

ARSENIC & OLD LACE

Mortimer Brewster once believed you had to be crazy to get married. Now he and his family tree might be TOO crazy to be committed to the institution of marriage! Happydale Sanitarium, however, sounds like the right spot.

An uproarious screwball comedy farce, which so happens to involve murder, *Arsenic and Old Lace* has become a favorite amongst regional theatres throughout America.

The leading man, Mortimer Brewster lives a happy-go-lucky life. He is a self-proclaimed bachelor and famous dramatic critic at a prominent New York newspaper and has just become engaged to the beautiful girl-next-door. Having a close relationship with his adoring spinster aunts, Mortimer visits them to announce the happy engagement, but instead discovers that the dears have been poisoning lonely old men and having his brother Teddy (who believes himself to be President Theodore Roosevelt) bury them in the basement. As if things couldn't get worse, Mortimer's estranged psychopath brother, Jonathan, shows up with another body to add to the collection.

Cast List / Character Description

ROLE CONSIDERATIONS: The director plans to cast as traditionally as possible and minding the time-period the play is set in as well.

Ages noted below are only suggestive. If an actor can play the part, they will be considered.

Additionally, the parts noted with physicality need to be able to BE PHYSICAL in the role with both acting and minor fight choreography.

Depending on audition turn out, we may consider a female for one of the officers.

See below for Character Descriptions 

ABBY BREWSTER (Female 50-70 years old or able to Play Age with special effects make-up/costume help.)

A darling lady, the very model of Victorian charm, poise, and grace (on the outside), however, she is the auntie that will always give you candy.

Ms. Abby is a bleeding heart, exudes kindness, and treats everyone as if they are the most precious treasure in existence. She can't stand the thought of anyone being unhappy or alone, and that is why she thinks it is the greatest act of kindness to "un-alive" someone with arsenic-laced wine rather than to have them continue through life alone. The fact that it is first-degree murder is incomprehensible to her. In her mind, she is providing the ultimate act of service.

Ms. Abby is a doting aunt to Teddy and Mortimer and is currently estranged (and scared of) her nephew Jonathan.

The director would like to see Abby played with a light foot and bubbly personality with the backstory that she always wanted to be a dancer but had either the lack of talent or lack of opportunity.

MARTHA BREWSTER (Female 50-70 years old or able to Play Age with special effects make-up/costume help.)

Martha is also the very model of Victorian charm, poise, and grace; however, she is more of the matriarch of the family and community, and although she cares very deeply as well, Martha is more strait-laced with her response.

She approaches her "charitable works" with a more logical reasoning. The fact that it is first-degree murder is not incomprehensible, it just doesn't register. "Helping" these men, in her mind, is the most logical next step.

Ms. Martha serves as head-of-household and does not take these responsibilities lightly. She is not as openly enthusiastic and bubbly as Ms. Abby, but she has her moments, and then they are buttoned back up.

MORTIMER BREWSTER (Male 30-50 years old or able to Play Age)

Mortimer is a self-proclaimed bachelor and brutally honest theatre critic. He is the essence of sophistication, and everyone either wants to be him, befriend him, or marry him. He, however, had no intention of ever getting married, which is a testament to Elaine's beauty and personality.

Though good-hearted, charming, and playful at his core, Mortimer is a cynic and did not believe in happily ever after until Elaine came along. At the beginning of the play, he is the happiest man in the universe. It's a wild downhill ride from there.

Nephew of Abby and Martha, brother to both Teddy and Jonathan Brewster, newly engaged to Elaine Harper.

This is a PHYSICAL ROLE.

Special Note: The actor who plays this role must be comfortable to utterly "LET GO." Mortimer controls the show. From the discovery of the first body, Mortimer must be electrified. He carries that energy all the way through the show. The actor must be comfortable with physical comedy, have sharp comedic timing in dialog delivery, likability in presence, and an ability to display agility in navigating the rapidly changing circumstances of each scene.

ELAINE HARPER (Female 20-30 years old, or able to Play Age)

The captivating "girl-next-door" minister's daughter. Not unlike the character of Mary in "It's a Wonderful Life", Elaine has had her hopes pinned on Mortimer from the beginning.

Elaine is surprisingly wise in the ways of the world, wily, sassy, and sharp. But there is a shiny, glowing musicality to her essence that instantly puts Mortimer at ease, but at times, it can make him overprotective and prepared to sacrifice his happiness to save her from a lifetime of misery. When Elaine walks into a room, all eyes are on her, but she is beautifully unaware this.

(Actor seeking this role will need to show genuine charm, sparkle, zest, and spunk, but she needs to also show vulnerability along with a wonderful sense of versatility.) We witness Elaine progress from casual happiness, to utter bliss, to twisted confusion, to stark fear, to godsent relief, and back to genuine happiness again.

TEDDY BREWSTER (35-60 years old or able to Play Age)

Very likable, kindhearted brother to Mortimer and Jonathan; Nephew of Abby and Martha Brewster.

Teddy is a man who absolutely, beyond the shadow of a doubt, believes that he is the 26th President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. Extreme dedication and energy are necessary while charging up a flight of stairs and screaming "CHARGE!" PHYSICAL ROLE. Teddy charges up the staircase multiple times throughout the show, so the ability to do so is necessary.

JONATHAN BREWSTER (35-60 years old or able to Play Age)

Nephew of Abby and Martha Brewster, brother to Teddy and Mortimer. Jonathan is a cool and horrific psychopath with "dead eyes" who has numerous murders to his credit and no scruples whatsoever. He is creepy personified, and his stillness makes him even more terrifying. Jonathan is a killer, and he enjoys it. He has an unbelievably short temper. To keep him from being caught, Jonathan's sidekick and plastic surgeon, Dr. Einstein, has changed his facial features three times already, currently resulting in a Boris Karloff (Frankenstein's Monster) resemblance (to which he is more than a little sensitive.) Some PHYSICAL work.

DR. EINSTEIN (35 - 55 years old or able to Play Age)

A German plastic surgeon, and right hand to Jonathan. Dr. Einstein is mousey and submissive to Jonathan. Einstein should be viewed as a good guy whose life has gone bad. The audience must sympathize with this guy. With somewhat of a ratty appearance, his face wears the benevolent smirk of a man who lives in a pleasant haze of alcohol. He is not a fan of Johnathan's murderous ways; however, he is unable to leave him.

(A believable German accent is not a game changer for casting; however, it would be preferred.)

THE REVEREND DR. HARPER (50-70 years old or able to Play age) (Cameo)

We only see Elaine Harper's father in the opening scene; a doctor of divinity, and the minister to the church next door to the Brewster house. The Brewster sisters have seen many ministers come and go over the years, but they seem to be particularly fond of Dr. Harper and vice versa. The actor portraying Dr. Harper should display a sense of polish, refinement, and mild-mannered sensitivity towards others. He is not in favor of Mortimer and Elaine's relationship.

OFFICER BROPHY (25-45 years old or able to Play age) (Cameo)

The first police officer we meet in the show, Brophy is a thoroughly likable sort of fellow. Is making his rounds collecting Christmas toys for the needy. Some PHYSICAL work.

OFFICER KLEIN (25-45 years old or able to Play age) (Cameo)

A flatfoot Brooklyn officer who makes his rounds with Officer Brophy collecting Christmas toys.

OFFICER O'HARA (any age) (Cameo)

He is the quintessential example of an Irish American police officer: Full of life, good natured and played big. He is on very good terms with the aunts. O'Hara is a would-be playwright, and needs to plainly display the nagging, persistent drive that's kindled within him once he discovers that Mortimer is a famous dramatic critic. Well intentioned, O'Hara really doesn't mean to come across as annoying as he does.

MR. GIBBS (55-80 years old or able to Play age) (Cameo)

An elderly gentleman who wishes to rent a room from the Brewster sisters; and nearly falls victim to the sisters "charity". He is a little gruff, but he warms up fairly quickly upon being offered a treat he hasn't had since he was a child.

LIEUTENANT ROONEY (40s-65 years old or able to Play Age) (Cameo)

The man in charge at the local police precinct. Very early in the show we gain a strong understanding of the caliber of men he has to manage under his watch. As such, he has very little patience for blunder and mistakes, and needs to run a tight ship. He is loud, decisive, and clearly in-charge of every situation in which he finds himself.

MR. WITHERSPOON (40s-60s years old or able to Play Age) (Cameo)

The superintendent of Happy Dale Sanitarium. Very mild mannered and kind. (A resemblance to President William Howard Taft would be a plus.)

Director's Note:

This production is centered around the "old black & white movie" feel.

Accent work will be part of the rehearsal process and will be mainly "Trans-Atlantic" style (think Cary Grant, Katherine Hepburn, James Stewart, Maureen O'Hara) unless specified otherwise.

You do not have to be an actor to audition. And you do not have to be an actor to be involved in the show. There are many aspects of theatre that do not involve delivering lines from the stage.

Please feel encouraged to watch the 1944 movie of "Arsenic and Old Lace" starring Cary Grant for inspiration.