MISS JULIE

BY AUGUST STRINDBERG

TRANSLATED BY HARRY G. CARLSON

DIRECTED BY GABRIELLE RANDLE-BENT

FEB 6 - MAR 8, 2026

court THEATRE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

WELCOME

Photo by Joe Mazza.

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the third production in the 2025/26 season, and the first of the New Year: August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, directed by Associate Artistic Director Gabrielle Randle-Bent.

Miss Julie is simultaneously a fairy tale, a folkloric horror story, a warning, and an expression of pure, unadulterated feeling—as so many great dramas are. Part of the appeal of Strindberg's masterpiece is the sheer breadth of emotion and experience captured in such a compact one-act. It oscillates between feeling dangerously alive—impossible to predict or contain—and beautifully, tragically claustrophobic. It is through this expansion and contraction, this realism and abstraction, that a central question emerges: What does it mean when you're teetering on the precipice of who you are and who you want to be? That tightrope is where *Miss Julie* shines.

As we look towards our future as an organization, we find ourselves at a similar (albeit much more hopeful) inflection point. The end of 2025 represented the conclusion of the most successful year in our history, in which we broke box office, attendance, and fundraising records. We were nominated for 21 Jeff Awards (the most in our history) and won nine (the most of any theatre company last season); we deepened our relationships across the South Side, the University of Chicago, and the city of Chicago, more broadly; and we welcomed new staff with a wealth of fresh ideas and valuable experience.

We are proud of our legacy of artistic excellence, and we can't wait to continue sharing the ambitious, innovative, and intimate theatrical productions you know and love. As we hone in on who we want to be in this new and exciting moment, we do so with joy, focus, and optimism for the future. After all, anything is possible on a Midsummer's eve.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. Welcome back to Court Theatre.

With gratitude,

Avery Willis Hoffman
Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director

Angel Ysaguirre
Executive Director

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Avery Willis Hoffman
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Angel Ysaguirre
Executive Director

FEB 6 - MAR 8, 2026

MISS JULIE

BY AUGUST STRINDBERG

TRANSLATED BY HARRY G. CARLSON

DIRECTED BY GABRIELLE RANDLE-BENT

John Culbert USA, Scenic Designer

Raquel Adorno USA, Costume Designer

Keith Parham USA, Lighting Designer

Willow James USA, Sound Designer

Sheryl Williams, Fight and Intimacy Designer

Sammi Grant, Vocal and Dialect Consultant

Abhi Shrestha, Production Dramaturg

Becca McCracken C.S.A., Casting Director

Katie Moshier*, Production Stage Manager

Amanda Blanco*, Assistant Stage Manager

Setting: An upper-class, aristocratic household at the turn of the 20th century.

Presented without intermission.

Please note: Production uses water-based haze.

Supported by the **Marion M. Lloyd Court Theatre Fund**.

Special thanks to Lela Heather Simone Randle-Bent.

Miss Julie (Carlson, trans.) is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com.

The scenic, costume, lighting and sound designers in LORT Theatres are represented by United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of the IATSE.

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

Cover: Julia Thecla, *Evening Bow*; courtesy of the Art Collection from South Side Community Art Center.

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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 the League of Resident Theatres and the Illinois Humanities Council. Court Theatre is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the American Theatre, 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.

ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION 1913

Illinois ARTS Council

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PODCAST

THE MINDS BEHIND THE **BREAKTHROUGHS**

CAST

Miss Julie..... Mi Kang*

Jean.....Kelvin Roston Jr.*

Kristine..... Rebecca Spence*

Understudies

Joan Nahid (u/s Miss Julie/Kristine)

Christopher Wayland (u/s Jean)

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PRODUCTION TEAM

Assistant Director ..... Felicia Oduh

Associate Casting Director ..... Celeste M. Cooper

Literary Fellow ..... Marissa Fenley

Company Culture Manager ..... Sheryl Williams

Assistant Scenic Designer ..... Lauren M. Nichols USA

Scenic Artists ..... Sarah Lewis USA, Rachel Meierotto USA

Carpenters ..... Sean Moore, Tseela Sokolin-Maimon

Assistant Properties Manager ..... Persephone Lawrence

Assistant Costume Designer ..... Lia Wallfish

Costume Shop Assistant ..... Jess Donaldson

Stitcher ..... Ari Casas

Associate Lighting Designer ..... Josiah Croegaert

Assistant Lighting Supervisor ..... Bobbie Buie

Assistant Sound Designer ..... Ian C. Weber

Audio Engineer ..... Christine Burquest

Electricians ..... Sibyl Ashcraft-Holt, Emily Brown, Juni Cruz, Alex Boehm, Anne Huerta, Nell Morrisey, Jonah White

Floor Manager ..... Sebastian Van Horn

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

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Resident Artist	Ron OJ Parson
Director of Casting and Artist Cultivation	Becca McCracken CSA
Executive Assistant	Tyler Calhoun
Director of Engagement	Kamilah Rashied
Director of Education	Jarrett King
Engagement Programs Manager	Kelcie Beene
Education Programs Manager	Kate Wiseman
Education Coordinator	Sonia Goldberg
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	India Nicole Burton
	Monet Felton
	Willow James
	Jamaque Newberry
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Assistant Technical Director	Kelly Lesniak
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House Carpenter	Tony Cooper
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IN CONVERSATION
MI KANG, KELVIN ROSTON JR., AND REBECCA SPENCE

Photo of Rebecca Spence, Kelvin Roston Jr., and Mi Kang at first rehearsal (Joe Mazza).

Played out in real time with only three characters, Miss Julie is deceptively simple, but its depth, honesty, beauty, and brutality are astonishing. Since its premiere in 1889, it has remained both incredibly popular and incredibly complicated. To some, it's a thorny portrayal of a power imbalance written by an avowed misogynist. To others, it's one of the greatest—or the greatest—works of realism onstage.

Mi Kang plays Julie, an aristocratic woman desperate to escape the trappings of her status; Kelvin Roston Jr. plays Jean, Julie's valet who's willing to do whatever it takes to ascend beyond his station; and Rebecca Spence plays Kristine, Julie's cook and Jean's fiancée, who refuses to upset the status quo. Associate Director of Marketing Camillo Oswald recently spoke with these three actors to reflect on these iconic roles and what it means to stage this production in this moment. Their takeaway? Everyone's playing with fire.

Below is an excerpt of their conversation.

What is the biggest challenge/thrill of playing each of these characters?

Rebecca: Kristine represents the establishment, the class order. She's certainly a woman who has opinions, and her own conflicts, and certainly her own thoughts about Jean and Julie, but in the subtlety of her quietness, she represents the negative space. On the page, in terms of dialogue, there's not a ton to work with, but [her language is] so filled with her understanding of the system, her acceptance of it, her judgment of herself within that system, and her judgment of the other two characters who are trying so hard to rally against it.

Mi: The biggest thrill [of playing Julie] is that she's a full character—she is so emotionally open and available, and I'm excited to get into her girl. That's also the biggest challenge: How do you play this massive character with all the different layers of her humanity? How do you do this without being shallow or one-note? How do you remain honest to who she is, and who she is in relationship to the world around her, and the people around her, as well?

Kelvin: The biggest thrill is getting the opportunity to do a three-hander with these amazing women here. I've worked with Rebecca in a film, but this will be our first time onstage together, and I've been waiting for this. That's a thrill.

It is, of course, a thrill getting to sink my teeth into this character. The biggest challenge is juggling the class system, without judging [Jean] or his narcissism. I feel that he knows that he deserves [more], and should be higher than the station that he's in, but he has to quelch those moments where he wants to speak freely as the person he thinks he should be. That, on top of whatever magnetic attraction he has to Julie; how to walk that tightrope of whether it's truly desire, or if it's just something he feels that he deserves and maybe wonders what if he weren't born into the station he was born into. Working that class system when it does not agree with what your brain says about you, trying to walk that tightrope.

> The want in this play feels so bare, and so apparent, and so raw. The whole play is just pulsing with want: *I want more, I want different, and I'll do whatever it takes to get there.* With these competing voices in mind, how are these characters foils for one another?

Kelvin: Kristine always reminds Jean of his station, and I think she helps him feel what love really is, as opposed to what he might think he feels for Julie or that confusion of emotion he has with Julie, even though he doesn't necessarily know how to label it. Julie also reminds Jean of his station, but it's very different. Julie holds the mirror up to Jean so he can really see the deficiencies in himself. Jean is a lesson in trying to strive for more, but [through him], you can also see that there are many, many better ways to attempt ascension.

Mi: These characters are all very different, but also very similar. In the eyes of Julie, Kristine is a very stable character; she has her faith (which Julie is envious of). Jean represents an out for her, but I don't yet know what that out is, exactly; as Julie, [something] happens to me [in the play], and it's negative, and I'm in fear, and so I possibly glamorize this other life that Jean, and her, and Kristine, and [fixate] on this notion that we have to leave. At this moment, right now, I don't know if Julie even believes that. It's nice to have these dreams, the belief that we could do this, but ultimately, I don't actually know if she can put her money where her mouth is. She learns a lot from these two people. I'm specifically thinking about the moments where Kristine tells her about faith, and who that's for, and who will go to heaven, and who won't, and how, after *Kristine* leaves Julie, says, "*Well, if what Kristine says is true, then she's also not going to get into heaven.*" She's learning in real time, and the people teaching her are Jean and Kristine.

Rebecca: It's such a polarizing play. I said yes to this project because I think Gabby's a genius, and her vision for this play she chose is so incredibly nuanced in her phenomenal research and the insight that she brings, but when I read it in college, I was like, "*Oh my god, Strindberg is a misogynist, and what a bleak view of this sort of women; he sees them as either the saint or the whore. How are we going to do this?*"

A podcast I listen to researched the production history, and there has been a production of *Miss Julie* somewhere on the planet every single year since it premiered in 1889, so why do we keep coming back to this play? I spoke to Gabby, and something she said was that our country, specifically now, has gotten very, very comfortable talking about race and talking about gender issues, but we have never fully tackled class. Given where we are now with this huge swing towards democratic socialism, even in progressive parties, we still can't deal with actual class issues: talking about that yearning to rise, or—in the case of the people who have risen—their guilt about it and how they utilize the privilege at their fingertips.

Kristine is this steady, bordered line that goes through the action—she is the system that's pushing it through. She's the least bothered of the three of them about her station. There's freedom in that; she's "*I know my boundary here, and I know my boundary here, and I can live freely in between.*" She represents the pragmatic counterpart to these two—Jean, who's below the level they think they should be at, someone trying to ascend and go higher; and then Julie, someone of really high status who's deeply lonely, and deeply fragile, and who is trying to find her people, trying to find relevance, and trying to say, "*I'm simple, I'm simple, I'm simple—until I'm not.*" Kristine is the steady throughline of who lives within those rigid boundaries.

Kelvin: Thinking about the three, Kristine is technically the only one who lives in any type of freedom. [Julie and Jean] wear this chip [on their shoulder] every day. They drag this weight, and then retreat into what's comfortable. Julie wants to escape, but she still has the advantage of her privilege. Jean wants to ascend, but knows that if things hit the fan, he can still disappear back into his position. There's a tug-of-war happening within each of them.

What contemporary conversations does this production join or challenge?

Mi: The wealth disparity in this country continues to grow, and the media that I've been consuming lately about Asian Americans is one of wealth, right? You have the movie *Crazy Rich Asians*, there's the Korean movie *Parasite*, and there are conversations about East Asians and class. My observations have been that they're in the upper class, or they're associated with wealth, or at the very least, they're comfortable. We have the stereotypes of East Asians being in the medical field, or lawyers, and automatically, those careers imply a certain level of money. But I don't come from a wealthy background. [My family] immigrated. I have a very stereotypical immigrant story. Seeing these stories about Asian people associated with wealth, and [knowing] that's just a completely different experience from what I had… I'm still trying to grapple with that. Even as an actor, even with its privileges, my career is very in flux. It's very up and down. It's never stable. To now portray a character who doesn't have to think about money, who has everything she needs, or can get whatever she needs by purchasing it, but wants something that she cannot buy with money—that's interesting.

Rebecca: The great thing about theatre is that it's a living text, so we can breathe new interpretation [into the script using the original words]. There's so much force and attention focused on who we allow to ascend, particularly now, with ICE and immigration issues; these rigid boundaries are so magnified. There are billionaires and the upper percentage of earners who're just getting wealthier, and wealthier, and wealthier, and who are changing the rules as we speak. Then there's this middle ground of people, like Kristine, who're like, "*I don't like that, but I'm good right where I am—it doesn't threaten me,*" but that level of comfort can end up being very dangerous. If we're making parallels, it's Kristine who's the most dangerous at the end, who prevents either one of them from leaving. The establishment is still winning, and—for some—there's comfort in that.

Mi: There can also be an element of survival, right? "*If I just stay in my lane, and keep my head down, and don't ask questions, and don't disrupt anything, I'll make it out of here alive and so will my loved ones.*"

How would you describe *Miss Julie* in three words? Or even more challenging, to match the title of the play, two words?

Kelvin: Intense. Thought-provoking.

Mi: Complicated. And quite straightforward. All of these things are in play, and their wants are very clear. If we stay true to that want, the complication comes with us.

Rebecca: In this adaptation of the play, there's a line about how the characters are "playing with fire." And that's what this is. Everyone's playing with fire.

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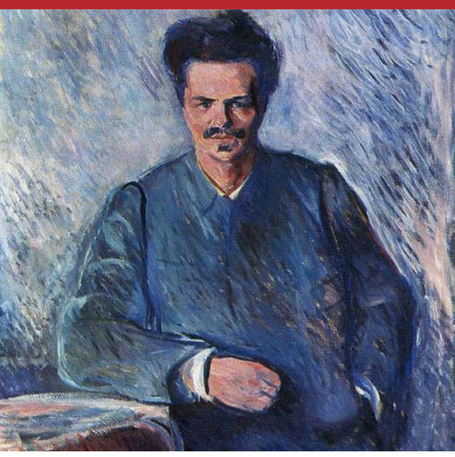
THE SCIENCE OF STRINDBERG

A PERSONAL ESSAY

BY ABHI SHRESTHA, PRODUCTION DRAMATURG



Portrait of August Strindberg by Edvard Munch, 1892.

Early on in the process for *Miss Julie*, I sent Gabby a text that simply read:

> *"Did you know that Strindberg used to inject apples with morphine to see if they had nervous systems…"*

It feels like an artist is always navigating a relationship between their constitution, their inherited traits and acquired tastes, and the contexts of the world they live in. Maybe that's inherently what living, in general, is—but artists channel that relationship between context and constitution through the lens of curiosity, of questioning. In Strindberg, I find that there is an unquenchable, and maybe even cursed, curiosity that plagues him. When you look at the extensive sweep of his life's work, you start to see a sprawling portrait of a man using any and every tool in his arsenal to sate that curiosity. He was painting, writing historical fiction and dramas, creating his own cameras to capture the night sky, penning multiple autobiographies, experimenting with transmutation and alchemy. The sheer enormity of his creative output felt compulsive, almost clinically so—he wrote *Miss Julie* in the span of only two weeks. *Miss Julie*, a play heralded, in many senses, as the apotheosis of naturalism—a movement fascinated by the ways human life is subject to the uncontrollable forces of nature.

One day, I turned to Gabby and said

> "Miss Julie *reads like a science experiment to me."*

In *Miss Julie*, I see a central question,

> *"Can we transcend our position (class, gender, race, etc.)?"*

or a hypothesis:

> *"If we succeed in transcending our position, then something is created and something is destroyed."*

With this hypothesis in hand, Strindberg picks his subjects. Two variables, and a constant. Miss Julie and Jean, variables who are interested in directional movement between their positions, and Kristine, the constant, who appreciates, finds value, and has a need for a structured class system. Then the experiment begins.

> *"On a night like this we're all just ordinary people having fun, so we'll forget about rank. Now, take my arm!"* –Miss Julie

It's no accident that the environment chosen for this experiment is Midsummer, the longest day of the year, the summer solstice, a night when anything can happen. With origins rooted in ancient pagan rituals to celebrate fertility and abundant harvests, the significance of the festival, of a rite of passage, of ritual where people are often between social roles serves as an essential boon to the play and what Victor Turner would 80 years later call "Communitas," an intense feeling of fellowship, a moment where structured social ranks collapse and there is a sense of perceived equality. Communitas can only occur in liminality, the threshold where something has been destroyed but something new has yet to be created, a space that the characters occupy as soon as Miss Julie enters the play.

Strindberg said of *Miss Julie*: "In the following drama I have not tried to do anything new—for that cannot be done ... but I have chosen, or I have surrendered myself to, a theme that might well be said to lie outside the partisan strife of the day: for the problem of social ascendancy or decline, of higher or lower, of better or worse, of men or women, is, has been, and will be of lasting interest."

He knew that these themes would transcend the time and place in which the play was written. Instead of seeing *Miss Julie* as a naturalist drama, the scientific method holds the key to its timelessness. A hypothesis, variables, observation, and experimentation. Questions about the world we live in that can only be answered when those variables are brought together to the point of combustion.

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UP NEXT: *OUT HERE*

Don’t miss the final production in the 2025/26 season: *Out Here*, a new musical by Leslie Buxbaum, David J. Levin, and Eric McKeown.

Dawn has a house, a husband, and a family, but she wants more. She wants her ex-girlfriend, Robin. She wants nothing to change and she wants everything to change, and she wants it all on her own terms. As she’s caught between what’s been and what’s next, Dawn must learn to abandon expectations, harmonize with loved ones, and trust the process. If she can do all that, she might just learn a new song.

Strikingly original, *Out Here* explores the unexpected freedom of relinquishing control, and how, sometimes, you have to break something apart to create something better.

Acclaimed director Chay Yew makes his Court directorial debut with this charming and bold take on the American kitchen sink drama, bringing the 2025/26 season to a joyous conclusion.

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ARTIST PROFILES

MI KANG (*Mok Julie*) is thrilled to be making her Court debut with *Miss Julie*! Chicago credits: Much Ado About Nothing (Chicago Shakespeare); *Inherit the Wind* (Goodman); *Villette* (Lookingglass); *The Chinese Lady* (TimeLine). Regional/tour credits: *Life of Pi* (Broadway national tour); *Dracula* (Cincinnati Playhouse); *John Christie's*; *The Journal of Ben Uchida* (Seattle Children's Theatre); *Pink: A Tale for the Time Being* (Book-It Rep). *The Great Leap* (Intiman Theatre Co.). MI is a freelance AFM, acting graduate and school credits include: *Dance Nation*, Princeton, and *Hamlet Gabler*. She is represented by Stewart Talent.

KELVIN ROSTON JR. (*Jean*) is excited to be back at Court! Court credits: *East Texas Hot Links* (Roy Hofheinz Award); *The Unfinished Revolution* (Adolphus Award); *Detroit* (Jeff Award nomination); *Oedipus*; *Oedipus Rex* (Oedipus); *King Hedley II* (King Hedley); *The Boys Named Sue Every Year* (Evo Jackson); and many others. Recent credits include: August Wilson's *Radio Golf* (Pittsburgh Public Theatre); *Clue* (Marriott Theatre); *The Color Purple* (MSMT); *The Wiz* (Porchlight); *Chicagoland*; Congo Square, Paramount, Marriott, Goodman, TTC, etc. Kelvin is a Second City, TimeLine, Northlight, Steppenwolf, International: Orb Jam, Spain; Lincoln Hall Chicago; and Film and Television: *Chicago Med*, *Chicago P.D.*, *South Side*, *Empire*, *Fire Island*, *Ride Along*, *Barbershop*. Awards: Jeff Award, three BTAA Awards, two Black Excellence Awards, NAMI Award. Kelvin is represented by Vanessa Talent (CHI) and Michael Moore Agency (NY).

REBECCA SPENCE (*Kristine*) is an Equity Jeff Award-winning actor based in Chicago. She is seen at Court Theatre in *The Lion in Winter* (Jeff Award nom)

with Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Goodman Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, TimeLine Theatre Company, Lookingglass Theatre, TimeLine Theatre Company, Windy City Playhouse, Theatre Wit, and Timeline Theatre, where she is an Ensemble Member. Film credits include: *Candyman*, *Princess Cut*, *Men of Steel*, *Contagion*, *The Dilemma*, *Public Enemies*, *Grace is Gone*, and *The Break-Up*. She has a regular role in the upcoming series *The Madison*, opposite Michelle Pfeiffer, and returning to Court, *Men of Steel*, *The Unfinished Revolution*, *Book Of HORCE*, *61st Street*, and *Paper Girls*. Other commercial credits include: *Jeopardy!*, *Law & Order*, *The Big Leap*, *Utopia*, *Empire*, *Easy*, *Boss*, *Crisis*, *Dragon Age*, *The Bernie*, *The Mob Doctor*, *Detroit 1-8-7*, *The Chicago Code*, *The Beast*, and *Prison Break*.

JOAN NAHD (*Ms Julie, Kristine*) is a multi-disciplined actor-writer based in Chicago. She is thrilled to make her Court Theatre debut with her favorite play, *Miss Julie*! Some of her Chicago credits include: *Wish You Were Here* (Bonfire Theatre Company); *A Lie of the Mind* (Jeff Raven Theatre); *The Madness of Edgar Allan Poe* (Oak Park Festival Theatre); *Miss Julie* (Theatre Gallery, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Medea Theatre Company); *Venus*, *Tango*, *Pentecost* (Trap Door Theatre). Joan holds an MFA in Theatre Directing/Playwriting from Columbia College and has published three collections of short stories. She is a proud ensemble member at Trap Door Theatre. www.joannahd.com

CHRISTOPHER WAYLAND (*Jean*) is thrilled to return to Court Theatre, where he previously appeared in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. He is an Associate Artist and Director at Theatre at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. He received an MFA in Acting from The Theatre School at DePaul University. In the Chicago area, he has performed with Writers' Theatre Ensemble, Paramount Theatre, Marriott Theatre, Porchlight Music Theatre, Chicago Dramatists, First Folio Theatre, 16th Street Theater, Oak Park Festival Theatre, Lifeline Theatre, The Gift Theatre, Raven, Lifeline Theatre, and Stage Left Theatre. His previous credits include *The Cry of Lonely Boy*, *Chicago Med*, and *APB*. Follow @heychriswayland and christopherwayland.com

AUGUST STRINDBERG (*Playwright*, 1849–1912) was a transformative Swedish writer and polymath whose professional achievements and controversies shaped modern European arts. He authored over 60 plays, 30 novels, historical works, and scientific essays. Strindberg's widely recognized as the founder of modern Swedish literature and wrote *The Red Room* (1879) is considered the first modern Swedish novel. A committed moral reformer, he co-founded the Intimate Theater in Stockholm (1907) as a venue for his experimental "chamber plays." His works, including the seminal *Miss Julie*, continue to influence 20th-century drama. Today, the most prestigious Swedish literature prize is named Pilot in honor of his honor.

GARY F. GARDNER (*Translator*, 1930-2021) was a renowned scholar and translator largely responsible for bringing the works of August Strindberg to a wider English-speaking audience. A distinguished Professor of Theater Emeritus at Queens University, Gardner published numerous books, including *Strindberg's Naturalism: A Reappraisal of His Beginnings as a Writer* (1971). Gardner dedicated much of his career to the study and translation of Scandinavian drama. His work includes highly regarded translations of several Strindberg masterpieces, including *The Father*, *The Father*, and *A Dream Play*. Carlson's significant academic contributions include his books *Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth* (1982) and *Out of Inferno: Strindberg's Reawakening and Rebirth* (1996). Through his meticulous and accessible translations, Gardner has cemented Strindberg's place in the English literary canon.

DR. GABRIELLE RANDLE-BENT (*Director Assistant, Court Director*) is a mother, director, dramaturg, and artist. Her directorial highlights include *A Kingdome*, *The Wonderful Life*, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* (co-director with Charles Newell), *Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine* (Steppenwolf); and *The Year of Magical Thinking* (Signature). She is a co-founder of the Black Ensemble Theater, a leadership program of the University of Chicago's Office of Civic Engagement (2016-2019). She has a BA in Drama from Stanford University, an MA in Performance Studies from Northwestern University, and a PhD from Northwestern University.

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JOHN CUBLER (*Scenic Designer*) designed scenery or lighting for many Court productions, including *Berlin*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Antigone*, *The Gospel at Colonus*, *Heaven and Earth*, *The Tempest*, *Othello*, *the Moor of Venice*, *Oedipus Rex*, *The Adventures of Huck Finn*, *All My Sons*, *Ajax*, *Intimate Apparel*, *Goodman's Having Our Say*; Lookingglass's *Villette*, and TimeLine Theatre's *Time Stands*. Mr. Cubler is a member of Northlight, Writers' Theatre, Glimmerglass Opera, Lookingglass Theatre, Opera National du Rhin, Berkeley Rep, McCarter Theatre, Yale Shakespeare Festival, and Seattle Opera. He is also a member of Court Theatre's Directing Ensemble. He received an MFA in Design from The Yale School of Drama, and is a professor emeritus at DePaul University. Court Theatre: *Raisin in the Sun*, *Fabatitio*, *Stokely: The Unfinished Revolution*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Christmas Carol* (Goodman); *Black Sunday*, *The Human Trilogy*, *Relentless* (TimeLine); *Gogoboy* (Steppenwolf Garage); *Eleemosynary* (Victory Gardens); *Hamlet* (Chicago Dramatists); *

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LET IT BURN

FEBRUARY 21

Join Court Theatre's Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director Avery Willis Hoffman in conversation with directors Gabrielle Randle-Bent and Marti Lyons, as they discuss their productions of *Miss Julie* (at Court) and *Hedda Gabler* (at Remy Bumppo Theatre Company).

They'll dive into the complicated titular characters, explore the role of desire within the strict societal rules placed on women and femmes, and why these stories are so enduring.

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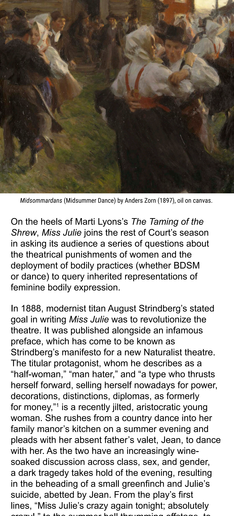
FORWARD MOMENTUM

BY CJ NIZARD, PhD STUDENT IN ENGLISH AND THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



Midsommardans (Midsummer Dance) by Anders Zorn (1897), oil on canvas.

On the heels of Marti Lyons's *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Miss Julie* joins the rest of Court's season in asking its audience a series of questions about the theatrical punishments of women and the deployment of bodily practices (whether BDSM or dance) to query inherited representations of feminine bodily expression.

In 1888, modernist titan August Strindberg's stated goal in writing *Miss Julie* was to revolutionize the theatre. It was published alongside an infamous preface, which has come to be known as Strindberg's manifesto for a new Naturalist theatre. The titular protagonist, whom he describes as a "half-woman," "man hater," and "a type who thrusts herself forward, selling herself nowadays for power, decorations, distinctions, diplomas, as formerly for money,"[1] is a recently jilted, aristocratic young woman. She rushes from a country dance into her family manor's kitchen on a summer evening and pleads with her absent father's valet, Jean, to dance with her. As the two have an increasingly wine-soaked discussion across class, sex, and gender, a dark tragedy takes hold of the evening, resulting in the beheading of a small greenfinch and Julie's suicide, abetted by Jean. From the play's first lines, "Miss Julie's crazy again tonight; absolutely crazy!," to the summer ball "humming" in the ballroom, to the cook's frying and sizzling in the kitchen where the entire drama unfolds, the play announces itself at a hysterical fever pitch. When Julie comes down to sleep with Jean, hoping with her only her greenfinch in a cage, he beheads the bird, and, just as her absent father is due home, she appears to lose her mind entirely. Julie plays the part of femininity's dangerous wishes: her jilted hysteria, her failed taming of men, and her hereditary "degenerate" nature are what seem to lead her to "suicide."

Degeneracy—defined in this play as Julie's unregulated need for dancing and bodily expression—was key in Strindberg's lexicon. As a manifesto for a new theater, *Miss Julie* focused as much on new staging and lighting ideas as it did on a completely new paradigm for drama: no more stock characters whose experiences were limited by mask-like clichés and predictable tropes. Instead, an event like Julie's suicide must be shown in the "multifocal and complex psychological dynamics, degeneracy leading among them. Strindberg wrote, presciently, "It seems to me that the psychological process is what interests people most today. Our inquisitive souls are no longer satisfied with seeing a thing happen; we must also know how it happens. We want to see the wires themselves, to watch the machinery." As "modern" characters, Julie and Jean are two studies in late 19th century psychology, where the "soul" has to be represented as a "complex of motives." Strindberg wanted to avoid tropes and physical gimmicks, trying instead to provide an "objective" take on an event like Julie's death. And yet, his characterization of the "degeneracy" of modern women like Julie betrays an anxiety about what he calls Naturalism's "desperate fight against nature," where "nature" is assimilated to women's bodily excesses. It reproduces its own kind of misogynistic trope, a proposal any 2026 production of this play must interrogate, since Strindberg landed on the sinister notion that a "sound species," rid of "degenerates" like Julie, was required to achieve collective, social "happiness." In what way do Strindberg's aspirations for a new theater only work to naturalize an old cliché? And what are theater-makers now to do with these problems?

For a play that seeks to center psychology, *Miss Julie* is oddly haunted by the sweaty spectacles more readily associated with embodiment. Dance troubles theatre's psychological naturalism by threatening to drown out a scientistic study of human behavior. Strindberg knew this, and his first gesture was to banish the Midsummer revels offstage, as if to keep bodily spectacle at bay so that a psychological power struggle can unfold. Director Gabrielle Randle-Boré, however, plays with the porous nature of the boundary between the dance outside and drama within as if to heighten the formal trouble dance presents. After Court audiences get a privileged glimpse of Strindberg's banished Midsummer revelry, Julie relentlessly attempts to convince Jean to come back out and dance with her. Jean replies: "I wonder if it's wise for you to dance twice running with the same partner, especially since these people are quick to jump to conclusions...." Their debate parses the disastrous implications of being seen dancing together and crossing the strictures set by class and gender.

How the chorus interprets Jean and Julie's dance is a matter with devastating consequences both for Julie and for *Miss Julie*. This production asks us to grapple with similar questions of interpretation. Strindberg was as much seduced as he was repelled by the bodily forces of dance. His ambivalence about its peripheral but potentially devastating impact makes his dancing bodies difficult to reclaim, in particular in this hysterical condition. What are we to make of these forms and their associations to female madness? Managing what dance means—what its powers and perversions are—frays the hard edge of the "new" theatrical naturalism Strindberg sought to establish. By first banishing dance, he paradoxically amplified its unspoken presence and heightened its strong correlation with taboo. But it's not merely that the Midsummer revels are ongoing just beyond the stage. Strindberg also includes a mimed movement sequence for the cook Kristine's domestic labor—"leaving here an even wider scope for the actor's imagination, and more chance for him to win independent laurels"—and a formalized Ballet in which the chorus of country dancers finally enters the kitchen, reviling Jean and Julie for dancing (or sleeping) together. Even Jean and Julie's erratic, overlapping language is choreographic: Julie has nightmares of falling from pillars and is cautioned against "stepping down," that is, dancing with people beneath her station. Jean's aspirational dance is instead a leap upward, a desire to "soar" above the trees, to raise himself above his station. In this collision between upward and downward trajectories, in the push and pull between Strindberg's desired objectivism and dance's dangerous embodiment, the tragedy finds its combustive energy.

Strindberg might not have intended his play's relentless focus on the dancing body. Yet *Miss Julie* works through an immensely popular and longstanding set of questions about "dangerous" women who move, feel, and express through embodiment. The play is in fact a forthright retelling of the biblical tale of John the Baptist's execution by Herod Antipas, otherwise known as the story of the murderous girl-dancer Salome. At the time of Strindberg's own writing, a veritable "Salomania" had taken hold of European theatre.[2] We can read Strindberg's play as his own version of the tragic dancer that would clear a passage for a new aesthetic form. As the gospels of Mark and Matthew narrate, John was held prisoner at Herod's court. On Herod's birthday, a young girl is brought out to dance. Having pleased the king, she is authorized to ask for whatever she wants. She asks for John the Baptist's head. John is beheaded. In Strindberg's retelling, dancing risks similar consequential decollations—though John/Jean comes out unscathed: it is Miss Julie's girlfinch who bears out the myth. Instead, *Miss Julie* explicitly avenges the male martyr and punishes the female dancer. Perverting the tale of Christian martyrdom, *Miss Julie* takes the biblical dance and turns it into a pressure cooker for Strindberg's modern associations between gender, class, and psychology. Are we indeed to believe that "Miss Julie is crazy!" as advanced by the evergreen assertion that she wants too much from dancing? Is her dancing a mere symptom of her decadent aristocracy and corrupt gender? Or are we rather to take up Strindberg's Naturalist method for interrogating the association of the (female) psyche with the problem of degenerate embodiment? Does dance, in the background, allow us to think of Julie's interior life and capitulation differently?

Strindberg's Julie hates men—and this quality is, per his evolutionary Naturalism, hereditary. Tragic, in this way, too. We are told early on that Julie was jilted by her fiancé for trying to "make him [her] slave." Just like Kate in *Shrew*, Julie is a tamer tamed. Here, in its modern rather than pre-modern version, she is a wild dancer choreographed into submission. Julie's death is just another capitulation—not quite placing her, like Kate, "below her husband's foot," but demanding something more gruesome: that Jean order her to slit her own throat. It is not her tongue, ultimately, that takes her down, but rather the suppression of her wily bodily agency, banished like the dances that threaten the naturalism of Strindberg's new theatre.

CJ NIZARD (she/they) is a joint PhD Candidate in English and Theatre and Performance Studies researching the hatred of dance. They are also an educator and performer, and have shown work in the UK, USA, and Canada.

[1] See *Playwrights on Playwriting : From Ibsen to Ionesco*. Ed. Tony Cole, Cooper Square Press, 1960.

[2] All citations are from the preface.

[3] See for example Gustave Flaubert's 1877 *Trois Contes*, Jules Massenet's opera *Hérodiade*, Oscar Wilde's 1891 play *Salomé*, and the choreographies of Maud Allan and Loïe Fuller at the turn of the century.

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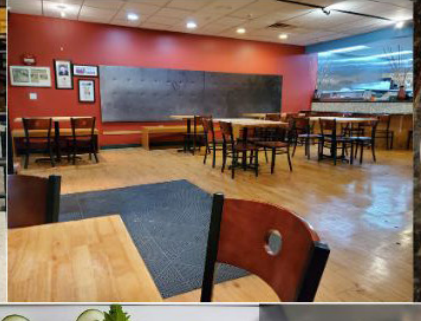

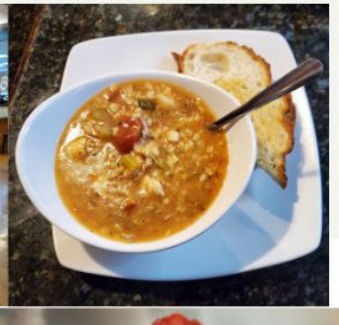

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Winner of the 2022 Regional Theatre Tony Award, Court Theatre reimagines classic theatre to illuminate our current times. In residence at the University of Chicago and on Chicago's historic South Side, we engage our audiences with intimate and provocative 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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