From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Dock

This iBook was edited by Daniel P. Castillo
"Something special happened in 1933 and 1934. We took history into our own hands, and it felt good."

- Harry Bridges-
FROM WHARF RATS TO LORDS OF THE DOCKS

About the Play

Harry Bridges...a hero or the devil incarnate?

It all depended on your point of view.

He was certainly radical. He was fighting for workers rights, equality, justice for all and a national health care system 75 years ago! And the issues in his life – the growing gap between rich and poor, government surveillance, immigration, globalization, communism and terrorism, prejudice and discrimination – they certainly haven’t gone away. If anyone stood up for the 99% it was Harry Bridges.

This multi-media production is a rousing portrayal of legendary labor leader Harry Bridges’ passion, struggles and wicked sense of humor, with 40 + sound and visual cues. It takes you on an amazing journey through a Great Depression, a stunning General Strike, the rise of the American labor movement and McCarthyism, and the longest attempt in history to deport an individual. It also takes you through three wives, two bitter divorces and a couple of years of a lot of Jack Daniels. A live performance was filmed by Hollywood legend Haskell Wexler and has aired on PBS for the last three years.

This play is edgy, entertaining and educational, and there is the possibility of course credits for students of American history, political science, sociology, anthropology, drama and writing. Workshops on writing and performing monologues are also available, led by Ian Ruskin.

“There will always be a place for us somewhere, somehow, as long as we see to it that working people fight for everything they have, everything they hope to get, for dignity, equality, democracy, to oppose war and to bring to the world a better life.”

- Harry Bridges
FROM WHARF RATS TO LORDS OF THE DOCKS

Reactions

“Unmistakable topicality and human interest infuses From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks...it is undeniably apropos for the corporatist-beleaguered present. Certainly Ruskin, whose versatility, innate affability and easy delivery lands directly between middle-period Geoffrey Rush and the late Roger Livesey, conveys the truth as he sees it, holding focus...maintaining intrigue...

David C. Nichols, Theatre Critic
Los Angeles Times

“Ruskin, a stellar storyteller, revivifies Bridges in both appearance and sentiment. Ruskin’s script is wonderfully didactic and his presence is compelling. We see this master stage craftsman in a sterling performance and are also informed of an important and rarely broached part of America’s labor history. For anyone who works for a living, or is dependent on workers to live (and that’s all of us), From Wharf Rats to Lord of the Docks is a must-see show”.

Ben Miles, Theatre Critic
showmag.com, Los Angeles

“Thanks for bringing your wonderful, riveting and highly entertaining performance to Harvard Law School for the 65th Anniversary of our Trade Union Program. It was the absolute highlight of our conference....with a sustained standing ovation and the audience staying to talk to you for over an hour....from retirees to young college students and even a sprinkling of High School students....you managed to hold everyone’s attention and bring labor history to life”.

Elaine Bernard, Executive Director,
Labor and Worklife Program & Trade Union Program, Harvard Law School

“Harry Bridges is one of the most important labor leaders of the 20th century, and Ian Ruskin, in his one-man show, has captured him brilliantly. There were times when I forgot this was someone other than Harry Bridges speaking. It’s a valuable piece of working-class history, presented colorfully and intelligently”.

Howard Zinn,
Historian, Playwright and Social Activist

“I had the pleasure to see Ian Ruskin’s performance as a graduate student in Labor Studies at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. It is a wonderful theatre experience and an illuminating account of the life and times of one of America’s most important union leaders”.

Micah Landau,
Graduate student and Labor Journalist, United Federation of Teachers
Therefore, we, who have the common objectives to advance the living standards of ourselves and our fellow workers everywhere in the world, to promote the general welfare of our nation and our communities, to banish racial and religious prejudice and discrimination, to strengthen democracy everywhere and achieve permanent peace in the world, do form ourselves into one indivisible union...

_from the Constitution of The International Longshore & Warehouse Union_
Cast and Crew

Ian Ruskin - Producer, Writer and Actor

Suzanne Thompson - Producer

Haskell Wexler - Director of the film version

Ed Asner - Voice

Elliott Gould - Voice
Ian has worked extensively in theatre, television, and film, in England and Los Angeles. His life-long interest in social justice led him to found The Harry Bridges Project in 2000. He has gone on to produce, write, and narrate two radio documentaries and the one-man play “From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks” that premiered at the University of Washington Summer Arts Festival in 2001. He has subsequently performed the play over 200 times. In 2003 he completed a one-man play From Piers to Plantations about the ILWU in Hawai‘i, and in 2004 “Harry and John,” a two-man play about the relationship between Harry Bridges and John L. Lewis. He has produced four documentary films including, in association with Suzanne Thompson, the film version of “From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks,” directed and shot by Haskell Wexler. It has aired nationwide on PBS for the past three years, making the film available to 150 million Americans. His latest play “To Begin the World Over Again; the Life of Thomas Paine” premiered on opening night of Grand Performances in Los Angeles. He is also working on a feature film treatment based on the 1934 San Francisco General Strike and a radio documentary, “A Wild Woman Sings the Blues.”
Suzanne Thompson combines her love for art and politics in “From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks” and its soundtrack “Step by Step”. In the early 1980’s Thompson worked for an LA based Central American refugee service organization and worked on the Salvadoran Coffee Boycott where ILWU members stood in solidarity against the war and refused to unload Salvadoran Coffee along west coast and Canadian ports. Thompson began work with Ian Ruskin in 1999 to develop ideas combining art with labor history to form The Harry Bridges Project, and continued her work with Ruskin on radio documentaries, fundraising, and as a producer on the film and soundtrack.

In 2005, Thompson co-founded the Venice Arts Council, Chairs The Endangered Art Fund and is currently involved in a major public art restoration project, the Venice Beach Poet’s Monument. She is one of the founders of the Venice Japanese American Memorial Monument Committee. In 2010, Thompson founded Actors and Artists United for the Freedom of the Cuban 5 and is leading an ILWU delegation to Cuba.
Haskell Wexler
Director of the Film Version

Haskell Wexler is one of the most important cinematographers working in the film industry today. His work has spanned six decades. He shot his first film in 1947. He's photographed a wide range of films that have earned him five Academy Award nominations and two Oscars for Best Cinematography. He won Academy Awards for his work on Mike Nichols’ WHO’S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF and Hal Ashby’s BOUND FOR GLORY. Wexler is also known for his work on ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO’S NEST, IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT and THE THOMAS CROWN AFFAIR to name just a few.

He’s also done television work, earning an Emmy nod for the lensing of the HBO movie 61*, directed by Billy Crystal.

As a director, Wexler has made over fifty documentaries including, MEDIUM COOL, a groundbreaking film shot during the Democratic convention in Chicago and LATINO in Nicaragua which received a special honor at Cannes Film Festival. He’s also directed the documentaries THE BUS, BUS II and BUS RIDERS UNION; INTRODUCTION TO THE ENEMY, shot in Vietnam with Jane Fonda; INTERVIEWS WITH MY LAI VETERANS, which also won an Academy Award, NO NUKES with Barbara Kopple, TARGET NICARAGUA: INSIDE A SECRET WAR, FROM WHARF RATS TO LORDS OF THE DOCKS and WHO NEEDS SLEEP?
Ed Asner
Voice

Best known for his comedic and dramatic crossover as the gruff but soft-hearted journalist Lou Grant, in "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and continued in the newspaper-set drama "Lou Grant," which earned him five Emmys and three Golden Globe Awards, Asner received two more Emmy and Golden Globe Awards for the mini-series "Rich Man, Poor Man" and "Roots." As well, Edward Asner has been the recipient of seven Emmy Awards and 16 nominations, and five Golden Globe Awards.

In addition to his professional versatility, Edward Asner has consistently served and committed himself to the rights of the working performer in addition to advocating for human rights, world peace, environmental preservation and political freedom. Edward Asner has more than 100 TV credits, and was nominated for another Emmy for Hallmark’s "The Christmas Card" in addition to his Emmy nominated guest appearance on "CSI/NY." He was the lead voice of Carl Fredricksen in Pixar’s 2009 box-office-hit "UP!"

He will begin his second season of touring the country to sold out theatres in his one man show about FDR. In 2011 he will appear regularly in CMT’s first sitcom, Working Class. The HBO Movie "Too Big To Fail," scheduled to air in 2011, will find Ed Asner cast in the role of Warren Buffett and costarring with William Hurt, James Woods and Paul Giamatti.
Elliott Gould
Voice

Elliott began his acting career on Broadway in the 1960’s, and then went on to become the embodiment of a disenchanted youth culture in such films as Robert Altman’s Korean War satire M*A*S*H (1970) in which he played the maverick surgeon "Trapper John" and BOB & TED & CAROL & ALICE (1969), for which he received an Oscar nomination. Time Magazine placed him on one of its covers in 1970, at a peak of his long and prolific career, calling him a "star for an uptight age."

Some of his other notable films include A BRIDGE TOO FAR, CAPRICORN ONE, and a remake of THE LADY VANISHES. Gould played the detective Philip Marlowe in Altman's 1973 film THE LONG GOODBYE.

Gould’s Broadway theatre credits include IRMA LA DOUCE, SAY, DARLING, I CAN GET IT FOR YOU WHOLESALe, LITTLE MURDERS, and DRAT! THE CAT!

On television, Gould hosted “Saturday Night Live” six times. He had a recurring guest role on “Friends” as Jack Gellar, the good-natured, but fussy father of the Greenwich village-dwelling Gellar kids, Monica and Ross, spending nine years recurring in the role across 10 seasons. Later, Gould appeared in guest spots on “Law & Order” and “CSI.”

Gould received critical praise for his role in Warren Beatty’s 1991 gangster epic film BUGSY. In addition, he appeared in AMERICAN HISTORY X as the boyfriend of Edward Norton’s character’s mother. He co-starred as Reuben Tishkoff in OCEAN’S ELEVEN (2001), and its sequels: OCEAN’S TWELVE (2004), and OCEAN’S THIRTEEN (2007). Gould also can be seen in the Warner Brothers feature CONTAGION (2011).
CHAPTER 4

Introduction and Scenes from the Play
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Chapter 5

Book a Performance

The fee structure for 2014 is based on the location, size of audience and your budget. For Universities, a day of workshops with various classes can be added for an additional $1,000. Students can include those studying American history, Labor history, political science, sociology and anthropology, as the play addresses issues of immigration, the Depression, rise of unions, McCarthyism, and globalization. For drama students, the process of writing and performing the play (oral histories, character development, the soundtrack, promoting and producing your own work).
Book a Performance

Travel is economy class or usually mileage in California and accommodations can be at a conference center, hotel, or guest room in a private house. Fees for national and international conferences and conventions are by arrangement.

For more information about booking a performance:
Unions click here and Colleges click here

The fee includes:

- All props and costume
- Sound and Visual cues on DVD, external hard drive, and iPad plus pre-show music on CD
- Coordination of technical requirements
- 3 personalized templates for a program, 8x11 flyer and a 16x22 poster
- Ian Ruskin is happy to do phone interviews for print and radio publicity
- A press release package is available click here

To learn more about bringing the play to your college or university, union, conference, museum, library, community group or theatre you can also contact us at –
ianruskin@theharrybridgesproject.org
FROM WHARF RATS TO LORDS OF THE DOCKS

More Reactions

“Thank you for your powerful performance of 'From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks' at the Organization of American Historians convention. I heard nothing but the highest praise, and your performance was one of the highlights of the convention.”

Pete Daniel,
Past President, Organization of American Historians

“I cannot thank you enough for your brilliant presentation 'From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks' at our annual labor-management conference this year. Our audience was simply riveted, and the enthusiastic standing ovation you received speaks volumes for the power and impact of your performance!”

Janet Walden,
President and CEO, Center for Collaborative Solutions

"Ian Ruskin's play about Harry Bridges and the West Coast dock workers brings to life the story of one of the most important leaders and militant unions in American Labor history. While the story primarily covers a period some 50 to 70 years ago, the message applies to the struggles we face today. I wholeheartedly recommend this play to all trade unionists whether you are a seasoned organizer or just joined your first union.”

Richard Trumka,
President, AFL – CIO