedly it takes an average of six links to connect any human being on the planet with any other and a similar number (or fewer) to link ubiquitous actor

Kevin Bacon, currently chasing a perhaps-dead serial killer's murderous "cells" on the Fox horror-drama *The Following*, to any actor from silent movie days to the present. Can we do as well with S.N.?

To warm up, how about linking Behrman to....**Will Rogers**, the drawling humorist who was about as far from Behrman's urbane world as you could get?

Too easy: It takes just *Two Steps*. In 1931, Behrman wrote the screenplay for *Daddy Long Legs*, a romantic comedy starring Janet Gaynor, later remade into a movie musical starring Fred Astaire. Gaynor was also the star of *State Fair*, which was also made into a movie musical (twice). Her costar in the film was **Will Rogers!**

All right, now on to the tougher challenges: How many steps to link **S.N. Behrman** to . . .

. . . **Marjoe Gortner**? Surely you remember the once famous child evangelist who briefly became famous in the documentary about his life as an exploited, creepily charismatic kid faith healer. Marjoe had a brief run as an actor, with one major role as a villain in *Earthquake* (with Sensurround!), a big-budget, all-star cast disaster movie. The film's biggest star was Charlton Heston, who was also, of course, the star of *Ben-Hur* a decade earlier. S.N. Behrman, along with Gore Vidal, was called in to fix *Ben-Hur*'s dialogue, so via Chuck, we get from S.N. to Marjoe in *Two Steps*.

. . . **Eddie Murphy**? One of Murphy's best comedies is *Trading Places*, where his and Dan Ackroyd's lives were exchanged and turned inside out by a cruel "experiment" engineered by the rich Wall Street tycoon Duke brothers played by Don Ameche and Ralph Bellamy. In his younger days, Bellamy was a frequent film leading man, and one such film was *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, written by, you guessed it, S.N. Behrman, so again, the road to Eddie is only *Two Steps*. (Also in that film was character actor Alan Hale, who is one step removed, of course, from his almost identical Jr., who played The Skipper on *Gilligan's Island*. This means that that S.N. is only *Three Steps* from **Dawn Wells**, who played Mary Ann. Scary!)

. . . **Natalie Wood**? S.N. wrote the screenplay for Clark Gable’s biggest bomb, *Parnell*, in which he played the famous Irish politician using the best Irish accent he could muster, which made Dick Van Dyke in *Mary Poppins* seem like Meryl Streep. Clark’s presence means that it takes just *Two Steps* to get from S.N. to anyone who starred in a movie with The King of Hollywood—**Vivian Leigh, Marilyn Monroe, Doris Day . . . Spencer Tracy, Charles Laughton, Burt Lancaster** . . . and thus just *Three Steps* to reach anyone who appeared in films with any of them. Also in *Parnell* was Edmund Gwynn—that’s right, Kris Kringle himself, who taught little Natalie about believing in Santa Claus in *Miracle on 34th Street*. Again, just *Two Steps* to get to lovely Natalie.

Oh, come on! Surely every actor isn’t just three steps or fewer from an S.N. Behrman screen play! Let’s pick someone at random, like . . .

. . . **Groucho Marks**? Yes, still just *Two Steps*. Behrman wrote the screenplay for the classic screen adaptation of Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, which, of course, provided the greatest role for British actor **Ronald Colman**. Late in his career, Coleman starred in one of the worst movies, ever made, the all-star cast embarrassment, *The Story of Mankind*, in which he played . . . Mankind. Groucho starred in one of the many awful vignettes in that film. *Two Steps*.

All right, this is getting ridiculous. Let’s see how fast we get to someone really *contemporary* . . . S.N.’s been dead for forty years, after all. How about a rising young actress who has never heard of S.N. Behrman and probably none of his plays or movies either, someone like . . .

. . . **Elle Fanning**? Elle is one-time child-star, now burgeoning teen-actress Dakota Fanning’s “little” sister, who is herself in demand for starring roles despite being only fifteen (but about half a foot taller than big sis Dakota). There are lots of ways to get from S.N. to Elle, and this probably isn’t even the shortest, but here it is:

Step One. S.N. wrote the screenplay for the mega-sword-and-sandals epic *Quo Vadis*. **Elizabeth Taylor** had a small role in it.

Step Two. Many years and husbands later, Liz starred as Fred Flintstone’s mother in the movie version of the Hanna Barbera cartoon show, *The Flintstones*, with **John Goodman** as Fred.

Step Three. Goodman was memorable last year as the Hollywood contact who allowed **Ben Affleck** to execute his audacious rescue scheme in the Oscar-winning *Argo*.

Step Four. Affleck, of course, co-starred with his real life buddy **Matt Damon** in Damon's break-through vehicle, *Good Will Hunting*, and . . .

Step Five. Damon played the father who bought a struggling zoo in *We Bought a Zoo* . . . which co-starred **Elle Fanning**. **Five Steps.**

Now here is the full list of S.N. Behrman's screenwriting credits—

1959 *Ben-Hur* (contributing writer, uncredited)

1958 *Me and the Colonel*

1951 *Quo Vadis*

1941 *Two-Faced Woman*

1940 *No Time for Comedy*

1940 *Waterloo Bridge*

1939 *Love Affair* (contributor to screenplay, uncredited)

1938 *The Cowboy and the Lady*

1937 *Conquest*

1937 *Parnell*

1935 *A Tale of Two Cities*

1935 *Anna Karenina* (dialogue adaptation)

1935 *The Lottery Lover* (contributor to screenplay construction, uncredited)

1934 *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (scenario, continuity, and dialogue as Sam Bermann)

1934 *As Husbands Go*

1933 *Queen Christina* (dialogue)

1933 *My Lips Betray* (dialogue)

1933 *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum!*

1932 *Tess of the Storm Country*
1932 *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*
1931 *Surrender*
1931 *The Brat*
1931 *Daddy Long Legs*
1930 *Lightnin'*
1930 *Liliom*
1930 *The Sea Wolf* (dialogue)
1930 *He Knew Women*



Marksman with a Typewriter: S.N. Behrman, Master of Language

S.N. Behrman was to writing what Richard Rodgers and Mozart were to composing music---he was a complete master of his craft and naturally incapable of producing anything bland or ordinary. While churning out lively plays like Biography, he was also writing reviews, essays, articles, and screenplays. He just loved to write, had an intellect that gave him lots of ideas worth writing about, and had a particular love of exploring the infinite variety within the human species.

We are fortunate that there is an exhaustive Behrman archive online, containing much, though not all, of what he wrote, but plenty to give any curious reader and lover of language both hours of enjoyment and new found respect for his talent. Here is a sample, chosen for its quirkiness, as Behrman painted a portrait of a Fifth Avenue furrier trying to keep his luxury item business afloat in the middle of the Great Depression.

The S.N. Behrman Archive can be reached <http://www.snbehrman.com/index.htm>

—Jack Marshall

Mr. Jaeckel and a Few Hides

From *The New Yorker*, 1932

On October 23, 1929, the day of the first big stock market crash, Richard Jaeckel, the furrier, had such a day as he never had before and as he never hopes to have again. There were various—to Mr. Jaeckel—interesting transactions. One customer, a stockbroker, bought a Russian sable coat for fifty-five thousand dollars. Somebody else, more saving, bought a chinchilla for thirty-eight thousand. In that one day, various gentlemen said it with furs to the tune of one hundred and two thousand dollars. Several financiers, high in the banking fraternity, who dropped in at Mr. Jaeckel's shop at Fifth Avenue and Forty-fifth Street the night before that fateful Wednesday, to roam conversationally in the twin realms of business and diversion, were optimistic. The present boom was nothing. Things would go higher than a kite: as Mr. Jolson would put it, Mr. Jaeckel hadn't seen nothing yet. Since then bankers have fallen somewhat into disrepute, but at that time Mr. Jaeckel shared the average American's religious faith in their dicta. Once he heard the word, Mr. Jaeckel went forth to do. On the basis of the bankers' optimism, he invested forthwith a quarter of a million dollars in sables alone. And, he says grimly, "I've still got 'em!"

You can't tell Mr. Jaeckel about the depression. He will tell you. On the Thursday after the fatal Wednesday, business for the day dwindled from one hundred and two thousand dollars to eight hundred. At the present moment the gross income of Jaeckel's is a fraction of what it was in the boom year. Chinchilla coats, the rarest and most costly of coverings sold in the platinum era for prices up to sixty thousand dollars, have since come back in dozens for resale. More chinchilla coats have been turned in to Mr. Jaeckel for resale in the past year than have been sold in the entire trade for the past ten years. A partial list of the owners—one famous actress has three—is a touching roster of vanished or dimming glory: those celebrities most extinct of all, the celebrities of the near-past. Of a forgotten luminary who, in my boyhood, was the symbol of voluptuary splendor, before whose hotel in Worcester, Massachusetts, I stopped on the way to the theatre with the bated thought: "This building contains her!" I found myself asking with some surprise: "Is she alive?" only to have Mr. Jaeckel tell me, with a singular lack of emotion: "Sure, she's alive! She lives in Flatbush. Paid fifty thousand for a chinchilla twenty years ago and expects to get forty for it still!" . . . They are

hanging in Mr. Jaeckel's vaults in Fifth Avenue, these costly shrouds of the vanished living.

Concerning depression, Mr. Jaeckel is there to contradict an aphorism common to his trade: that the fur business is the last to feel it and the first to recover. To this hopeful lay, Mr. Jaeckel is a nay-sayer. In the past year, for example, he has sold as many expensive sables and broadtails as ever, but his income from the moderately priced pieces has dwindled lamentably. The lower-middle class of his customers, economically speaking, those with incomes ranging from five to twenty-five thousand a year, has been submerged by the depression into the non-fur-buying strata. It is easy to see that in a business where an income of from five to twenty-five thousand dollars represents the "submerged tenth" of the clientele, only the fabulous uppermost layers can still afford to indulge a taste for peltries. Even the luxury trades have their indispensable lower and middle classes; the spectacular sales can't keep business running and the poorer customers, comparatively speaking, have been decimated by the slump. The out-of-town trade—the buyers from Fort Worth and Wichita and Montpelier, anxious for a metropolitan imprimatur on their garments—is now contenting itself with a local imprint. Every business, Mr. Jaeckel says, must depend on the mass-volume of its middle-priced orders and these have been conspicuously "shot" by the depression. There are still the standbys: there is, for example, his best customer, a lady who, for some unexplained reason, sold all her stocks—"everything she had"—on the day before the first market crash and who has spent eighty thousand a year at Jaeckel's for the past ten years; there are a few spectacular bears who are able to indulge magnificently their impulses of gallantry; there are the movie stars; there are the few unassailably rich—but the bread-and-butter customers are vanished. I asked Mr. Jaeckel if I might idle around his emporium. "You can," he said brusquely, "but you won't meet anybody." Concerning the depression, Mr. Jaeckel is vociferously frank, like a hypochondriac advertising his ailments. On the very lease of his store, a lease acquired very advantageously in 1919, he might have had, a few years later, a profit of a hundred thousand a year. The possibility of that profit, together with the fur-buyer with the income of from five to twenty-five thousand, has vanished beyond recovery.

Still, it is a fascinating and enviable world in which Mr. Jaeckel functions imperially. He was born, it may be said, to the ermine. His father, Hugo Jaeckel, like an earlier fur-trader, John Jacob Astor, came here from Germany, and arrived

in time to fight on the Northern side in the Civil War. He brought over with him a small capital and a preoccupation with the fur business, both of which he invested in the establishment in New York which still bears his name and of which he is still listed as president. The elder Jaeckel remained here as active head of the business till 1926, when he left it safely in the care of three sons—H. Francis, Richard, and Walter—and went back to a country estate outside of Wiesbaden, where he is now living in hearty retirement. Richard, on his swift expeditions to Paris to look at models—owing to the speed with which he makes these trips he is known in the trade as the Flying Dutchman—occasionally takes the time to look in on his father in the old house in the village near Wiesbaden where he lords it, Richard will tell you with a chuckle, like a great man. Of the other sons, Theodore is consul-general at Rome and Albert is a member of the law firm of Chadbourne, Hunt, Jaeckel & Brown. Richard was born in New York, went to Williams, and became the amateur wrestling champion of America before he started in his father's business in the shipping department, and later on the delivery wagon at five dollars a week. (What an aroma of outdated Spartanism there clings to this heroic discipline, as old-fashioned as cloak-spreading in chivalry!) Young Richard's first contact with the social side of the business to which he was to devote his life came when he was asked in to have a cocktail by a young lady to whom he was sent to deliver a fur-piece, This was his first experience of hospitality of this kind and it is not surprising that he kept the wagon waiting downstairs so long that there were no more deliveries that afternoon. On his return he was given a prideful lecture by his father, fired, and sent upstairs. The interesting thing about such dismissals when you are the heir to the business is that they instantly result in advancement. But the pleasant fiction of "starting from the bottom" and of surviving such crises of parental wrath contributes to a sense of having made one's way against immense odds which is valuable and perhaps gratuitous for the upkeep of complacency in the scions of the established.

Prices, beginning with the present Jaeckel's ascendancy in the business, began to soar. During this period furs became, with jewelry, the prime commodity of the "conspicuous consumers." Richard remembers his father saying to him, when he told him that he was asking and getting two hundred and fifty dollars for a red fox he had in his hand! "You're a bunch of robbers!" In Richard's youth, when the store was in Thirty-Second Street, he sold his first sable coat to Mrs. Al Woods, at a price that made him gasp: twenty-one thousand dollars. Mrs. Woods came to the store in a hansom cab, and a retainer staggered in with two valises containing the

price of the coat in cash. Mr. Jaeckel claims the credit for having started, single-handed, a vogue which he himself modestly describes as “nutty”: the white-fox craze. In the summer of 1914, an unusually hot one, with the thermometer around one hundred, women walked festooned with white foxes costing from twenty to a hundred and fifty dollars. In his lucubration on the mystery of changing fashions, Professor Veblen does not allow for the creative imaginations of such captains of the cohorts of the conspicuously wasteful as Mr. Jaeckel. With the cynical detachment of a mercenary but critical writer turning out a potboiler, Mr. Jaeckel conceived this white-fox mania and propagated its contagion among many thousands of women. The “aesthetic nausea” which, Professor Veblen says, follows styles once they are outmoded, Mr. Jaeckel felt even in the moment of his inspiration.

Indeed, it would repay amply any professional sociologist to consult Mr. Jaeckel before setting down his generalizations. Knowing personally, according to his own weary admission, more women than any other man in America, he is in a position, in a matriarchy, to give you the lowdown on the still current civilization. He is as paradoxical as Bernard Shaw and as realistic as an accountant. None of the satirists of marriage, for example, are so devastatingly critical of it as an institution as Mr. Jaeckel, whose actuarial analysis makes you realize that it is not (at least in the metropolis) an institution at all. From the point of view of a creditor, Mr. Jaeckel distrusts the married accounts as unreliable and impermanent. The erosion of divorce eats away two out of three marriages before the charge account is balanced. Far more satisfactory, as the ledger indicates, are the unsanctified relationships in which the women have independent incomes. Judged by the keystone of credit, these ladies, Mr. Jaeckel will assure you, are more solid, more reliable. Those hallowed bourgeois virtues—meeting your obligations, paying your bills on time, simple capitalistic honesty—are subserved far more faithfully by what used to be known, in a less practical age, as the *filles de joie* than they are by those momentarily blessed of book and candle. The jagged issue of credit seems to pierce inevitably through matrimonial disputes and it appears to be harder to pay for a fur coat once ecstasy has gone glimmering. On the other hand, the outlaw relationships go on placidly and solvently year after year. One lady, with no ecclesiastical standing whatever, has bought a quarter of a million dollars’ worth of furs from Mr. Jaeckel and her account is tidy. So with many others. One gets a bewildering sense of the chaotic insecurity of the married relation: the satirists, one feels, should centre their attacks on those stodgy, humdrum alliances plodding

along year after year with unimaginative adherence to all the obligations which arouse the hilarity of the lampooners of the middle-class virtues. Marriage, among Mr. Jaeckel's clients at least, appears to have all the excitement of uncertainty, the glamour of the unpredictable.

Such diverse authorities as Anita Loos and Mrs. Edna Woolman Chase of *Vogue* find Mr. Jaeckel's emporium of plate glass and mahogany a vantage point for observing the foibles and the vanities. Through these mirrored ateliers, where the models pirouette slowly, farce and drama bubble. Sometimes they converge On one occasion, Mr. Jaeckel had the delicate responsibility of entertaining simultaneously in contiguous booths a gentleman's sweetheart, at the moment suing him for fifty thousand dollars; his first wife; and his second, current one. The gentleman, when informed of the coincidence, felt a certain natural apprehension, but on the whole he was not displeased. His vanity swelled at this inopportune concentration of his far-flung interests. Mr. Jaeckel managed it for him so that the situation passed off without consequences, and he adds proudly: "I sold all three of them!"

It would be surprising, from his special vantage point, if Mr. Jaeckel were not slightly cynical about the reputedly popular morality. Like medicine and religion, the supplying of furs to ladies seems to be a personal ministration, and if Mr. Jaeckel is less austere than the self-righteous consider seemly, it is because he, as he himself modestly confesses, is "in a spot for concessions." Sometimes, after a day of waiting on as many as a hundred women, he feels that he could not ever bear the thought of addressing another, but so resilient is human nature that after dinner the misogynistic mood vanishes and his anticipations return to normal. These disclosures about himself he makes with an eighteenth-century bluntness. At fifty-one he is remarkably youthful-looking and vigorous and, although a grandfather, not without a masculine pride in the fact that he has a daughter of twenty-four and a son of five and one-half.

The walls of his office above the store in Fifth Avenue are lined with inscribed photographs of most of the prominent musical-comedy and picture stars: Kitty Gordon, who had the best-advertised back in America; Lillian Russell, wrapped in the furs of an earlier day; Marion Davies, Mary Pickford, Adele Astaire, Peggy Joyce, Marilyn Miller, Gloria Swanson, Lilyan Tashman, who, in Mr. Jaeckel's opinion, can wear a smart gown or a fur coat better than anyone else in the world. Contrary to popular legend, the stage, Mr. Jaeckel says, is of no importance in his

business, as most of the actors haven't any money—the actual percentage contributed by the theatre and movies is less than five—but actresses are of great value as advertisers and boosters. Actresses who go in heavily for society are especially valuable in this respect; Adele Astaire—soon to be Lady Cavendish—has sent in droves of customers. But the best ad in the world, Mr. Jaeckel says, is Peggy Joyce. To make a coat for Miss Joyce is to cast bread upon the waters. On one occasion, Mr. Jaeckel made her a white ermine coat which she wore for the first time one night after dinner on the Île de France. Mr. Jaeckel had jumped on the boat at the last minute on one of his innumerable trips. The ship was filled with Western buyers, to whom the coat, as worn by Miss Joyce, appeared to be a knockout. At odd moments in whiffs of confidence, Miss Joyce let fall the maker's name and by the time the ship docked at Cherbourg, Mr. Jaeckel had put down special orders for the coat from forty percent of the buyers. Again Professor Veblen, searching the mystery of style fluctuation, might have done well to consult Miss Joyce also. It may be added that Mr. Jaeckel is himself no slouch at advertising. On one of his Paris visits, he went to the best perfume manufacturer in the world and commissioned him to synthesize a unique scent. Of this mixture he had two hundred and fifty bottles made; dubbed it with his initials, "Are Jay;" and sent the bottles to two hundred and fifty of his best-known customers. "If," he speculated in his message to them, "you like me well enough to accept this scent of me, you may keep this bottle, but the scent is not for sale." And so it has been ever since. There is no other way of acquiring this scent except by personal gift, and the habit of it must be insidious, for Gloria Swanson, finding herself abroad bereft of it, had to cable Mr. Jaeckel; and Marion Davies and Mrs. W. A. Harriman will use no other.

Mr. Jaeckel is proud of his trade and happy in it. He feels himself part of a stalwart tradition; the fur trade has been important in the development of this country and has been the basis of some of its most spectacular fortunes, from John Jacob Astor's to Marcus Loew's. It is curious that this pioneering, frontier hardihood should have formed the basis of the most effete of contemporary industries. It is a long distance from the forest-runner, John Jacob Astor, carrying a pack through the dense forests of the Niagara frontier, dickering with Indians for muskrat skins in exchange for beads and needles, to Miss Joyce's ermine on the Île de France. Even since his father's time, Mr. Jaeckel says, the character of the business has changed from a necessity to a luxury trade. It is a long way but an inevitable one, as inevitable as the swing from classicism to romanticism—like climbing and going

down a hill, as Havelock Ellis says—and no theme song for the hymn-intoning moralist. But it is a fascinating world which Mr. Jaeckel allows you to glimpse, perhaps the final dissolving epitome of our time. Aldous Huxley might trace the slow evolutionary process which makes it possible for Miss Joyce's ermine, on a transatlantic liner, to arouse envy in Midwestern salesmen: that sated stockbrokers may flaunt generosity to the ladies of their adoration the bright-eyed expensively furred little animals roam the wide steppes to their doom. But the speculative aspect does not concern Mr. Jaeckel. He is worldly, Bismarckian. When we entered the war, he matched with his brother, H. F. Jaeckel, and won. He allowed his brother to go and tells you with genuine pride that H. F. came out a major. At the same time he is very content to have missed the chance of being killed or maimed himself. It is a healthy realism. With his customers he has an easy intimacy, he understands them because he understands himself.





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