



Dead Man's Cell Phone

A PLAY BY
Sarah Ruhl

DIRECTED BY BROOK DAVIS

	FRI	SAT	SUN	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
FEB	07	08	09	13	14	15	16
	7:30 PM	7:30 PM	2:00 PM 7:30 PM	7:30 PM	7:30 PM	7:30 PM	2:00 PM

PERFORMED ON THE RING THEATRE



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

“She’s going to become her own vocabulary word. There’s not anyone else like her. There are no models to refer to. Ten years from now, we’ll say, ‘It’s rather Sarah Ruhl.”
--Paula Vogel, describing former student Sarah Ruhl’s unique voice

This is my second time directing a Sarah Ruhl play, and I have been asked (many times) how I would describe the style of her work. Part realism, part fairy tale, part expressionism, part magical realism, and part Wizard of Oz with maybe a sprinkle of Alice in Wonderland-- that’s the best I can come up with.

About the script. I certainly am not going to use this space to preach about our country’s obsession and overreliance on cell phones. You have probably heard those statistics until you are blue in the face. To me, it is hard to fathom that this play was written in 2008. Seventeen years later (particularly after our much-documented tech reliance during COVID), most of us remember how happy we were to get back in the room together and away from a screen. This prophetic play at once celebrates and condemns our phones. And it asks all sorts of questions about the ringing rectangles in our pockets. Can our phones bring us closer together while also pulling us apart? How well do we know people when we only know them virtually? Do you cease to exist when your phone stops ringing?

The play doesn’t stop there; it poses interesting questions about relationships. Do you get to choose who you love? Who do you love best? To whom would you give your last bowl of lobster bisque?

Welcome to this odd play and the work of this great team who have created fantastical worlds and people in our Ruhlian playground. I’ve had a blast and I hope you have fun too. Buckle your seatbelts.

And, please, turn off your phones.

--Brook Davis, Director

“Dead Man’s Cell Phone” is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals
on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.

www.concordtheatricals.com

Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, produced the New York Premiere of
DEAD MAN’S CELL PHONE Off-Broadway in 2008.
Originally produced June 2006 by Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Washington, DC
Howard Shalwitz, Artistic Director; Kevin Moore, Managing Director.

Wake Forest University Theatre presents

Dead Man's Cell Phone

by Sarah Ruhl

February 7-9 & 13-16, 2025

Director
Brook Davis

Scenic Designer
Kaylin Gess

Costume Designer
Alice Burton Barsony

Sound Designer
David M. Greenberg

Lighting Designer
Maggie Payne* ('26)

Fight Choreographer
Lara Ianni

Choreographer
Sam Shapiro

Assistant Director
Hannah Reynolds*‡ ('26)

Stage Manager
Margaret Williams* ('26)

CAST

JEAN.....	Ellie Howell*
GORDON.....	Joe Bruno*‡
MRS. GOTTLIEB.....	Sharon Andrews
HERMIA.....	Ashlyn Collings
DWIGHT.....	Patrick Fenlon*
OTHER WOMAN.....	Callise Young
STRANGER.....	Senya Li
SONDER.....	Conner Hunt*
SONDER.....	Bradley Jiang*
SONDER.....	Janiyah Lewis
SONDER.....	Mati Romagnoli*
SONDER.....	Tracy Xie*

*denotes Anthony Aston Players member

‡denotes Presidential Scholar in Theatre

§denotes Presidential Scholar in Dance

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Sonder (n.) - The feeling one has upon realizing that every other individual one sees has a life as full and real as one's own, in which they are the central character and others, including oneself, have secondary or insignificant roles.

When we started rehearsals for this play, Brook and I decided that we needed to find a new name for the “ensemble.” After all, these actors are doing so much more than what a typical “ensemble” does. Each of them wrote an original monologue for the opening sequence of the show, and over the past few weeks, they’ve developed rich, beautiful characters that you’ll see in several scenes. The Sonders have become essential to the world we’ve created for our production of *Dead Man's Cell Phone*.

The word “sonder” came up while we were discussing what our “ensemble’s” new name should be. It’s the feeling that you get when you’re sitting at a café, or in the airport, and you notice that all of these people around you are the main characters of their own lives. Each of them has a deep inner life just as you do, which is somehow fascinating to think about. I’ve noticed this theme deeply embedded within the play as we’ve gone through the rehearsal process. The Sonders represent the people who surround you, who you may never get to meet, but whose lives are just as wonderful and captivating as your own. We’ve had so much fun exploring this idea and discovering these new characters, and I hope you enjoy what we’ve created!

--Hannah Reynolds, Assistant Director

INFORMATION

In consideration of everyone in the theatre, especially the cast who have rehearsed for weeks, please observe the following:

- **No admission (or re-entry) during the performance!**
 - Turn off and put away your cell phone or any device that might ring, buzz, or light up.
 - Laptops are not allowed; pens and paper are great alternatives for taking notes.
 - Copyright laws prohibit recording in any format of any performance.
- Flash photography can be especially hazardous to performers and is a distraction to the rest of the audience.
- Eating and drinking (other than water) are never allowed inside the theatre.

Thank you, and enjoy the show!

This show runs approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes with a 10-minute intermission.

Why Ask Why? Try Some Lies

BY SARAH RUHL Source: Ruhl, Sarah.

Los Angeles Times, 28 Sept. 2008

If SOMEONE were to ask me why I wrote this strange play *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, I might be silent, I might be evasive, or I might outright lie. But imagine that I said that I was interested in the culture of cellphones, in how they have completely altered our emotional, psychic and body states to the point where culture (and perhaps not even evolution) has caught up.

Imagine that I said I was interested in how there is no longer any privacy, nor is there any reason anymore to talk to strangers on elevators. I might say that I don't feel comfortable with modernity. That the last novel to feel contemporary to me was the modernist novel. That I am trying to make sense of the times we live in, the Digital Age. An age that feels bodiless, as though there is no longer any imprint. That I feel, at times, lost.

And what of the morbid quality of the title, this *Dead Man's Cell Phone*? Why connect cellphones with death? If I took a journalistic approach, I would tell you that my morbid approach to cellphones is based on recent studies in Israel that have linked long-term cellphone use with salivary gland cancer and brain tumors, and that a new study in Denmark has linked talking on the cellphone during pregnancy to a wide array of emotional and behavioral problems in the grown children, and that these two studies have tempted me to chuck my cellphone at last. But I haven't chucked it yet. In any case, the following essay is full of lies and this is based on actual scientific evidence, and so while I do exhort you to chuck your cellphone, especially if your family has a history of salivary gland cancer, as mine does, or if you are pregnant, as I had been, I am not qualified to take a scientific stance on the matter.

And truly, am I the best person to tell you why I wrote this play? In fact, I might be the very last person to have any insight into why I wrote it or what you should think about it. So let me introduce to you an expert on my work, Jacques Joli-Coeur. He is a very eminent theatrical scholar, at this very moment now working on a book about ladders and their usages backstage, historical and modern, and the eventual extinction of the ladder as a means of hanging lights.

According to Mr. Joli-Coeur, "Ms. Ruhl began writing *Dead Man's Cell Phone* when a man's phone kept ringing and ringing at a cafe and she wished that he was dead. Ms. Ruhl was reportedly raised Catholic, so presumably she felt guilty about this death-wish, and wrote a play to expiate her bad thoughts about her fellow man. This was in the year 1998."

And here I pause. Because I recall that I did not own a cellphone in the year 1998; in fact, I bought one three years later, standing on the base of a mountain in Utah from a cowboy because my mother was having a medical test and I wanted to speak with her. So Jacques Joli-Coeur cannot have been right; no, he was not right at all -- about my work, or about chronology. And so I ask you: What is the truth?

The truth is that Jacques Joli-Coeur was a cabdriver I met on the way to see the Dalai Lama at Radio City Music Hall in 2007. I wrote down the name Jacques Joli-Coeur in a little red book for future use. I am sorry, because I do not know if the truth about Jacques Joli-Coeur is more illuminating than the fictional one, and now his name, his beautiful name, is lost to me forever. I can never name a character after him because now you know his real identity. And so Jacques Joli-Coeur is not to be believed as an expert on what *Dead Man's Cell Phone* is about.

And we find ourselves in the dark again.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director of Theatre.....	Corey Gilliam
Technical Director.....	Thomas Williams
Costume Studio Manager.....	Alice Burton Barsony
Audience Services Coordinator.....	Leslie Spencer
Academic Coordinators.....	Lara Ianni, Lu Anne Simpson
Lighting Designer Mentor.....	Kaylin Gess
Assistant Stage Managers.....	Ziqi Huang*, Taylor Nisbet*
Assistant Sound Designer.....	Vir Gupta*
Properties Heads.....	Alice Burton Barsony, Kaylin Gess Gabby Miller* [§] , Abby Parr*
Assistant Technical Director.....	Bradley Jiang*
Scene Shop Assistants.....	Ethan Anderson, Thomas Bausermann, Zewen Ma* Taylor Nisbet*, Celina Seo*, Callie Wittmann* [‡] Liwen Zhang*, Carly Galbreth*, Vir Gupta*, Kenzie Lawson Abby Parr*, Riley Shanaghan* [§] , Gabby Miller* [§]
Electricians.....	Ethan Anderson, Alyssa Cheng*, Allison Sweeney*
Carpenters.....	Bradley Jiang*, Zewen Ma*, Gabby Miller* [§] Taylor Nisbet*, Bennett Haara*, Melinda Cheatham* Natalie Howell* [‡] , Mati Romagnoli*
Painters.....	John Mark Stowers* [§] , Taylor Nisbet*, Conner Hunt* Alaura Knoop, Rylie Torguson, Kenzie Lawson Brook Davis, Hannah Reynolds* [‡] , Allison Sweeney*, Riley Shanaghan* [§]
Costume Studio Assistants.....	Grace Clark, Nina Clayton*, Alyssa Cheng* Sadie Macdonald, Maggie Payne*, Alyssa Worley, Yue Yu
Wardrobe Supervisor & Dresser.....	Nina Clayton*
Dresser.....	Taylor Nisbet*
Fly Operators.....	Abby Parr*, Gabby Miller* [§]
Light Board Operator.....	Bennett Haara*
Sound Board Operator.....	Allison Sweeney*
Photographers.....	Mike Liu, Bill Ray III, Lyndsie Schlink
Social Media Assistants.....	Aderinola “Nola” Adepoju*, Zac Anderson* [‡] Natalie Howell* [‡] , Ella O’Neill-Bryant
Front of House Managers & Staff.....	Aderinola “Nola” Adepoju*, Zac Anderson* [‡] Ashley Christian*, Dami Dawodu, Sara Goncalves Evan Lipetz, Hayley Ochoa James Oparinde, Noah Stoycos
Playbill Assistants.....	Aderinola “Nola” Adepoju*, Zac Anderson* [‡]
Ushers.....	Anthony Aston Players, APO Service Fraternity WFU Dance Company, Theatre & Dance students

*denotes Anthony Aston Players member

[‡]denotes Presidential Scholar in Theatre

[§]denotes Presidential Scholar in Dance

SPECIAL THANKS

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January 1 - October 23, 2024

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[†]Wake Forest alumni



THE

TEMPEST

DIRECTED BY MICHAEL KAMTMAN

PERFORMED ON THE TEDFORD STAGE



SCAN ABOVE FOR TICKETS

APR

FRI
04
7:30 PM

SAT
05
7:30 PM

SUN
06
2:00 PM

THU
10
7:30 PM

FRI
11
7:30 PM

SAT
12
7:30 PM

SUN
13
2:00 PM

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The Yalta Game

directed by ELLIE HOWELL

A MARRIAGE PROPOSAL

directed by YUE YU

PERFORMED IN THE RING THEATRE

APRIL 17 - 19

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