

# Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla

by Electric Company: Kim Collier,  
David Hudgins, Kevin Kerr,  
Jonathon Young

an Electric Company Theatre (Vancouver) production

## Study Guide

THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE  
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## About This Study Guide

This Study Guide is formatted in easy-to-copy single pages, which may be used separately or in any combination that works for your classes. The two colour pages are intended for classroom display but may also be photocopied for students.

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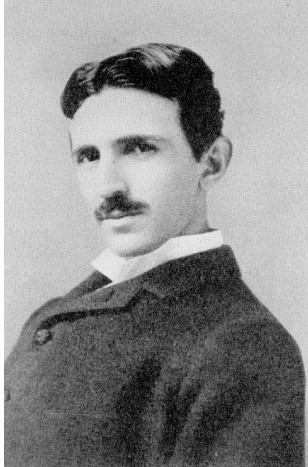
### ArtsAlive.ca

Have You Heard?

This NAC hosted site has a wealth of educational resources available for teachers and students of music, English theatre, French theatre, and dance. It's well worth a visit.

<http://www.artsalive.ca>

## **Brilliant!: The Story** (page 1 of 3)



The visionary scientific genius Nikola Tesla was born in 1856 in Croatia. His father was a Serbian minister and his mother had a knack for inventing things. Tesla introduced technological advances that transformed the day-to-day lives of future generations. His brilliant mind was the first to conceive of a practical way to harness electrical power for widespread use in industry and private homes. In addition, he envisioned and created the scientific basis for much of the electronic age, including the technologies of remote control, neon and fluorescent lighting, radio transmission, robotics, x-rays, radar, and more. The following outline of scenes from *Brilliant!* traces the central facts of Tesla's life.

### **Prologue / The Raid (New York 1943)**

Tesla dies in virtual poverty in his boarding house in New York, and the FBI confiscate all his personal files and documents.

### **Lightning Walk (Budapest 1882)**

While strolling in the hills at night reciting passages from Goethe's *Faust*, Tesla has a vision of a rotating magnetic field. It is the missing piece of the puzzle that will make the polyphase alternating current system of electrical power generation and distribution a reality.

### **Rowing / America! / Fifty Thousand Dollars / Laboratory Spectacular / The Muse (New York 1884-88)**

Tesla arrives in America and immediately goes to see his hero, Thomas Edison, who has had a measure of success generating and supplying direct current electricity to wealthy New Yorkers like J.P. Morgan. Instead of buying into Tesla's superior AC technology, Edison hires the 28-year-old Serbian to work on improving the efficiency of his DC generators. In a matter of months Tesla completes the job and returns to collect the \$50,000 Edison had promised; Edison reneges, claiming that his offer had been in jest. Tesla quits.

Robert Underwood-Johnson, editor of *Century Magazine*, and his socialite wife Katherine meet the young inventor and become close friends. Tesla treats them to late-night entertainments in his laboratory that feature the startling fruits of his genius. Katherine and Tesla share a special bond, but the driven inventor has no room in his life for romantic love. His remarkable intelligence carries with it a host of eccentricities -- an unusual devotion to pigeons; phobias to germs and jewelry, especially pearls; an aversion to touching human hair; a compulsion to do things in numbers divisible by three; visual and auditory hallucinations.

## **Brilliant!: The Story** (page 2 of 3)

### ***Battle of the Currents / Interference / The Meeting (America 1888-98)***

Tesla goes head to head with his arch rival Edison over the chance to build the first-ever hydroelectric project at Niagara Falls. Edison does his best to vilify Tesla's alternating current system and uses an AC generator to stage public electrocutions of stray animals. Backed by entrepreneur George Westinghouse, Tesla's AC system gets the contract in spite of Edison's underhanded tactics. As the AC system moves into the forefront as the industry standard, Tesla relinquishes his entitlement to royalties from Westinghouse, nobly releasing him from an agreement that would have made the inventor a billionaire.

During this time Tesla's scientific preoccupations continue to consume him, compromising his relationships and driving him ever onward in his quest to harness electrical energy for the greater good of mankind.



The 1896 Chicago World's Fair, lit by the Tesla system.

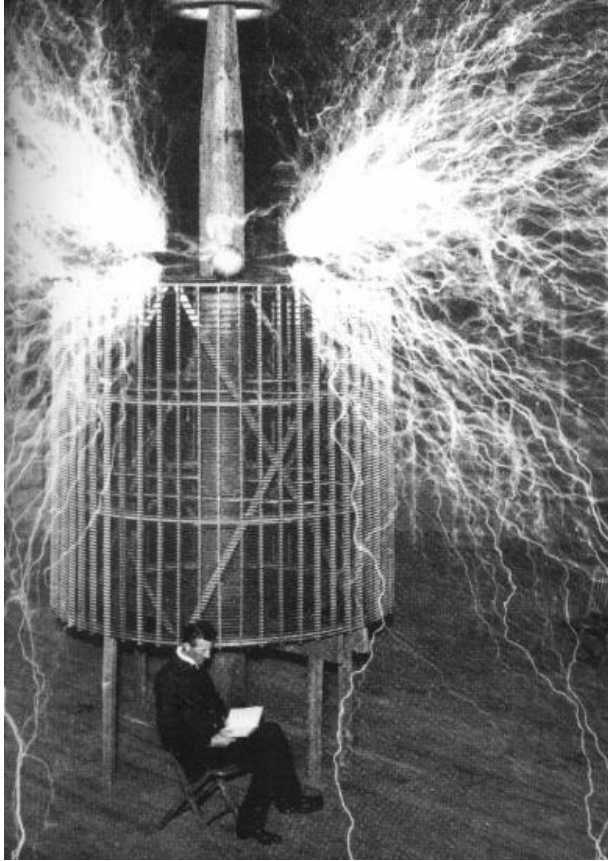
### ***Colorado Springs / Dinner Scene / HAARP / Bicycles / The Tower / Rockaway Beach (Colorado Springs and New York 1898-1905)***

Tesla travels to Colorado Springs and experiments with enormous transformers called Tesla coils, generating extremely high voltages that discharge as spectacular bolts of lightning. He devises a system to transmit electricity without wires. Fearful lest his ideas be stolen, he stores most of the details solely in his photographic memory. Many of Tesla's other discoveries at Colorado Springs will reappear decades later as sinister adjuncts to the top-secret High-frequency Active Auroral Research Project (HAARP) currently being conducted by the US military in Alaska.

Back in New York, Tesla starts work on a tower at Wardenclyffe, Long Island, which he hopes will eventually become the heart of a world radio network, though Marconi is about to make headlines with his successful wireless telegraph transmission. Tesla's ambitions for the tower at Wardenclyffe also include the wireless transmission of electrical power around the globe, but financial backer J.P. Morgan is frustrated with Tesla's lack of progress and pulls out. By 1905, unable to find investors, Tesla is forced to abandon the project.

**Brilliant!: The Story** (page 3 of 3)

Tesla in front of a Tesla coil.



**Disappearance / Last Letter/Demolition (New York 1905-1943)**

Devastated by the failure of the Wardenclyffe project and by the success of his rivals Edison and Marconi, Tesla slips further into depression and eccentricity. He is frequently seen in the streets of New York covered in pigeons and feels an alarmingly intense connection with one bird in particular.

The tower at Wardenclyffe is demolished on July 4th, 1917. Tesla dies penniless in his New York hotel room in July of 1943.

The tower at Wardenclyffe.



## **Brilliant! The Style**

*Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla* is the creation of an innovative group of theatre artists from Vancouver known as the **Electric Company Theatre (ECT)**. Kim Collier, David Hudgins, Kevin Kerr, and Jonathon Young are the core members of the collective. ECT takes each element of production -- staging, design, and performance -- into account during the development and expression of a story onstage. The impact of this approach on *Brilliant!* is evident in its rich variety of theatrical forms, its use of multi-media, and its endlessly inventive and ever-changing stage picture.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle identified **spectacle** as one of six dramatic elements (the others are plot, character, thought, diction, and music) out of which all drama is composed. The dramatic element of spectacle takes in “the entire visual aspect of a production, including the scenery, costumes, and grouping (the arrangement of actors on the stage)”\*. When asked, founding ECT member Kevin Kerr confirmed the importance of spectacle in the company’s aesthetic:

*“Maximizing the theatrical potential and visual potential within the work has always been a major intention. We recognize that today’s audiences are very visually sophisticated, so we employ cinematic conventions and often multiple media in order to tell the stories, as well as big exciting stage pictures (which is Kim’s forte as a director); we are often looking for ‘low-fi’ theatrical methods to achieve particular visual ideas.*

*“The silent film in Brilliant! is an example. We wanted to tackle a particular plot point in a way that reflected the excitement and mystery surrounding Tesla’s work at Colorado Springs. Putting it in the form of a few newsreels from the era spoke to the sense of newness in Tesla’s work (as cinema was a brand new medium at the time) as well as the cloak of mystery surrounding his work (which is emphasized in the restricted access of a silent film as there is no dialogue to provide an easy explanation of his actions).*

*“We then wanted to perform it live on stage and attempt to create as complete an illusion of watching a silent film as possible for the audience. We worked on the physicality (sped up, jerky, sometimes skipping a few frames ahead) and added a lighting look that gave the flickering quality of old film. It’s a very simple form of spectacle but creates that sense of novelty that all spectacle has which is what draws the audience’s attention and allows them access to the narrative from a different angle, hopefully thereby enhancing their relationship to the story.”*

\*A Handbook of the Theatre, Esmé Crampton, p.262

## **Brilliant!: The Themes**

The Tesla story opens up possibilities for discussion on a wide number of themes including:-

-genius as both a blessing and a curse (the heaven of creative inspiration and accomplishment vs. the hell of obsession, self-absorption, workaholism, and social isolation);

-the moral/ethical implications of progress/new technologies (widespread access to electricity improving the quality of people's lives vs. the electric chair, death rays, particle beams -- scientific advancement turned to destructive ends);

-the uneasy relationship between visionary creativity and the need to acquire the resources to make one's visions realities (pure scientific investigation vs. capitalism and what it takes to succeed in the marketplace).

The play draws on the overreacher motif through allusions to Goethe's *Faust*, who made a bargain with the devil in exchange for knowledge. The scene in Tesla's lab recalls images of the mad scientist from movies and television, another version of the overreacher driven to obtain godlike powers. Classical allusions to Tesla as the modern Zeus or Prometheus and to Dante's *Inferno* ("Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here" in neon in Tesla's lab) magnify the scope of the biographical story by giving it archetypal resonances.

## **Possibilities for Further Study**

ECT's *Brilliant!* connects quite directly to the curriculum for teachers of Dramatic Arts and Science. Other curriculum tie-in possibilities are

### -Business and Technology Studies

What's the story behind the dominance of one form of technology over another in the marketplace?, e.g., AC vs. DC, Beta vs. VHS; Apple vs. Microsoft.

Who funds scientific and technological research? How does a modern inventor go about finding investors to support his/her efforts?

### -English

How does the story of Nikola Tesla as it is presented in *Brilliant!* compare to other portraits of the overreacher (compare Dr. Faustus in Goethe and/or Marlowe; Dr. Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel and/or in popular film)?

### -History

Tesla's New York; Progress: the Pros and Cons (the Luddites; the Industrial Revolution and Global Warming); Magic, Alchemy; Anatomy -- the early origins of modern science and the fight for access to "forbidden" knowledge.

## **A Production Who's Who**

A production of a play in the professional theatre represents the collaborative efforts of many, many people. The combined talents of the following people made this production of *Brilliant!* possible:

### **Creative Team**

#### **Written and Directed by the Electric Company:**

Kim COLLIER  
David HUDGINS  
Kevin KERR  
Jonathon YOUNG

**Set Design** by Andreas KAHRE

**Costume Design** by Mara GOTTLER

**Lighting Design** by Adrian MUIR

**Video Design** by Amos HERTZMAN with Electric Company

**Sound Design** by David HUDGINS with Electric Company

### **Cast**

Kim COLLIER  
David HUDGINS  
James LONG  
Jonathon YOUNG

**Stage Manager:** Stephen COURTENAY

**Producing & Tour Manager:** Cynthia REID



## Activities, Discussion Questions, and Lesson Plans (page 1 of 2)

As a brief **general introduction** to *Brilliant!*, you may want to proceed ...

### 1. Through the Story.

Read through the section called **Brilliant!: The Story** (pages 1-3) to give students a general overview of Tesla's life and the action in the play.

### 2. Through the Inventions.

Begin a discussion of Tesla by asking the class to come up with the name of the inventor and the date of creation for each of the following:

Polyphase Alternating Current.....	1883
Earthquake Machine .....	1887
Radio Technology.....	1891
Robotics.....	1893
X-ray Technology .....	1894
Broadcast Power.....	1900
Electromagnetic Pulse.....	1901
Radar Technology .....	1915
Particle Beam Weaponry .....	1917
Death Ray.....	1943

Chances are no one will come up with Tesla, which can make a nice segue into introducing a fieldtrip to a play about this unsung genius.

### 3. Through the Photos.

Post the two photos from ECT's production of *Brilliant!* included in this Study Guide (pages 17-18) in your classroom. Once students have had a chance to look at them closely, ask that they choose one photo as the subject of a timed writing activity. On a signal, give them three minutes in which they must keep writing continuously, never taking pen from paper, in an attempt to capture whatever initial responses/ideas the photo evokes in them. When the time is up, share some of the written work in class. Are there any themes or ideas that seem to be repeated in the students' work? Did the photo evoke mostly positive or negative feelings? What things/people/ideas were most often associated with the image?

### 4. Through Improvisation.

- a)** Divide the class into several groups. Ask students to create their own version of the Tesla inventions listed above using only their bodies, voices, and movements.
- b)** Give each group of students either of the photos to study closely. Ask them to treat the image in the photo as an event that takes place either at the beginning, middle, or end of a story, and challenge them to come up with the two other images that complete the storyline. When they're ready, have them show their work as a sequence of tableaux, first in silence, then a second time with voice-over narration and/or dialogue.
- c)** If your group is familiar with the improv game called a Harold (or Herald) in which as many short scenes as possible are created on a given theme within a four-minute timeframe, have groups play several rounds with theme words from *Brilliant!* -- genius; power; competition; invention; eccentric; obsession; technology; science; creativity. (Type "Harold" and "Improv" into your web browser for more information on this classic improv game.)

## Activities, Discussion Questions, and Lesson Plans (page 2 of 2)

For **more in-depth** work on *Brilliant!*, have a look at ...

### 5. Web Sites with Ready-Made Educational Resources for Teachers

#### a) All Things Tesla.

PBS offers an excellent web site on Nikola Tesla as a companion to a documentary first aired in 2000, “Tesla: Master of Lightning”. The site provides a comprehensive overview of the life and legacy of the great inventor. The Ottawa Public Library has a VHS copy of the 90-minute documentary.

<http://www.pbs.org/tesla/index.html>

#### b) Life Without Electricity.

The CBC Web Archives is another excellent Internet resource for teachers. For a detailed lesson plan on the Ice Storm that will help students grasp the central role electrical power has in our lives, go to [http://archives.cbc.ca/ACT-1-70-258/disasters\\_tragedies\\_extreme\\_weather/ice\\_storm/educational\\_activities/](http://archives.cbc.ca/ACT-1-70-258/disasters_tragedies_extreme_weather/ice_storm/educational_activities/)

### 6. The Script Excerpt

The two-page script excerpt from *Brilliant!* plus questions (pages 14-16).

### 7. The Interview with the ECT’s Kevin Kerr (pages 11-12).

### 8. The Electric Company Theatre

The ECTS web site at <http://www.electriccompanytheatre.com/home.htm> and the companion Web Q&A Activity Page in this Study Guide (page 13).

## Post-Show Discussion and Activities

### 1. Organizing Student Responses.

To seed post-show discussion of the complexity of the staging in *Brilliant!*, assign pairs of students the task of taking note of at least three striking and/or unusual ways in which the production makes use of props; costumes; setting; masks; music; sound; dance; film; projections; lights; the actors' bodies and voices; conventions borrowed from other media. In post-show discussions, have each pair report back on their specific area.

### 2. How Did They Do That?

While the memory of the production is still fresh in their minds, offer them behind-the-scenes information about Adrian Muir’s lighting effects in *Brilliant!* (pages 9-10).

### 3. Questions for General Discussion.

Explain the significance of the play’s subtitle “*The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla*”. What factors in his external world contributed to Tesla’s ultimate failure to fully reap the rewards of his brilliance?

What aspects of his personality held him back?

What’s the relationship between genius and eccentricity?

What aspects of this production excited you?

What, if anything, would you change about this production, and why?

## **How Did They Do That?** (page 1 of 2)

*Brilliant!* lighting designer Adrian Muir reveals the technical means he used to create:

### **1. the illumination of and projections onto the sphere**

There are three spheres in the show that needed to be lit. The small handheld one the narrator uses is a custom-made prop. The outside is a translucent six-inch glass shade -- the kind you'd find in a residential hallway -- attached to a base that was salvaged from a battery operated Canadian Tire "push" light. The light itself comes from three high intensity krypton bicycle light bulbs that are soldered together inside the glass shade. The actor turns this sphere on and off using a switch on the side. The larger spheres are lit using normal stage lights.

Projections on the spheres were created on a Mac using a custom DVD authoring program. They can be played back on any standard DVD player and can pause on a still image seamlessly. The fades are also short DVD clips. The images are projected using a pair of LCD projectors that have computer controlled dowsers or gates that are programmed to close whenever the projectors are not actively in use. This eliminates any spill light from the projectors and allows scenery and props to be moved off and on stage in a complete blackout.

### **2. the lightning**

The lightning effect is achieved using a strobe light controlled by the lighting computer. Using three separate control channels it is possible to change the intensity, rate, and duration of each flash.

### **3. the effects in Tesla's laboratory**

Tesla's lab uses the inside of a set piece roughly the size of an average phone booth (*Dr. Who* fans will recognize the nickname the company adopted for it after our tour to Edinburgh: The Tardis). Inside this set piece are several fluorescent fixtures that light up when Tesla "electrocutes" himself. One of the fixtures is circular and creates the halo effect behind Tesla's head. The other effects in the lab are mostly colour-based effects created by using stage lights with colour scrollers attached. The scroller is a computer controlled device that allows a string of different coloured gels to be moved back and forth in front of a light.

Using the lighting computer, you can select one of 16 colours for each light; thus a scene that is heavy blue one minute can change to brilliant red the next. Most of the lighting in *Brilliant!* is rather monochromatic to match the black-and-white world of the projection imagery. More colour is used in the lab scenes to highlight how different Tesla's world is from the "ordinary" one around it.

## **How Did They Do That?** (page 2 of 2)

### **4. the fire in the drawing room**

The fire in the drawing room is the most low-tech effect and is created by a technician holding a handheld flashlight in one hand and waving the other hand in front of it.

### **Adrian's favorite moment in the lighting design for *Brilliant!***

The projection of the rotating electric field that Tesla discovers close to the top of the show. It is created using a photocopier, an acetate transparency, and a Source Four™ Ellipsoidal Spotlight\* with cold reflector technology. It is a very cheap alternative to video or slide projection and is ideal in this application. I've designed the show for eight different theatres and I still get a kick out of seeing that image appear as Jonathon, the actor who plays Tesla, traces it on the theatre floor.

Anyone trying to replicate this effect on their own, be warned -- you must use light with a cool beam such as the Source Four™ by Electronic Theatre Controls, Inc. (ETC) and you can only turn the lamp on to about half of its full brightness to avoid burning a hole in your image!

\*For a full details on this lighting instrument, visit  
[http://www.productionadvantageonline.com/source\\_four.htm](http://www.productionadvantageonline.com/source_four.htm)

## **An Interview with Electric Company Theatre Founding Member Kevin Kerr** (page 1 of 2)

### **1. How did ECT come to be?**

*Electric Company Theatre was founded about ten years ago by Kim Collier, Jonathon Young, David Hudgins and me. We had met at Studio 58 (the acting school located at Vancouver's Langara College) and shared an interest in physical and visually oriented theatre and play creation. We started at the 1996 Vancouver Fringe with a 45-minute version of Brilliant! and have gone on to produce nine mainstage premiere productions, a number of shorts, a feature-length film for CBC, and have toured to centres across Canada as well as Scotland and, recently, California.*

### **2. What's unique about ECT's approach?**

*The company has created the majority of its work as an ensemble or collective with the core members collaborating on the creation of the story, the writing of the dialogue, imagining the staging, and playing major roles in the design. Though the work is collective, it doesn't follow the more usual pattern of "group-devised" plays that are often in the form of a collage inspired by a particular theme; we strive to tell strong stories that follow a central character's journey with a through-line and narrative. We often write together or assign scenes to individuals in the group that are then subjected to the collective dramaturgy of the core. We sometimes trade scenes for rewrites or tackle rewrites together.*

### **3. What are the company's influences/inspirations?**

*Early on we often talked about the work of Robert Lepage and some of the other exciting work coming out of Quebec (Carbone 14, for example). We were attracted to the imagery, imagination, sense of theatricality, and scale. Three of us grew up in the interior of BC and watched and/or acted in work at the Caravan Farm Theatre – again their staging, use of site/location, and penchant for spectacle were something that attracted and inspired us. The four of us had also had other experiences in site specific work and outdoor theatre and the unique experience that that provides an audience as well as the relationship between venue/site and narrative were other elements we wished to explore in our work.*

*The instruction we received at Studio 58 – especially the movement work and innovative style of generating story as taught by Wendy Gorling (The Overcoat) was also very influential in encouraging the eclectic style of the company and the collage of techniques often used in our work.*

## **An Interview with Electric Company Theatre Founding Member Kevin Kerr** (page 2 of 2)

### **4. What drew you to the Tesla story?**

*I once ran into Tesla's name and an anecdote about Thomas Edison electrocuting animals with an AC generator in an attempt to make the public think that Tesla's system was far more dangerous than his DC system of generating power. Curious about this, I ended up tracking down a biography about Tesla and found the description of the man to be quite theatrical. As a group we decided that there was something here for a good story, and we then researched further into his life. His eccentricities, his showmanship, his quest for aesthetic within invention all seemed to point to a story that lent itself to the stage. There were really strong images and theatrical elements such as Tesla's late-night laboratory shows that he would mount for the cultural elite of New York, the battle with Thomas Edison (including the stories of Edison's smear campaign), as well as a story of unrequited love, which added a strong human and emotional dimension to the man. Further research began to unveil themes of creation, the isolating effects of technology, and the desire to break through that isolation. His story seemed to be a tragic tale of a man whose creative impulse was so strong that it would ultimately be the force that destroyed him and as creative artists this spoke to us.*

### **5. How much of the story of Brilliant! is fact and how much (if any) did you invent?**

*Brilliant! is based almost entirely in fact. The characters are all historical (Tesla, Edison, Robert, Katherine – plus the off-stage characters such as Westinghouse and J.P. Morgan, etc.). The action of the play is also derived from historical research: Tesla's vision of an AC generator while walking alone reciting Faust; his brief employment under Thomas Edison and their ensuing rivalry; his relationship with Robert and Katherine, the apparent love between Tesla and Katherine, and the eventual complete disintegration of the trio including Robert and Katherine's marriage; his trip to the desert in Colorado - which led to his vision of "broadcast power" or free world-wide energy distribution and eventually would turn investors against him; his curious obsession with pigeons and his eccentric behaviour; the FBI's raid of his apartment upon his death; and the HAARP Project are all factual elements.*

*Specifics within the relationships and dialogue are of course largely conjecture (though much of what Katherine says in her monologues is taken directly from letters she wrote to Tesla). We took a little dramatic license here and there (such as Robert's "betrayal" at the end of the play – in reality he and Tesla remained friends until old age), and we drew conclusions about the love story based on letters between Katherine and Tesla that were never entirely explicit, given the era in which they were written; but everything is quite strongly rooted in the research we did.*

### **6. What special challenge does performing in a piece like Brilliant! present to an actor?**

*It's a pretty physical show and fast paced for the actor – there's very little chance to catch one's breath in the 90 minutes it runs. It requires certain skills like mask work, mime, tap dance and such. I think, for an actor, it's quite a fun show to perform with the diversity of styles, techniques, and quality of scenes presented.*

## About the Electric Company Theatre: A Web Q&A

In keeping with their technology-friendly approach, ECT maintains an excellent web site featuring striking visuals and in-depth information about the company and its work. Visit the site at <http://www.electriccompanytheatre.com/home.htm> and have fun ferreting out the answers to the following questions. (Answers on page 16).

**1.** Kim Collier, David Hudgins, Kevin Kerr, and Jonathon Young are the founding members of the Electric Company Theatre. They have been working together in British Columbia since 1996, united by a shared respect for “*physical spectacle, adventurous narrative, technology and visual art.*” Which two members of the ECT collective are also united as the parents of a daughter named Azra?

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**2.** ECT’s 2005-06 season included a High (Voltage) Tea in celebration of an important first for the collective. What was it?

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**3.** One of the company’s key objectives is to foster a kind of creative collaboration among theatre artists that gives everyone involved in a given project the chance to have a say in that project’s development. How might a lighting designer’s or an actor’s experience working on an ECT show differ from the kind of experience they would have in a more traditional theatre company?

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**4.** The Electric Company Theatre has a strong interest in the creation of site-specific theatrical works, i.e., shows developed around the story and staging possibilities inherent in a particular location. Where were each of these past ECT productions staged?

**a)** *The One That Got Away* \_\_\_\_\_

**b)** *The Wake* \_\_\_\_\_

**c)** *The Fall* \_\_\_\_\_

Specific Expectation ADA4M Ontario Curriculum: Dramatic Forms--describe the development of Canadian theatre, focusing on some specific aspects (e.g., playwrights, works, regional theatres, docutheatre, etc.), p.34.

## **Brilliant! Scene Study** (page 1 of 3)

**NB:** This scene from *Brilliant!: The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla* by Electric Company collaborators Kim Collier, David Hudgins, Kevin Kerr, and Jonathon Young (Brindle & Glass: 2004) appears herein by permission of the Electric Company Theatre Society and Brindle & Glass publishers. It is intended for educational purposes only.

For information on obtaining production rights for *Brilliant!*, contact ECT at [www.electriccompanytheatre.com/home.htm](http://www.electriccompanytheatre.com/home.htm)

For information on purchasing copies of the full text of *Brilliant!*, contact Brindle & Glass at <http://www.brindleandglass.com/>

### **Preshow**

*As the audience enters, a human-sized canvas sphere stands illuminated onstage. Projected onto it, pigeons flutter and flock. Sounds of their cooing and flapping fill the space.*

### **Prologue**

*Darkness. NIKOLA TESLA'S APARTMENT 1943. Tesla is revealed: an old man carrying a bundle of letters. He struggles to open one but the stack falls to the floor, ruffling a nearby Pigeon who perches beside him. Tesla stoops and picks up the stack, this time getting one open. The Narrator appears.*

**Narrator:** He is a strange picture. Clinging to letters he has, until now, left unopened. That is how I see him at the end. Alone with his pigeons clutching a packet of dusty mementos. What does he fear? Perhaps he wonders that himself. He decides to read them--and that is the last time I can see him: as he is remembering her.

In 1943, Nikola Tesla died. The FBI confiscated three hundred thousand documents, most of them unpatented inventions and plans, packed into his tiny New York flat. Where the US government has these documents today is unknown. Last reported sighting: 1943.

*Lightning. Thunder.*

### **The Raid**

*In the semi-darkness, two FBI Agents break down the door of Tesla's apartment and rush in with their flashlights blazing. They search the room for Tesla's files, stacking boxes from his closet onto a dolly. Something stirs behind them and they spin to face it. The White Pigeon, frightened by the glare, flies away, revealing another box. The Agents uncover it. A moment of elation. They storm out with the confiscated files.*

*Intense music underscores this sequence with a series of images of Tesla's patents and inventions that roll like an opening credit sequence to the play.*



**Brilliant! Scene Study** (page 2 of 3)

POLYPHASE ALTERNATING CURRENT 1883  
EARTHQUAKE MACHINE 1887  
RADIO TECHNOLOGY 1891  
ROBOTICS 1893  
X-RAY TECHNOLOGY 1894  
BROADCAST POWER 1900  
ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE 1901  
RADAR TECHNOLOGY 1915  
PARTICLE BEAM WEAPONRY 1917  
DEATH RAY 1943

*As the music plays out, the title appears: BRILLIANT!*

**Lightning Walk**

*A bolt of lightning. Rain. Night. BUDAPEST 1882. Tesla walks alone in the hills near Budapest. We hear his voice, just discernable in the shadows.*

**Tesla:** Here, Faustus, is thy world--a world!  
Still dost thou ask, why in thy breast  
The sick heart flutters ill at rest?  
Why a dull sense of suffering  
Deadens life's current at the spring?

*From the darkness, the Narrator appears:*

**Narrator:** It's 1882, in Budapest. A young man is walking. His thoughts drift to a favorite passage from *Faust* by Goethe, and he speaks it aloud.

**Tesla:** It is, it is the planet hour  
Of thy own being; light, and power,  
And fervour to the soul are given,  
As proudly, it ascends its heaven  
To ponder here, o'er spells and signs,  
Symbolic letters, circles, lines,  
Then ye, whom I feel floating near me,  
Spirits, answer, ye who hear me!

*Lightning flash. Tesla experiences a vision. As he draws it on the ground, the diagram appears.*

**Narrator:** He freezes as if he is being clutched ... from the inside.  
Collapsing to his knees he grabs a stick and draws in the sand. The diagram.  
The answer. It is a rotating magnetic field. It is the heart of the Polyphase  
Alternating Current System. A system that will transform the field of electricity,  
transform all of industry, transform all of society, transform the entire world. And  
he knows it.

*Lightning flashes. Blackout.*

## **Brilliant! Scene Study** (page 3 of 3)

### **Questions**

1. What does the pre-show image of the human-sized canvas sphere with projected images of pigeons suggest right away about the style of the play?
2. How would you describe the mood that's created by the words, images, and special effects in the scene called "Prologue"?
3. How do you suppose the character called the White Pigeon will be performed?
4. What kind of pacing does the action in "The Raid" call for?
5. "Lightning Walk" opens with the description "*A bolt of lightning. Rain. Night.*" What movie genre is most strongly associated with this type of weather? How might this subtly influence your attitude to the action in the scene?
6. How does the presence of the Narrator alter your experience of Tesla, the main character in the drama?

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Answers to "About the Electric Company Theatre: A Web Q&A" (page 13)**

1. Kim Collier and Jonathon Young are the parents of Azra.
2. The publication of *Brilliant!* by Brindle & Glass Publishing was the celebrated first.
3. *The One That Got Away* was staged in an indoor swimming pool complex; *The Wake* was staged in 11 different outdoor venues on Vancouver's Granville Island, including a tennis court, a harbour, and a dock; *The Fall* was staged in an abandoned factory.
4. Artists involved with ECT are encouraged to think outside of their traditional roles, so a lighting designer might offer up an idea for staging or an actor might contribute text to the script.



**Jonathon Young in *Brilliant!*** (photo credit: Tim Matheson)



**A scene from *Brilliant!*** (photo credit: Tim Matheson)



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