

Caroline, or Change
book and lyrics by Tony Kushner
music by Jeanine Tesori

WORKSHEET

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Mara Manus, Executive Director

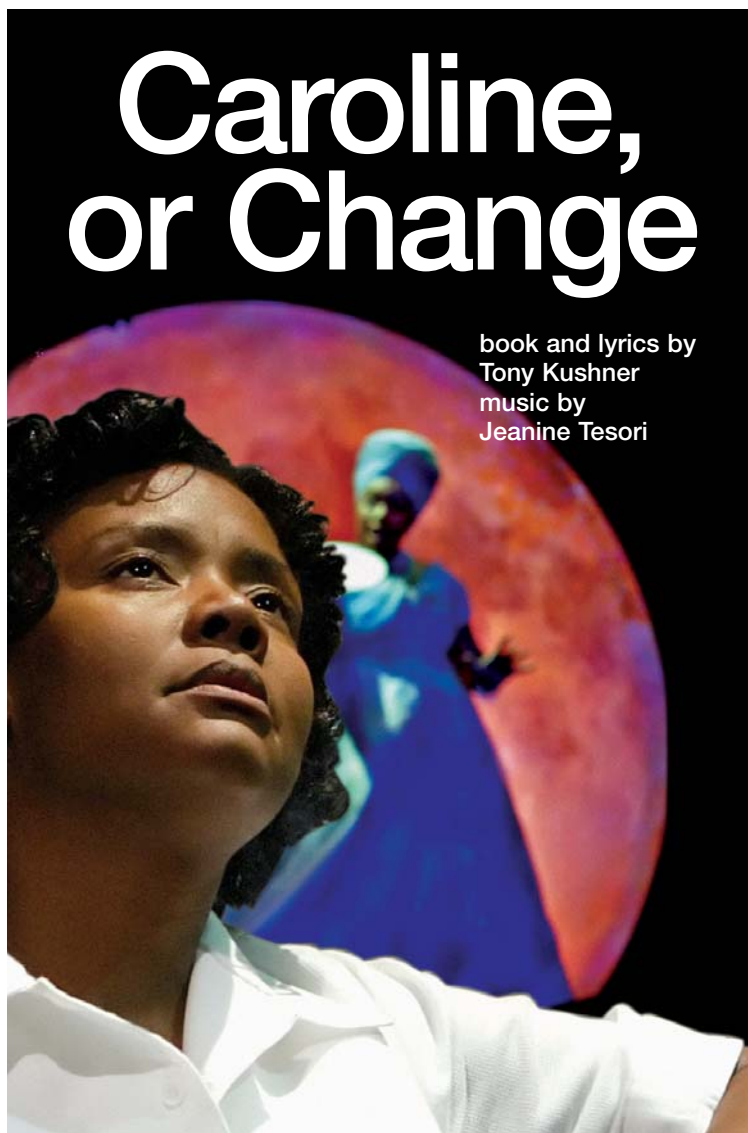


photo (Tonya Pinkins as Caroline Thibodeaux) by Michal Daniel

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Caroline, or Change

CAST

Caroline Thibodeaux **TONYA PINKINS**
The Washing Machine **MALINDA PARRIS**
The Radio **RAMONA KELLER,**
JOY MALCOLM, NATAYLIA RONI
Noah Gellman (alternating)
GREG BERNSTEIN, PERRY MILLWARD,
JONNY WELDON
The Dryer/The Bus **CLIVE ROWE**
Grandma Gellman **VALDA AVIKS**
Grandpa Gellman **IAN LAVENDER**
Rose Stopnick Gellman **ANNA FRANCOLINI**
Stuart Gellman **RICHARD HENDERS**
Dotty Moffett **NORA COLE**
The Moon **ANGELA M CAESAR**
Emmie Thibodeaux **PIPPA BENNETT-**
WARNER
Mr Stopnick **HILTON McRAE**
Jackie Thibodeaux (alternating)
RONALD CHABVUKA, LOUIS EKOKU
MITCHELL ZHANGHAZA
Joe Thibodeaux (alternating)
KAZIM BENSON, KUAN FRYE,
JAMAL HOPE

Understudies:

NAANA AGYEI-AMPADU (Radio 2/Emmie),
TRICIA DEIGHTON (Grandma Gellman),
THOMAS GOODRIDGE (The Dryer/The Bus),
JOY MALCOLM (Radio 1),
JODIE MICHAELS (Rose Stopnick Gellman),
EDWARD NEWBORN (Grandpa Gellman/Mr
Stopnick),
AMANDA POSENER (Radio 3/Washing
Machine), **SIMON TUCK** (Stuart Gellman),
ANNABELLE WILLIAMS (The Moon)

Orchestra

Conductor **MARTIN LOWE**
Keyboards/Asst Conductor **MARK ETHERINGTON**
Violins **CATHERINE HAGGO** (leader),
JOANNA WATTS
Viola **JANE ATKINS**
Cello **VICTORIA MATTHEWS**
Clarinets/flute/alto saxophone **STEVE PIERCE**
Bassoon/clarinet/tenor sax **SIMON HOLLAND**
Guitars/mandolin **MITCH DALTON**
Double bass **FRASER SNELL**
Percussion **GARETH ROBERTS, MAGNUS MEHTA**

Director **GEORGE C WOLFE**
Choreographer **HOPE CLARKE**
Set Designer **RICCARDO HERNANDEZ**
Costume Designer **PAUL TAZEWELL**
Lighting Designers **JULES FISHER** and
PEGGY EISENHAUER
Sound Designer **MIKE WALKER**
Original & US Music Supervisor
KIMBERLEY GRIGSBY
UK Music Supervisor **MARTIN LOWE**
Orchestrations **RICK BASSETT,**
JOSEPH JOUBERT, BURLY RED
Associate Music Director
MARK ETHERINGTON
Dialect Coach **MICHAELA KENNEN**
Company Voice Work **ANNEMETTE VERSPEAK**
Staff Director **CLIVE PAGET**

Opening of this production:

Lyttelton Theatre 19 October 2006

Brief summary



Caroline (Tonya Pinkins)
photo Catherine Ashmore

The musical is set in Lake Charles, Louisiana in 1963. Caroline Thibodeaux is a 39-year-old African-American maid employed by the Gellmans, a middle class Jewish family. Caroline is a divorcee with four children to support and has been working as a maid for 22 years. Working all day in the humid basement of the house, she talks to the washing machine, the dryer and the radio. She also has a close relationship with Noah, the eight-year-old son of the family. Noah's mother has recently died of cancer and his father, Stuart has married Rose, a family friend. Rose struggles to form a bond with Noah and is critical of the way he leaves his money in the trousers that Caroline is to wash. When she decides to impose a new rule that Caroline can keep any change that she finds, Rose sets in motion a sequence of events that leads to a devastating fight between Caroline and Noah but also, ultimately, to a series of resolutions for each of the characters.

Set against the background of the American Civil Rights movement (championed by Caroline's politicised daughter Emmie) and the assassination of President Kennedy, the musical shows how people confront change on both a personal and a national level.

Synopsis

Scene 1

The basement of the Gellman's house in Lake Charles, Louisiana. It is November 1963. The maid, Caroline Thibodeaux, enters to do the daily laundry. As she gets on with the washing and sorting the clothes she observes that the basement is unusual as the town is 16 feet below sea level. In her own world Caroline has created personalities for the washing machine and the radio, who talk to her, reminding her of what she has failed to achieve in her life. When she takes a break, Noah Gellman appears, an introspective eight-year-old for whom the secret highlight of the day is lighting Caroline's cigarette. After Noah leaves, Caroline is taunted by the embodiment of the electric clothes dryer. This is the worst part of her day, when the humid basement becomes a purgatory in the heat generated by the dryer. As she sweats she tells us of her broken dreams of a better life, especially since becoming a divorcee with four kids to support. She feels that she is literally 16 feet underwater.

Scene 2

The Gellmans are a middle class Jewish family. Noah's mother, Betty, has died sometime in the past year and his father, Stuart, a clarinet player, has married Rose, an old family friend from New York. Stuart's parents, Grandma and

Caroline and Noah
photo Catherine Ashmore



Grandpa Gellman tell Noah that his mother died because she smoked too many cigarettes. Caroline, on the other hand, tells him that cancer is God's way of testing people. Finally Stuart confuses him even more by telling him that there is no God. Rose struggles to engage with Caroline, who rejects every attempt at friendship. When Rose finds money left in Noah's pockets again, Noah reveals that despite her attempts to be nice to him, he hates Rose with all his heart.

Scene 3

Rose calls her father in New York to tell him how she is getting on in the South. As they chat it appears that Stuart still misses Betty, that Rose knows that Noah hates her and that Rose is irritated by the money that Caroline finds left in Noah's clothes: she feels that is embarrassing to Caroline, who earns so little. Finally, the normally irrepressible Rose reveals how isolated and miserable she feels.

Scene 4

Caroline waits for the bus after her working day and her old friend, Dotty Moffett, tries to start a conversation. Dotty is also a maid but is going to night school as she has recently acquired a boyfriend with a car. Caroline attacks her for having changed, for dressing inappropriately, running with men, drinking and a host of other things. Dotty retaliates by pointing out that it's Caroline who has changed – she has become “pinched and pruney” like the ladies at her church. However, Dotty swallows her pride and manages to engage Caroline in gossip about a local event. It turns out that the statue of a Confederate Soldier – symbolising the South's part in the Civil War – was stolen from outside the courthouse the previous night. Dotty is delighted but Caroline senses trouble will come of it. Eventually the bus appears, but it brings the terrible news of President Kennedy's assassination in Dallas. Back at the Gellman house Rose challenges Noah for persistently leaving money in his pockets. Noah defies her and Rose imposes a new rule on him: from now on, any money

Synopsis

found in the laundry will belong to Caroline. Finally the older Gellmans arrive to share the news about the President.

Scene 5

Caroline sits on her porch listening to sad songs on the radio and smoking – this is her time of the day. Her daughter Emmie, a feisty 16-year-old, returns, late, from having fun with her friends. Caroline scolds her for this behaviour when a national tragedy has occurred but Emmie scorns JFK and his failure to deliver on the civil rights agenda. Eventually they are reconciled and Emmie goes to bed. Joined emotionally by the night and the moon, Caroline ‘talks’ to Noah in bed on the other side of town. Noah asks what Caroline would do if she were president. She would pass laws to bring her eldest son, Larry back from Vietnam, “wherever that is”, and to keep Emmie as contrary as she is. Noah tells how he likes Caroline, as his mother did, and thinks that she likes him too. Caroline is full of regrets for what she hasn’t got and what she can’t give her kids.

Scene 6

Rose tries to get Caroline inside with her plan to deal with Noah and the money he leaves in his pockets. As usual Caroline blocks any attempt at a friendly relationship – any money

she finds she puts in the bleach cup where Noah expects to recover it. Nevertheless Rose tells her that she can keep any money she finds. Meanwhile Stuart has been told to talk to Noah about money. Despite forgetting how old his son is, he manages to tell the boy that he is giving him a “dollar fifty” allowance every week as an incentive to be more responsible. Noah now starts a game by deliberately leaving money in his pockets to see what Caroline will do with it. Initially Caroline decides to take small change while refusing to take a whole dollar. As he leaves more and more money, Caroline experiences an increasingly agonising moral dilemma, but eventually takes 75 cents home for her children. As she hands over the money, a whole world of possibilities opens up for Emmie and for Caroline’s two small sons, Jackie and Joe. Noah imagines how his money will be received by the Thibodeaux kids – how they will talk about him and eventually take him in to live with them. Emmie tells Jackie and Joe a made-up story about a boy called Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw who questioned his mother and was hit so hard he died. In heaven he had all the money he could want and ended up marrying the moon. As they play and dance, Noah enters into their game and eventually becomes a part of their world along with the moon who comes down to join in.

Caroline, with the washing machine (left) and the Radio (right)

photo Catherine Ashmore



Interval

Scene 7

Christmas is approaching and Caroline is sorting clothes in the basement. The washing machine and radio express her dilemma: although Christmas is expensive she has decided to resist the temptation of the money she finds. As she reflects, she goes into a reverie where we learn about her past: Caroline married a sailor in the US Navy who fought in WWII but once he returned home, couldn’t find work. He turned to drink, eventually hitting her and breaking her nose. After that, Caroline took work as a maid to support the family while trying to protect her

Synopsis

husband from the shame of unemployment. One day, now with a family of four children, he hit her again. She beat him black and blue and he consequently left her, something that she has never recovered from, blaming her own anger for destroying their marriage. Ever since, she has buried herself in the basement, afraid that if she ever reached for anything again she might end up hurting those she loves. In the middle of this painful reminiscence, Rose enters with one of Stuart's shirts. He has left a coin in the pocket which Caroline has ironed over, burning the face of George Washington into the pocket. Rose offers Caroline the shirt. Caroline snaps and threatens to hit her with the iron if she bothers her with money again. Rose apologises and leaves, and as Caroline thinks about what her children will want for Christmas she decides to take the money once more.

Scene 8

The Gellmans are celebrating Chanukah with a party to which Rose's father, Mr Stopnick, has been invited. Noah is the unwilling centre of attention and escapes to the kitchen where Caroline, Dotty and Emmie are helping with the catering. Stopnick's left-wing views on the civil rights movement are unwelcome to the older Gellmans who would prefer not to upset a peaceful family celebration with politics. As the family dance to Stuart's clarinet, he breaks

The Gellman family, with Mr Stopnick (centre back)
photo Catherine Ashmore



down, overwhelmed by the memory of his dead first wife. In the kitchen Dotty and Emmie discuss the theft of the statue of the Confederate Soldier, which has apparently been found without its head in the bayou; the authorities are blaming "coloured boys". Emmie seems troubled, especially by the breakdown in law and order encapsulated in the recent shooting by Jack Ruby of Lee Harvey Oswald on live TV. Caroline doesn't want Emmie involved and sends her into the dining room where she engages in a heated argument with Stopnick about the value of Martin Luther King's programme of peaceful protest (Stopnick believes the protest shouldn't be peaceful: "nonviolence will get you burned.") Caroline is furious and humiliates her daughter by ordering her back into the kitchen. Emmie turns on her mother, taunting her about being afraid to stand up to white people. Caroline slaps her daughter and walks out. Back at the party, Stopnick gives Noah a present of a 20 dollar bill, along with a lecture on money: "Here in the Devil's South you rip you gold from a starving man's mouth." Despite this the evening ends disastrously for Rose with Noah running upstairs and Stuart neither able to talk to his son nor go back downstairs and face his wife. As Emmie waits at the bus stop, she reflects on what she lacks in life; the other characters are forced to confront their own problems.

Scene 9

The next day Noah goes off to school where he plans how to spend his Chanukah gift. Suddenly the awful realisation dawns that he has left the money in his trousers. He runs home but it is too late, Caroline has found the 20 dollars and refuses to return it. Noah rages at her that he hopes President Johnson, who he claims has built a bomb designed to kill all Negroes, will drop it on her. In hatred, Caroline retaliates by telling Noah that as a Jew, he'll go to hell when he dies. She gives him the money and walks out, leaving Noah to put the note in the bleach cup in the hope that she'll return for it. Rose comes home to find Caroline gone but

Synopsis

Noah can't tell her what has happened.

Scene 10

Three days pass and Caroline still hasn't returned. Rose finds the \$20 in the bleach cup and she and Stuart question Noah about it. Just as it seems that he will confess, Mr Stopnick appears and says that the money is his. He takes it back – Noah has been taught a hard lesson. Rose calls Dotty to try to find out what has happened to Caroline. Stopnick tries to point out to Rose that although she may have subconsciously driven a wedge between Noah and the maid, she may be able to become his mother. Rose feels that whatever happened she has failed, but Stopnick tells her to wait and see.

Scene 11

Dotty finds Caroline and advises her to call the Gellmans and quit. She recognises her friend's deep sadness and tells her that she needs to move on and change or else she will "drown in the basement". Caroline tells Dotty that she is going to church to pray and tells her to leave. Caroline then passionately assesses her situation and determines that from here on she will crush her spirit flat so that her hate and anger can never again rise up. She asks God to "murder my dreams to I stop wantin'." After a fervent prayer, she embraces her daughter and goes on to church.

Scene 12

As Rose tucks Noah into bed he calls her by her name for the first time and asks her whether his mother is buried underwater. Rose comforts him and then goes downstairs where she is also able to comfort Stuart, who has begun to grieve at last. During the night, Noah speaks to Caroline again. She has returned to work and tells him that one day they will talk again despite their mutual pain and sorrow. Finally, in an epilogue, Emmie appears and admits she was responsible for the removal of the statue from outside the courthouse. She is proud of her mother, a maid: her strength enabled her to defeat an

image of a past evil. As her younger brothers come out of the house, the three of them join hands and acknowledge the blood that flows through all of the children of Caroline Thibodeaux.

Characters

Caroline Thibodeaux is a divorced African-American mother of four children. At 39 she is still working as a poorly-paid maid and is acutely conscious of her missed opportunities and lost dreams. She is a woman of immense strength and great potential but has condemned herself to working in the Gellman's basement as a self-inflicted punishment for what she feels is the rage inside her that drove her husband to leave some years previously. In reality she was the victim of abuse (having had her nose broken on one occasion) but Caroline's strict moral code won't allow her to accept this. She has been brought up to accept a second class place for the Negro in society and she lashes out at her rebellious daughter for stepping out of line, although at the same time she is fiercely proud of Emmie's independent spirit. Caroline is aware of the pressure to change but uses her implacable inner strength to consciously crush any chances of her moving forward.

Emmie Thibodeaux is a feisty 16-year-old on the verge of becoming a woman. She is supportive of Martin Luther King's campaign of civil disobedience and has taken direct action herself through her involvement in the secret nocturnal removal of a statue of the Confederate Soldier (a symbol of white oppression) from outside the Courthouse. Initially contemptuous of Caroline's position as a maid in a white family, she learns to be proud of her mother's strength and her own Black heritage.

Jackie and Joe Thibodeaux are Caroline's two youngest children. They have been brought up in considerable poverty, but thanks to Caroline's untiring efforts to keep her family in food and clothing they are happy, especially when playing with their sister.

Dotty Moffett is an old friend of Caroline who also works as a maid. Dotty, however, positively embraces change and is going to night school. She also has a boyfriend with a car. She cares about Caroline and wants to

help her, invariably with good advice. She also supports Emmie's independence, although not so far as condoning disrespect for her mother.

Noah Gellman is a shy but inquiring 8-year-old who has recently lost his mother (and on an emotional level lost his father as well). He is particularly worried that his mother was buried underground, which in Louisiana means underwater. Surrounded by grown-ups who frequently offer conflicting points of view, he is closely bound to Caroline who represents a degree of permanence in the household and who had a firm friendship with his mother.

Stuart Gellman is a professional clarinettist and teacher. His wife, Betty, a professional bassoonist (they sat side-by-side in the orchestra) died within the last year and Stuart has married Rose, an old family friend, in order to help make a new start and to give Noah maternal support. Stuart however hasn't yet grieved and buries himself in his music instead of confronting his loss. As a result he has lost the close connection he used to have with his son and hasn't really formed a proper marital relationship with Rose.

Grandpa and Grandma Gellman

When Betty was alive, Grandpa and Grandma Gellman were regular visitors to the house. Now, however, they feel excluded, reduced to walking past and hoping to be invited in. This isn't because Rose is inhospitable, just that things are different. Stuart's parents are typical assimilated Southern Jews. As such they prefer a quiet life and use their all-consuming politeness to keep conflict at bay.

Rose Stopnick Gellman is a relative newcomer to the Gellman house having moved to Lake Charles from New York in order to marry Stuart. Her high energy northern ways are in sharp contrast to the more relaxed behaviour in the south and her desire to organise the household, especially Noah, makes her immediately unpopular with the boy. Rose has grown up with strong principles

Characters

especially where money is concerned and each new day for her is a new opportunity to sort out what she sees as the problems at hand. Behind the capable veneer though, Rose has nothing to do at home all day and is painfully aware that she isn't Betty.

Mr Stopnick is Rose's father and a left-wing liberal New York Jew. Like many northerners he shares a suspicion that southern politeness is a mask for casual racism. He is an advocate of armed political struggle in order for the poor to get a fair deal. He likes the sound of his own voice and enjoys nothing better than a debate, especially where Civil Rights are concerned. Despite his gruff exterior, he possesses considerable insight into human behaviour, especially his daughter's.

The Domestic Appliances

Caroline has projected personalities onto the inanimate objects that fill her daily routine in the Gellman's basement. On the one hand they are company for her solitary working existence and on the other they are an extension of her subconscious self-punishment. In this way, they both convey to the audience a lot of information about her life but on a psychological level they torment her by constantly pointing out her short-comings and failures.

Outwardly, the radio is gorgeous and vain, contrasting its own glamour with Caroline's dowdiness – its three parts look and sing like a Motown girl group. The washing machine is brand new and essentially a force for good, pushing Caroline to make choices that will move her life on. The electric clothes dryer is the baleful overseer of Caroline's working day, goading her on and mentally tormenting her at every opportunity. On another level though, in George C Wolfe's production, he imagines them as the spirits of slaves from America's darker past, buried along with Caroline below the Louisiana alluvial silt.

The Moon watches over all of the characters, dispensing calm and healing at one moment while creating magical pennies and dimes for the children at another.

In George C Wolfe's production she is specifically linked to an older African tradition – that of Brazilian Candomblé and chiefly Yemanjá, the goddess of the oceans (or the moon in Haitian voodoo).

The moon, Noah, the Thibodeaux children, and Caroline
photo Catherine Ashmore



Background to time and place

A Civil Rights timeline for the USA in the 1950s and 1960s

1955

Rosa Parks triggers the Montgomery bus boycott

1957

Federal troops sent in to enforce school integration in Little Rock

1960

Greensboro' sit-in by black students demanding service at a lunch counter.
Kennedy defeats Nixon in Presidential elections

1961

Soviet Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin is the first man in space.

Kennedy initiates Peace Corps.

Bay of Pigs Invasion.

The Berlin Wall goes up separating communist East Berlin from the West.

Vietnam War officially begins with 900 military advisors landing in Saigon

1962

Cuban Missile Crisis.

Troops escort black student James Meredith to Mississippi University

1963

Sheriff 'Bull' Connor orders hoses and dogs on protestors in Birmingham, Alabama.

John F Kennedy assassinated.

Lyndon Johnson becomes President.

March on Washington; Martin Luther King, Jr. 'I have a Dream' speech

1964

Johnson signs Civil Rights Act of 1964

1965

Voting Rights Act abolishes discriminatory tests for black citizens.

Watts Race Riots in Los Angeles begin the 'long, hot, summer'.

Assassination of Malcolm X

1966 Mississippi rally begins the 'Black Power' movement

1968

Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated

Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy assassinated

Civil Rights Act of 1968

The Civil Rights Movement and 1963

The 1950s witnessed considerable gains in the struggle for equal rights for Black Americans. The Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, triggered by Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat to a white passenger, was led by a young minister named Martin Luther King. Collective peaceful action (modelled on Mahatma Gandhi's successful programme in India) led to Alabama being forced to repeal its transportation segregation laws despite the lack of enthusiasm of the Eisenhower administration. The following years saw several other key challenges force the federal government to push through equality legislation in education and other areas in various southern states.

By the 1960s, racial injustice was a central issue as the media showed often brutal white reprisals against Black protestors. In 1963 Martin Luther King was heading a coalition aiming to force integration in Birmingham, Alabama through a series of non-violent sit-ins at lunch counters, kneel-ins at white churches and peaceful marches. The city police, led by Commissioner Eugene 'Bull' Connor dispersed the demonstrators, many of whom were children, with high pressure water hoses and police dogs. Governor Wallace went as far as to stand on the steps of the University to bar entrance to two black students. At this point, Kennedy sent in federal troops who escorted the students and Wallace was dramatically forced to step aside.

Later in August, more than 200,000 people gathered in Washington to hear King deliver his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. These great moments in the Civil Rights history of the US immediately precede the action of *Caroline, or Change* and of course directly influence the actions of Caroline's daughter Emmie and her friends when they remove the statue of the Confederate Soldier from outside the Lake Charles courthouse.

Background to time and place

The Assassination of John F Kennedy

On 22 November 1963, John F Kennedy was assassinated while he was traveling with his wife, Jacqueline, in a motorcade in Dallas, Texas. He was rushed to hospital where he was pronounced dead. Two days later, the assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was being moved to another prison when he was shot dead by Jack Ruby, a local nightclub owner with a shady past; the killing took place on live TV. Few events in American history have caused such bewilderment and grief on an international scale. Kennedy was a war hero with a glamorous wife whose administration was likened by the media to King Arthur's *Camelot* (coincidentally the title of a hit Broadway musical in the 1960s).

These extraordinary and turbulent events form the background to the week in which the musical takes place. John F Kennedy was an amazingly popular and charismatic President who represented, almost naively, the potential for positive social and political change in the United States. This is contrasted directly with the atmosphere of the Gellman home, where the death of the wife and mother has plunged the household into a period of dysfunctional emotional inertia. Although the political events are not the direct trigger for the resolutions within the family, they provide the large scale framework which acts as a mirror for small scale domestic events.

Lake Charles, Louisiana

Bounded by the steamy Atchafalaya swamp on the east, the Gulf of Mexico to the south, and pine forests to the north, Lake Charles is a slightly isolated settlement and from the city's beginning, no one ethnic group, race or religion has dominated the culture. In the 19th century a small Jewish community grew up, involved primarily in the lucrative lumber industry. It is to this group, consisting of about 100 families by the 1960s, that the playwright Tony Kushner's family belonged.

On the other side of the town lived a large community of poor African-American families, predominantly employed in low paid jobs and many of whom worked directly for wealthier white households. As a historically persecuted minority, Jewish families like the Gellmans could sympathise with the cause of their black neighbours but as a property owning class, this relationship could also be an uneasy one.

As it turned out, Lake Charles was never directly involved in the turbulence of the Civil Rights struggle but its inhabitants must have had a strong awareness of the violent political events in nearby Alabama and Mississippi.

Themes

Caroline and Change

Like many great plays, *Caroline, or Change* is both a comedy and a tragedy. The playwright Tony Kushner has written a multi-layered text that functions on several levels at once.

At its heart lies the subject of change, both the active verb and the monetary noun. On one level it is a play about how human beings resist or open themselves up to the possibility of change. This is a major theme of Kushner's work from the revolutionary *Angels in America* onwards. Dotty and Emmie actively embrace change – they want it and seize it with both hands even when it causes problems. The Gellmans are resisting change (to a large extent through denial) but they are able through the course of the play to accept it and move on. Caroline has denied herself the possibility of change because of what she believes the personal cost has been in the past. The sadness within the piece is that despite the gains and progress of the other characters, Caroline chooses to suppress her considerable potential for the time being and remain working in the Gellman's basement.

On another level it is a play about the power of money. Through the medium of the small change that Noah leaves in his pockets and

that, through Rose's intervention, comes to belong to Caroline, Kushner has created an economy in miniature (cleverly reflecting the Greek derivation of the word which implies financial rules within a household). Once Caroline has started taking the money she is trapped in an economic cycle that threatens to spiral out of control – if she buys sweets for her children, then she will need to pay for the dentist and so on. It is her final temptation, that of the \$20 bill, that is the catalyst for the event that brings her down but allows Rose and Noah to move forward.

Dotty and Caroline
photo Catherine Ashmore



Musical influences

Caroline, or Change has an extraordinary musical score that draws on a wide range of influences associated with the time and place of the drama. Here are a few of the most important:

1) Field Hollers and Work Songs

This is the earliest musical influence heard in the play and comes from the songs that Negro slaves sang as they worked on the plantations of the American South. The rhythms and sounds ultimately derive from African tribal music. By the time of the play, these songs could still be heard in the fields as well as on the chain gangs in penitentiaries. The music is used to represent Caroline's work regime and especially the way in which the Dryer cruelly drives her, as a plantation overseer would drive a group of slave workers.

2) The Blues

The blues derived directly from the older work song tradition and came to reflect the suffering felt by so many poor people in this part of the US. When Caroline listens to the radio at night, a Southern blues sound is what she chooses. The sound represents both the period and place, as well as reflecting the sadness inherent in Caroline's life.

3) Motown

While Caroline listens to old-fashioned blues at night, during the day the radio plays the more contemporary, upbeat sound of the 1960s. In this respect, the radio both looks and sounds not unlike The Supremes, the most influential and successful product of the Motown music 'factory'.

4) Classical Music

This is the structured music that normally fills the Gellman house and is focused on Stuart Gellman, as a professional musician. When we first see him he is playing a clarinet piece by Weber. His other music includes Tchaikovsky's 'Pathetique Symphony', Mozart's 'Clarinet Concerto' and Rimsky Korsakov's 'Capriccio Espagnol'.

5) Klezmer

This is the Jewish folk music which dominates the Chanukah party in Act 2. Traditionally it is music for dancing but as an improvisatory music it also represents an emotional freedom that the 'closed off' Stuart would prefer not to allow himself, hence giving rise to the memory of his dead wife and triggering his emotional breakdown while playing a riff.

6) Other musical references

Other direct references include R&B, which underpins most mentions of the Civil Rights movement and works for characters like Emmie and Dotty who have a progressive optimism; the bassoon in the orchestration which subtly represents the presence of the dead Betty Gellman, who we know was a professional bassoonist; the rapid harshness of Rose's accompaniment which represents her New York energy set against the slower, more melodic South; 40s swing used when Caroline remembers the happier times with her husband immediately after the war; and the Gospel sound of Caroline's final prayer.

Finally, other direct quotations in the score include the Christmas carols in scene 7, the Jewish prayer *Mi ka mo cha* and the children's rhyming song *Miss Mary Mack*.

These are many subtle musical cross references and reflections within the score but perhaps the most beautiful musical moment occurs in the final scene when Stuart plays the theme that until now has been associated with Caroline's 'underwater' existence. In scene 1 this tune seemed to be firmly associated with the old African-American sound world. At this point it is poignantly transformed into something which sounds like a traditional Jewish melody – a true sign of the power of music to bridge different classes, cultures and creeds.