The Odd Couple

By Neil Simon

STANLEY INDUSTRIAL ALLIANCE STAGE

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SYNOPSIS (Spoiler alert!)

Act I

It’s a hot summer night in sportswriter Oscar Madison’s New York City apartment. A few months earlier, before Oscar’s wife left him, the apartment had reflected a modest luxury. Now discarded clothes, newspapers, magazines, and mail lie indiscriminately strewn about. At the centre of the smoke-filled room, Oscar’s friends Murray, Roy, Speed, and Vinnie sit around a table, deep into their weekly poker game. One of the game’s usual participants, Felix Ungar, is late. They soon find out that earlier that very day, Felix’s wife told him that she was ending things with him. Worried that the sensitive Felix might be thinking of taking his own life, they’re relieved yet watchful when he shows up at Oscar’s apartment. After heartfelt expressions of concern, Murray, Roy, Speed, and Vinnie head home, and Oscar tries to console Felix. The pair talk about their failed marriages: Felix confesses that he was unbearably obsessive and Oscar lays out his own faults. Out of sympathy, Oscar invites Felix to move in with him for the time being, happily admitting that he doesn’t like living alone anyway. Felix quickly agrees, and just as quickly begins to put his store of domestic expertise to good use.

Act II

Two weeks later, another poker game is in session, but this time the apartment is immaculate. Felix, appearing from the kitchen with laboriously prepared refreshments, politely reminds his friends to use their coasters to preserve the table’s new finish. The place has been mightily spruced up. Oscar is none too pleased with Felix’s fastidious ways, and tension builds as the game goes on, or rather, as it is constantly interrupted by Felix’s ministrations of food and drink. After the game breaks up, Oscar starts an argument with Felix, claiming that his new roommate has to feel obsessively in control of his environment and, by extension, his emotions, and ought to loosen up. Oscar’s plan for having more fun involves inviting to dinner Gwendolyn and Cecily Pigeon, two attractive British sisters from the apartment upstairs. Felix, however, feels a loyalty to his estranged wife that makes seeing other people seem wrong to him. At Oscar’s continued urging though, he relents and agrees to help entertain—provided that he can cook the dinner.

A few days later, the dining room table is set elegantly for four. Felix is in the kitchen, and when Oscar arrives late, he admonishes him; he has timed everything to perfection, and now the meal is nearly ruined. Gwendolyn and Cecily arrive shortly and they all sit, but Felix, aloof and preoccupied, takes no part in the conversation. When Oscar goes into the kitchen to make drinks, Felix becomes the centre of attention for the Pigeon sisters. He woefully tells them how much he misses his wife and children. The sisters find him sensitive and caring, and can’t help but commiserate. When Oscar returns, all three are in tears. Felix, having been caught up in his reminiscing, has forgotten all about the roast in the oven, which has burned to a crisp. When he dejectedly returns from the kitchen, Gwendolyn and Cecily suggest that they all go upstairs to their apartment for dinner instead, and leave to prepare. Felix tells Oscar he won’t go because it would mean being unfaithful. Nonplussed, Oscar goes upstairs alone, berating Felix for being unwilling to change.
Act III

The next evening, the apartment is set up for yet another poker game. Felix is vacuuming when Oscar comes in, still annoyed about the previous night’s failure with the Pigeon sisters. They bicker, and Oscar begins to sabotage Felix’s efforts at tidying up, delivering the coup de grace by heaving a plate of linguini against the kitchen wall. Oscar gets his friend’s suitcase and demands that he leave. Felix is on his way out just as the other poker players arrive. His friends, though worried about him, start the game as he leaves. Soon after, the doorbell rings and Gwendolyn, Cecily, and Felix appear. They have come for his things; he is going to move in with them for a few days until he gets settled. As he is going out the door, everyone back in friendly good spirits, Felix promises to come back for next week’s poker game. The poker game restarts, but not before Oscar fetches an ashtray, and scolds his friends: “watch your cigarettes, will you? This is my house, not a pig sty.”
ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Writer of wry, down-to-earth, and quick-witted comedies; frequent winner of theatre’s most prestigious laurels; and critically lauded both for his consummate comedic sense and subtle social observation, Neil Simon casts a long shadow over the twentieth-century American stage. His awards, not to mention his nominations (he has received the most Oscar and Tony nominations of any writer), include the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, multiple Tony Awards for Best Play, and a Special Tony Award for his contribution to theatre, among many other honours.

Born in New York in 1927, Simon grew up in northern Manhattan mired in the grim atmosphere of the Depression. His parents’ relationship was fraught with confrontation brought on in part by their tenuous financial situation, and his childhood was an unhappy period that he escaped from by devouring the local library’s supply of adventure novels. After completing high school, he enlisted with the Army Air Force Reserve and briefly attended New York University before being transferred to Colorado, where he took classes at the University of Denver from 1945 to 1946. After that short sojourn in the West, where he began to write, he returned to New York and took a job working in the offices of Warner Brothers.

His writing career began when he—along with his brother Danny, who would go on to a distinguished writing career in his own right—was hired to write for a radio variety show in the late 1940s. In just a few years he had moved from radio to television, joining a flourishing stable of comedy writers at the variety program *Your Show of Shows*. It was around this time that he and Danny collaborated on comedic sketches for their first Broadway show, *Catch a Star!*, which premiered in 1955.

Simon had his first notable success on Broadway in 1961, when *Come Blow Your Horn*, a popular hit, ran for nearly 700 performances. His major follow-ups, coming in quick succession, were the similarly well-received *Barefoot in the Park* (1963) and *The Odd Couple* (1965), for which he won the now-defunct Tony Award for Best Author. With three hits in a row, he became one of the most sought-after playwrights of the 1960s. In this, his most productive period, he brought out new works for the screen and stage at breakneck pace: between 1968 and 1974 eight of his plays had their premieres, along with six films.

The 1970s and 1980s were almost as fertile and the sheer number of his scripts for stage and film from those decades is daunting. He garnered praise for his semi-autobiographical trio of plays of the mid-1980s, *Brighton Beach Memoirs, Biloxi Blues, and Broadway Bound*. His late masterpiece, *Lost in Yonkers*, for which he won the 1991 Pulitzer and the Tony for Best Play, marked his critical apogee. Simon continued to write actively into the late 1990s, when the pace of his writing began to taper off.
However, his work has continued to find enthusiastic audiences: in 2009 alone, licenses were granted for some 1200 amateur and 150 professional productions.

Simon’s expansive oeuvre was for some time disregarded by critics and academics, who initially found little depth in his writing, seeing instead crowd-pleasing, gentle humour. In recent years, however, his body of work has been hailed for its circumspect yet prodding inspection of the mores of twentieth-century Americans and his memorably true-to-life characters. He continues to live and write in New York.
In 1967 the Arts Club on Seymour Street presented a production of Neil Simon’s The Odd Couple, just two years after it premiered on Broadway. It was directed by Otto Lowy, who was well known for his appearances on CBC Radio and later as host of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra’s Pop series. Otto wrote about those early days at the former gospel hall on Seymour Street, with the upstairs 150-seat theatre space: “It was Lionel Lukin Johnston and myself who set up the chairs along with [Arts Club trustee] Doug Perkins. The tickets got printed and the owner of Vancouver Ticket Centre would stand at the top of the stairs and sell the tickets himself. The people who ushered and volunteered were arranged by Brownie Perkins [Doug’s wife]. The only people who got paid were Lionel and myself. I would accept whatever was offered. I think I started off with $80 a week!”

Noted director Janet Wright (Clybourne Park, Elizabeth Rex) was an aspiring actress in that 1967 production (she played Cecily Pigeon). She recalls the excitement of performing in the intimate theatre, with the audience close enough to touch the props. “The dressing room was just behind the stage, so within a few steps you were ready to go on. The Vancouver theatre scene was small back then (with the Playhouse and Freddie Wood the only other professional companies), and actors from the various shows would congregate in the downstairs Arts Club after their performances.”

Now, 47 years later, the theatre landscape is vastly different, and actors no longer gather just at the Arts Club. The city’s theatre scene has matured, and yet beloved plays and theatre artists like The Odd Couple and Janet Wright endure.

—Bill Millerd, Artistic Managing Director
ENDURINGLY, ENDEARINGLY ODD

What is it about *The Odd Couple*? Incessantly revived, reimagined, and reworked for the stage and screens big and small, Neil Simon’s play, in its many iterations, has kept its comedic buzz like few other shows of the 1960s. That it still gets big, hearty laughs is certainly a testament to the quality of Simon’s witty dialogue, but it is also testament to the thought that he puts in our heads while we watch Felix and Oscar bicker over the cleaning: “I know someone just like that!” This, coupled with a tendency to fall into one character or the other’s camp—identifying with the fastidious, orderly Felix or the laidback, messy Oscar—goes some way to explain the timeless appeal of the Odd Couple.

And its appeal really has been timeless. The original Broadway production opened in 1965 and ran for two years and 964 performances. On the back of this success, it was promptly made into a film of the same name in 1968. The film version met with enough acclaim to motivate ABC to air a sitcom based on the play that ran from 1970 to 1975. Though it never enjoyed impressive ratings, the show consistently earned Emmy nominations and can be credited with firmly lodging the idea of the odd couple in the popular imagination. An updated version of the show returned for a poorly received single season in 1982 as *The New Odd Couple*, starring black actors in the lead roles. In the mid-1980s Simon himself revisited the play (the television versions were written primarily by Garry Marshall), rewriting it as *The Female Odd Couple* in 1985, an adaptation that ran for nearly 300 performances despite middling reviews and a general conviction that something had been lost in the gender swap. In a final revision, Simon worked to bring the play up to speed with contemporary references in 2002, producing the little-performed *Oscar and Felix: A New Look at the Odd Couple*.

On paper, the play, like many of Simon’s, is unassuming. There are some obvious laugh lines, but not nearly as many as you’d think such a celebrated comedy would have. It is this understated quality, and the accompanying ease with which audiences slip into the play’s atmosphere, that has helped it stand the test of time. The playwright himself has claimed that he never consciously writes a “joke” into his plays, by which he means a one-off punch line. He’s even gone so far as to say that he goes out of his way to take them out. In 1994, he told the Paris Review about a moment in the *Prisoner of Second Avenue*—a dark comedy that premiered in 1971. He described a scene that he didn’t think had a laugh-line all, yet though he hadn’t intended it, it invariably got a big laugh “because the audience identified.” We naturally read our own foibles into stories and project ourselves onto characters and into their situations, and Simon takes full advantage. He went on to say that “that, more or less, is what is funny to me—saying something that’s instantly identifiable to everybody.”

That very idea, of an “odd couple,” resonates with nearly everybody, though the history of the phrase itself is murky. It plays on a slick uncertainty, suggesting a strange twosome or a numerical pun on the impossibility of an odd pair, or something else entirely. Though Simon plays down the originality of his use of the phrase (it was in circulation before he took it as his title), it only came to prominence after the film version of the play was released. Etymological considerations aside, the usual meaning of the idiom
is clear: a mismatched pair, two people you just wouldn’t expect to want to have anything to do with each other, yet do.

Simon’s naturalistic writing draws us into Oscar and Felix’s checkered home life, even if we haven’t had quite the same experiences—though at a time when having roommates is becoming more and more commonplace for young and middle-aged adults many have. Felix’s unerring aptitude for rubbing Oscar just the wrong way, rarely, if ever, intentionally, is the source of much of the play’s comedy, as well as one of the areas that touches closest to life even in 2014. One scene rings particularly true (at least for a Felix sympathizer). Once the friends have left following the second poker game—this is after Felix has taken up residence and spiffed up the place—it chafes at Oscar that Felix cleans up immediately afterwards. It makes him feel guilty, and he becomes irascible, rebuking Felix. For his part, Felix claims that he isn’t asking Oscar to do anything (though the passive-aggressiveness is palpable). For anyone who has lived with roommates, this little vignette captures something—often an infinitely annoying something—that’s affectingly close to life. This is but one moment among many in *The Odd Couple* that hews close to recognizable scenes of day-to-day life but maintains just enough comedic distance to convert the characters’ exasperation into comedic fodder.

Certain to ignite friendly debates over the housekeeping and earn more than a few laughs, *The Odd Couple* is as warm and funny a comedy now as it was in the mid-1960s. While the petty conflicts of home-sharing that Oscar and Felix find themselves embroiled in might well echo life, Simon’s sparkling dialogue—where the humour lies in a superb delivery and attentively built-up situation—ensures that not only does the audience see something of themselves, but that they see the absurd humour that has captivated and cajoled so many for nearly fifty years.
THE COMPANY

Sasa Brown ~ Gwendolyn

Sasa is truly thrilled to be a part of this production. Some of her previous Arts Club credits include Clybourne Park, Don Quixote, Black Comedy, Doubt, and It's a Wonderful Life. A graduate of UBC's BFA program, Sasa has worked for various companies throughout Western Canada. Her other recent credits include Endgame (Main Street), Vimy (Firehall), Peter Panties (Leaky Heaven/Neworld), Loot (Blue Bridge), A Streetcar Named Desire (Leaky Heaven), and The Blue Horse (Caravan). Sasa is a two-time Jessie winner and lives in East Van with her husband and baby boy Jack.

Cavan Cunningham ~ Vinnie

Cavan is pleased to be back at the Arts Club Theatre Company, where he was last seen in Becky's New Car. Cavan has been acting for over 25 years in theatre, film, and television. On stage he has performed at Persephone Theatre (Saskatoon), The Globe (Regina), Theatre Northwest (Prince George), and with several companies throughout Western Canada. His film and television credits include both national and international productions including The Englishman's Boy, Just Friends, Little Mosque on the Prairie, Hungry Hills, Rust, and most notably, as Mayor Fitzy for six seasons on Corner Gas. Cavan is thankful for the support of his wife actor/director Kathryn Bracht, and their kids Lina and Jian.

Josh Drebit ~ Speed

Josh is very happy to be a part of this talented group of artists. Previously for the Arts Club: She Stoops to Conquer, and A Flea in her Ear. Other selected credits include Endgame and American Buffalo with Main St. Theatre, where he is co-Artistic Producer; Dream with Caravan Farm Theatre; Two with Solo Collective; R&J with Mad Duck Theatre; Showdown with Green Thumb Theatre; Treasure Island with Carousel Theatre; and Tragedy of Dr. Pioneer with Pollywog.

Andrew McNee ~ Oscar

Vancouver born and raised, Andrew splits his time between theatre, film and television, and raising his little rascals Finn and Thom with his wife Karen. Some select theatre credits include It's Snowing on Saltspring, It's a Wonderful Life and Boeing-Boeing (Jessie Award winner) at the Arts Club, Dress Me Up In Your Love (Theatre Replacement), Jesus Hopped the A Train (Pacific Theatre), Henry V, Falstaff, Merchant of Venice, Comedy of Errors (Bard on the Beach), Capsule, Cozy Catastrophe, Lazy Susan (Theatre Melee), The Project, After Jerusalem (Solo Collective), My Chernobyl, Half Life (Belfry), The Wars (Theatre Calgary), Equus, Vincent in Brixton, A Christmas Carol (Playhouse). Younger audience members may recognize him as Coach Malone from Diary of a Wimpy Kid or Mr Clay from Ramona and Beezus. Andrew is a graduate of Studio 58.

Robert Moloney ~ Felix

Robert's previous Arts Club credits include last season's hit Clybourne Park (for which he won a Jessie Richardson award for his performance), The Glass Menagerie and All My Sons (Jessie nomination). Other
stage credits include Uncle Vanya, (Blackbird Theatre), Except in the Unlikely Event of War, (Pi/Horseshoes & Hand Grenades), Bingo (Prairie Theatre Exchange), Great Expectations (Persephone/Blackbird), King Lear and Twelfth Night (Bard on the Beach). Film and television work has kept Robert extremely busy of late. Recent projects include the feature films Vow of Violence, Random Acts of Romance, The Odds (TIFF), and Man of Steel, where working with director Zack Snyder was a dream come true. Selected TV credits include Motive, Almost Human, Bates Motel, Arctic Air, Endgame, Fairly Legal, and the Australian shot television series K-9. Robert is a graduate of Studio 58.

Kate Dion-Richard ~ Cecily

Kate is delighted to be making her Arts Club debut. She most recently played Nora in Brighton Beach Memoirs (Blue Bridge), also directed by Janet Wright. After graduating from the UVic Acting Programme in 2006 (Top Girls, Metamorphoses, He Who Gets Slapped,) Kate attained her Master’s at The Central School of Speech and Drama in London, England. Select theatre credits in London include A Doll’s House (Greenwich Playhouse,) The Government Inspector (Lost Theatre), Best Little Whorehouse in Texas (The Landor Theatre), Mr Marmalade (The Finborough Theatre), and Brecht’s The Decision (The Embassy Theatre). Since moving back to Vancouver, theatre credits include Suburban Motel (Squidamisou) at the Waldorf Hotel and Debts (Itsazoo) at Roedde House. Select feature film and television credits include Psych (NBC), Untold Stories of ER (TLC), 10 Arenas of Marwood (10amLtd), The Wolf Man (Universal), and The Young Victoria (GK Films). Kate has also enjoyed working as a voice over artist for companies such as Toshiba and Clarins UK, as well as voicing characters on several animated series including Tales of Tattonka (Cyber Group Animation). Thank you to family and friends for their continued unwavering support.

Alec Willows ~ Roy

Alec started his career at the Arts Club on Seymour in the early ‘70s. His last appearance at the Stanley was in Buddy. He toured Canada in the National Arts Centre production of John Gray’s Rock ‘n’ Roll. He toured Canada with the National Arts Centre production of John Gray’s Rock ‘n’ Roll, and with the Flying Karamazov Brothers he performed at the Goodman in Chicago and Lincoln Centre in New York in their acclaimed production of Comedy of Errors. Recently, he appeared in the premiere of Let Me Call You Sweetheart at the Belfry and Of Mice and Men at Little Mountain Gallery. Alec has starred in two TV series, Airwaves and Max Glick, and the Canadian film comedies Harmony Cats and Tokyo Cowboy. He plays drums with China Repair.

Joel Wirkkunen ~ Murray the Cop

Joel is thrilled to be returning to the Stanley stage to do what he does best... lose at poker. Some theatre credits include Richard III, Taming of the Shrew, Henry VI, Cymbeline – Bard on the Beach; Escape From Happiness, School for Scandal, A Flea In Her Ear, It’s Snowing On SaltSpring – Arts Club Theatre Company; The Overcoat, Of Mice and Men – Vancouver Playhouse; Cherry Docs, Grace, Sled – Touchstone Theatre; How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying ~ TUTS. A Jessie Award nominee and graduate of Studio 58, Joel is also the co-creator and producer of Vancouver’s wildly popular True Storytelling series The Flame.
John Murphy ~ Director

John is thrilled to be back on the Arts Club stage again. Previous Arts Club productions include *August: Osage County*, *The Optimists*, *Cyrano*, *A Twisted Christmas Carol*, *A Flea in her Ear* and *Sheer Madness*. He has played at Bard on the Beach in *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, *Richard II*, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, and *Merchant of Venice*. Other work includes *Hotel Bethlehem* (Ruby Slippers), *The Dissemblers* and *Eternal Hydra* (Touchstone), and *Ali and Ali* (Neworld). Directing: *The Santaland Diaries* (Arts Club), *Measure for Measure* (Bard on the Beach), *True Story* (revolution theatre), *Volpone* (United Players), *Fifty Words* (Mitch and Murray), and *Woody Sed* (Theatre Bagger). Playwriting: *The Heretic*, Edinburgh Fringe; and *True Story* at the VECC (Jessie Award for Best New Play). John writes and plays music with his band, China Repair (www.reverbnation.com/chinarepair). Love to Michelle.

David Roberts ~ Set Designer

David recently designed the main stage and touring productions of *She Stoops to Conquer* and *Circle Mirror Transformation* for the Arts Club. His previous season included a stopover in Prague for the Prague Quadrennial where, amongst other activities, David presented a Pecha Kucha talk on *Tear the Curtain!* and participated in a seminar on the future of the Quadrennial. David’s recent work has also included *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Pasquale* for Saskatoon Opera, *A Christmas Story* for Persephone Theatre, Saskatoon, *Hotel Bethlehem* for Ruby Slippers, *Eternal Hydra* for Touchstone, and *Becky Shaw* for Mitch and Murray Productions. Upcoming, *Innocence Lost* for Studio 58. David is a member of ADC and his work can be seen at www.davidscenographer.ca

Barbara Clayden ~ Costume Designer

Barbara has been a theatre artist for over 30 years, designing costumes and sometimes sets for various theatre and dance companies around Vancouver, including Bard on the Beach, Blackbird Theatre, Carousel Theatre, Neworld Theatre, Presentation House, Pi Theatre, Rumble, and Theatre Replacement. Past shows with the Arts Club include *Circle Mirror Transformation*, *August: Osage County*, *Griffin and Sabine*, and *The Matka King*. She has been nominated for numerous Jessies and won a few along the way. Most recently, her work was seen in the Pi Theatre and Horseshoes & Hand Grenades co-production of *Except in the Unlikely Event of War*.

Marsha Sibthorpe ~ Lighting Designer

Marsha has designed the lighting for over 525 productions, most recently the Arts Club Theatre Company's *Mary Poppins* and Chemainus Festival Theatre's production of *Dracula*. Marsha is thrilled to be a part of the Arts Club Theatre’s 50th Season as this year marks her 43rd year with the company. Favourite Arts Club productions include *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*, *Creeps*, *The Matka King*, *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon*, and *Next To Normal*.

Murray Price ~ Sound Designer

Murray is a busy producer, composer, and arranger with KOKO Productions. He studied composition at the Victoria Conservatory of Music and UVic before working at Vancouver’s Little Mountain Sound
Studio. He began his professional work as an actor with Bastion Theatre. He recently appeared as Benjamin Britten in *The Habit Of Art* at the Jericho Arts Centre, and behind the scenes: *MacBeth*, *King John*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Much Ado About Nothing* (Bard on the Beach); *Boeing-Boeing*, *The Importance Of Being Earnest*, *The 39 Steps* (Arts Club); He has received several IBA and Clio awards for TV and radio work, as well as four Jessie nominations include outstanding artist achievement.

**Angela Beaulieu ~ Stage Manager**

Some of Angela’s favorite stage managing experiences include *Blood Brothers, The 39 Steps, My Granny The Goldfish, It’s a Wonderful Life, Under the Influence, Arts Club; Urinetown: The Musical, The Shooting Stage*, Firehall Arts Centre; *Sex in Heaven, Lion in the Streets*, Touchstone Theatre; *All Shook Up, Thoroughly Modern Millie, Shirley Valentine*, and *Lend Me A Tenor*, Gateway Theatre; *The Shape of a Girl, Rage, Problem Child*, Green Thumb Theatre. In June 2008, Angela received the Mary Phillips Prize for Behind-the-Scenes Achievement. Love to SJT.

**April Starr Land ~ Assistant Stage Manager**

April Starr is so very happy to be a company member in this, the Arts Club Theatre Company’s 50th season. This is

April Starr’s 14th season with the Arts Club. Past Arts Club shows include *Venus in Fur, Avenue Q, Master Class, Altar Boyz, Calendar Girls, The Penelopiad, A Closer Walk with Patsy Cline, Becky’s New Car*, and *Les Misérables*. April Starr has spent seasons past with Bard on the Beach and The Stratford Festival of Canada, and studied stage craft at Douglas College. April Starr thanks her family for their unconditional love and support. “I love you Noah and Elizabeth!”