Acting Edition

Ken Ludwig's Dear Jack, Dear Louise

SAMUEL FRENCH

Copyright © 2020 by Ken Ludwig
All Rights Reserved
Excerpt from *Arsenic and Old Lace* by Joseph Kesserling
Original Broadway Production by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse
Used with permission
Cover artwork by Bob King Creative Ltd © Arcola Theatre

KEN LUDWIG'S DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all member countries of the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, the Universal Copyright Convention, and/or the World Trade Organization conforming to the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television, online/digital production, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-70880-0

www.concordtheatricals.com
www.concordtheatricals.co.uk

FOR PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

United States and Canada
info@concordtheatricals.com
1-866-979-0447

United Kingdom and Europe
licensing@concordtheatricals.co.uk
020-7054-7298

Each title is subject to availability from Concord Theatricals Corp., depending upon country of performance. Please be aware that *KEN LUDWIG'S DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE* may not be licensed by Concord Theatricals Corp. in your territory. Professional and amateur producers should contact the nearest Concord Theatricals Corp. office or licensing partner to verify availability.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *KEN LUDWIG'S DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE* is subject to a licensing fee. The purchase, renting, lending or use of this book does not constitute a license to perform this title(s), which license must be obtained from Concord Theatricals Corp. prior to any performance. Performance of this title(s) without a license is a violation of federal law and may subject the producer and/or presenter of such performances to civil penalties. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to the appropriate agent before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title(s) is

presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged. Professional/Stock licensing fees are quoted upon application to Concord Theatricals Corp.

This work is published by Samuel French, an imprint of Concord Theatricals Corp.

No one shall make any changes in this title(s) for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, scanned, uploaded, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, digital, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall share this title(s), or any part of this title(s), through any social media or file hosting websites.

For all inquiries regarding motion picture, television, online/digital and other media rights, please contact Concord Theatricals Corp.

MUSIC AND THIRD-PARTY MATERIALS USE NOTE

Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted music and/or other copyrighted third-party materials (e.g. artworks, logos) in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. If no such permission is obtained by the licensee, then the licensee must use only original music and materials that the licensee owns and controls. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for clearances of all third-party copyrighted materials, including without limitation music, and shall indemnify the copyright owners of the play(s) and their licensing agent, Concord Theatricals Corp., against any costs, expenses, losses and liabilities arising from the use of such copyrighted third-party materials by licensees. For music, please contact the appropriate music licensing authority in your territory for the rights to any incidental music.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

If you have obtained performance rights to this title, please refer to your licensing agreement for important billing and credit requirements.

DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE was first produced by Arena Stage (Molly Smith, Artistic Director; Edgar Dobie, Executive Producer) in Washington, D.C. on November 21, 2019. The performance was directed by Jackie Maxwell, with sets by Beowulf Boritt, costumes by Linda Cho, lights by Jason Lyons, original music and sound by Lindsay Jones, wigs by Charles G. LaPointe, and dramaturgy by Jocelyn Clarke. The production stage manager was Kurt Hall. The cast was as follows:

JACK LUDWIG . . . . . Jake Epstein
LOUISE RABINER . . . . . Amelia Pedlow

DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE received its UK premiere at Arcola Theatre (Mehmet Ergen, Executive Artistic Director; Leyla Nazli, Deputy Artistic Director & Executive Producer) in London on April 2, 2026. The performance was directed by Simon Reade, with design by Robert Innes-Hopkins, lighting design by Richard Williamson, sound design by Jamie Lu, costume supervision by Katherine Watt, and casting by Ginny Schiller CDG. The production manager was Herbe Walmsley, the stage manager on book was Rosie Fleming, and the assistant stage manager was Mikaela Mondlane. The cast was as follows:

JACK LUDWIG . . . . . Preston Nyman
LOUISE RABINER . . . . . Eva Feiler

CHARACTERS

JACK – is in his early to mid-thirties. He is reserved and wears khakis to suggest that he's in the Army.

LOUISE – who is in her mid-twenties to early thirties, is outgoing and stylish.

TIME

June 1942 – May 1945

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Louise's last name, Rabiner, is pronounced "ra-*bean*-er." Jack's last name, Ludwig, is pronounced "*lud*-wig." "Lud" rhymes with "bud," and the "W" has no hint of a "V" in it.

My parents were married for over fifty years. They lived most of their lives in York, Pennsylvania where they raised my brother Gene and me. York is about fifty miles west of Coatesville. At least once a year we would visit our grandparents in Brooklyn and then go into New York to see a Broadway show.

A NOTE ON PRODUCTION

Because this play is for two actors and all the dialogue is composed of letters, the play could well be presented simply by having the actors sitting at separate desks and "reading" their letters aloud. This indeed is how I directed the play myself at the initial workshop and two subsequent benefit presentations. However, there are other ways to present the play, and I hope that future productions will explore those as well.

It was during the rehearsals for the first full production of the play, at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., that one possible staging emerged. Our wonderful director was Jackie Maxwell, and during rehearsals, bit by bit, a style of presentation emerged that was both exciting and true to the spirit of the story.

In Jackie's production, the stage still had two desks, Jack's utilitarian desk on one side and Louise's more feminine desk on the other. And this is where the action began. But both actors had their parts memorized, and they did not stay moored to their desks in the least. They brought the play to life, as most plays are brought to life, through movement, emotion and interaction.

As such, the play had a single evocative set that symbolized both the glamorous world of New York theater and the utilitarian world of the U.S. Army. Equally, the story was evoked by an abundance of props and costumes. Jack had a footlocker and a bookshelf, both Army regulation. Louise had a decorative screen behind her with loads of clothes hanging over it, this way and that. And the costumes took on all the more importance as the play developed. Louise was rather breathtakingly stylish (as was my mother, on whom the part is based); and Jack rooted the play in the practicalities of Army life, moving from hospital dress to battle gear as his ever-changing life required.

Meanwhile, one element of the style of the play emerged very clearly, and indeed was intended by me from the moment I put pen to paper: During the course of the play, the actors should never look at each other. It may feel "normal" at first to direct the dialogue to the other actor. In a way, the letters do indeed become a sort of dialogue between the characters. But addressing each other directly destroys the metaphorical distance that letters create by their very nature, and it equally subverts the formality of letter-writing which is so much a part of the play's style. So the actors should deliver the letters looking elsewhere, usually out towards the audience, where, in their minds their newfound love interests somewhere exist. This approach of course requires memorization of the text.

Another "rule" for the play is that the actors should never try "write" the letters with pen and paper. The practicalities of letter-writing should never muddy the play. Now and then, they can pick up their letters

– single sheets of paper pre-set for convenience. But pens and stationery will get in the way of the flow of the story. And with this in mind, it will be best if the actors have memorized the script, even though they might glance at their letters now and then.

This is all to say that the play can be presented in a number of ways, and I have confidence that future producers and their creative teams will find new, exciting paths to follow. Bear in mind that the story is meant to come to life before our eyes as a tale of heroism, risk, danger and love on the part of two souls who manage to find each other during a time of heart-stopping peril, then desperately try to hold on for dear life.

Ken Ludwig

A NOTE ON THE USE OF MUSIC IN THE PRODUCTION

The original production of *DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE* at Arena Stage included the following songs:

SONG IN ORIGINAL PRODUCTION	ACTING EDITION PAGE
"The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" by Don Raye and Hughie Prince as sung by The Andrews Sisters	1
"Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!" by Sammy Cahn and Jule Styne	11
"In the Mood" by The Glenn Miller Band	22
"For Me and My Gal" by George W. Meyer with lyrics by Edgar Leslie and E. Ray Goetz as sung by Judy Garland and Gene Kelly	27
"I'll Be Seeing You" by Sammy Fain and Irving Kahal	51

If you wish to include these songs in your production, the publisher and author suggest that the licensee contact ASCAP or BMI to ascertain the music publisher and contact such music publisher to license or acquire permission for performance of the song. If a license or permission is unattainable for any particular song, the licensee may not use the song in *DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE* but should create an original composition in a similar style or use a similar song in the public domain. For further information, please see Music Use Note on page iii.

For my brother Gene,
without whom nothing would be the same

"As for my parents,
it never occurred to me
that they had ever been young."

John Carey
The Unexpected Professor:
An Oxford Life in Books

ACT I

(Music is playing, an upbeat swing dance tune of the period with female vocalists. As the music fades, the play begins.)*

JACK.

June 1, 1942

Dear Miss Rabiner,

How do you do? I'm Captain Jacob S. Ludwig, U.S. Army. As you probably know, my father and your father are friends, and they have suggested that you and I meet and get acquainted in a social way. I am stationed at an Army base in Medford, Oregon, 168 miles south of Eugene, Oregon. I understand that you live in New York City. I would not imagine that you get to Medford, Oregon very often, so perhaps a meeting in New York City would be more convenient for you.

Sincerely,

Captain Jacob S. Ludwig, U.S. Army

LOUISE.

June 4, 1942

Dear Captain Ludwig,

Thank you for your letter. Does "meet and get acquainted in a social way" mean go out on a date? If so, the answer is yes, I would like that very much. As for where to meet, I agree that New York City would be more convenient. I suppose we could meet halfway, in Bismarck, North Dakota, but then we'd both need snowshoes.

---

* Please see A Note on the Use of Music in the Production on page viii.

Sincerely,
Louise R. Rabiner, Private Citizen

PS: Can you tell me something about yourself?

JACK.

Dear Miss Rabiner,

You said you would like to know something about me, but I don't know what to write without boring you. My father is a tailor in Coatesville, Pennsylvania. I was born in Coatesville and grew up in Coatesville. Coatesville is even smaller than Medford. That's all I can think of.

Sincerely,
Captain Jacob S. Ludwig, U.S. Army

LOUISE.

Dear Captain Ludwig,

You can do better than that.

Sincerely,
Louise Rabiner

JACK.

Dear Miss Rabiner,

All right, I'll try. Coatesville has a population of 5,000, and it's twenty-five miles due west of Philadelphia on Route Thirty. I have only one sibling, a sister named Betty. It is just us two children, which I suppose is a little unusual, since my mother is one of twelve children, all girls. So I have a lot of aunts.

Sincerely,
Captain Jacob S. Ludwig, U.S. Army

LOUISE. Keep going.

JACK. There is not much more to tell. During high school I worked at a soda fountain after school and during the summers. I enjoyed making root beer floats most of all because it took a lot of practice to keep the foam from dripping all over my hands when I added the ice cream. My next job was working at the Lukens Steel Mill on the outskirts of Coatesville, also after school and on weekends. Then I went to college and then medical

school. Right after medical school I was drafted. Now you know everything there is to know about me.

LOUISE. You're a doctor?

JACK. Yes.

LOUISE. And you didn't tell me?

JACK. I just told you two letters ago.

LOUISE. You are either the most modest human being who ever lived or this is a trick. Don't you know that every girl in the world wants to go out with a doctor? Except me. It's too obvious. Do you dance?

JACK. No.

LOUISE. Why not?

JACK. No one ever taught me.

LOUISE. Would you like to learn to dance?

JACK. No.

LOUISE. Why not?

JACK. Because it would make me feel self-conscious.

LOUISE.

Dear Captain Jacob S. Ludwig, U.S. Army,

That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard. Dancing is the one thing in life that can take you out of yourself and lift you up from the everyday workaday world onto a higher plane. Dancing is also beautiful, artistic and a wonderful way to get to know people. PS: I'm a dancer.

PPS: Can we start using first names now? I like to be called Louise, though my sister calls me Lou. What do you prefer?

JACK. I like to be called Jack.

Sincerely,

Captain Jacob S. Ludwig, U.S. Army

LOUISE. Was that a joke?

JACK. Was what a joke?

(She shakes her head in despair.)

And I'm sorry for my remarks about dancing. My father told me you were an actress, not a dancer. Can you tell me about yourself?

LOUISE. Of course. I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. I went to the High School for the Performing Arts in Manhattan for which I had to audition, and I did a song from *Anything Goes* by Cole Porter. I sang "Blow Gabriel Blow," which is one of the songs that Ethel Merman sang in the original production. She's my idol. Her and Ginger Rogers. And Katherine Hepburn. And, if I'm fair, Rosalind Russell, but I don't like how she dresses. Anyway, I sang "Blow Gabriel Blow" and I went for the high B-flat at the end, which in my case sounded like a chain saw trying to cut through aluminum, but that apparently stunned the professors so much that they marked the wrong box on their evaluation sheets and I still got in.

After high school I went to NYU for two semesters but dropped out to become a dancer and actress, and now I'm living in the theatre district at the Curtain Call Boarding House. And guess what? It's working! Earlier this year I was in my first professional show ever. I played a woman who was…how shall I put this…a lady of the night. It was terrific and everybody said I was very convincing.

(Silence.)

Dear Jack,

I take it from your long silence that you don't approve of my playing a lady of the night. But I think it's important that the theatre isn't afraid to talk about anything that it considers honest and important. And it *was The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht, who is a well-known writer.

(Silence.)

Okay, it was nice knowing you. Have a nice life.

(Silence.)

Bye.

(Silence.)

JACK.

Dear Louise,

I'm so sorry for not writing. There was an emergency and they needed doctors to go out to sea and treat the incoming wounded from a battle in the Pacific. I was on the ship for several days, but that's all I'm allowed to say about it. So I'm very sorry. I received your letters but I wasn't allowed to write to anyone. You must have thought I was extremely rude.

(Beat.)

So last heard from you, you were playing an unusual part in a play. That must have been challenging.

LOUISE.

Dear Jack,

What a terrible war. I'm sorry you had to be out on emergency and I feel awful for being mad about it. Of course, you didn't know I was mad.

JACK. Yes I did. I could tell when you wrote "Bye." Can you please continue telling me about yourself? If that's all right?

LOUISE. Of course it's all right. I guess I tried to shock you by saying lady of the night. The truth is, *The Threepenny Opera* isn't shocking at all. It's a modern version of a musical from the eighteenth century, and it's meant to be very avant-garde. That just means the stage was dark and we all spoke with Hungarian accents. It was presented in a church basement with about forty seats, and it only ran for two weeks, so it was not exactly a Broadway debut.

JACK.

Dear Louise,

I think that's wonderful. Everyone has to start somewhere, and to get any role in any play in New York

City sounds like a big accomplishment to me. Have you tried out for other parts, too?

LOUISE. Yes, I audition all the time, mostly for musicals, but for some of them you need experience just to get in the door. I also take dancing and singing lessons every week, both with the same woman and she's tremendous. She screams with life. (Sometimes she screams, at me, too, but only when I do something dumb like strain my vocal cords.)

As I guess you can tell, my goal in life is to be on Broadway. That usually means starting out in the chorus line, which would be fine with me, in fact, I'd love it. Last week I saw *Oklahoma!* and it was so wonderful I almost fainted. Really. At one point, a character named Ado Annie, who was played by an actress named Celeste Holm, sang a song called "I'm Just a Girl Who Cain't Say No," and I literally held my breath for so long I got dizzy. I didn't know I was holding my breath, it's just that the song was so perfect and the performance so stunning that I couldn't move. Do you ever feel that way about anything? Sometimes I want to be in a show so badly that I want to cry about it. I shouldn't have told you that. Now you'll think I'm crazy.

JACK. You don't sound crazy at all, you sound passionate. I don't feel as passionate as that about anything. I wish I did. I feel angry about the war, but that's not the same. When I was in college, I thought about becoming an architect and I even took a course in it. There's something very precise about architecture that I like very much. But I also like working as a doctor. It makes me feel that I'm accomplishing something specific and useful. I also like getting to know my patients. Some of them are so wounded, they can't communicate at first. But as they get better, they start talking about their lives and their families, and I can see the anxiety simply lifting out of them. Their faces become less troubled

and they start looking hopeful again. It doesn't always happen, of course. Some of them just don't get better.

Sorry. That was the longest paragraph I've ever written. Except once when I wrote a three-page letter to my father, right after high school, telling him that I didn't want to follow in his footsteps. He read it quietly, handed it back to me and said, "You want to become a doctor instead of a tailor and you think I'm going to be mad at you? Your mother is out there dancing in the kitchen."

LOUISE. Ha!

JACK. On a more practical note, I've been looking into getting a plane to New York. It shouldn't be too hard because my base is part of the Army Air Force Training Command, and we have a whole airport right here on the other side of the hospital. The hard part will be getting leave. I figure I'll need at least a four-day pass to get to New York, meet you and get back. The trouble is that leave is only granted to one doctor at a time, and apparently it can take as long as six months to get any kind of a pass at all.

On top of that, my commanding officer, Colonel Ramsey, is very hard-nosed and inflexible. Those aren't the words we use about him here on the base, but I don't want to shock you. For the word "nose" in the phrase "hard-nosed," you have to substitute another word which stands for a different part of the body, the part you sit down on. It starts with the letter "a."

All best,
Jack

(Silence.)

Hello? Are you there?

(Silence.)

Oh my God, now *you're* offended. I'm so sorry! I shouldn't have tried to be funny. I can see now how offensive it was.

(To himself, how stupid can he be.) "The a-word."

...Louise?

LOUISE. No, no, no, I'm not offended at all, are you crazy? Dancers are very physical beings and we use the "a" word constantly. Besides, I grew up in Brooklyn, and calling people the a-word is the nicest thing we said about anybody. But guess what, guess what?! I've got an audition for an actual Broadway play! It's a long story, but a friend of mine knows somebody who knows a producer and I got a call last week and they want to see me this Friday! So I'm very sorry that I didn't write for a few days, but I've been buried in the part because I have about forty lines I have to memorize and I want to be letter perfect and I'm still working on them.

My roommate is drilling them with me every night. Her name is Cynthia Monroe and she's the most gorgeous creature you've ever seen, as well as the nicest. She holds down two jobs, one as a receptionist, the other as a waitress, and she still wants to be in show business. You watch. She'll be a big star some day and she'll still have every friend she ever met.

More soon, I promise,

Sincerely,

Louise-in-a-state-of-terror-Rabiner

JACK. What's the play?

LOUISE. It's a comedy called *Arsenic and Old Lace*. It's been playing on Broadway for ages and they're putting in their third replacement cast and I'm up for Elaine, who's one of the leads, and it's a wonderful part. In the story, Elaine is engaged to Mortimer Brewster and in the movie he's played by *Cary Grant*, and he thinks his family is crazy, which they are. I wish you could hear me deliver the lines out loud, but I can write them out so you can see them. Plus, that'll help me memorize them. Okay? Here goes.

Wait! I should also mention that at this point in the play, Elaine has run out of the cellar, where she was locked up by Mortimer's brother, who's a criminal.

*(**LOUISE** now acts out the play. She reads her own part with gusto. And when she plays the part of Mortimer, she uses a Cary Grant accent.)*

ELAINE. Mortimer, where have you been?! I've almost been killed! What's going on in this house?!

MORTIMER. What do you mean what's going on in this house?

ELAINE. You were supposed to take me to the theatre tonight and you called it off. You asked me to marry you – I said I would – and five minutes later you threw me out. Now listen, Mr. Brewster, I want to know where I stand. Do you love me?

MORTIMER. I love you very much, Elaine. In fact I love you so much I can't marry you.

ELAINE. Have you suddenly gone crazy?

MORTIMER. I don't think so, but it's just a matter of time. You see, insanity runs in my family. It practically gallops.

ELAINE. Now listen, Mortimer, you've got to do better than that.

MORTIMER. No, dear – there's a strange taint in the Brewster blood. If you really knew my family, it's what you'd expect if Strindberg had written *The Ziegfeld Follies*.

ELAINE. Now, darling, all this doesn't prove you're crazy. Look at your aunts, they're Brewsters, aren't they?, and they're the sanest people I've ever known.

MORTIMER. Look Elaine, I know I'm acting irrationally, but remember, I'm a mad Brewster.

ELAINE. *(Really losing her temper.) Listen, Mister. If you think you're going to get out of this by pretending you're insane – you're crazy! Maybe you're not going to marry me, but I'm going to marry you, you dope!*

(Beat.)

That's it. What do you think? Elaine's whole part is terrific, but that's the passage I'm doing for the audition.

JACK. Wow. I wish I could hear you reciting the lines. When I come East and you're in it, will you get me a ticket?

LOUISE. Ha ha. The audition is on Friday, and I don't think I've ever been this nervous.

JACK. Good luck. I'll be thinking about you on the big day.

(Silence.)

Louise?

(Silence.)

Louise, how did it go?

(Silence.)

Louise?

LOUISE. *Hell's bells, I am so angry!* I'm sorry, I'll never swear again, but *God dammit to hell, you won't believe it!* Okay, here's what happened.

On Wednesday, I walked into the audition and behind the table, are the producers Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse, two of the biggest names in the American theatre. I'm not kidding, they wrote *Life With Father*. Anyway, they asked me to read, so I took a breath and did the part...*and I was incredible*! I don't know why, but I was like an airplane, soaring through the sky *and they loved it*! They even said so. So then they asked me to wait outside, it would just take a minute, then they called me back and said, "Listen, we both thought you did a wonderful job but we've decided to go with the another actress. Her name is Cynthia Monroe."

CYNTHIA MONROE! That's my roommate, the little no-good weasel! She never told me she was up for the part, and now she says she didn't tell me because she thought it would make me nervous, which is a big lie