By Thornton Wilder
Directed by Dámaso Rodriguez

May 17 – June 12, 2016

Time & Place:
ACT I: HOME, EXCELSIOR, NEW JERSEY
ACT II: ATLANTIC CITY BOARDWALK
ACT III: HOME, EXCELSIOR, NEW JERSEY

THIS PLAY HAS TWO INTERMISSIONS AND RUNS APPROXIMATELY 2 HOURS & 45 MINUTES.

STUDY GUIDE

Study guide prepared by Jessica Gleason, Marketing & Publications Manager
Cast

Sara Hennessy  as  Sabina
Don Alder  as  Mr. Antrobus
Shawn Lee  as  Henry
Linda Alper  as  Mrs. Antrobus
Val Landrum  as  Gladys
Michael Mendelson  as  Ensemble
Vana O'Brien  as  Announcer/Ensemble
Chris Harder  as  Ensemble
Eva Rodriguez  as  Woolly Mammoth
Lauren Modica  as  Fortune Teller/Ensemble
Sky Jude  as  Dinosaur
Dámaso J. Rodriguez  as  Telegraph Boy
The cast, crew and creative team gathered with Artists Rep Staff, supporters and Guild members for the production’s first rehearsal.

Creative Team

Scenic Designer………………………………………………………………………………………………Megan Wilkerson^  
Lighting Designer………………………………………………………………………………………………Kristeen Willis Crosser^  
Costume Designer…………………………………………………………………………………………Gregory Pulver^  
Sound Designer………………………………………………………………………………………………Rodolfo Ortega^  
Wig Design……………………………………………………………………………………………………Jane Holmes  
Assistant Costume Designer………………………………………………………………………………Josie Benedetti  
Props Master…………………………………………………………………………………………………Emily Wilken  
Dialect Coach………………………………………………………………………………………………Mary McDonald Lewis^  
Dramaturg……………………………………………………………………………………………………Luan Schooler  
Fight Choreographer………………………………………………………………………………………Jonathan Cole  
Production Stage Manager………………………………………………………………………………Michelle Jazuk  
Assistant Stage Manager……………………………………………………………………………………D Westerholm  
Assistant Director…………………………………………………………………………………………Joshua Rippy  
Production Assistant…………………………………………………………………………………………Esther McFaden  
Lead Wardrobe………………………………………………………………………………………………Sundance Wilson Henry  
Deck Crew……………………………………………………………………………………………………Grace Owens, Charlie Capps  
Board Operators……………………………………………………………………………………………………Duncan Lynch, Jon Plueard  

^Artists Rep Resident Artist
Portland’s premiere mid-size regional theatre company is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodriguez and Managing Director Sarah Horton. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artists Rep’s mission is to engage diverse audiences in fresh, thought-provoking and intimate theatre. We are committed to world-class acting, directing, design and stagecraft that support new playwriting and aspire to embody great literature, moving audiences to truly feel — to experience — storytelling in a way that only the best live theatre can.
“We came through the depression by the skin of our teeth, — that’s true! — one more tight squeeze like that and where will we be?” – Sabina

This comedic masterpiece takes on the entirety of history, with one ordinary American family who lives through it all. Dad’s just invented the wheel, Cain is throwing rocks at the neighbor kid, mammoths and dinosaurs lounge in the family room and mom frets about how to get all those animals on the boat two by two. Through Ice Ages, biblical floods and political conventions, the Antrobus family of Excelsior, New Jersey perseveres. With a huge cast and time-set across the ages, this theatrical allegory captures the human spirit – of brilliance, idiocy and ultimately sweet survival.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) was an accomplished novelist and playwright whose works explore the connection between the commonplace and the cosmic dimensions of human experience. He won three Pulitzer Prizes: for his novel The Bridge of San Luis Rey, and two plays Our Town and The Skin of Our Teeth. Wilder’s farce, The Matchmaker, was adapted as the musical Hello, Dolly! He also enjoyed enormous success as a translator, adaptor, actor, librettist and lecturer/teacher. Wilder’s many honors include the Gold Medal for Fiction and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.
ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Dámaso is in his fourth year as Artistic Director of Artists Repertory Theatre. In 2001 he co-founded the Los Angeles-based Furious Theatre Company, where he served as Co-Artistic Director until 2012. From 2007-2010 he served as Associate Artistic Director of the Pasadena Playhouse. His directing credits include work at Artists Rep, the Pasadena Playhouse, Intiman Theatre, South Coast Repertory, Laguna Playhouse, A Noise Within, The Theatre@Boston Court, Naked Angels and Furious Theatre. Rodriguez is a recipient of the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award, the Back Stage Garland Award, the NAACP Theatre Award and the Pasadena Arts Council’s Gold Crown Award. His productions have been nominated for multiple LA Weekly Theatre Awards and LA Stage Alliance Ovation Awards. In 2012, Rodriguez was honored by the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation as a Finalist for the Zelda Fichandler Award. He is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC).

Directing credits at Artists Rep include revivals of *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson and *The Playboy of the Western World* by J.M. Synge, the world-premiere musical *Cuba Libre* featuring the music of three-time Grammy-nominated Tiempo Libre, the Portland premieres of David Ives’ adaptation of Pierre Corneille’s *The Liar*, Nina Raine’s *Tribes*, *Exiles* by Carlos Lácamara, the U.S. premiere of Dawn King’s *Foxfinder*, and the West Coast premieres of Dan LeFranc’s *The Big Meal* and Jeffrey Hatcher’s *Ten Chimneys*. Credits at other theaters include a mix of plays by contemporary and classic playwrights including William Shakespeare, Eugene O’Neill, Noel Coward, Bernard Shaw, Clifford Odets, Tennessee Williams and Lillian Hellman. More information at [www.damaso-rodriguez.com](http://www.damaso-rodriguez.com).
“Which play, that you have not directed, do you admire and why?”

My answer to this, or some similar question, is always Thornton Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth*. I love this play wholeheartedly, and despite a dozen years or so in positions at theatres where I have had either full control over choices or some input affecting programming, the play evades me. The cast is usually determined too large or the design needs too demanding. Despite its status as a “classic” and Pulitzer-winner, it is still usually considered not familiar enough to general audiences to be anything less than a big, bold box office risk. Part of the problem is that I won’t accept just any production; I want to live up to Wilder’s extraordinary, relentlessly relevant vision. The play is so important that it deserves everything Mr. Wilder asks of producers and directors. His characters exist “every time” and “everywhere,” and his play has the power to capture (and relieve!) the anxiety of any community in any moment. No matter how many times I consider the play, I am left in awe of Wilder’s audacity, and his innovation. The play was ahead of its time in its 1942 debut, and ahead it remains. Like in *Our Town*, Wilder continues to break the fourth wall, to call attention to the fact that we are seeing a play, but in *The Skin of Our Teeth* he establishes characters, tone, setting and style, and then changes each on a dime again and again. “Which kind of play is this and where will it take me next?” audience members might ask, as if plays need be one particular kind or conform to a recognizable structure. I find that audiences can still be uncomfortable when playwrights break rules, especially in one evening of theatre, let alone mid-Act. In *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Wilder keeps us — his audience, like Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus — uncertain, on edge, and in doing so, unites us.

-Dámaso Rodriguez

*Originally published in the SDC Journal, a publication of the Stage Directors & Choreographers Society.*
Thornton Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth* follows the Antrobus family of Excelsior, New Jersey as they carom through history: raising kids, inventing the alphabet, getting dinner on the table, all while surviving the Ice Age, the Flood and the Great Depression. Asked about his groundbreaking work, Wilder said that he was “trying to make some sense out of the multiplicity of the human race and its affections.” He created George Antrobus (derived from the Greek, *anthropos*, meaning humanity) as a kind of Everyman, and we follow him and his family through recurrent cycles of progress and loss. Three apocalypses in three acts, the family struggles with the same issues that we all do: how to live together, how to balance tradition and change, where does evil come from and how can we manage it, how to be the best we can be.

When Wilder was writing this play in the early years of World War II, the entire world was in upheaval. The Great Depression had destabilized the world economy and undermined many Americans’ faith that democracy and capitalism could co-exist. Reports of the mass murder of Jews had been confirmed, though the response was as yet equivocal and grossly inadequate. Millions of displaced people in Europe and Russia were seeking safety. Fear of Japanese spies lead to the internment* of 127,000 Americans of Japanese descent. Although not yet so extreme, this cycle seems to be upon us again: economic inequality, murderous extremism, floods of refugees, and cries to ‘build the wall’... it’s déjà vu all over again.

*The Skin of Our Teeth* revisits “all the troubles the human race has gone through”, but Wilder is no pessimist. With staggering imagination, a jaunty and optimistic outlook, he reminds us that destruction and rebirth are each a part a life. We *anthropos* tumble along, sometimes breaking down, sometimes falling over the cliff, but always standing back up, dusting ourselves off, and carrying on.

- By Luan Schooler, Director of New Play Development and Dramaturgy

* - In Portland, the Pacific International Live Stock Exposition Facility was used in 1942 as a temporary detainee camp for Japanese Americans being sent to permanent internment camps in Washington, Idaho and California. The peak population was 3,676.
• Excelsior is the motto of the State of New York and the title of a poem by the 19th Century poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow about a youth who climbs a mountain to heaven. Why does Wilder choose this name for a “typical” American city?

• Sabina says that if you want to know about Mrs. Antrobus, just “go and look at a tigress, and look hard.” What does she mean by this? Is the similarity between animals and humans important? Why do you think animals play such a large part in the play?

• There is no equivalent of Gladys in the Book of Genesis. What is her function in the play? What does she represent?

• Mr. Antrobus has recently invented the wheel and discovered that ten tens equals a hundred – “Consequences far-reaching” – and the telegraph boy remarks, “a few more discoveries like that and we’ll be worth freezing/” What does this mean? What is the point of advances in technology or mathematics in the face of disaster?

• The disaster of the first act is natural. What’s different about the disasters of the second and third act? Why does Wilder change the disasters? What would be different about the play if he had chosen different disasters (the plague, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes)?

• Wilder wrote this play to span all of time. What themes do you see resurfacing and reinvented across the play? Do you feel the topics addressed are still as relevant now as when he it was first published in 1942?

Additional Resources ...


3. Wikipedia pages:
   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Skin_of_Our_Teeth
   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thornton_Wilder