



STUDENT  
MATINEE  
PROGRAM

# Discovery Guide

“I’M TRYING TO REMEMBER IT EXACTLY THE WAY IT HAPPENED.  
CAUSE I PROMISED  
I PROMISED”

—N, *Good Grief*

*Good Grief* is a “best friend play” set between 1992 and 2005. In the play, we follow **Nkechi**, or **N**, in non-linear jumps in time as she tries to process and grieve the loss of her best friend, **MJ**. Through N’s family, MJ’s Mom and other community members, we explore the different ways that people experience grief and how a familiar song, shirt or even the stars can help in the process of saying goodbye and reconciling the past.

# GOODGRIEF

BY Ngozi Anyanwu  
DIRECTED BY Patricia McGregor

# REMEMBERING

The playwright Ngozi Anyanwu gives us clues to the fact that the play is based on her life in the beginning of the script:

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *This was a play written because I missed someone and I missed myself when I was this young. I conjured him. I thought of him. Conjured my past and wrote the things I might have said or did had I a second chance to walk in this world. So for all intents and purposes, though it feels autobiographical ...this is still very much a work of fiction. But for thinking these words, for saying these words, for directing these words, I thank you. Through you these people live.*

What does this note tell us about how grief can work?

How do you think this note will help the director, designers, and actors better understand how to tell this story?

## THE ART OF MEMORY

Hearing a particular song that brings back a tidal wave of memories is an almost universal experience. Music and other works of art are profoundly linked to personal memories, and can easily take us back to a different time or to help us to remember a loved one. In *Good Grief*, classic tracks from the 1990s like "Crossroads" by Bone Thugs-N-Harmony and "Water Runs Dry" by Boyz II Men act as cultural touchstones in Nkechi's life and are essential to her grieving process. These songs, and other works of art featured throughout the play, provide her with tangible ways to connect with others around her and with MJ's memory. The arts help us to relive moments with those we care about so their memories are preserved throughout our lifetime.

Are there pieces of art that help you connect with friends or family members—or have helped you to make a new connection with someone?



## ARTEMIS & ORION

Anyanwu refers to the mythological characters, Artemis and Orion throughout the play. Over the course of history, there have been several versions of the myth of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the moon, and Orion, the huntsman. In one version, Artemis' twin brother Apollo, the Greek god of the sun, is concerned that Artemis and Orion are getting too close, so Apollo tricks his sister into killing Orion. As part of her grief, Artemis transforms Orion into a constellation in the sky.

In what way would you choose to remember someone?

What are ways you have seen people grieve for or remember a loved one?

## THE JOURNEY OF BEST FRIENDS

Over the course of the play we see different scenes that show us glimpses of Nkechi and MJ's friendship. The playwright could have chosen to tell this story chronologically but instead chooses to jump back in forth in time and even to create fantastical moments at the beginning of time or in the future. Throughout the play, we also observe Nkechi's experience through the eyes of other characters to help us understand how her friendship with MJ evolves over time.

## LANGUAGE WITH FRIENDS

The intimate moments that Nkechi and MJ share throughout the play use the secret language of close friends: a mixture of playful humor and honest vulnerability. Their combination of fast-paced exchanges and brief sentences that speak volumes sets them apart from the rest of the world.

## AT HOME

Throughout the play, the characters of *Good Grief* use words from different languages, contexts, and generations. Sometimes they mash words together, sometimes they pull words apart, and sometimes they even sing the words. When Nkechi is at home, for instance, her parents use Igbo words that are part of their culture from Nigeria. In scenes with her Papa and Nene, Nkechi understands Igbo words like "maechionu" (shut up) and "chere" (stop it). She even has a different name when she is with her parents: Nne.

MJ  
You seem lighter-

N  
Like anatomically-

MJ  
Like spiritually.  
You seem kinda  
different.  
What is that?

N  
Oh...  
I don't know...  
I guess...  
Life seems lighter...  
I don't know...

Does friendship grow  
in straight lines?

Why or why not?

Are there words or  
a specific language  
that you use only:

- at home?
- with your friends?
- at school with your classmates or teachers?
- or in particular communities to which you belong?

# WELCOME TO THE THEATRE!

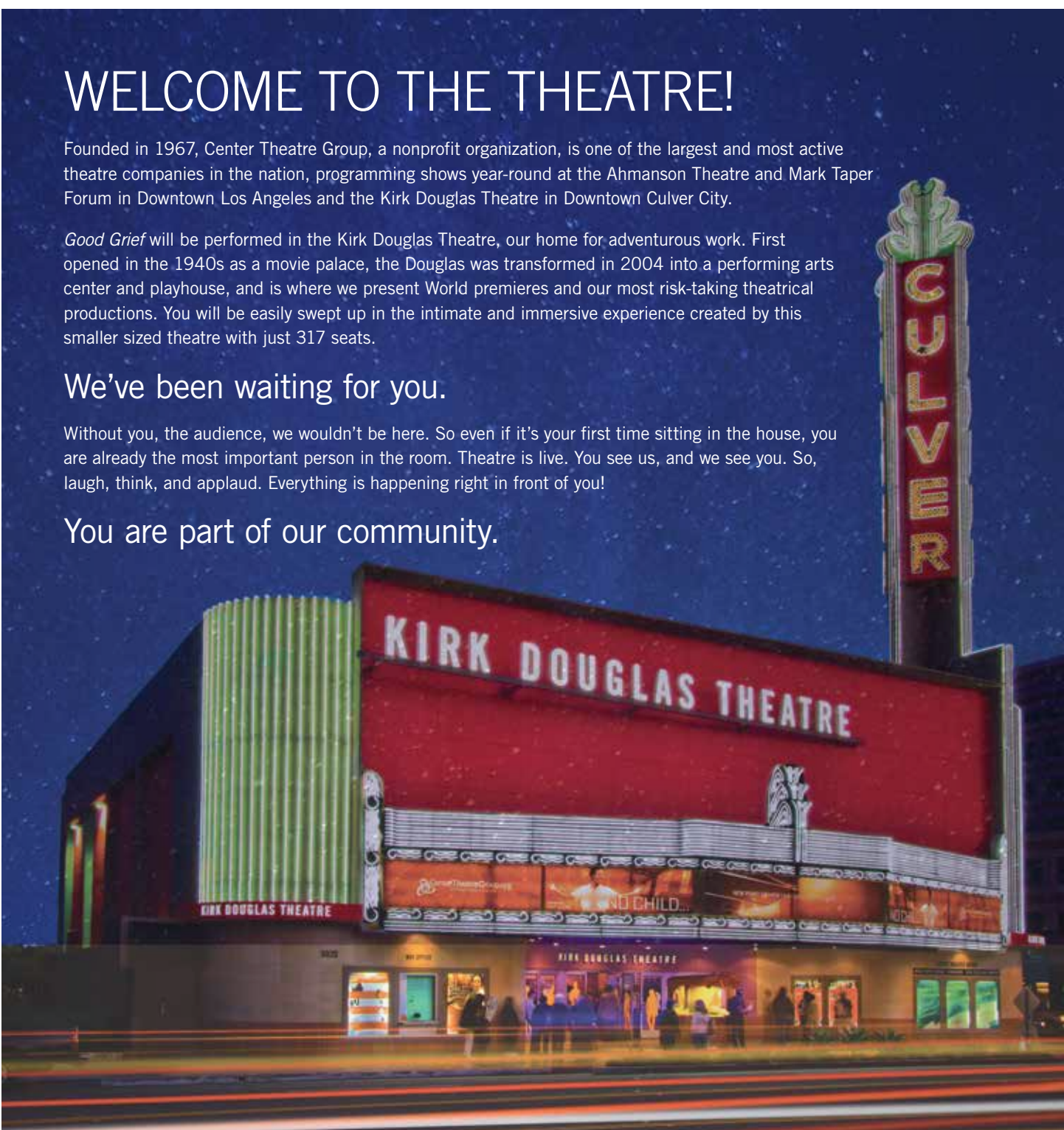
Founded in 1967, Center Theatre Group, a nonprofit organization, is one of the largest and most active theatre companies in the nation, programming shows year-round at the Ahmanson Theatre and Mark Taper Forum in Downtown Los Angeles and the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Downtown Culver City.

*Good Grief* will be performed in the Kirk Douglas Theatre, our home for adventurous work. First opened in the 1940s as a movie palace, the Douglas was transformed in 2004 into a performing arts center and playhouse, and is where we present World premieres and our most risk-taking theatrical productions. You will be easily swept up in the intimate and immersive experience created by this smaller sized theatre with just 317 seats.

## We've been waiting for you.

Without you, the audience, we wouldn't be here. So even if it's your first time sitting in the house, you are already the most important person in the room. Theatre is live. You see us, and we see you. So, laugh, think, and applaud. Everything is happening right in front of you!

## You are part of our community.



### Special Thanks

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