

**THE
AMERICAN
CLOCK
AT THE
OLD VIC**

SYNOPSIS

THE AMERICAN CLOCK

Cast

Amber Aga
Paul Bentall
Greg Bernstein
Clare Burt
Flora Dawson
Abhin Galeya
James Garnon
Fred Haig
Jyuddah Jaymes
Julie Jupp
Francesca Mills
Taheen Modak
Christian Patterson
Clarke Peters*
Sule Rimi*
Golda Rosheuvel
Abdul Salis
Ewan Wardrop

Musicians

Shaney Forbes
Jim Henson
James Mainwaring
Laurence Ungless

Director

Rachel Chavkin

Choreographer

Ann Yee

Set

Chloe Lamford

Costume

Rosie Elnile

Composer

Justin Ellington

Sound

Darron L West

Lighting

Natasha Chivers

Casting

Jessica Ronane

CDG

Musical Director

Jim Henson

Voice Coach

Charlie Hughes

D'Aeth

Dialect Coach

Penny Dyer

Baylis Associate Director

Julia Locascio

Associate Choreographer

Temitope

Ajose-Cutting

*Clarke Peters will appear in performances until 02 March and Sule Rimi in performances from 04 March.
First performance of this production at The Old Vic, 04 February 2019

SYNOPSIS

This version of the play is described as a 'vaudeville', and many of the characters have music, songs and dances which help illustrate their character and story.

Most of the music is live and produced by the onstage band, featuring piano, clarinet, double bass, saxophone and guitar. The music consists mainly of popular tunes and music styles from the twenties and thirties. There is also a recurring rhythm which is recorded and deliberately modern. Another recurring sound is the chiming of an old-fashioned clock. The production also makes use of popular song recordings from the era which have been sampled and altered.

The play is interspersed with original news broadcasts from the time and the voice of President Franklin D Roosevelt.

The central character of Robertson, a businessman who survives the crash, narrates the play. He begins by explaining the lead up to the Wall Street Crash of 1929 which led to the Great Depression in the United States.

The actor playing Robertson also plays MOE 3 and TAYLOR. All of the cast play two, three or more characters.

We are introduced to a 'tapestry' of snapshots of the Depression and its effect on different sections of American society.

Throughout the play runs the story of the wealthy Baum family consisting of Rose and Moe Baum, their teenage son, Lee, and Rose's father (Grandpa). They live in a large apartment in Manhattan and enjoy all the pleasures and excitement of the big city as well as luxuries such as a chauffeur-driven car. Rose, Moe and Lee, are each played by three actors, sometimes individually, sometimes all at the same time. They form three families, the main Baum family is Jewish (ROSE 1, MOE 1, LEE 1), another is South Asian (ROSE 2, MOE 2, LEE 2) and a third is African American (ROSE 3, MOE 3, LEE 3). Rose also has a sister, Fanny Margolies who lives with her teenage son, Sidney (who also plays LEE 2), in Brooklyn. Their fortunes change as the Depression hits and they become gradually poorer, while still surviving through selling off their possessions.

The play takes us through a series of vignettes, including a story of a farmer whose farm and possessions are put up for auction. A mob of other farmers and workers disrupt the auction and force the auctioneer to sell everything for a dollar and he keeps the farm. We soon learn this is a short reprieve and he ends up in New York, starving and desperate for work and lodgings.

We meet Quinn, a businessman who has risen from the role of factory clerk to become President of General Electrics. Once there he realises that his company represents all that is wrong with capitalism and decides to quit to help small business. Robertson dismisses him as an idealist.

We return to the Baum's, where Lee comes to a realisation that his parents cannot afford to send him to college.

We then visit the apartment of Fanny Margolies, whose son, Sidney, is trying to write a hit song having graduated from high school. His mother puts it to him that he could marry the landlady's daughter and thereby avoid eviction and ruin. Sidney is not averse to the idea but begs his mother to let him try a little longer to make a success of his music.

Lee and Moe walk to the subway and Moe asks Lee for a quarter to get downtown. Lee realises his relationship with his father has changed forever.

Act two begins in the Baum home, they have moved to a house in Brooklyn which is much smaller than their Manhattan apartment. Rose is still hanging on to elements from their wealthy past, including their beloved piano and reminiscing about Broadway shows.

Lee finally goes to university and discusses future prospects and aspirations with his friends Joe & Ralph. They all are philosophical about their prospects (or lack of them).

Lee decides to follow the footsteps of Mark Twain and heads for Mississippi. He writes to his mother and talks of revolution. Joe writes to Lee and talks of his fear of what he sees as growing fascism evident in New York.

Sidney and Doris, now together, have a lover's tiff prompted by Doris' suspicion that Sidney has only agreed to marry her in order to get a home. Sidney suggests they see other people but becomes jealous when Doris seems a bit too enthusiastic about the idea. He changes his mind and they make up.

Back in Mississippi, Lee meets Isaac, an African American café owner who explains that the Depression has had little effect on African American people because they didn't have much in the first place and indicates a certain pleasure in seeing 'white folks' suffering the same level of poverty. A local sheriff who has no money attempts to bully Isaac into taking his radio in return for a fried chicken dinner. The scene ends with them listening to Roosevelt on the radio talking about his plans to return America to a land of hope and prosperity.

Lee returns to New York and he and Moe find themselves in a welfare office. Lee needs to be homeless and on relief in order to get on to a writers' project. In the waiting room are a diverse group of New Yorkers, all of whom have their own stories of poverty and desperation.

Later Lee is flirting with Edie, an illustrator, in her apartment. Edie is a committed Communist Party member and an idealist who see the Depression as an opportunity to bring about a revolution. Lee is more interested in seducing Edie in order to have access to her apartment. Edie sees through him and orders him out. Lee leaves New York once again.

At the Baum's house on a sweltering July day, Rose, Fanny, Doris and Lucille, Fanny's married daughter, are playing cards with the windows tight shut so that the mortgage man thinks they are away. Rose has become bitter, desperate and paranoid. Moe returns home and tries to calm Rose but is unable to raise her spirits. The scene ends with continuous doorbell ringing and knocking which becomes unbearable.

We hear a montage of news items which indicate the passing of time and ends with the moon landings.

Lee and Robertson sum up the events of the play and what they mean to themselves as individuals and to America as a whole.