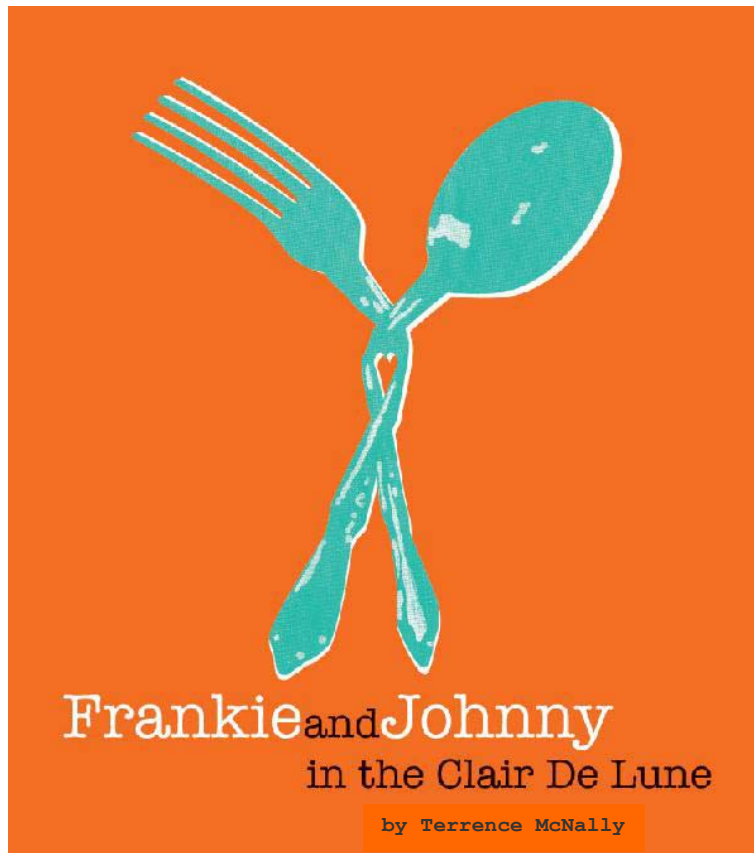


STUDY GUIDE



Clair de Lune

French Translation = Light of the Moon

SYNOPSIS

Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune is simply a story about love. Mythic love. Raw desire. Loneliness. It is not about politics, social criticism, religion, or economics. The story is rooted in romanticism, expressionism, clunky realism, and an attempt at naturalism.

"I don't think I've ever written anything even remotely naturalistic. The closest probably would have been 'Frankie and Johnny' and that's only 'cause they eat a sandwich and make an omelette in act two. But it's a romantic fairy tale, and I'm very aware of that." Terrence McNally

The play focuses on two lonely people who happen to work at the same diner. Frankie, a waitress and Johnny, a short-order cook finally have a first date and afterwards tumble into bed. Frankie expects a one-night stand and wants to just go back to watching TV and, waits for Johnny to leave. Johnny however, is a talker and romantic, certain he has found his soulmate. She, on the other hand is far more cautious. As the night unfolds under the moonlight, they slowly begin to reveal themselves to each other as they take tentative steps toward the possible start of a new relationship.

BIOGRAPHY

Terrence McNally, considered one of America's leading playwrights was born in 1939 in St. Petersburg, Florida. Raised in Corpus Christi, Texas he moved to New York City to study English at Columbia University, graduating in 1960.

An early one-act play submitted to the prestigious Actor's Studio was turned down, but resulted in McNally becoming the Studio's stage manager. He gained practical knowledge of writing for the stage and was introduced to the greatest individuals in theatre at the time, ultimately becoming a protégé of noted playwright Edward Albee.

McNally's early playwriting themes surrounded absurdist theatre, political anger, and the obscene frankness of the sexual revolution. His 1964 farce *AND THINGS GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT* caused scandal and titillation!

Becoming an important voice in off-Broadway theatre, seven of McNally's one-act plays were in production in 1968-1969, though his focus and style began to change in the coming years. His political anger, absurdist mannerisms, and hard-edge eroticism began to fade into a humorous, sometimes farcical treatment of the joy and pain of love with *THE LISBON TRAVIATA* (1985) and *FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE* (1987).

In 1990 McNally won an Emmy Award for the TV miniseries *ANDRE'S MOTHER*, a drama about a mother trying to cope with her son's death from AIDS. McNally's attention turned back to the stage in 1991 with *LIPS TOGETHER, TEETH APART*, a study of the irrational fears some harbor towards homosexuals and victims of AIDS.

McNally teamed with composer John Kander and lyricist Fred Ebb for a second time in 1992 to write the book for *KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN*. The script explored the complex relationship between two men caged together in a Latin American prison. He won the Tony Award for best book of a musical.

In 1995 McNally scored his second Tony Award for Best Play with *LOVE, VALOUR, COMPASSION*, his examination of the relationship of 8 gay men. McNally followed the next year with his third Tony Award win for Best Play, *MASTER CLASS*, a character study of legendary opera soprano Maria Callas. He wrote the book for the musical *RAGTIME* (1997) and won his fourth Tony Award for best book.

Stirring up much controversy, McNally's 1997 *CORPUS CHRISTI* was a modern day retelling of the story of Jesus' birth, ministry, and death in which both Jesus and his disciples are homosexuals.

During the last decade McNally wrote the book for the musical *THE FULL MONTY* (2001), the play *DEDICATION OR THE STUFF OF DREAMS* (2005), and the musical *CHITA RIVERA: A DANCER'S LIFE* (2006). His latest work *DEUCE* starring Angela Lansbury will open on Broadway in April of 2007.

THE HISTORY OF FRANKIE AND JOHNNY

"Pretend that we are the only two people in the world, that's what I'm doing, and it all falls into place." Johnny - *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*

"I just write about characters who interest me and try to write about them honestly." Terrence McNally - *The Houston Chronicle*

In 1890 French Composer Claude Debussy composed *The Suite Bergamasque*, one of the most famous piano suites. The third movement, *Clair de Lune* is a piano solo with variations between intensity and distance. Debussy likely used French poet Paul Verlaine's poem *Clair de Lune* as inspiration.

In spite of the vagueness of his poetry, Verlaine showed a careful craftsmanship, using simple, musical language with moments of extreme sensation; a perfect description of McNally's play.

Debussy's *Clair de Lune* is heard in many films such as the 2000 restored version of Disney's *Fantasia* (edited out of the 1940 version due to time), *Down and out in Beverly Hills*, *Seven Year's in Tibet*, *The Right Stuff*, and the 2001 re-make of *Ocean's Eleven*. Most recently *Clair de Lune* has been used in the Chanel commercial starring Nicole Kidman.

Moonlight by Paul Verlaine

*Your soul is like a landscape fantasy,
Where masks and Bergamasks, in charming wise,
Strum lutes and dance, just a bit sad to be
Hidden beneath their fanciful disguise.*

*Singing in minor mode of life's largesse
And all-victorious love, they yet seem quite
Reluctant to believe their happiness,
And their song mingles with the pale moonlight.*

*The calm, pale moonlight, whose sad beauty, beaming,
Sets the birds softly dreaming in the trees,
And makes the marbled fountains, gushing, streaming-
Slender jet-fountains-sob their ecstasies.*

THE SONG - FRANKIE AND JOHNNY

The names of the characters Frankie and Johnny come from the traditional American popular song *Frankie and Johnny*. It tells the story of a woman, Frankie, who finds her man Johnny "making love to" another woman and shoots him dead. Many versions of the song open with the lyrics:

Frankie and Johnny were sweethearts.

Lordy, how they could love.

They vowed to love one another.

Underneath the stars above.

At least 256 different recordings of Frankie and Johnny have been made since the early 20th century including Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan and Taj Mahal. As a jazz standard it has also been recorded by Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, and Count Basie.

Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune opened off-Broadway at The Manhattan Theatre Club Stage I in June 1987 with Kathy Bates and F. Murray Abraham. In October of the same year Kenneth Walsh replaced Abraham and the play continued for fifteen months at the Theatre Club's Stage II. The first Broadway production of *Frankie and Johnny...* at the Belasco theatre ran for 243 performances with Edie Falco and Stanley Tucci who were replaced by Rosie Perez and Joe Pantoliano later in the run.

Other films using the basic story of Frankie and Johnny are the 1930 *Her Man* starring Helen Twelvetrees, the 1936 *Frankie and Johnnie* starring Helen Morgan, the 1966 *Frankie and Johnny* starring Elvis Presley, and the 1991 film adaptation by McNally starred Michelle Pfeiffer and Al Pacino which is a dramatic departure from his original stage play.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Frankie and Johnny in the Clair De Lune

by Terrence McNally

Dramatists Play Service, copyright 1988

Director's notes and design concept notes provided

by Michael Stricker

www.talkinbroadway.com

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