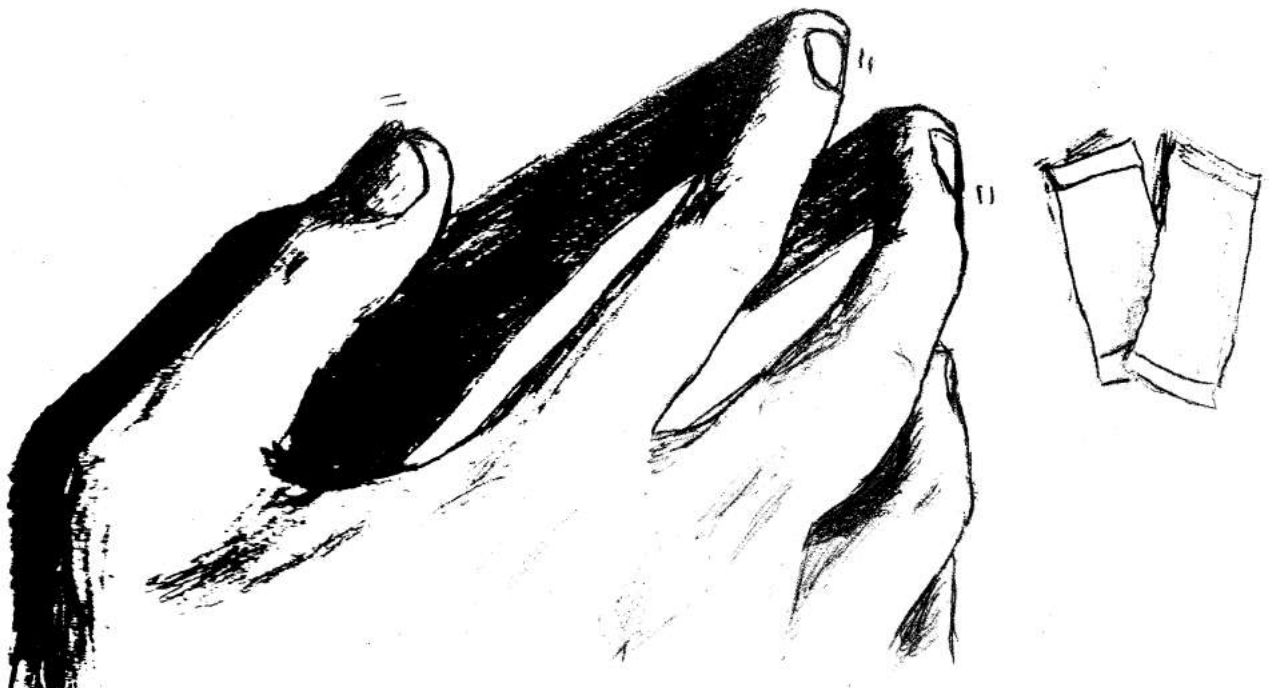


# SPOONFACE STEINBERG

by Lee Hall



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Cover by Simmie Kastner  
Content & layout by Eric S. Kildow.

Welcome to *Blue Sky* by Clare Bayley. This co-production between Burning Coal Theatre and the Contemporary Art Museum of Raleigh (CAM) marks the U.S. Premiere of the play. *Blue Sky* is a play about burying truth. As Jane digs deeper to uncover the truth about the CIA's extraordinary rendition program, she unearths a series of truths concerning the rest of the characters in the play. While celebrating the power of journalism, *Blue Sky* asks what we do with the truth once we know it, and what stories we tell ourselves in order to live with the truth. The play is a political thriller, but at its core it is an aching family drama.

Gus Heagerty, Director  
Burning Coal Theatre Company  
CAM Raleigh

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# WAYS OF BEING: AN INTRODUCTION TO AUTISM

The main character in Spoonface Steinberg is autistic. Autism is defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder which is often manifested by impaired social interaction, communication, and restrictive behaviors. Despite the fact that the disorder is well-documented, experts do not fully agree on the causes. However, both environmental and genetic factors are considered, though the role of vaccines in causing autism has been solidly disproven. Autism affects the brain by altering how nerve cells and the related synapses connect to one another, but the precise changes are not well understood and seem highly variable.

Generally, the first signs of autism appear during infancy or early childhood and generally follows a course without remission. Due to the highly variable nature of the disorder, autistic individuals may be severely impaired in one aspect of their lives but normal, or even superior, in other aspects. Often the chief impairments are in social situations, where autistics tend to lack the intuition that others take for granted. Also, between 1/3 and 1/2 of all autistic individuals do not develop enough natural speech in order to meet their daily needs in terms of communication. Such individuals

may have an ample grasp of vocabulary and spelling, but test less well when dealing with complex tasks like figurative language.

In the vast majority (over 90%) of cases, autistic individuals suffer from other forms of sensory abnormality. This can include either under or over responsivity, compulsive sensation seeking, poor muscle tone, and poor motor planning. These difficulties are not known to be a core feature of autism, and opinions differ in regards to whether these sensory symptoms distinguish autism from other developmental disorders.

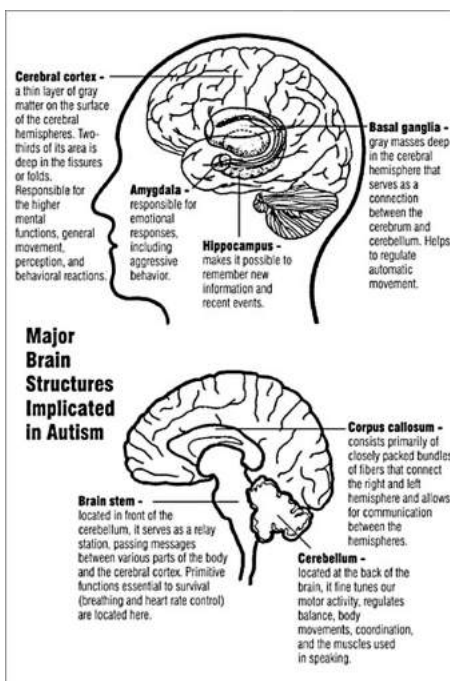
The causes, as well as unifying mechanisms of autism, are largely unclear to the scientific community. There seems to be no recognizable unifying factor at the molecular, cellular, and system levels. Further, autism seems to be a large number of disorders with varied and diverse mechanisms. Various brain development studies suggest that alteration of the brain's development occurs soon after conception and long before birth. There are various theories of how the mechanics of autism work, including differences in cellular biology, mirror neuronal migration, and lack of robust neural connections. Each of these theories account for some, but not all, of autism's symptoms.

10% of the population have some form of savant ability.

The diagnosis of autism is based on a battery of tests of the individual's behavior, not cause or mechanism. Recent spikes in the diagnosis of autism in children are related to the expansion of provider benefits linked to a formal diagnosis, as well as a refined understanding of autism itself. Recently, autism, Asperger Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified, have been grouped together in what are called the "autism spectrum disorders."

Recent developments in our understanding of autism have also led to a change in the status of this disorder. In recent years, a movement called the neurodiversity movement has sought to develop the cultural and sociological aspect of autism. Developments in internet technology have also helped autistic individuals bypass emotional sharing and nonverbal cues that tend to trip them up and facilitated the creation of a community. Some in the community remain dedicated to seeking a cure for autism, while others advocate it as simply another way of being. Some autistic individuals have been quite successful in their fields, including entertainers Daryl Hannah and Dan Akroyd, as well as animal scientist Temple Grandin.

Spoonface, as well as numerous other autistic individuals depicted in fiction, displays a condition called savant syndrome. This condition is where a person with a mental disability demonstrates some profound mental capability far in excess of what would be considered normal. The most common manifestations are feats of memory, and is the result from damage to the left anterior temporal lobe of the brain. Doctors have been able to artificially replicate savant syndrome using magnetic stimulation to disable that part of the brain. Roughly half of all known savants are autistic, but among those with autism, only about



Temple Grandin

## EVERY DAY A PRAYER: HASIDISM

Many of Spoonface's religious or mystical thoughts can be found in the Hasidic Jewish tradition. Arising in Poland, Lithuania, and the Ukraine around the middle of the 18th century and led by the mystic philosopher Bal Shem Tov, much of Hasidism's energy was pointed toward connecting with the common people of the Jewish community.

In particular, Spoonface's book that encourages her to make everything she does into a prayer is similar to the Hasidic thought of Panentheism, which refers to the omnipresence of God. As God is all present, so too should everything the individual does be made into a prayer. This is also reflected when she talks about being a baby filled with planets. The tzadik (righteous person) is in constant communion with God due to this as well. The discussion of sparks between people can be found in the works of Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, who wrote extensively on the

Hasidic tradition.

Above all, the Hasidic tradition helped to connect Jewish mystical and philosophical thought to people who might not otherwise have access to it. An individual like Spoonface, for example, was not equipped for the rigorous study of the Kabbalah and Talmud, and so the teachings of Bal Shem Tov open new opportunities for spirituality to an individual like Spoonface who cannot engage in the rigorous study of the Kabbalah that usually marks Jewish mysticism and religious thought.

## CHILDHOOD CANCER

Both adults and children are susceptible to developing cancer. However, cancer in young people is often significantly different than that in adults. Often, the DNA changes in the cells that trigger the cancer happen very early in their development, often before birth. As such, childhood cancers are not commonly linked to environmental risk factors.

Though their bodies are often better able to cope with the rigors of Chemo and Radiation therapies, children who undergo these treatments will need lifelong followup to handle long-term side effects of these treatments. The most common forms of childhood cancers are leukemias and lymphomas. Individuals with developmental disorders (autism or Down Syndrome) are up to twenty times more likely to develop some form of leukemia.

## DIVA OF DIVAS: MARIA CALLAS

The music that Spoonface listens to is opera sung by the Twentieth-century diva, Maria Callas. This Greek-American soprano was known during her career as La Divina and is widely considered one of the most significant and influential opera singers in recent history.

Raised in New York, Callas studied singing in Greece and began her career in Italy. Despite struggles and scandals throughout her career (she suffered from myopia that left her nearly blind while onstage) she was highly praised for her bel canto technique, wide vocal range, and dramatic interpretations. Indeed, her voice has been difficult to classify under modern systems, as her repertoire included not only heavy dramatic soprano roles but also light, agile coloratura roles as well. One commentator simply said, "This woman can sing anything written for the female voice." Her vocal range was just shy of three octaves, from F#

below middle C to E above high C.

Callas was also noted for her artistry and textual interpretations of the operas. However, around the mid-1950's, her voice declined significantly. The specific reasons are unclear, whether it was sudden weight loss (80 pounds in roughly a year), poor breath support, or other factors, her career was all but over by the time she was 40 years of age when she could have been singing up to her death at age 53.

A 2010 study by vocal researchers at the University of Bologna concluded that Callas suffered from Bronchitis, tracheitis, and dermatomyositis (the last of which causes a failure of muscles and tissues). Despite her short and scandalous career, Leonard Bernstein considers her catalogue "the Bible of Opera." Her influence on the art form is such that she is still considered the archetype for the diva as an artist.



*Maria Callas*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lee Hall, the author of *Spoonface Steinberg*, is an English playwright and screenwriter. He is probably best known for the 2000 film *Billy Elliot*. *Billy Elliot* would later be adapted into a stage musical, with music by Elton John and Lyrics by Hall. It would win the 2009 Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical.

Also successful was his radio monologue-turned-stage piece *Spoonface Steinberg*. The play would open in 1999 and then transfer to the West End. However, he was less successful with his comedies *Cooking with Elvis* and *I Luv You Jimmy Spud*. Hall commonly moves and adapts his works between mediums. *I Luv You Jimmy Spud* began as a radio play and a film entitled *Gabriel* and *Me*.

Hall is also a prolific translator, bringing plays from Carlo Goldoni, Bertolt Brecht, and Herman

Hieijermans to the English language.

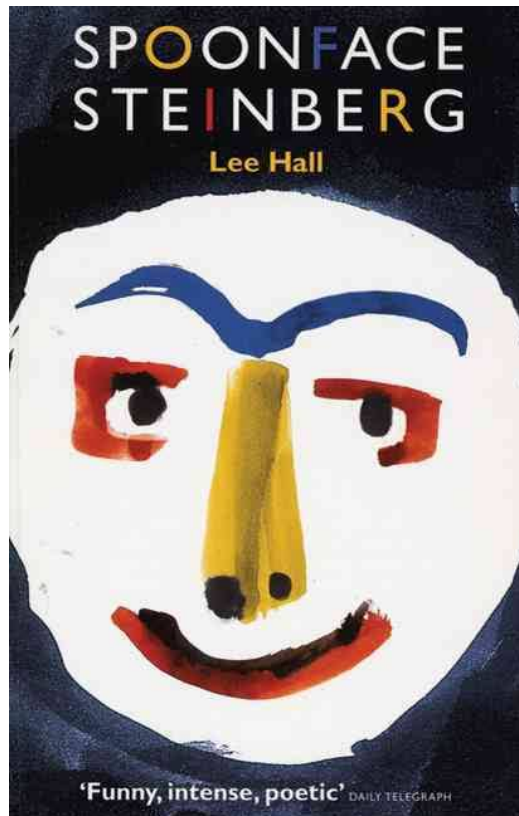
His most recent play, *The Pitmen Painters*, premiered in 2008, and won the Evening Standard Award for best play. He also co-wrote recent adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*.

In 2011, a minor controversy arose over Hall's children's opera entitled *Beached*. After six months of rehearsal, the school responsible for producing the work threatened to pull out if references to the main character as a gay man were not changed. He was also the original writer on the screenplay for the film adaptation of *War Horse*. He still writes regularly for television.



## SYNOPSIS

*Spoonface Steinberg* is a long, almost stream-of-consciousness monologue delivered by a young autistic girl who is dying of cancer. *Spoonface* was different from the moment she was born. Throughout she discusses issues such as her love of opera, the deteriorating relationship between her parents, her mother's drinking problem, her father's infidelity, the Holocaust, hope and human dignity, and Jewish mystical thought.



## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*Spoonface Steinberg* was first conceived as a dramatic monologue for radio broadcast. It was first broadcast on BBC Radio 4, and was such a popular success that it was immediately slated for rebroadcast. Originally it was the fourth and final play in a series of linked radio dramas called "God's Country." However, its great success has led it to be thought of as a standalone play.

A year after its radio broadcast, it was broadcast for television, accompanied by images (featuring Ella Jones as *Spoonface*). The stage adaptation, adapted by Hall, Magni, and Castledine, was first performed in 2000. It featured Kathryn Hunter in the title role.

This production at Burning Coal Theatre marks the US premier.

## THE COMPANY

### Caitlin Wells (Spoonface)

Caitlin was raised in North Carolina and has lived in Minnesota, Brazil, and Spain. A teacher by day, she is a member of Little Green Pig Theatrical Concern and Delta Boys Theater Company. Recent credits: *Love & Information*, *Mac*, *Iphigenia Crash Land Falls on the Neon Shell That Was Once Her Heart* (Delta Boys); *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, *hmlt*, *Tarantino's Yellow Speedo*, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (Little Green Pig); *Amadeus* (Leviathan); and *Measure Back* (Duke Performances & Christopher McElroen/T. Ryder Smith). Upcoming shows include *The Nether* at Manbites Dog.

### Jerome Davis (Director)

Jerome is a member of the 2015/2016 Burning Coal Company. He founded the company in 1995 with his wife, Simmie Kastner. For Burning Coal: *Rat in the Skull*, *Pentecost* (twice), *Winding the Ball* (American premiere), *Steward of Christendom*, *Night and Day*, *Company*, *Juno & the Paycock*, *The Weir*, *Road to Mecca*, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Hamlet*, *Inherit the Wind*, *The Seafarer*, *The Prisoner's Dilemma* and *The Shape of the Table* (American premieres both), *Enron* and *Jude the Obscure*, Parts 1 & 2. As an actor, *St. Nicholas* (twice), *Love's Labours Lost*, *The Mound Builders*. He directed Benjamin Britten's *Turn of the Screw* for NC Opera at Durham's Carolina Theatre. Elsewhere, he has directed *Twelfth Night*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Keely & Du*, *The Elephant Man*, *The Time of Your Life*, and *Red*. He has acted or studied with Uta Hagen, Ellen Burstyn, Adrian Hall, Richard Jenkins, Oliver Platt, Hope Davis, Steve Harris, Ralph Waite, Julie Bovasso and Amanda Peet.

### Eric S.Kildow(Dramaturg/StudyGuides)

For Burning Coal: *Man of La Mancha*, *Brigadoon*, *As You Like It*, *Shining City*, *Good*, *Ruined*, *The Heretic*, *(Three Man) Tempest*, *The Jesus Fund*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Fayetteville Street*, *Outrunning Bullets(Reading)*, *ASYLUM*, *The Wiz*. Eric is an Assistant Professor of Theatre at Kent State University in Ohio and works as a freelance dramaturg & director. As an artistic associate of the London-based Loitering With Intent Theatre Company, he presented the devised work *TurnRight/TurnLeft: A Manual for the End of the World* at the Fleet Street Theatre in Hamburg, Germany. He is a member of the Stage Directors & Choreographers Society, Literary Managers & Dramaturgs of the Americas, the Lincoln Center Theatre Director's Lab and the Burning Coal Company of Artists. <http://www.eskildow.com>



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# NC STATE EDUCATION STANDARDS

The state of North Carolina values the skills and competencies of Arts education due to their applicability to other disciplines. These productions are designed to give your students exposure to the competencies and specific standards listed below.

This production and the related study materials will provide students with specific knowledge and skills to address the following Standard Course of Study Competencies and Objectives in the Theatre Arts.

- **COMPETENCY GOAL 1:** The learner will write based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.
  - Grades 3-5
    - 1.02: Recognize the beginning, middle, and end of a story
    - 1.03: Infer lessons from multicultural stories, fairy tales, tall tales, legends, and myths.
    - 1.06: Refine reading comprehension by using verbal and non-verbal communication.
  - Grades 6-8
    - 1.01: Recognize and explain unique characteristics of the dramatic script such as dramatic structure and dialogue.
    - 1.04: Produce written, verbal, and visual responses to written and/or performed dramatic material.
    - 1.05: Identify themes and plots from multicultural literature.
  - Grades 9-12
    - 1.03: Compare and contrast play structure in relation to other forms of literature.
- **COMPETENCY GOAL 7:** The learner will analyze, critique, and construct meaning from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
  - Grades 3-5
    - 7.01: Build skills to critique self and others in a respectful and constructive manner.
    - 7.03: Convey personal reactions to various texts.
    - 7.05: Communicate emotions and thoughts evoked by performance.
    - 7.07: Suggest alternative characters, settings, or events after viewing or participating in a performance.
  - Grades 6-8
    - 7.01: Recognize and practice audience etiquette.
    - 7.03: Develop verbal, visual and written responses to works of informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions from various cultures.
    - 7.04: Express meaning perceived from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
  - Grades 9-12
    - 7.02: Develop and relate a world view of theatre in society.
- **COMPETENCY GOAL 8:** The learner will understand context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the past and present.
  - Grades 3-5
    - 8.04: Experience live or recorded performance
    - 8.05: Discuss the similarities and differences between live and recorded theatrical events.

Spoonface Steinberg is also designed to address the following Core Curriculum Anchor Standards in Language Arts Literacy and Social Studies.

- **Reading Anchor 4:** Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- **Reading Anchor 6:** Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- **Writing Anchor 2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- **Writing Anchor 7:** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.