

STUDY GUIDE

GRAND GHOSTS

By Trina Davies

Directed by Jillian Kelley

OCT 18 TO NOV 5
ON THE SPRIET STAGE

HAVE YOU SEEN
AMBROSE
SMALL?

In 1919 something happened . . .



World Premiere!

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...ville-in-
...n't stop
...and we can
...to share it with
...ed with music,
...nce, and spectacle, or
...ghosts will haunt you with
...their rendition of a time in
...our theatre's history that
...remains a mystery. And,
...who knows? Perhaps our
...ghost, Ambrose, might just
...drop in while you're here...

WHO WAS AMBROSE SMALL?

Ambrose Joseph Small was a Canadian theatre magnate who owned several Ontario-based theatres including the Grand Theatre in London. The last known sighting of Small occurred the evening of December 2, 1919. At age 53, Small owned theatres in seven Ontario cities and was the controller of 62 other buildings, a self-made millionaire at the height of his career.

Start at the beginning

1866

Ambrose Small is born on January 11, 1866, in Newmarket, Ontario, to Daniel Small, an innkeeper, and Helen (Ellen) Brazell, each twenty years old.

1880

Small's family moves to Toronto, where Daniel becomes the manager of the Grand Hotel. Next door to the hotel is the Grand Opera House, a prestigious establishment that presents the best shows coming out of New York.

1884

Young Small begins working at the opera house as an usher and bartender. He's also involved in an illegal bookmaking operation taking bets on horse races.

1889

After a quarrel with Grand Opera House manager Oliver B. Sheppard, Small goes to work for the Toronto Opera House, a venue for vaudeville and popular melodrama on the touring circuits controlled from New York and Montreal. While Small learns the intricacies of the business and is promoted to manager, his mother dies. His father marries Josephine Kormann, daughter of wealthy beer baron Ignatius Kormann.

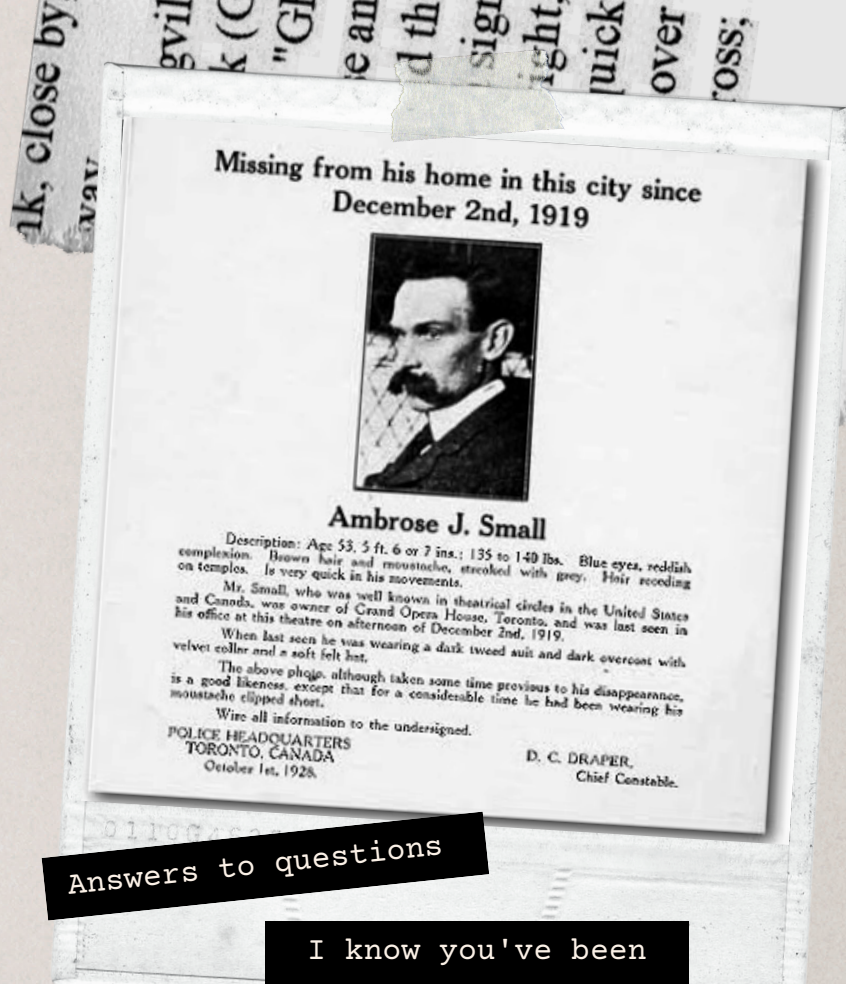
1901

In London, The Grand Opera House is the focus of theatrical activity in the second half of the 19th century. Although it's destroyed by fire in 1900, it's now replaced by the Grand Theatre, at the present site.

1902

Ambrose goes into partnership with Detroit theatre mogul Clark J. Whitney, who controls a major circuit in Ontario. When Whitney dies, Small buys theatres in Peterborough, Hamilton, St. Thomas, Kingston and other communities across Ontario.

Ambrose marries Theresa Kormann, his stepmother's younger sister, in 1902 in York (Toronto). The Smalls live in an opulent mansion in Toronto's affluent Rosedale district. They never have children.



1905

Theresa uses some of her family money to help Ambrose purchase theatres he's leasing, including the London Grand Opera House. London is one of Ambrose's favourite cities and he gives the theatre his special attention.

1919

Live theatre is in decline due to the growing popularity of motion pictures, the impact of WWI and the Spanish Flu. Small decides to get out of the business and strikes a deal to sell his chain of theatres to Trans-Canada Theatres Limited of Montreal for \$1.75 million. On December 1, 1919, Small sells all of his theatre holdings. The following day, he meets with lawyer F. W. M. Flock in Small's office at the Grand Opera House. Flock leaves at 5:30 p.m. and is the last person to see Small.

1920

In January 1920, Small's attorney and Theresa Small, now alarmed by Small's lengthy absence, notify the local police. Theresa offers a \$50,000 reward for information about her husband's disappearance and whereabouts if found alive, and \$15,000 if dead. The reward went unclaimed.



Grand Ghosts by Trina Davies

STUDY GUIDE

Synopsis

On December 2, 1919, Ontario theatre magnate Ambrose Small sold all of his theatre holdings, including London's Grand Theatre, for a record sum. That very day, he disappeared. In his wake, Ambrose left behind his enormous fortune, a jealous wife, a disgruntled employee, gambling buddies, a mistress, and a ghostly mystery waiting to be solved.

In this world premiere imagining, every Halloween, Ambrose Small gathers the ghosts of the Grand Theatre to replay his 1919 disappearance, hoping to work out what happened, who was responsible and to achieve both vengeance and peace. For over a hundred years it has been the same story. This year he's going to change the outcome, to get what he's deserved, what he's had coming to him all these years.

The Cast of Characters

Ghost 'Ingenuer' as: Clara Smith / Chorus	<i>Ambrose's lover</i>
Ambrose Small	<i>Theatre tycoon</i>
Ghost 'Acrobat' as: John Doughty (Jack)	<i>Ambrose's right-hand man in the business</i>
Ghost 'Contortionist Gambler' as: Jennie the Bookie / Chorus	
Ghost 'Security Guard' as: Mitchell / Chorus	<i>Policeman assigned to the Ambrose case</i>
Emcee / Chorus	
Ghost 'Singing Diva' as: Theresa Small	<i>Ambrose's wife</i>
Ghost 'Dramatic Actress' as: Violet / Chorus	
Ghost 'Scaffold Worker' as: Painter / Frank (Contractor) / Hammond / Chorus	

Creative Team

Playwright	Trina Davies
Director	Jillian Keiley
Musical Director, Composer & Pianist	Allen Cole
Choreographer	Genny Sermonia
Set Designer	Shawn Kerwin
Costume Designer	Joseph Abetria
Lighting Designer	Bonnie Beecher
Sound Designer	Richard Feren
Tap Dance Choreographer	Andrew Prashad
Stage Manager	Suzanne McArthur
Assistant Stage Manager	Kelly Boudreau
Apprentice Stage Manager	Andrea Handal Rivera

Fun Facts

Grand Ghosts was originally commissioned and developed by the Grand Theatre, London, Canada as part of the COMPASS New Play Development.

- The COMPASS New Play Development Program is dedicated to creating and premiering new work on our stages. With a goal to enhance new theatrical content in Canada, the Grand will commission, develop, and premiere original plays that are relevant to our city, and region. While these homegrown plays will begin here, the COMPASS program endeavours to sustain and heighten the lives of our stories – promoting their potential for stages around the world. www.grandtheatre.com/compass

A ghost light is an electric light that is left on at centre stage of a theatre when the theatre is unoccupied and would otherwise be completely dark. It's usually a bare bulb on a stand.

- A popular theatrical superstition holds that every theatre has a ghost, and some theatres have traditions to appease ghosts that reach far back into their history. Ghost lights provide opportunities for ghosts to perform onstage, thus appeasing them and preventing them from sabotaging the set or production.



Watch out for a specially designed and built piano on stage that Music Director, Composer, and Pianist, Allen Cole, operates and plays throughout the performance.

- An electric keyboard sits in this grand piano which glides smoothly around the stage on hydraulics that Allen can control with a foot peddle to release the hydraulics and keep the piano from moving once he's positioned properly.
- Special LED light tape is used to illuminate this piano. The light tape is battery operated and controlled from the booth – way above your heads at the top of the Spriet Stage!

Costume design by Joseph Abetria has the ghost characters appearing as they looked on the day of their untimely death. Using makeup special effects and costume treatments to achieve these looks means you might notice a scar on someone's neck or a stab wound through the back of another's costume.

Specifically, the Emcee is a unique and intriguing character to dissect further as they were written and designed to inhabit both masculine and feminine qualities, as well as Dionysian characteristics. Deriving from Greek mythology, "Dionysian" refers to the sensual, spontaneous, and emotional aspects of human nature. The Emcee controls the show for the purpose of audience entertainment.



Proscenium Arch

Speaking to the set's unique design, which honours the Grand's historic proscenium, Set Designer Shawn Kerwin says it's a "love letter to theatre, specifically the Grand Theatre". The Grand Theatre in London was purpose-built for touring productions in 1901, complete with the original proscenium arch, one of the last remaining in Canada, featuring original artwork by muralist Frederick S. Challener.



During the 1977 renovations, the famous proscenium arch almost collapsed due to heavy equipment operating. The construction equipment kept breaking-down. When the crew went to investigate, they discovered only two bricks were holding up the arch. Some believe that it was the theatre's ghost, Ambrose Small, who stopped the machinery and saved the arch.



Pre-show Activity/Discussion Questions

Learn about Vaudeville

The Vaudeville era is a large source of inspiration for the content, design, and music in *Grand Ghosts*.

Vaudeville is a theatrical genre of variety entertainment born in France at the end of the 19th century. It became popular in the United States and Canada from the early 1880s until the early 1930s and evolved to mean a live performance that consisted of 10 to 15 individual unrelated acts such as: popular and classical musicians, singers, dancers, comedians, trained animals, magicians, ventriloquists, strongmen, female and male impersonators, acrobats, clowns, illustrated songs, jugglers, one-act plays or scenes from plays, athletes, lecturing celebrities, minstrels, and movies.

A vaudeville performer is often referred to as a "vaudevillian"

- 1) Which is your favourite form of Vaudeville entertainment and why?
- 2) Research this era and learn 2-3 facts about a "vaudevillian" you find interesting.
- 3) What is a problem you can identify with vaudeville? What are some factors that led to the decline and end of the era?

Post-show Activity/Discussion Questions

Play Detective

Here is a best guess at the details leading up to Ambrose's disappearance:

December 2, 1919

- Ambrose and Theresa left their Rosedale home in Toronto at different times.
- At 2pm, Ambrose arrives at Grand Opera House and there meets his wife, Mrs. Theresa Small and his lawyer, F.W.M. Flock.

This is where it gets tricky...

- a) Ambrose and Theresa Small went to Dominion Bank then meet Flock in a tearoom adjoining the theatre *OR*
 - b) Ambrose went shopping for Theresa, buying her a new Cadillac, fur coat and jewellery while she deposited the cheque *OR*
 - c) Ambrose deposited cheque into his own account.
- After lunch, Ambrose dropped Theresa off at the Catholic orphanage saying he'd be home for dinner around 6pm. Ambrose meets Flock again at the Grand Opera House around 5pm. Flock leaves 5:30pm and was the last person to see Ambrose Small.

Using your deductive reasoning, additional research, what you experienced during *Grand Ghosts*, or your gut instincts, what do *you* think happened?