



## Dramaturgy Cast Packet

### *Bright Star*

Music, Book, and Story by Steve Martin  
Music, Lyrics, and Story by Edie Brickell

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Thank you Gabby Lawlor for providing foundational research!

## Guiding Questions

- What is your “bright star”?
- How can you relate to a story with mythic quality?
- How can this experience open you to new perspectives regarding culture, history, or music?
- What is your relationship with Southern Identity?
- How does the music in this piece influence the emotional nature of the story?

## Cast Enrichment:

- Spotify Playlist link:  
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5wLTNsRvyYVJbbg9aozI2i?si=c798863137654e50>
- Bluegrass Music Night: Krazy Kup in Plant City holds a monthly open mic night for bluegrass bands. February’s Open mic will be 2/4/23, and March’s will be 3/4/23
- <https://www.krazykup.com/>

## The Making of the Musical

**Music:** Steve Martin and Edie Brickell

**Lyrics:** Edie Brickell

**Book:** Steve Martin

**Steve Martin:** highly accomplished comedian, actor, writer, producer, and musician. Among his many appearances in TV, Film, and Standup, Martin is also well known in the bluegrass music industry, with his solo album “The Crow: New Songs for the 5-String Banjo” winning a Grammy in 2009

**Edie Brickell:** American singer-songwriter, best known for being the lead singer of Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians

*Bright Star* was born from Steve Martin and Edie Brickell’s collaboration on their Bluegrass album “Love Has Come For You”. “The album features deeply evocative songs such as “When You Get to Asheville,” ‘Sarah Jane and the Iron Mountain Baby,’ ‘Remember Me This Way,’ ‘Fighter,’ as well as the haunting title track. Each tune offers playful, resonant character studies, conveying a wealth of imagery, emotion and musical

ideas within spacious, mostly acoustic arrangements and irresistibly accessible tunes” (Concord’s Recorded Music Database). “Sarah Jane and the Iron Mountain Baby”, one of the songs on the album, is based on the true story of William Moses Gould Helms, which intentionally went on to inspire a portion of the *Bright Star* story.

### **Original Production:**

**Music:** Steve Martin and Edie Brickell

**Lyrics:** Edie Brickell

**Book:** Steve Martin

**Direction:** Walter Bobbie

**Sound Design:** Nevin Steinberg

**Choreography:** Josh Rhodes

**Scenic Design:** Eugene Lee

**Costume Design:** Jane Greenwood

**Lighting Design:** Japhy Weideman

Old Globe Theatre (2014) \*world premiere\*

Kennedy Center (2015)

Broadway Production began previews at the Cort Theatre on February 25, 2016 and officially opened on March 24, 2016

Broadway Production closed on June 26, 2016

### **Awards:**

Received 5 Tony Nominations including Best Musical (2016)

Won Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Music (2016)

Won Theatre World Award for Carmen Cusack’s Outstanding Debut Performance (2016)

Won Outer Critics Circle Awards for Outstanding New Broadway Musical and Outstanding New Score (2016)

### **So What’s The True Story?**

-William Helms was stopping to water his horse in August of 1902 and found a baby in suitcase along a riverbank near Irondale

-Helms took the baby home to his wife, Sarah. They had assumed the baby was intentionally thrown from the Iron Mountain Train as it was going over the river

-They named the baby William Moses Gould Helms who grew up to become a printer and worked for specific newspapers

<https://thediaryofjukeboxjennie.blogspot.com/2019/11/small-town-saturday-irondale-missouri.html>

<https://www.krcu.org/2021-04-06/almost-yesterday-the-iron-mountain-baby>

## Bluegrass Music

### Instruments:

- “The typical bluegrass band includes 5-string banjo, flat-top guitar, fiddle, mandolin, and bass”
- Traditionally acoustic
- Characterized by the unique tradition of soloing, or “passing a break”, where each instrument takes a turn carrying the melody, with the other instruments reverting to backing

### History:

- Originated in the rural south after WWII
- Blend of: American southern string band music, blues, English/Irish/Scottish traditions, and country music
- Named after Bill Monroe’s band “The Blue Grass Boys”
- Songs are about issues that pertain to everyday people. Popular subjects include religion, myth, love, death, home, and family

### - [Bluegrass on Folkways: An American roots tradition](#)

- This is a feature on the Smithsonian Institute’s “Smithsonian Folkways Recording” database
- Bill Monroe is known as “The Father of Bluegrass”
- Monroe was heavily influenced by popular black musician, Arnold Shultz
- Shultz was the son of a freed slave who grew up in Kentucky and learned to play the fiddle and guitar. Would perform often with all kinds of bands as the only black member

### - [Bluegrass Heritage Foundation](#)

#### **-International Bluegrass Music Association**

- [IBMA Foundation](#) (set up by IBMA to foster and support the future of bluegrass music by providing funding and equal access opportunities)
- Under this foundation there is a scholarship fund named after Arnold Shultz to support people of color seeking to pursue bluegrass music

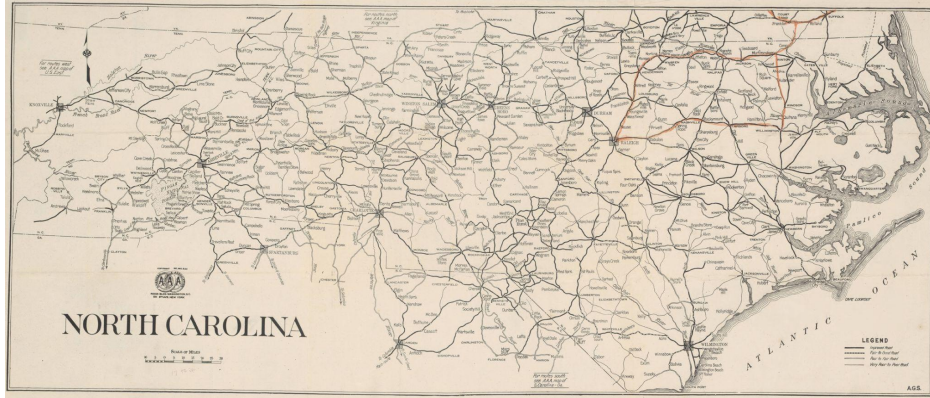
### - [Kentucky Country Music](#)

### - [Country Musical Hall of Fame: Bluegrass](#)

## Historical Context

### North Carolina: During the 1920s and 1940s

1920:



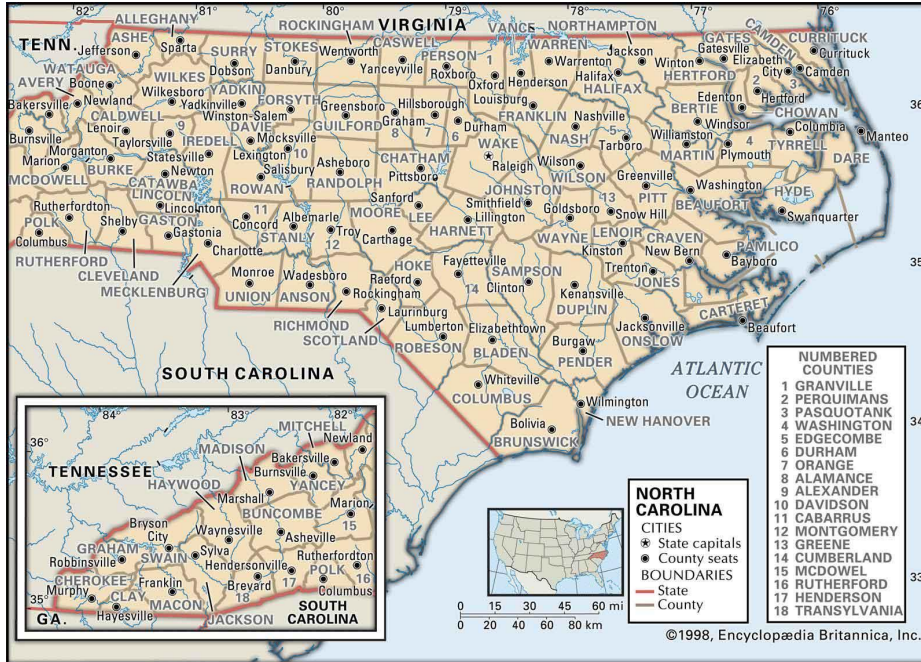
**Map of North Carolina (1920)**



**Zebulon, NC (1920)**



1940:



Map of North Carolina (1940)



Asheville, NC (1940)

[Blue Ridge Heritage](#)

## -History of Zebulon

### Post-WWI Relations (American South)

#### **Economic:**

- Tranquility and a moment of prosperity had returned to the farms of the state by 1919, but the good times were brief. The plummeting of farm prices in 1920 set the stage for another prolonged agricultural depression, for the descent into tenancy and poverty of still more thousands of North Carolinians, and for renewed migration to the cities.

#### **Environmental:**

- North Carolina was still predominantly rural in the 1920's. Much of the land was undeveloped and its natural resources made it prime for the farming industry.

#### **Social:**

- With more money in their pockets, many North Carolinians believed that the 1920s would be a decade of economic growth. On the promise of prosperity, people bought cars and radios or took trips to the state's new hotspots, such as Asheville. For others who longed for goods advertised in national magazines, the 1920s meant Listerine, makeup, rayon dresses, or vacuum cleaners that could be purchased in New York City, Chicago, or Raleigh. The 1920s marked the advent of voting for North Carolina's white women. It also meant bobbed hair, short skirts, and cigarettes. For the 75 percent of the state's population who still lived in rural areas, these images served as evidence of both the decline of traditional values and the growing distance between urban and rural America. The Roaring Twenties was a time of change for many North Carolinians who moved to cities and towns across the state. For most, however, it was not an era of prosperity (ncpedia.org).

#### **Geographical:**

- **The Bible Belt:** the Bible Belt is a region of the Southern United States in which socially conservative Protestant Christianity plays a strong role in society and politics, and church attendance across the denominations is generally higher than the nation's average.

#### **Global:**

- **Spanish Flu outbreak (wiped out 1/3 of world population)**
- **Global Relations are still extremely tense following the end of WWI.**

#### **Cultural:**

- **Southern Renaissance (1920's):** The Southern Renaissance was the first mainstream movement within Southern literature to address the criticisms of Southern cultural and intellectual life that had emerged both from within the Southern literary tradition and from outsiders, most notably the satirist H. L. Mencken. In the 1920s Mencken led the attack on the genteel tradition in American literature, ridiculing the provincialism of American intellectual life. In

his 1920 essay "The Sahara of the Bozart" (a pun on a Southern pronunciation of 'beaux-arts') he singled out the South as the most provincial and intellectually barren region of the US, claiming that since the Civil War, intellectual and cultural life there had gone into terminal decline. This created a storm of protest from within conservative circles in the South. However, many emerging Southern writers who were already highly critical of contemporary life in the South were emboldened by Mencken's essay. On the other hand, Mencken's subsequent bitter attacks on aspects of Southern culture that they valued amazed and horrified them. In response to the attacks of Mencken and his imitators, Southern writers were provoked to a reassertion of Southern uniqueness and a deeper exploration of the theme of Southern identity.

- **The Progressive Era (1896–1916)** brought attention to the problems the South faced. An influential scholarly study was Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913), which portrayed an isolated and culturally inert people.[118] The bleak image inspired northern philanthropy, such as the Rockefeller foundations, to intervene using modern public health techniques and to promote better schooling.

#### **Political:**

- **19th Amendment ratified (1919)** giving women the right to vote (though women of color still faced intense voter suppression and weren't represented fully at this time)
- **Great Migration:** roughly 1 million African Americans relocated from the rural South to the North between 1915 and 1920 in pursuit of better pay, a higher standard of living, and improved political rights in Northern cities.

### Post-WWII Relations (American South)

#### **Economic:**

- The Post-War South experienced a large expansion in the economy. Income per capita rose to the national average and industry manufacturers were attracted to settling in the South, creating a more affluent and urbanized community.

#### **Environmental:**

- As urbanization continued, rural land became slightly less common. Machines took the place of work animals, and farmers began to experience some struggle. Railroads were also further expanding at this time.

#### **Social:**

- More women entered the workforce postwar, creating a stronger sense of feminism. Additionally, more women were pursuing higher education as it became more accessible and affordable.

#### **Geographical:**

- The "Research Triangle" became more defined post-war. The Research Triangle refers to a metropolitan area in the Piedmont region of North Carolina in the United States, anchored by the cities of Raleigh and Durham and the town of Chapel Hill, home to three major research universities: North Carolina State



University, Duke University, and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, respectively.

**Global:**

- Beginning signs of the Cold War
- United Nations were created

**Cultural:**

- Overall group attitudes were positive and a general culture of comfortability was ushered in.

**Political:**

- The GI Bill of Rights (GI Bill): provided unemployment benefits, home loans, and, most important, financial support for veterans returning from World War II to attend college or take vocational training.

**Cultural Facts About North Carolina**

- North Carolina is the state with the highest percentage of inhabitants self-identifying as Scots Irish or Scottish (U.S. Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey)

**The Musical Itself**

**“The play jumps in time between 1923-4 and 1945-6 in North Carolina. It is based on a true incident.”**

**Fable:** a literary genre: a succinct fictional story, in prose or verse, that features animals, legendary creatures, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature that are anthropomorphized, and that illustrates or leads to a particular moral lesson (a "moral"), which may at the end be added explicitly as a concise maxim or saying.

**Themes:** Music, Hope, Dreams, Love (Romantic and Familial), Young Love, Loss of Innocence, Class Relations, Expectations of Women, Motherhood

**Locations:**

**Blue Ridge Mountains North Carolina**

**Billy's Home - Hayes Creek (1945)**

**Walnut Tree**

**Margo's Bookshop**

**Asheville, NC**

**Asheville Southern Journal**

**Zebulon, NC**

**Shiny Penny Bar**

**Cabin in Zebulon**

**Raleigh, NC**

**References:**

- **“You win the war all by yourself?”** (pg 6) - Referencing World War II
- **Stars and Stripes paper (pg 7)**- daily American military newspaper reporting on matters concerning the members of the United States Armed Forces and their communities, with an emphasis on those serving outside the United States. Began in 1861 during the Civil War
- **“Follow my own bright star”** (pg 13)- possible reference to the Star of Bethlehem, the path to new beginnings
- **New Yorker Magazine** (pg 17)- American weekly magazine featuring journalism, commentary, criticism, essays, fiction, satire, cartoons, and poetry. Founded as a weekly in 1925
- **Ernest Hemingway** (pg 17)- (July 21, 1899 – July 2, 1961) was an American novelist, short-story writer, and journalist
- **“He used a comma to join two independent clauses”** (pg 17)- THE COMMA SPLICE. Writers make this error when they try to separate the two independent clauses in a compound sentence with a comma alone. A comma is not a strong enough punctuation mark to separate the two independent clauses by itself; thus, using it causes the clauses to be spliced together.
- **Thomas Wolfe** (pg 18)- (October 3, 1900 – September 15, 1938) was an American novelist of the early 20th century. His books, written and published from the 1920s to the 1940s, vividly reflect on American culture and the mores of that period, filtered through Wolfe's sensitive, sophisticated, and hyper-analytical perspective.
- **Carl Sandburg** (pg 19)- (January 6, 1878 – July 22, 1967) was an American poet, biographer, journalist, and editor. He won three Pulitzer Prizes
- **Tennessee Williams** (pg 19)- (March 26, 1911 – February 25, 1983), known by his pen name Tennessee Williams, was an American playwright and screenwriter. Along with contemporaries Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller, he is considered among the three foremost playwrights of 20th-century American drama.
- **Adonis** (pg 22)- Adonis was the mortal lover of the goddess Aphrodite. The goddesses fought over him because of his beauty.
- **F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and the Damned*** (pg 24)- Set in New York City, the novel's plot follows a young artist Anthony Patch and his flapper wife Gloria Gilbert who become "wrecked on the shoals of dissipation" while excessively partying at the dawn of the hedonistic Jazz Age.

- **“Black Sheep”**(pg 27)- to be the outcast, odd one out, unlike the others
- **“Little Lost Lamb”** (pg 27)- reference to the Biblical Parable of the lost sheep referenced in Matthew 8:12-14
- **Jazz Age** (pg 33)- period in the 1920s and 1930s in which jazz music and dance styles gained worldwide popularity.
- **Charlotte, NC** (pg 33)- Charlotte is a major city and commercial hub in North Carolina. 188 miles from Zebulon.
- **Winston-Salem, NC** (pg 34)- Winston-Salem is a city and the county seat of Forsyth County, North Carolina, United States. 126 miles from Zebulon
- **“You brought sin into our blissful Eden.”** (pg 53)- reference to the Biblical Garden of Eden, compared to paradise
- **“It was Eve who tempted Adam.”** (pg 62)- reference to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve where Eve was tempted by the Devil to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, later convincing Adam to eat as well.
- **Durham, NC** (pg 63)- Durham is a city in North Carolina. It's part of the Research Triangle Region, known for its technology companies and scholarly institutions. 47 miles from Zebulon
- **Raleigh, NC** (pg 70)- Raleigh is the capital city of North Carolina. It's known for its universities, including North Carolina State University. 23 miles from Zebulon
- **Chapel Hill, NC** (pg 70)- Chapel Hill is a town in North Carolina. It's home to a campus of the University of North Carolina. 50 miles from Zebulon.
- **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** (pg 70)- is a public research university in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The flagship of the University of North Carolina system, it is considered a Public Ivy, or a public institution which offers an academic experience similar to that of an Ivy League university. Known simply as University of North Carolina until 1963
- **“Boy meets girl”** (pg 79)- Having a romantic storyline involving a man and a woman.

- **Raymond Chandler** (pg 81)- was an American-British novelist and screenwriter. In 1932, at the age of forty-four, Chandler became a detective fiction writer after losing his job as an oil company executive during the Great Depression.
- **Carson McCullers** (pg 91)- was an American novelist, short-story writer, playwright, essayist, and poet. McCullers's work is often described as Southern Gothic and indicative of her Southern roots.
- **Eudora Welty** (pg 91)- was a Pulitzer Prize winning American short story writer, novelist and photographer who wrote about the American South.
- **Mr. Ichabod P. Toad** (pg 106)- possibly a reference to the film *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* from 1949
- **“Moses in the rushes”** (pg 106)- reference to the Old Testament story of Moses. He was found in a basket on the Nile as a baby and went on to free the Israelites from slavery and become a major religious figure

### Vocabulary:

- **Hillbilly** (pg 7)- DEROGATORY. An unsophisticated country person, associated originally with the remote regions of the Appalachians.
- **Plow** (pg 7)- a large farming implement with one or more blades fixed in a frame, drawn by a tractor or by animals and used for cutting furrows in the soil and turning it over, especially to prepare for the planting of seeds.
- **Floribunda Rose** (pg 9)- modern group of garden roses that was developed by crossing hybrid teas with polyantha roses, the latter being derived from crosses between *Rosa chinensis* and *Rosa multiflora*. Symbolizes femininity, beauty, love, and romance
- **Walnut Tree** (pg 9)- are deciduous trees that produce a stone fruit, or drupe, that houses edible kernels called walnuts inside their hard shells. Native American culture sees walnut trees as a symbol of wisdom.
- **Gravestone Angel** (pg 9)- Angels with their wings outstretched or pointing upwards usually represent the departed person’s soul being escorted to heaven. If the angel is facing downwards or weeping this is often an illustration of an untimely death.
- **Parlance** (pg 10)- a particular way of speaking or using words, especially a way common to those with a particular job or interest.

- **Thesaurus** (pg 11)- A thesaurus or synonym dictionary is a reference work which arranges words by their meanings
- **Heavy Bond** (pg 12)- expensive quality paper for typewriters
- **“Round file”** (pg 16)- trash can
- **Ice Box** (pg 22)- a compact non-mechanical refrigerator which was a common early-twentieth-century kitchen appliance before the development of safely powered refrigeration devices.
- **Purveyor** (pg 33)- a person who sells or deals in particular goods.
- **“She’s a dumbbell”** (pg 34)- implies she is unintelligent and is dead weight
- **‘34 Ford** (pg 43)- 1934 Ford vehicle
- **Callow** (pg 52)- (of a young person) inexperienced and immature.
- **Superfluous** (pg 59)- /soʊˈpɜːflʊəs/ Unnecessary, especially through being more than enough.
- **Valise** (pg 62)- a small traveling bag or suitcase.
- **Sloe Gin Fizz** (pg 79)- cocktail made with sloe gin, lemon juice, simple syrup, and club soda
- **Manhattan beverage** (pg 81)- cocktail made with whiskey, sweet vermouth, and bitters
- **Ritz beverage** (pg 82)- cocktail made with cognac, triple sec, maraschino liqueur, lemon juice, and champagne
- **Greyhound beverage** (pg 82)- cocktail, traditionally made with just two ingredients: grapefruit juice and either gin or vodka as the spirit.
- **Muscadine wine** (pg 83)- While some love Muscadine wine’s highly fruity flavors and intense aromatic quality, others deem it a cheap “get drunk quick” wine.
- **“Flapadoodle”** (pg 86)- nonsense
- **Hooch** (pg 98)- alcoholic liquor, especially inferior or illicit whiskey.



- **Nehi beverage** (pg 102)- flavored soft drink that originated in the United States. It was introduced in 1924 by Chero-Cola/Union Bottle Works and founded by Claud A. Hatcher, a Columbus, Georgia grocer who began bottling ginger ale and root beer in 1905.
- **Settee** (pg 102)- a long upholstered seat for more than one person, typically with a back and arms.
- **Frog Gigging** (pg 105)- a particularly cruel form of hunting that involves painfully stabbing frogs or other small animals with multi-pronged spears (picture a sharp, oversized fork) called “gigs.”

## References

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