

SHOW GUIDE

 **MCC
THEATER**

new musical

ONLY GOLD



**KATE
NASH**



**ANDY
BLANKENBUEHLER**



**TED
MALAWER**

This show guide will be dissecting the show through the lens of "the ultimate group project."

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MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM

WHO IS BRITISH POP SENSATION KATE NASH?

KATE NASH launched her music career as a teenager in 2005 and had her first hit single “Foundations” in 2007. Her debut album *MADE OF BRICKS* landed at Number 1 on the UK Album Charts and stayed there for over 40 weeks, which earned Nash a BRIT Award at the age of 17. While continuing to release music, touring, and acting in various projects, Nash co-starred on Netflix’s hit TV show *GLOW*. This solidified her singer-songwriter-actor-multi-hyphenate status. Nash is also passionate about her activism for gender equality and LGBT+ rights.

WHO IS DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER ANDY BLANKENBUEHLER?

ANDY BLANKENBUEHLER is a three-time Tony Award-winning choreographer, dancer, and director. Blankenbuehler began his career as a dancer on Broadway in *FOSSE*, *CONTACT*, *MAN OF LA MANCHA*, *SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER*, *STEEL PIER*, *BIG*, and *GUYS AND DOLLS*. As he transitioned into choreography, he shaped some of the biggest Broadway hits. Blankenbuehler choreographed the 2016 *CATS* revival, *BANDSTAND*, *9 TO 5 THE MUSICAL*, *IN THE HEIGHTS*, and *HAMILTON*. His work also appears on camera in “SO YOU THINK YOU CAN DANCE,” the 2019 *CATS* film adaptation, and the mini-series “*FOSSE/VERDON*.” His 2015 Drama Desk Award described Blankenbuehler’s choreography as “versatile,” “dynamic,” and “fluid.”

WHO IS WRITER TED MALAWER?

With a background in literature and publishing, TED MALAWER has a sharp eye for developing plot. He studied at Columbia and Juilliard where he continued honing his skills as a writer. Since then, his work has been seen at Atlantic Theater Company, Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, Juilliard, HERE Arts Center/Untitled Theater Company #61, The New Colony, and Edge Theatre Company. Malawer wrote for on-camera projects “*HALSTON*” (Netflix) and “*RISE*” (NBC). Through his work on new play development in New York City, he joined the *ONLY GOLD* team in 2018 and has been a fierce collaborator ever since.

DEVELOPING A NEW MUSICAL

ONLY GOLD is a brand new musical, only twelve years in the making. That’s right! To create an exciting new musical, a lot of time, energy, and collaboration is required. After using KATE NASH’s music in his choreography for years, ANDY BLANKENBUEHLER felt that there was a story to be told through her personal lyrics and bright sound. He approached the 23-year-old musician with a pitch to collaborate on creating a dance musical featuring her songs. This joint passion project has been growing ever since, and with writer TED MALAWER on the team, the story began to take shape.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE (OR A FEW SCENIC SHOPS)

The world of *ONLY GOLD* is fantastical—one where time, place, power, and purpose are constantly in flux. Balancing the antiquity of Paris in the early 1900s and the



Interior view of the Opera National de Paris Garnier, France

contemporary feel in both Nash’s and Blankenbuehler’s work, the designs for this show were crucial in telling the story.

Scenic designer David Korins and Blankenbuehler have collaborated on many projects before, including *BRING IT ON THE MUSICAL*, *ANNIE*, *HAMILTON*, and *BANDSTAND*. Korins has been involved with *ONLY GOLD* since the early stages. Based on mood boards, reference images, and color palettes provided by the director, Korins and his team created a unit set inspired by oversized jewelry, clockwork, and the passage of time. To sparkle the way *ONLY GOLD* does, the show uses over 300 stationary lights, 50 moving lights, a few hundred LEDs, and a set assembled by five scenic shops across three states and two countries. Associate scenic designer Justin West had to travel across state lines and national borders, in person, to ensure that the colors and feeling of the set pieces were cohesive.

West speaks about “the web of collaboration,” saying that at as “each level of collaboration as the web grows - a lot of trust and a lot of agency for each person touching this set [is] needed.” Behind the scenes, this show requires a 15-person backstage crew to run smoothly. The designers, writers, director, and assistants have been in constant refinement and communication to figure out the precise measures of how to tell this story.

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PARIS AS A CHARACTER

ONLY GOLD opens with a typical morning in the bustling streets of France's most populous city, Paris. We meet clock-maker Henri and his piano teacher wife Camille going about the ticking of their daily life. The Narrator introduces the King of Cosimo, his wife Roksana, and their daughter Tooba. We learn that the royal family has traveled from afar for Tooba's arranged marriage to the Count. We also learn that the King and Queen fell in love during their first trip to Paris, where he gifted her a seemingly ordinary necklace that dazzled her beyond belief. Since then, the glimmer in their marriage has dulled. The king hopes this new trip will bring stability not only to his kingdom but also to his marriage.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

ONLY GOLD is loosely inspired by Paris in the early to mid-1920s. Following the Exposition Universelle of 1889 (the World's Fair where the Eiffel Tower was debuted), Paris was regarded as the cultural hub of Europe. With tourism and commerce booming, France became invested in establishing a unified culture. To do so, key French industries put quality protections on their main exports such as fashion, wine, art, and cheese. For example, Haute Couture, which directly translates to "high sewing," was regulated to ensure Paris maintained a reputation

for quality fashion. In order to qualify, a workshop had to design clothing made-to-order, employ at least fifteen staff, and create at least 50 original designs per year, among many other ordinances (1). Chanel, Balenciaga, and Dior all achieved Haute Couture status (2). Exports of wine and cheese also have regional laws, parameters, and designations that contributed to the unique French stamp of culture. Most notably, Champagne can only legally be called "champagne" if it's produced in a specific area only 100 miles south of Paris (3). Regulations like these allowed France to become not only an "artist's city" but also a city of luxury.

During this time, Paris also served as a playground for artists and writers from all corners of the world. American performers Nina Simone and Josephine Baker, along with Spaniard Pablo Picasso, and Dutch painters like Vincent Van Gogh, Johan Jongkind, and Frederik Hendrik Kaemmerer were all on the scene with French contemporaries like Monet, Cézanne, and Matisse (4). At the same time, literary titans from around the world such as Oscar Wilde, Richard Wright, George Orwell, Ernest Hemmingway, and James Baldwin (only to name a few) populated Paris from the late 1800s through the second World War (5).

However, World War I (1914-1918) ravaged the French economy and psyche (6). France was able to recover and maintain stability due to the diverse agricultural landscape and a large number of skilled artisans. Some of the exports included clocks, furniture, livestock, and non-perishable goods (7). Skilled trade workers were able to continue to provide with their craft. Yet in a city with artists pouring their passions out at every corner, Heri's dreams are always circling in the back of his mind.

RESETTING THE CLOCKS

Both Tooba and Roksana are bound by blood to serve their country through a marriage of state, and European royal marriages are no small matter. Current UK monarchs Prince William and Princess Kate's 2011 wedding had 162 million viewers tuned in across the world to watch the ceremony live. With such a large impact, royal weddings throughout history dictate many of the "western" marriage traditions we uphold today. For example, the white wedding dress was started by British Queen Victoria in 1840 and then subsequently copied by the ruling classes. Slowly the trend trickled down to all weddings as an attempt to display wealth, rather than the common myth that white fabric meant virtue (8).

Marriages throughout all of European history have been important economic affairs, and not just as a means for excessive celebration. In a Washington Post article, Emilie M. Brinkman writes “historically, a royal marriage was a matter of state, not a matter of the heart.” Brinkman goes on to describe the way that daughters in royal families have been treated as political tools in either building an empire or keeping the peace. Often when a monarchy faced trouble women in these “Marriages of State” were expected to accept proposals, especially in times of economic instability or threat of war as a means for the country to retain power or social grace in the global market (9). Divorce was not an easy task historically in France, especially among royalty. Roman Catholicism returned with Louis XVII in the late 1700s, which completely outlawed the practice. The path to legitimizing divorce didn’t begin until after the 1848 Rebellion and wasn’t popularized until after the first World War (10).

Something is shifting in the Paris air, and all of our characters can feel it. Camille encourages her husband to find his own success but is left questioning her own identity in his shadow. In Tooba’s search for her own autonomy, she discovers where her heart is truly meant to be. Through Roksana’s eyes, her life has been set in stone, yet on this trip, she finds that maybe there is a chance for a clean slate. As they all step into their own, will they be able to listen to the ticking of their own hearts?

EXERCISE

Pick a musical artist you love and come up with a concept for a musical based on a few of their songs. Draw inspiration from an era of history or an event.

- Example: A musical about the seamstress who made Queen Victoria’s white wedding dress but can’t afford to pay for her own wedding with music by Taylor Swift, using “Love Story,” “Dress” and “You Belong with Me.”

LINKS FOR EXTENDED LEARNING:

- [Kate Nash Live in Concert](#)
- [Director Andy Blankenbuehler breaks down his Hamilton Choreography](#)
- Time lapse of the creation of the set
- [Colorized footage of Paris in the 1920s](#)
- [Examples of French furniture in the 1920s \(art deco\)](#)
- [ADAM RUINS EVERYTHING—information on marriage traditions](#)
- [Article on the Impact of WWI & WWII on marriages in France](#)
- [Article on the History of Haute Couture](#)

Sources:

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