

Production Notes

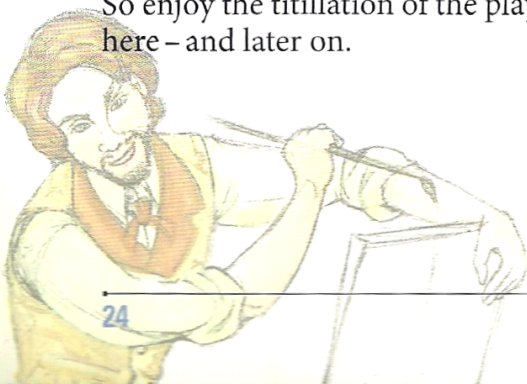
From the Director **Kristin Kundert-Gibbs**

This past summer, I spent considerable time with family and old friends. As often happens, they inquired about the play I will be directing in the upcoming season. When I explained *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* and its premise, I was inevitably asked two questions: “Is this really true?” and “Did it work?” I answered, “Yes, at the dawn of electricity, doctors really did use vibrators in medical settings to induce orgasms in women suffering from hysteria.” Did it work? “Well if you were suffering from anxiety or depression and you had twice daily orgasms would you feel better?”

This may seem rather crass, but it was the reality of women’s medicine at the time. In the playwright’s notes for the text, Sarah Ruhl writes: “Things that seem impossibly strange in the following play are all true. Things that seem commonplace are all my own invention.”

The electrification of the vibrator allowed women to better understand their own sexuality within the “safe” confines of the doctor’s office. This awakening provided an opportunity for women to explore their own bodies and sexual needs. The beauty of this particular play is that through the magic of electricity, a couple begins to find true intimacy in their marriage.

So enjoy the titillation of the play. Have fun here – and later on.



From the Dramaturg **William Tate Murdock**

On November 1, 1879, Thomas Edison patented his carbon filament lamp and sold nearly 40,000 of them in the invention’s first year alone. Other electric appliances were quick to follow: sewing machines, fans, tea kettles, and toasters. Just as quickly came the introduction of the vibrator – a slightly intimidating contraption devised to provide medical care for the countless women and handful of men diagnosed with hysteria.

Hysteria was described as a “congestion of the womb.” Symptoms included nervousness, fatigue, slight depression, and “heaviness” in the abdomen. Prior to the advent of electricity, the only treatment was for doctors or midwives to manually stimulate their patients for long periods of time to produce a “hysterical paroxysm” – what is today known as an orgasm. The invention of the vibrator provided more efficiency in treatment and, as hysteria was deemed incurable, most women diagnosed with hysteria returned for multiple treatments.

As technology advanced, it became commonplace to find personal vibrators at the local pharmacy or to see advertisements for them in periodicals and catalogues. A vibrator was part of the everyday boudoir of a housewife until the 1920s when the device’s sexual nature was evidenced in stag films. Vibrators quickly lost their image of health and innocence and were immediately removed from store shelves. Moreover, many states placed bans on the device that are still in place today. Georgia is one such state, though the law is no longer enforced.

From the Scenic Designer **Psyrl Apacible**

The unique thing about *In the Next Room* is that the set is divided into two rooms, the parlor/living room and the doctor’s office. The husband and wife have their own little world where they can be themselves. The