

Let the music flow

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Welcome to Urinetown; The musical, not the place. It's a musical about a place; a sort of dystopia, if you will, where the only laughter is one of irony, the only smiles are twisted grimaces, and the only singing is a woe-begotten chorus of the cries for the right to pee for free—there's some other singing, but only because this is a musical. Don't let that distract you from the main point: Urinetown is an awful, awful place...but a fantastic musical!

#### BUT THE TITLE HAS THE WORD "URINE" IN IT

Playwright Greg Kotis first conceived the idea of Urinetown when he encountered the frustration of Europe's pay-per-use bathroom amenities. From there, a whole world was born: one of oppressed poor and privileged rich; of corrupt politicians and crooked cops; of heroes and villains; of public restrooms and public restrooms.

The dictator-esque Caldwell B. Cladwell runs the city's public restroom amenities, the only restroom amenities in town, charging citizens a fee every time they go to the bathroom. The show's hero, Bobby Strong, kicks off a long-overdue revolution, granting the poor the chance to pee for free without being sent to Urinetown, an apocalyptic land of horror where the authorities send guilty pee-ers. Amidst the rebellion is a love story, questions about corporate control, and a political and social commentary that cannot go unnoticed.

Suann Pollock, director of Miami's Urinetown production, explains that the overall feeling of the show is one of silliness. "There is a strong social voice in the show, but, in the end, Urinetown is a satire, a comedy. It's a smart and clever show with something for everyone to enjoy."

#### URINETOWN IS HERE AT MIAMI

Liz Mullenix, Head of Miami University Department of Theatre, is very pleased that the department is producing Urinetown. "This show is both intellectually provocative and enjoyable entertainment and I think it will both teach and please."

According to Mullenix, the Department's Season Selection Committee landed on Urinetown because of its Brechtian style and satiric commentary. For those not familiar with Brechtian theatre, it is a style of performance—often referred to as epic theatre—that encourages the idea of narration and performance in play as opposed to naturalism. Two of Brechtian theatre's elements, satire and political theatre, are largely employed in Urinetown.

Pollock was ecstatic when Mullenix offered her the position as director, making this the second show Pollock has directed at Miami (she also did *Seussical* for Miami's summer theatre in 2005). "I've stage managed or directed about 70 musicals," Pollock says, "I love the age old device that when the emotion rises high we break into song or dance, or both! When you have a chance to spoof, parody or just play homage to that, how can you say no?"

Pollock also elected to direct the show because of its relativity to today's audience. She insists that the show reflects today's political and economical status, almost to an uncanny extent. "We are seeing our own excesses and greed bringing the demise of massive financial corporations,"

Pollock asserts. “There’s also this unthinkable environmental crisis that we, in our desire for immediate wealth have helped create.”

On that depressing note, it might be a good idea to take a quick pause and remind the reader that Urinetown is a comedy and while its subject matter may be pessimistic and disheartening, it is sure to make one laugh out loud multiple times throughout the show.

## CREATING URINETOWN

The look of Urinetown (the musical, not the place) is the brainchild of Scenic Designer Gion DeFrancesco. DeFrancesco saw the importance of relating the show to the current economic state, and used this as a launching pad.

“You have this chorus of poor and this chorus of rich, something that can be seen in today’s society,” DeFrancesco explains, “We looked for ways to make a visual connection using that thematic sequence.” He went on to say that what most people connect with the downtrodden and oppressed poor is the Great Depression.

“We used the Great Depression as our window to make the play visually connect, particularly graphics and designs from the Works Progress Administration.” The WPA style comes through in the set of Urinetown in DeFrancesco’s bold and simplistic graphics.

“We also used some war propaganda from WWII and Russian propaganda,” Francesco says. “There’s a lot of similar visual style between WPA posters that were helping American social causes and totalitarian regime posters in the Soviet Union that were glorifying the worker.” This design concept works seamlessly with the social commentary in the show, with Urine Good Company (Cladwell’s corporate empire, the “bad guy”) being paralleled to a totalitarian regime. Another subliminal design message in the show is one of being trapped, almost like a prison. The guard towers framing the stage allow the crooked cops of the show to keep the poor in control, so to speak, while the bathroom fixtures lining the stage reinforce the idea that these people are imprisoned by paying to pee.

## YOU MIGHT PEE YOUR PANTS...

While the set is reminiscent of the Great Depression, downtrodden poor are oppressed by corrupt, wealthy businessmen, and quite a few people die in Urinetown (the musical, not the place), this show cannot be described as anything but a comedy.

Parodying famous musicals like West Side Story, Les Miserables, Threepenny Opera, and Fiddler on the Roof along with countless other references to musical theatre stereotypes, Urinetown is a satire that has been described as the anti-musical by director Pollock.

“It’s a really smart show,” Pollock says. “It’s the most clever lyrics and dialogue I’ve ever heard. It is the kind of stuff that you really want to listen to. It’s smart, it’s clever, it’s fun and it really makes people laugh.”

But be careful: some people laugh so hard they pee their pants—without paying to use the amenities, and then they are sent to Urinetown, the place, not the musical.

## MEET THE CHARACTERS

Old Man Strong

“It all started with the Stink Years,” Joseph “Old Man” Strong bitterly recalls. “Suddenly, water started to dry up. Eventually, private toilets became unthinkable.” In response to the crisis, Old Man Strong and his wife, Josephine, along with a few higher-ups, founded an organization of miscreants. “You thought the LA riots were bad, we did much more than light couches on fire,” Strong recalls. But the water levels continued to drop, and no amount of rabble-rousing could stop publicly run and operated bathroom amenities.

#### Caldwell B. Cladwell

Cladwell started Urine Good Company during the Stink Years. “The Stink Years were a very bad time for everyone. I had a vision of a future that would be filled with happiness and cleanliness...and money, of course. I knew that there would be plenty of money.” Prior to UGC, Cladwell dabbled in sales and politics—forging relationships with influential politicians. In response to Bobby Strong’s uprising against paying to pee, Cladwell says, “Those who don’t follow the rules are sent to Urinetown because if they don’t follow UGC’s rules, my rules, there is no room for them here.”

#### Penelope Pennywise

Penelope Pennywise is a UGC employee that runs Public Amenity No. 9, the poorest amenity in town. As a faithful UGC worker, Penelope never lets anyone pee for free. “You either have the money or you don’t, and if you don’t, tough luck.” Playing eyewitness to the struggles of the poor every day, Pennywise knows of their hardship but she stands by Cladwell and UGC. “In times like these when we have a water shortage like we do, you do what you have to do. And what you have to do is pay to pee because, after all, it is a privilege to pee.”

#### Officer Lockstock

Officer Lockstock heads up the police force. “I arrest guilty pee-ers and keep the peace.” After arresting the guilty, Lockstock sends them to Urinetown. “It’s a hard, cold tumble of a journey, worthy of a gurney, a bumble down,” Lockstock says of the trip to Urinetown, the ultimate destination for all those who pee without paying. “It’s a path that leads you only one place, horrible to retrace, a crumble down. A hard, cold tumble of a tourney, jumble of a journey to Urinetown.”

#### Millie the Secretary

Millie grew up poor, struggling to scrounge up the money it took to pee three times a day. Desperate to become privileged and no longer worry about not having enough dough to use the bathroom, Millie launched a plan to get into Caldwell B. Cladwell’s good graces. “I couldn’t be poor anymore,” Millie explains. “There’s a great divide between the privileged rich and the depressing, smelly, irritating, pathetic poor and I was on the wrong side of that divide.”

#### Hope Cladwell

Hope Cladwell has always planned to work at Urine Good Company, her father’s business. Starting this summer as fax/copy girl, Hope is thrilled to be a part of UGC and its humanitarian

role in the community. “I think my Daddy does great work for the people,” Hope asserts proudly. “The people should look into their hearts and understand that everything my Daddy does is for their own good.” Hope explains that if it were not for her Daddy and Urine Good Company, the Stink Years would return.

#### Senator Fipp

Longtime friends with Cladwell, Fipp enjoys Cladwell’s companionship. “I like being friends with good people, and Cladwell is a good person,” Fipp says. “Without him we wouldn’t have water, and we’d be stuck in a kind of apocalyptic wasteland. I’m more than happy to help him and the good folks down at UGC out in any way I can.” The way Fipp “helps out” the UGC is by passing legislation in support of new fee hikes, or bills that make it more expensive for people to pee. The newest fee hikes, Fipp believes, may be the final straw as the people won’t stand for the rising costs much longer.

#### McQueen

McQueen is Cladwell’s right hand man and number one fan. “Mr. Cladwell is the nicest person in the whole world,” McQueen says fervently. “Because he knows what’s right, and what’s wrong, and makes sure that everyone agrees and follows the rules.” McQueen’s enthusiasm for Cladwell’s policy is overwhelming, despite the fact that he has only been working at UGC for a short period. A big supporter of Cladwell’s policies, McQueen cannot understand Bobby Strong’s call for revolution. “He is a bad man and should be punished. He should be sent to Urinetown.”

#### Bobby Strong

Bobby works at Amenity No. 9 under the supervision of Penelope Pennywise, with his ultimate boss being Caldwell B. Cladwell up at UGC. “I don’t think too highly of UGC, to be honest,” Bobby says. As a daily witness to the oppression of the people, Bobby follows his heart all the way to a revolution. “I started the revolution because we aren’t going to pay to pee. I was told to follow my heart, so that’s what I’m going to do.” Bobby spreads word of the revolution to other amenities in town, and the idea of peeing for free, a highly forbidden and unheard of idea, begins to catch on.

#### Little Sally

Little Sally is a street urchin, with no parents, no money, and no desire to go to Urinetown. “It’s a very bad place, that’s what I’m told.” Little Sally says. The teddy bear-wielding orphan follows Bobby Strong shamelessly, believing in the revolution with all her heart. “I think that everything Bobby promises will come true. After the revolution, we’ll have plenty of water and everything will be happy and wonderful.” A firm believer in peeing for free, Little Sally plans to see this revolution through to the end, reaching that utopia where everyone can pee for free whenever they like, as much as the like, for as long as the like, with whomever they like.



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