BACKSTORY

BY AARON SORKIN

THE Farnsworth INVENTION





Your behind-the-scenes look at TimeLine productions

YESTERDAY'S STORIES.
TODAY'S TOPICS.

TimeLine Theatre Company

From Artistic Director PJ Powers

a message

Dear Friends,

I admit it. I'm a bit of an Aaron Sorkin junkie.

I'm not alone here. My addiction is shared by many of my TimeLine colleagues. Our managing director, Elizabeth Auman, has even accidentally (or, perhaps, intentionally) referred to our conference room at the theater as "The Situation Room," showing her hand as a card-carrying addict of *The West Wing*, Sorkin's seminal TV show.

Perhaps so many of us TimeLiners are drawn to Sorkin's writing because it often speaks to our theater's mission. He clearly is a student of history, fearlessly boasting a contemporary point of view and igniting discourse about pressing social and political issues while balancing contextual authenticity with damned good, compelling, human stories.

So we've been anxiously anticipating Sorkin's return to the theater ever since *A Few Good Men*, his breakout play, debuted in 1989. We're honored to introduce *The Farnsworth Invention*, his latest play, to Chicago.

In those intervening years Sorkin kept quite busy with a bustling career in TV and film. He gained fame with shows and movies that all provide almost voyeuristic access into the power centers of some of the most complex and politicized institutions. Whether it's TV shows like *The West Wing, Sports Night* and *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* or films like *An American President* and *Charlie Wilson's War*, Sorkin is fascinated by the personalities and conflicts inside the offices, conference rooms and corridors of two endlessly interesting workplaces — the U.S. government and the television industry.

I will never forget the first time I saw an episode of *The West Wing*. I came to it late, in its second season, and I was trying to keep up, overwhelmed by Sorkin's rapid-fire dialogue, dense insider jargon and the complexity of the ideas on debate. Honestly, much of it flew over my head. But it didn't seem to matter. It almost seemed as if that was a given. Or beside the point. Because the energy, drive and ambition of Sorkin's characters were intoxicating: all working at the top of their game, under unimaginable scrutiny, on the grandest stage of all — the White House.

In that show — throughout his body of work, actually — nearly all the characters have one thing in common: They're brilliant. Sorkin clearly suffers no fools, even in his writing. In scene after scene and show after show, he pits genius against genius, his characters dueling with razor-sharp wit (as well as steely resolve and relentless ambition).

Watching a Sorkin show is like watching the gold-medal round of Olympic Ping-Pong.

The Farnsworth Invention is no exception. Once again, Sorkin takes us on an epic ride, this time going behind the scenes to dissect one of the most influential inventions of all time — television. This ambitious play, which has a cast of 16 actors playing nearly 70 characters and almost 40 scenes, centers on the battle between two visionaries — Philo T. Farnsworth, an Idaho farm boy, and David Sarnoff, the country's first media mogul — as they battle for the fame, fortune and glory of bringing television into the marketplace.

Through the limitless aspirations of Farnsworth and Sarnoff, Sorkin returns to one of his favorite questions: "What's Next?"

Through the limitless aspirations of Farnsworth and Sarnoff, Sorkin returns to one of his favorite questions: "What's Next?"

It is used repeatedly in his writing; *West Wing* fans will surely recognize it. And now, with *The Farnsworth Invention*, the question serves as the taunting challenge that ruled Farnsworth and Sarnoff's lives.

Both were on a quest to be innovators, explorers and pioneers of industry. While having wildly different means to support their endeavors, they aimed to redefine how culture, entertainment and news were spread throughout the world. Each believed the invention of television could raise people up, eliminating ignorance, misunderstanding and, ultimately, war.

The question of "What's Next?" consumed Farnsworth and Sarnoff — and those around them — to their limits, often causing turmoil in its wake. Sorkin's probing of their psyches is the heart of the play, as he unravels and reveals the personal cost of trying to tackle what's next.

I write this note in early March at the start of rehearsals, and I confess to being consumed by the complexity of this production and the fact that I am playing the role of David Sarnoff. But I know this provocative script and the actors are in great hands with director Nick Bowling at the helm — Nick is another Sorkin junkie, by the way. This show is his 15th as a director at TimeLine and, ironically, also my 15th TimeLine production as an actor, about half directed by Nick. I can't think of anyone with whom I'd rather try to tackle this play and this role. There is no one who demands or expects more from his colleagues than Nick, and no one brings more to the table every day in terms of work ethic and drive. His tireless pursuit for authenticity and excellence is a rare and special trait. It has distinguished all his work here, and I expect it will continue to distinguish his work in the future.

I thank you for making the last 12 months the biggest year in TimeLine's history. Through your support, enthusiasm and belief in our work, we welcomed more people into our theater than ever before and introduced TimeLine's work to countless newcomers.

When we announced that we would be producing *The Farnsworth Invention* it was January 2009, a daunting time for the economy and a fearful moment in the world of not-for-profit arts organizations. It was the support of people like you — people who believe in TimeLine's work and want to see us thrive — that prompted us to forge ahead with our dream of bringing this play to Chicago. It was no small feat for an organization our size. This production will stretch our resources, imaginations and ability to innovate within our intimate theater. As it should. Thanks for continuing to push us — and for joining us on another journey.

Like Sorkin, Farnsworth and Sarnoff, we look forward to what's next.

Fondly,

PJ

Aaron Sorkin

the playwright

Aaron Sorkin was born June 9, 1961, in Scarsdale, N.Y. He graduated with a bachelor of fine arts degree in theater from Syracuse University, N.Y. His plays include *Removing All Doubt, Hidden in this Picture* and *A Few Good Men*, for which he received the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Playwright and later a Golden Globe nomination for his screenplay of the same title. Other screenplays include *The American President, Malice, Enemy of the State, Excess Baggage, The Rock* and *Charlie Wilson's War.*

He is perhaps best known for his Emmy Award-winning television series *The West Wing*. Other critically acclaimed television series include *Sports Night* and *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip.*

His newest film, *The Social Network*, is scheduled to be released Oct. 1, 2010.

The Farnsworth Invention was first developed at California's La Jolla Playhouse in 2007. It opened on Broadway later that year at the Music Box Theatre, with Hank Azaria as David Sarnoff and Jimmy Simpson as Philo Farnsworth. It subsequently has been produced at the Alley Theatre in Houston, the Beck Center for the Arts in Lakewood, Ohio, and the Kavinoky Theatre in Buffalo, N.Y.

Special Events and Resources

the conversation

TimeLine looks forward to engaging our audience in conversations inspired by our productions. We hope you will participate in the array of additional resources and online communities available:

SUNDAY SCHOLARS

After the show on **Sunday, May 2** is Sunday Scholars, a one-hour panel discussion featuring experts talking about the play's themes and issues. **Admission is free.** Visit ***timelinetheatre.com*** to learn more.

COMPANY MEMBER DISCUSSION

Our Company members shape the artistic vision and choose programming for TimeLine. On **Sunday, June 13,** join them for a free post-show discussion.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS

On **Thursdays, April 22, 29 and May 6; Sundays, May 9 and 16;** and **Wednesday, May 26**, moderated by a TimeLine Company member and featuring cast and production staff.

DRAMATURGY

A **study guide** is available at ***timelinetheatre.com.***

BLOG AND MORE!

Find behind-the-scenes insight and conversation on our blog, **Behind the 'Line**, via ***timelinetheatre.com.***

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Sorkin's Artistic License

the history

"It raises a question, and it also raises a problem, which is that, as I said, my first, if not only, obligation is to entertain. A news organization has a much different responsibility. I might not be telling you the whole story. I might not be telling you a story in a manner that is properly sophisticated. I would hate for anyone to limit the scope of their education on a subject to me. And, frankly, every teacher I've ever had in my life would agree with what I've just said."

— Aaron Sorkin, in an interview with Terrence Smith, *Newshour*, PBS, Sept. 27, 2000

In his interview on the PBS news magazine *Newshour*, Aaron Sorkin speaks about the fundamental question that informs many of the plays chosen by TimeLine Theatre: the tension between a good script that gets at the heart of an event emotionally, and the history that surrounds an event. It is the prerogative of the playwright to adjust circumstances of history to make a good play that can be performed in a couple of hours.

While Sorkin is respectful of the source material, within *The Farnsworth Invention*, there is some compression of the timeline of some events and characters as well as the full outcome of certain events. This is discussed at greater length in the Study Guide, authored by dramaturg Maren Robinson and available online at *timelinetheatre.com.*

TIMELINE: Farnsworth, Sarnoff and TV

- **January 6, 1884** Paul Nipkow applies for a patent on an image-scanning system using a perforated disk, a mechanical method of television.
- **1888** Henrich Hertz demonstrates that one can create electromagnetic radiation or radio waves.
- **February 27, 1891** David Sarnoff is born in Uzlian, Russia.
- **1896** Guglielmo Marconi applies for a patent on a system of transmission and reception of radio telegraphy using electric waves.
- **1897** Carl Braun perfects the cathode-ray tube, a vacuum tube with a gun that shoots electrons at one end and a fluorescent screen (a screen coated with photosensitive material that releases light when hit by the electrons) at the other end.
- **December 17, 1902** Marconi successfully transmits a wireless telegraph message across the Atlantic Ocean.
- **1905** Albert Einstein writes "On a Heuristic Viewpoint Concerning the Production and Transformation of Light," about the photoelectric effect, for which he would receive the Nobel Prize in 1921. It refers to the emission of electrons from matter, most often metals, in response to electromagnetic radiation or light, in the form of photos. It is a discovery that will make television possible.
- **August 19, 1906** Philo T. Farnsworth is born in a log cabin in Indian Creek, Utah.

the people

Philo T. Farnsworth

The log cabin in Utah where Philo T. Farnsworth was born.

Philo T. Farnsworth was born Aug. 19, 1906, in a log house without running water in Indian Creek, Utah. He was the first of five children born to Lewis Edwin and Serena Farnsworth. His grandfather and namesake converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and migrated to Utah in 1848. In 1919, the family moved to a ranch near Rigby, Idaho.

When he was barely a teenager, Farnsworth won a contest in *Science and Invention Magazine* for his invention of the magnetic ignition lock, a device that would be used in cars for years to come. The contest won the young inventor $25, which he used to order his first suit with long trousers from the Sears, Roebuck catalog. The prize also helped him order a violin from the Sears catalog, and he became an accomplished violinist.

He became close friends with his high-school chemistry teacher, Justin Tolman, who gave him supplemental articles and books to read. Farnsworth would confide his early idea for an electronic television to Tolman — an idea he said was in part inspired by looking at the parallel furrows of a plowed potato field.

After the death of his father from pneumonia in 1924, Farnsworth joined the U.S. Navy to earn money for school and started going by the name Phil to avoid being teased by his shipmates. Although he passed the Naval Academy tests with the second-highest score, he was not suited to Navy life. A Navy chaplain helped him secure release from the military.

He attended Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, but after a year did not have enough money to continue. In 1926, he moved to Salt Lake City, where he would work for the Salt Lake City Community Chest and meet his friends and future investors, George Everson and Leslie Gorrell. He moved first to Los Angeles then San Francisco, California, where he was set to start working on television in a lab on Green Street.

On May 27, 1926, he married his neighbor and sweetheart Elma "Pem" Gardner. He actually missed his wedding night: Upon returning the car he had borrowed from Everson to drive to their honeymoon hotel, he and Everson ended up talking about television late into the night! Pem and her brother Cliff would become vital members of Farnsworth's lab team. On Sept. 7, 1927, Farnsworth would transmit the first electronic image to a screen in a room adjoining his lab.

In May 1929, the team incorporated as Farnsworth Television Laboratories. The

The original partners in the Farnsworth Television Co., circa 1928 (from left) Leslie Gorrell, Philo T. Farnsworth and George Everson.

Pem and Philo Farnsworth, pictured here circa 1929, were inseparable during 45 years of marriage.

1929 stock market crash meant Farnsworth's investors put additional pressure on him to sell or license his electronic television. In 1930, Farnsworth and his team were hopeful when Vladimir Zworykin, head of research at Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Co., visited the lab. They assumed he was sent to review Farnsworth's television in advance of an offer to buy or license his patents. They did not know Zworykin already had agreed to work for RCA and David Sarnoff and that no offer was forthcoming. And they soon learned Sarnoff was modifying Zworkin's earlier television patent for RCA.

On March 6, 1932, Farnsworth's 18-month-old son, Kenny, was rushed to the hospital with a streptococcal infection of the throat. Without other effective treatments at the time, doctors performed a tracheotomy, but Kenny died. It was a devastating loss to the Farnsworths. Farnsworth started drinking heavily, a problem he would struggle with the rest of his life.

Less than three months later Farnsworth's attorneys filed a patent-interference lawsuit to try and establish who invented television. RCA countersued, challenging Farnsworth's electronic-television patents and claiming they infringed on Zworykin's television-system patents. It was not until July 1935 that the U.S. Patent office would affirm Farnsworth's priority of invention and uphold his patents for electronic television. Soon after the ruling, RCA entered into a licensing agreement with Farnsworth.

Farnsworth continued to make some innovations in television, but he ultimately turned to researching fusion. He was invited to work on the Manhattan Project but, suspecting that he would be helping develop a bomb, he declined.

Farnsworth died of pneumonia on March 11, 1971, in Holladay, Utah; he was 64 and held over 150 U.S. patents for various inventions.

Utah schoolchildren worked for two years to get a statue of Farnsworth erected in Washington, D.C. as "Father of the Television."

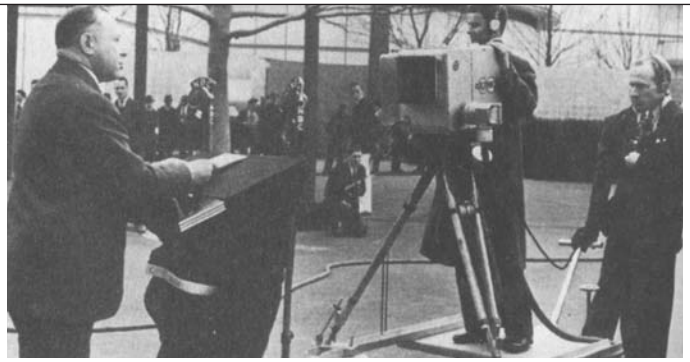
- **April 14, 1912** The sinking of the RMS Titanic is reported over wireless telegraph by the RMS Olympic. Sarnoff claims to have been the wireless operator listening that night.
- **July 4, 1917** Lizette Hermant and Sarnoff marry at a Bronx synagogue.
- **November 20, 1919** American Marconi — the U.S. branch of British Marconi — is sold to the Radio Corporation of America. RCA had been created by General Electric Co. after congressional mandate amid fears about having a foreign corporation controlling American radio telegraphy.
- **July 2, 1921** The Jack Dempsey-Georges Carpentier boxing match airs live over broadcast radio. Later, Sarnoff claims the publicity stunt, which increases the demand for radios, was his idea.
- **February 21, 1922** Farnsworth sketches his idea for a television for his high-school chemistry teacher Justin Tolman, who saves the sketch.
- **1923** RCA appoints former "Rough Rider" Gen. James G. Hubbard as president.
- **December 29, 1923** Vladimir Zworykin files for a patent for his television system.
- **1924** Farnsworth's father dies; Farnsworth joins the U.S. Navy to earn money for college, but leaves a few months later.
- **1924** AT&T sells its RCA stock.
- **1925** Walter Gifford becomes president of AT&T.
- **1926** Farnsworth works at the Salt Lake City Community Chest, a charity fundraiser, for

David Sarnoff

David Sarnoff was born Feb. 2, 1891, in the tiny Russian shtetl of Uzlian, in the province of Minsk. He was the eldest of five children born to Abraham and Leah Sarnoff. His early skill with Yiddish and Hebrew led his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Pritkin, to believe he would make a good rabbi. After his father immigrated to New York City to earn passage for the family, Sarnoff was sent, at age five, to live with a grand-uncle who was a rabbi in the village of Korme. The only child in the house, he was required to study the Talmud six days a week for the next four years.

By the time Sarnoff was nine, Abraham Sarnoff could bring the family to New York City. As he passed through the capital of Minsk, Sarnoff witnessed Cossacks clashing violently with a crowd of protesters. He later would claim the sight of the Cossacks with their whips trampling the crowds on their horses, "...trampled out of me any lingering feeling I might have had for Russia as my homeland."

Days after his arrival in America, Sarnoff found work selling Yiddish newspapers. He soon had his own stand and a series of runners, including his younger brothers. Earning money was important to the family, especially since his father's health was shattered from consumption and years of menial labor.



On April 20, 1939, David Sarnoff introduced television to the public at the site of the World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, New York. (David Sarnoff Library)

Sarnoff continued his education and soon spoke a careful English without a trace of an accent. At the end of eighth grade, his grades were good enough to qualify for one of the high schools, but his father now was bedridden with consumption and would soon die. Sarnoff became the family breadwinner.

In 1906, he went to get a job at the *Herald* but found himself at the offices of the Commercial Cable Co., where he got a job as a messenger boy for $5 a week. He was fired when he asked for time off for the Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah holidays. He quickly found a new job as an office boy for American Marconi. When Guglielmo Marconi visited, Sarnoff introduced himself and offered his services as an errand boy. A rapport grew between Marconi and Sarnoff, and Marconi would use Sarnoff as an assistant whenever he visited. He also allowed him to study the technical files. After Sarnoff's father died, Marconi became his father figure. He moved quickly from errand boy to telegraph operator, and, by the time he was 18, he was the youngest chief operator in the company.

Some of Sarnoff's history at this point gets murky. It was widely reported later in his life that he was the young telegraph operator who stayed at his station for three days to deliver news of the sinking of the RMS Titanic on April 14, 1912, as the news was telegraphed from the RMS Olympic.

There are number of holes in the story: Sarnoff was one of several telegraph operators, and his name is only mentioned in a few news articles at the time; plus, his station was one ordered not to broadcast at a certain point.

In 1917, he married a beautiful French Jewish émigré, Lizette Hermant. They had three sons. Their 54-year marriage was the foundation of his life, in spite of occasional philandering.

Sarnoff was successful at moving up the ranks of any company. When American Marconi was sold to General Electric Co. in 1919, he would become the fledgling Radio Corporation of America's commercial manager.

Much like the Titanic story, Sarnoff claimed to have come up with the idea to broadcast the July 2, 1921, Jack Dempsey-Georges Carpentier boxing match live over the radio — but newspaper accounts at the time do not mention him.

Sarnoff soon became general manager of RCA, and the secret contracts he negotiated with American Telephone and Telegraph Co. were instrumental in the formation of the National Broadcasting Co. in 1926. In 1928, Sarnoff became president of RCA: Gen. James G. Harbord, then the president, had taken a leave of absence to work on Herbert Hoover's presidential campaign and decided to make his leave permanent.

As president of RCA, Sarnoff would actively pursue television, recruiting Vladimir Zworykin from Westinghouse to head a television research lab at RCA.

During World War II, Sarnoff served as a special communication consultant to Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, for which he would be given the rank of brigadier general when Eisenhower became president. Throughout the remainder of his life he preferred to be called General.

In addition to his fight with Philo T. Farnsworth over patents and precedent for the electronic television, Sarnoff engaged in similar legal battles over the development and patents for FM radio with inventor Edwin Howard Armstrong. Armstrong would kill himself in 1954; Sarnoff always denied he contributed in any way to Armstrong's suicide.

Sarnoff died in his sleep after suffering a heart attack on Dec. 12, 1971.

George Everson and Leslie Gorrell, who become his friends and future investors.

- **May 27, 1926** Farnsworth and Elma "Pem" Gardner are married in Provo, Utah.
- **November 15, 1926** The party for the newly formed National Broadcasting Company is broadcast live on radio from the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City.
- **January 7, 1927** Farnsworth applies for a patent for his electronic television system.
- **September 7, 1927** Farnsworth transmits the first electronic image to a screen in a room adjoining his lab on Green Street in San Francisco, Calif.
- **1927** The movie *The Jazz Singer* is released, starring Al Jolson. It is the first feature film with synchronized sound and picture.
- **1928** Harbord takes a leave of absence from RCA to work on Herbert Hoover's presidential campaign.
- **March 17, 1929** Farnsworth and his partners in San Francisco incorporate as Television Laboratories, Inc.
- **September 23, 1929** Pem and Philo Farnsworth's first child, Philo Taylor Farnsworth III, is born.
- **October 29, 1929** The stock market crashes, and financial panic grips the U.S. at the start of what would become known as the Great Depression.
- **1930** Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, as owners of United Artists, visit the Farnsworth lab to see television, but it doesn't work because of a disconnected cord.

the invention

The Science

The idea of a television was not new. Many scientists contributed the necessary steps to what would be essential for its development, starting with Albert Einstein's work on the photoelectric effect, which refers to the emission of electrons from matter, most often metals, in response to electromagnetic radiation or light, in the form of photos.

Early mechanical moving pictures like the zoetrope and film relied on many separate still images that flickered past, giving the illusion of movement when viewed by the human eye and processed by the brain.

All early attempts at designing a television relied on a mechanical method of dissecting movement into a series of images. This was generally achieved by means of a perforated spinning disk.

Farnsworth's innovation was to realize that the nature of light and photosensitive material might be used to create an electronic television that did not rely on a spinning disk.

Farnsworth theorized that light bouncing off a moving person could then be

Rigby High School teacher Justin Tolman (left) was the first person to whom Philo T. Fansworth described his ideas about the possibilities of television. This photo circa 1953.

received and turned into electrical impulses. Then the electrical impulses could be transmitted just like radio or telephone signals and reconverted back into an image when the electrons hit a photosensitive material in a series of rows that the eye would register as a moving image.

This solved the problem of speed that had plagued the mechanical approach because images would be transmitted at the speed of light through the same technology that allowed the transmission of radio.

Philo T. Farnsworth examines the image dissector, the tube that permitted him to transmit images electronically through the atmosphere. This photograph was used to prove that he had invented the apparatus that developed into television.

The Business

Patents

The United States government issues a patent when an inventor submits an invention that is shown to be substantially different from other similar inventions that have been issued patents. There are three fundamental statutory requirements that an invention must embody before a patent will be granted: utility, novelty and non-obviousness. That is, a patent must be for an item that is useful, unique or different from its predecessors and so different from previous inventions that it would not have been obvious even to experts in the field. To

Farnsworth's image dissector (left), with an end view of the tube at top. At right, the image oscillite (a cathode ray tube).

receive a patent an inventor must submit drawings and explanations of the invention (along with the required fees). Experts in the patent office review the paperwork to determine if it meets the legal standards for a new patent.

Priority of invention

Under U.S. patent law, a patent may be issued only to the "original and first inventor," which means that inventors working separately on the same invention have at times had a race to file a patent first. If an inventor is granted a patent or priority of invention on a patent, the inventor can bar others from making, using or selling the invention. However, once a patent is issued, the inventor only has 17 years before the patent expires and the invention becomes public.

Patent pools

Through David Sarnoff, RCA began amassing key patents on parts related to radio and television. Sarnoff sold and swapped stock in RCA for patents and created a so-called "patent pool," which later would be investigated as an illegal monopoly. RCA stock, or simply radio as the traders called it, was a hot commodity on the stock market, and so corporations were willing to trade for stock even though RCA kept a controlling share.

Licensing patents

After striving to compete with other radio makers who were using patented parts illegally, RCA instituted a licensing program by which radio makers paid a licensing fee to RCA for the use of the patents on each radio they made. Intimidated by the threat of lawsuits, most radio makers paid the licensing fee, further enriching RCA. Many of these licensees later would be part of the government's anti-monopoly case against RCA.

- **August 26, 1930** Farnsworth is granted a patent for the electronic television system.
- **January 15, 1931** Farnsworth's second child is born: Kenneth "Kenny" Gardner Farnsworth.
- **October 18, 1931** Thomas Alva Edison dies.
- **March 6, 1932** Kenny Farnsworth dies after an emergency tracheotomy to treat a streptococcal infection.
- **1932** Farnsworth brings a patent-interference suit against RCA. RCA countersues, claiming Farnsworth's 1930 patent is infringing on Zworykin's December 29, 1923 patent for a television system.
- **1932** GE and Westinghouse are ordered to sell all RCA stock, to end an illegal monopoly. RCA is required to license patents to competitors.
- **October 5, 1935** Farnsworth's third son, Russell Seymour Farnsworth, is born.
- **July, 1935** The examiner of interferences at the U.S. Patent office affirms Farnsworth's priority of invention, and his patents for electronic television are upheld.
- **1936** Sarnoff enters into a cross-licensing agreement for Farnsworth's patents.
- **September 4, 1948** The Farnsworth's fourth son, Kent, is born.
- **March 11, 1971** Farnsworth dies in Holladay, Utah, at age 64. At his death he holds more than 150 U.S. patents for various inventions.
- **December 12, 1971** David Sarnoff dies in his sleep of a heart attack, at age 80.

the interview

Early in the rehearsal process for *The Farnsworth Invention*, TimeLine Artistic Director PJ Powers (PJP) interviewed scenic designer John Culbert (JC).

(PJP) John, how did you get started as a scenic and lighting designer?

(JC) I started working on theater productions backstage in high school. From a very young age I was fascinated by mechanical things (like motorcycles). I was drawn to the combination of get-your-hands-dirty work and the expressive aspects of working on theater productions. I was always interested in the design/technical elements and never in the performing aspects. In college, I first majored in math and physics, then finally realized I could pursue a career in theater design — and it might be more adventurous than math and physics. I went to NYU specifically to study design in its MFA program.

(PJP) What is it about the Chicago theater community that made you want to build a career here?

(JC) I came to Chicago to head the lighting-design program at The Theatre School at DePaul University. The very first production I designed in Chicago was *Serious Money* at Court Theatre. That relationship has continued, and I have designed scenery and/or lights at Court for more than 35 productions. I also now have the honor of being The Theatre School's dean.

I find the focus in this theatre community to be on creating challenging, carefully rendered and thoughtful theater. This focus on the work is consistent in all levels of the community — the theaters with no budgets and those with plentiful resources. The theater community and audiences respect and celebrate a successful production, whether it be at the smallest storefront theater or one of the larger, more visible theaters. The range and quality of the theater artists here in Chicago is unmatched anywhere else. We are indeed privileged!

(PJP) What was your first reaction when you read *The Farnsworth Invention*?

(JC) I was initially struck by the exploration of creative vs. scientific, or orderly, thinking. How and why is it that a particular person can see things that another does not? We can have an army of very smart people working on a problem and someone else, outside that context, has the ability to see a solution that cannot be discovered through the structured process.

My next thought was, "Oh no! How many scenes, in how many locations?"

That was followed by relief, knowing there are so many scenes in so many locations that we could not possibly recreate them literally. The tendency in my design work is to search for the more abstract world that enables the storytelling while hopefully stimulating the audience's imagination.

Then I thought, "What will we do about the car on stage?"

Then I wondered why these two men needed to tell each other' stories.

(PJP) How did you and the team approach the design?

(JC) The goal was to create an overall "box," inside which we could illuminate this story. Not the story of the invention of television, but the story of two men. Men who lived in different worlds but whose work directly impacted each other; who, although they never met, had the need to tell, and retell, each other's story. Nick [Bowling, the director] provided the key to the world of the play when he suggested these two men were in purgatory together. Both made decisions they now question, so they relive their stories in an effort to reach a resolution. The box is based on the world of the creative laboratory in which Farnsworth worked. Light penetrates the box from outside to reveal the story as it unfolds in this purgatory.

(PJP) What challenges or opportunities does this big play bring to our intimate theater?

Close-up detail of the model of The Farnsworth Invention *set, designed by John Culbert.*

(JC) The flexibility to determine the configuration of the audience and the stage is exciting. Another asset is the height of the grid, which enables two levels for the set — unusual in a space of this scale. The intimacy allows the focus to remain on the characters. The challenge and the opportunity is to define the world with close-up detail rather than big-gesture scenery.

(PJP) You have had a huge impact at The Theatre School, my alma mater and that of all of TimeLine's founders. With this production — your first at TimeLine — you are reconnecting with many DePaul alums. Can you talk about what it's been like working alongside so many of them?

(JC) At the school, we have the privilege of working with artists to develop tools and thinking they will take into the world and make their own. One of the biggest rewards is to see how alumni take off from this shared background. So it is a real honor to have the opportunity to work as a colleague, with those who share The Theatre School experience, vocabulary and discipline. It also has been a pleasure to watch the growth and success of TimeLine — The Theatre School could not be more proud.

(PJP) What are some of the important traits you try to develop in young designers?

(JC) I think there are three critical aspects of preparing for a career in design. First, a designer needs to be able to develop visual ideas. The ideas should be rooted in the material but also reflect one's perspective and understanding. Second, the designer must communicate the ideas. Theater is inherently collaborative; clear communication of visual ideas and thoughtfully responding to the others' ideas are critical skills. Finally, the designer must have the artistry, skills and organization to implement the ideas and make them happen in the context of a production. It sounds simple, but, like most things, the simpler it sounds the harder it is to achieve.

(PJP) How do you juggle your job as dean with your active design work?

(JC) The two go hand in hand. I would not feel at home representing the school if I were not engaged in the theater community myself. Of course, there are times when I don't get a lot of sleep!

Step Into [Prime] Time: The Age of Television

On Friday, March 26, 2010, TimeLine welcomed our largest audience ever — more than 230 people — to the ballrooms at Germania Place for our annual gala benefit, *Step Into Time*. This year, guests joined us to *Step Into [Prime] Time: The Age of Television* in celebration of the Chicago premiere of Aaron Sorkin's *The Farnsworth Invention*.

During this glamorous television-themed evening guests sipped the "I Dream of 'Tini" signature drink while perusing the auction and reminiscing about favorite TV memories. Guests enjoyed a gourmet meal and musical entertainment created exclusively for the event featuring hit TV show theme songs such as *Laverne and Shirley, Good Times, The Brady Bunch,* a *Cheers* sing-along and more!

It was a festive evening of catching up with old friends and making new ones while celebrating and supporting TimeLine Theatre. Through everyone's generosity, the event raised nearly $75,000 in net proceeds to support our mission, the art on our stage and our arts education work in Chicago Public Schools. We would like to express our gratitude to gala co-chairs **Jill Hurwitz** and **Bobbie Schultz**, the entire *Step Into Time* Committee, and sponsors **McCormick Foundation, Trabert & Hoeffer Jewels, CavComm Corporation** and **Drinks Over Dearborn** for making the event a huge success.

Read an extended recap of the event and see many more photos at *timelinetheatre.com/step_into_time.*

Above: More than 230 people gathered at Germania Place for TimeLine's 2010 Step Into Time benefit on March 26.

Right: The Step Into Time *Committee (from left): Rob Waters, co-chairs Jill Hurwitz and Bobbie Schultz, Robert Alpaugh, Michelle Cucchiaro, Laurie Hamilton and Debra Siegel. Not pictured: Nancy Bradt, Maureen Powers and Penny Shaw.*

Mastering the Art Play Reading

TimeLine donors got a sneak peek of an upcoming production in TimeLine's 2010-11 season at a private TimePieces reading of *Mastering the Art* by William Brown and Doug Frew on February 9, 2010. Donors of $150 and above were in the audience for the first public reading of this upcoming world premiere play that was commissioned by TimeLine. The play reading was followed by a post-show discussion with the authors.

To learn more about the benefits of being a TimeLine donor visit *timelinetheatre.com/donate* or call 773.281.8463 x26.

Artistic Director PJ Powers (from left) and playwrights Doug Frew and William Brown talk with donors at February's reading of Mastering the Art.

Throughout the year, in grateful appreciation for their generosity, TimeLine is delighted to invite our donors even closer to the art at TimeLine through special opportunities to mingle with the artists, Company members and staff. To learn more, contact Lydia Swift at 773.281.8463 x26 or visit *timelinetheatre.com/donate.*

Supporting TimeLine is easier than ever!
Donate online via *timelinetheatre.com* and opt for a "recurring donation" to effortlessly make monthly, quarterly or annual gifts. With this option, you'll be continuously supporting the art on our stage and all of TimeLine's programs.

BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy & Historical Research by Maren Robinson

Written by Maren Robinson, PJ Powers, Lydia Swift and Lara Goetsch

Edited by Karen A. Callaway & Lara Goetsch

Photography by Lara Goetsch and Jennifer Girard

Graphic Design by Lara Goetsch

The Farnsworth Invention *Photo by* Ryan Robinson

Backstory is published four times each season.

Pictured on front cover (from left): Actor PJ Powers; dramaturg Maren Robinson and actor Justine C. Turner; projections designer Mike Tutaj; cast and production team look at the scenic design model at first rehearsal; and actor Rob Fagin.

Pictured on back cover (from left): Actor Sean Patrick Fawcett; actors Larry Baldacci and Tom McElroy; actors Zach Kenney and Jamie Vann; actor Jeremy Glickstein; actors Eliza Stoughton and Bill McGough; and actor Bridgette Pechman.

Our Mission:
TimeLine Theatre presents stories **inspired by history** that connect with today's social and political issues.

Our collaborative artistic team produces provocative theatre that engages, educates, entertains and enlightens.

the play






April 17 - June 13, 2010

previews 4/14 - 4/16

by **AARON SORKIN**

directed by **NICK BOWLING**

Chicago Premiere! From the creator of *The West Wing* and *A Few Good Men* comes this fascinating new play. Two ambitious, larger-than-life visionaries — Philo T. Farnsworth, an Idaho farmboy, and David Sarnoff, head of RCA — battle through corporate espionage, family tragedy, financial disaster and the thrill of discovery to claim one of the greatest inventions of all time — the television.

Cast

Tom McElroy**
Bill McGough**
Larry Baldacci
Kurt Brocker
Paul Dunckel
Rob Fagin
Sean Patrick Fawcett
Jeremy Glickstein
Zach Gray
Maris Hudson
Zach Kenney
Bridgette Pechman
PJ Powers
Eliza Stoughton
Justine C. Turner
Jamie Vann

***Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.*

Production Team

John Culbert, U.S.A.:
Scenic Designer

Lindsey Pate:
Costume Designer

Keith Parham, U.S.A.:
Lighting Designer

Kevin O'Donnell:
Sound Designer

Mike Tutaj:
Projections Designer

Emily Guthrie:
Properties Designer

Julia Eberhardt:
Assistant Properties Designer

Maren Robinson:
Dramaturg

Ana Espinosa:
Stage Manager

James Ogden:
Production Manager and Technical Director

Those designers and scenic artists identified by U.S.A. are members of United Scenic Artists, IATSE Local 829, AFL-CIO

APRIL 2010

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

MAY 2010

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

JUNE 2010

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13						

Regular Performance
Preview Performance
Opening Night ***Sold Out***
Post-Show Discussion with cast & production crew ***Free***
Sunday Scholars a one-hour post-show panel discussion with experts on the themes and issues of the play ***Free***
Company Member Discussion a conversation with TimeLine's Company members ***Free***

SHOW TIMES

PREVIEWS 8 PM
OPENING NIGHT 7 PM
WEDNESDAYS & THURSDAYS 7:30 PM
FRIDAYS 8 PM
SATURDAYS 4 PM & 8 PM
SUNDAYS 2 PM