



Artistic Director **Pam MacKinnon**
Executive Director **Jennifer Bielstein**

PRESENTS



COMMUNION

By Christopher Chen
Directed by Pam MacKinnon

WELCOME TO A.C.T.

We have made the program available to you, only after seeing the show. Please do not reveal to anyone its secrets and twists. But please do reveal to everyone its fun.

In the hopefully waning weeks of using Zoom as a near-universal and sole means to connect beyond our homes, in the hopefully waning months of the pandemic, we built a show called *Communion*.

I approached our playwright, Christopher Chen, in December 2020 with bad news. We had to postpone indefinitely the A.C.T. production of his beautiful Bay Area-set noir *The Headlands*. We knew by late fall that we would not be producing in person by the spring. No one would be, in this country. But I did have an opportunity to pitch in that phone call. Could Chris imagine writing a short play for one actor on Zoom that was interactive and has something of a puzzle in it? I called it a puzzle play, not really knowing what that might mean. Chris took the weekend to say yes. Maybe there is a con artist element to it, he thought. That was his hook. We were off to the races. And A.C.T. commissioned Chris to write a Zoom play with a working title *The Long Con*.

This play was born out of necessity and had a very fast turnaround. We talked about casting early on. An actor that our audiences thought they knew well could be helpful. The brilliant and easygoing Stacy Ross was our first choice. What she has told you about the making of the piece is largely true. A lot of stories were shared; Chris then scripted it all, only to ask that Stacy in turn make the language at times her own.

This play has turned into a labor of love for our small but mighty creative team and company. I believe in its odd personality; part play, part seminar; part meeting, part hangout. I believe in its simple humanity—where does the writer end, and the actor begin? What is biographical, and whose biography is it? What is made up? I believe in its ambition: to give a few strangers, in each performance, a platform to talk, to reveal a little about themselves, first with Stacy Ross—one on one—and ultimately with each other. That's the gift. That's also the struggle. It's a play of this moment for the moment.

We can now hopefully start to imagine re-entering the world of folks beyond our most intimate circle. We will be shy and out of practice conversing, let alone communing, for a spell. This play is an exercise to strengthen those slack muscles. It's a rehearsal of sorts. Still over Zoom and at first facilitated and conned but ultimately just to set conversations in motion.

I write this letter not knowing if we succeeded. *Communion* has more degrees of freedom than most plays. There are blanks on the page. Prompts known but not answered. I cannot direct what happens between Stacy and a volunteer. I cannot direct what happens in the final breakout rooms. But we build toward it and hopefully make it safe, so we can feel a little braver when the curtain falls, or in this specific case when you are asked to "leave meeting." Thank you for being great scene partners and participating in the making of a story—communing.

Be well.



Pam MacKinnon
Artistic Director

Welcome to *Communion*!

And welcome to American Conservatory Theater. We exist to bring artists and communities together to inspire and provoke joy, connection, reflection, curiosity, and so much more. Thank you for joining us!

We're so excited to bring you *Communion*, a live, world-premiere experience that is part docudrama, part mystery, and part confessional. Written by Christopher Chen, a native of San Francisco, *Communion* was commissioned by and written just for A.C.T. Our very own Tony Award-winning Pam MacKinnon directs, and we're thrilled to welcome Stacy Ross back to our virtual stage. You've seen Stacy as everyone from Hedda Gabler to Leni Riefenstahl—but who is she really? We can't wait to find out with you.

As a playwright, Chris is a master of psychological intrigue, and his play *The Headlands* was slated to be part of our 2021 in-person season. We're grateful for his ingenuity in pivoting to the Zoom platform, and we're so thankful for your support, and for communing with us through this play.

We've also reimaged Heather Christian's *Animal Wisdom* for the screen, available on demand from now through Jun 13. The sold-out, acclaimed musical séance that premiered at The Bushwick Starr has been adapted into an original film, and we're delighted to be coproducing with DC's Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company to deliver this transporting experience straight to your living room. Pre-Covid, this was a production that we planned on bringing to the Strand—so please picture that. Then, in the early moments of the pandemic, we planned to bring it to the Geary, spreading our audiences out with some onstage with Heather and company, some in the house in pods, and utilizing the balcony as a choir loft—so please picture that as well. But instead, here we are as proud movie producers. Shapeshifting between rock star, folklorist, and high priestess, Heather conjures a constellation of souls in this story, all in an effort to confront her family's mythologies.

Then we cannot wait to welcome you back to the theater. We're thrilled to announce our in-person season beginning again in January 2022. We are sharing an unprecedented trio of Bay Area premieres with you—the Broadway hit *Freestyle Love Supreme*, the National Theatre production of *The Lehman Trilogy*, and the greatly anticipated world-premiere musical *Soul Train*. We're also producing one of the most influential plays of the 20th century, Maria Irene Fornés's *Fefu and Her Friends*. These plays reflect our mission and values and we can't wait to be in community with you through these performances. To subscribe to our season, you can contact our box office at 415.749.2228 or visit act-sf.org.

The best ways you can help us navigate this time is to continue your commitment as a ticket buyer, as a donor, and to spread the word to your networks. We're so grateful for your continued participation, and we can't wait to see you at the theater.

Enjoy the show,



Jennifer Bielstein
Executive Director

**PAM
MACKINNON**
Artistic Director

**JENNIFER
BIELSTEIN**
Executive Director



A.C.T. would like to thank our generous supporters including our

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We recognize the following Lead Contributors to our Gala who helped make the commission of *Communion* possible:

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This production of *Communion* is made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Arts



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COMMUNION

By Christopher Chen
Directed by Pam MacKinnon

THE CAST

STACY ROSS

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The Actor and Stage Manager employed in this production are members of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

The videotaping or making of electronic or other audio and/or visual recordings of this production, or distributing recordings on any medium, including the internet, is strictly prohibited.



Communion was commissioned and developed at A.C.T.

ACT-SF.ORG

ABOUT A.C.T.

American Conservatory Theater is an essential gathering place that brings artists and communities together to inspire and provoke. Our mission is to engage the spirit of the San Francisco Bay Area, activate stories that resonate, promote a diversity of voices and points of view, and empower theater makers and audiences to celebrate liveness. We value inclusion, transformational learning, participation, and rigorous fun.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As part of our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion at A.C.T., we are in the process of building a meaningful relationship with the local Indigenous theater community. As part of this we begin by honoring the lands upon which we do our work. We would be proud to offer deep gratitude to the tribal band of Ramaytush Ohlone peoples and their lands that cover Northern California and down the Pacific coastline. Prior to the arrival of the Spanish in the 1700s, the Ramaytush Ohlone numbered approximately 1500 persons, and made their life on the sacred lands. Only a few families survived and still remain. Those descendants make up the membership of the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone (ARO) today. We honor the Ohlone as a people, their resilience, and all they have done and continue to do in maintaining sacred and ancestral lands, ceremony, and communities to this day.

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WHO'S WHO IN COMMUNION



STACY ROSS is happy—and a little surprised, given the past year—to be back at A.C.T., having spent the last year in Zoom readings, gardening, and framing pictures . . . Last seen at A.C.T. in *The*

Hard Problem. Other most recent work from “the before times” includes *The Year of Magical Thinking* at Aurora Theatre Company, *The War of the Roses* at California Shakespeare Theater, and *Free For All (a New Miss Julie for a New World)* at Cutting Ball Theater.

CHRISTOPHER CHEN (Playwright) is a playwright born and bred in San Francisco. His plays include *Caught*, *The Headlands*, *The Hundred Flowers Project*, *The Late Wedding*, *Mutt*, *Passage*, and *You Mean To Do Me Harm*. Honors: 2021 USA Fellow, Obie Award for playwriting, Barrymore Award, Glickman Award, Lanford Wilson Award, Sundance Institute/Time Warner Fellowship, Paula Vogel Playwriting Award, and the inaugural Ollie Award. Current commissions: American Conservatory Theater, Audible, Cutting Ball, Playwrights Horizons, Portland Center Stage. Education: BA, UC Berkeley; MFA in playwriting, San Francisco State University.

PAM MACKINNON (Director & A.C.T. Artistic Director) is in her third season as A.C.T.’s fourth artistic director. She is a Tony, Drama Desk, and Obie award-winning director, having directed upwards of 75 productions around the country, off Broadway, and on Broadway. Her Broadway credits include Beau Willimon’s *The Parisian Woman* (with Uma Thurman), David Mamet’s *China Doll* (with Al Pacino), Wendy Wasserstein’s *The Heidi Chronicles* (with Elisabeth Moss), Edward Albee’s *A Delicate Balance* (with Glenn Close and John Lithgow), Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and Bruce Norris’s *Clybourne Park*. Her most recent credits include world premieres of Bruce Norris’s *Downstate* (Steppenwolf Theatre

Company, London’s National Theatre), Lydia R. Diamond’s *Toni Stone* (Roundabout Theatre Company, A.C.T.), Kate Attwell’s *Testmatch* (A.C.T.), and Edward Albee’s *Seascape* (A.C.T.). She grew up in Toronto, Canada, and Buffalo, New York, and majored in economics and political science at the University of Toronto. (she/her)

HANA S. KIM (Production Designer) is a designer whose recent credits include *Sweet Land* (The Industry) directed by Yuval Sharon; *The Anonymous Lover* (LA Opera) directed by Bruce Lemon; *You Are Here* (La Jolla Playhouse) directed by Marike Splint; *Eve’s Song* (The Public Theater) and *The Untranslatable Secrets of Nikki Corona* (Geffen Playhouse), both directed by Jo Bonney; *Sweat* (A.C.T.) and *The Gangster of Love* (Magic Theatre), both directed by Loretta Greco; *Little Black Shadows*, directed by May Adrales (South Coast Repertory). She is a recipient of the 2018 Richard E. Sherwood Award from Center Theatre Group and a Princess Grace Award for theater design. Her designs have won San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle awards, a Helen Hayes Award, Stage Raw Theater awards, and StageSceneLA awards. hananow.com

JESSIE AMOROSO (Costume Designer) is currently the costume director at American Conservatory Theater where his costume design credits include *Testament*, *Ah, Wilderness!*, *Love and Information*, *Underneath the Lintel*, *Chester Bailey, John, Vietgone*, and this season’s MFA lineup. Bay Area theater design and styling credits include work at Marin Theatre Company, Center REpertory Company, California Theatre Center, Berkeley City Club, Marines’ Memorial Theater, Herbst Theatre, and the Palace of Fine Arts. Other highlights include designing two world premieres for Brad Erickson at New Conservatory Theatre Center. At Project Artaud/Z Space he designed *Caligula* featuring Nancy Carlin and *A Round-Heeled Woman* starring Sharon Gless and featuring Stacy Ross. Amoroso is a graduate of California State University Hayward (now CSU East Bay) and a member of United Scenic Artists local 829. In his spare time he has donated many hours of service to Broadway Cares Equity Fights Aids and the Richmond/Ermet Aid Foundation.

STEVE CUIFFO (Creative Consultant) is a theater maker who creates solo performance as well as collaborative works with other artists and theater companies. Cuiffo has consulted for theater on and off Broadway including *Dana H.* (Vineyard Theatre); *The Thin Place* (Playwrights Horizons); *Everyday Rapture* (Broadway); *Old Hats* (Signature Theatre); *Antipodes* (Signature Theatre & National Theatre London); *A Public Reading of an Unproduced Screenplay About The Death of Walt Disney* (Soho Rep.); *Home* and *The Object Lesson* (Brooklyn Academy of Music). Additionally, Cuiffo co-created *Elephant Room* with Geoff Sobelle and Trey Lyford.

JOY MEADS (Dramaturg), a native of Oakland, is director of dramaturgy and new works at American Conservatory Theater. A.C.T. credits include *Testmatch*, *Wakey*, *Wakey*, *Sweat*, *Men on Boats*, *Edward Albee’s Seascape*, *Her Portmanteau*, *The Great Leap*, and *Rhinoceros*. Prior to A.C.T., she was literary manager/artistic engagement strategist at Center Theatre Group. CTG credits include *Archduke*, *Good Grief*, *Appropriate*, *Forever*, *Marjorie Prime* (2015 Pulitzer Prize finalist), *A Parallelogram*, *The Royale*, and *Sleep* (also: Brooklyn Academy of Music and Yale Repertory Theatre). Previously, Meads was literary manager at Steppenwolf Theatre Company and associate artistic director at California Shakespeare Theater. Meads is a co-founder of The Kilroys. (she/her)

DANI BAE (Stage Manager) returns to A.C.T. for *Communion*. Bae recently stage managed A.C.T.’s *Trouble in Mind*, and assistant directed *A Christmas Carol: On Air*. A.C.T. assistant stage management credits: *Testmatch*, *Heisenberg*, *The Birthday Party*, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Local stage management credits: *Culture Clash (Still) in America* (Berkeley Repertory Theatre), *Her Portmanteau* (A.C.T.), *The Year of Magical Thinking*, *Detroit ‘67*, *Dry Powder*, *Luna Gale*, and *Splendour* (Aurora). Other notable stage management credits include *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Arena Stage, Seattle Repertory Theatre), the Bard Music Festival (Bard SummerScape), *Urinetown: The Musical* (American Theatre of Actors). Bae has a BFA in stage management from Syracuse University.

IN MEMORIAM

A TRIBUTE TO OLYMPIA DUKAKIS

Olympia Dukakis, perhaps best known for her iconic film roles in *Moonstruck* (for which she won an Academy Award), *Steel Magnolias*, and *Mr. Holland's Opus*, has long been part of the DNA of American Conservatory Theater. Bay Area audiences had the privilege of seeing Olympia in person on A.C.T.'s Geary stage where she played pivotal roles in *Elektra*, *Vigil*, *Hecuba*, *A Mother*, *For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again*, and *Singer's Boy*. In addition to her work onstage, **Olympia was deeply invested in A.C.T.'s success as a theater company and as a school.** She became a trustee on A.C.T.'s board where she helped to facilitate generous funding support and she taught classes for A.C.T.'s students on every visit. Bay Area audiences loved her, and she loved them right back. "The most important thing for Olympia was always the audience," writes Carey Perloff, A.C.T.'s Artistic Director Emerita, in *American Theatre*. "Often, in the midst of working on a scene in rehearsal, she would stop and say to me, 'What are we trying to say? Where are audience members to put their minds?' **The only thing that really mattered to Olympia was that those watching the play have an experience that was meaningful to them.**"

Beyond A.C.T., Olympia's impressive career spanned far and wide. She received her MFA from Boston University. She started two theater companies; one in Boston, and another in Montclair, New Jersey which she ran with her husband and acclaimed actor Louis Zorich as they raised their three children, Christina, Peter, and Stefan. In addition to her illustrious film career, Olympia also worked in television (most notably, originating the role of Anna Madrigal in the *Tales of the City* TV series) as well as on and off Broadway. A dedicated educator, Olympia taught acting for over 50 years; she was a founding faculty member of the graduate acting program at New York University and she taught master classes all around the country. "When Olympia and I would meet, we always talked about her love of teaching the next generation, relishing classic texts and the big roles, and of course A.C.T.," writes A.C.T. Artistic Director Pam MacKinnon. **"She was an actor's actor, a truth teller, generous with her time, committed to the work. She will be missed."**



Olympia Dukakis in A.C.T.'s *Elektra*, *Hecuba*, *Vigil*, and *A Mother* (top to bottom).



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Jerry is president of Parnassus Investments and serves on the boards of San Francisco Opera and A.C.T. Thao and Jerry have established scholarships for music education at the San Francisco Symphony, undergraduate education at UC Berkeley, and high school education for 125 girls in Vietnam.

BILL DRAPER

Bill is a member of the A.C.T. Emeritus Advisory Board. He is one of the West Coast's first venture capitalists and the founder of Sutter Hill Ventures. He has received Lifetime Achievement Awards from the Silicon Valley Fast 50, the International Business Forum, and the National Venture Capital Association

LINDA JO FITZ †

Linda Jo Fitz is a member of A.C.T.'s Board of Trustees and the Finance Committee, and served as Treasurer. She had a nearly 35-year career in personal financial planning and investment management, having co-founded Kochis Fitz (later known as Aspiriant). Linda was named one of the Top 50 Women in Business by Wealth Manager Magazine in 2010, and given the Champion Award by Greenbelt Alliance in 2017.

PRISCILLA AND KEITH GEESLIN

Priscilla is a vice chair of A.C.T.'s Board of Trustees. She is vice president and president elect of the SF Symphony, a board member of Grace Cathedral, and a board member and former chair of NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation. Keith is president of SF Opera's board and a board member of Episcopal Community Services.

KIRKE AND NANCY SAWYER HASSON ◇ †

Kirke and Nancy have been A.C.T. subscribers for over 26 years, and Kirke is a trustee on A.C.T.'s board and its immediate past chair. They have enjoyed serving as hosts for seven students in A.C.T.'s Master of Fine Arts Program, and their daughter Kathryn was a frequent flier in A.C.T.'s Young Conservatory.

KENNETH AND GISELE MILLER

JAMES C. HORMEL AND MICHAEL P. NGUYEN-HORMEL

James, the first openly gay US ambassador, founded the James C. Hormel Gay & Lesbian Center at the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL). Michael works alongside James on their charitable giving foundation, and has served on the SFPL Commission for two terms. A trustee of A.C.T., Michael is profoundly passionate about the arts and humanities.

BARBARA RAVIZZA AND JOHN S. OSTERWEIS

are excited to be season presenters at A.C.T. Osterweis is a graduate of Stanford Graduate School of Business, and was a senior analyst, concentrating on forest products and the paper industry, for several regional brokerage firms and later for E. F. Hutton & Company, Inc. Ravizza has lived in the Bay Area for 70 years and has always been interested in the arts. She worked as a designer and illustrator in the publishing industry for John Wiley & Sons, Wadsworth, and Science Research Associates. For the last two decades, she has devoted herself to painting and drawing.

TONI REMBE AND ARTHUR ROCK

Past chair of A.C.T.'s Board of Trustees, Toni is a retired partner at Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman. Arthur was one of America's first venture capitalists. Along with other community endeavors, they are cofounders of the Arthur and Toni Rembe Rock Center for Corporate Governance at Stanford Law School.

ROBINA RICCIHELLO †

Robina is communications director for the Million Person Project, a company that helps people identify their core values to tell their personal story. She is involved with the UCLA Depression Grand Challenge, an effort to cure depression by the end of this century, and with NARAL Pro-Choice America.

JAY YAMADA

KAY YUN AND ANDRE NEUMANN-LORECK †

President of A.C.T.'s Board of Trustees, Kay is a partner at private equity fund Health Evolution Partners. She is a trustee of Parnassus Funds and a board member of San Francisco University High School. Andre, the founder of On Tap Consulting, has held executive roles in startups and Fortune 500 companies.

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