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# People Of the book

BY YUSSEF EL GUINDI

DIRECTED BY JOHN LANGS

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# encore 50 years

September 2019 | Volume 16, No. 1


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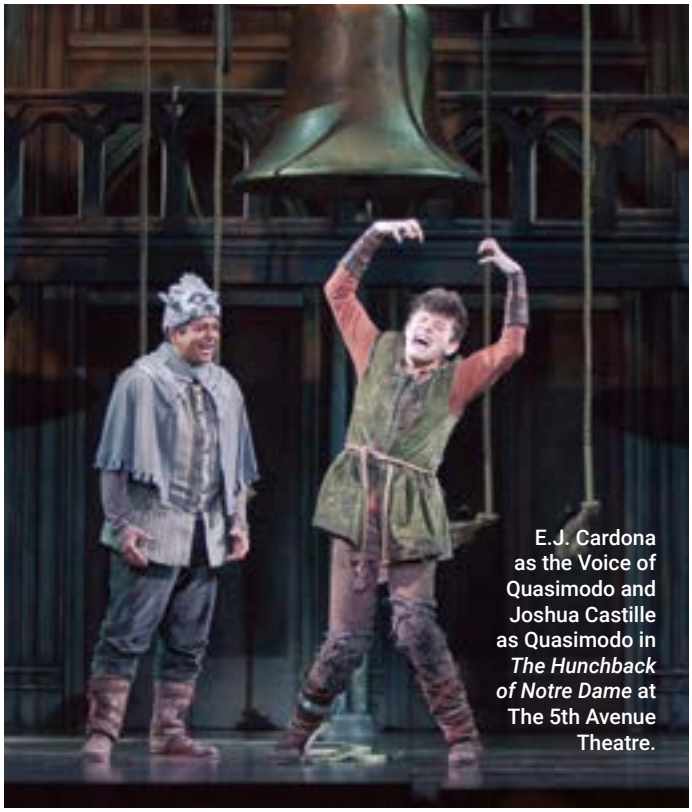
# The State of Deaf Theatre in Seattle

by DANIELLE MOHLMAN

According to the 2010 United States Census, an estimated 2.4% of the Washington population identifies as Deaf. And while estimations surrounding the size of Seattle's own population vary widely, it's clear that the Deaf community here is vibrant and engaged. So how are the region's theatres providing accessible performing arts experiences for the community?



E.J. Cardona as the Voice of Quasimodo and Joshua Castille as Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* at The 5th Avenue Theatre.

TRACY MARTIN

According to Deaf Spotlight's accessibility index, The Paramount Theatre (as part of Seattle Theatre Group and Broadway at The Paramount), The 5th Avenue Theatre and ACT Theatre all offer long-term commitments to providing captioning, American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation and other accessibility services to their Deaf and hard of hearing audiences. And while these three theatres seem to be leading the way in Deaf accessibility, Seattle Repertory Theatre and Sound Theatre Company also provide captioning and ASL interpretation during select performances.

Over the last couple of years, both The 5th Avenue Theatre and ACT Theatre have embraced the talents of actor Joshua M. Castille. In 2017, Castille made his Seattle debut playing Billy in ACT's production of *Tribes* by Nina Raine. He returned in 2018 to play Quasimodo in 5th Avenue's production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, a role traditionally played by a hearing actor. His performance in the titular role of this new Disney musical was augmented by actor E.J. Cardona, who sang on Castille's behalf. Earlier this year, Castille returned to Seattle to portray yet another titular role: Romeo in ACT's production of *Romeo and Juliet.*

"Deaf theatre rarely happens, because it's rare that we get to direct or produce a show from our lens," Castille explained. He clarified, saying that all of the roles he's performed in Seattle lean more toward what he calls "theatre including the Deaf."

"I wouldn't consider *Romeo and Juliet* 'Deaf theatre' because its primary audience isn't Deaf, it's hearing," Castille said. "It's all about the intended audience." Deaf West Theatre's production of *Spring Awakening*, the show that gave Castille his Broadway debut, was a blend of the two.

Castille identifies as an artivist, an identifier that he picked up from Andrea Moore, executive director of The Wayfaring Band. Castille was struck by the way Moore uses art to mobilize her

Howie Seago and Joshua Castille in ACT's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Denver community to create change in the world.

"Artists make observations on life," Castille said. "We explore and encourage ideas. It's so powerful that it would be silly not to be conscious about the sociological effects of our work."

Reflecting back on *Romeo and Juliet*, which closed in March 2019, Castille said that the decision to cast two Deaf actors in the production—Howie Seago played Friar Lawrence—was intentional. Director John Langs had noticed that this young tough guy, Romeo, was visiting the priest a lot. "Why?" Castille asked. "What motivates Romeo to go to the priest? Because they are the only two people who speak that language and share that experience. This is similar to real life. We often find Deaf families to participate in or find a Deaf role model to latch onto."

It's a casting choice that sent ripples through the rest of the text, including the second half of the play when Romeo is left out of a major communication loop regarding Juliet.

When asked what keeps him coming back to Seattle, Castille was quick to bring up the Deaf community and the strength he witnesses every time he comes back to work. "I love how Deaf Spotlight fosters Deaf artists," Castille said. "I'm so blown away by their mindset and the events they produce. They are supportive and loving."

Actor Howie Seago, who played the aforementioned Friar Lawrence role, said that he identifies as a Deaf person first and a Deaf actor second. "Most any role can be adapted to be performed by a Deaf actor, but I believe I cannot exclude my deafness as part of the makeup of the character," Seago said. "It is always there."

Seago has worked all over the world—with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Edinburgh Festival, Amsterdam Opera, Seattle Children's Theatre, Intiman and most recently at ACT. Seago grew up in Tacoma and it was important to raise his two sons in the Pacific Northwest, surrounded by family. He and his wife decided to call Seattle home because it's a theatre town full of innovative artists.

After ACT's production of *Tribes*, it was clear to Seago that the theatre was inspired to include Deaf talent and ASL in future productions. It was clear they were willing to put in the work.

"Other theatres in town can start to consider how they might adapt roles for Deaf talent," Seago said. "Having a Deaf actor portraying a role and utilizing some aspects of the Deaf experience might add another layer of depth to the message of the play." In *Romeo and Juliet*, a flashing light signaled the end of the school day in Friar Lawrence's class. Friar John, the often forgotten second friar in William Shakespeare's classic, was given a much larger role as Lawrence's interpreter. And, as Castille pointed out, the shared deafness of Romeo and Friar Lawrence strengthened the bond between these two characters.

Seago encourages Seattle theatres to broaden their Deaf talent to include those behind the scenes as well. "The next step after offering more performance opportunities to the Deaf talent community would be to sponsor playwriting workshops for the Deaf and hire Deaf directors—either as the main director or an assistant director," Seago said. "Having a 'Deaf eye' will ensure Deaf culture accuracy, proper ASL translations and clear sightlines for Deaf audiences."

Patty Liang, the executive director of Deaf Spotlight, is grateful for the mentorship she received as a Ceramics student at the University of Washington. It was her ASL interpreters who suggested she seek out Deaf non-profits in town.

"There are not many Deaf POC arts administrators," said Liang, who identifies as Chinese American. "I hope my efforts encourage other Deaf female and POC artists and arts administrators in my field. There isn't enough visibility and representation right now."

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Joshua Castille and Lindsay W. Evans in ACT's *Tribes*.

Liang's artistic background is in visual art, but her advocacy work through Deaf Spotlight extends to theatre and other performing arts. Liang said that she'd love to see a more inclusive effort from Seattle's theatres, hiring Deaf talent on all levels of production. "Right now, theatres only offer opportunities for Deaf talent as actors, performance interpreters or directors of ASL," Liang said. "I especially want to see more works by Deaf directors. They will certainly bring different perspectives and resources, reframing each play in a different light."

Part of Deaf Spotlight's programming is a biannual Short Play Festival. Earlier this year, Deaf Spotlight partnered with ACT Theatre, producing the festival during the 2019 ACTLab season. Deaf Spotlight hired six playwrights, three directors, eleven actors—all Deaf. "That's Deaf theatre right there," Liang said. "We don't often get the opportunity to have a Deaf- and ASL-centric space, especially a creative space. I treasured these moments of banter and collaboration. It's what made the festival such a success."

Rob Roth, who identifies primarily as an audience member despite being a founding member of Deaf Spotlight, shared that he and his husband used to be subscribers to Seattle Rep. They're both retired now and enjoy traveling, so it's been difficult to fit captioned and ASL-interpreted shows into their schedules. "Our ability to attend captioned and ASL-interpreted shows is limited, as they are on specific nights and cannot easily be exchanged for another performance unless it is also captioned or ASL-interpreted," Roth said. "ACT now has captions available for any performance, so this has expanded our options considerably."

Thinking back on the shows he's seen recently, Roth cited *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* at 5th Avenue as his most joyful experience as an audience member. "The production threaded deafness and ASL into the production wonderfully, and Joshua Castille in the title role was wonderful to watch," Roth said. Roth also enjoyed seeing *The Music Man* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2009, starring Howie Seago as Professor Harold Hill's friend Marcellus.

When I asked what Seattle theatres can do to be more accessible to Deaf audiences, Roth had a list at the ready. "Accessibility excellence would be obtained when all performances are captioned, like they are at ACT, and when at least two performances—or more!—are ASL-interpreted, so that Deaf audiences have more choices," Roth said. "It's important to note that ASL-interpreted performances should not be dropped in favor of captioning. For many Deaf persons, English may not be their first language."

Roth enjoys seeing performances at ACT, Seattle Rep, The Paramount and 5th Avenue. He says that Sound Theatre has also captured his attention.

Audience member Ian Aranha identified himself as a human being first and foremost. "I may be Deaf, but that does not mean I cannot live a full, varied and interesting life," Aranha said, "even though most people depend so much on audio clues."

When we started talking about the kind of shows he gravitates toward, Aranha said that he enjoys musicals much more than plays. The combination of choreography and the visually interesting set pieces that come with seeing a Broadway-style musical make for an incredibly joyful experience. His favorite musical is *Les Misérables*. "I come

CHRIS BENNION

> "I especially want to see more works by Deaf directors. They will certainly bring different perspectives and resources, reframing each play in a different light."
>
> —Patty Liang

from a musically inclined family," Aranha said. "I usually know the lyrics and storyline of a musical already. Or I'll learn it beforehand."

Looking back on this last year, Aranha's experience of seeing *Hamilton* at The Paramount Theatre is a particular favorite. "I love how Lin-Manuel Miranda combined history, music and modern storytelling, all into one," Aranha said. "It was all braided together so wonderfully."

Before seeing *Hamilton*, Aranha read the script and did some research on YouTube. "But when I went to see it live, with captioning provided, it was even so much better than I expected," Aranha said.

In the middle of his story about seeing this performance, Aranha stopped to acknowledge the theatre that made this all happen. "The Paramount [via programming by STG and Broadway at The Paramount] has been incredible in providing access to shows for Deaf and hard of hearing people," Aranha said. "Shout out to them!"

As a hearing audience member, I shared with Aranha that my only experience with captioning was at the opera, where all

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performances are captioned and interpreted for the entire audience.

"That segues into my argument that all shows should have captions," Aranha said. "People go to the opera and need captions. But the argument theatres make is that hearing people complain about captions, so they'll never turn them on for all shows."

And it can be frustrating when the dates and times for captioned and ASL-interpreted shows are so few and far between. "Have you noticed that the ASL performance is always on Saturday at 2 p.m.?" Aranha asked. "It's like we're sheep. Go see the afternoon show and then go home. I want to have dinner and drinks before and then take in a show."

Aranha echoed what so many of the Deaf actors and audience members I spoke with did. There is always room to do more to welcome Deaf audiences in. Provide more captioned performances, more ASL-interpreted performances and more opportunities to grow and learn from Seattle's vibrant Deaf community.

"I hope your article makes waves," Aranha said.

I hope it does too. ■

More information about captioned and ASL-interpreted performances at Seattle Repertory Theatre, Sound Theatre, The Paramount Theatre, ACT Theatre and The 5th Avenue Theatre, as well as other accessibility services they provide, can be found on each theatre's website.

Submissions for Deaf Spotlight's 2020 Seattle Deaf Film Festival are now open. Visit www.deafspotlight.org for more information.

***Danielle Mohlman*** *is a Seattle-based playwright and arts journalist. She's a frequent contributor to Encore, where she's written about everything from the intersection of sports and theatre to the landscape of sensory-friendly performances. Danielle's work can also be found in* American Theatre, The Dramatist *and on the* Quirk Books *blog. www.daniellemohlman.com*

John Langs
*Artistic Director*

Becky Witmer
*Managing Director*

ACT – A Contemporary Theatre presents a world premiere

# People Of the book.

## by Yussef El Guindi

### Directed by John Langs

Beginning September 6, 2019
• Opening Night September 12, 2019

**CAST**

| | |
|---|---|
| Sydney Andrews* | Lynn |
| Quinlan Corbett* | Jason |
| Monika Jolly* | Madeeha |
| Wasim No'mani | Amir |

**CREATIVE TEAM:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Shawn Ketchum Johnson | Scenic Designer |
| Rose Pederson | Costume Designer |
| Jessica Trundy | Lighting Designer |
| Chris Walker | Sound Designer |
| Jeffrey K. Hanson* | Stage Manager |
| Kelly McGee | Production Assistant |
| Lily McLeod | Assistant Lighting Designer |
| Peter Dylan O'Connor | Fight Choreographer |
| Nadira | Choreographer |
| Louis Sallan | Dialect Coach |
| Mario Gomez | Dramaturg |
| Rey Zane | Kenan Directing Fellow |

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

Running time: This performance is approximately 1 hour 40 minutes. There will be no intermission.

ASL interpreted performance: September 27 at 8:00pm.

*People of the Book* is presented by special arrangement with Robert A. Freedman Dramatic Agency, Inc.

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*John Langs*
PHOTO BY TRUMAN BUFFET

# WELCOME to ACT

## A Note from Artistic Director, John Langs

ACT thrives when we challenge ourselves to be artistically ambitious and commit to taking risks, and I believe there is no better way to do that than supporting the new work of artists like ACT Core Company Member Yussef El Guindi. Guindi's *People of the Book* is ACT Theatre's 49th world premiere and it exemplifies what happens when you invest in new plays; you get complex characters and diverse stories that respond to the current climate in the country and that encourage us all to move outside our comfort zones to examine our community, our empathy, and our humanity.

Eighteen years ago, the experience of being a Middle Eastern American was changed in an instant by the events of September 11th. So desperate was our country's desire to find a villain we could hold accountable, that our government's great lie about Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction went unchecked and carried us into not one, but two wars.

What followed was a steady stream of "patriotic" stories that bolstered our march into that conflict which seemed to continually cast Middle Easterners in the role of religious fanatics; morally corrupt and socially backwards. Our TV shows, films, and books all contributed to these stereotypes, reinforcing the othering of Middle Eastern people and Arab Americans. Baghdad, formerly known in the Arab world as Madīnat al-Salām or "City of Peace", was continually depicted as a source of this foreign evil and became the epicenter of the negative stereotypes that took control of the national narrative as U.S. involvement in Iraq continued.

> "Today we are still watching this unfold in our national debate over immigration, which continues to use stories and stereotypes to stoke the passion and vitriol of the public."

Today we are still watching this unfold in our national debate over immigration, which continues to use stories and stereotypes to stoke the passion and vitriol of the public. This is why *People of The Book* is such a necessary play to produce this year, because it directly addresses the power that stories wield over our personal and national behavior. Yussef has written multi-dimensional humans with all the flaws and complexities that make them universal, all while illuminating our national character. This is what makes him one of the most exciting playwrights in America and we are fortunate that he has chosen Seattle as his home. Tonight, you will be witnessing a brand-new play developed for this moment in history. This is the kind of play that makes you think in a way we hope you have grown accustomed to here at ACT. Thanks for your support.

# A Note from Managing Director BECKY WITMER

Welcome to ACT Theatre,

It's renewal time for our 2020 season! The 55th Anniversary Season will be one to remember, featuring the best that contemporary theatre has to offer. ACT is proud to be the place where audiences in our region come to see new work and to engage in robust conversation.

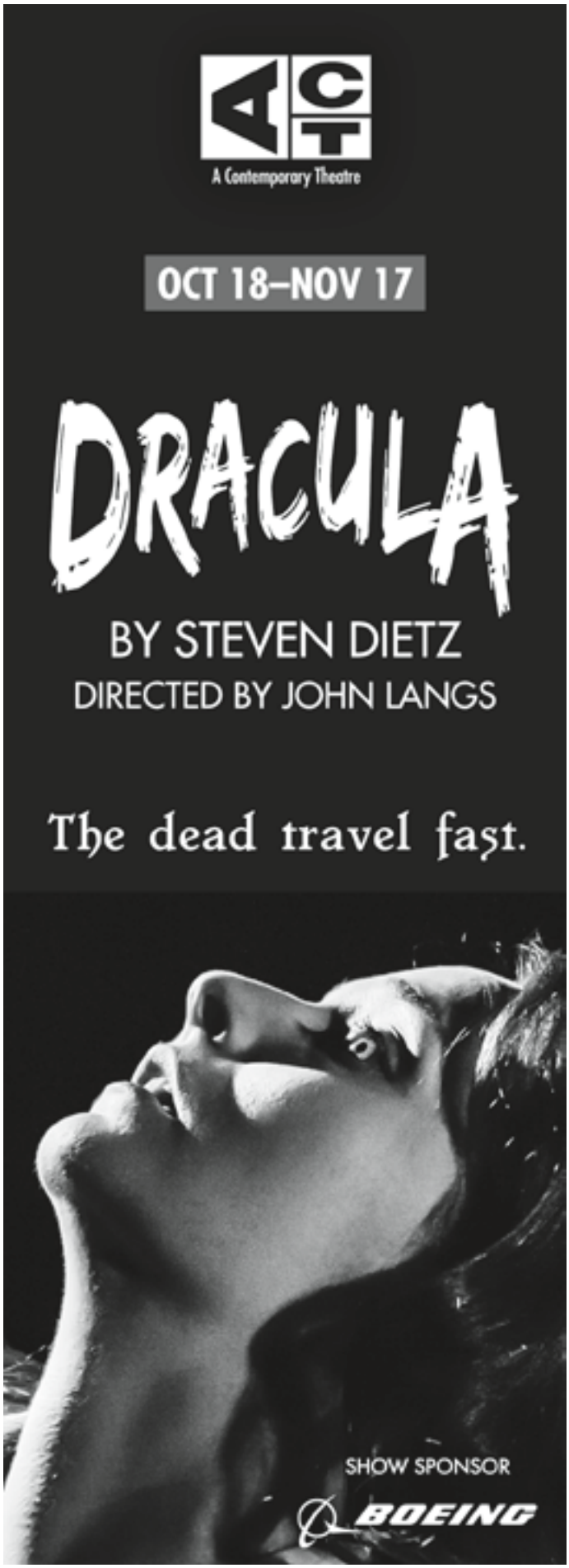
Many of you are already subscribers or donors—thank you! You are the life blood of our theatre and your commitment year after year strengthens us and inspires the vision for what we can accomplish together. Your investment in us enables ACT to take risks by producing new work that propels the American theatre forward, just like your commitment to support the world premiere play you are seeing tonight. Next season we will present our *50th world premiere*—a comedy about a beloved female television character and the female writer working behind-the-scenes. And you won't want to miss the rest of the season either! From a Pulitzer Prize-winner to a Broadway hit, there is so much to enjoy in our 55th Anniversary Season in 2020.

In 2020, at least 50% of our playwrights and directors will be women. As you learned in my last message, ACT is fully integrating Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) into all we do. Elevating female voices is one element to implementing this work at ACT and we are committing to increased racial diversity in our approach to casting our productions and in our hiring practices of administrative, production, and creative staff in 2020. Through our conversations and surveys, we have heard you and we are taking the steps necessary to build a community for everyone at ACT.

I share this because your subscription isn't only a guarantee you will have seats for the most compelling theatre in the region. *It means so much more!* With your subscription to ACT, you are participating in shaping American theatre in the 21st Century—whether it's through the development of new plays or the work we must do to make our creative community equitable and inclusive.

I hope you will be part of the conversation by purchasing your subscription today. We thank you for your continued support and we cannot wait to show you what ACT has to offer our audiences in 2020 and beyond.

Becky Witmer

# Thoughts of an Iraqi American Actor Following in his Father's Footsteps

Playwright Yussef El Guindi interviewed actor Wasim No'mani, who plays Amir in *People of the Book,* to talk about his experiences as the child of a Middle Eastern actor, the progress and pitfalls of telling stories, and auditioning as a working Iraqi American actor in Los Angeles.

**YUSSEF: When did you first get the acting bug and what was your parents' reaction when you told them you wanted to be an actor?**

WASIM: My father was an actor in Iraq and came to the US to study theatre. That influence had been palpable in our home for the duration of my childhood. Mounting scenes in the living room until my late teens was pretty commonplace. That's how we bonded. So it wasn't much of a surprise that I became an actor. The only misgiving they may have had was that I should be better at it. I think they're victims of my earlier work.

**YUSSEF: What stumbling blocks, if any, did you face when you started auditioning? Did you find yourself pigeonholed into playing certain parts?**

WASIM: The same stumbling blocks that can trip up any actor: inadequacy, inferiority, lack of talent, nerves, etc. The usual neurotic soup that swirls in every aspiring artist's head. Wrestling with these obstacles really left no room to contend with any issues of type casting, however actually problematic it was and is. Having said that, yes, indeed, you are cast as your ethnicity and what you look like more than you are yourself as a human—in film and television anyway. I mean, you get into a door based on a photo. What can you tell about someone from a photo? Only the things you can see. But that may just be a life thing, we're all discreet book cover judges.

**YUSSEF: Hollywood actor Rami Malek (from the motion picture *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Mr. Robot* on Amazon Prime) has made a point of never playing a terrorist. What's your feeling about that? Do you have any problems playing such characters?**

Playwright Yussef El Guindi and actor Wasim No'mani. *Photos by Jose Abaoag.*

WASIM: I'm encouraged and bolstered to hear that actors are actively trying to buck stereotypical and flat lazy trends. I don't have an issue with the character of "terrorist" per se. It's more a question of why and how as opposed to what. One man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. But the overused, two-dimensional trope of "evil terrorist" who hates the freedoms of the West as his main hobby is getting tiresome and boring. I'd be interested, however, in seeing an otherwise good man slowly turn and morph into someone who feels compelled to do horrendous things—the how and why of that which pushes dark buttons. I wouldn't turn down a role just because it's a terrorist so long as something of value is being said. But I do get it—most of the time you see people who look like me on film and television, they're clutching a detonator of some sort. So much so, you'd think that terrorism is the number one recreational sport of the Middle East.

YUSSEF: Have you been asked to portray an Arab or Muslim in a way you couldn't stomach? What have you done on those occasions?

WASIM: Yes, I certainly have. I've reacted both shamefully and admirably in different situations. I've succumbed to the temptation of silent rebellion but outward cooperation. And the regret and shame that follows and hovers like a rancid fog. And I've also declined roles, especially the "Jihadist #3" variety. Rami Malek aside, poppa gotta eat. I don't fault anyone for doing what they need to do to survive.

YUSSEF: Have you played other ethnicities?

WASIM: I have played other ethnicities and I love it! I love playing with accents, languages, postures, etc. The personal revelation that pushed me into acting was, "I'd really rather be somebody else." The further from me the better and more challenging. There's no better exercise in empathy than imagining yourself standing in the shoes or heels of somebody else. Because the truth you can find is: There's no such thing as somebody else. Tu eres mi otro yo. You are my other me.

YUSSEF: What's it like being an actor of color in Los Angeles?

WASIM: I honestly don't feel like an actor of color. I just feel like an actor. But everyone keeps insisting on reminding me of my skin tone. Which I think is the least interesting thing about me and is certainly something I had absolutely nothing to do with. Therefore, there's no pride or shame attached. So, in that respect, I suppose that's what it's like being an actor of color in LA; every film and television audition is rooted in my ethnicity, who and what I look like. And the most popular versions of who I look like are cabbies and terrorists, evidently.

YUSSEF: What differences, if any, do you face as a Middle Eastern actor in theatre and film? Do you feel theatre is just as rife in stereotypes and misperceptions about Middle Easterners as the film world is?

WASIM: I've found so much more freedom in theatre. The variety of genres, stories, and characters I've played on stage have greatly outweighed the limited selection in film and T.V. I would say the theatre is much less congested with repetitive shallow cut-outs than the screen world.

YUSSEF: Have you felt a positive change in either theatre or film in terms of more diverse representation? Or do you feel it hasn't quite reached people of Middle Eastern and Muslim descent yet?

WASIM: I think we're making headway. As with all change, it's a slow cook. With shows like *Ramy, Fresh Off the Boat, Master of None*, I think celebrating and encouraging and nurturing progress is more imperative than just complaining. I think our energies are better suited and more efficacious when channeled into creating what we want to see as opposed to whining that someone else isn't doing so. That's why I respect and admire you so much, Yussef. You're doing it, actively and with immediacy.

YUSSEF: Thanks for that! And thank you for deciding to carry on your father's legacy so I can watch you bring the character of Amir to life.

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# WHERE IS HOME:
# BIRDS OF PASSAGE

Choreographed and performed by Alice Gosti

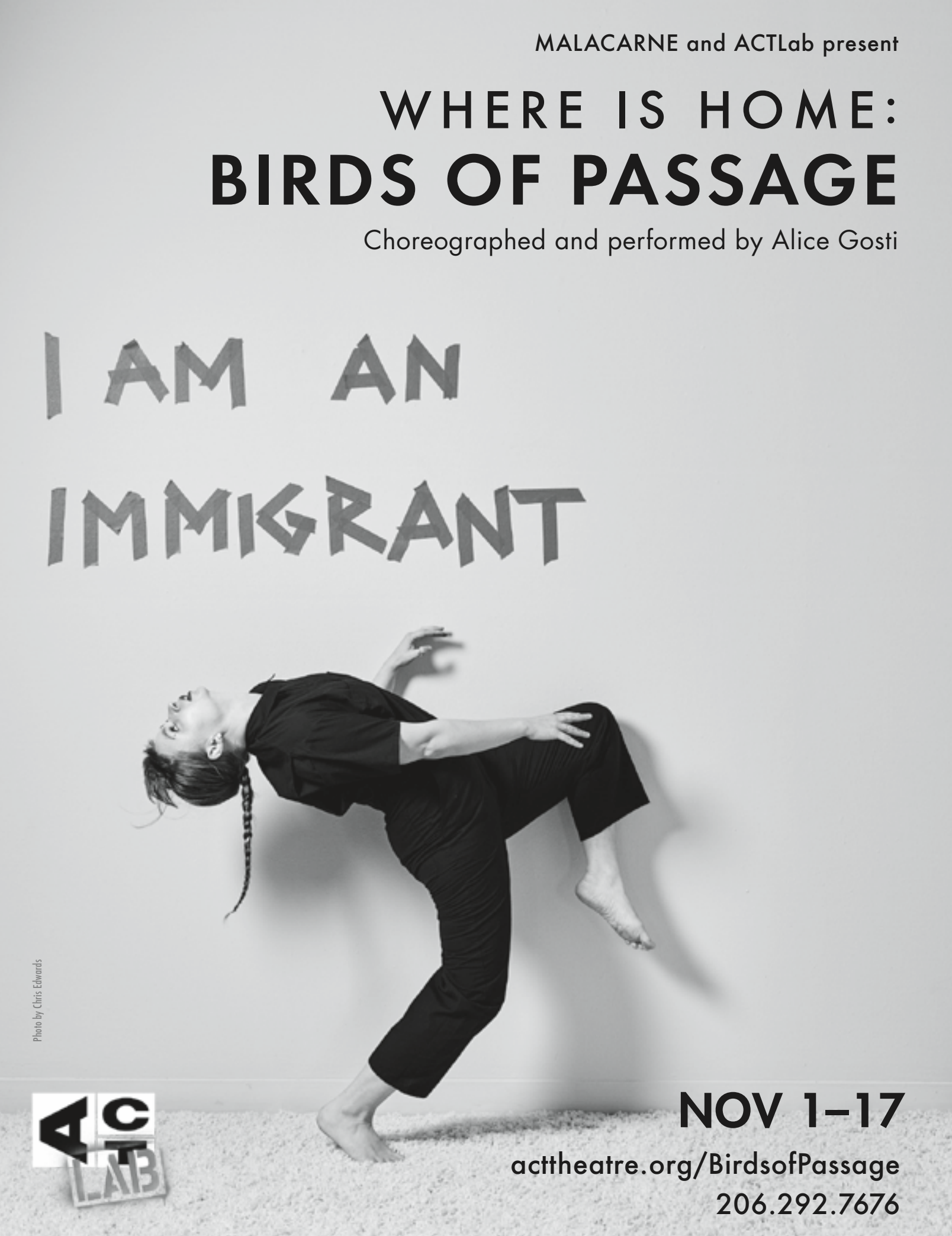


Photo by Chris Edwards

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# Who's Who in *People of the Book*

## CAST:

**Sydney Andrews** (*Lynn)* Sydney is so excited to be returning to ACT this season! Past productions with ACT include *Bloomsday*, *Vanya and Sonya and Masha and Spike*, and *A Christmas Carol*. In the ACTLab, she performed in The Seagull Project's *The Three Sisters* (Irina) and *The Cherry Orchard* (Varya). Most recently, she played Miep in a co-production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* between Indiana Repertory Theatre and Seattle Children's Theatre. In Seattle, she has also worked with the Village Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Book-It Repertory Theatre, New Century Theatre Company, and Annex Theatre. Regionally, she has worked with the Berkshire Theatre Festival, Zach Scott Theatre, Austin Shakespeare, Indianapolis Shakespeare Company, the Children's Theatre of Charlotte, and performed at the NY International Fringe Festival. Sydney holds an MFA in Acting from the University of Texas at Austin and a BA in Acting from Greensboro College.

**Quinlan Corbett** (*Jason*) is exhilarated to make his ACT debut. Seattle credits include: *As You Like It* (Seattle Shakespeare Company); *The Play's The Thing,* and *The Little Dog Laughed* (Intiman). Off-Broadway: *Incident at Vichy* (Signature Theatre, Directed by Michael Wilson) and *American Jornalero* (INTAR Theatre Company). Other New York City credits include: *Habit* (PS122, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art), *Icebound* (Metropolitan Playhouse), *Be The Death of Me* (The Civilians), the premieres of Eduardo Machado's *Worship* (Theatre for a New City), and Mac Wellman's *Three Two's or Afar* (Dixon Place). He has also performed for The Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival in *Othello* and *Twelfth Night*. Film credits include: *Kill Your Darlings* (starring Daniel Radcliffe) and *Frayed*. Quinlan's poetry has been published in multiple journals, most recently *Poetry Ireland Review*. He holds an MFA in Acting from the University of Washington.

**Monika Jolly** (*Madeeha*) is honored to be making her ACT debut. Local: *The Who & The What* (ArtsWest, Seattle). Regional: Originating the role of Zarina in the world premiere of *The Who & The What* (La Jolla Playhouse), *Orange* (South Coast Repertory – Pacific Playwright's Festival), Shiv in the West Coast Premiere of *Shiv* (Theatre @ Boston Court, Pasadena), *1001* (Theatre @ Boston Court, Pasadena). She has also performed Off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theater, Target Margin Theatre, A.C.T. in San Francisco, and Stella Adler Studio and 24th Street Theatres in Los Angeles. Film credits include: M. Night Shyamalan's *After Earth*, HBO's *Cinema Verité*, *The Scenesters*, *Non-Transferable*, *Two: Thirteen*, and *Soccer Mom*. Her television credits include: *Entourage*, *Arrested Development*, *The O.C.*, *Hannah Montana, Standoff,* and recurring roles on *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Lincoln Heights*. Monika was born in India; raised in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Scotland, and lived in New York City and Los Angeles before moving to Seattle in 2017. She received her B.A. in acting from UCLA's School of Theater Film and Television, and a post-graduate degree at The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts.

**Wasim No'mani,** (*Amir*) Wasim is proud and honored to make his appearance on the ACT stage for the second time under John Langs' direction in *People of the Book* after playing the role of Hassan Asfour in ACT's 2018 production of *Oslo*. Wasim resides in Los Angeles where he is unemployed as a working actor. Born of migrating Iraqi parents pursuing their higher education in theatre, Wasim spent his developing years meandering through sets, stages, and theaters throughout the United States with big immigrant dreams of becoming a working actor. He has been on stage before but you probably haven't seen him in productions such as: *Water by the Spoonful* and *Happiest Song Plays Last* (Profile Theatre, Portland); *Jesus Hopped the A Train* (CoHo Productions, Portland); *Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (The Hudson Mainstage, Los Angeles); *Buffalo Soldier* (El Portal, Los Angeles) and other shows along the western coast of America. Wasim thanks his friends and family for their unreasonably durable support and is also deeply indebted to the entire ACT family for their warmth and continuing hospitality. He praises Mr. Guindi for having written this play and writing it especially for YOU.

## Creative Team:

**John Langs** (*Director*) John has been delighted to serve ACT as Artistic Director since 2016, and previously as Associate Artistic Director for three years. Before ACT, John's freelance career afforded him the opportunity to work with many prestigious theatre companies across the country. He has directed productions at Playwrights Horizons NY, Ensemble Studio Theater NY, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Lookingglass Theater Company in Chicago, Circle X in Los Angeles, The Resident Ensemble, New Century Theatre Company, Washington Ensemble Theatre, and Seattle Shakespeare Company. John received his directing degree from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. As a dedicated fan of original work, John has shepherded over a dozen projects to their premieres.

**Jeffrey K. Hanson** (*Stage Manager*) Now in his 30th season at ACT, Hanson has stage managed more than 70 shows including *Urinetown, Murder for Two; Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris; Mr. Burns, a post electric play; Little Shop of Horrors; Sugar Daddies; Double Indemnity; Becky's New Car; The Lieutenant of Inishmore; Das Barbecü; The Women; Stuff Happens; The Pillowman; Mourning Becomes Electra; Quills; Laughter on the 23rd Floor; The Gospel at Colonus; Halcyon Days; The Revengers' Comedies;* and *Lloyd's Prayer.* At The 5th Avenue Theatre, he has been production stage manager for *Annie, The Pajama Game, A Night With Janis Joplin, How to Succeed In Business Without Really Trying, A Chorus Line, Oklahoma!, Candide, Irving Berlin's White Christmas, Hello, Dolly!,* and *Mame.* He has stage managed *Metamorphoses, The Cider House Rules, Parts One and Two* (Seattle Repertory Theatre); and for Seattle Children's Theatre, Intiman, and Arizona Theatre Company.

**Yussef El Guindi** (*Playwright*) Born in Egypt, raised in London, and now based in Seattle, Yussef El Guindi's work frequently examines the collision of ethnicities, cultures, and the politics that face Arab Americans and Muslim Americans. El Guindi holds an MFA in playwriting from Carnegie Mellon University, and has worked as a playwright at Silk Road Rising; literary manager for Golden Thread Productions; and is playwright-in-residence at Duke University. He is the recipient of many honors including the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award and the 2010 Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award. El Guindi's most recent productions include *Language Rooms* (Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award) at Pony World Theatre in Seattle, and Broken Nose Theatre in Chicago; *Threesome* at Portland Center Stage, ACT, and at 59E59 (winner of Portland Drammy for Best Original Script); *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (winner of the Steinberg/ American Theater Critics Association's New Play Award in 2012; and the 2011 Gregory Award) also at ACT, and at Center Repertory Company (Walnut Creek, CA) 2013. Other productions: *Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat* was produced by Silk Road Rising and won the M. Elizabeth Osborn award. His plays *Back of the Throat* (winner of L.A. Weekly's Excellence in Playwriting Award for 2006), *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*, *Jihad Jones and the Kalashnikov Babes*, *Such a Beautiful Voice is Sayeda*, and *Karima's City* have all been published by Dramatists Play Service. In January 2019, Bloomsbury/ Methuen Drama published *Selected Works by Yussef El Guindi*. He is also a Resident Artist at Golden Thread Productions.

**Peter Dylan O'Connor** (*Fight Choreographer*) You may have recently seen Peter's Fight Direction on ACT's stage in Antoinette Nwandu's

# Who's Who in *People of the Book*

play, *Pass Over,* directed by Tim Bond. Fight Direction credits include: *The Tempest, Richard III, King Lear*, *Shakespeare in Love, Julius Caesar, Bring Down the House, Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Henry V, Macbeth, Much Ado About Nothing, Pericles, As You Like It, Othello,* and *The Taming of the Shrew* (Seattle Shakespeare Company). Other credits include *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois, Crime and Punishment, The Children's Hour, John Baxter Is a Switch Hitter*, and *Bootycandy* (Intiman Theatre); *As You Like It* (Oregon State College); *Henry IV* (Freehold's Engaged Theatre); as well as work with New Century Theatre Company, UMO Ensemble, Cornish College of the Arts, The 14/48 Projects, Emerson College, CHAC, Theater Schmeater, Theatre Under the Influence, Consolidated Works, The Globus Theatre (Novosibirsk, Russia) and the Novosibirsk College of Acting. Peter is the Production Director for the 14/48 Projects and a Co-Founding member of New Century Theatre Company. Peter works for LCM Builders as a Project Lead, looking for every opportunity to travel with his lovely wife Betsy Schwartz.

**Nadira** (*Choreographer*) Nadira is an internationally acclaimed Belly Dancer, holding seven national titles, including Instructor of the Year, and is a professional performer, instructor, and choreographer. Currently, Nadira performs and instructs throughout the United States and abroad but calls Seattle home. Nadira has also been featured on several performance and instructional DVDs and has a solo instructional DVD. For more info, please visit www.nadira.com.

**Rose Pederson** (*Costume Designer) People of The Book* marks the 30th production that Rose has designed at ACT. Other productions include *Tribes*, *The Royale*, *The Price*, *Middletown*, *The Invisible Hand*, and *Uncle Ho to Uncle Sam*. Other local credits include: *West Side Story*, *Mamma Mia, Pajama Game* and *How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* at The 5th. Broadway: Largely New York; plus The Kennedy Center. Regional: Seattle Repertory Theatre (47 plays total) including *Roz and Ray*, *View From The Bridge*, *Outside Mullingar*, *Red* and *Road to Mecca*; New Century Theatre: *Festen*; Mark Taper Forum: *Nickel and Dimed*; Berkeley Repertory Theater: *The Importance of Being Earnest*; Intiman Theater; Arizona Theater Company: *La Malinche*; Idaho Shakespeare Festival: *Othello*; as well as Portland Center Stage, Artists Repertory Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, Playmakers Repertory Company, and The Merc Playhouse.

**Shawn Ketchum Johnson** (*Scenic Designer* ) Shawn is a Texas-based theater maker. His expertise in site-specific and devised performance keep him linked to innovative, socially-engaged ensembles throughout the country. Recent Seattle projects include the world premiere of *Time to Tell*, an original, hybrid performance piece presented by ACTlab at ACT Theatre. Seattle scenic designs include the world premiere of *Daisy* at ACT (2016 Gregory Award Recipient for Scenic Design), *Ghosts* at ArtsWest (2016 Gregory nominated), *Bring Down the House* and *Richard III* at Seattle Shakespeare Company, and *Material Deviance in Contemporary American Culture* at On The Boards. Upcoming projects include *The Riot Ballet*, an "interactive game and theater hybrid" devised by a multinational collaborative team, with rolling premieres in Montreal and Seattle. An alumnus of Northwestern University, Johnson is Assistant Professor of Scenic Design at Texas Tech University.

**Jessica Trundy** (*Lighting Designer*) Jessica is excited to be a part of the creative team for *People of the Book*. Previous work at ACT Theatre includes *King of the Yees*, as well as *Sound* and *Jesus Hopped the A-Train* with Azeotrope. Her work has been seen elsewhere in Seattle at On the Boards, New Century Theatre Company, Intiman Theatre Festival, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Seattle Children's Theatre, Book-It Repertory Theatre, Washington Ensemble Theatre, and Seattle Repertory Theatre. She holds a M.F.A. in Lighting Design from the University of Washington, is a Founder of Washington Ensemble Theatre, and works in Seattle as a theatrical and architectural lighting designer.

**Chris Walker** (*Sound Designer*) Chris is very pleased to be returning to ACT, where his work was most recently heard in *Oslo* last season. In Seattle, Chris has created sound designs at the 5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre and the Intiman Theatre. He has been the resident sound designer at Seattle Children's Theatre since 2002. Previously he spent seven years as resident sound designer for the American Repertory Theatre in Boston. He's designed for regional theatres in San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix, Houston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and New York. Internationally, his sound designs have been heard in Taiwan, Singapore, and Moscow. Commercially, he's composed for Intel and Starbucks. He holds a B.F.A. in Classical Piano Performance from Cornish College of the Arts.

Special thanks to our consultants for *People of the Book*: Kareem Fahmy, Tara Cox-Britton, and Jeb Wyman.

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In the event of an emergency, please wait for an announcement for further instructions. Ushers will be available for assistance.

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The theatre's emergency number in the Union lobby is 206.292.7667. Leave your exact seat location with your emergency contact in case they need to reach you.

**Smoking Policy**
Smoking is NOT allowed in any part of the theatre or within 25 feet of the entrance.

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No firearms of any kind are allowed in any part of the theatre.

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Food is not allowed in the theatre. Tuxedos & Tennis Shoes is the exclusive caterer of ACT.

**Accessibility**
ACT offers the Figaro MobiTxt® Closed Captioning System for audience members who are Deaf / Hard of Hearing (HH). This system is offered at multiple performances for each production. Devices can be requested upon arrival at the theatre. ACT is also equipped with the Williams Sound® Audio Equipment, which amplifies stage sounds with the aid of headsets (ask staff for assistance). ASL interpreted performances for the Mainstage Season are offered at least once per play (check the website or contact the Ticket Office for ASL dates). Wheelchair seating is also available.

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The touring cast of Broadway's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* with adults playing all characters except Collin Jefferey (Charlie).

JOAN MARCUS

# Why Aren't Young Characters Always Played by Young Actors?

by HANNAH SCHOETTMER

When we go to see a play or musical, we expect to enter a world of suspended reality. For this reason, watching adults perform the roles of children may not register as strange in the moment. But after the show we may ask ourselves, for what purpose are adults cast in much younger roles?

The infamous teen flick/cult classic *Mean Girls* follows Cady Heron, a high school student who has recently moved from Africa to an American public high school. There she meets "the Plastics," a group of mean girls who rule the school. Hijinks ensue. The key concepts here are not the hijinks, but the high school setting. The ringleader of the malicious Plastics, Regina George, was played by a then 25-year-old Rachel McAdams. In the movie, the character is 16—that's a nine-year age difference. In the warp speed of puberty, that's a "totally bogus" gap.

Huge age gaps between actors and the characters they play isn't an isolated trend—think of almost any smash hit starring teens and the actors will be in their twenties, occasionally even pushing 30. These casting age gaps are in no way exclusive to TV and movies. Kids and teens are everywhere in the media, be it on the silver screen or live on stage. And across genres, the casting age gap is startlingly prevalent. There are some obvious reasons for this—teenagers are often gangly and awkward, and by casting people in their mid- or late twenties, the acne and braces can be edited out without any post-production or makeup department headaches.

But there are also some troubling implications—for one, age dissonance in casting can set a standard of beauty that is nigh impossible for many teens to achieve, which can contribute to long-term issues with body image and/or self esteem for the kids in the audience. Also, there's the chance that the age gap can impact the ability of an actor to capture the youth experience

The cast of the original Broadway production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee,* which was also a full cast of adults playing the grade school characters.

JOAN MARCUS

accurately—if older bodies are playing younger people, the chance for an actor to play a role in telling their own story is lost.

A lot of a character's impact, however, depends on the actor. Brynn Williams, a Broadway actress who starred as Sandy in *Spongebob Squarepants: The Musical,* is currently touring the country with Broadway's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.* She plays Violet Beauregarde, a bratty twelve-year-old with a penchant for blowing bubblegum and spitting snark. Williams said that in taking on her role as Violet, she not only alters her speech patterns and energy, but even the small details—like the way she's standing—in order to accurately capture the essence of a kid. "The Golden Ticket winners have qualities that transcend age . . . who are very prideful or very greedy," she stated. "What we [actors] do is we take that energy and put it in a kid form."

In this role, Williams felt that having a child played by an adult actor is beneficial. "People are more forgiving of kids," she said. "If a kid is being nasty, there's a little more tolerance that goes along with it. If [the Golden Ticket winners] are played by adults, it really zeros in on how this isn't okay behavior."

Arika Matoba, who will play Marcy Park in Village Theatre's upcoming production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee,* had similar feelings. In *Spelling Bee,* Marcy is a grade schooler. "Anyone, at any age, can play those child-like characteristics," Matoba said. "A lot of us feel like kids sometimes . . . if you can tap into that, then it doesn't really matter what age you are." While she acknowledged that the casting of older people as younger characters can impact audience perception, she felt that "everyone knows that you're not a kid, but they're there with you for that hour and a half of the show."

In theatre, one must check a certain amount of realism and disbelief at the door to engage with the medium, so adults taking on bite-sized roles can be considered along as part of that. However, it does raise the question—why are adults cast in these roles in the first place?

Brandon Ivie, the director of the upcoming *Spelling Bee,* felt that he needed people who could "play child-like characters...but still keep it grounded in some kind of reality." He said that he treats casting the child roles just like any other, and that to cast somebody who couldn't take the role of a kid seriously would damage the production's credibility as a whole. When asked what he was looking for in casting the show, Ivie said, "adults that have a youthful energy to them, a joy, an optimism, without being caricaturish or juvenile or . . . treating the material and characters as 'lesser than.'"

Ivie also pointed out an unfortunate stigma in theatre, especially musical theatre, against productions that feature predominantly young actors. It's different than in TV or film, where there are a variety of critically acclaimed shows featuring young actors—think *Stranger Things.* But on stage, it's different. For one thing, "as soon as you see a kid on stage, you think about *Annie,*" Ivie said. As well as other associations to "cheesy, corny musical theatre." These stigmas color the casting decisions made in shows, as productions that feature kids are categorized as "family shows" or pieces of fluff, rather than being treated as valid, respectable productions.

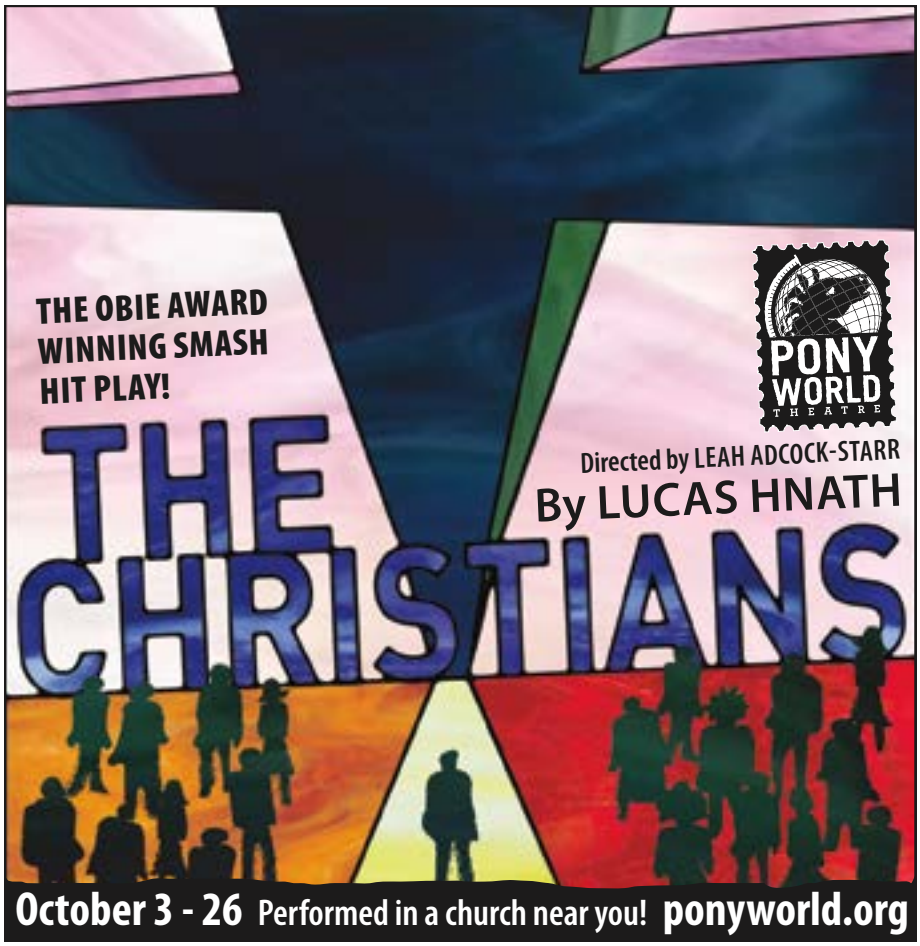
But every production is different. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,* for example, the role of Charlie is played by age-appropriate actors—three of them, in fact, all of whom play the role on different nights. Williams said the age dissonance between the casting of Charlie and the other kids in the play helps to emphasize the good qualities possessed by Charlie, which are often associated with kids in general—innocence, goodness and a sense of wonder. The casting also serves to contrast those good things with the negative quirks and traits of the other kids, who are all, in their own unique and terrible way, bratty, spoiled and generally rotten. Also, Williams said the age gap among the actors helps to amp

up and emphasize Charlie's cuteness factor. So in this case, there are young actors involved in a production largely populated by young characters, but the kids are cast deliberately, with awareness of the impact that the age gap in casting can have on the audience.

Given that theatre is a medium inherently reliant on a suspension of disbelief, the casting of adults in these young roles, when done with thought and care, can actually have a positive impact on the production. It's important to acknowledge that there can be harmful impacts to age dissonance in casting—it all depends on the needs of an individual show and role. So next time you see a kiddo or a teen played by somebody clearly pushing 30, think carefully before you chuckle—is this casting beneficial to the production? Is there a reason a kid isn't up there? The casting dissonance is probably an intentional decision, so ask yourself—does the casting work for the show? If it does, maybe the whole thing isn't "totally bogus" after all. ■

***Hannah Schoettmer*** *is a senior at Interlochen Arts Academy. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of* Butcher Papers, *a youth-focused literary magazine, which can be found online at butcherpapers.org. She is also an active writer and participates in several other arts-centered activities around the city of Seattle.*

This article was written on special assignment for Encore Stages through the TeenTix Press Corps, a program that promotes critical thinking, communication and information literacy through criticism and journalism practice for teens. TeenTix is a youth empowerment and arts access non-profit.



# Intermission Brain Transmission

Why stare at your phone for the hundredth time today when you could treat your brain to this scintillating trivia quiz. Better yet, send us your answer to the bonus question for a chance to win tickets to an upcoming performance.

**1** Running September 6–29 at ACT Theatre will be *People of the Book* by Seattle's own Yussef El Guindi. El Guindi has worked with ACT before, and one of his plays was awarded a prize by the American Theatre Critics Association in 2012. For which play did the ATCA reward him?

A *Threesome*
B *Hotter Than Egypt*
C *The Talented Ones*
D *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*

**2** A stage adaptation of Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything is Illuminated* will be performed by Book-It Rep September 11–October 6. Safran Foer's novel of family history was made into a film in 2005 and starred Elijah Wood and Eugene Hütz. Of which "gypsy punk" band is Hütz the front man?

A Firewater
B Gogol Bordello
C Kultur Shock
D DeVotchKa

**3** *Necessary Sacrifices* will play at Taproot Theatre Company September 18 through October 26. This play depicts abolitionist, author and orator Frederick Douglass and President Abraham Lincoln as they discuss policy and strategies to win the Civil War. Lincoln was born in Kentucky. In which state was Douglass born?

A Virginia
B Massachusetts
C Maryland
D Indiana

## BONUS

**What was the last arts performance you attended that you liked best and why?**

Email your answer with "Trivia Quiz" in the subject line to production@encoremediagroup.com or post your answer to social media and tag @encorespotlight.

1.) d.—*Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*. This play about immigration and assimilation won the Harold and Mimi Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award in 2012. 2.) b.—Gogol Bordello. The Hütz-led band's contribution to the score, "Start Wearing Purple," became well-known. 3.) c.—Maryland. Born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey in Cordova, Maryland in 1818, Douglass changed his name to evade capture after escaping slavery.

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# Seattle Rep Teams Up with the Community to Put on a Show

Angie Kamel

by ROSEMARY JONES

We talk to Public Works Director Angie Kamel about how Seattle Rep's Public Works program centers on the joy of theatre, and how it lives up to their motto: "theatre of, by, and for the people."

Seattle Rep's Public Works program is an ambitious attempt to create theatre relevant to communities and those within them. After successfully launching with a citywide production of *The Odyssey* in 2017, the program has provided workshops, classes and conversations about theatre. This summer, they're back to rehearsal as more than 100 community members prepare for a musical version of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* at the Bagley Wright Theater in early September.

**How did the idea for a series of community classes, dialogues and grand performance come about?**

Public Works began as a program at New York's Public Theater for community-based theatre. It's certainly a lovely way for a regional company to be involved in community. Our Artistic Director Braden Abraham was interested in this type of work for some time. He was so excited about [what New York had done] and wanted to make it happen. He and Marya Sea Kaminski kept talking about the future of Seattle Rep here. Marya was interested in a similar type of work and [began the program at the Rep]. In 2016, we held our first classes.

**How does the program work for Seattle Rep and its partners?**

We are looking for deep, long-term relationships with members of our community and building relationships with existing organizations. We host classes and special events throughout the year to create an appreciation of theatre-making in general. Our partners vary. We have seven partners at the moment and some have been with us since 2016. Some of our participants, like Path with Art, create arts access for folks who are low or no income. For the acting classes at Seattle Central College, we are embedded in classes. We work with Ballard NW Senior Center, Byrd Barr Place, Jubilee Women's Center, the Boys & Girls Clubs of King County and, most recently, Compass Housing down in Redmond. At Compass we have a multigenerational group with the youngest participant being six and our oldest in her 70s.

**What are some of the ways that you spark conversation around theatre and the community?**

We host a meal around every mainstage show, two potlucks a year, and find other ways to support leadership of different organizations. [One] of our goals is to build enough relationships so that we can get together in our upcoming

SEATTLE REP'S PUBLIC WORKS

Rehearsal of Seattle Rep's Public Works' *The Odyssey*.

season to create cross-cultural communications and intergenerational connection—to have young people from Boys & Girls Club building relationships with Ballard NW Senior Center, for example. We want to emphasize human commonality and build ties across experiences.

**How does the performance of *As You Like It* build those relationships?**

It's deeply rooted in the values and goals of the program. Musical theatre is a great opportunity for joyful expression. This is theatre for anyone who wants to participate and creates a big, dynamic, exciting opportunity for people on the stage and in the audience. They get to exercise various aspects of their creativity. It's not only members from our workshops and partnerships. Beyond that we've opened auditions to the general public in our region who are interested in the values of the work that we are doing. There are five Equity actors in the show, a number of actors who participate in the fringe scene and a number who feel a real connection with spirit.

**There's also a bunch of community groups who will be on stage.**

A big part of what we are doing is redefining the participation of professional musicians. Regular musicians who work in musical theatre as well as a number of cameo groups or feature artists [are in the show]. We're working with a number of incredible groups like the Seattle Hand Drummers, Lucha Libre Volcánica and LQ Lion Dance. Local puppeteer Sarah Lovett is loaning one of her rainbow serpents.

**So this is a big show and a lot of work.**

It's fully costumed and with 100+ people needing costumes, our costume shop was moving full speed ahead this summer. We want everyone in the show to get the same level of respect as any artist who walks through door.

**What do the theatre professionals get out of this work?**

There are ways that we produce theatre that aren't particularly friendly or welcoming or comforting. The pros have learned so much during the process of *The Odyssey*. A lot of folks did not necessarily know what it was going to be [until] once it happened and saw that this is how we can do things differently to support the actors, the director and crew in a really beautiful way. That's so incredibly good and valuable. Our director for *As You Like It*, Timothy McCuen Piggee, brings joy. His spirit is perfect for this work. He talks about a big part of what makes this show interesting is the bonds between family, chosen and otherwise. How it's about reconciliation, love and understanding. ■

Seattle Rep's Public Works' *As You Like It* will play at the Bagley Wright Theater September 6–8.

***Rosemary Jones** has written about arts and culture in the Pacific Northwest for the* Cornish Magazine, Capitol Hill Times, *Encore, Examiner.com and others. Additional work can be seen at rosemaryjones.com.*

JIM BENNETT/SEATTLE REP'S PUBLIC WORKS

Cellist Daniel Müller Schott performing at Seattle Symphony September 26–29.

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# Upcoming Events

Explore a full-season performing arts calendar at encorespotlight.com.

**People of the Book**
**SEPTEMBER 6–29**
ACT Theatre

**As You Like It**
**SEPTEMBER 6–8**
Seattle Rep

**Everything is Illuminated**
**SEPTEMBER 11–OCTOBER 6**
Book-It Repertory Theatre

**The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee**
**SEPTEMBER 12–NOVEMBER 17**
Village Theatre

**Opening Night Concert & Gala**
**SEPTEMBER 14**
Seattle Symphony

**Necessary Sacrifices**
**SEPTEMBER 18–OCTOBER 26**
Taproot Theatre Company

**Indecent**
**SEPTEMBER 20–OCTOBER 26**
Seattle Rep

**Rent**
**SEPTEMBER 24–25**
Tacoma Arts Live

**Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition**
**SEPTEMBER 26–29**
Seattle Symphony

**Black Beauty**
**SEPTEMBER 26–OCTOBER 27**
Seattle Children's Theatre

**Carmina Burana & Agon**
**SEPTEMBER 27–OCTOBER 6**
Pacific Northwest Ballet

**Garrick Ohlsson**
**OCTOBER 1**
Meany Center for the Performing Arts

**Bryce Dessner's Triptych**
**OCTOBER 9**
Seattle Theatre Group

**The Tempest**
**OCTOBER 15–NOVEMBER 10**
Seattle Shakespeare Company

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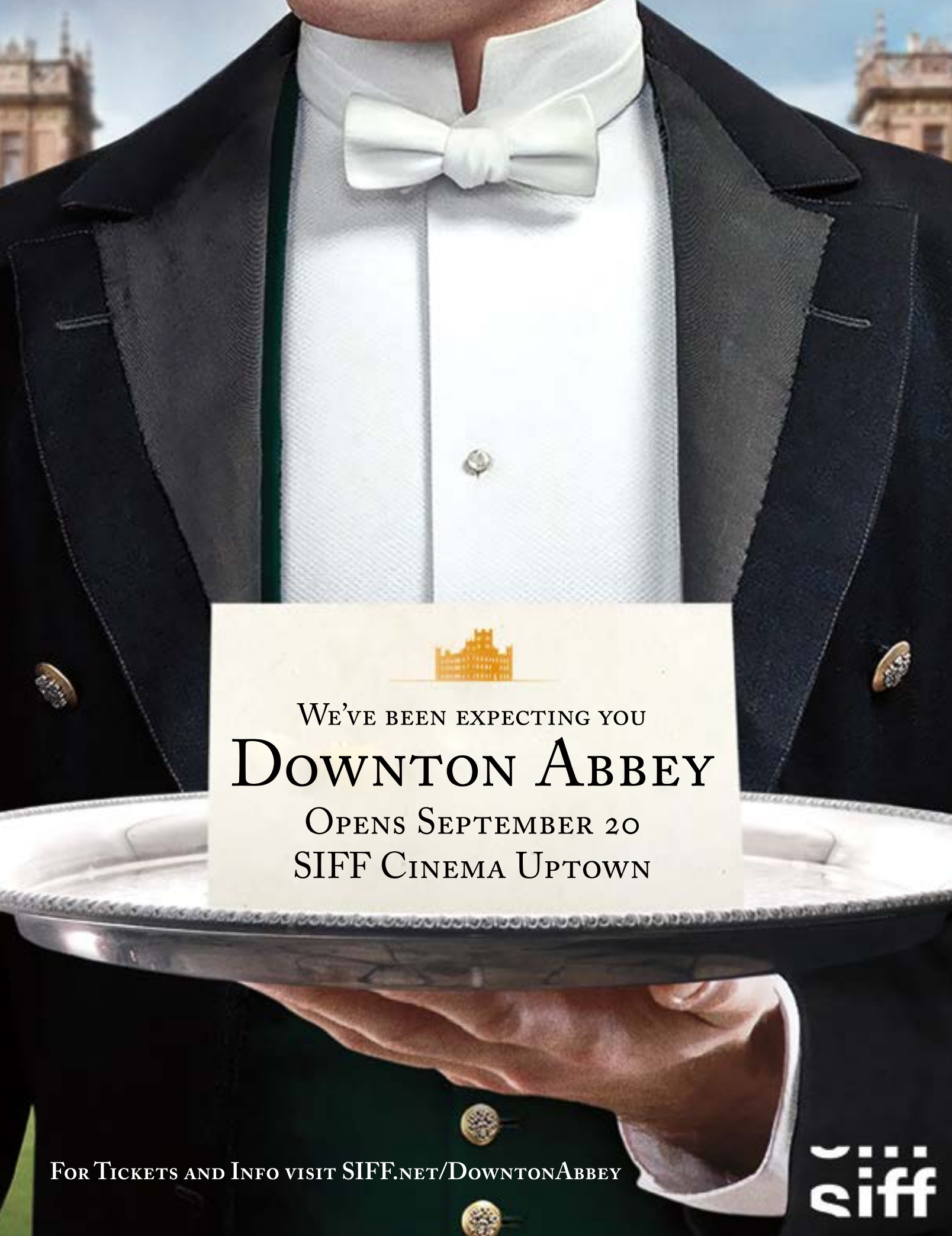
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SIFF Cinema Uptown
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