

Suite Surrender Dramaturg's Notes

Plot Synopsis

Suite Surrender is set in the Presidential Suite of the Palm Beach Royale Hotel in Palm beach, FL, during World War II. At the insistence of Mrs. Everett P. Osgood, the hotel is hosting a benefit to raise money for the war effort, and they've booked both Claudia McFadden and Athena Sinclair. The two are major celebrities—Claudia is a singer and Athena a film star—but they also hate one another. Their public blowouts have become legendary, as have the tempers of the two divas when their riders aren't met.

Trying to ensure that everything runs as calmly as possible, hotel manager Bernard S. Dunlap books Claudia into the Presidential Suite and Athena into the Admiral's Suite on the other side of the hotel. However, shortly after Claudia arrives (along with her personal secretary, Mr. Pippet, and her dog, Mr. Boodles) and retires to one of the bedrooms, Athena arrives in the suite (with her personal secretary Murphy Stevens) claiming that she spoke to someone on the phone who booked her into the room. Dunlap spends much of the show panicking and trying to keep the two enemy divas away from one another, periodically enlisting the help of Pippet, Murphy, and the two bellhops, Francis and Otis. The need to keep the women separate is complicated by the periodic return of Dora Del Rio, a gossip columnist who wants a story about one of Claudia and Athena's legendary fights. Dunlap detests Dora and keeps trying to eject her or to hide her after she gets knocked out when first Claudia and then Athena hit her with their bedroom doors.

While this main action is occurring, Murphy and Francis are reunited in the hotel after having been lovers before the war. Francis pursues Murphy, but she is reluctant because he left her to enlist and so that she could pursue a career in show business—neither of which worked out. This love plot is complicated when Francis delivers red roses for Murphy, but gives them to Claudia for "her personal secretary," not realizing that Murphy works for Athena, and Pippet works for Claudia.

The main plot comes to a climax when Athena and Claudia finally appear in the suite at the same time. After some initial, tension-filled pleasantries, they launch into a pillow fight attack on one another, clobbering Dora, who happens to be between them, and then chasing everyone else from the suite to have their final showdown. However, once everyone else is out, the two women embrace and reveal for the audience that they're actually best friends who have manufactured this feud to draw media attention and thereby raise money for the war effort. They sing their signature duet, then rip their clothes as though they've had a full out brawl before letting everyone back in.

Character Profiles

- Bernard S. Dunlap: The manager of the Palm Beach Royale Hotel, Dunlap is very straight and narrow, uptight, and has an extremely narrow sense of how things *should* be done. He is very much a believer in the status of the Palm Beach Royale, and his ultimate motive is to make sure that everything is proper.
- Claudia McFadden: An established icon of the Hollywood scene, Claudia is a diva's diva. She lives in a world where her whims are catered to as much as her needs are, primarily by Mr. Pippet. A great singer. Claudia's great rival is Athena Sinclair.
- Athena Sinclair: Another member of Hollywood royalty, Athena is primarily a movie star, though also a singer. She is man-crazy, having had six marriages and numerous more lovers. She hates Claudia.
- Murphy Stevens: Athena's personal secretary and Francis' ex, Murphy is the ingenue of the play. While she herself had the ambition to become a star, that

hasn't worked out. Instead, much of her responsibility now seems to be keeping Athena out of bed with whatever man happens to be around.

- Mr. Pippet: Claudia's personal secretary, Mr. Pippet is meek and henpecked, submitting to his employer's every desire and whim seemingly out of a blend of loyalty and terror.
- Dora Del Rio: A gossip columnist extraordinaire, Dora is constantly trying to find any hint of scandal or conflict. Her tenacity and questionable journalistic ethics make her a thorn in Dunlap's side, especially as she continually sneaks into and hides in the suite.
- Mrs. Everett P. Osgood: An upper crust, domineering woman with the manners of the nouveau riche. In line with the charity work so beloved of her social set, Osgood has embraced the war effort with full vigor, and is determined to put the hotel's full resources at the disposal of the troops, regardless of the consequences for the hotel and Dunlap's blood pressure.
- Francis: A hotel porter, seemingly slightly more competent than his friend Otis, Francis is the young lover to Murphy's ingenue. He had been a piano player, but he broke up with Murphy so he could enlist and she could pursue her dreams of stardom—neither of which worked out. Francis is the heartthrob of the play, being pursued (against his will) by Athena.
- Otis: A hard character to get a clear read on, it's not clear whether Otis is the slightly buffoonish sidekick to Francis or whether he's competent but becomes the target of Dunlap's comic wrath. Otis also works as a porter, but in his personal life he's an autograph hound obsessed with celebrities.

Author Biography

Michael McKeever is an American playwright, who has authored thirty five plus full length plays, often comedies or farces. His most popular plays include *Suite Surrender*, [37 Postcards](#), and [Clark Gable Slept Here](#). McKeever's plays have been produced throughout the US, Canada, Europe, Russia, and Australia. He has also won numerous awards, including Carbonell and Silver Palm Awards, three Florida Individual Artist Fellowships, and an NEA Residency Grant, in addition to a plethora of nominations. McKeever lives in Miami, where he co-founded Zoetic Stage, a theater company that develops new work and brings unique and exciting points of view to the stage.

Production History

Suite Surrender premiered in early 2008 at the Caldwell Theater Company in Boca Raton, FL. It has since had a dozen professional productions in various US states, Germany, and Canada, as well as over 370 total productions either completed or scheduled by the end of May 2024—including Sock & Buskin's performance. The play is popular with community theatres, high schools, and amateur dramatic societies.

Historical Background and Selected References

- P. 6: [Palm Beach, Florida](#) is a very wealthy community along the southeast coast of Florida, next to the Atlantic ocean.
- P. 9: Mizneresque refers to the architectural style of [Addison Mizner](#) (1872-1933), whose blend of [southern Mediterranean](#) and [Spanish colonial](#) styles still shapes architectural preferences in Florida.

- P. 9: [French doors](#) are double doors that open from the middle, typically swinging into a room and typically having windows for most or all of the middle portion of each door.
- P. 9: [Baby grand pianos](#) are large (4 ft. 11 in.) pianos, which produce a rich and harmonious sound.
- P. 9: May, 1942: Although [World War II](#) had begun in Sept. 1939, the US remained officially neutral until after the [Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor](#) on 7 Dec. 1941. The following day, the US Congress, at the urging of [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt](#), [declared war on Japan](#), bringing the US into the conflict on the side of the [Allies](#). In the spring of 1942, the war was not going well for the Allies, with the Japanese conquering the Philippines and threatening to cut naval supply lines in the Pacific. US forces were not yet involved in the war in Europe in significant numbers. However, support for the war was high in the US, and people generally believed that defeating the Japanese Empire and the Nazis was crucial to the American projects of freedom and democracy.
- P. 9: [Bellhops](#) are hotel porters who help customers bring their luggage up to their rooms, especially in fancier hotels catering to clients who bring a lot of luggage. Bellhops traditionally wore uniforms, hence Athena's comment on p. 62, often in medium-dark red with black trousers and [small, round, brimless hats](#).
- P. 9: The [Fairmont San Francisco](#) is a luxury hotel in [San Francisco, California](#). By the 1930s and 40s, San Francisco was a financial powerhouse in the western United States, which helped establish it as a cultural and artistic center.
- P. 10: The Paramount here probably refers to the [Paramount Theatre Building](#) in Palm Beach, unless Otis travels extensively. Though this may be the [Paramount Hotel](#) in New York, which Athena refers to on p. 74.
- P. 10: [Bing Crosby](#) (1903-1977) was one of the most famous and successful musicians and media personalities in history. He was an incredibly influential singer and actor.
- P. 10: Frankie Lane likely is a misspelling of [Frankie Laine](#) (1913-2007), another influential singer/songwriter who, after WWII, would work on many movie soundtracks.
- P. 10: "[God Bless America](#)" is a patriotic song by [Irving Berlin](#), originally written during [World War I](#), but then revised during WWII. In [this video](#), Berlin performs the song.
- P. 10: Douglas Fairbanks likely refers to [Douglas Fairbanks Jr.](#) (1909-2000) because his father [Douglas Fairbanks](#) (1883-1939) had died about two years earlier. Both men were celebrated movie stars, known for playing adventurers and romantic heroes.
- P. 10: [Tallulah Bankhead](#) (1902-1968) was a successful movie star whose scandalous personal life added to her fame.
- P. 10: [Packard](#) was a luxury car company originally out of Detroit, Michigan.
- P. 13: [GI](#) is a term for US soldiers, particularly those serving in the army, and particularly linked to WWII. There are several potential meanings of the term, depending on the source, though the first military use of GI referred to items made from galvanized iron. In reference to soldiers, common interpretations are "general infantry," "government issue," "garrison issue," or "ground infantry."
- P. 14: "[Begin the Beguine](#)" is a 1935 Cole Porter song. In [this video](#), Ella Fitzgerald performs the song.
- P. 14: [USO](#) (United Service Organizations) is a non-profit founded in 1941 that provides entertainment to US servicepeople.

- P. 16: [Hedda Hooper](#) (1885-1966) was a Hollywood gossip columnist famous for her ability to destroy careers and for her high profile feuds with celebrities and other gossip columnists.
- P. 17: The [United States Navy](#) is the branch of military service primarily tasked with combat at sea. Sailors are stereotypically known for being rowdy and for consuming large amounts of alcohol, especially rum, while in ports—though this stereotype didn't necessarily apply as much to WWII-era sailors as it did at other times. WWII sailors wore white dress uniforms, hence Athena's comment on p. 27.
- P. 18: The [United States Marine Corps](#) is the branch of the Department of the Navy responsible for land operations, often including amphibious assaults. The Marines are often regarded as tougher and more disciplined than typical members of the other services (e.g., the army, the navy, or the air force).
- P. 18: A [personal secretary](#) or personal assistant is someone who provides logistical and organizational support for another individual, usually someone famous, powerful, or wealthy.
- P. 19: [Monte Carlo](#) is an area in [Monaco](#), an independent city-state along the [French Riviera](#) on the southern coast of [France](#). The [Monte Carlo Casino](#) is famous for its lavish luxury and wealthy, famous, and exclusive clientele.
- P. 20: A [martini](#) is a cocktail made primarily of gin or vodka, with vermouth to taste (though a standard measurement is 2 parts gin to 1 part vermouth) and an olive and/or olive juice added to taste.
- P. 24: [Louis B. Mayer](#) (1884-1957) was a co-founder of [MGM Studios](#), who played a major part in the careers of many of early Hollywood's brightest stars. However, he also set strict physical/personal requirements for actors, particularly female actors; and he was accused of sexual harassment.
- P. 27: [Errol Flynn](#) (1909-1959) was one of the era's most famous leading men, renowned for his attractiveness and charm. Flynn was famous for his affairs, multiple marriages, and designing his house with one way mirrors and peep holes to observe women.
- P. 27: [Paramount Pictures](#), along with MGM, was and is one of the major movie production studios in Hollywood.
- P. 27: [Billie Burke](#) (1884-1970) was an actor best known today for playing [Glinda the Good Witch](#) in [The Wizard of Oz](#), but who often played society ladies in silent films and talkies.
- P. 27: [Adolphe Menjou](#) (1890-1963) was an actor famous for his sharp fashion, both in his films and in his public appearances.
- P. 27: [Cecil B. DeMille](#) (1881-1959) was one of the most famous directors and producers in Hollywood history, directing the first full length film shot in Hollywood, and directing or producing iconic films across a number of genres.
- P. 28: The Roxy is probably the [Roxy Theatre](#) in New York city, a leading venue for both movies and stage shows.
- P. 28: [Edith Head](#) (1897-1981) was one of the most successful and influential costume designers in cinema history.
- P. 28: [Red Skelton](#) (1913-1997) was a comedian and star of radio and television.
- P. 28: The Post is likely a reference to the [New York Post](#), a tabloid.
- P. 60: The [fall of Rome](#), particularly when the [Vandals sacked the city in 455 CE](#), has become a byword for a period of chaos, violence, confusion, and destruction, particularly following a period of decadence and excess.

- P. 71: A [golem](#) is a humanoid creature in Jewish folklore, made of mud or clay and brought to life when a particular sacred word or phrase is either written on paper and inserted into the golem's mouth or forehead, or written directly on the golem's forehead or heart, depending on the story. Today, the term *golem* sometimes refers to a dull or mindless person, or can refer to someone who is physically large and unattractive.
- P. 74: The [Paramount Hotel](#) in New York is a well-known hotel in New York's theatre district.
- P. 78: An [admiral](#) is a high ranking naval officer, roughly the equivalent of a general in the army.