

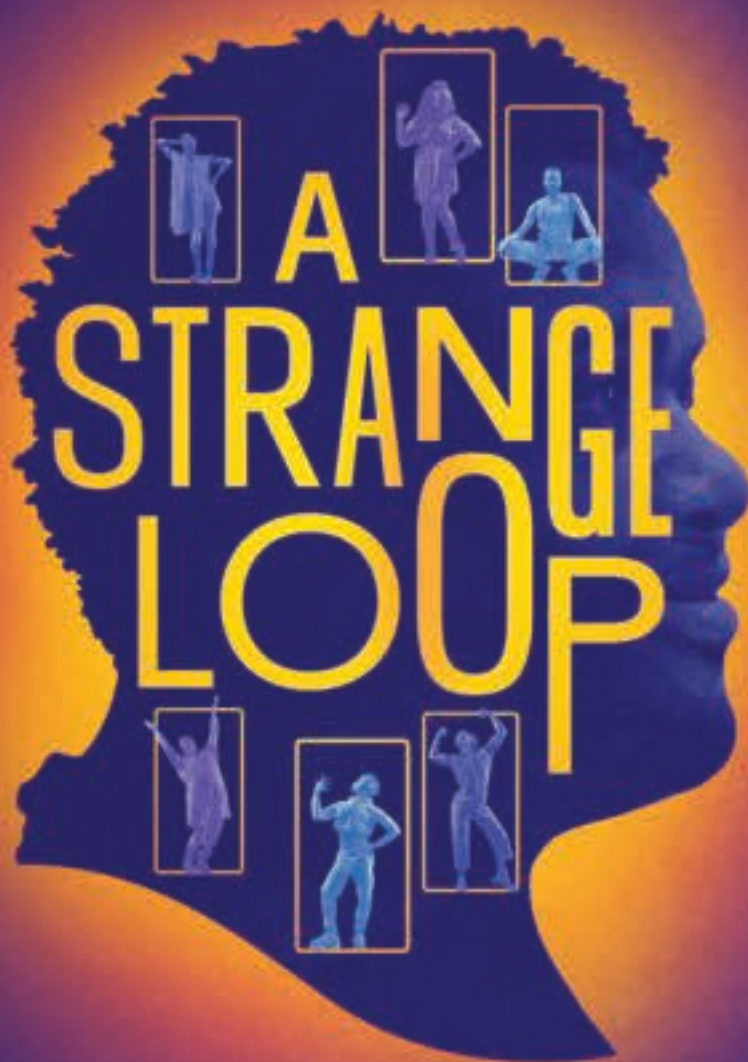
APRIL 2024



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23 SEASON
24
SEASON 57

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BOOK, MUSIC, AND LYRICS BY **MICHAEL R. JACKSON**

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THIS IS YOUR THEATER, SAN FRANCISCO

American Conservatory Theater is an essential gathering place that brings artists and communities together to inspire and provoke. Now in its sixth year under the leadership of Tony Award-winning Artistic Director Pam MacKinnon and Executive Director Jennifer Bielstein, A.C.T. is charged with fulfilling its mission 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. A.C.T. is a Tony Award-winning nonprofit theater serving almost 200,000 people in the San Francisco Bay Area annually through theater, training, education, and community programs. The organization values inclusion, transformational learning, participation, and rigorous fun.

In the first half of our 2023/24 Season, we celebrated “love, peace, and soul!” with *Hippest Trip – The Soul Train Musical*, and honored decades of tradition with the final year of our beloved *A Christmas Carol*. (We’ll be back next year with a new *Christmas Carol* to continue the tradition!) We explored the way tech intersects with relationships in the critically acclaimed *Big Data*, directed by our own Pam MacKinnon and featuring BD Wong. And through May 5, Kristina Wong will be at the Strand Theater with her autobiographical, capital-H-Hilarious, Pulitzer Prize-winning *Kristina Wong, Sweatshop Overlord*.

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 community. As part of this we begin by honoring the lands upon which we do our work. We are 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. A.C.T. donates to the Shuumi Land Tax to support the repatriation of these Indigenous lands. For more information on how you can support the Ohlone community, please visit act-sf.org/indigenous-community.

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The cast of *A Strange Loop* on Broadway, photo by Marc J. Franklin.

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FROM THE ARTISTIC + EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

WELCOME TO YOUR THEATER AND A *STRANGE LOOP*!

Thank you for coming out to Michael R. Jackson's masterpiece and the second musical of our 23/24 season.

I first saw *A Strange Loop* in Spring of 2019 at the off-Broadway theater and one of my artistic homes, Playwrights Horizons. It was the final performance. I was walked in to a sold-out room and perched myself in the gallery. Michael R. Jackson, who I had just met that day, sat directly behind me. By show's end I was starstruck. The company and the audience was on point. The roof came off the house. It changed me; the way theater can alter you—by its candor and brashness, its singable melodies and chords that reminded me at times of Joni Mitchell, Liz Phair, personally foundational artists for me, soaring gospel, and bubble gum pop. I was also struck by the show's Aeneid-like journey of the soul but as intimate experience that engaged the audience instead of just putting on display the hero's trek. My goodness.

In January 2022 as an early birthday present to myself, I took my sister to see the production—by now Michael had a Pulitzer—at Woolly Mammoth Theatre in D.C. I was excited to share it with my sister but nervous too; that hosting anxiety is real. Phew. My sister loved it too. "This could be a musical!?" She had no idea.

And now A.C.T. in partnership with Center Theatre Group in LA is sharing this outrageous real story with you all. Again, I hold some hosting nerves because it's scary to want others to respond to a piece of art the same way I cherish and hold it, and this is intentionally not a piece that takes the middle of the road. But I trust that A.C.T. can be a bold space that gives platform to artists to shake us up.

Let me hand it over to Michael R. Jackson from a 2019 interview:

"I think art is about making the intangible tangible and about creating a common language between disparate experiences. It is none of my business what lyrics people sing along with at home. I believe strongly that everyone has to take responsibility for their own choices including whether to clap along to "AIDS is God's Punishment" or not. That song was written specifically because I had gone to see the 2013 Tyler Perry film *Temptation: Confessions of a Marriage Counselor*. In the film two black women are essentially "cursed" with AIDS for exercising free sexuality. In the movie theater, there were audience members who nodded along and said, "Yup, that's what she gets." And I was struck by the dissonance of that and how that kind of thinking was completely consonant with the homophobia I had been raised with/under. I wanted to create an infectious song moment that gave listeners a punishment and a reward (not necessarily in that order). I think our favorite musicals give us a framework for thinking about real life, which is why I love the form so much."

Okay, here we go. Lean in.

Enjoy. Tell your friends.



Pam MacKinnon
Artistic Director

In the incredible Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning show you're about to watch, you'll meet Usher: a Black, queer writer writing a musical about a Black, queer writer writing a musical about a Black, queer writer. I think this show resonates with so many because of its themes of struggle, success and failure coming back-to-back, and of pushing through to chase your dreams. Usher represents what the daily grind looks like to so many, and he reminds us of the reasons we keep striving. I hope you, too, see something onstage that reminds you of what is important to *you*.

We've recently announced our exciting 2024/25 Season. We hope you will join us as a subscriber as it is the best way to be plugged in to all things A.C.T. and to support your theater! We depend upon the loyalty of subscribers and returning audience members to bring you excellent theater to inspire and provoke joy, laughter, conversation, reflection, and more. You can read more about all these upcoming shows on page 8, and learn all about the new season at act-sf.org. Please share with your friends, family, and colleagues as well!

Before the 24/25 Season begins, our Young Conservatory's summer production will be *Carrie: the Musical*, performed in August at the Strand Theater. This musical features a book by Lawrence D. Cohen (screenwriter of the classic film), music by Academy Award winner Michael Gore (*Fame*, *Terms of Endearment*), and lyrics by Academy Award winner Dean Pitchford (*Fame*, *Footloose*)—and an ending that will bring the house down. Learn more at act-sf.org/CSV-shows.

Thank you for choosing to join us today for *A Strange Loop*. We hope you'll check out more of what A.C.T. has to offer: classes and training for all ages through our conservatory program (act-sf.org/training), space rentals for all sizes and needs (act-sf.org/rentals), behind-the-scenes benefits for our generous donors (act-sf.org/support), and more. This is your theater!

Best,

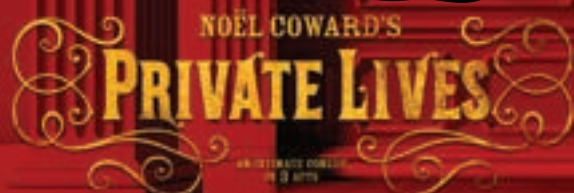


Jennifer Bielstein
Executive Director



PHOTO BY KEVIN BERNE

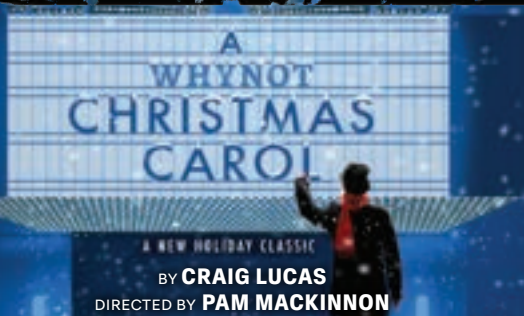
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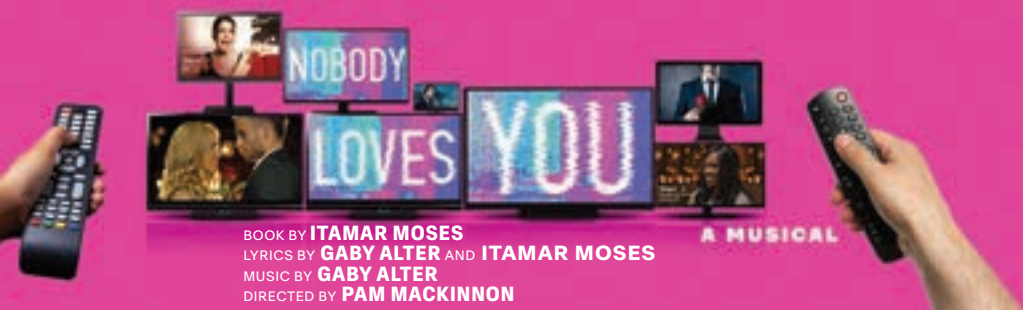
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ALVIS GREEN JR USHER ALTERNATE*
AVIONCE HOYLES THOUGHT 3
TARRA CONNER JONES THOUGHT 1
MALACHI MCCASKILL USHER
JOHN-ANDREW MORRISON THOUGHT 4
JAMARI JOHNSON WILLIAMS THOUGHT 6

*4/27 EVE, 5/1 MAT, 5/4 EVE, 5/8 MAT, 5/11 EVE

UNDERSTUDIES

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AARON TACY ASSOCIATE LIGHTING DESIGNER

**Dance Captain

*Original Broadway Production produced by Barbara Whitman
Playwrights Horizons, Inc. in association with Page 73 Productions
produced the World Premiere of "A Strange Loop" in New York City in 2019.
Subsequently produced by Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Washington, DC.*

A STRANGE LOOP is presented by special arrangement with Concord Theatricals. concordtheatricals.com

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

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Please note: Gilead has had no input into the content of this production.

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MARTIN BARRON **DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION**

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A.C.T.'s **Rising Leaders Council (RLC)** is a dynamic membership program that connects Bay Area professionals in their 20s and 30s with a growing community of young theater lovers, providing insider benefits and an exclusive and customized A.C.T. experience.

"The RLC has been a truly delightful experience! Getting behind-the-scenes access to how A.C.T. works via previews; meet and greets with trustees, staff, and creators; and community-building social gatherings has been insightful, exciting, and just plain fun."
—Alexandra Simmons, Educator

"Joining the RLC has been a wonderful opportunity to connect with a very welcoming community of theater makers and appreciators, not to mention a fascinating window into how a play comes to life at A.C.T. I would highly recommend it to anyone who wants more theater in their life!"
—Lee Brand, Attorney



TO JOIN AND UNLOCK YOUR OWN RLC EXPERIENCE, VISIT [ACT-SF.ORG/RLC](https://act-sf.org/rlc) OR CONTACT WILL GAINES AT WGAINES@ACT-SF.ORG.

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH DIRECTOR STEPHEN BRACKETT



Tell us about your journey with *A Strange Loop*. How did you begin this incredible ride?

I first met Michael when he was at NYU Graduate school in 2008. A musical of his was being directed by a mentor of mine who recognized similar sensibilities in our work. When I saw his show I was floored by his writing—the transparency in his voice was audacious and thrilling and dangerous and so intensely soulful. It reflected a world I felt that I knew and understood. Immediately I pledged my allegiance to him, ended up directing a couple of his concerts, and immersed myself in his world. He approached me with *A Strange Loop* in 2012; I had known about the project and was desperately waiting for the invitation. We had many years of development, much of it in a porn studio being inhabited by Musical Theater Factory. We were met with much enthusiasm, but a pervasive sense that the show would never be

produced—it was deemed too risky. Finally we met Barbara Whitman, our eventual producer in New York, and she opened doors for us we never imagined possible.

What's been the most surprising or revelatory moment you've had in rehearsal with this show over the years?

I remember the first time we had a book workshop for this piece. The moment that broke me was when we spent an entire afternoon talking about our individual relationships with our mothers, and how that was represented in Usher's relationship with his mom. There was such an overwhelming sense of care in the room, allowing for specific stories and insights to be shared. The common denominators were the tensions between real profound love and respect, and the more challenging expectations of the dreams they naturally have placed on us. It was a moment of such blinding clarity. It was a moment where we started to see how this show about this very specific character and his very specific perspective could hold some big universal truths that could resonate with an audience of people with disparate experiences.

You have a track record of working on new musicals. How does your process change when you're rehearsing with a new cast a show you've directed numerous other times in readings and productions?

There's something beautiful about bringing a new cast into an existing show. While the shape of the show exists, you get to know more about the psychology of the show through the brains and hearts you've assembled into the room. And a

performance changes when a person's lived experience is different. So the question becomes—how do we create these characters that we know, but filter them through the new people in the room? How does one's worldview shape and influence a portrait of a person? It's a thrilling process, and the conversations that happen invariably are surprising and moving. I work in the theater because I believe in collaboration. I love the chemistry of working with other people to create something whole.

Other than directing, what's one theater role you would want to take on?

I definitely don't have the skills for it, but I love working with designers in creating a world that articulates the play. So in another world, if I had those skills, I'd be a designer.

Why do you think San Francisco will love *A Strange Loop*?

Obviously San Francisco is a city steeped in gay history and culture, and our show is *REAL* gay. Apart from that surface observation, San Francisco is a city that really endured the brutal impact of the AIDS epidemic, and so much of this show expresses a sense of the gay anxiety of a generation growing up with the wake of the epidemic. I think that will resonate here. San Francisco is also a city full of glorious counterculture. I've been so moved by the people I've met here—there's a pervasive sense of creativity and curiosity that permeates the city. Honestly it's an ideal audience for this show.

PLAYWRIGHT'S PERSPECTIVE:

A STRANGE LOOP

BY MICHAEL R. JACKSON, PLAYWRIGHT

Photo by Marc J. Franklin.



My name is Michael Jackson. That means my entire life has been overshadowed by the notoriety and infamy of a now-dead pop star. When I'm meeting someone for the first time, my uniquely famous name strips me of an identity that is solely my own.

In recent years, I have been mistaken for or identified as playwright-director Robert O'Hara to my face more times than I can count. It's become a running gag where I am offering the correction "actually, I'm not Robert." And to be clear, many of the people mistaking me were Black so it's more complicated than a racist White person thinking "they all look the same." But in either case, it is in these moments that my seeming resemblance to another Black man strips me of an identity that is solely my own.

Over the last few years, I have been meditating on the tendency of theater critics to compare Black playwrights' plays to each other without making a substantive case for their comparisons. In most instances, these comparisons come in the form of the anointing of one Black writer's work as the gold standard while other Black writers find themselves cast as lesser or failed satellites orbiting around them depending on how successful or unsuccessful the critics decide their plays are. I raise this issue not to scold anyone but to grapple in good faith with the extent to which the stories, questions, and obsessions Black writers have might truly appear to be the same to this largely but not exclusively White gaze, stripping Black writers of identities that are solely our own. W.E.B. DuBois coined the term "double consciousness" to describe the uniquely African-American experience of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." But what is a

"self" anyway? Cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter coined the term "a strange loop" to theorize about the self as merely a collection of meaningless symbols mirroring back on their own essences in repetition until death. He further theorized that a human being is the organism with the greatest capacity to perceive itself perceiving itself perceiving itself ad infinitum.

"What is a 'self' anyway?"

A Strange Loop is not formally autobiographical but I did begin writing it as a monologue in my early 20s when I experienced myself as nothing more than a mass of undesirable, fat, Black gay molecules floating in space without purpose. I was functionally miserable, relentlessly self-critical and very lonely. It was like I was on the outside of my body looking in and on the inside of my body scratching to get out. Self-hatred is a strange loop too.

When I think back on these "dark café days," if I might borrow a phrase from songwriter Joni Mitchell, I imagine two killer lines from poems by Emily Dickinson and Nikki Giovanni in a kind of vaudeville act in my head that starts with Emily warmly introducing herself to Nikki with "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" And then Nikki clapping back at her with "I ain't shit. You must be lower than that to care." In my estimation, this negative feedback loop perfectly describes where we find Usher, the protagonist of *A Strange Loop* with his famous name that's also the name of the occupation he's working while he, like me, tries to pen a musical with a plot that requires us to ask ourselves questions like *"Who is Usher? And who am/what is 'I'? Whose gaze do I honor? Does it matter? Do I matter? Do Black 'I's' matter? Am I their negro? Am I **not** their negro? Or am I Michael Jackson? And if I am, do I finally get to claim an identity that is solely my own? Who is Usher? And*

*who am/what is 'I'? Whose gaze do I honor? Does it matter? Do I matter? Do Black "I's" matter? Am I their negro? Am I **not** their negro? Or am I Michael Jackson? And if I am, do I finally get to claim an identity that is solely my own? Who is Usher? And who am/what is 'I'? Whose gaze do I honor? Does it matter? Do I matter? Do Black "I's" matter? Am I their negro? Am I **not** their negro? Or am I Michael Jackson? And if I am, do I finally get to claim an identity that is solely my own?*

This essay first appeared in conjunction with the world premiere production of A Strange Loop at Playwrights Horizons in association with Page 73 in 2019.

RULES OF PLAY

WE ARE TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE **LIVENESS.**

All and any laughter is welcome. Laughter from many that can make a whole room shake. Laughter that is a beacon of any one person's connection to the story told. And laughter that betrays nerves as a story builds tension. Please laugh and let others around you laugh. It is why we have come together.

We encourage all response. You, the audience, are part of the storytelling equation. Feel free to express yourself and let those around you express themselves. We are building a community with each performance.

Theater is alive and precious in that aliveness. The stories are honed and rehearsed and told with—not just to—you, the audience. If you miss a phrase or two, please know that the show will take care of you. It'll come round again to catch you up and pull you forward. You can trust in the craft, so you can enjoy yourselves.

We ask that you turn off your mobile devices during the performance. This is out of respect for us all coming together to be part of a story told in this space and in living time.

Please share the fun. We ask that you save taking photos or video to before and after the performance and during intermission. We love seeing posts on social media: our programs held high among friends, floating before the set or curtain or lobby spaces. Tell folks about your experience. These shows have short runs and then are gone.

We encourage you to be present, mindful, and together in these spaces. Be kind to your neighbor and fellow theater lover. Help nurture and welcome new and young theater goers; for some this is their first time seeing a play. Give each other room, but also smile and say hello, as you pass on the way to your seats, or at intermission standing in a line, or as you walk out into your city.

WELCOME TO A.C.T. THIS IS YOUR THEATER.

Our intent is to be a truly inclusive theater, welcoming to all. Including these in each program was influenced by artist Dominique Morisseau's Rules of Engagement.



A *Strange Loop* Broadway Production Photo by Marc J Franklin.

COME TOGETHER: CREATING COMMUNITY

BY ZACH STAFFORD

In 2019, I was living in New York City, and one day my phone rang: It was a call from a dear friend and collaborator, songwriter Benj Pasek, who could not stop gushing over a show he had just seen. That show was the off-Broadway production of *A Strange Loop*.

Soon after this call, the show's writer, Michael R. Jackson, would win a Pulitzer Prize and go on to become a darling of the New York theater scene. And Benj, a friend of Michael's already, was making sure everyone in town—even outside the theater world—knew how amazing this show was.

With every call Benj made, he was not just able to talk a lot of us into seeing the show, he was able to connect us to producer Barbara Whitman, who was then able to weave an incredible tapestry of people to join her in bringing this show to life on Broadway. People including luminaries like Jennifer Hudson, RuPaul, Billy Porter, and many others, who all stepped up as co-producers during a global pandemic to make sure the world got to see how incredible *A Strange Loop* is on Broadway.

All us involved in producing *A Strange Loop* are grateful to the incredible communities surrounding American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.) in San Francisco and Center Theatre Group (CTG) in Los Angeles—communities that came together and worked tirelessly to find a path for this show to make its West Coast premiere. Through their partnership, this show was able to dream a California Dream, with the original creative team coming in to help shape it with a brand-new cast, plus the return of our original Tony Award nominee, John-Andrew Morrison, as “Thought 4.”

Amidst these heroic efforts, our friends at Gilead—who had always been so supportive of the show since its run on Broadway—raised their hands to do something many companies would never do: produce a piece of theater. As *A Strange Loop* makes its California debut, A.C.T. and CTG are investing in deep community engagement work, to ensure that communities that have historically lacked access to theater are not only welcomed at these performances, but celebrated while they are here. These organizations are working closely with community partners to make sure they have tickets to join our ever-growing *Strange* family—all in the hopes that people are as changed by this piece as many of us were back in New York a few years ago.

As we share this show tonight, we are building bridges, and this couldn't happen at a better time. We are all currently living in a time and place where LGBTQ+ folks, people of color, and those that live on the intersections of these two identities face so many hurdles. Much of the hate these groups face begins because people don't truly know their stories. Telling those stories is what makes *A Strange Loop* so important today, and every day. It is through this act of you sitting here in this theater that we can all begin to peer through a window into someone else's life, someone else's story, and realize the world is big enough for all of us. Because, at the end of the day, the act of bringing people together from all walks of life to witness a story is still radical, and art can still touch each and every one of us if we let it. It is why all of us involved in theater-making keep getting up every single day and fighting to keep doing it over and over again—like our own beautiful and strange...loop.

Zach Stafford is a journalist, editor, and a Tony Award-winning producer. He is the co-host of the SiriusXM podcast *Vibe Check*, which *The New York Times* named one of the best podcasts of 2022. Prior, he was the first Black editor-in-chief of *The Advocate*, served as the chief content officer of Grindr, and was a journalist at *The Guardian*. Zach is also the author of two books titled *Boys* and *When Dogs Heal*. In 2019, he was included in the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 list and named as one of the 100 most influential Black people living today by *The Root*.

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PHOTOS BY MARK KITAOKA AND TRACY MARTIN

WHO'S WHO IN A STRANGE LOOP



JORDAN BARBOUR (Thought 5)

happily returns to A.C.T. after appearing in Peter Brooks's *The Suit* in 2014. A New

York-based actor, singer, and writer, Barbour recently appeared on Broadway in the closing cast of *Come From Away*, and originated the role of Tristan in *The Inheritance* (2020 Tony Winner, Best Play). Barbour has toured internationally with *The Suit*, *Come From Away*, and Young Jean Lee's *The Shipment*. Notable US venues include Theater for a New Audience, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Kennedy Center, Diversionary Theater, Denver Center, Seattle Rep, and Pasadena Playhouse, among others. Additionally, Barbour voices Black Panther in Marvel's *Mech Strike* animated comic series.



J. CAMERON BARNETT

(Thought 2) is best known for his recurring role as Castle on the series *POSE*. He's toured the world in the

musicals *Hair*, *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, and *The Buddy Holly Story*. His select off-Broadway and regional credits include *F*cking A* (Signature Theatre/ NYC), *The Wiz* and *The Winter's Tale* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Finian's Rainbow* (Goodspeed Opera House), and *The Producers* (Ogunquit Playhouse). Some of Cameron's film and television credits include *Allswell in New York* (Tribeca Film Festival Winner), *Line of Duty*, *The Twilight Zone*, and many others.

jcameronbarnett.com

IG @jcameronbarnett. (he/him)



ALVIS GREEN JR. (Usher Alternate)

makes their west coast debut at A.C.T.! Past credits include *Once on This Island*, (Blackfriars

Theatre), *The Prom* (JCC Centerstage), *Smokey Joe's Cafe* (Blackfriars Theatre), *Urinetown* (Gatesingers CO), and *Sister Act* (OFCCreations). When Green isn't on stage, they're writing their own original music which can be streamed on all streaming platforms.



AVIONCE HOYLES

(Thought 3) is a Rock Hill, SC native and a graduate of the American Musical and Dramatic

Academy of NY. Recently Hoyles has been traveling the globe in his self-written/performed love letter to the Queen Tina Turner in a show entitled *Dear Tina*. Other credits include *FBI Most Wanted*, *Orange is the New Black* (TV), *Titanique*, *Bat Out of Hell*, *Boys of Summer* (Off Broadway), *Memphis the Musical*, *Bring It On*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (National Tour). Thank you to my Kreativ Artist family and the A.C.T. team for this opportunity to create. Ephesians 3:20

@theeavioncehoyles @deartinashow



TARRA CONNER JONES

(Thought 1) is an NYC based singer/actor/writer originally from Jacksonville, FL.

She recently made her off-Broadway debut in Michael R. Jackson's *White Girl In Danger* (Second Stage Theater), where she received Drama Desk and Drama League Nominations, and an Audelco Award for her role as Nell Carter Gibbs. Past credits include: *The Music Man* (Broadway At Music Circus), *Hairspray* (Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines/Symphony of the Seas), *The Color Purple* (Maine State Music Theatre), *Little Shop of Horrors* (North Shore Music Theatre), *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe), *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Theatre By The Sea), *Shrek The Musical* (Alhambra Theater and Dining), *Chicago The Musical* (The Fulton), and *From Birmingham To Broadway*, a one act play with music about Nell Carter, written by Tarra (Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe). Tarra forever performs in memory of her mother, Chonita Conner, who cheers from heaven. Much appreciation to her agent, Dave Secor (Daniel Hoff Agency), and THEEEE Michael R. Jackson. @tarraconnerjones



MALACHI MCCASKILL
(Usher) is excited to be making his A.C.T. debut in the Tony Award-winning, hit Broadway musical

A Strange Loop! This North Carolina native hails from Jackson Springs, NC. He took his dreams of being on Broadway to Greensboro, NC, where he is a current junior obtaining his Bachelor's in Fine Arts degree in Musical Theatre at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Through his years in college, McCaskill has been working throughout North Carolina and in his school's program. Some credits include: *The SpongeBob Musical* (Ensemble, u/s Patrick and Krabs), *Rock of Ages* (Lonny Barnett), *Dontrell*, *Who Kissed the Sea* (Dontrell Jones Jr.), and *Godspell* (John the Baptist/Judas) at UNC Greensboro; *The Color Purple* (Ensemble) at The Barn Dinner Theatre; and *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* (Swing) and *Elf The Musical* (Macys Store Manager) at The North Carolina Theatre!
IG @malachimccaskill (he/him)



JOHN-ANDREW MORRISON
(Thought 4) is a Tony Award nominee and a Lucille Lortel and Obie Award winner

for his work in *A Strange Loop* (Broadway and Off Broadway). He is an Outer Critics Circle Honoree for his work in the off-Broadway premiere of *Blues For An Alabama Sky*. Morrison is a cabaret artist headlining venues like 54 Below and The Green Room 42. He will be presenting his show *No... Maybe... Why Not* at Feinstein's at the Nikko on April 29 at 7:30pm. BA from Brandeis University and an MFA from UC San Diego. He is a member of The Actors Center. johnandrewmorrison.com. @jandymorri



JAMARI JOHNSON WILLIAMS
(Thought 6) A.C.T. debut! Jamari made his Broadway debut in the Tony Award-

winning *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations*. His touring credits include the original tour cast of the Tony-winning *Hadestown*, the *Ain't Too Proud* 1st National Tour, and the final cast of *Motown the Musical*. Select regional credits include *Swept Away* at Arena Stage; *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* at Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera; and *Smokey Joe's Cafe* at Riverside Theatre and Palace Theatre with the original Coasters. Williams hopes to heal others through art as he once was. @Jamaridarling



DAVE J. ABRAMS (U/S Thought 2/3) is exultant to be making a comeback to A.C.T. after his work in *Hippest Trip: The Soul*

Train Musical (u/s Tony Cornelius, Ensemble). Recent theater credits include: TheatreWorks's *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Chip), Center Rep's *In the Heights* (Benny), and Berkeley Playhouse's *Ragtime* (Coalhouse), which awarded him a TBA Award for the principal role. Abrams holds a BA in Theater and Dance from the University of California, Berkeley. May you all enjoy this big, Black, queer ass American Broadway show! IG @davejabrams (he/him)



ANGELA ALISE (U/S Thought 1) is making her A.C.T. debut. Other regional credits include *The Wolves* (Actors Theatre of

Louisville); *Nothing to Lose But Our Chains* and *Black Side of the Moon* (Second City @ Woolly Mammoth Theatre); *Almost Accurate Guide to America* (Second City @ The Kennedy Center); *Hairspray* (Drury Lane Theatre); *The MLK Project* (Writers Theatre); *The Killing Game* (A Red Orchid Theatre); *The Wolves* (Goodman Theatre); *The House That Will Not Stand* (Victory Gardens Theatre); and *Saturday Night/Sunday Morning* (2014 Steppenwolf Garage Rep). Alise was also previously the Artist Director of Prologue Theatre in Chicago for 5 seasons. (she/her)



CARLIS SHANE CLARK (U/S Thoughts 5/6) is so excited to join this talented company! A performer since

age 9, Clark obtained a BFA from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and has performed on stages in NYC, Edinburgh's International Fringe Festival, and Los Angeles where he was honored at the LA Drama Critics Circle Awards, Stage Raw, and Ovation Awards. Clark most recently performed with the Boston Lyric Opera and Long Beach Opera's *The Feast* and episodic series, *desert in*. Other recent television credits include *Dear White People* (Netflix), and *Jean-Claude Van Johnson* (Amazon Original). Film: *Clemency* (2019 Sundance Grand Jury Prize) and *Dutch*. Thank you to Telsey Casting, NOVA, BQ, & family.
@carlisshane (he/him)



ALBERT HODGE (U/S Thought 4) is thrilled to be making his A.C.T. debut with this production. He recently appeared

as Eddie/Dr. Scott in *The Rocky Horror Show* (Ray of Light Theatre/Oasis). Other recent credits include Mr. Bones in *The Scottsboro Boys* (42nd Street Moon), Pierre Bezukhov in the West Coast premiere of *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* (Shotgun Players), Narrator in *Passing Strange* (Shotgun), and Tom Collins in *Rent* (Landmark Musical Theatre). He is proud to have been a member of the final cast of Steve Silver's *Beach Blanket Babylon* after 20 years with the longest-running musical review in the world. (he/him)

MICHAEL R. JACKSON (Book, Music, and Lyrics) is one of *Time's* 100 most influential people of 2022. *A Strange Loop* (Playwrights Horizons 2019 world premiere in association with Page 73 Productions) won Tony Awards for Best Book and Best Musical, the Pulitzer Prize and New York Drama Critics Circle award. Awards and associations: Dramatist Guild Fellowship, Page 73's Writers Group, New Professional Theatre Festival Award, Jonathan Larson Grant, Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award, ASCAP Foundation Harold Adamson Award, Whiting Award, Helen Merrill Award, Outer Critics Circle Award, Drama Desk Award, Obie Award, Fred Ebb Award, Windham-Campbell Prize.

RAJA FEATHER KELLY (Choreographer) is a choreographer and director, and the Artistic Director of the feath3r theory (TF3T), a dance-theatre-media company. Kelly has created 18 evening-length premieres with the feath3r theory. The company's latest work, *The Absolute Future*, premieres in April 2024 at The NYU Skirball Center. His choreography can currently be seen in Michael R. Jackson and Anna K. Jacob's *Teeth* at Playwrights Horizons, and *Lempicka* written by Matt Gould and Carson Kreitzer on Broadway. He choreographed the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical *A Strange Loop*, and is also a choreographer for off-Broadway theater with frequent collaborators like Jackson, Blain-Cruz, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, and Sarah Benson. He has received numerous accolades, including a Princeton Arts Fellowship (2023–2025), three Princess Grace Awards, and a Lucille Lortel Award nomination for choreographing the Tony Award-winning musical *A Strange Loop*, to name a few.

STEPHEN BRACKETT (Director) has directed *A Strange Loop* on Broadway where he received a Tony Award nomination for his work, as well as off-Broadway, where he received the Drama Desk Award for best direction of a musical, London's Barbican Theater, and DC's Woolly Mammoth. Other credits include *Be More Chill* (Lyceum Theater, Signature Theater, Two River, London's Other Palace and Shaftsbury Theater), *The Lightning Thief* (Longacre Theater, Theatreworks USA, National Tour), *Buyer & Cellar* (Off-Broadway, London's Menier Chocolate Factory, National Tour), and *AD 16* (Olney Theater).

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

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ARNULFO MALDONADO

(Scenic Designer) is a New York City-based set and costume designer. He is a Tony Award nominee for Best Scenic Design of a Musical for *A Strange Loop*. Notable design credits include the recent 20th anniversary Broadway production of *Topdog/Underdog* by Suzan-Lori Parks (Golden Theatre), directed by Kenny Leon, and the Broadway premiere of Alice Childress's *Trouble In Mind* (American Airlines Theatre), directed by Charles Randolph-Wright. West End/UK: *A Strange Loop* (Barbican Theater), *In Dreams* (Leeds Playhouse). Off-Broadway: Atlantic, CSC, Lincoln Center, MCC, MTC, New Group, Playwrights Horizons, Public Theatre, Roundabout, Second Stage, Signature, Soho Rep. Regional: Alley Theatre, Berkeley Rep, CTG, Guthrie, Steppenwolf, Woolly Mammoth. International Tour: The Magnetic Fields, 50 Song Memoir. Arnulfo received an Obie Award for Sustained Excellence in Set Design, as well as a Special Citation Obie, as part of the Creative Team of *A Strange Loop*. Arnulfo is a recipient of a Princess Grace Faberge Theater Award, Lucille Lortel Award, and a multiple Henry Hewes Design nominee.

MONTANA LEVI BLANCO

(Costume Designer) is excited to make his A.C.T. debut. In the Bay Area, he has designed costumes for *An Octoroon*, *Angels in America*, *Fairview*, *Ripple*, *the Wave that Carried Me Home* (Berkeley Repertory Theatre), and *Measure for Measure* (California Shakespeare Theatre/Santa Cruz Shakespeare). Recent New York Credits include *The Skin of Our Teeth* (Lincoln Center Theater/Broadway); *White Girl in Danger* (Second Stage/Vineyard Theatre); *Champion*, and *El Niño* (Metropolitan Opera). He is a recipient of the Tony Award, Drama Desk Award, Henry Hewes Design Award, and the Obie Award. Blanco is a graduate of Oberlin College and Conservatory of Music, Brown University, and the Yale School of Drama. montanaleviblanco.com

JEN SCHRIEVER (Lighting Designer)

was lighting designer on *Hippest Trip – The Soul Train Musical* at A.C.T. Broadway credits include *Mother Play*, *A Strange Loop* (Tony nomination), *Death of a Salesman* (Tony nomination), *1776*, *Birthday Candles*, *Lackawanna Blues*, *What the Constitution Means to Me*, *Lifespan of a Fact*, *Eclipsed*, *Ghetto Klown*. Jen recently lit *A Transparent Musical* at the Mark Taper Forum in LA. Opera credits include *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (World Premiere, Seattle Opera), *Die Fledermaus*, *Pearl Fishers* (Metropolitan Opera); *Faust*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *La Traviata*, (Mariinsky, Russia). Jen has an Obie Award for Sustained Excellence and is an adjunct at Purchase College. Mom to Henry. jenschriever.com

DREW LEVY (Sound Designer)

is thrilled to be working at ACT for the first time. Broadway credits include *A Strange Loop* (Tony nom.), *Oklahoma!* (Tony nom., Drama Desk nom.), *Honeymoon in Vegas* (Drama Desk nom.), *Chaplin* (Drama Desk Award), *The Winslow Boy*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *Present Laughter*. Levy also took *A Strange Loop* to London, and was nominated for an Olivier for his work on *Oklahoma!*. Off-Broadway credits include Brynolf & Ljung's *Stalker*, *Oh Mary!*, *Judgment Day* (Park Avenue Armory), *Oklahoma!*, *Cleopatra*, *One Day the Musical*, *The Weir*, *Why Torture is Wrong...*, *Emergence-See!*, *Rainbow Kiss*, *Dutchman*. Levy has worked at numerous regional theaters around the country.

COOKIE JORDAN (Wigs, Hair, and Make-Up Designer)

Broadway: *A Strange Loop*, *Camelot*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Into the Woods*, *Trouble In Mind*, *Clydes*, *POTUS*, *Slave Play*, *Choir Boy*, *The Cher Show*, *Once on This Island*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *In Transit*, *Eclipsed*, *Side Show*, *After Midnight*, *Fela*, *A View From the Bridge*, *South Pacific*.

Off-Broadway: *Flex*, *Orpheus Descending*, *White Girl in Danger*, *Flex*, *Girls*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *Aint No Mo*, *Fairview*, *Toni Stone*, *If Pretty Hurts*, *The Secret Life of Bees*, *Boseman and Lena*, *Fabulation*, *Our Lady of 121st Street*, *In the Blood*, *Daddy*, *Hercules*. Television: Emmy nominated for makeup design for NBC's *The Wiz Live*. Recipient of 2019, 2020 Obie Award.

SEAN KANA (Music Director)

is grateful to be back at American Conservatory Theater. Kana is an award-winning music director known for his recent work on *Hippest Trip – The Soul Train Musical* as well being the associate music director for the show run and pre-Broadway tour of *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations* at Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Sean just finished a world premiere new musical at Brava Theatre, *Larry the Musical*, where he served as co-composer, orchestrator, and music director. Kana has been involved with BRT as music director on *Swept Away: A New Musical Tale*. Sean has worked extensively with TheatreWorks and CenterREP and has toured around the globe in varying capacities. seankana.com

CHELSEA PACE (Intimacy)

returns to A.C.T. following her work on *Big Data*. Pace's credits include the Broadway productions of *A Strange Loop*, *Leopoldstadt*, and *K-POP*, and a number of Off-Broadway productions. Select regional credits include La Jolla Playhouse, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Signature Theatre, Studio Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Folger Theatre, and Philadelphia Theatre Company. Her film and television work includes *Drive Away Dolls*, *HARLEM*, *Dr. Death*, *A League of Their Own*, *Ramy*, *Wu-Tang*, and *Elsbeth*. Pace founded Open Intimacy Creatives and is the author of *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy*. chelseapace.com @professorpace (she/her)

THE TELSEY COMPANY / DESTINY LILLY, CSA

(Casting) With offices in both New York and Los Angeles, The Telsey Office casts for theater, film, television, and commercials. The Telsey Office is dedicated to creating safe, equitable, and anti-racist spaces through collaboration, artistry, heart, accountability, and advocacy. thetelseyoffice.com

KATIE CRADDOCK (Casting)

is the literary manager and casting associate at A.C.T. Her favorite casting processes here so far include *The Headlands*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Big Data*, and workshops of commissions by Aleshea Harris, Eisa Davis, Craig Lucas, RyanNicole Austin & Adesha Adefela & Beau Lewis, Anne Washburn, and Kate Attwell. Previously she was the artistic associate at Berkeley Rep, where she supported season planning, casting, and dramaturgy, mentored artistic fellows, moderated postshow discussions, taught playwriting and dramaturgy to teens, served on the board/staff antiracism taskforce, and facilitated the making of new plays at The Ground Floor. (she/her)

NAILAH HARPER- MALVEAUX (Associate Director)

has directed for A.C.T.'s MFA Program, including *Sunset Baby* and *Belleville* for SkyFest. Other directing credits include the West Coast premiere of *Edit Annie* by Mary Glen Fredrick (Crowded Fire) and the world premiere of *Getting There* by Dipika Guha (NCTC). She has worked at Woolly Mammoth, Pasadena Playhouse, Williamstown Theater Festival, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, and Baltimore Center Stage. Harper-Malveaux is a member of the groundbreaking Shared Leadership Team at Crowded Fire and serves as their Leader of Artistic Curation and Producing. She received her B.A. in American Studies and Theatre Studies from Yale University. (she/her)

CANDACE TAYLOR (Associate Choreographer)

is a multi-passionate Dream Doula, whose work exists at the intersection of coaching, consulting, personal empowerment, and creative expression. She is NYC-based, but loves to travel the world empowering revolutionary leaders to use their unique gifts to cultivate meaningful life experiences. She has had the honor of working on *A Strange Loop* since 2019, helping to bring to life the Playwrights Horizon production, and has had the pleasure to reimagine the piece with every production since! (she/her)
[@candacethedreamdoula](https://twitter.com/candacethedreamdoula)

AARON TACY (Associate Lighting Designer) is a lighting designer who primarily works as an associate on a wide variety of creative projects. With Jen Schriever on Broadway: *A Strange Loop*, *1776*, *Birthday Candles*, *Lackawanna Blues*. Off-Broadway: *White Girl In Danger* (2ST/Vineyard). Regional/touring includes: *Hippest Trip – The Soul Train Musical* (A.C.T.), *A Transparent Musical* (CTG), and *Blue Man Group* (North American Tour). Activist for equitable practices in the arts, eliminating uncompensated labor, and a union-strong entertainment industry. Proud member of United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829, IATSE. aaronatacy.com

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

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EDMOND O'NEAL

(Production Stage Manager) is a New York City-based freelance stage manager and educator. Broadway credits include *Hadestown*. National Tour credits include *Ain't Too Proud: the Life and Times of the Temptations* and *An Officer and a Gentleman*. NYC workshop/reading credits include *The Wrong Man*, *The Outsiders*, and *Pal Joey*. Selected regional credits include Williamstown Theatre Festival, Lyric Repertory Company, Guthrie Theatre, and the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre. Edmond also works proudly in collaboration with Broadway and Beyond Access as well as Black Theatre United. Proud graduate of the Stage Management program at the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale and the University of Central Florida. (he/him)

CAMELLA COOPILTON

(Assistant Stage Manager) holds a BA in Theatre from UC Santa Cruz and a MA in Education from Antioch University, Seattle. Her credits include Production Stage Manager for *Both/And* by Carolyn

Ratteray at The Wallis Annenberg/Boston Court and *SHE* by Marlow Wyatt at Antaeus Theatre Company. Coopilton was the Stage Manager of *Blues for an Alabama Sky* by Pearl Cleage and *King James* by Rajiv Joseph at Center Theatre Group. Her assistant stage manager credits include *Two Trains Running* by August Wilson at The Matrix. She co-founded Black Stage Everything and has served as Co-Artistic Director of Ammunition Theatre Company.

JULIA FORMANEK

(Assistant Stage Manager) is excited to return to A.C.T. after last working on *Hippest Trip - The Soul Train Musical*. Other regional credits include: *Let The Right One In*, *Cambodian Rock Band*, *Goddess*, *Culture Clash* (Berkeley Repertory Theatre), *Sleeping Beauty: Panto* in the Presidio (Presidio Theatre), *Romeo y Juliet*, *House of Joy*, and *Everybody* (California Shakespeare Theater).

DICK DALEY (Stage Management Substitute)

is currently the County of Marin Vaccine & Logistics Coordinator managing COVID-19 Vaccination sites and clinics. He's been a sub-SM on *Poor Yella Rednecks* and *The Wizard of Oz* and has stage managed many shows and events at A.C.T., including *The Great Leap*, *Top Girls*, *Satchmo at the Waldorf*, *Between Riverside and Crazy*, *A Little Night Music*, *Indian Ink*, *The Orphan of Zhao*, *1776*, *Gem of the Ocean*, *Happy End*, *Travesties*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *Waiting for Godot*, *A Christmas Carol*, and the world premiere of *After the War*. Other positions at A.C.T. have been Associate Production Manager and Conservatory Producer. (he/him)

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

Hannah Bailey, Stage Management
Production Assistant
Lucy Briggs, Deck Crew
Randy Cohen, Keyboard Programmer
Henry Cotter, Electrics
Key/Spot Operator
Andrew Custer, Spot Operator
Azalea Fairley, Associate
Costume Designer
Ben Fichthorn, Moving
Light Programmer
Harley Haberman, Associate Wigs,
Hair, and Make-up Designer
William Thomas Hodgson,
Assistant Choreographer
Brian Hsieh, Sound Associate
Jeremey Lane, Production
Electrician
Christian Lee, A1
Beck Lindner, Rehearsal Substitute
Production Assistant
Wyatt Martinez, Deck Crew
Julianne Merrill, Pat Master
Productions, Playback Engineer
Russ Milligan, Technical Director
David Möschler, Associate
Music Director
Dotty Petersen, Wig, Hair,
and Make-up Consultant
Mike Pettry, Music Consultant
Mika Rubinfeld, On Book
Production Assistant
Hannah Solomon, Assistant
Lighting Designer
Russ Souza, Mechanic
Omar Stewart, Production
Department Production Assistant
Corey Umlauf, Associate
Scenic Designer
Dr. Cathia Walters, Psychologist
(Walters Wellness Group)

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The cast of *Urinetown*, photo by Jay Yamada



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IN CONVERSATION: TWO USHERS AND A THOUGHT

BY JOY MEADS

A.C.T.'s Director of New Works and Dramaturgy, Joy Meads, sat down with Malachi McCaskill ("Usher"), Alvis Green, Jr. ("Usher Alternate"), and John-Andrew Morrison ("Thought 4") to discuss *A Strange Loop*.



Joy Meads: Malachi and Alvis, this is the beginning of your journeys with *A Strange Loop*, but JAM, you've been involved with the piece for quite some time. Tell us about your history with the play.

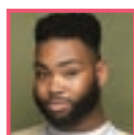


John-Andrew Morrison: I have been involved with the song "Periodically" for many, many years. The first time I sang "Periodically" was for Michael [R. Jackson, playwright]; I believe it was in 2008. He was doing a show called the *Dirty Laundry Cabaret* at Ars Nova, and he asked me to read some voicemails from his mom as interstitials between the songs. A couple weeks before, he said, "And I have this song, would you sing it?" When I heard it for the first time, I thought, "This is an entire world in a song." He had played one of his mom's messages for me, and what I heard in it was her deep love for her son. So even though "Periodically" is complicated, I knew it was really a love song from a mother to a son.

We did cabarets—Joe's Pub, Ars Nova—all over New York City. Later on, he said, "Hey, I'm putting together this show called *A Strange Loop*." We did it first at Playwrights Realm, and it was cast very differently: there were two white women and a white man in the show. Later, when Michael

brought it to Musical Theater Factory, [director] Stephen [Brackett] asked him, "Why do you have John-Andrew sing this song?" Michael said, "I think I just like how he sings the song." And Stephen said, "Well, what if the stage was peopled with all Black gay bodies?" Once Stephen said that, it cracked open the show: Michael realized, "Oh, they can be anything. They can morph; they can become all these things." The first iteration of that version of *A Strange Loop* was in a gay porn studio above the Drama Book Shop.

JM: Malachi and Alvis, you're joining the show at a time when it's come a long way from the gay porn studio over the Drama Book Shop. It's won the Pulitzer, 11 Tony Awards, it's up for an Olivier. What does it feel like entering a show with that kind of prestige?



Malachi McCaskill: It feels surreal. I was in love with the show as soon as I heard it my sophomore year of college. When I

listened to the Broadway recording, I thought, "Wow, I am Usher." This role is life changing. I am getting to portray my life—the deep, dark part of me that I don't really share with anybody. I'm getting to convey that honestly on a stage.



Alvis Green, Jr.: The pressure is definitely on. The only words I can use to describe it are "it's an honor." Growing up I would've loved to see something like this on Broadway. First, to know that there was a role specifically made for

someone like me, and second, because the story itself would've had as much an impact on me then as it does now.

JM: Usher is such a personal part. You're playing the inner workings of consciousness. It's profoundly intimate aspects of self that we might not even share with family or close friends. What is it like to embody Usher and how do you bring yourself into the role?

MM: Usher has this strange loop of self-hatred and his perception of the world. The work I am doing is to bring Malachi's perception: to figure out my strange loop in the world and then to apply it to Usher's.

AGJ: It's very enlightening and healing to be playing Usher. Usher goes through some similar occurrences that I went through when I was in my early 20s...it makes me want to give a younger version of Alvis a huge hug and I often want to give Usher a huge hug after the show as well. It's also reteaching me to love myself more and to be kinder to myself.

JM: Different aspects of Usher's consciousness are embodied by actors playing his Thoughts. Which of the Thoughts in the play feels most familiar to you?

MM: It changes day by day. There was a point in my life where I didn't recognize Thought 1 at all. Thought 1 always speaks last, but she's the one that encourages him and speaks life into him. Recently, I've been reconnecting with my Thought 1, and it's been a beautiful experience to have her presence when she's been gone for so long. But I have a deep connection with all of these

Thoughts. My Daily Self-Loathing gets me down all the time: I have to tell myself, “Get out of your head, Malachi.” Especially with a show on this level. I am only a junior in college; I have to tell myself, “Malachi, you are worth it. If they didn’t like you, you wouldn’t be here.”

AGJ: For me, Thought 2 feels the most familiar. Thought 2’s main persona is Usher’s inner self-loathing, and while I’ve learned to keep mine at a very hushed tone, it’s the most familiar. I am my own worst critic and it would get to the point where I tell myself things like, “You can’t do that, that’s not for you, you’re silly to think you’re made for that or deserve that.”

JAM: As an actor, financial insecurity is very real. And the Black Excellence crowd is there too. You think, “Not only am I trying to do this thing for myself, but I want to show up and represent my race and make them proud. Am I doing that?” All of the Thoughts rear their ugly heads at some point in time. The fabulous thing is that Michael has written the play with so much humor that when they show up in my head, I can laugh a little bit about the ridiculousness—I can say to them, “Okay. Thanks for sharing.”

JM: *A Strange Loop* is perhaps the best dramatization of the mechanics of consciousness that I’ve ever seen on a stage. When I was a young woman, I read *I Am a Strange Loop*, the Douglas Hofstadter book that’s referenced in the play, and the central thesis blew my mind: that the concept of a unified self is a self-protective illusion. Actually, our consciousness is made up of all these different components firing away, often at cross-purposes. Has being in this play affected your feelings about the nature of consciousness at all?

JAM: It has been very healing to be part of this show. I’ve gotten to process some things I don’t know that

I would’ve ever talked about with other people. These feelings I thought I would just take to my grave with me.

This piece does what great theater does best, which is make people feel less lonely in the world. People sit in the audience and think, “Oh my God, I thought I was the only one who had feelings like this.” It cracks consciousness open. There is healing in the community of gathering in a theater and being able to laugh at it and also be shocked by it and have catharsis with it. That is a wonderful thing.

JM: Speaking of things you don’t usually talk about with other people: this play requires true honesty from the artists making it, which depends upon having a culture of safety and trust among the ensemble. How was that culture created, and how is it maintained?

AGJ: I think being in a cast of all POC actors and the materials we’re working with, there was already an understanding that we were gonna need to rely on each other and trust each other from the first day.

MM: This is the first process I’ve been a part of where a serious foundation was laid, from the very beginning, of communication about how you feel. When I was cast, Stephen called me and said, “Hey, this show is very dense and it’s very dark, so if you ever need anything, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me.” And our intimacy coordinator, Chelsea Pace, has been very helpful. We even have a system in our show...when things get a little too dark, we call our girl Samantha. Things get a little too heavy for us, we say “Samantha,” and we all understand that to mean, “Hey, I need a minute; this is a lot for me right now.” If things get a little too dark, we can give each other a little nudge, a little back rub. It’s a very supportive atmosphere.

JM: JAM, I want to return to the subject of Usher’s mom and the love that grounds her. One of the aspects of this play I most admire is the way it depicts the depth and weight of her love, without minimizing the pain that her actions sometimes cause. What was it like finding that nuance as you were building the character of the mother?

JAM: The base of the character is love. She loves her kid; she loves him enough to hurt his feelings. She wants to save his life and his soul. My own mom would say to me, “If I didn’t care about you, I wouldn’t fuss on you; because I fuss on you, it means I am invested in you.”

JM: Michael R. Jackson describes himself as fundamentally a satirist. And, while satire has long played an important role in culture, we are in a bit of a fraught time for satire. Can you talk about the function of the play’s humor? How does it change the way that the audience listens to the story?

AGJ: It’s designed to sort of take away from the harshness of the material while still delivering a powerful message behind the work.

JAM: It allows for outrageousness. There’s a lot of stuff in this show that is just rude. But it’s also sly, because we’re constantly setting the audience up and pulling the rug out from under them. And as we’re doing it, we’re digging them a hole, so as we pull the rug out, they’re going deeper and deeper. I think that’s the wonderful, gut-punch surprise of the show—Michael is so funny, and the humor is so over-the-top, that the audience doesn’t realize what’s coming until they’re in it. I enjoy playing in the humor because every time they laugh, I’m think, “Oh, you poor things.”

MM: You have no idea what’s coming.

JAM: You have no idea.

MEET OUR USHERS!

BY MEG MURRAY

Welcome to your theater! Audience Services is so very excited to welcome *A Strange Loop* to the Toni Rembe Theater. As you might imagine, the subject matter is especially meaningful to many of us. In *A Strange Loop*, we get to know Usher, who's working front of house at *The Lion King* on Broadway. On any given day at the Toni Rembe Theater there are upwards of twenty front of house staff with their own stories, memorable experiences, and anecdotes about what happens when a thousand people sit down together for a performance. We asked some of the crew about their connection to theater, their favorite theatrical experiences, and what it's like to usher at A.C.T.



JACK

What is your connection to the arts?

I'm an actor and theater professional.

What do you love about being at A.C.T.?

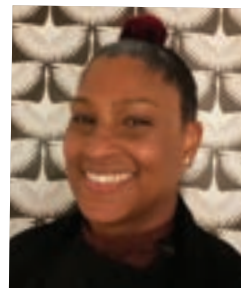
A.C.T. is a temple to theater and it's a great privilege to be working in the space.

What's a fun fact about you?

I worked in a casting office for Broadway for a few years in NYC.

What has been your favorite or most memorable show?

The Goat, or who is Sylvia?—it was a production that really inspired me and blew my mind.



KESCHA

What is your connection to the arts?

My grandmother introduced me to theater at a very young age; as a teacher, she took me to a "SMAT" dress rehearsal for the original *Dream Girls* play!

What do you love about being at A.C.T.?

The intentional creation of an inclusive and welcoming environment, with productions that are meaningful, inclusive, and relatable to the present.

What's a fun fact about you?

Despite being introverted and shy, I've always wanted to try acting. When I was 5, my grandmother wrote a play for me titled *The Little Marigold*.

What has been your favorite or most memorable show?

Hard to say, but as of recent, *Hippest Trip*! Not just because it was an all around amazing production, but more so because of the nostalgia, connection, and reminiscence it brought for everyone.



BRIA

What is your connection to the arts?

I've been a performer since I was a kid, from being in performance art school to going to college for acting.

What do you love about being at A.C.T.?

The sense of community that we have with each other from one department to another.

What's a fun fact about you?

I went to a two year miming program.

What has been your favorite or most memorable show?

Hippest Trip. Working on the wig, hair, and makeup designs was a life changing experience—both personally and career-wise too.



VAL

What is your connection to the arts?

I work in A.C.T.'s audience services department as an usher.

What do you love about being at A.C.T.?

It's tight-knit and very friendly.

What's a fun fact about you?

Ushering keeps a smile on my face!

What has been your favorite or most memorable show?

A Night with Janis Joplin. I loved the music, singing, and dancing.



CRAWFORD

What is your connection to the arts?
I have been an independent filmmaker and stage actor for 8 years.

What do you love about being at A.C.T.?

The people, both my coworkers and our patrons, make this job worthwhile and meaningful to me.

What's a fun fact about you?

I once performed as both an Elvis impersonator and a drag queen in the show *The Legend of Georgia McBride*.

What has been your favorite or most memorable show?

The Tempest at The Globe Theater in London. Going to The Globe had always been a bucket list item of mine and to see such a wonderfully directed show with such brilliant performances in that setting brought me to tears. Inspired me and blew my mind.



SERENA

What is your connection to the arts?
I'm a part of the audience services team.

What do you love about being at A.C.T.?

The feeling of family and inclusion.

What's a fun fact about you?

I had a very tiny tiny tiny part in the movie *Dirty Harry*.

What has been your favorite or most memorable show?

A Night with Janis Joplin. It was electrifying and joyful



GERRY

What is your connection to the arts?
Began as a theater major and acted in community theater productions throughout my life.

What do you love about being at A.C.T.?

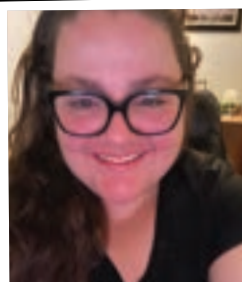
The audience goes home with sometimes funny, sometimes just entertaining, and always thought provoking material.

What's a fun fact about you?

I was playing one of the Pidgeon sisters in a college production of *The Odd Couple* and my grandfather yelled out "THAT'S Gerry????!!!!!" The fourth wall almost came tumbling down!

What has been your favorite or most memorable show?

Fat Ham and *Hippest Trip*. The first for its cleverness and the second for its absolute pure entertainment.



KAT

What is your connection to the arts?

I have been involved in the arts my whole life. I started doing dance when I was 5 and was in theater in high school and college. I was involved both onstage and backstage as a part

of the tech crew. It was always a part of my life, something I am very grateful for.

What do you love about being at A.C.T.?

I love that there is always a new experience. The lights go down and you are invited to experience firsthand another person's story. It is the shared experience that keeps people coming back. I love having time to reflect on the story and talking with others about their individual experience with the show.

What's a fun fact about you?

For one show in high school I was a follow-spot operator and I had to stay on the catwalks that were 50 feet high every show for the whole run.

What has been your favorite or most memorable show?

I loved *Fefu* and *Her Friends* because it was an opportunity to give the audience an experience that was completely different. My confidence as an usher also grew so much during this show because of all the logistical aspects of moving the groups around from one place to another.



LINDSEY

What is your connection to the arts?

My mom enrolled my sister and me in local theater when we were very young, and I fell in love with it.

What do you love about being at A.C.T.?

I love how inclusive the environment is at A.C.T.—it's very welcoming

What's a fun fact about you?

The first Broadway show I ever saw was *The Lion King*!

What has been your favorite or most memorable show?

The first show I did at A.C.T. was *Passengers*—I loved it! Everyone was so incredibly talented and it was such a spectacle to watch.

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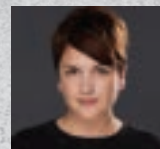
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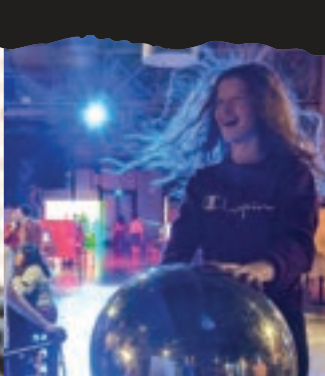
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Jerry is the former president of Parnassus Investments. Now retired, he serves on the boards of San Francisco Opera and San Francisco Symphony, as well as on the Emeritus Board of A.C.T. Thao serves on the board of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. 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.

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Priscilla is a vice chair of A.C.T.'s Board of Trustees. She is President 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.

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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 RICCITIELLO ♦

Robina is the Board Secretary of A.C.T.'s Board of Trustees and 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.

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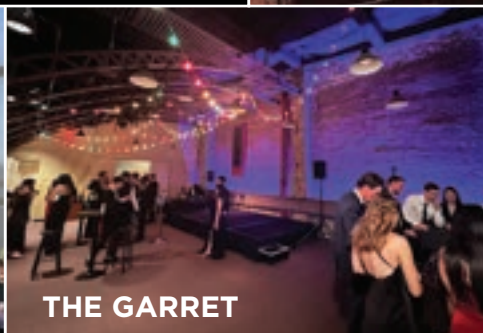
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PAM MACKINNON

(A.C.T. Artistic Director) is in her sixth season as A.C.T.'s fourth artistic director. She is a Tony, Drama Desk, and Obie Award-winning director, having directed upwards of 80 productions around the country, off Broadway, and on Broadway. Her

Broadway credits include *Amélie*, *A New Musical* (featuring Phillipa Soo), 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?* (Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Direction of

a Play), and Bruce Norris's *Clybourne Park* (Tony Award nomination and Obie Award for Best Direction of a Play). Her most recent credits include world premieres of Kate Attwell's *Big Data* (A.C.T.), Bruce Norris's *Downstate* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company, London's National Theatre, Playwrights Horizons), Lydia R. Diamond's *Toni Stone* (Roundabout Theatre Company, A.C.T., and Arena Stage), Kate Attwell's *Testmatch* (A.C.T.), Edward Albee's *Seascape* (A.C.T.), Christopher Chen's *Communion and The Headlands* (A.C.T.), and Maria Irene Fornés's *Fefu and Her Friends* (A.C.T.). She has been recognized as among the 25 Most Influential San Franciscans of 2020 by *San Francisco Magazine*, along with Jennifer Bielstein. Pam is the most recent past president of SDC, the national union representing stage directors and choreographers. (she/her)



JENNIFER BIELSTEIN

(Executive Director) joined A.C.T. in 2018. She serves on the board of TCG (Theatre Communications Group), is a member of the International Women's Forum, the Advance SF Advisory Panel, and the leadership team of the SF Arts Alliance, was part of Mayor

Breed's Economic Recovery Task Force, and is the immediate past-president of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT)—an organization that represents 80 theaters nationwide—having previously served as LORT's vice president; chair of its Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee; secretary; and on multiple union negotiating teams. She has been recognized as among the 25 Most Influential San Franciscans of 2020 by *San Francisco Magazine*, along with Pam MacKinnon, and as one of the Most Influential Women in Bay Area Business by the *San Francisco Business Times* in 2021. Before relocating to the

Bay Area, Bielstein was the managing director of the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, managing director of Actors Theatre of Louisville, and executive director of Writers Theatre in Chicago. She has also worked for Steppenwolf Theatre Company, About Face Theatre, Northlight Theatre, and the Lincoln Park Zoo, as well as served on multiple arts and civic boards. She has received the Center for Nonprofit Excellence's Pyramid Award of Excellence in Leadership, has been recognized as one of Louisville's *Business First's* 40 Under 40, by *Twin Cities Business* as a Person to Know, and by *Minnesota Business* magazine as a Real Power 50 member. Bielstein is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, attended Stanford's Graduate School of Business Executive Program for Nonprofit Leaders in the Arts, and has an MBA from Bellarmine University, where she received the MBA Faculty Merit Award, was inducted into the honor society Beta Gamma Sigma, and in 2021 was recognized as a Distinguished Alumna. (she/her)

ABOUT THE THEATER

MAILING ADDRESS

415 Geary St
San Francisco, CA 94102

ONLINE: act-sf.org

BOX OFFICE INFORMATION

A.C.T. BOX OFFICE

Address: 405 Geary Street and
1127 Market Street

Tel: 415.749.2228

Visit our website for hours of operation

SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION DISCOUNTS

Full-time students, educators, and administrators save up to 50% off season subscriptions with valid ID. Visit act-sf.org/educate for details.

GROUP DISCOUNTS

Groups of 10 or more save 20%! For more information contact groups@act-sf.org or 415.749.2228.

AT THE THEATER

The lobby opens one hour before curtain. The theater opens 30 minutes before curtain.

REFRESHMENTS

Join us in Fred's Columbia Room & Nancy's Bar on the lower level, or the Sky Bar on the 3rd floor, to enjoy a full, relaxed bar and treats experience. You'll find delicious ready-to drink cocktails, soft drinks, and snacks at one of our Quick Bars on the 2nd floor, Mezzanine. You can preorder for intermission pick up at act.salesvu.com or by scanning the code below:



PHOTOGRAPHY & RECORDING

Audience members may take photos in the theater before and after the performance and during intermission. If you post photos on social media or elsewhere, please include the designer names listed on the lobby board. Please note: Photos are strictly prohibited during the performance. Video recording is not permitted in the theater at any time.

MOBILE DEVICES

If you carry a mobile device, including a phone, tablet, or watch with alarm, please make sure to completely turn them off while in the auditorium. Vibrating devices still produce audible sounds in a quiet auditorium. Text messaging during the performance is disruptive and not permitted.

CHECK TO CHARGE

Mobile devices can be charged in coat check while you watch the show. You are welcome to check your phone into a charger at our attended coat check on the lower level. We're happy to offer this service without a fee.

SENSORY SUPPORTS

Fidgets, ear protection and eye protection are available free of charge in coat check.

SEATING SUPPORTS

If, after you have been already seated, you find you need more support, please speak to an usher about using one of our supplemental seat cushions or booster seats.

PERFUMES

The chemicals found in perfumes, colognes, and scented aftershave lotions, even in small amounts, can cause severe physical reactions in some individuals. As a courtesy to fellow patrons, please avoid the use of these products when you attend the theater.

LATECOMERS

A.C.T. performances begin on time, so it is important to arrive with enough time to comfortably get settled and enjoy the show. Latecomers will be held in the lobbies until an appropriate late seating opportunity is called. Latecomers with seats in the first five rows will also be reseated to the best available seats as late arrivals in those rows are disruptive to the entire theater. Late coming parties may or may not be seated together based on availability of new seating where moving seats is required.

LISTENING SYSTEMS

Headsets designed to provide clear, amplified sound anywhere in the auditorium are available free of charge in the lobby before performances. Please turn off your hearing aid when using an A.C.T. headset, as it will react to the sound system and make a disruptive noise.

AFFILIATIONS

A.C.T. is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the nonprofit professional theater. A.C.T. is a member of Theatre Bay Area, the Union Square Association, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, and the San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau.



A.C.T. 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.



The Director is a member of the STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS SOCIETY, a national theatrical labor union.



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



The scenic shop, prop shop, and stage crew are represented by Local 16 of the IATSE.



A.C.T. is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.



A.C.T. is supported in part by a grant from Grants for the Arts.

RESTROOMS

Gender diversity is welcome at A.C.T. We invite audiences to use the restroom that best fits your gender identity or expression.



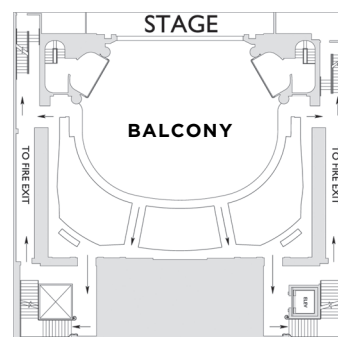
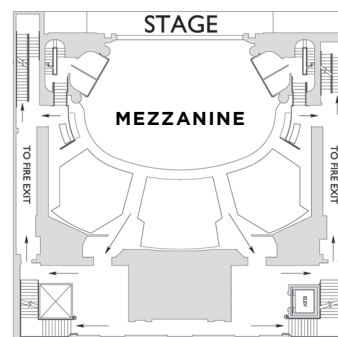
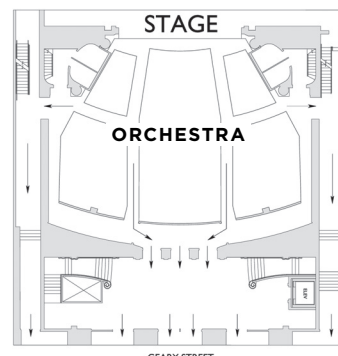
Wheelchair-accessible restrooms are located in Fred's Columbia Room on the lower lobby level, and the Garret on the uppermost lobby level.

An **Automatic External Defibrillator (AED)** is available in the house management closet in the street level lobby.

LOST AND FOUND

If you've misplaced an item while you're still at the theater, please look for it at the merchandise stand in the lobby. Any items found by ushers will be taken there. If you've left the theater, please call 415.439.2471 and we'll be happy to check our lost and found for you. Please be prepared with the date you attended the performance and your seat location.

THEATER EXITS



Four-time Tony Award nominee **Raúl Esparza** stars in a dazzling world-premiere musical helmed by Tony Award winner **Michael Mayer** (*Spring Awakening*, *American Idiot*, *Swept Away*), written by two-time Emmy winner **Danny Strong** (*Dopesick*, *Empire*, *The Butler*).

GALILEO

A ROCK MUSICAL

When maverick scientist Galileo Galilei makes celestial observations that challenge humanity's understanding of its place in the universe, he's summoned to Rome to defend his discoveries before the most powerful religious institution in the world, which is facing a rebellion of its own. With an original rock score and lyrics by **Michael Weiner** (*First Date*) and **Zoe Sarnak** (Jonathan Larson Award winner), *Galileo* is an explosive collision of science and faith, truth and power.

Galileo will likely join the constellation of world premieres that traveled from Berkeley Rep to Broadway — be among the first to see it!

BOOK BY **DANNY STRONG** | MUSIC AND LYRICS BY **MICHAEL WEINER & ZOE SARNAK**
DIRECTED BY **MICHAEL MAYER** | CHOREOGRAPHED BY **DAVID NEUMANN**
BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH JORDAN ROTH AND KEY TO THE CITY PRODUCTIONS

MAY 5–JUN 16, 2024



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