



BEHIND THE SCENES—

Mirette

A Resource Guide for Teachers and Parents



SHOW TIMES

APRIL 18- MAY 8

SATURDAYS 1:00 PM & 4:00 PM

SUNDAYS 1:00 PM

SCHOOL PERFORMANCES:

WED, THURS, FRI: 9:15AM & 11:15 AM

***WEEK 1 ALSO HAS SHOWS MONDAY & TUESDAY AT 10:00 AM**

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Synopsis:

The show opens with the “Artistes” setting the scene, and introducing themselves to the audience. (MADAME GATEAU’S COLORFUL HOTEL). Each Artiste shows off his or her skill, while Madame Gateau reminds Mirette there are chores to do. Mirette watches them all carefully, and wonders what it would be like to be recognized for having a special talent. (MAYBE).

At the end of the song, a stranger enters. He is Bellini, a dark, mysterious man. He says his name is Paul, and asks for a room. Madame Gateau tells him one of her tenants hasn’t paid his rent, so there may be a vacancy soon, but he is impatient. Mirette suggests a tiny room by the back stairs, and he agrees. He tells Madame that he is retired, and pays 3 months rent in advance. This is impressive. Mirette shows him to his room, and he tells her he will take his meals alone. (A TINY LITTLE ROOM).

The next morning, Mirette is doing laundry when she sees Bellini set up a practice wire in the courtyard. She watches him walk on it in fascination. The Artistes comment to each other (and to the audience) about this strange man in their midst. (PRACTICING) Mirette asks him to teach her, but he refuses. When he leaves, she tries it herself. Time passes and we watch Mirette practice until she’s able to stay on the wire. After a while, Bellini notices, and is furious that she went behind his back. He tells her to become an acrobat or a dancer – anything but a wire walker, which is too difficult and demands too much. She is stubborn and says this is what she is born to do. He explains what it is to search for who you are – and she begs him to teach her. (LEARNING WHO YOU ARE). By the end of the song, he realizes that she is serious, and agrees.

The Artistes are now in the parlor, practicing their own acts. Tabac, a young juggler, enters, dejected and tells the group that he was fired. He doesn’t know how he’ll pay his rent, and the others sympathize. The performer’s life isn’t easy, and they try to cheer him up by telling him to have faith that something will turn up. (THE SHOW GOES ON). Bellini enters, but instead of joining in, he angrily tells them he needs peace and quiet. As the party breaks up, Madame Gateau puts Mirette to bed. Mirette tells her mother that “Mr. Paul” is peculiar because wire-walkers are special. Mother is skeptical, and tells Mirette that she is lucky to have stability, and doesn’t need to take risks like the performers. She tells her that the boarding house will be hers someday. (FEET UPON THE GROUND).

The next day, Mirette arrives for her lesson, and Bellini begins to teach her, and tells her that if she chooses this path, she must dedicate her life to it, which means that she will be alone. (IF YOU CHOOSE TO WALK UPON THE WIRE). She does as he asks on the low wire, and suddenly a higher wire appears. She is frightened, and wants to stop. He tells her that she must learn what it’s like to be where there is danger – clearly he is talking to himself as well as to his pupil. Mirette does as he asks, and succeeds!

The Artistes are again in the parlor, practicing, when Max, an impresario, arrives. Tabac thinks this is just the break he needs, and hopes to catch his eye, but Max asks if it’s true that The Great Bellini is in the boarding house. They are all amazed that the melancholy man living in the small room is actually the legendary wire walker, who mysteriously stopped performing. (THE GREAT BELLINI).



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Synopsis (continued):

Mirette overhears this and confronts her teacher. He denies it, but finally tells her that something happened that changed everything, and she wouldn't understand. She asks him to trust her, and maybe she can help, even if she's only a child. He tells her that he doesn't want to teach her anymore and wants to be left alone! She asks if he's afraid of something, but he gets angry, and lashes out at her. She is stunned, but before he can take it back, she runs away. Bellini contemplates. (SOMETIMES YOU JUST NEED SOMEONE).

Tabac tells Madame that he's gotten a temporary job sweeping the stage at the Music Hall, but it's not enough to pay the rent. Clouk and Claire wonder if they should loan him the money, but he's already packed his bags. The Artistes know that this could happen to any of them, no matter how talented they are. What can they do? An artist's life is difficult, but it's what they were born to do. Madame reiterates that it's better to have a stable life, but this doesn't console Mirette, who has been miserable ever since Bellini yelled at her.

Bellini appears with his bags packed, but Madame won't let him leave without saying good-bye to Mirette. He is shocked at her appearance- a ghost of her former self. He apologizes, and tells her that she is truly talented, and could be better than him, one day. He confesses that he stopped performing because he became afraid – a fear so overwhelming that he could no longer perform. He tells her to keep practicing, and to find another teacher, but she says no. She tells him that her mother was right – that if you dream about something that won't come true, you'll just be hurt, so it's better not to dream at all, and she leaves, dejected.

Bellini watches her go, and then makes a decision. He tells Max that he will walk over the streets of Paris that very evening! Everyone is amazed, and they realize he's doing it for Mirette – so that she'll believe in her dream again. The wire is set up, but when he gets up to the rooftops, he hesitates. Mirette sees him, and climbs up to join him. As she gets near him, she holds out her hand, and he stops being afraid. They do a trick together, and neither are afraid any more. The show ends on a hopeful note (LEARNING WHO YOU ARE).

About the Authors...

Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt (Music & Lyrics) wrote *The Fantasticks* for a summer theatre at Barnard College. After its Off-Broadway opening in May 1960, it went on to become the longest-running production in the history of the American stage and one of the most frequently produced musicals in the world. It is currently running in a successful revival in New York. Their first Broadway show, *110 in the Shade*, was successfully revived by the New York City Opera in 1992, and revived again on Broadway in 2007, by the Roundabout Theatre, starring Audra MacDonald. *I DO! I DO!*, their two character musical starring Mary Martin and Robert Preston, was a success on Broadway and is frequently done around the country and the world. (One production, in Minneapolis, played for twenty-two continuous years with the same two actors in the leading roles.). For several years, Jones and Schmidt worked privately at their theatre workshop, concentrating on small-scale musicals in new and often untried forms. The most notable of these efforts were *Celebration*, which moved to Broadway, and *Philemon*, which won an Outer Critics Circle Award. They contributed incidental music and lyrics to the Off-Broadway play *Colette*, starring Zoe Caldwell, then later did a full-scale musical version under the title *Colette Collage*. In 1998, *The Show goes On*, a musical revue featuring their theatre songs and starring Jones and Schmidt, was presented at the York Theatre, and *Mirette*, their musical based on the award-winning children's book, was premiered at the Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut. In addition to an Obie Award and the 1992 Special Tony Award for *The Fantasticks*, in 1999, their "stars" were added to the Off-Broadway Walk of Fame outside the Lucille Lortel Theatre in New York.



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About the Authors (continued)...

Elizabeth Diggs (Book) is a playwright and professor of Dramatic Writing in the Goldberg Department of Dramatic Writing at Tisch, NYU. She was born in Tulsa and went to college at Brown where she co-wrote the annual musical with Emily Arnold McCully. While getting her PhD at Columbia she became involved in the anti-war and feminist movements of 1968 and beyond. In 1972, she was chosen to head one of the country's first Women's Studies Programs, at Jersey City State College. In Dramatic Writing at Tisch, she has taught some of the most gifted dramatists of the next generation. Liz's plays are both contemporary (*Close Ties*, *Goodbye Freddy*, *American Beef*) and reexaminations of history (*Nightingale*, *Custer's Luck*, *Glory Girls*, *Grant & Twain*, and the musical, *Mirette*). Liz is a longtime member of Ensemble Studio Theatre and EST's Playwrights Unit. Her plays have been produced in New York at EST and the Vineyard, and at dozens of theatres across the country and around the world. For television, she wrote for the groundbreaking drama, *St. Elsewhere*. Her many awards include Guggenheim, NEA and Kennedy Center grants, runner-up for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and the Los Angeles DramaLogue award for playwrighting. She was invited twice to the Sundance Playwrights Institute to work on the musical, *Mirette*.

Emily Arnold McCully: (Author, "Mirette on the High Wire") was born in Galesburg, Illinois, and grew up "a daredevil child," always climbing trees or buildings. She made it to college intact, however, and received her B.A. from Brown University and an M.A. in art history from Columbia University. Emily McCully's artwork has been included in the International Biennale at Bratislava, and she has won a Christopher Award for "Picnic", one of the many picture books that she has both written and illustrated. Writing also for adults, Ms. McCully has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and New York State Council on the Arts. Her book, "A Craving" was nominated for an American Book Award. The idea for "*Mirette on the High Wire*", which was awarded the Caldecott Medal, began as a biography of real-life daredevil Blondin. But the author changed her mind to accommodate the tree-climbing child and risk-taking adult she was and is.

About MainStreet's Production....(part one)

The original, 2-act musical of *Mirette* premiered at the 1994 Sundance Festival and was developed there again over the following summer. It was produced twice by the Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut: on their smaller stage in 1996, and then on the main stage in 1998. Despite the Jones/Schmidt pedigree, *Mirette* was not recorded, or widely performed after its Goodspeed production. In 2005 it received its New York premiere, with a shorter script, at the York Theatre's popular "Musicals in Mufti" series, a program that presents concert revival readings of underappreciated Broadway musicals for five performances each, with minimal staging and scripts-in-hand. The concert reading at the York Theatre received a glowing review, but aside from a few showcases, the show was not produced again professionally.

In 2014, MainStreet producer Murry Hepner approached playwright Elizabeth Diggs and asked if she'd consider re-thinking her script to make it more "TYA friendly". The idea was to bring the musical closer to the original picture book, which concentrates on the relationship between Mirette and her teacher, Bellini. She agreed to give it a try, which included cutting two characters and shortening the script to fit into the 60-70 minute constraints of two-performance school show days. The new script was approved by Ms. Diggs' collaborators, and we gathered some friends to read it (for timing), which made us love it all the more!

The result, with the added bonus of a top-notch creative team, is the show that you and your children will be seeing at the Lewis Family Playhouse. We couldn't be more thrilled to be premiering the revised version of this beautiful story, and we hope that many Theatre for Young Audience companies around the country will discover it, and include it in their seasons!



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About MainStreet's Production....(part two)

The story takes place in 1890's Paris, so the creative team will be using "old-fashioned" theatre magic to create the setting for our production. The idea is to give our young audiences a sense of the world that is illustrated so beautifully in Emily Arnold McCully's award winning book. Period costumes will help to set the characters in the proper time period.

Although we don't expect the actors playing Bellini and Mirette to *actually* become wire walkers, the production team does include a Circus Director/Consultant, who will teach all of the actors how to make the circus elements in the show appear authentic. Our goal is to have the "artistes" show off their (real) circus skills, and to use circus routines instead of typical musical theatre choreography throughout the show.

And, as with all of MainStreet's musical productions, there will be a live band on the stage. We're excited to share this Jones/Schmidt musical score with our audiences!

Characters in the Play

Madame Gateau: The proprietor of a small hotel in Paris which caters to Music Hall "artistes". Cautious, pessimistic, and extremely protective of her daughter, Mirette.

Mirette: Madame's daughter & assistant, 10 years old. Dreams of becoming a circus performer.

Bellini: A retired wire walker and the newest resident at Madame Gateau's hotel. Dark, brooding, and private about his past, but passionate about his craft.

Max: An impresario and promoter of Talent

Mme. Rouspenskaya: A singer with a "grand" manner. Russian. She has been on the scene for years. Her age is a secret.

Tabac: A juggler and jack-of-all-trades. Desperately poor, and down on his luck.

Clouk & Claire: Acrobats. A couple who know each other's every thought and gesture.

Vocabulary Words

Here are some words that are used in the play.

Boarding House	Juggler
Catastrophe	Talent
Monsieur	Impresario
Observant	Obstinate
Pride	Discipline
Marathon	Triumphant
Bon-nuit	Uncertainty
Exotic	Retired
Afraid	Sous (French money)
Extraordinary	Fantastic

Keep up to date with by signing up for the "MainStreet Scoop", which you can do right from our Facebook page! While you're there, post questions and comments about the play or your field trip experience!



www.facebook.com/MainStreetTheatreCompany

- **Write a review** of the play, describing the scenery, lighting, music, costumes, and performers.
- How did the scenery or the lighting help you to know which location each scene took place?
- What was your favorite part of the play and why? Can you draw a picture of it?

MainStreet's Production of *Mirette* is supported in part by Bank of America, and by a "Challenge America" Grant from the National Endowment of the Arts.



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Discussion Questions:

- Bellini was the greatest wire walker in the world, until he became paralyzed with fear. Even though Mirette is a child, she helps Bellini to face his fears. What does it mean to be brave? What are ways to overcome your own anxieties, worries, or fears?
- Mirette is determined to become a wire walker. Her mother is not encouraging, and wants Mirette to be practical, and to be grateful for the stability of the boarding house. Is there something your students are passionate about? If you have a dream, should you follow it even though you might not succeed? How do you persevere and not let others stand in your way? Ask the students to discuss this from both points of view. Is Mirette's mother wrong, or is she just trying to protect her child?
- In his day, Bellini was a "superstar". He teaches Mirette that being great at something takes a lot of practice, discipline, and hard work. How do your students perceive the work it takes to be a "celebrity" today?
- Tabac loves being a juggler, but he loses his job. During the play, he gets a new job sweeping the stage, instead of performing. The other performers encourage him to keep trying, but they all know it isn't always easy. Your students may have family members who have lost their jobs, too. How does that make them feel? What happens when necessity compels you to take a job that you didn't expect?
- Mirette begs Bellini to teach her, and in the end, she teaches *him* something as well. Can you give some examples of what teachers in your school have learned from their students?

Can you walk on a wire?

You don't need a real wire to experience what it's like. Lay a rope down on the floor, or draw a line with chalk, and see how hard it is to balance as you walk from one end to the other. It's not as easy as it looks! Here's a trick: Don't look down! Keep your eyes focused on where you're trying to get to.

Using the Play in the Classroom

History, Geography, Social Studies: *Mirette* takes place in Paris in the 1890's. Find Paris on a map. Can you find photos of Paris from today? How has the city changed? How has it remained the same as it was when the play takes place?

Music: If you know anything about the American Musical, you'll have heard of Harvey Schmidt & Tom Jones, who wrote *The Fantasticks* in 1960. Even though it wasn't written for children, *The Fantasticks* asks the audience to use their imagination to help tell the story. Listen to the music from that show – how do the lyrics and the music help to tell the story? How do you think the music helps to set the mood for the story of *Mirette*?

Writing (and Drawing) Exercise: Emily Arnold McCully, who wrote the book the musical is based on, wrote two additional books about Mirette and Bellini, now that they've become a wire-walking team: "Starring Mirette and Bellini", and "Mirette and Bellini Cross Niagara Falls.". Can you imagine another place they might go? Try writing a short story about Mirette and Bellini. If you like, you can try illustrating it as well.

Art: Paris in the 1890's was a center of the Art World, where Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Art Nouveau became famous. The watercolor illustrations in the original book evoke the feel of this period, and the show's production uses the illustrations as a jumping off point for the scenic and costume designs. Do some research about the Art and Artists of that time. Can you pick your favorite painting and write about it? What makes it special?

More Geography. Max arrives at the boarding house after travelling all over the world. Can you locate some of the places he mentions? St. Petersburg, Stockholm, Baden Baden, Prague, Rio de Janeiro, Transylvania. What countries are they in? Can you learn something about each place that you didn't know before?

Run away to the Circus:

You don't have to become a high wire walker to learn a few cool Circus moves. Why not start with the basics? Here are easy step-by-step directions on how to do a somersault:

You Will Need

- * A Soft surface
- * Practice

Step 1: Bend knees

Bend your knees and get into a squatting position.

Step 2: Place palms on floor

Place your palms on the floor with your elbows slightly bent.

Step 3: Tuck your head in

Tuck your head in as you straighten your legs, pushing your bottom into the air, and roll the back of your head onto a soft, flat surface. Do not put the top of your head on the floor.

Keep your chin tucked into your chest and your back rounded.

Step 4: Push with your legs

Straighten your legs as you softly push your bottom over your head.

Step 5: Stand up

Lean forward and reach your hands out as you push your legs straight and finish the somersault and land in a standing position.



Bravo!!

At home activity: French crepes!*

This is a classic French Dish that Madame Gateau might make for breakfast or dessert at the boarding house.

Directions:

1. In a medium bowl, mix flour, granulated sugar, baking powder and salt. Stir in milk, 2 tablespoons butter, the vanilla and eggs. Beat with wire whisk just until smooth.
2. Lightly butter 6- to 8-inch skillet or crepe pan. Heat over medium heat until bubbly. For each crepe, pour slightly less than 1/4 cup batter into skillet. Immediately tilt and rotate skillet so thin layer of batter covers bottom. Cook until light brown. Run wide spatula around edge to loosen; turn and cook other side until light brown. Repeat with remaining batter, buttering skillet as needed.



3. Stack crepes, placing waxed paper between each; keep covered. Spread applesauce, sweetened berries, jelly or jam thinly over each warm crepe; roll up. (Be sure to fill crepes so when rolled the more attractive side is on the outside.) Sprinkle with powdered sugar

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups milk
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 2 eggs

Butter, margarine or shortening
Applesauce, sweetened berries,
jelly or jam, if desired
Powdered sugar, if desired

*from Betty Crocker.com



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FROM THE STAGE TO THE PAGE ... @ THE RANCHO CUCAMONGA LIBRARIES

Books serve as inspiration for our imagination, hearts, and for this theater performance! The library is great place for families to continue their theater experience. Families can choose from all kinds of materials including: books, audio books, CDs, magazines, and other materials. Come visit the award winning Rancho Cucamonga Libraries for all your learning and entertainment needs!

LIBRARY TOUR INFORMATION

As part of your class visit to the Lewis Family Playhouse, why not take a tour of the Victoria Gardens Cultural Center Library?

Show your students about the wonderful, free resources they have access too and exciting library programming. The Paul A. Biane Library facility has over 100,000 volumes housed in a beautiful, 23,000 square foot facility.

Among the facility's unique features: a story theater with a star ceiling made of fiber optic lights, 20 seat technology center, teen study area, and a special performing arts collection.

The [Paul A. Biane Library at Victoria Gardens](#) has over 1000 books and media in the Performing Arts collections for Adults and Children.



Pre- and post- show tours last approximately 15 minutes and are scheduled on a first come, first served basis. To arrange a tour, please call Lorena Paz, Librarian, at (909) 477-2720 ext. 5058.

PROGRAMS AND FAMILY FUN @ THE RANCHO CUCAMONGA LIBRARIES

The [Rancho Cucamonga Libraries](#) offer a full calendar of entertaining, enriching and informative programs for the whole family.

Weekly story times

Discovery Club – Ages 6-12

- Archibald Library – Wed. @ 4 pm
- Biane Library – Thurs. @ 4pm

Special events

Earth Day

- Biane Library – Sat. April 16th, 1-4 pm

Cultural Arts Nights

“Asian & Pacific Islander Cultural Arts Night

- Biane Library - Fri. May 20th, 7-9 pm

BOOKS @ THE LIBRARY

If you liked Mirette, you'll love these!

Song and Dance Man

By Karen Ackerman

Shelved under **Award Books EASY ACKERMAN**

Charlotte in Paris

By Joan Knight

Shelved under **Juvenile Fiction KNIGHT**

Starring Mirette & Bellini

By Emily McCully

Shelved under **Picture Books EASY MCCULLY**

The Man Who Walked Between the Towers

By Mordicai Gerstein

Shelved under **Award Books J 791.3409 GER**

Paris

By Gill Stacey

Shelved under **Juvenile Non Fiction J 944 STA**



This Curriculum guide was prepared by the staff of the Lewis Family Playhouse. Library information compiled by Library staff. For questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact Mireya “Murry” Hepner at (909) 477-2775 ext. 3734.