

MARCH 29 - APRIL 21, 2024



TOM STOPPARD'S
**ROSENCRANTZ
& GUILDENSTERN
ARE DEAD**

DIRECTED BY CHARLES NEWELL

**TONY
AWARD
WINNING**
COURT THEATRE



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

WELCOME

Dear Court Theatre Family,

I love that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is so vital, so alive. The play is an interrogation of what it means to find yourself and your place in the world—with all the chaos, humor, pathos, and joy contained therein. It is also a celebration of transformation.

In that way, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is a play about legacy.

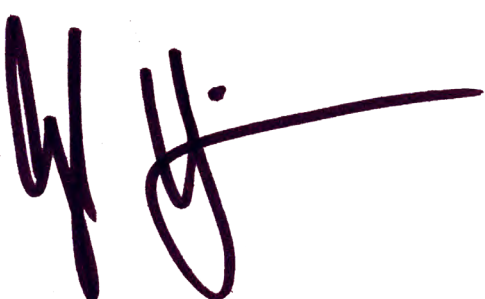
Director and Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director Charles Newell has led Court Theatre for thirty years and, come summer of 2024, he will be transitioning out of this role and into the newly-created role of Senior Artistic Consultant. He built upon Founding Artistic Director Nicholas Rudall's passion for exploring classics, and under Charlie's leadership, Court's impact and national reputation have grown exponentially.

Charlie's artistic legacy is the work he has done on this stage, his creation of productions that are emotionally resonant with strikingly clear storytelling. His engagement with the University community includes faculty collaborations, leadership training, and master classes. And, as a co-founder of the Civic Actor Studio, Charlie uses classic texts to empower local leaders.

Just as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* go to great lengths to find themselves, Charlie has found himself at Court. He and the institution have, for thirty years, been inextricably linked. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a way for him to honor both the place and the very art form that played such an integral role in his artistic growth.

Thank you, Charlie, for all that you've done for Court. And thank you, audience, for your support throughout this journey—with all the chaos, humor, pathos, and joy contained therein.

Sincerely,



Angel Ysaguirre
Executive Director

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COURT THEATRE

CHARLES NEWELL
Marilyn F. Vitale
Artistic Director

ANGEL YSAGUIRRE
Executive Director

MARCH 29 - APRIL 21, 2024

ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

BY
TOM STOPPARD

DIRECTED BY
MARILYN F. VITALE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
CHARLES NEWELL

Scenic Design by John Culbert U.S.A.

Costume Design by Raquel Adorno U.S.A.

Lighting Design by Keith Parham U.S.A.

Sound Design by Andre Pluess U.S.A.

Sheryl Williams, Physical Content Consultant

Rueben D. Echoles, Wig and Hair Design Concepts

Marissa Fenley, Production Dramaturg
and Shadow Puppet Advisor

Casting by Becca McCracken C.S.A.

Kate Ocker,* Production Stage Manager

Kira Neighbors,* Assistant Stage Manager

Please note: This production contains the use of
water-based haze and flashing lighting effects.

Sponsored by

Michael C. Litt

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is presented by arrangement with
Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com.

Designers identified by U.S.A. are members of United Scenic Artists, I.A.T.S.E.
Local USA829, AFL-CIO,CLC.

*Denotes a member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of
Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

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Court Theatre operates under an agreement between the League of Resident
Theatres and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and
Stage Managers in the United States. Court Theatre is a constituent of Theatre
Communications Group, the national organization for the American Theatre, the
League of Resident Theatres, the Illinois Humanities Council, and the League of
Chicago Theatres.

This project is partially supported by a CityArts Grant from the City of Chicago
Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events. Court Theatre acknowledges
support from the Illinois Arts Council.



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CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Rosencrantz	Nate Burger*
Guildenstern	Erik Hellman*
The Player	Lorenzo Rush Jr.*
Ensemble/Polonius	Rob Lindley*
Ensemble/Ophelia	Charence Higgins
Ensemble/Hamlet	Blake Hamilton Currie
Ensemble/Claudius	Amir Abdullah*
Ensemble/Gertrude	Elizabeth Ledo*

Understudies:

Blake Hamilton Currie (Guildenstern)

Richard Gomez (Ensemble/Polonius, Ensemble/Claudius)

Grayson Kennedy (Rosencrantz)

Kenesha Kristine Reed (Ensemble/Gertrude, Ensemble/Ophelia)

Christopher Wayland (The Player, Ensemble/Hamlet)

*Denotes a member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

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PRODUCTION CREW

Assistant Director	Carol Ann Tan
Assistant Dramaturg	Alec Abramson
Associate Casting Director	Celeste M. Cooper
Assistant Scenic Designer	Lauren Nichols
Charge Scenic Artist	Sarah Lewis U.S.A.
Scenic Artist	Michael A.C. Besancon U.S.A.
Carpenters	Cordell Brown, Kate Nagorski, Brian Wasserman
Assistant Costume Designer	Jeanette Rodriguez
Stitcher	Eric Guy
Costume Shop Assistant	Jessica Donaldson
Wardrobe Technician	Sebastian Van Horn
Properties Artisan	Persephone Lawrence
Assistant Lighting Designer	Josiah Croegaert
Assistant Lighting Supervisor	Emily Brown
Electricians	Emily Brown, Aljoya Hall, Kenneth Martin, Ish Petersen, Jess Zhang, Joel Zishuk
Assistant Sound Designer	Josh McCammon
Audio Engineer	Ian C. Weber
Floor Manager	Kate Nagorski

Scenic Artists identified by U.S.A. are members of United Scenic Artists, I.A.T.S.E. Local USA829, AFL-CIO,CLC.

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SYNOPSIS

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are lost. They have been instructed to locate their childhood friend—Hamlet, Prince of Denmark—and discern what ails him, but he is nowhere to be found. They proceed on their quest and stumble upon the Ensemble, a troupe of actors who slip in and out of playing characters from *Hamlet*, the Shakespeare play from which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern emerged. Confusion and mischief abound. As the line between theatricality and reality becomes increasingly blurred, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discover who they are, why they're here, and the transformational power of theatre.

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COURT THEATRE

2024/25
SEASON

ANNOUNCING THE

SEPT 2024

EAST TEXAS HOT LINKS

By Eugene Lee
Directed by Resident Artist Ron OJ Parson



NOV/DEC 2024

FALSETTOS

Music and Lyrics by William Finn
Book by William Finn and James Lapine
Produced in partnership with TimeLine Theatre Company
Directed by Nick Bowling, TimeLine Associate Artistic Director



FEB/MAR 2025

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

By Lorraine Hansberry
Directed by Associate Artistic Director
Gabrielle Randle-Bent



WORLD PREMIERE

APR/MAY 2025

BERLIN

By Mickle Maher
Based on the graphic novel by Jason Lutes
Directed by Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director Charles Newell



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ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE BACK



Joe Delger and Malcolm Rothman in Court's 1979 production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, directed by Robert Benedetti (*Chicago Maroon*).

Since the 1970s, Court has produced Tom Stoppard eleven times. We have staged *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* twice (first in 1972, then in 1979), *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1985), *Jumpers* (1987), *Travesties* twice (first in 1995, then in 2005), *The Real Thing* (1999), *The Invention of Love* (2000), *Arcadia* (2007), *The Hard Problem* (2017), and a virtual reading of *Leopoldstadt* (2020).

This iteration of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is our twelfth Stoppard production and our third time staging this specific play. Of the twelve, approximately half have been directed by Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director Charles Newell, and the majority have been staged during his tenure. The only other playwrights we have produced with the same frequency are William Shakespeare, Molière, and August Wilson.

Part of our mission is to expand the modern theatrical canon so that lists, such as the one outlined above, are more diverse and better reflect our lived realities. Another aspect of our mission is to use theatre to explore the enduring questions that confront humanity and connect us as people. This is the wellspring of Newell's affinity for Stoppard.



Harry Althaus and Larry Yando in *Travesties*, directed by Charles Newell in 1995 (*Michael Brosilow*).

One of Stoppard's hallmarks as a playwright is existentialism; he is constantly wrestling with the question of who we are and why we're here, most notably in his essay "On Turning Out to be Jewish."

To quote Production Dramaturg Marissa Fenley: "In Stoppard's essay 'On Turning Out to Be Jewish,' published in *Talk* in 1999, he talks about his identity as though it is something given to him by someone else. Identity, in this essay, is not something innate or personal but very much something conferred upon you by others. Identity also seems to have agency of its own — it acts autonomously from you, while nevertheless directing the course of your life. Stoppard writes about his mother: *As I understand it, if I do, 'being Jewish' didn't figure in her life until it disrupted it, and then it set her on a course of displacement, chaos, bereavement, and—finally—sanctuary in a foreign country, England, thanks at least that her boys were now safe. Hitler made her Jewish in 1939.*"



Photo of Chaon Cross and Enjoy Gavino in *The Hard Problem*, directed by Charles Newell in 2017 (*Michael Brosilow*).

These questions of identity and agency are arguably the most enduring and universal questions that we confront. Because Stoppard revisits them again and again through his work, we have returned to him as a playwright, again and again, on our stage. This question is never truly answered, therefore Stoppard will never be irrelevant.

Both this production and this playwright have been of great institutional importance; Tom Stoppard has been a central figure in our history and we are pleased to revisit *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*—and their many questions—once more. To quote the Player: "You are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That's enough."

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*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
Are Dead*

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**TONY
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IN CONVERSATION

DIRECTOR CHARLES NEWELL AND PRODUCTION
DRAMATURG MARISSA FENLEY



*Production Dramaturg Marissa Fenley interviewed Director Charles Newell about *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, inquiring about legacy, the transformational power of theatre, joy, and the distinct realms of the play. The resulting conversation was equal parts emotional and intellectual, much like Stoppard's work.*

Below is a snapshot of two creatives in conversation, and a meditation on Newell's thirty-year journey as his tenure as Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director comes to a close.

Marissa: Throughout our process, we've explored the joy of theatre-making, the joy of play, and the joy of discovering your purpose. When you read *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, what made you think, *This is a play about joy?* That's not what most people take away from this production.

Charlie: Yeah, the title doesn't seem joyous [*laughs*]. For me, the genesis of that joy is found in the completion of a life project, *The Gospel at Colonus*, in 2023. I was taken aback by the redemptive joy that I experienced at almost every performance, both when it was at Court Theatre and when it was revived at the Getty Villa in Los Angeles, California. It made me think, *I just want to do this for the rest of my life*. We've done a lot of Greek tragedy, a lot of plays that don't end in joy, so tapping into that with *Gospel* made me wonder about what might happen if I just *stay* in that. I then thought about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's journey not as one toward death, but rather one toward becoming their most divine, sacred, spiritual, and empowered selves. What if the story we were telling was about the joy of that journey? That felt so timely for me and for Court Theatre; I've been here for thirty years and, in that time, we've done a whole bunch of Tom Stoppard plays. So, in my final season as Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director, why not choose joy and celebrate the power of theatre?

That then led me to my next thought: What if *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is actually autobiographical and tells the story of Stoppard's own journey of self-discovery? Here you've got these two characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, showing up in a world where they don't know who they are, they don't know where they are, they don't know what their purpose is, they don't know what their identity is. So, maybe this production is also about the transformational power of theatre and how Stoppard found himself.

As we've been having these discussions, I've just been on cloud nine—we're going to do this play in a way that will be completely unexpected.

Marissa: In that same vein of autobiography, Stoppard conceded that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is about the writer, the process of creation, and that's where he lives in the text, so to speak. Creating is a very joyful kind of production, as opposed to negating, which we tend to think of more readily when we think of this play. Thinking about that negation, there's a dark center to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*. I'd like to hear about how you approach the darkness of this play, coming from a personal commitment to finding joy.

"I think of Court Theatre as my temple. This is my place of sacredness and spirituality. I believe that—for everything that we've done in this space, beginning with Founding Artistic Director Nicholas Rudall—the energy is still somewhere in the room."

Charlie: With any of the Stoppard work that we've done at Court, we always start by diving into the complicated intellectual topics. We have really smart people in our community—people from the University of Chicago, like yourself—who help us understand Stoppard's ideas. What we work towards, then, is to not only be very precise and clear about the intellectual ideas, arguments, counterpoints, and context Stoppard gives us, but also to lean into the emotional story. The emotion is where an audience finds its way into an experience, so if the actors are not operating at the highest emotional stakes possible, will I really care, as an audience member? Will I really invest? Will I really see myself in them as they're struggling to figure out who they are? There is no other Stoppard play (that I'm aware of) that has so many stage directions that are adverbs of emotional stakes, like "terrifyingly," "desperately," or "mind-breakingly difficult." He keeps reinforcing—not through the spoken text, but the stage direction—how high the emotional stakes are and how we should translate that.

Marissa: Often this play is understood as having three discrete realms: we have the world of *Hamlet*, which operates as a closed play—it's been written and we can't change it, even as Stoppard very blasphemously dares to do; then we have the world of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, this suspended space backstage; and then we have the Ensemble, who are this roaming troupe who can traverse both of these worlds. In this production, however, we are combining the Ensemble and the world of *Hamlet*. What does that enable us to do?

Charlie: Maybe folks will think I'm a little odd this way, but I think of Court Theatre as my temple. This is my place of sacredness and spirituality. I believe that—for everything that we've done in this space, beginning with Founding Artistic Director Nicholas Rudall—the energy is still somewhere in the room. The idea was to combine the players with this group of characters from *Hamlet* to make the Ensemble because—when taken together metaphorically—they become spirits of creation and transformation. Their role is to tap into almost seventy years of legacy; seventy years of live theatre in this room; these communal, cathartic, transformational experiences; and the interchange between artists and audience. Suddenly, the Ensemble becomes really fascinating, and really powerful, and really fun, because they can do anything; they're the spirit of what theatre can do! There's an improvisational sense all the time, anything can happen, and the compression of the three worlds that you mention is part of that. While we don't know for sure if Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead at the end of this play, we do know that they transform in some radical way, they join the spirits of the Ensemble, and they become part of the legacy of the temple that is Court Theatre.

Marissa: Thinking about legacy a little more, this play's legacy is generally thought of as one of two things: some people think the conceit is a bit overwrought and trite, and others consider it the origin of their theatre experience. But the legacy of the text isn't the only legacy that we're contending with in our production, as you just alluded to. We're taking the legacy of the institution into account, in addition to your own legacy as a director and an artistic director. Could you offer some final reflections on what this means to you?

Charlie: I have been so blessed to be part of a community in which we all learn about each other through the power of theatre. As Artistic Director, you work alongside staff to choose the work that's going to be produced, and one of the things that became true for me very early on was that I discovered that you have to have a deep connection to the pieces you choose. You're going to invest a huge amount of time, and energy, and resources into them, so they better mean something.

When we were reading some of the final speeches in this play and thinking about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's transformations, I started weeping because there was something deeply powerful about the completion of their journey, the legacy of their arrival at this new place, this other state of being. Thanks to the transformation they've gone through, it is clear that they will not be forgotten. In that same way, the work that has happened in this room will live on. We, as theatre artists, transform people in ways that we don't ever really get to know. To have the opportunity to do that at this part of my journey, both as an artist and a human being? I just feel so blessed.

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[cel·e·brate]: acknowledge
a happy day or event with
a social gathering

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FAITH, LOGIC, AND MISUNDERSTANDING

BY MARISSA FENLEY, PRODUCTION DRAMATURG,
AND ALEC ABRAMSON, ASSISTANT DRAMATURG

In tennis, to score zero is to score “love.” There are two theories about the origin of this term. One is that it comes from an English mispronunciation of the French word for egg, *l’oeuf*. A score of 0, because of its ovular shape, is often referred to as a “duck egg” or “goose egg.” However, most understand this to be apocryphal—French tennis players don’t say *l’oeuf* when they fail to score. The other theory is that if you score a zero, you are not playing to win, but for the love of the game.



Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead opens on our titular characters betting on the toss of a coin. It keeps landing on heads in Rosencrantz’s favor: “Seventy-six – love,” he announces. Guildenstern, reflecting on his astonishing loss, responds: “A weaker man might be moved to re-examine his faith, if in nothing else at least in the law of probability.”

There’s no need for Guildenstern to lose faith. The law of probability isn’t being broken here. Any single sequence of heads and tails 76 times is a rare, yet probable, occurrence; in fact, any sequence of heads and tails 76 times has the same probability of occurring, thus a series of exclusively heads should be no more surprising than any other. When faced with a seemingly irrational series of events—be it the back and forth of the tennis ball or the statistical anomaly of a series of coin flips—we might think that turning to rational systems (scorekeeping and probability among others) to make sense of these events would give us a feeling of security.

However, Stoppard shows us that rational explanations can feel less believable than the irrational. We have less faith in them. In fact, when his characters provide rationales for seemingly impossible events, things tend to come to a crashing halt. Nonsense, silliness, and absurdity give them more to go on. Meaninglessness does not forestall action on Stoppard’s stage, but drives it. In other words, rather than accepting a score of 0 as the decisive conclusion of a tennis match, Stoppard prompts us to ask: What if you recast this zero as an egg, translate this egg into French, mistranslate it back to English, and somehow arrive at love?

Stoppard, remarkably, turns existential paralysis into a motivation for action. He claims that he had no intention of exploring metaphysics in this play, and yet he confronts a question volleyed back and forth between many Western philosophers: What can one do in the face of meaninglessness? The existential philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, would say that, once confronted with the destruction of religious faith in the wake of science and reason, we must make meaning for ourselves. If nihilism offers another response to meaninglessness, Frederick Nietzsche warned us that the nihilistic impulse is a dangerously destructive one: the nihilist believes that if the world cannot exist as it should, the only solution is to dismantle the world as it is. And the absurdist Albert Camus characterized absurdism as the acceptance of both the world’s fundamental irrationality and our necessity to make sense out of it anyway.

At various points, Stoppard’s characters act upon different impulses in the face of nothingness. They invent; they destroy; they question without expectation of an answer. While on their way to England, Rosencrantz asks: “So we’ve got a letter that explains everything?” Guildenstern confirms: “You’ve got it.” However, Rosencrantz misunderstands; he takes “it” to mean the letter rather than “the gist.” Panic ensues. “You seemed so sure it was *you* who hadn’t got it,” Guildenstern chides. “It *was* me who hadn’t got it!” Rosencrantz exclaims. Guildenstern then produces the letter from his own pocket. Rosencrantz, however, has forgotten why they were looking for it. “We thought it was lost,” Guildenstern explains.

This interaction ends just as it began: Guildenstern has the letter but “the gist” is still lost on them. The letter—the thing that should “explain everything” and provide rationale for the events of the play thus far—does not provide much in the way of understanding. Instead, it is the act of not “getting it” that gives the scene its momentum.

When watching *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, we don’t necessarily have to “get it.” It is not that the problems Stoppard’s characters face are impossible to understand—in fact, Stoppard often provides more than enough explanation to get at the logic behind a particular conundrum. Rather, understanding something does not give us much to do in its wake. It’s a dead end. We’ve found that it’s far more fun (and perhaps more productive) to revel in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s misunderstandings than to resolve them.

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Hattori Tadasaburō (d. 1939), lamp globe with phoenix, ca. 1910. Plique-à-jour enamels. Private collection. Image Courtesy Orientations Gallery.

AESTHETIC LEGACY

Based on the Shakespeare reference in the title, it seems obvious that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* will be a self-reflexive piece of theatre. To that, we say: sort of. While it's true that it's written as the "offstage story" of *Hamlet*, much of the play concerns itself with the nature of performance more generally, simultaneously honoring and disrupting conventions of the form.

In our nearly seventy-year history, we have staged many plays and welcomed countless audience members (including you, the person reading this article). With every production, we create something ephemeral and leave something ineffable behind; these stories persist in our hearts and become part of our collective narrative. That's the magic of theatre.

"I feel I am in a spiritual place when I walk into an empty theatre," shares Scenic Designer John Culbert. "Our approach to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* evokes 'the spirit of the theatre' as a guide to exploring identity. What is Court's identity, and how does theatrical storytelling shape and reflect that identity?"

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern celebrates Court's aesthetic identity through its scenic design and staging. By incorporating subtle nods to our past artistic hallmarks, Culbert and Director Charles Newell pay homage to this place and this art form that have given so much to so many.

Here, Culbert reflects on some of Court's aesthetic signatures that live on in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.



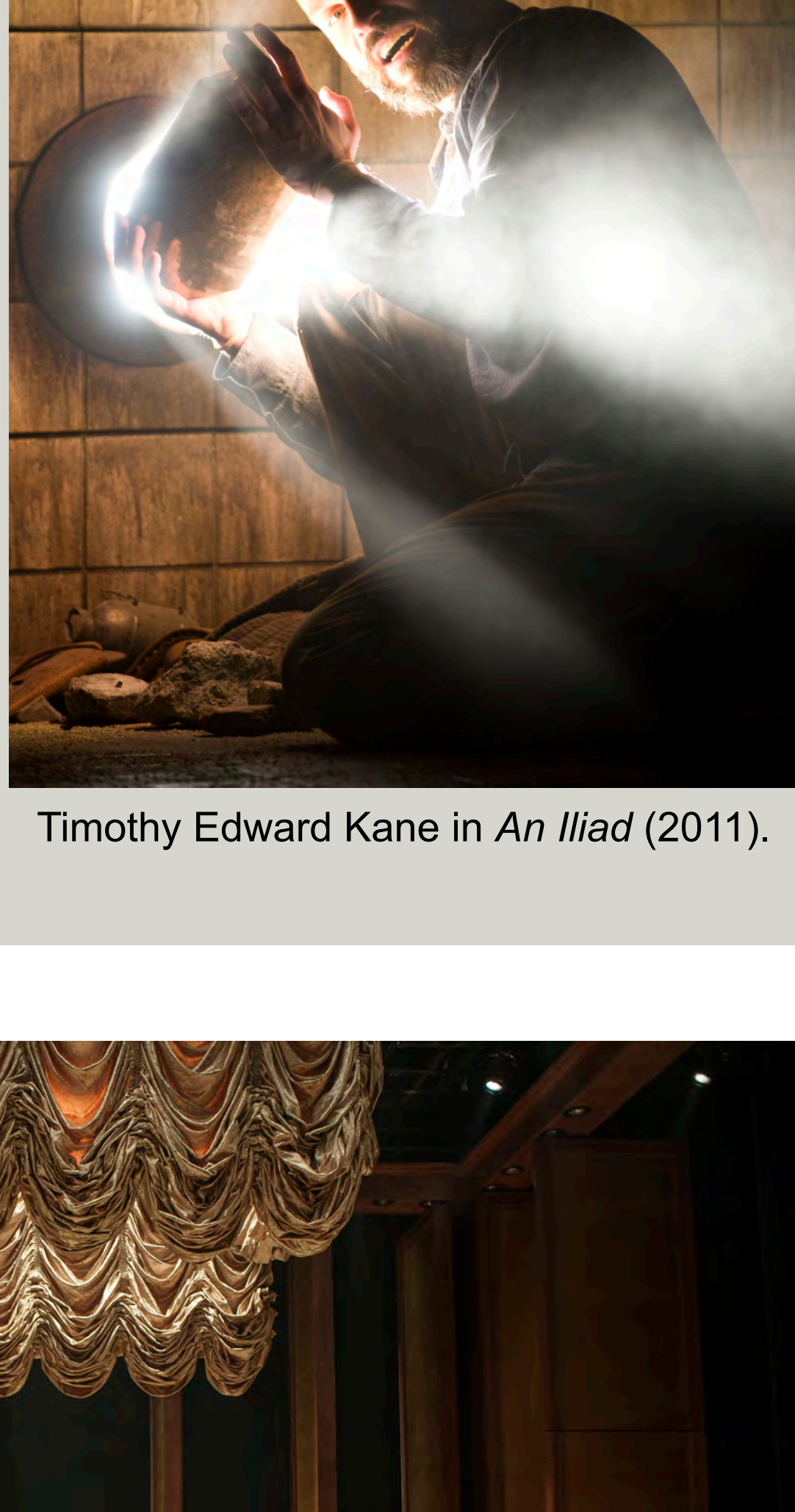
The cast of *The Adventures of Augie March* (2019).



The cast of *Oedipus Rex* (2019).

Something that I think Court does extremely well, as an institution, is create a sense of connection with an audience. Court productions typically build an intensity of experience that then reaches a climax; as we see in these sample images above, that effect is often aided by footlights and a breaking of the fourth wall. The impact, for the audience, is the realization that we're in a shared space with the characters in the play, and the actors on stage. It creates multiple layers of connection between the audience, the actors themselves, and the characters, so the human connections are more real and hit closer to home.

Lighting is one of the most powerful tools in theatre; it can immediately set a mood. In my experience, Court productions typically use lighting to enhance the emotional storytelling to great effect, which is a credit to all the talented lighting designers who have worked here.



Timothy Edward Kane in *An Iliad* (2011).



A.C. Smith, Grace Byers (formerly Grace Gealey), and Erik Hellman in *The Misanthrope* (2013).

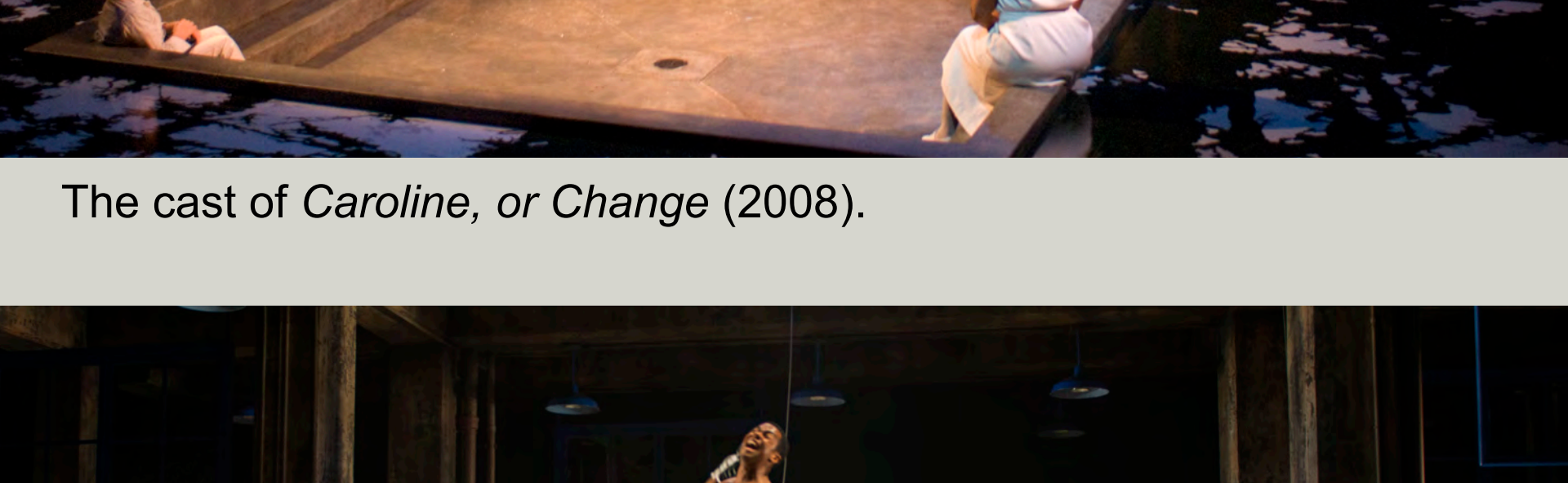


Bethany Thomas and the cast of *Porgy and Bess* (2011).

As I'm sure you can tell, Court Theatre has an intimate house with a relatively large stage, so we have the opportunity to be creative with space. Court often uses vertical and overhead scenic elements to define a volume of space within the larger theatre, which creates a sense of scale, makes the space feel more expansive than it actually is, and also establishes the 'sky,' or 'the heavens.' Thinking about the theatre as a spiritual place, the concept of 'the heavens' is crucial, so that verticality—the sense of something higher, or bigger, than ourselves—can be really moving and effective.

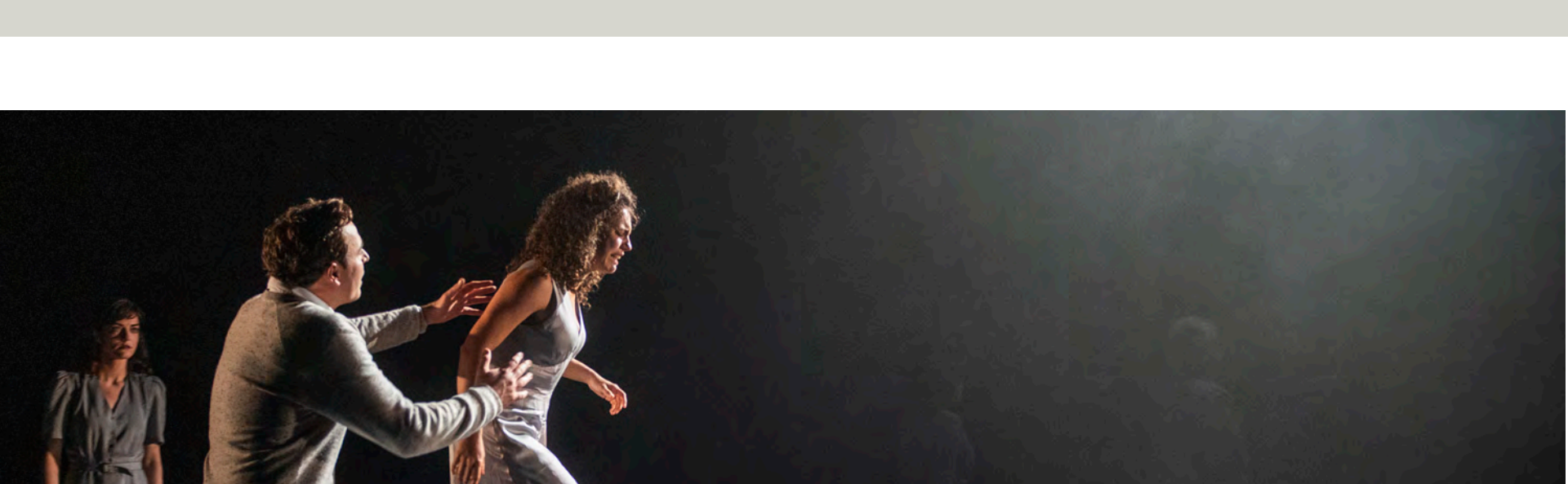


The cast of *Caroline, or Change* (2008).



The cast of *Man in the Ring* (2016).

Another one of Court's aesthetic hallmarks that will be echoed in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is an open, large-scale, abstract world that highlights the people in the space. The arrangement of bodies is used to create and define the world in individual moments, and it also allows for a very changeable environment to best support the emotion of a piece.



Abby Pierce, Patrick Mulvey, and Aurora Real de Asua in *The Adventures of Augie March* (2019).

Similar to the creation of an abstract world, many Court productions orchestrate scale—a virtually empty stage, strong lighting gestures, and obstacles (such as walking on chairs, as you see in the image above)—to empower the physicality of the actors. This allows them to build and express an emotional moment with authenticity.



Mary Beth Fisher and Chaon Cross in *The Glass Menagerie* (2006).



The cast of *Uncle Vanya* (2007).

A final Court signature is the use of abstracted architecture that allows us to capture the essence of a gesture. By removing a production from any literal structure or place, we enable the audience to bring their own experiences into play; they are empowered to determine what this world means to them in relation to the story being told.

Production photography by Michael Brosilow.

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BY DIRECTOR TASIA A. JONES



Stokely Carmichael (Alamy).

Stokely: The Unfinished Revolution, the final production in Court's 2023/24 season, is a new play by Nambi E. Kelley that has been in development over the last few years with Court Theatre. Stokely Carmichael—also known as Kwame Ture—was a central figure in the Civil Rights movement and a global activist for decades after. He set out to document his life and legacy in his memoir *Ready for Revolution* to provide a path forward for those ready to continue the fight against racism and injustice. Though he passed away from cancer before he could finish this blueprint, the book was completed and edited by his friend and collaborator Ekwueme Michael Thelwell. This play is inspired by the voice and pursuit of the man detailed in that autobiography.

The play gives us a glimpse into the mind and memories of Stokely Carmichael and offers us the opportunity to honor his life and legacy. Essentially, this is a memory play. What I find so interesting about memory is that it can be both extremely detailed, at the same time, out of focus. It can creep gradually into our minds or sneak up on us quickly when we least expect it. Memories can be inspired by many different things: a song, a sound, a color, a word, a scent, or another memory. We're having a lot of fun figuring out what the catalysts for memory are that transport us from the present back to the people, places, and events that shaped Stokely Carmichael's life. The play also asks us to consider how we re-member our lives when memory can be fallible and fleeting.

I'm honored to be a part of the team of creative minds helping to bring Stokely Carmichael's story to the stage. As a Black theatre artist, I am a direct descendant of his work and purpose. This being a world premiere of a new play means that every person who touches this project is contributing to furthering the legacy of one of our great leaders and thinkers. Every audience member who sees this production will also become a part of that legacy. I find that really exciting.

***Stokely: The Unfinished Revolution* runs May 24 through June 16. Tickets are available [online](#) or by calling the Box Office at (773) 753-4472.**

Tasia A. Jones is the Director of *Stokely: The Unfinished Revolution*. She is an Assistant Professor at Boston University. Chicago credits include: *Pass Over* (Steppenwolf, Assistant Director); *The Roommate* (Steppenwolf, Assistant Director); *Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Goodman, Associate Director); *Intimate Apparel* (Northlight); *The MLK Project* (Writers); *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* (Lookingglass, Assistant Director). Regional: *Intimate Apparel* (Utah Shakespeare Festival); *Small Mouth Sounds* (UCCS Theatreworks); *Seussical* (Jean's Playhouse). Education: MFA Directing, Northwestern University; BFA Theatre Arts, Boston University.

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THE BLACK POWER SERIES

BY KAMILAH RASHIED, DIRECTOR OF ENGAGEMENT



Profile of Stokely Carmichael speaking and gesturing in the midst of a crowd near the Capitol in Washington, DC (Alamy/Everett Collection).

I often think about whether or not my work is futile; I wonder if theatre can even have a tangible impact in the face of insurmountable difficulties. Much like the main characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, I try—we all try—to make meaning, even when this feels daunting.

When I have these moments, I think back to the earliest record of human existence; how evidence of our original impulse to communicate survives on cave walls and in ancient temples. We are naturally inclined towards documenting ourselves to make sense of the time we are in and to record it for posterity. When I think of any art form's legacy, I think of this unfinished business. How art exists not to solve the problems of this world, but to “hold the mirror up to nature” as said by Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Our work is to interpret the story—to mine it for meaning—right now. In this regard, a script becomes a literary monument to remind us of what it means to be here and to be human. This is the anchor that grounds me in my work and the compass that has guided our programs for the upcoming (and final) production of the 2023/24 season, *Stokely: The Unfinished Revolution*. During the run of this production, we will be launching the Black Power series, including talks, archival explorations, and artist responses honoring the monumentality of Black creativity.

We are excited to highlight the Chicago [SNCC History Project Archives](#), a part of the Vivian Harsh Research Collection at the Woodson Regional Chicago Public Library, as part of our upcoming programs. Sourcing research from this archive will allow us to make connections between the Black Power movement on Chicago's South Side and its impact on the national Civil Rights movement from 1966 to 1968, during Stokely's term as Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The Black Power series aims to call attention to the necessity of Black studies, conjuring counter-narratives that imagine an expansive and liberatory Afrofuture.

I cannot wait to share more information with you soon. I hope you'll join us on this journey.

To be notified about Engagement programming and events, please [join our email list](#).

Kamilah Rashied is the Director of Engagement at Court Theatre. Rashied is an arts administrator, producer, educator, and artist with 20 years of experience in cultural production, education, and community outreach. Cultivating a broad range of programs for the public, Rashied has contributed to the development of programs at venerable arts and culture organizations across Chicago.

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Beignet Done That!

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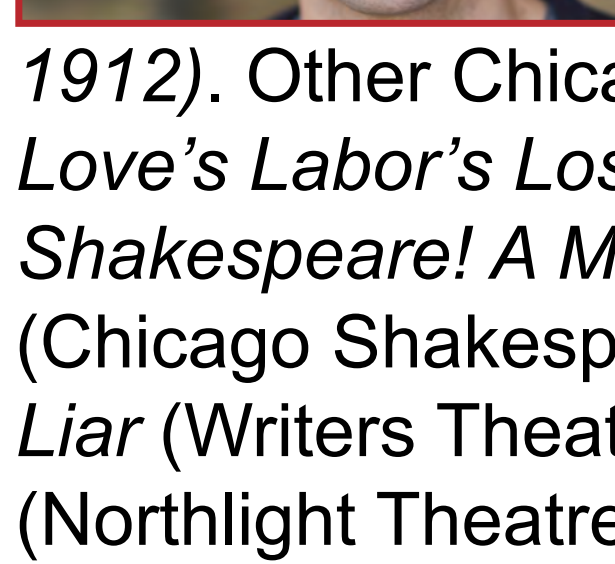
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CAST PROFILES



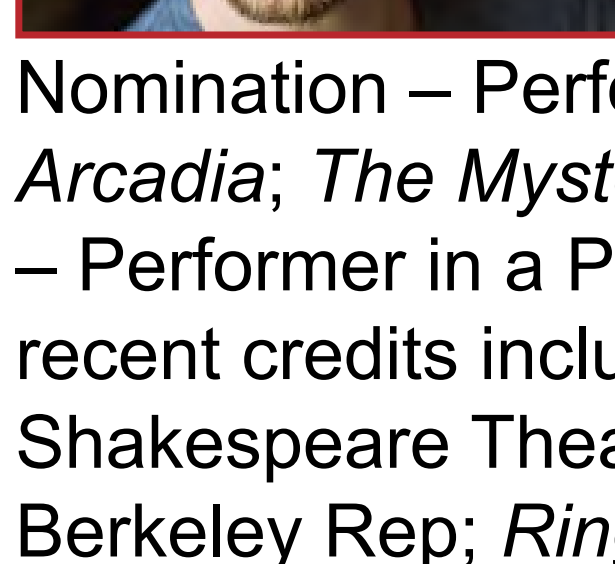
AMIR ABDULLAH (*Ensemble/Claudius*) is an award-winning actor, audiobook narrator, and writer. He has been seen on screen in *Chicago Med*; *Empire*; *The Odd Couple*; *Radioflash*; *Tosh.0*; *Happy You Near*; *No Vows, No Cows*; and more. On stage, he has performed at the Geffen Playhouse, California Shakespeare Theater, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Writers Theatre, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Pennsylvania Centre Stage, A Noise Within Theatre, and many other venues across the country. His first full-length play, *Pray To Ball*, had its world premiere at the Skylight Theatre in Los Angeles. BFA – University of Miami; MFA – Pennsylvania State University. Visit amir-abdullah.com.



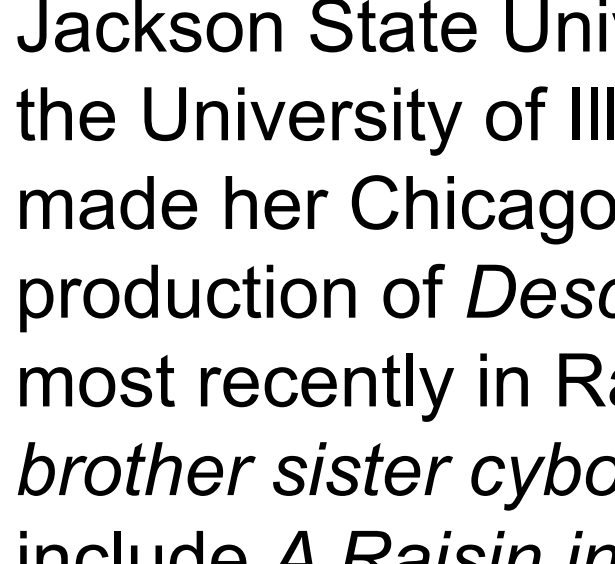
NATE BURGER (*Rosencrantz*) gratefully returns to Court, where he was last seen in *Titanic (Scenes from the British Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry, 1912)*. Other Chicago credits: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *The Heir Apparent*, *Short Shakespeare! A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *A Number*, *The Liar* (Writers Theatre); *Mansfield Park*, *Butler* (Northlight Theatre); *Wasteland*, "Master Harold"... and the Boys (TimeLine Theatre); *A Christmas Carol* (Goodman Theatre). Regional credits: Milwaukee Rep, Asolo Rep, Forward Theater, and 12 seasons at American Players Theatre, where he is a member of the Core Acting Company. TV: *Shining Girls*, *Emperor of Ocean Park*, *Chicago Fire*, *Chicago Med*. Film: *The Year Between*. He is a proud graduate of Loyola University Chicago. Love and gratitude to Laura.



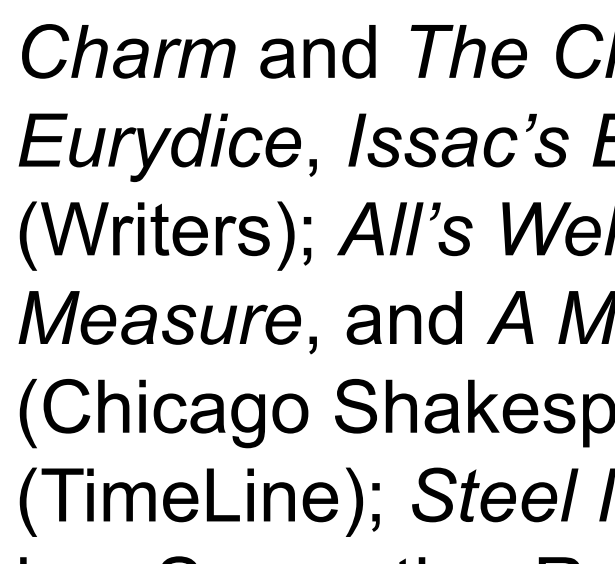
BLAKE HAMILTON CURRIE (*Ensemble/Hamlet, u/s Guildenstern*) is incredibly excited to be making his Court Theatre debut. Chicago credits: *Twelfth Night* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Topdog/Underdog*, *Do You Feel Anger?*, *Three Antarcicas* (The Theatre School at DePaul). Regional credits: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare and Company); *Buried Deep* (Endstation Theatre); *The Parchman Hour* (Hattiloo Theatre); *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It* (Tennessee Shakespeare Company).



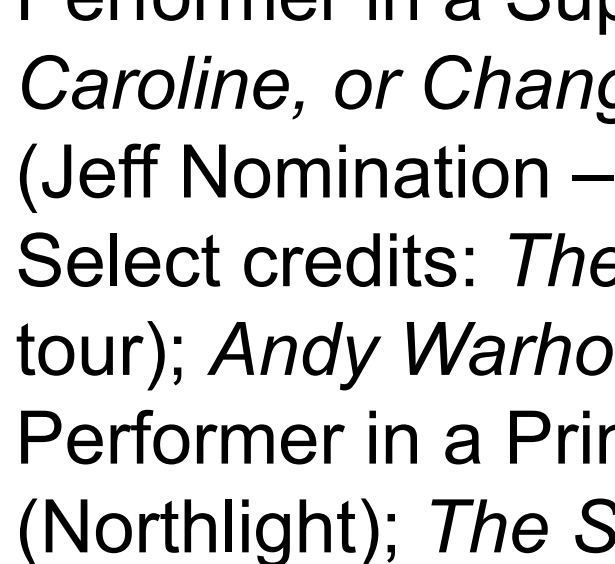
ERIK HELLMAN (*Guildenstern*) returns to Court where he was previously seen in *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*; *The Mousetrap*; *Proof* (Jeff Nomination – Performer in a Supporting Role); *Arcadia*; *The Mystery of Irma Vep* (Jeff Nomination – Performer in a Principal Role); and others. Other recent credits include *Richard III* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater; *Let the Right One In* at Berkeley Rep; *Ring of Fire* at Drury Lane; *The Sound of Music* at Marriott; *Lindiwe*, *Familiar*, and *The Burn* at Steppenwolf; *Smart People* and *Marjorie Prime* at Writers; *Georgiana & Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley* and *Lost In Yonkers* at Northlight; and *Luna Gale* at Goodman. Film/TV work includes *The Dark Knight*, *Walden*, *Chicago Fire*, *Chicago P.D.*, *Empire*, *The Good Fight*, *Mrs. America*, *Fargo*, *61st Street*, and *The Killer*.



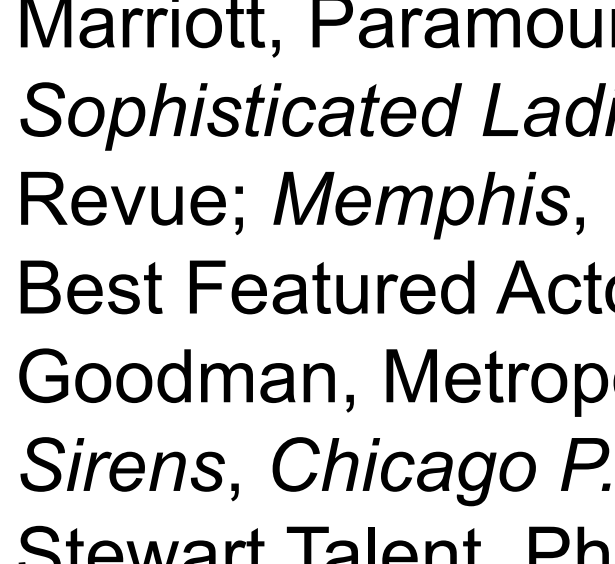
CHARENCE HIGGINS (*Ensemble/Ophelia*) is a performing and teaching artist from Mississippi with degrees in Psychology and Theatre from Jackson State University and an MFA in Acting from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She made her Chicago theatre debut in Steppenwolf's production of *Describe the Night* and has been seen most recently in Raven Theatre's world premiere of *brother sister cyborg space*. Other regional credits include *A Raisin in the Sun* at American Players Theatre, *Hands Up!* at Alliance Theatre, *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* at Theater at Monmouth, and more. Follow Charence's journey at www.charencehiggins.com/@char.is.matic.



ELIZABETH LEDO (*Ensemble/Gertrude*) returns to Court Theatre, having previously appeared in *One Man, Two Guvnors*; *The Secret Garden*; *Tartuffe* (Jeff Award – Performer in a Supporting Role); and many others. Chicago credits include: *The Matchmaker*, *Boleros for the Disenchanted*, and three seasons of *A Christmas Carol* (Goodman); *Charm* and *The Chalk Garden* (Northlight); *Eurydice*, *Issac's Eye*, and *Arms and the Man* (Writers); *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Chicago Shakespeare); *The How and The Why* (TimeLine); *Steel Magnolias* (Jeff Award – Performer in a Supporting Role) and *Mamma Mia!* (Drury Lane); *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Lookingglass); *Cymbeline* (American Players); *Homebody/Kabul* and *Morningstar* (Steppenwolf). Regional credits include Shakespeare at Notre Dame, Indiana Rep, and over 25 productions at Milwaukee Rep.



ROB LINDLEY (*Ensemble/Polonius*) is thrilled to return to Court after appearing in *The Secret Garden*; *James Joyce's The Dead* (Jeff Nomination – Performer in a Supporting Role); *Angels in America*; *Caroline, or Change*; *The Wild Duck*; and *Carousel* (Jeff Nomination – Performer in a Supporting Role). Select credits: *The Phantom of the Opera* (national tour); *Andy Warhol in Iran* (Jeff Nomination – Performer in a Principal Role) and *Funnyman* (Northlight); *The Sound of Music* (Marriott); *Fun Home* (Jeff Nomination – Performer in a Principal Role, Victory Gardens); *The Temperamentals* (About Face); *Candide* (Goodman); *Oh Coward!* (Jeff Award – Performer in a Revue, Writers Theatre). Directing credits include *50 Shades!: The Musical Parody* (Off-Broadway); *Songs for Nobodies* (Northlight, People's Light); *2 Pianos 4 Hands* (Northlight); and others. IG: @RobLindley.



LORENZO RUSH JR. (*The Player*) is excited to return to Court. Regional credits: Court (*Five Guys Named Moe*, Jeff Award – Performer in a Revue), Marriott, Paramount, Porchlight (*Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies*, Jeff Award – Performer in a Revue; *Memphis*, Black Theater Alliance Award – Best Featured Actor in a Play), Drury Lane, Skylight, Goodman, Metropolis. TV/film: *Chicago Fire*, *Fargo*, *Sirens*, *Chicago P.D.*, *The Chi*. Represented by Stewart Talent. Phoebe is my motivation. Proverbs 18:16.

RICHARD GOMEZ (*u/s Ensemble/Claudius, u/s Ensemble/Polonius*) is an actor from Chicago. He went to Columbia College Chicago and graduated with a degree in comedy writing and performance. He started as an improviser at The Second City, and then became an actor, doing everything from theatre to network television. Richard is very grateful to be part of such a wonderful production and hopes everyone loves the final product.

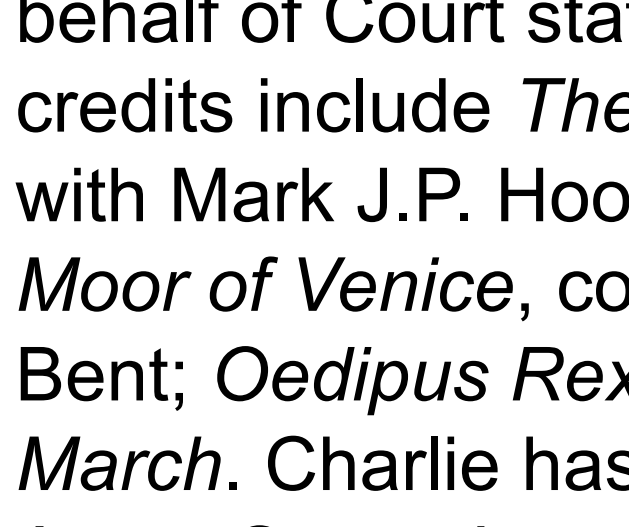
GRAYSON KENNEDY (*u/s Rosencrantz*) is making his Court debut. He is the founder and current artistic director of Gwydion Theatre Company. Since moving to Chicago in mid-2023, Grayson has appeared on stage as Jerry in *The Zoo Story* (Gwydion Theatre) and directed Gwydion's production of *Waiting for Lefty*. Grayson's other credits include *Dog Sees God* and *The Crackwalker* (Academy Theatre). Grayson received the Hollywood Fringe Producers' Award for Gwydion Theatre's production of *Ascension Day*.

KENESHA KRISTINE REED (*u/s Ensemble/Gertrude, u/s Ensemble/Ophelia*) is making her Court Theatre debut. Chicago regional credits: *Judy's Life's Work*, *Lot 110*, *The Color Purple* Workshop (Definition Theatre); *Shadow Town* (Her Story Theater/The Den Theatre). Memphis regional credits: *Sister Act*; *Memphis: The Musical*; *Billy Elliot*; *Kiss Me, Kate* (Playhouse on the Square); *Carrie: The Musical* (Circuit Playhouse). Television credits: *61st Street*, *Chicago Med*. Education: MFA in Musical Theater Performance (Boston Conservatory at Berklee), BA in Drama and Dance (Spelman College).

CHRISTOPHER WAYLAND (*u/s Ensemble/Hamlet, u/s The Player*) is thrilled to make his Court Theatre debut! In the Chicago area, he has worked at Paramount Theatre, Marriott Theatre, Porchlight Music Theatre, Raven Theatre, First Folio Theatre, 16th Street Theater, Oak Park Festival Theatre, Griffin Theatre Company, Teatro Vista, Haven, Lifeline Theatre, Stage Left Theatre, and with Right Angle Entertainment. Regionally, he has worked at TheatreWorks, Spotlighters, Fells Point Corner Theatre, and Baltimore Shakespeare Factory. His television credits include *The Chi*, *neXt*, *Chicago Med*, and *APB*. He earned an MFA in Acting from The Theatre School at DePaul University, and is an adjunct faculty member at Chicago College of Performing Arts (CCPA) at Roosevelt University. @heychrismwayland.

ARTIST PROFILES

TOM STOPPARD (*Playwright*) is a playwright and screenwriter who has written for film, radio, stage, and television. Stoppard's body of work includes *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), *Jumpers* (1972), *Travesties* (1974), *Night and Day* (1978), *The Real Thing* (1982), *Arcadia* (1993), *The Invention of Love* (1997), *The Coast of Utopia* (2002), *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006), *The Hard Problem* (2015), and *Leopoldstadt* (2020), and others. He has received numerous awards and honors including five Tony Awards.



CHARLES NEWELL (*Director, Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director*), together with Angel Ysaguirre, accepted the 2022 Regional Theatre Tony Award on behalf of Court staff and artists. Recent directorial credits include *The Gospel at Colonus*, co-directed with Mark J.P. Hood; *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, co-directed with Gabrielle Randle-Bent; *Oedipus Rex*; and *The Adventures of Augie March*. Charlie has directed at Goodman, Guthrie, Arena Stage, Long Wharf, and many others. Awards received include the SDCF Zelda Fichandler Award, four Jeff Awards, and seventeen Jeff nominations. Charlie is a co-founder of the Civic Actor Studio, a leadership program of the University of Chicago's Office of Civic Engagement.

JOHN CULBERT (*Scenic Designer*) has designed scenery or lighting for many Court productions, including *Antigone*; *The Gospel at Colonus*; *Arsenic and Old Lace*; *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*; *Oedipus Rex*; *The Adventures of Augie March*; *All My Sons*; and *Iphigenia in Aulis*; Goodman's *Having Our Say*; Lookingglass's *Villette*; and TimeLine's *The Lehman Trilogy*. He has also designed for Northlight, Writers, Glimmerglass Opera, Singapore Repertory, Opera National du Rhin, Berkeley Rep, McCarter Theatre, and Shakespeare Theatre Company. He served as the dean of The Theatre School at DePaul University for over 20 years.

RAQUEL ADORNO (*Costume Designer*) is excited to return to Court, where she previously worked on *Antigone*; *The Gospel at Colonus*; *The Island*; and *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*. Select Chicago credits: *POTUS* and *Describe the Night* (Steppenwolf); *Measure for Measure* and *I, Banquo* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Georgiana & Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley* and *Intimate Apparel* (Northlight Theatre); *Wife of a Salesman* (Writers Theatre); *PERSONALITY: The Lloyd Price Musical*; *Unelectable You* (The Second City). Regional: *Rent* (The Mundy); *The Tempest* and *Intimate Apparel* (Utah Shakespeare Festival); *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Cymbeline* (American Players Theatre). Awards: Michael Maggio Award (2022), Michael Merritt Academic Achievement Prize for Collaborative Design (2019).

KEITH PARHAM (*Lighting Designer*) returns to Court, having previously worked on *Antigone*; *The Gospel at Colonus*; *Fen*; *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*; *Oedipus Rex*; *Photograph 51*; *All My Sons*; *The Hard Problem*; *An Iliad*; *Angels in America*; *Proof*; and many others. Broadway: *Thérèse Raquin* (Roundabout); *Between Riverside and Crazy* (2nd Stage Theater). Off-Broadway: *Wild Goose Dreams* (The Public); *Man from Nebraska* (2nd Stage); *The Purple Lights of Joppa Illinois* (Atlantic Theater), among others. Awards: Obie, Lortel. Visit keithparhamlighting.com, tutatheatre.org.

ANDRE PLUESS (*Sound Designer*) has designed over 30 productions at Court, including *Two Trains Running*, *An Iliad*, *Man in the Ring*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Broadway credits include *Metamorphoses*; *I Am My Own Wife*; *33 Variations*; *The Minutes*; and *The Clean House* (Lincoln Center Theater). Chicago credits include composition and sound design for numerous productions at Goodman, Steppenwolf, Northlight, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, About Face, and many others. Regional credits include multiple projects at Center Theatre Group, Seattle Rep, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Cal Shakes, American Conservatory Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Guthrie Theater, and Arena. Andre is an ensemble member of Lookingglass Theatre Company.

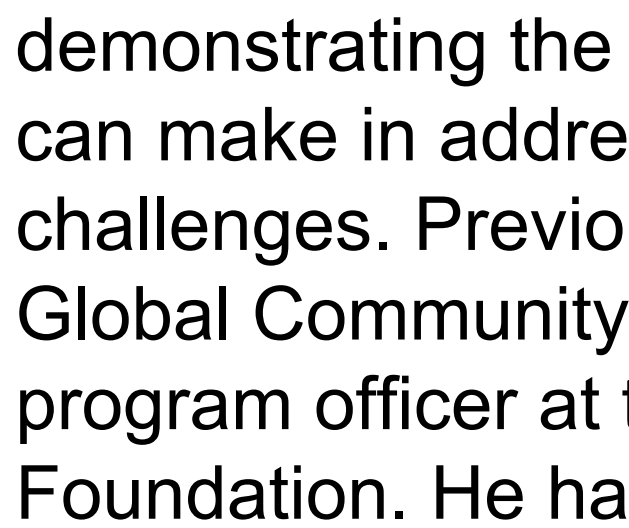
SHERYL WILLIAMS (*Physical Content Consultant*) is originally from Phoenix, Arizona. She received her BA in Musical Theater from Columbia College Chicago and has been working in and around Chicago since 2017. In addition to working as an intimacy professional for several universities (such as Roosevelt, North Central, and DePaul), she has worked on a number of theatrical productions. Recent credits include: *Anything Goes*, *Cabaret* (Porchlight); *The Nacirema Society* (Goodman); *Spring Awakening* (Roosevelt CCPA); *Antigone* and *Fen* (Court); and more. She has also been published as a contributor on staging violence and intimacy for the stage. Visit her website for more info: iamsherylwilliams.com.

RUEBEN D. ECHOLES (*Wig and Hair Design Concepts*) is an accomplished playwright, director, choreographer, illustrator, and costume and wig designer. He has worked with Black Ensemble, et al, MPAACT, Congo Square, Porchlight, Drury Lane, Skylight Milwaukee, Writers, Paramount, Theo Ubique, Invictus, Goodman, Phoenix Theatre, and Studio One. He was most recently the Wig and Hair Designer for *Antigone* here at Court. Rueben has designed wigs for *Rent* at The Mundy and for *Dreamgirls* at Paramount and North Carolina Theatre Company. He also designed the costumes for *You Can't Fake the Funk* (Jeff Award – Costume Design) and for four episodes of WTTW's *Chicago Stories*, two of which ("Ida B. Wells" and "The Birth of Gospel") won Emmys for Best Production. Rueben would like to thank Christ his Savior for everything!

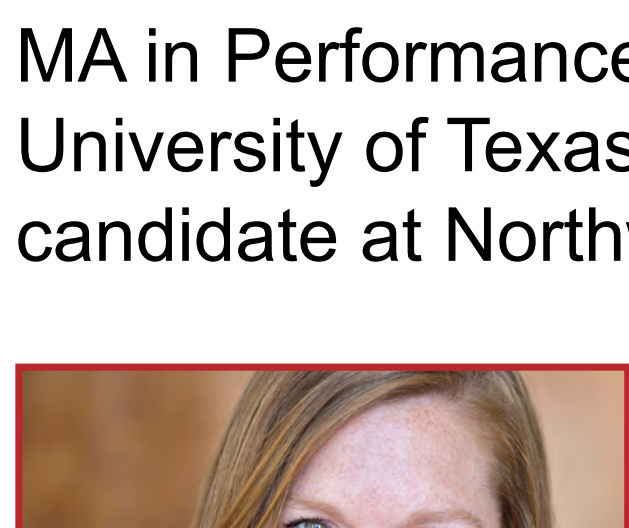
MARISSA FENLEY (*Production Dramaturg and Shadow Puppet Advisor*) is a Harper Schmidt Fellow in Theater and Performance Studies at the University of Chicago. Her current book project, *Puppet Theory: the Mechanical Infrastructure of Personhood*, argues that puppetry in the 20th and 21st-century Western context is uniquely concerned with the limits of what it takes to qualify as a person. Her work traces the material backstories of four puppetry traditions—ventriloquism, marionetting, protest puppetry, and Muppetry—alongside the historical assumptions around personhood that such traditions either reify or renegotiate. As a dramaturg, she is invested not only in exploring the historical and structural aspects of a text, but of the materials, choreographies, and techniques we use on stage.

KATE OCKER (*Production Stage Manager*) is thrilled to be back at Court Theatre. Regional credits include *Antigone*, *The Gospel at Colonus*, *Fen*, *The Island*, *An Iliad*, *The Adventures of Augie March*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Court Theatre); *It Came From Outer Space*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *As You Like It* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Six Corners*, *BUDDY – The Buddy Holly Story*, and *The Spitfire Grill* (American Blues Theater); *Noises Off* (Asolo Rep); *A Christmas Carol*, *The Odd Couple*, and *An Inspector Calls* (Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma); *Red* (Resident Ensemble Players).

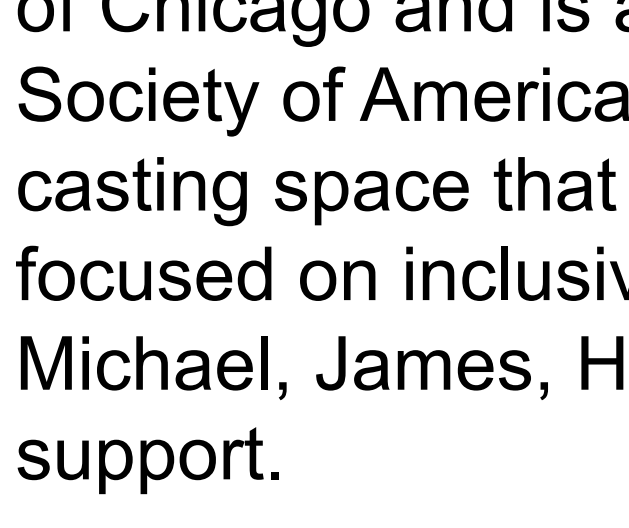
KIRA NEIGHBORS (*Assistant Stage Manager*) is tickled pink to be working at Court Theatre for the first time! After studying Stage Management at the University of South Carolina, Kira made her way to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she began her professional stage management career. Select Wisconsin stage management credits include *Little Women*, *The Nativity Variations*, and *The Legend of Georgia McBride* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater); *The Wanderers* (Forward Theater); *Laughs In Spanish*, *The Island*, and *The Thanksgiving Play* (Milwaukee Chamber Theatre); and Door Shakespeare's 2019, 2021, and 2023 seasons. Many thanks to Kate, Corey, and many others for the Chicago love!



ANGEL YSAGUIRRE (*Executive Director*) has been Court's Executive Director since 2018. Prior to this role, he served as Executive Director of Illinois Humanities. During his tenure there, the organization established a number of new programs demonstrating the contribution that the humanities can make in addressing today's most pressing challenges. Previously, he was the Director of Global Community Investing at Boeing and a program officer at the McCormick Tribune Foundation. He has served on the boards of the Theatre Communications Group, Donors Forum of Chicago, the Illinois Center for the Book, Horizons Community Services, Blair Thomas and Company, and Next Theatre.



GABRIELLE RANDLE-BENT (*Associate Artistic Director*) is a mother, director, dramaturg, and scholar. Her directorial highlights include *Antigone*, *The Island*, and *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* (co-directed with Charles Newell) at Court Theatre; *1919* (Steppenwolf); and *The Year of Magical Thinking* (Remy Bumppo). She is a co-founder of the Civic Actor Studio, a leadership program of the University of Chicago's Office of Civic Engagement. She has a BA in Drama from Stanford University, an MA in Performance as Public Practice from the University of Texas at Austin, and is a PhD candidate at Northwestern University.



BECCA MCCRACKEN (*Director of Casting and Artist Cultivation*) has spent 19 years casting in Chicago, covering the Midwest market working on TV/film, commercial, and theatre projects. Becca is an Artios Award winner for her casting work at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and is a proud member of the Casting Society of America. She is committed to creating a casting space that empowers the artist and is focused on inclusivity and humanity. Thank you to Michael, James, Hayes, and Luna for their love and support.

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Winner of the 2022 Regional Theatre Tony Award, Court Theatre reimagines classic theatre to illuminate our current times. In residence at the University of Chicago and on Chicago's historic South Side, we engage our audiences with intimate and provocative experiences that inspire deeper exploration of the enduring questions that confront humanity and connect us as people.

Court Theatre defines classic theatre as texts from any culture, tradition, or era that resonate throughout time and speak to our present moment.

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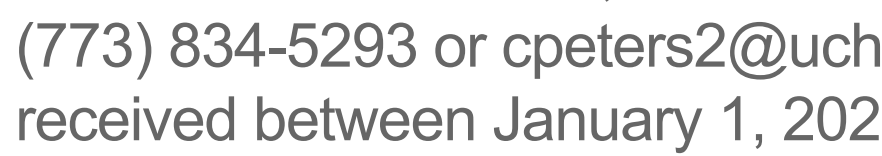
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