

ELLIS ISLAND 2024 CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

AMERICANS

COMMISSIONER WATCHORN (male-presenting, 38-60, baritone)

Commissioner of Ellis Island from about 1906 until 1909. Actual historical character. He himself had been an immigrant and worked at Ellis Island as an inspector in 1896. He believed that immigrants were beneficial to America and loosened the money requirements instituted by his predecessor, Comm. Williams. His hobby was photography, and he is responsible for a good deal of the portraits of immigrants that exist today. He was open to suggestions for reform and was aware that certain members of his staff took advantage of the immigrants. Doubles as an immigrant or ship captain/ticket seller in the opening scene.

BRIGITTE ANDERSSON (female-presenting, 20-30, musical theatre soprano, G-E)

She is second-generation Swedish. Her parents were immigrants who came through Castle Garden. She is single and her parents are very wealthy. She is a crusader and president of the Society for The Protection of Immigrants, which is a fictitious group, but representative of the type of organizations that were forming to combat the abuses perpetrated on immigrants. Doubles as a first-class passenger in the opening scene.

DR. GREGORY SCHMIDT (male-presenting, 35-60, non-singing)

Dr. Schmidt is the overworked, serious, sympathetic head doctor at Ellis Island. He oversees the hospital where certain immigrants are sent to recover. Doubles as an immigrant or ship captain/ticket seller in the opening scene. Light ensemble singing.

SAMMY TATE (male-presenting, 30-45, tenor)

Sammy Tate is the head baggage handler. He is notorious for ripping off unsuspecting immigrants. Everyone knows it, but, he has yet to be caught red-handed. He will be by the end of the play. Doubles as an immigrant in the opening scene.

MR. HERBERT WINSTON (male-presenting, 30-60, non-singing)

Mr. Herbert Winston is the chief inspector. He does initial inspections and sits on the Board Of Special Inquiry as well. He is "by the book", but, somewhat absentminded. He means well but often misunderstands the situation and then compounds confusion. Doubles as an immigrant or ship captain/ticket seller in the opening scene. Light ensemble singing.

MR. GEORGE WASHINGTON (male-presenting, 30-60, non-singing)

George is an assistant inspector who works for Mr. Winston. The immigrants always confuse him with the George Washington and it's a running joke. He is very serious and does not like joking. He is very proud of his job. Doubles as an immigrant or ship captain/ticket seller in the opening scene. Light ensemble singing.

NURSE CLARA MARTIN (female-presenting, 25-40, mezzo)

Nurse Martin is head nurse at the Ellis Island Hospital. She works directly for Dr. Schmidt. They are friendly. Nurse Martin is his "right hand man". Doubles as a 1st class passenger in the opening scene.

MRS. WILHEMINA MACARTHUR (female-presenting, 40-65, mezzo)

President of The Ladies' Aid and Temperance League. Very righteous and nose-y. Comedic character who is concerned about the moral character of the incoming immigrants. She has a run-in with Kate Sullivan. Doubles as a 1st class passenger in the opening scene.

NURSE CYNTHIA JACKSON (female-presenting, 35-50, mezzo)

Examining nurse assisting the doctors "on the line" during the initial examinations. Gossipy. She wants Nurse Martin's job. She is critical of everyone and everything. Doubles as a 1st class passenger in the opening scene.

MRS. MARY ELSWORTH (female-presenting, 30-40, soprano)

Vice-president of The Ladies' Aid Society and Temperance League. Good friend of Mrs. MacArthur, but her opinions change depending upon to whom she is speaking. She calls everyone "very nice". Doubles as a 1st class passenger in the opening scene.

MISS AMANDA BUCKLEY (female-presenting, 25-45, non-singing)

Stenographer to Commissioner Watchorn. Always writing down his directives. He is continually dismissing her then shouting, "Where is Miss Buckley? Confound that girl! She's never here when I need her!". Doubles as a 1st class passenger in the opening scene. Light ensemble singing.

MISS HILLARY WARD (female-presenting, 25-45, non-singing)

Stenographer to Inspector Winston. She gets exasperated with Mr. Winston because of his forgetfulness and because he is always confusing the issue. Miss Ward is constantly being mistaken for Miss Buckley by Comm. Watchorn and others, and she finds this very annoying. She is outspoken for a woman of 1907. Doubles as a 1st class passenger in the opening scene. Light ensemble singing.

MARIA PASTORELLA (female-presenting, 25-45, non-singing)

She is a charwoman on Ellis Island. She emigrated from Italy 6 years before. She doesn't like dirt and is constantly cleaning. If someone walks on a floor she has just swept, she'll look at them, look at the floor, then make a big deal about resweeping it. Doubles as a 1st class passenger in the opening scene. Light ensemble singing.

MRS. MIRANDA SUTTON (female-presenting, 28-39, mezzo)

Treasurer of The Ladies Aid Society and Temperance League. She is part of the Wilhelmina and Mary "threesome". They are always interrupting her. The women resent Miss Anderssen and consider her to be intruding on their territory, but they kow-tow to her because her father is a personal friend of Teddy Roosevelt and she went to school with Alice Roosevelt. The three ladies, Mary, Wilhelmina, and Miranda are involved with New York Society and have rich husbands. This is their hobby.

ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS

SIGNORA FONTANA (female-presenting, 20-35, ensemble singing)

The mother of Carolina and Paolo, she is traveling to America to rejoin her husband, Antonio, who has sent the money for their passage. Her husband has been staying with his brother and his brother's family. She hasn't seen him for 2 years. She is outspoken, good-natured, and down-to-earth. The "ladies" try to make her over into an "American", but she changes back to her old self as soon as she is away from them. She and her family must temporarily stay in detention until her husband arrives.

CAROLINA FONTANA (female-presenting, 10-17, ensemble singing)

Daughter of Signora Fontana. She is a lively girl who is made to look after her annoying brother.

PAOLO FONTANA (male-presenting, 8-15, ensemble singing)

Curious, energetic young boy. He is very proud that his father, uncle, and cousins are already in America. He considers himself an "expert" on America because he has received letters about it from his relatives.

ANNA CHRISTINA del AMANTE di BORGHESE (female-presenting, 8-15, ensemble singing)

An orphan of well-to-do parents who died in a cholera epidemic. Unscrupulous officials took all their money as "taxes". Her rich uncle and aunt in America, whom she has never met, have sent the orphanage money to send her 1st class. They send her via steerage (3rd class) and keep the rest of the ticket money for themselves. Because her aunt and uncle expect her first class, they are not at Ellis Island to meet her. She goes to detention, but eventually she is united with her uncle. She becomes friendly with Paolo and Carolina on the ship. Signora Fontana feels sorry for her and feeds her and takes care of her on the trip. Anna's rich uncle gives them a gift of money in gratitude for having protected Anna from starvation on the trip.

GIUSEPPE DISCALA (male-presenting, 20-45, baritone)

A peasant farmer who is travelling to America with his five sisters. They are planning to journey all the way to California to start an orange-growing farm. He has sold their farm and everything they own to do this, and his sisters are not happy about it. They are afraid. To make matters worse, he leaves his ticket money in his baggage, and it is stolen by Sammy Tate. Because they have no money, they are sent to detention. An investigation is conducted, and Sammy is finally caught and made to return the money.

TERESA DISCALA (female-presenting, 15-30, ensemble-singing)

One of Giuseppe's 5 sisters. She also plays the mean orphanage owner who sends Anna to America in steerage and pockets the rest of the money for her 1st class ticket.

REGINA DISCALA (female-presenting, 20-35, ensemble-singing)

One of Giuseppe's 5 sisters. Also, a matron with the orphanage owner who puts Anna on the "BEL ITALIA"

VIOLETTA DISCALA (female-presenting, 15-30, ensemble singing)

One of Giuseppe's 5 sisters.

SUSANNAH DISCALA (female-presenting, 20-35, ensemble singing)

Sister to Giuseppe. She does not get through the medical inspection because she is blind in one eye. She tells them she can see better with one eye than most people can see with two. She reads the full eyechart and tells them about a childhood accident which made her lose her eye. She convinces them and they let her through, but she still must go to detention because their money has been stolen.

MARIA DISCALA (female-presenting, 35-55-, ensemble singing)

Sister to Giuseppe. She is the only one who agrees with her brother about going to America. She is also the oldest and is older than her brother.

MAGYAR (Hungarian) IMMIGRANTS

JUTKA HARASZTI (female-presenting, 30-40, mezzo)

The mother of 4 girls, Jutka is journeying from Poloske, Austria-Hungary, to meet her husband who left for America 3 years earlier. During the trip, her youngest daughter, Ildiko, becomes very ill. By the time they reach Ellis Island, she has a temperature of 103° and she is sent to the hospital. Jutka goes with her and her daughters go to detention. Her friend from the old country, Eva Szabo, promises to take care of the children while she waits for her husband to come for her.

MARISKA HARASZTI (female-presenting, 16, ensemble singing)

Eldest daughter of Jutka. She is the most responsible and takes care of the other children.

ILONA HARASZTI (female-presenting, 14, ensemble singing)

Fun-loving and mischievous. not to wander or get lost. 2nd oldest daughter of Jutka. Her mother often must tell her not to wander or get lost.

ZSUZSI HARASZTI (female-presenting, 8-10, ensemble singing)

The 2nd youngest daughter of Jutka, she becomes extremely frightened when her sister becomes ill. She is afraid that little Ildiko is going to die and continually prays for her recovery.

ILDIKO HARASZTI (female-presenting, 6-10, ensemble singing)

Jutka's youngest daughter. She is lively and talkative until she gets sick. She makes friends with Paolo Fontana onboard the "BEL ITALIA". She gets better while in the hospital at Ellis Island and is reunited with her father and family.

EVA SZABO (female-presenting, 20-55, ensemble singing)

From Poloske, Austria-Hungary, she is a friend and former neighbor of Jutka Haraszti. They have been traveling together. Their husbands work for the same butcher in New York. The reason that she waits in detention is that her husband did not receive the telegram she sent because they changed addresses. Eventually, it is all cleared up and there is a happy reunion at the end of the show. She has two daughters, Margitka and Irenka.

MARGITKA SZABO (female-presenting, 6-10, ensemble singing)

Daughter of Eva Szabo. Friend of Ildiko Haraszti. She becomes worried and scared when her friend gets sick and is taken away.

IRENKA SZABO (female-presenting, 8-14, ensemble singing)

Daughter of Eva Szabo, sister to Margitka. Best friend of Zsuzsi Haraszti. She, Margitka and Zsuzsi all hang out together.

ANIKO WINKOVICZ (female-presenting, 20-55, ensemble singing)

She is Slovak, from the area of what is now Czechoslovakia. Her husband was killed in a farming accident, and she is travelling with her 2 children to join her brother on a farm in Iowa. She purchases tickets for the train when she gets through inspection.

KARL WINKOVICZ (male-presenting, 10-15, ensemble singing)

Son of Aniko. His father has recently been killed. He is going to join his single uncle in Iowa to help on the farm. Karl is excited about the trip but, his younger sister, Una, is afraid.

UNA WINKOVICZ (female-presenting, 7-12, ensemble singing)

She is the young daughter of Aniko. She misses her father who has recently passed away and she is afraid of the ship and the ocean. Her family gets through inspection and leaves on a train.

IRISH IMMIGRANTS

KATE SULLIVAN (female-presenting, 19, mezzo soprano/belt)

Fiery Irish girl. 19 years old. She is unaware that you can't get into America if you are a single girl and not accompanied by a man. She is outspoken and audacious and her mouth gets her into trouble. She ultimately marries Timothy O'Reilly at the Kissing Post and that is how she gets into America.

COLLEEN SULLIVAN (female-presenting, 17, soprano)

Quiet sister to Katie. She is always having to smooth over her sister's faux pas. She falls in love with Daniel Murphy and is married to him at the Kissing Post in a double ceremony with her sister and Tim O'Reilly.

TIMOTHY O'REILLY (male-presenting, 20-35, bari-tenor)

A member of the Fenians, the forerunner of the Irish Republican Army, he is escaping the law by going to America. His friend, Daniel Murphy is also on the run. They were involved in robbing a bank and the British authorities are after them. He is held in detention because an English passenger recognizes his picture from a Wanted poster he had seen. They talk their way out -of it at the Board of Inquiry hearing by saying they are just hardworking people coming to America to start a new life with their "fiances", Colleen and Kate Sullivan.

DANIEL MURPHY (male-presenting, 20-35, bari-tenor)

A member of the Fenians (see above), Daniel is running from British law along with his friend,

Timothy O'Reilly. They are not really criminals but, believe they were doing their patriotic duty while robbing the bank. Daniel falls in love with and marries Colleen Sullivan.

ELIZABETH O'DONNELL (female-presenting, 20-55, ensemble singing)

Mother of 2 children, she is going to meet her husband whom she has not seen for 2 years. He is a coalminer in West Virginia. She and her family wait in detention until her husband can wire her train tickets. She learns on the boat that Irene O'Grady is going to the same company town to be with her husband, and they become friends.

ELEANOR O'DONNELL (female-presenting, 7-12, ensemble singing)

Young daughter of Elizabeth. She stays near her mother a lot, because there are no little girls on the boat to play with and the boys are too rough.

TOMMY O'DONNELL (male-presenting, 7-15, ensemble singing)

Son of Elizabeth, he becomes good buddies with Patrick and Teddy O'Grady. He's very excited that they are going to be neighbors. He likes waiting in detention and thinks it's all a great big adventure. He is greatly impressed by Tim O'Reilly and Daniel Murphy.

IRENE O'GRADY (female-presenting, 28, ensemble singing)

She is a 28-year-old wife and mother of two boys. She hasn't seen her husband in 4 years and is worried about seeing him again. She becomes friends with Elizabeth O'Donnell when she finds out they are going to be neighbors. She and her family also wait in detention until the train tickets can be wired to them.

TEDDY O'GRADY (male-presenting, 8-15, ensemble singing)

Son of Irene; brother of Patrick. Teddy becomes pals with Tommy O'Donnell. He brags that he wants to grow up and become a Fenian, so he can turn Ireland into a free country. His mother is always warning him to "not talk such nonsense!"

PATRICK O'GRADY (male-presenting, 7-12, ensemble singing)

Son of IRENE, brother of TEDDY. He is the younger brother, and he doesn't like girls. He wants to be a FENIAN, too, because his brother wants to be one.

ENGLISH IMMIGRANTS

WINIFRED GODFREY (female-presenting, 45, ensemble singing)

45-ish spinster who worked for the postal service as a stenographer, she recognizes TIMOTHY and DANIEL from a wanted poster that was hanging in her former office. She tells INSPECTOR WINSTON that they are fugitives from the law. She has come to America to spend her old age with her sister's family.

RUSSIAN & POLISH IMMIGRANTS

NICOLAI GOLDOVSKY (male-presenting, 30-60, bass baritone)

NICOLAI is an anarchist and Russian Jew from Moscow. He is wanted by the law in connection

with a bombing of the Czar's relatives city home. NICOLAI is a loner. At first he speaks to no-one, but, while onboard the "DEUTSCHLAND" he overhears some women cursing the anarchists for causing the pogrom. He lectures them that they should be "cursing the Czar and his Cossacks, not, the people who put their lives on the line to free everyone from the tyranny of the czarist regime." NICOLAI views America as the promised land. He's held in detention because he grabs INSPECTOR WINSTON and kisses him, which makes them think he's crazy. He eventually makes it through the Special Inquiry Board.

LUDMILLA ANTONOVICH (female-presenting, 16, mezzo/belt)

A young ballet star in St. Petersburg who keeps her Jewish identity a secret until she receives news that her parents have been killed in a pogrom back in their village. Everyone was killed. She takes all the money she has saved, travels to Hamburg, Germany, and buys a ticket to America with her remaining money. She lies to the ticket man and says her uncle will meet her there. She is sent to detention because single women were not allowed into the country. BRIGITTE ANDERSSSEN finds out about her and arranges for her to dance for the head of a New York ballet company. He wants to engage her on the spot, but there is still the problem of her being single. Of all people, MRS. MACARTHUR agrees to sign for and have her live in her New York mansion.

LEONID CHEKOV (male-presenting, 18-30, ensemble singing)

He is a young man coming to America to escape persecution. His wife and child are staying behind in Russia. He is a cabinetmaker by profession and gets through the examinations quickly.

ANUSHKA ABELSON (female-presenting, 35-50, ensemble singing)

One of three sisters traveling onboard the "DEUTSCHLAND", she is going to join her husband who is a tailor. Her nieces are ESTER and RACHEL. She does not approve of their socializing with NICOLAI.

RACHEL ABELSON (female-presenting, 16-25, ensemble singing)

Niece to ANUSHKA and sister to ESTER, she is a seamstress and interested in NICOLAI. Her aunt, ANUSHKA, calls her every time she sees her speaking to NICOLAI. RACHEL is a seamstress.

ESTER ABELSON (female-presenting, 12, ensemble singing)

Niece to ANUSHKA and sister to RACHEL, she is the youngest. She is infatuated with NICOLAI and thinks he is "dashing". ESTER is 12. The ABELSON sisters temporarily wait in detention, until ANUSHKA's husband comes to pick them up.

NORA MEYERSKY (female-presenting, 20-55, ensemble singing)

She is a Polish wife whose husband is working in a steel mill in Ohio. In Poland she taught school in a one room class to Jewish children. This she did secretly because it was forbidden. She is relieved to be heading for America. She has one daughter, ADEL, but she is looking out for the two BERKOWICZ sisters, SADI and ELIZABETH, who are also going to Ohio. There is a mix up in their papers, so they temporarily go to detention.

ADEL MEYERSKY (female-presenting, 8-15, ensemble singing)

Daughter of NORA. Polish. Very intelligent girl. Doesn't get along with SADI and ELIZABETH.

SADI BERKOWICZ (female-presenting, 8-15, ensemble singing)

Polish. They have remained in Poland while their parents earned enough money to bring them out. They have been staying with an aunt. Her sister is ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH BERKOWICZ (female-presenting, 6-11, ensemble singing)

Sister to SADI. She is very excited to be rejoining her parents. She is afraid of the water.

PER SVENSSON (male-presenting, 50+ years old, ensemble singing)

The patriarch of the SVENSSON family. Per is a widower and a 'kindly older man whom everyone loves. GRETSCHEN is his daughter. He has 4 sons in Minnesota. He has his three daughter-in-laws traveling with him ... HELGA (the oldest, with 5 kids), ERICA and ASTRID. His daughter, GRETSCHEN, has one child, INGRID. HELGA's children are DANA, KIRSTEN & BRUNHILDE (twins), RONA & ERIC. Two other grandchildren are with him, the sisters, DAHLIA & KELSEY. PER is tolerant and self-sacrificing. He is the only one rejected by the authorities at Ellis Island, due to his age and infirmities. He must return alone to a life alone. He voluntarily does this against his grieving family's protestations. They want to return with him, but he tells them, "My life is behind me, your lives are ahead of you."

HELGA SVENSSON (female-presenting, 20-60, ensemble singing)

The excitable daughter-in-law of PER. HELGA has children, DANA, KIRSTEN & BRUNHILDE (twins), RONA and ERIC. She is very emotional and a close friend of GRETSCHEN.

GRETSCHEN NORDLUND (female-presenting, 20-60, ensemble singing)

Daughter of PER. Mother of INGRID. GRETSCHEN is calm and level-headed, like her father. She is sensible, realistic, and kind. In the end, she realizes first, that PER is correct in his decision to return home alone. She makes the rest of the family accept his decision, even though HELGA is crying hysterically about it.

INGRID NORDLUND (female-presenting, 7-14, ensemble singing)

Daughter of GRETSCHEN. She is a fun-loving, happy-go-lucky child who likes nothing better than to play, sing and dance with her cousins.

DANA SVENSSON (female-presenting, 19-25, ensemble singing)

Cheerful oldest daughter of HELGA. She is always smiling.

KIRSTEN SVENSSON (female-presenting, 15-17, ensemble singing)

Good-natured daughter of HELGA: BRUNHILDE is her twin. They are the second oldest.

BRUNHILDE SVENSSON (female-presenting, 15-17, ensemble singing)

Twin sister of KIRSTEN, daughter of HELGA. Constantly with her twin sister.

RONA SVENSSON (female-presenting, 10-15, ensemble singing)

2nd youngest child of HELGA. She is "in charge of" her younger brother, ERIC.

ERIC SVENSSON (male-presenting, 6-10-year-old, ensemble singing)

Youngest child of HELGA and her only son. He is pampered and adored. His older sister, RONA, takes care of him, but he playfully tries to hide from her. All the SVENSSON grandchildren are always happy and playful.

DAHLIA SVENSSON (female-presenting, 12, ensemble singing)

Granddaughter of PER, sister to KELSEY. Her mother and father are already in America, and she has been staying with her Aunt GRETSCHEN. She is 12.

KELSEY SVENSSON (female-presenting, 14, ensemble singing)

Granddaughter of PER, older sister to DAHLIA, KELSEY is 14. She is adventurous and lively.

ERICA SVENSSON (female-presenting, 17, ensemble singing)

17-year-old daughter-in-law of PER. She is sensible and obedient. She is considerate and very concerned for PER's welfare and comfort.

ASTRID SVENSSON (female-presenting, 17, ensemble singing)

17-year-old daughter-in-law of PER, ASTRID is a daydreamer. When the family all gets on the ship she is left staring at the city of Hamburg, until ERICA notices her and comes back for her. She is always smiling and pleasant.

<p><i>**** THE SVENSSON FAMILY is a very large, extended family who "stick together". They are all lively and hardworking. It never occurs to them that PER will be excluded from America, and this becomes a major tragedy for them.</i></p>

ULRIKA JACOBSEN (female-presenting, 20–40-year-old, ensemble singing only)

She is the bossy, young, Danish wife of Hans. They are farmers travelling to America. They are temporarily sent to detention because she is "with child" and didn't realize it. She is sent to the head nurse for a further medical examination, but at first, she is very argumentative because she doesn't understand why she is being sent there. Eventually, she is reunited with her husband, and they get through immigration.

HANS JACOBSEN (male-presenting, 20–55-year-old, ensemble singing only)

Henpecked husband of ULRIKA. He finally stands up to her at the end. For medical reasons, ULRIKA is detained, so HANS waits for her in men's detention.

CARIBBEAN & WEST INDIAN IMMIGRANTS

MRS. SYLVIA BONET (female-presenting, 28, African-American, lyric mezzo)

28-year-old wife of Dr. Pierre Bonet from Guadeloupe. Her husband is a brilliant man who has set up practice in New York. She has travelled here 1st class from Guadeloupe, but she has been sent to Ellis Island for processing because she is black and because her daughter walks with the use of a crutch. She has two daughters, ANTOINETTE, and DOMINIQUE, who is lame in one leg and walks with a crutch.

ANTOINETTE BONET (female-presenting, 8, African-American, ensemble singing)

The 8-year-old daughter of SYLVIA. She is from Guadeloupe, an island in the West Indies. She has never experienced the cold of January in New York and she wants to go home. She hasn't seen her father for two years.

DOMINIQUE BONET (female-presenting, 9, African-American, ensemble singing)

9-year-old daughter of SYLVIA BONET. She is refused entry to the U.S. because of a lame leg. Her father gets a letter from President Teddy Roosevelt exempting her from deportation. The BONET family is happily reunited at the end of the show.

Other parts:

- Guards in detention (male-presenting, one scene, no lines, commonly doubled)
- Dr. Bonet, Mrs. Bonet's husband who arrives in the final scene to pick her up (male-presenting, 20-50 years old, one scene, acting only, a few lines)
- Mr. Gorky, the head of the New York Ballet Company (male-presenting, 30+ years old, one scene, acting only, a few lines)
- Mr. and Mrs. Borghese, Anna's aunts who arrive in the final scene to pick her up (40+ years old, one scene, acting only, a few lines)
- Orange seller in Naples (any gender, only in opening scene, frequently doubled with an "American", acting/pantomime only)