

# WILKES

*By James Stover*

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### DEDICATION

*To my many friends who supported this play's development,  
especially Davy and Steve.*

### STORY OF THE PLAY

The play tells the story of Davey Herold, a co-conspirator in the Lincoln assassination who accompanied John Wilkes Booth during the ensuing manhunt. It asks if Davey Herold had a choice in taking part in the assassination and whether or not he actually committed a crime. It moves fluidly from his jail cell where he speaks to his lawyer, to a series of locations during the planning of the assassination, to the history-changing execution, to Davey and Booth fleeing authorities. Approximately 70 minutes.

### Production and Development History

A public staged reading of "Wilkes" was presented in May of 2013 at the St. Stephen's Theatre's Lab Theatre in Philadelphia. The cast was Davy Raphaely (Herold), Jake Blouch (Booth and others) and Jared Delaney (Stone and others). It was directed by M. Craig Getting.

The world premiere of "Wilkes" was presented in July and August of 2018 by the Glaciy Theatre Collective at the Center for the Performing Arts in Toledo, Ohio. It featured a Lighting Design by Stephen Sakowski, Costume Design by Kelly McBane, Set Design by Jim Hill, Sound Design by Ryan Hieber and Props Design by Kevin Upham. The production was stage managed by Tori McBean, assistant directed by Faith Murphy and directed by the playwright. The cast was as follows:

Davey Herold.....Jackson Howard  
Frederick Stone and others.....Bryan Harkins  
John Wilkes Booth and others.....Daniel Schweikert

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(3 actors or 3-8 actors)*

**DAVEY HEROLD:** A small-framed 22-year old man. Believes he is completely innocent and had no choice about taking part in the assassination. Naïve, but not stupid.

**FREDERICK STONE:** Early 30s. Well-dressed lawyer. Kind in demeanor but filled with ambition.

**JOHN WILKES BOOTH:** 26-year-old actor, the matinee idol of his day.

**PRISON GUARD:** Mid 20s, just doing his job.

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN:** Seen only in silhouette. The 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

**LEWIS POWELL:** A large man in his mid 20s. War veteran, always excited for a fight.

**MR. GARRETT:** Early 40s. A kindhearted southern farmer.

**LT. DOHERTY:** 30s. The leader of a Union Army troop.

### **Options for Casting**

**Actor #1** (male, early 20s) plays Davey Herold.

**Actor #2** (male, 30s) plays Frederick Stone, Mr. Garrett, Lt. Doherty, and the voice of Abraham Lincoln.

**Actor #3** (male, mid 20s) plays Prison Guard, John Wilkes Booth, and Lewis Powell.

**Actor #1** Herold

**Actor #2** Stone

**Actor #3** Booth

**Actor #4** Garrett, Doherty, and Lincoln

**Actor #5** Guard and Powell

*Wilkes*

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### **SETTING / LIGHTS**

The play takes place in 1865 in the jail cell of Davey Herold. We should seamlessly shift to the other playing worlds (the woods, the taverns, etc.) using lights. Herold can leave his seat in the cell as the lights shift and be in place in a different playing world as the lights establish the different areas.

## WILKES

*(LIGHTS up on a small, dark and dingy room, which contains only a chair. In that chair is a young man in his early 20s. This is DAVEY HEROLD. His head is covered with a burlap sack that is tied at his neck. His hands are in shackles, held together by a long bar that keeps his hands at an uncomfortable distance. He is asleep and slumped over in his chair. A PRISON GUARD, also in his 20s, enters the room. He is dressed in his Union Army uniform. He carries with him a small table and places it to the left of Herold. He then steps out of the room and comes back quickly with a chair, which he places next to the table. As he sets down the chair, FREDERICK STONE, a lawyer in his 30s, enters. He is dressed in a suit and carries a small pile of papers. He's a very serious man but has a clear warmth about him. He sets the papers on the desk and motions to the Guard to take off the burlap sack. The Guard jostles Herold, waking him up, and removes the sack. Herold wakes up, quickly gasps for breath, and shifts in his chair.)*

**STONE:** *(To Guard.)* You may remove those and excuse yourself.

*(GUARD removes HEROLD'S shackles and takes them with him as he exits.)*

**STONE:** *(Cont'd.)* Looked uncomfortable. *(Gives Herold a small smile.)* Mr. Herold, my name is Frederick Stone. I've been appointed by the Judge Advocate General...I'm here to ask you some questions. Do you mind if I call you David?

**HEROLD:** Davey, everyone calls me Davey.

**STONE:** Alright, Davey. *(Shooting a small smile in Herold's direction.)* Alright. To begin with, Davey, you do admit to being an associate of the now-deceased John Wilkes Booth?

**HEROLD:** *(Quietly.)* Yes, mmm...Yes, sir. He was my friend.

**STONE:** You met with Booth and other conspirators at Mary Surratt's Tavern?

**HEROLD:** Thought I already went through all this, with that other man?

**STONE:** Other man?

**HEROLD:** Mr. Bingham. He already come and seen me. Asked me a slew of questions. Who my parents are, how I got to know Johnny...

**STONE:** Yes...well, I'm here in a somewhat different capacity.....

**HEROLD:** Don't really see the point.

**STONE:** The point?

**HEROLD:** Answering your questions. You law folks, acting like you don't know what's gonna happen, but I know soon as you finish all the paperwork, you'll all be there watching me swinging by the neck.

**STONE:** Is that what you believe?

**HEROLD:** That's what everybody believes.

**STONE:** To be honest I'm not sure about that yet. Davey, I was sent here to gather information in order to aid in your defense.

**HEROLD:** My defense.

**STONE:** Yes.

**HEROLD:** So you're *my* lawyer.

**STONE:** In a manner of speaking, yes.

**HEROLD:** What does that mean, in a manner of speaking?

**STONE:** You are somewhat familiar with the legal system?

**HEROLD:** I've seen a trial or two.

**STONE:** Criminal trials?

**HEROLD:** Yes.

**STONE:** You watched from the gallery?

**HEROLD:** Yes, sir. Mighty interesting.

**STONE:** What we're dealing with here is slightly different. You are a defendant, but you won't be tried in front of a jury of your peers. Your trial will be a military commission, a government trial; and a panel of military officers will decide your case.

**HEROLD:** Men from the Army?

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