

Flat Earth Theatre Presents

# *The Farnsworth Invention*

BY AARON SORKIN

June 12<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> 2015  
Arsenal Center for the Arts  
Watertown, MA

# FARNSWORTH VS. SARNOFF, FACT VS. FICTION

by David N. Rogers, Dramaturg

*The Farnsworth Invention* is about a struggle over a legacy. Philo Farnsworth and David Sarnoff are locked in a struggle about history and what it will remember. But the play itself injects all sorts of unfactual elements into the story of the invention of television, which exist seamlessly alongside careful biographical and historical work. What kinds of fictions exist in the play, and why? And what are our responsibilities, as theater artists and audiences, to plays dealing with history that, for some of the people affected, is all too recent?

The play includes various small inaccuracies, inventions, and omissions alongside truthful details - most of them innocuous. But some changes are drastic and surprising. In fact, the play's climax, the moment in the script right at the end where the victor of the conflict between Farnsworth and Sarnoff is determined—and if you're reading this before seeing the show, you'll know the moment when it happens—is based on a real historical event. Except, in the play the outcome is completely reversed. What happens in the script is actually the opposite of what really occurred.

*“This has made it  
all worthwhile.”*

—Philo Farnsworth  
after watching the first  
moon landing live on television

Why such a major diversion from history? Because the play is about the entire rivalry between Farnsworth and Sarnoff, and their ultimate fates. The struggle between them played out in the press, in the marketplace, even at the World's Fair. The play doesn't touch on all of these, but it uses part of the story to communicate the whole. It's a distillation of complex events into a fast-paced, punchy play—not accurate, one might say, but still true.



But, if we take the question of who invented television seriously, is that sort of treatment really enough? After all, the principal characters aren't inventions. Philo Farnsworth's wife Pem passed away in 2006, and her husband's legacy was a huge part of her life up until the end. Pem never saw this play, but her surviving family don't like it, in large part due to historical inaccuracies, including the one at the play's climax, which (they argue) denigrate Philo and his contribution to television—one more insult after 80 years of contention over his legacy.

Not everyone agrees with the Farnsworth family's estimation of the play, and no one is obliged to join in their verdict—especially as artists and audience members drawn to Aaron Sorkin's well-crafted script. But we do have an obligation, perhaps, to be aware of what we watch or create and what we take away from it.

In the play, the character of Sarnoff sees in television and radio an incredible potential for education and enlightenment, but underestimates the danger that people would use these new media to manipulate. Theater has always had the same power, and the same dangers, and as audience members and artists we should take stories like *The Farnsworth Invention* as the start of a conversation about history, not the last word.

# The Farnsworth Invention

by Aaron Sorkin

directed by Sarah Gazdowicz

## CAST

Philo Farnsworth	Chris Larson
David Sarnoff	Michael Fisher
Stan Willis, et al.	Matt Arnold
Pem Farnsworth, et al.	Katharine Daly
Cliff Gardner, et al.	Robin Gabrielli
Leslie Gorrell, et al.	Andy Hicks
Harlan Honn, et al.	Justus Perry
Lizette Sarnoff, et al.	Korinne T. Ritchey
George Everson, et al.	Noah Simes
Agnes Farnsworth, et al.	Sophie Sinclair
Bill Crocker, et al.	Dale J. Young

## STAFF

Producer	Lindsay Eagle
Stage Manager	Amy Lehmitt
Tech Director	Leigh Downes
Set Designer	Rebecca Lehrhoff
Lighting Designer	Ian King
Sound Designer	Kyle Serino
Costume Designer	Erica Desautels
Property Master	Lindsay Alaimo
Dramaturg	David N. Rogers
Assistant Tech Director	Adam Teti
Build Crew	Becca Dunham
Master Electrician	Adam Teti
Lighting Assistant	Jacob Athyal
Marketing Liaison	Lindsay Eagle
Production Assistant	Coriana Hunt Swartz
Graphic Design	Jake Scaltreto
Board Op	Caitlin Mason
House Manager	Chris Chiampa

A Page to Stage Production of *The Farnsworth Invention*

Produced in 2007 by The La Jolla Playhouse, La Jolla, California

Christopher Ashley, Artistic Director & Steven Libman, Managing Director

Original Broadway Production by Dodger Properties, Steven Spielberg and Rabbit Ears, LLC; Produced in association with Frederick Zollo, Jeffrey Sine, Dancap Productions, Inc., Latitude Link and Pelican Group; Associate Producer: Lauren Mitchell

*The Farnsworth Invention* is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.

The video and/or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever are strictly prohibited.

This production is supported in part by a grant from The Watertown Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

## BIOS

**Matt Arnold (Stan Willis, et al.)** holds a BA in Theatre Studies from Emerson College. Previous roles with Flat Earth include *Terra Nova* (Bowers) and *The Memorandum* (George). Other previous credits include *Good People* (Stevie), *Letters to Medford* (Reverend Charles Brooks) and *Human Contact: Short Sci-Fi Plays* (Brent Baker). He is also an experienced fight designer, having devised moments of violence for Flat Earth's *Pygmalion*, *Unreliable Narrator's Human Contact*, and Boston Latin School's *She Kills Monsters*.

**Katharine Daly (Pem Farnsworth, et al.)** is a graduate of The Gaiety School of Acting, National Theatre School of Ireland. Since her return to the United States, she has performed with *Unreliable Narrator* and *The Post-Meridian Radio Players*. Katharine is thrilled to call *The Farnsworth Invention* her debut performance with Flat Earth. She would like to thank her friends, and especially her family. It's all their fault.

*"Before this century is over,  
a man is gonna walk on  
the moon... And everyone  
in the world is gonna watch  
him do it on television."*

---

—Philo Farnsworth

**Michael Fisher (David Sarnoff)** recently learned an important lesson after a two-year acting sabbatical: you're only done with theatre when theatre's done with you. A life-time technology maven and longtime Sorkin appreciator, he couldn't ask for a more perfect opportunity to return to the stage than *The Farnsworth Invention*, and he thanks Flat Earth for having him. Prior Boston-area credits include *Glengarry Glen Ross* (IDS), *The Laramie Project* (Bad Habit), *Music from a Sparkling Planet* (Happy Medium Theatre) and *Blood Rose Rising* (Honest Ghost), among others. He holds a BFA in Acting from Old Dominion University.

**Robin Gabrielli (Cliff Gardner, et al.)** is proud to be appearing in a Flat Earth production once again. A proud company member, his past credits include *Evans in Terra Nova*, Daniel Lucas / Don Alfonso Morales in *Reader*, and Donny in *Rocket Man*. By day he works as Lead UI Developer for Bit9 / Carbon Black in Waltham, MA. Robin is grateful to Sarah Gazdowicz, to the wonderful cast of *The Farnsworth Invention*, to his fellow company members and friends at Flat Earth, and to all who come to see this production.

**Andy Hicks (Leslie Gorrell, et al.)** has worked in broadcasting most of his adult life, and he's thrilled and honored to help tell this story. His on-stage work includes *Election Day* (HMT), *Thinking Of You* (BAT), *Twins* (BAT), and *Space Seed* (PMRP). Off-stage, he designed sound for *What Once We Felt* (Flat Earth), *Paper City Phoenix* and *Dancing Wilde* (BAT), has produced, written, directed and/or voiced hundreds of spots for WGBH radio and television, and co-wrote *2010: Our Hideous Future - The Musical!* (UN). This one's for Dad, who understands all the "science talk."

**Chris Larson (Philo Farnsworth)** After a long break from this side of the stage, Chris Larson is thrilled to be returning to Flat Earth Theatre after taking part in the delightful Lovecraft reading *The Unnamable* last year. Other previous roles include *Comet (The Reindeer Monologues)* with Happy Medium Theatre; *Major Ross/Ketch (Our Country's Good)* and *Justice Balance (The Recruiting Officer)* with Whistler in the Dark; and *Kemmler (Trog and Clay)* with Fresh Ink Theatre, as well as shorts with Open Theatre Project, Heart and Dagger, and others. Chris is also an ArtsImpulse 2014 Award-winning and twice IRNE-nominated sound designer (one IRNE nom was for his work with Flat Earth!).

**Justus Perry (Harlan Honn, et al.)** is thrilled to return for his 6th show with Flat Earth Theatre, after an extended hiatus spent in Los Angeles honing his craft. Justus went through the UCB Improv program and worked on a sketch comedy team at ImprovOlympic West, as well as the

independent film *At The Maple Grove*. Justus has also appeared in some commercials and television projects, and recently appeared as the Scarlet Pimpernel for the Post-Meridian Radio Players. In his spare time, he likes to write short autobiographies.

**Korinne T. Ritchey (Lizette Sarnoff, et al.)** celebrates returning to Flat Earth, having portrayed Rita in *Rocket Man* two seasons ago. Most recently, she directed *Terminus* for the HCE Players, a company with whom she also performed in *Passages from Finnegan's Wake* (ALP) and the North American premiere of *Love in a Glass Jar* (Eve). Other collaborations have included work with the Theatre Cooperative, Devanughn Theatre, the Women's Theatre Project, and Women on Top with Centastage and Underground Railway. Korinne completed a Master's degree in theatre education at Emerson College where she focused on directing and currently works in Disability Support Services and as an adjunct theatre professor at Middlesex Community College.

**Noah Simes (George Everson, et al.)** is a Boston-based actor, director, and theatrical collaborator. He is delighted to be making his Flat Earth debut, and in a play by the great wordsmith Sorkin himself, no less. He has recently appeared in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (Bad Habit Productions), *Kerplop! The Tale of the Frog Prince* (Imaginary Beasts), and *Knock!* (Imaginary Beasts).

**Sophie Sinclair (Agnes Farnsworth, et al.)** is a Boston-based actress, who graduated from Brandeis University with a BA in Theater Arts! Most recently she performed in David Cromer's *Our Town* at the Huntington Theater Company (the recipient of the 2013 Tony Award for Regional Theater). Her other Boston credits include New Repertory Theatre's Classical Repertory Company, Riverside Theatre Works, GAN-e-meed Theatre Project, and Deana's Educational Theater. She is beyond excited to be part of her first Flat Earth Theater production!

*"...the ends do justify the means, that's what means are for."*

—David Sarnoff

**Dale J. Young (Bill Crocker, et al.)** claims Iowa as his "growing up place" but once he found out he was allowed to leave, he did! He has worked and studied throughout the country. Three years ago he relocated to the Boston area to fill the position of Assistant Professor of Acting and Directing at UMASS-Lowell's Department of English. Selected recent roles include Dr. Jonathan Fahey in *Greenland* (Apollinaire Theatre), Bill in *Making God Laugh* (Cortland Repertory Theatre), and The Apple Picker in *Invasion*, (Apollinaire). Recent directing includes *End Days* and *Lysistrata* at UML. When not challenging young minds, Dale can usually be found making messes in his studio, biking the back roads, or kayaking. He's totally enjoying re-inventing television.

**Sarah Gazdowicz (Director)** is a Boston-based director and actor. Previous directing credits with Flat Earth include *Enigma Variations* and *The Pillowman* (My Theatre World Award: Best Regional Production). Other recent directing credits include *Chalk* (Fresh Ink Theatre) *Argonautika* (The Young Company Summer Festival – Stoneham Theatre) and *Bully Dance* (Argos Productions – IRNE Nomination for Best New Play). Also a performer, Sarah's recent acting credits include *Betty Bam*, *Knock!* (IRNE Award: Best Ensemble) and *Rumpelstiltskin: Winter Panto 2013* all with imaginary beasts as well as *123* with Fresh Ink Theatre. This summer, Sarah will be directing *The Winter's Tale* with Maiden Phoenix Theatre Company and will be returning to Stoneham to once again direct and teach with the Young Company.

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

From TV Guide: After penning a number of off-Broadway plays, **Aaron Sorkin** made it to the Great White Way with the 1989 legal military drama *A Few Good Men*. Three years later the play was turned into an Oscar-nominated film, thus launching his Hollywood career. Sorkin then transitioned into television, creating a succession of witty, poignant and critically acclaimed series set behind the scenes at a sports show (the beloved but short-lived *Sports Night*), the White House (the Emmy-winning *The West Wing*), a late-night sketch-comedy show (*Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*), and a cable-news network (*The Newsroom*). Each were characteristically filled with crackling dialogue and fascinating characters, and Sorkin wrote almost all the scripts single-handedly. Sorkin returned to the movies by writing the scripts for the 2007 political comedy-drama *Charlie Wilson's War* and the 2010 docudrama *The Social Network*, about the rise of Facebook.

## ABOUT FLAT EARTH

Flat Earth Theatre has been collaboratively crafting thought-provoking theatre in greater Boston since 2006. Featured productions include the award-winning staging of *The Pillowman* with the IRNE-nominated shadow puppetry of Woellert&Clark, the dimension-traveling production of *Rocket Man*, and the New England premier of the sci-fi dystopia *What Once We Felt*. *The Farnsworth Invention* continues Flat Earth's 2015 season "Progress and Peril," which kicked off with Ted Tally's *Terra Nova* in the winter, and will conclude with D.W. Gregory's *Radium Girls* in the fall.

## AUDIENCE SURVEY

We need your feedback!  
Please complete our audience survey to let us know about your experience.

It only takes a couple of minutes, and your responses will help us evaluate and refine our process. Fill it out on paper, or online! Scan the QR code to take the survey.



## LATER THIS SEASON

Don't miss the conclusion of Flat Earth's 2015 Season, *Progress in Peril*.



September 4<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
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Charlestown, MA

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Don't miss these other upcoming productions from the Boston fringe theatre community:

### Three

Boston Public Works  
June 5 – 20  
[bostonpublicworks.org](http://bostonpublicworks.org)

### Dying City

Happy Medium Theatre  
June 18 – July 17  
[happymediumtheatre.com](http://happymediumtheatre.com)

### Travelogue: Songs from the Road

Open Theatre Project  
July 10 – 12  
[theopentheatre.com](http://theopentheatre.com)

### Laughing Wild

Hub Theatre  
July 17 – August 1  
[hubtheatreboston.org](http://hubtheatreboston.org)

### Fractured Fairy Tales

Theatre@First  
July 31 – August 8  
[theatreatfirst.org](http://theatreatfirst.org)

### Eyes Shut. Door Open

Wax Wings Productions  
August 6 – 15  
[waxwingsproductions.com](http://waxwingsproductions.com)

### The Winter's Tale

Maiden Phoenix  
August 14 – 30  
[maidenphoenix.org](http://maidenphoenix.org)

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