



## Director's Notes

Arthur Miller was no stranger to political coercion. His play *The Crucible* was a direct response to the House Un-American Activities Committee, drawing parallels between it and the Salem witch trials. Miller was denied a passport to the London opening of the play in 1954 after the HUAC became incensed by its subject matter and implications. In 1956, Miller was called before the committee and he refused to give up names (despite assurances that he would not be asked) and he was subsequently held in contempt of congress and ultimately blacklisted. The ruling was eventually overturned, but it left a mark.

In 1965, Miller was elected president of an international literary organization and thereafter traveled to the Soviet Union to persuade writers to join. He began campaigning on behalf of dissident writers and in 1967 visited Czechoslovakia, where he briefly met with Vaclav Havel. Then a persecuted playwright, Havel later ascended to the presidency, but his early days provided Miller with the inspiration for *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. Interestingly, in 1969, Miller found himself seemingly on the other end of the Communist threat as his works were banned in the Soviet Union due to his lobbying efforts and publicity around the suppression of writers in Eastern Europe. Fourteen years earlier, he had been called before the HUAC for Communist sympathizing, and suddenly he was under fire in Communist countries for promoting democracy and free expression.

*The Archbishop's Ceiling* takes place in this nexus.

The characters in this play share artistic history, romantic history, political history, and simply the history of friendship forged over many years. Arguably, they started at similar places, but the play finds them at a crossroads, and the shared histories intersect and collide – primarily because of the power structure that is influencing them all, spurring them to action.

But a fascinating aspect to this is not only people's reaction to the imposition of power, but to the imposition of *being observed*, being listened to. What drives this show is not the knowledge that the ceiling is bugged, but that the ceiling *might* be bugged. It's really an examination of how we communicate with each other when we think we're being overheard. The reality of the microphones is ultimately irrelevant – they have an effect on the characters whether they exist or not. And the effect may be a cooling of speech and thought, or it may cause one friend to turn against another. And to Miller this is the insidious but inevitable result – whether by blacklisting or by outright silencing, people are coerced by the powers-that-be to change behavior.

And taken to the next step, the power structure may not even be governmental at all. It could simply be societal. For all our current-day concerns about wire-tapping and identity theft and privacy, we live in an environment where it is not only possible but encouraged to post our every thought on the internet, thus sharing it widely – information about ourselves, friends, vacations, meals, books, films, likes, dislikes, politics, faith, and on and on. Miller would be simultaneously intrigued and alarmed by the power of the internet to reveal people, by a time when microphones are virtually unnecessary. Ever shopped for something online but had second thoughts, only to see that item follow you around the internet for weeks, appearing in sidebars and ad space and emails, prodding you into action?



**Brett Aune, Director**